

Ethnography and ancient history

MANUEL ALBALADEJO VIVERO

Romanticism is the starting point of modern scientific historiography in the field of Greek ethnography. Müller, steeped in the intellectual climate of his time, wrote of the “spiritual nature of a people,” in reference to the Dorians, and attempted an approach to the literary sources that in certain respects foreshadowed the positivist school (Müller 1824).

The publication by Müller of the *Geographi Graeci Minores* constituted a milestone in Greek ethnography. In these secondary geographic works, there is a large amount of ethnographic material, very much to the taste of the Hellenic tradition. Riese performed a similar job with the minor Latin geographers (Müller 1855–61).

The second half of the nineteenth century was the high point of the positivist approach to the classical texts. In this context, the contributions by Bunbury (1879) in regard to ancient geography and McCrindle (1901) in regard to the image of India in the classical authors stand out. The work of Berger (1880, 1903) on the mythical cosmography of the Greeks, on their scientific discoveries and, especially, his study of ERATOSTHENES’ geographical fragments were more in keeping with scientific criteria and a philological underpinning. In this period, Nissen’s work on Italic ethnography was also important (Nissen 1883).

In the early twentieth century, Detlefsen’s work on the sources employed by Pliny and the work done by Trüdinger, who made a good attempt to summarize the development of ethnography in Greece and Rome, were two outstanding contributions (Detlefsen 1908, 1909). On the other hand, Schroeder wrote a brief study of ethnography in Rome (Schroeder 1921). Shortly afterwards, Jacoby made his major contribution with the project of publishing all the surviving accounts and fragments of the Greek historians together

with his commentaries (Jacoby 1923–58). In particular, the first part of *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* was devoted to genealogy and mythography, the second to chronological history, and the third to horography and ethnography. In spite of a space having been specifically dedicated to ethnography in this third part, there is actually ethnographic information in a large number of the authors included, beginning with the first of them, the logographer Hecataeus. Alongside the huge task undertaken by Jacoby, Diller’s compilation of minor geographers should also be remembered (Diller 1952).

In regard to the first half of the twentieth century in Germany, mention must be made, first of Aly (1921, 1957), author of a major monograph on HERODOTUS and various studies on Strabo, and second, Schulten (1955–57), who studied ancient ethnography in the Iberian Peninsula. Schulten’s work was carried on after his death by Tovar (1974–89) and opened up the way for subsequent generations of historians of ancient HISPANIA.

In the English-speaking world, the ground-breaking work of Lovejoy and Boas (1935), which was part of a research project into the history of primitivism and the ideas linked to it, must also be highlighted. Both these authors distinguished between descriptions of a “soft” way of life, not far removed from the concept of the “noble savage” *avant la lettre*, and a “hard” one connected with the ideas of barbarism and the struggle for survival.

After the Second World War, Nenci prepared an edition of the fragments of Hecataeus that was very widely used, together with Jacoby’s (Nenci 1954; Jacoby 1923–58). In Germany, the work carried out by the researcher Dihle, author of numerous articles about Greek ethnography, which he summarized in a volume that appeared in 1994, was particularly important.

In the late 1960s, at a time of inter-racial conflicts in the United States, Snowden (1970) published a monograph on the perception of black people in the classical world, in which he

reached the conclusion that in that period color had not been an element of segregation or racial prejudice.

Moving on to the 1970s, mention must be made of various monographs, such as the one by Müller (1972–80), who sought to update and extend the study by Trüdinger. For his part, Momigliano (1975) published a work in his mature years, in which he condensed a large part of his thoughts on the geographical development of Greek culture and its contacts with Celts, Hebrews, and Iranians. Mention also deserves to be made of the critical edition of the fragments of POSEIDONIOS by Edelstein and Kidd (1972–99); in the present context, his treatment of Poseidonios in regard to Celtic ethnography is important. Dion (1977) dealt with the political aspects of ancient geography, while Ramin investigated the points of contact between mythology and geography. Janni (1978) wrote a monograph on the pygmies in classical literature. Lastly, Desanges (1978) produced an influential study exploring the contact between Mediterranean and African peoples, in which he reviewed all the ancient sources concerning this, particularly the ethnographic accounts (*see* EXPLORATION).

