

The Greeks and their Past: Poetry, Oratory and History in the Fifth Century BCE

By Jonas Grethlein

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Ancient Greeks remembered their past before the rise of historiography and after it poetry and oratory continued to serve commemorative functions. This book explores the field of literary memory in the fifth century BCE, juxtaposing the works of Herodotus and Thucydides with samples from epinician poetry, elegy, tragedy and oratory. Various socio-political contexts and narrative forms lent themselves to the expression of diverse attitudes towards the past. At the same time, a common gravitational centre can be observed which is distinct from modern ideas of history. As well as presenting a broad overview on memory in various genres, Professor Grethlein sheds new light on the rise of Greek historiography. He views Herodotus and Thucydides against the background of memory in poetry and oratory and thereby elucidates the tension between tradition and continuity in which the shaping of historiography as a genre took place.

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"... a valuable read on Hellenic memory as ideological tool."
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About the Author
Jonas Grethlein is Professor of Classics at the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg. He studied at Göttingen, Oxford and Freiburg before holding positions at Harvard and the University of California, Santa Barbara. In 2006 he received the prestigious Heinz-Maier-Leibnitz award for junior scholars. In addition to numerous articles he has published Asyl und Athen. Die Konstruktion kollektiver Identität in der griechischen Tragödie (2003) and Das Geschichtsbild der Ilias. Eine Untersuchung des Geschichtsbildes der Ilias aus phänomenologischer und narratologischer Perspektive (2006) and edited (with A. Rengakos) Narratology and Interpretation: The Content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature (forthcoming).

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