

Free, Alexander: *Geschichtsschreibung als Paideia. Lukians Schrift „Wie man Geschichte schreiben soll“ in der Bildungskultur des 2. Jhs. n. Chr.* München: C.H. Beck Verlag 2015. ISBN: 978-3-406-68606-1; X, 321 S.

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Is independent reporting possible in autocratic regimes? How can a true narrative about political events and acts of war be achieved? And, how can we separate fact from fiction? These are all questions of great relevance to our tumultuous and highly politicized times. They are also the questions that are at the core of the work „How to write history?“ (hereafter referred to as *Historia*) by Lucian of Samosata, a Greek author writing in the second century CE. Alexander Free's new monograph on this text, a re-working of his 2014 dissertation, is therefore timely and welcome. This particular Lucianic work has been the subject of several studies already,¹ but Free's contribution stands out by contextualizing *Historia* in Lucian's larger oeuvre and in the rhetorical culture of the second century CE.

The book consists of an introductory chapter, three substantive chapters, a conclusion, and an appendix on the position of *Historia* among other ancient works on historiography. In the introduction Free lays out the aim of his project: to advance our understanding of *Historia* by connecting it to the 'Bildungsdiskurs' of Lucian's time, in other words, the ideal of paideia of the cultural movement known as the Second Sophistic. Free gives an account of the state of the question on *Historia*, its historical context, and the structure of the piece, as well as a summary of the chapters. *Historia* presents itself as a response to a recent spate of historians recording the events of the Parthian war, which was fought by Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius in the 160s CE on the eastern frontiers of the Empire. The first person speaker of the piece criticizes these recent works harshly, and goes on to offer advice on how to write history better. The question that has vexed the scholarship on *Historia* is whether it should be taken as a sincere attempt at guidance, or rather a

satirical piece aimed only at ridiculing the historians of the Parthian war. Free promises an answer to this question.

The second chapter, „Geschichtsschreibung als paideia“, offers a close reading of large parts of *Historia*, and connects it to core issues of Second Sophistic culture. Writing history is a venue for *pepaideumenoi* to compete with one another, and to obtain lasting fame. The historians whom the speaker criticizes fall short because they fail to recognize how greatly they are lacking in paideia. Their composition, style, and language are all inferior, but their main sin is that they fail to follow and emulate the shining example of Thucydides. The real historian has to follow the two Thucydidean tenets of truth (*aletheia*) and clarity (*to safes*), and, in the spirit of the Second Sophistic, he has to compete with his contemporaries through *mimesis*, imitation that seeks to go beyond its example, in this case Thucydides. Free points out that the speaker's insistence on impartiality, independence, and free speaking (*parrhesia*) as traits of the historian borrows from the self-fashioning of philosophers. In this way the only vantage point for writing history becomes exile – as it was for Thucydides himself.

The third chapter, „Historia zwischen Fakt und Fiktion“, first traces the Thucydidean and Herodotean models in *Historia*, and then continues to survey other pieces in the Lucianic corpus that engage with questions of truth, fiction, and fact. In this section Free discusses *Alexander*, *True Histories*, *Lovers of Lies*, *On the Syrian Goddess*, and several of Lucian's introductions (*prolaliae*) in some detail. Free sets out to determine whether or not *Historia* is programmatic for Lucian's engagement with fact and fiction in his other works. Even though Thucydides is the number one model in *Historia*, Herodotus appears as a much more important foil for mimesis for Lucian in general, and there are many other ways in which Lucian's corpus contradicts the precepts from *Historia*. The piece is connected to

¹ The central works are: Gert Avenarius, *Lukians Schrift zur Geschichtsschreibung*, Meisenheim am Glan 1956; Helene Homeyer, *Lukian: Wie man Geschichte schreiben soll*, München 1965; Robert Porod, *Lukians Schrift „Wie man Geschichte schreiben soll“*. Kommentar und Interpretation, Wien 2013.

the remainder of the oeuvre not as a blueprint, but because it shares the same thematic preoccupations: *paideia*, mimesis, rhetoric and language, unmasking charlatans, and, most importantly, telling truth from fiction. *Historia* is an entertaining, satirical piece posing as an exposition on the historian's 'art' (*techne*), comparable to „On the Art of the Parasite“. Even if, should anyone want to write history, Lucian would recommend they do so as the piece prescribes, ultimately he is more interested in prompting the audience to reflect on the problems of the genre than in convincing them to put his 'lessons' into practice.

Chapter 4, „Die Geschichtsschreibung der Adoptivkaiserzeit“, argues that in broad strokes the depiction that *Historia* gives of the state of history writing in the second century CE can be trusted. Free, however, cautions against looking for specific parallels between the maligned historians and contemporaries of Lucian, such as Fronto or Arrian. The references of the piece had to be general enough to appeal to audiences in different cities, and, if *Historia* were to be a true Thucydidean 'possession for all time' (*ktema eis aiei*), for later, reading audiences. Free's emphasis on a performance setting for *Historia* and contemporary historical works is well taken. Finally, our evidence from other authors shows that also under the emperors of the second century CE a truly free and independent historiography was impossible. The insistence on *parrhesia* in *Historia* can be read as a powerful comment on the inescapable hypocrisy of history writing under autocratic rule.

A somewhat surprising omission from the book is that Free does not offer much comment on the persona of the anonymous first person speaker of *Historia*. Even though he cautions in general against drawing conclusions about the historical Lucian based on his works, Free refers to the speaker of *Historia* as 'Lucian' throughout, starting from the assumption that the audience is expected to attribute the views expressed in the piece to Lucian without reservation. In his discussion of *Alexander*, in contrast, Free is careful (and rightly so) in consistently referring to the narrator as 'Sprecher', even though in this case the narrator is explicitly called 'Lucian' in the piece. Free's thorough argument against read-

ing *Historia* as programmatic, while convincing, assumes that people are inclined to understand the work as such in the first place – which for this reader was not the case. Secondly, at times Free's book appears a bit uneven: this reader was, for instance, left wanting to hear more about *Historia*'s problematic claim that a true account of history must also be probable (*pithanos*). What of those historical events, like 9/11, that test our understanding of probability? On the other hand, the detailed reconstruction of the respective Thucydidean, Polybian, and Herodotean strands in *Historia* could profitably have been shortened.

The book on the whole is carefully produced, and is accompanied by several helpful indices, including an *index locorum*.² The bibliography supporting Free's argument is extensive and up to date. Free's book offers new and significant insights into *Historia*, and, more generally into Lucian's fascination with the complex web of lies, truths, half-truths, and fictions of life and literature under the Empire. „Geschichtsschreibung als *Paideia*“ is warmly recommended to anyone with an interest in Lucian, in the Second Sophistic, or in (ancient) historiography. Free defies the projected diffidence of the speaker of *Historia* – has he by producing his work merely rolled a vat up and down the hill like Diogenes? – by giving us a very useful book indeed on writing history.

HistLit 2017-2-180 / Inger Kuin über Free, Alexander: *Geschichtsschreibung als Paideia. Lukians Schrift „Wie man Geschichte schreiben soll“ in der Bildungskultur des 2. Jhs. n. Chr.* München 2015, in: H-Soz-Kult 19.06.2017.

²Two consistent mistakes concern the spelling of the names of Lucian scholars Jane Lightfoot (not Lightfood) and Alain Billault (not Billaut).