The 1980s began with a work of major importance: Hartog's analysis of Herodotus' description of the Scythians. In this book, he explains how this people were cast in the role of the reverse image of Greek reality. A few years later, also in France, Pédech (who also wrote a general work on the geographical imaginary of the Greeks) devoted a monograph to Alexander's historians, who compiled a large amount of ethnographic material on the regions known to those who accompanied the Macedonian king in the course of his campaign (Pédech 1984). For his part, Ballabriga (1986) made a study of the image of the universe (heaven, earth, and hell) in Greek mythology.

Studies of the figure and work of Strabo were given a fresh boost in the latter decades of the twentieth century by the work done in Perugia by Prontera (1992) (who also wrote an important study of peripli), and Prontera and

Maddoli (1984–86) and Biraschi (1994), to which should be added the monograph by the Israeli Dueck (2000).

As for Mela, Parroni (1984) and Silberman (1988), each published commentated editions of his *Chorographia*.

The Finnish scholar Kartunnen (1989, 1997) began his project of publishing various monographs on the conception of India in Greece and Rome; so far, his well-documented studies have covered the period up until the Hellenistic era.

In 1988, a meeting took place at the Hardt Foundation on Herodotus and the non-Greek peoples, and two years later the subsequent volume, edited by Burkert (1990), was published, in which some of the world's leading specialists dealt monographically with various issues present in this author's ethnography.

In the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the emergence of phenomena such as nationalism in eastern Europe, several studies looked at ethnic identity in ancient Greece. Hall (1997, 2002) attempted to demonstrate the dynamic operation of the anthropological and cultural mechanisms employed in shaping a given ethnic group.

Romm (1992, 1998) published a work on the outer confines of the world in ancient thought, in which his diachronic treatment of regions such as India and Ethiopia, and fabulous peoples such as the Hyperboreans, is of special note. He also showed how Greeks and Romans regarded geography (and, within it, ethnography) more as a literary genre than as a branch of science. A few years later, this author brought out a monograph on Herodotus.

The interest in analysing Greek ethnography in the twenty-first century is plain to see in the project of publishing volume V of the new edition of *FGrHist* by an international team under the direction of Gehrke.

SEE ALSO: Genealogy (Greece); Historiography, Greek and Roman; Orality, oral culture, and historiography.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

