

This paper develops a new approach to Ephorus, and his place in our models of Greek historiography. Previous scholarship has emphasised the revolutionary nature of Ephorus' history as an "Universal History", involving a new conscious pursuit of universality of geographical or chronological scope (or both). Here, starting from a reassessment of the testimonia, it is argued that there is no ancient justification for approaching Ephorus in this way; that the modern historiographical concept of "Universal History" is misleading as a model for Ephorus' history; and that Ephorus' history is better understood when resituated in a more flexible historiographical milieu.

Polybius v 33.1-5 is fundamental to this traditional model, as it is the only passage considered to imply that any ancient author saw Ephorus as the first to attempt to write the genre of "Universal History" (ἐπιβεβλημένον τὰ καθόλου γράφειν). A close reading of this passage in its context supports a different interpretation. First, the diversity of the historiographers whom Polybius chose here to discuss suggests that genre was irrelevant to Polybius: as ever, he wished to demonstrate his own superiority to all earlier writers of all forms of Greek historiography, not just those working within a particular genre. Second, perspective, not genre or scope, was Polybius' primary concern throughout his extended historiographical discussions, notably his treatment of Timaeus (XII), and his analogy between the inadequacies τῆς κατὰ μέρος ἱστορίας, so-called "isolated histories", and those of an examination of the scattered parts of an animal (I 4.7-11). In commending Ephorus, therefore, Polybius was not praising the genre or the scope of his history; he was acclaiming what he perceived as an increased similarity of perspective between Ephorus' history and his own. That Polybius felt able so to do, despite their very different subject matter, is thus of critical importance in analysing and reconstructing Ephorus' narrative stance.

Without the apparent constraint of the testimonia, to approach Ephorus' history in modern generic terms is counter-productive. To envisage it as "Universal History" emphasises disjunction, and reduces Ephorus' historiographical community. The converse presuppositions are crucial to analysis: an awareness of the deep continuity between fifth and fourth century historiography, and a broad understanding of the nature of the dialogue in which all Greek historiographers engaged, Ephorus no less than Herodotus, or Thucydides, or Polybius. Only then can the intense programmatic power of crucial narrative choices be explored, as a discussion of the opening and close of Ephorus' history illustrates.

It is hence unsurprising that Ephorus' history was in antiquity never considered an "Universal History", or to have founded a new genre: he was neither attempting "Universality", nor consciously fashioning a new genre of historiography. Quite the reverse. Ephorus was moulding his own historiographical vision, one reflecting his time, his society, and his interests, but that attempt was predicated on a rich engagement with his predecessors, just as theirs had been. His may have been a model Polybius found attractive, - hence Polybius' later praise for it, - but this should not encourage us to see it as intrinsically any different in its partiality and narrative purpose from those of Herodotus, Thucydides, or later, Polybius himself.