explore them, experiment with them, and, importantly, add to them. He has produced a subtle book, full of insights, one for the specialist rather than the Hellenistic novice.

University College Dublin ANDREW ERSKINE

THE PAST AS TEXT

C. PELLING: *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian.* Pp. x + 338. London: Routledge, 2000. ISBN: 0415-07350-2, 0415-07351-0 (pbk).

After *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford, 1997) comes a dose of pure Pelling on a broader subject—though not that broad, since a more accurate title would be: 'Some literary texts and the historian of late fifth-century Athens'. The texts include Thucydides, Aristophanes (*Acharnians*, *Lysistrata*), Plutarch (*Nicias*, *Alcibiades*, *Pericles*), Apollodorus = Pseudo-Demosthenes 59, *Eumenides* and *Orestes*, Lysias 1, and Xenophon's *Oeconomicus.* Histor(iograph)ical topics include several old favourites (Thucydidean speeches; women; the 'seriousness' of comedy), though there is little on others, e.g. religion or barbarians. P. acknowledges some impact from theoretical work on performance, narratology, reader-response, reception, New Historicism and gender, but that the impact is implicit is one of his strengths. Two others are his elegant amalgam of academic and conversational style and his sense of humour. (There are numerous allusions to TV comedy. But why none to *Blackadder*?)

While problematizing texts, P. resolutely clings to reality: 'Those who died at Salamis or Syracuse were not killed by a text, and we owe it to them to try and find out what happened'. If this involves being keenly aware of reasons why surviving texts might not tell us, the trust is not betrayed. Nor (as we have seen) does P. betray reality through excessive theorizing, rightly unwilling to '[pass] off criticism as more sophisticated, and more driven by a particular theory, than it really is'. What drives P. is the texts, approached with scholarship, reasonable cynicism, and good humour. Some principles emerge. We should note what the author expected to be sayable without alienating the audience, test comic texts by asking how little must be true for a joke to work, expect authors to cater for different reactions, look for how the audience thought, attend to context, and avoid hermetically sealing 'funny' from 'serious' ('the funny is the serious': p. 160). These are not wholly new ideas, but any student of classical Athens will find pleasure and profit in inspecting P.'s 'worked examples' (p. ix). The devil is in the detail, but so are the pearls.

P.'s texts are diverse and, though rhetoric is a common factor, the manipulations of reality in Thucydides or Plutarch are rather different from those in forensic oratory, comedy, or tragedy. One must agree that Plutarch is 'not merely . . . a "source" but also . . . an intelligent and knowledgeable reader of events and texts'; and one may agree that Thuc. 1.22 is a deliberately ambiguous statement about speech-(re)construction designed to cover a variety of individual cases, or that 'the truest cause but least clear in what was said' makes sense because (i) Spartan fear and 'enforced' war-declaration are not clear elements in Book 1 speeches, and (ii) the phrase may really apply to the actual speeches of 435–432. But this all seems remote from the problems of using, for example, *Troades*, and there is some equivocation in treating Plutarch, Thucydides, and Euripides undifferentiatedly as authors of 'literary texts'. (Moreover, Plutarch's date detaches him from P.'s prevailing concern with classical Athenian views.) Thucydides' 'need-to-know' policy and 'combative' silences do have a forensic quality; and historians can be as equivocal as poets. But the luxury

© Classical Association, 2001

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/51.2.322 Published online by Cambridge University Press

P. enjoys of not having to write fifth-century political history is richer when dealing with Plutarch or Thucydides, and no one could confuse Thucydides with Andocides or Lysias.

P.'s implicit view of drama is that an author selects hard issues and contrives a close enough balance of positive and negative to engage the spectator's interest, keep him undecided for as long as possible, and ensure other spectators form other views. This is surely right, even obvious. Plays are ideally not partisan. Tragedy shows what Athenian culture found problematic (and may seek common ground: cf. *Eumenides*). Comedy contains something for every prejudice, challenges but also reinforces hierarchies, and fosters a reflective society. In both, the rôle of women—as loci of *oikos*-values and instruments for males to inspect the world from a new direction ('what would a Martian make of . . .')—is potentially significant, though not always realized (the *Thesmophoriazousai* are less 'good to think with' than Lysistrata or Praxilla) or intended to upset the *status quo*. *Oeconomicus* illustrates a similar area, with an extra difficulty: extratextual facts about Ischomachus' wife pose an elusive ironic challenge to the surface content. 'Perhaps we can simply find his a thought-provoking and multivalent text, with no single interpretation imposed on the reader. Xenophon can be subtle too.' An excellent note to end on, proof positive of P.'s shrewd judgement.

University of Liverpool C. J. TUPLIN

ANCIENT PRICES

J. Andreau, P. Briant, R. Descat (edd.): *Économie antique. Prix et formation des prix dans les économies antiques.* (Entretiens d'archéologie et d'histoire Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges, 3.) Pp. 415. Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges: Musée archéologique départmental, 1997. Cased. ISBN: 2-9502446-9-6.

In ancient economic history, what does it mean to talk about 'prices'? How reliable, representative, or meaningful are surviving references to the exchange value of certain commodities or services? Was price formation governed by the laws of supply and demand or by political fiat, or by both? What, if anything, can prices tell us about the nature of economic processes and institutions in the ancient world? These are important questions, and the contributors to this substantial volume struggle hard to make sense of disparate and often decontextualized data. The net has been cast wider than usual, from Pharaonic Egypt to France under the *Ancien Régime*: while the first six papers deal with Greece and the next five with Rome up to the early Byzantine period, the following seven chapters take a step back in time to the main Near Eastern societies of the first millennium B.C. This chronological inversion remains unexplained but hardly matters: after all, there is no discernible interaction between 'oriental' and 'classical', no dialogue between individual authors except within their own field of specialization, and often not even that. Grenier's final paper, innovatively comparing price formation and exchange mechanisms in the Greco-Roman world and in early modern France, remains the sole exception.

Yet in this case, even a bookbinder's synthesis has much to offer. Gallo seeks to explain the low level of the prices recorded in the Attic *stelai* of 415 B.C. with reference to the crisis of that period rather than the specific context of an auction that might depress valuations. Descat and Migeotte search for evidence of price control. The

© Classical Association, 2001

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/51.2.322 Published online by Cambridge University Press