- Aly, W. (1921) *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot und seinen Zeitgenossen: eine Untersuchung über die volkstümlichen Elemente der altgriechischen Prosaerzählung*. Göttingen.
- Aly, W. (1957) *Strabon von Amaseia: Untersuchungen über Text, Aufbau und Quellen der Geographika*. Bonn.
- Ballabriga, A. (1986) *Le soleil et le tartare: L'image mythique du monde en Grèce archaïque*. Paris.
- Berger, H. (1880) *Die geographischen Fragmente des Eratosthenes*. Leipzig.
- Berger, H. (1903) *Geschichte der wissenschaftlichen Erdkunde der Griechen 2*. Leipzig.
- Biraschi, A. M. (1994) *Strabone e la Grecia*. Naples.
- Bunbury, E. H. (1879) *A history of ancient geography*, vols. I–II. London.
- Burkert, W. (1990) *Hérodote et les peuples non grecs: Neuf exposés suivies des discussions*. Geneva.
- Desanges, J. (1978) *Recherches sur l'activité des Méditerranéens aux confins de l'Afrique*. Rome.
- Detlefsen, D. (1908) *Die Geographie Afrikas bei Plinius und Mela und ihre Quellen. Die Formulae provinciarum, eine Hauptquelle des Plinius*. Berlin.
- Detlefsen, D. (1909) *Die Anordnung der geographischen Bücher des Plinius und ihre Quellen*. Berlin.
- Dihle, A. (1994) *Die Griechen und die Fremden*. Munich.
- Diller, A. (1952) *The tradition of the minor Greek geographers*. Lancaster, PA.
- Dion, R. (1977) *Aspects politiques de la géographie antique*. Paris.
- Dueck, D. (2000) *Strabo of Amasia. A Greek man of letters in Augustan Rome*. London.
- Edelstein, L. and Kidd, I. G. (1972–99) *Posidonius*. Cambridge.
- Hall, J. M. (1997) *Ethnic identity in Greek antiquity*. Cambridge.
- Hall, J. M. (2002) *Hellenicity: between ethnicity and culture*. Chicago.
- Hartog, F. (1980) *Le miroir d'Hérodote: essai sur la représentation de l'autre*. Paris.
- Jacoby, F. (1923–58) *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, vols. I–III. Leiden.
- Janni, P. (1978) *Etnografia e mito: la storia dei pigmei*. Rome.
- Karttunen, K. (1989) *India in early Greek literature*. Helsinki.
- Karttunen, K. (1997) *India and the Hellenistic world*. Helsinki.
- Lovejoy, A. O. and Boas, G. (1935) *Primitivism and related ideas in antiquity*. Baltimore.
- McCrinkle, J. W. (1901) *Ancient India as described in classical literature*. Westminster.
- Momigliano, A. (1975) *Alien wisdom: the limits of Hellenization*. Cambridge.
- Müller, K.O. (1824) *Die Dorier*, vols. I–II. Breslau.
- Müller, K. E. (1855–61) *Geographi Graeci Minores*, vols. I–II. Paris.
- Müller, K. E. (1972–80) *Geschichte der antiken Ethnographie und ethnologischen Theoriebildung von den Anfängen bis auf die byzantinischen Historiographen*, vols. I–II. Wiesbaden.
- Nenci, G. (1954) *Fragmenta/Hecataei Milesii*. Florence.
- Nissen, H. (1883) *Italische Landeskunde*. Berlin.
- Parroni, P. (1984) *Pomponii Melae De chorographia libri tres/introduzione, edizione critica e commento*. Rome.
- Pédech, P. (1976) *La géographie des grecs*. Paris.
- Pédech, P. (1984) *Historiens compagnons d'Alexandre: Callisthène, Onésicrite, Néarque, Ptolémée, Aristobule*. Paris.
- Prontera, F. (1992) "Periploi: sulla tradizione della Geografia nautica presso i greci." In *L'uomo e il mare nella civiltà occidentale: da Ulisse a Cristoforo Colombo: 26–44*. Genoa.
- Prontera, F. and Maddoli, G. (1984–86) *Strabone: contributi allo studio della personalità e dell'opera*, vols. I–II. Perugia.
- Ramin, J. (1979) *Mythologie et Géographie*. Paris.
- Riese, A. (1878) *Geographi latini minores*. Heilbronn.
- Romm, J. S. (1992) *The edges of the Earth in ancient thought: geography, exploration, and fiction*. Princeton.
- Romm, J. S. (1998) *Herodotus*. New Haven.
- Schroeder, A. (1921) *De ethnographiae antiquae locis quibusdam communibus observationes*. Halle.
- Schulten, A. (1955–57) *Iberische Landeskunde*, vols. I–II. Strasbourg.
- Silberman, A. (1988) *Chorographie/Pomponius Mela*. Paris.
- Snowden, F. M. (1970) *Blacks in antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman experience*. Cambridge, MA.
- Tovar, A. (1974–89) *Iberische Landeskunde*, vols. I–III. Baden-Baden.
- Trüdinger, K. (1918) *Studien zur Geschichte der griechisch-römischen Ethnographie*. Basel.