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# (Review) Roman Historiography: An Introduction to its Basic Aspects and Development,

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two events of Dido's groan and the divine ritual are presented parataxically and successively by Vergil but may be two aspects of the single last moment according to the poet's habit of theme and variation. Could it be that when Dido's eyes searched for the light "and found it" (692) as she struggled on her deathbed and gave her sigh, the poet means us to understand that she, but not Anna, glimpsed Iris' involvement in her own death and realized in the moment that deities do, after all, intervene in human affairs, a scene that then acts as a final commentary upon her Epicurean words at 376–80?

This commentary is elegantly written in language so free of jargon that it can be understood by those reading Vergil for the first time, while the attention paid to the semantic penumbrae of Vergilian words, phrases, and passages and the views expressed will interest Vergilians of all levels.

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Andreas Mehl, *Roman Historiography. An Introduction to its Basic Aspects and Development*, trans. Hans-Friederich Mueller. Blackwell Introductions to the Ancient World. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Pp. viii + 290. Cloth (ISBN 978-1-4051-2183-5) \$124.95.

Like Alexander the Great, contemporary students of classical antiquity have lots of companions. In the world of academic publishing these days, companions, introductions, and guidebooks abound. Oxford, Cambridge, Brill, Blackwell: all are trying their hands at this genre. Could a *Cambridge Companion to the Companions* be far off? With the book under review, Andreas Mehl tosses his hat in the ring with a primer on Roman historiography. This work originally appeared in German in 2001 as *Römische Geschichtsschreibung* (Stuttgart); Hans-Friederich Mueller's English translation now introduces the book to an Anglophone audience. The volume, which contains a select bibliography that has been updated for the English edition, aims at introducing lay readers, students, and scholars to the grand scope of Roman historical writing, all the way from Q. Fabius Pictor, Rome's first historian, to the late antique Procopius. As if this scope were insufficiently broad, Mehl also includes brief discussions of Roman historical epic, chronography, biography, and other genres ancillary to the Roman historiographical tradition. No one can fault Mehl for narrowness.

In the book's first chapter, Mehl presents various prolegomena for his chronological tour through Roman historical writers. As with the rest of the work, much of it is well worn for the scholar of ancient historiography, though requisite for students. The author's approach to the topic is distinctly German. Mehl, for example, though well aware of the heavily rhetorical character of Greco-Roman historiography, does not prove as

convinced of its poetic aspects as is fashionable among many Anglophone scholars. Despite reasons for remaining skeptical of ancient historians' methods, Mehl suggests that "we must proceed from the assumption that a Roman (or Greek) historian could have conceived an obligation for truth that met today's standards" (29). A. J. Woodman, for one, would certainly disagree (cf. *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, Portland 1988).

Chapters 2 through 7 offer a whirlwind tour of Roman historical writers, commencing with indigenous pre-historiographical traditions and working its way to late antiquity. Throughout, Mehl demonstrates a talent for presenting concise and useful descriptions. He packs a great deal of information into his individual chapters, and even includes brief discussions of numerous lost and fragmentary works. When turning his attention to various topics, furthermore, Mehl provides pithy summaries of the historical contexts surrounding them. This helps render the book easier for the lay reader or student to assimilate, though it obviously means that Mehl provides much information already well known to scholars. In places, furthermore, the work's brisk pace necessitates simplifications. Mehl's fleeting discussion of *optimates* and *populares*, for example, appears cursory and outdated.

In the course of these chapters, Mehl proves less attentive to the literary trappings of Roman historiography. Only some authors warrant Mehl's consideration on stylistic grounds, and even these estimations seem perfunctory. For the same reason, perhaps, Mehl demonstrates interest in the speeches historians included in their works only insofar as they provide accurate reflections of words actually spoken. He presents no discussion of the ways in which such orations could serve to dramatize events, highlight key themes, or flesh out important characters. But Mehl's excursion through the Roman historiographical tradition also contains its share of strengths. Mehl displays, for instance, great regard for religious matters, and thus the book's elaborations on the distinctions between pagan and Christian historiography seem especially clear and effective.

One should note that the book contains a few assessments controversial to contemporary scholars. Mehl assumes, for instance, that the two letters to Caesar and the invective against Cicero attributed to Sallust in antiquity are genuine (85). Following Burkhard Meissner, furthermore, he concludes that the *Historia Augusta* was the work of several authors from different time periods (174). Though such unpopular conclusions are rare, they may render the work less valuable for students aiming to discern the current *opinio communis* on various matters.

In places scholars may quibble with Mehl's choices. Herodian, for instance, only warrants one paragraph in the book (170–71); some fragmentary authors receive more attention than this. Though Mehl briefly touches on the Second Sophistic in regard to Arrian, his appraisals of other Greek authors from the second and third centuries AD fail to mention it. Mehl is almost certainly wrong about Cassius Dio's full name: the

attribution of the *agnomen* Cocceianus seems to be the result of Photius' confusion between Cassius Dio and Dio Chrysostom. More importantly, in a work that devotes space to examinations of numerous figures ancillary to the Roman historiographical tradition, Mehl ought to have included a full-scale estimation of Polybius.

Such criticisms, however, seem unavoidable in regard to a work of such breadth and brevity. It would be foolish to wallow in them, given the book's admirable qualities. In fact, the work's strengths seem clearest in its eighth and final chapter. Entitled "Some Basic Principles of Ancient Historical Thought," these pages are arguably the most interesting in the book. Though it does not break much new ground for scholars of the topic, the chapter provides a concise and useful synthesis of the ideology associated with Roman historiography. Mehl stresses the cardinal importance of personal morality in the work of ancient historians and focuses on the influence of Thucydides' fixed conception of human nature. He concludes that, "the basic principles of Roman historiography, at least in that era of the ancient world, when Rome exercised its political dominance, proved astonishingly permanent" (251). One wishes that Mehl had continued on with his astute observations; the chapter is unfortunately short.

In all, Mehl's *Roman Historiography* amounts to a helpful handbook for students of the ancient world. It seems an especially good means for readers to gain a quick appraisal of the German approach to its subject. Although some may criticize Mehl's assessments and emphases on occasion, the book presents a concise and readable introduction to the work of Roman historians, biographers, chronographers, antiquarians, and kindred authors.

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Eric Adler, *Valorizing the Barbarians. Enemy Speeches in Roman Historiography*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. Pp. x + 269. Cloth (ISBN 978-0-292-72628-4) \$55.00.

The national poet Vergil tells us early in the *Aeneid* that Jupiter himself promised Rome an empire without limits. Further, in book 6, Vergil has prescient Anchises charge his son Aeneas with specifics: take control of the peoples on earth and make them behave nicely; tolerate those who cooperate but whack anyone who gets uppity. Only in the later *Agricola* is the non-professional student of Rome likely to find a clearly counterpoised voice, that of the evanescent Caledonian chieftain Calgacus who utters the suspiciously Tacitean aphorism, *ubi solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant* (30.5). There are other skeptical attitudes in the canon, as in *Bellum Jugurthinum* 35.10, where Sallust records the sour judgment of Jugurtha, himself no