

Benjamin Allgaier, *Embedded inscriptions in Herodotus and Thucydides. Philippika. Contributions to the study of ancient world cultures*, 157. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2022. Pp. 198. ISBN 9783447117913.

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The book deals with the relationship between Herodotus' and Thucydides' historiographic works and the epigraphic record. Accordingly, it is divided into two main parts. Each part—the first one dedicated to Herodotus and the second one to Thucydides—opens with a presentation of the 'epigraphic dimension' of, respectively, Herodotus' *Histories* and Thucydides' *History*, then discusses some specific case studies, and eventually offers a summary. The book closes with a 10-page epilogue and a useful appendix with two lists of the inscriptions referenced by Herodotus and Thucydides, plus other useful notes on editions, translations, and abbreviations, a long bibliography, and two indexes.

Chapter 1 (Introduction: Inscriptions and Classical Greek Historiography) provides some necessary preliminary information concerning the 'epigraphic dimension' of Herodotus' and Thucydides' work. With this expression Allgaier conveniently encompasses a diverse range of relationships between the two historians and the epigraphic record: not only "passages where specific inscribed objects are explicitly referred to," but also "the tacit use of epigraphically recorded information and general allusions to the epigraphic sphere" (p. 7). However, explicit references to inscriptions are the main focus of the book, whose aim is not to assess the reliability of historiographical statements about inscriptions, but "to elucidate how embedded inscriptions contribute to the constitution of meaning in the two texts under consideration" (p. 9).

Part I (Herodotus) opens with an introductory chapter (Ch. 2. The epigraphic dimension of the *Histories*). Herodotus refers to 24 (groups of) inscriptions on 19 occasions; he paraphrases 2 Greek and 4 non-Greek inscriptions, plus a bilingual one (4.87.1), and quotes verbatim 17 inscriptions, of which 10 are Greek and 7 non-Greek. Allgaier notes, however, that epigraphic material is much more present in the fabric of the *Histories* than we would infer from the (small) number of explicit references to inscriptions and the (even smaller) number of pronounced claims of autopsy of inscriptions all throughout the work. The selection of case studies which Allgaier investigates in the following chapters shows well the internal variety of Herodotus' engagement with inscriptions, which he does not merely use as corroborative sources of information, but as means for creating historical meanings and strengthening his authorial voice. Two recurrent patterns of meaning-making through inscriptions can be discerned. One concerns the establishment of a link between embedded inscriptions and the individuals or groups responsible for them; in this sense, inscriptions play the role of means of characterization. This pattern is clearly at stake in the case of Persian King Darius' epigraphic acts (3.88; 4.87; 4.91), which constitute the focus of chapter 3 (Darius' Epigraphic Activities: Royal Self-Presentation and Its Limitations). Chapter 4 (Inscribed Funerary Monuments: A New Lease of Life?) sheds light instead on another pattern, namely Herodotus' concern for lasting commemoration. Five case studies concerning inscribed funerary monuments from different contexts are investigated, one from the Lydian *logos* (Alyattes' Monument, 1.93), three from the Egyptian *logos* (Cheops' Pyramid, 2.125; Asychis' Pyramid, 2.136; Nitocris' tomb, 1.187), and one from the account of the Thermopylae in book VII (7.228). Allgaier argues that "both the inscribed memorials of powerful non-Greek autocrats and the epigraphic commemoration of the battle of Thermopylae are staged in an ambiguous way" (p. 85), generating a tension between Herodotus' account and the inscriptions

themselves: this way, Herodotus draws metahistorical attention to the limits of epigraphic commemoration and highlights the superior power of his *Histories* to preserve memory.

Part II is dedicated to Thucydides. Allgaier here too sets the stage with some preliminary data and issues about the ‘epigraphic dimension’ of the *History* (Ch. 5. The epigraphic dimension of the History). Thucydides quotes only 8 inscriptions, of which only 3 are quoted verbatim (1.132.2; 6.54.7; 6.59.3), while the other ones are paraphrased or alluded to (1.134.4; 5.56.3; 6.54.7; 6.55.1-2). The corpus is much more limited than Herodotus’, not only in number but also in provenance and chronology: cited inscriptions are only Greek, all are from mainland Greece (except for one at Lampsacus, 6.59.3), predate the beginning of the Peloponnesian war, and are almost exclusively confined to the Pausanias excursus (1.128-134) and the Pisistratid excursus (6.54-59). Even though, as in the case of Herodotus, a wider tacit use of epigraphic materials might be assumed for Thucydides, “the very limited degree to which inscriptions are ‘visible’ in the *History* seems noteworthy” (p. 92). Chapter 6 (The Plataean tripod and the Funeral Oration: Exploring the Power of Epigraphic Commemoration) focuses on the tripod dedicated by the Greeks at Delphi after the victory over the Persians at Plataea. It discusses both its stratified epigraphic biography, with Pausanias’ original boastful epigram replaced by the list of the Greeks fighting against the Persians (1.132), and its rhetorical use by the Plataeans in their appeal for the Spartans not to destroy their city at 3.57. In contrast with the malleability and impermanence of epigraphic commemoration as it is shown by the Delphic example, Pericles’ funeral oration at 2.43 comments instead on its fixity, and therefore limited commemorative capacity, if compared to the power of words, which are capable of spreading fame (*doxa*) infinitely across time and space. Chapter 7 (The inscriptions in the Pisistratid Excursus: Evident Traces of the Past) investigates four inscribed Pisistratid monuments in book 6: three in Athens, specifically the Altar of the 12 Gods in the Agora (6.54.6-7), the altar of Pythian Apollo (*ibid.*), and the stele about the tyrants’ *adykia* on the Acropolis (6.55.1), and finally the funerary inscription of Hippias’ daughter Archedice at Lampsacus (6.59). According to Allgaier the inscriptions here are mentioned as valuable pieces of evidence echoing the contents of Thucydides’ account and reinforcing his authorial voice. Chapter 8 (Quoted Interstate Treaties: Set in Stone?) deals with treaties embedded in books 4, 5 and 8, which, despite not being introduced as inscribed texts, are conveniently approached by Allgaier “as integral parts of Thucydides’ presentation of diplomatic developments in the course of the Peloponnesian war” (p. 147). In general, like Herodotus, Thucydides shows the impermanence and tendentiousness of the epigraphic record, and by contrast the authoritativeness and commemorative power of his own work. Compared to Herodotus, however, Thucydides focuses not only on the act of producing inscriptions by the protagonists of his narration, but also on their reception (this is an interesting conclusion of Allgaier, which is apparent all throughout the book and is explicitly stated at p. 146). The Epilogue complements Allgaier’s previous discussion by commenting upon the use of inscriptions in Xenophon’s *Hellenica*, where the epigraphic record is absent (but treaties are paraphrased as in Thucydides), and in Lucian’s *True Stories*, where Allgaier detects “an irreverent engagement with the historiographic practice of embedding inscriptions as we can grasp it in the works of Herodotus and Thucydides” (p. 157).

The relationship between the two historians and inscriptions is a well-studied subject. Allgaier, who exhibits full knowledge of earlier studies (from Volkmann to West and Haywood, regarding Herodotus, from Zizza to Smarczyk, regarding Thucydides) commendably tries to frame the topic in an innovative way, which evidently owes much to the sensitiveness of Allgaier himself and Allgaier’s Docktorvater towards Greek commemorative culture, and to the longstanding interest of the Heidelberg scholarly environment in cultural memory issues. As the author stresses straight from the introduction (e.g., p. 3) the epigraphic record was a crucial aspect of Greek commemorative culture. Herodotus’ and Thucydides’ works did not originate in a

vacuum; on the contrary, historiography was just one of the means through which 5th-century Greeks remembered, represented and narrated their past, together with inscriptions, monuments, portions of space, rites, cults, festival, poetry, theatre, and oral tradition. In this framework, Allgaier shows effectively that Herodotus' and Thucydides' engagement with inscriptions is not comparable to that of a modern historian and is much more complex than it is usually assumed. In more concrete terms, it was not only about reading inscriptions, extrapolating pieces of historical information, and incorporating them into an historiographical work. To say it differently, it was not only about autopsy and source quotation, but also about manipulation, aimed at making meaning and building narrative. The emphasis on the dialectic relation between inscriptions and the historiographic text into which they are embedded as two commemorative media is one of the main merits of this book, whose most convincing *fil rouge* is the role of inscriptions "as a metahistorical device", contributing "to Herodotus' and Thucydides' implicit presentation of their historiographical projects" (p. 11).

Especially as far as Herodotus is concerned, however, one should acknowledge that most of his engagement with the epigraphic record occurred in fact behind the scenes, upstream of the literary text we read, in a deep entanglement among *opsis*, *akoé*, and Herodotus' own *gnome*, which remains for the most part inscrutable to us. On this point I will put forward some considerations. Even though Allgaier is aware of the complexity, as well as the tension, between Herodotus' account and the epigraphic record, and incisively scrutinizes Herodotus' textual fabric to see how, and to which aims, inscriptions are embedded in it, one can have the impression that he approaches Herodotus' text without historical depth. To be fair enough, rather than an objective flaw of the book, this might be seen as a missed opportunity to reach a closer understanding of Herodotus' use of the epigraphic material, which does depend also on the inscriptions' earlier life and on the ways Herodotus got in contact with them. If one digs deeper into Herodotus' 'off-stage' engagement with inscriptions, by exploring for instance the inter-medial relationship among inscriptions, Herodotus and local oral traditions, which surely lies behind some portions of the *Histories*, one might gain new perspectives on the meaning and function of some embedded epigraphic material. For instance, when Allgaier discusses Herodotus' alleged inaccuracy in mentioning several inscriptions (e.g., 2.106.2-5; 5.77.4; 8.82.1, which are all known from the extant epigraphic record: pp. 24-28) one might wonder whether slight mistakes or discrepancies might be seen as the outcome of a re-mediation process, of which Herodotus' work represented the last link in the chain: those mistakes might in fact be ascribed to the oral tradition(s) which had incorporated those inscriptions. In the same vein, one should consider the possibility that in some cases Herodotus did not even see himself the inscriptions he embeds but derived them from the local oral traditions which had already incorporated (and possibly reshaped) them. In the case of the Thermopylae epigrams, for instance, the tension between Herodotus' account of the battle and the uniquely Spartan and Peloponnesian perspective of the three inscriptions quoted at 7.228 (which according to Allgaier indicates "both an acknowledgement of the power of commemorative inscriptions and a critical awareness of their potential tendentiousness", p. 53), might suggest that Herodotus derived in block a local, Spartan oral tradition, in which the three epigrams had already been embedded. [\[1\]](#) Oral tradition, as an in-between Herodotus (and, to be fair, Thucydides too) and the epigraphic record, is according to my view the great lacuna in the book; the final bibliography, which is otherwise commendably rich and up-to-date, reflects Allgaier's deficit of interest in scholarly literature (e.g., by Giangiulio, Luraghi, and Murray) concerning oral tradition in (and beyond) Herodotus.

All in all, however, the book is clearly written, rationally structured, and well documented. Each of the case studies under scrutiny stands well both per se and as a concrete contribution to the wider aim of the book, namely providing evidence for the practice of embedding inscriptions as a means of historiographic thinking (and writing) in 5th-century Greece. More importantly, the book surely achieves the important goal of

showing that the relationship between the two 5th-century historians and inscriptions was not only a vertical, but also a horizontal one; in other terms, that for the two historians (and for Herodotus probably even more than Thucydides) the epigraphic record was not only a source, but also a context, part of the commemorative panorama within which they were thoroughly embedded, and with which they actively engaged in a variety of ways.

Notes

[1] I have hinted at the processes of re-mediation and inter-mediality between inscriptions and Herodotus' work in G. Proietti, *Prima di Erodoto. Aspetti della memoria delle Guerre persiane*, Stuttgart 2021, 53-54, and will deal with these issues more extensively elsewhere.