



Donald R. Kelley. *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. xii + 340 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-07308-9.



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Marc Bloch, the noted authority on medieval feudalism, once observed that "behind the visible characteristics of the countryside, the tools and the machines, behind writings, even those which appear to be the most completely detached from the people who established them, it is men that history seeks to grasp." Accolades go to Donald R. Kelley, the James Westfall Thompson Professor of History at Rutgers University and executive editor of the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, for his highly successful efforts to recapture the faces behind the Western tradition of historical writing. Although the author covers two and a half millennia (from Herodotus to Herder) in stalking the sometimes elusive builders of the Western tradition, he never loses his readers in the search, in large measure owing to the author's well-defined scope and purpose. While it has been traditional for works on historiography either to be encyclopedic, for the sake of providing "total coverage," or for writers to increase the analytical content of their text by limiting coverage to a narrowly defined list of "super historians," Kelley eludes both

pitfalls and provides us with a study that is both analytical and comprehensive.

With regard to purpose Kelley states, "The essential purpose of this book is to present a critical survey and interpretation of the Western tradition of historical inquiry and writing from Herodotus and Thucydides down to the masterworks of the eighteenth century and the beginning of 'scientific history' in the nineteenth" (p. xi). In his analysis of both major and minor works that span twenty-five centuries, Kelly retains the reader's interest by addressing issues and themes that have been of perennial interest to historians. Topics traced throughout the *Faces of History* include questions of historical truth and utility, methods of interpretation and criticism, history's relation to myth, narrative versus analytical history, history's fascination with origins, the differences between chronicle and history, history's relationship to the arts and sciences, and the philosophy of history. Kelley returns to these topics at appropriate junctures in his text giving his work a unity of purpose that is frequently lacking in other books dealing with the history of history.

Also unique to Kelley's *Faces of History* is the presence of a bona fide thesis which the author defends with zeal and erudition from beginning to end. In the opening chapter, "Mythistory," Kelley portrays Herodotus and Thucydides in a Janus-like posture to accentuate the contrasting perceptions they brought to history in its formative stages. Herodotus' concept of history consisted of a broad antiquarian tradition that focused on the great diversity of the human experience. Scholars of the eighteenth century came to call this "Cultural History"; it was universal and eclectic. Thucydides, the other face of Janus, focused on headline events of political and military history, questions of material interest, agency and power and the causal factors underlying conspicuous changes in public affairs. Herodotus considered history to be a broad, open-ended field of human inquiry, while for Thucydides history was a circumscribed series of events, with spatial and temporal limitations that could be explained and perhaps even controlled. While it is true that Clio has had many faces, Kelley argues that the "Two Faces" reflected in the paradigms of Herodotus and Thucydides have persisted for twenty-five centuries. True, there have been many variations on and departures from the traditions established by the dual patriarchs of Clio, but their paradigms continue to loom large across the total spectrum of the Western historical tradition. For example, with regard to strategy, is the historian's primary concern "narrative" or "analytical?" Are historians telling stories or solving problems? Are historians involved in a process of reductionism (Thucydides) or should they avoid the need for closure and concern themselves with the mysteries of cultures that go beyond their experience (Herodotus)? Lord Acton, who falls at the end of Kelley's historical odyssey, reflects the on-going concern spawned by the "Two Faces" tradition regarding the dilemma of "strategy" when he instructed his students to "study problems, not periods." Unfortunately, as Kelley's deliberations reflect, the choices are not always as simple as Lord

Acton would have them appear. However, one thing is clear, either consciously or unconsciously, historians must deal with the issue of historical strategy.

In addition to strategy, Kelley maintains that historians must also concern themselves with the "context" in which history is written and read. "Thucydides, for example, was conspicuously and painfully the product of a political 'crisis' and his work cannot be extricated from his own intense and ultimately tragic experiences" (p.6). Equally important is the context in which history is received. Whatever message the writer may have wanted to send, the message received and reconstructed may well be very different due to time, place and circumstances. Just as Kelley admonishes his readers to observe the significance of "context" in reporting and interpreting history, he follows his own admonition in his reconstruction of the "Faces of History."

Another thread that runs throughout Kelley's text concerns the "Concept of History," or issues related to the "scope," "method," and "purpose" of history. In the context of Kelley's text, "scope" deals with subject matter, chronology, geography and historical evidence; "method" involves the means of gathering information, making sense of it, and transmitting it to a reading public; and "purpose" relates to claims regarding the utility of history. While the universal, eclectic scope of Herodotus stands in contrast to Thucydides' problem-oriented conception, they were both fascinated by "origins" and "first causes," they both exercised a binocular vision that divided history into "we" and "they," or "civilization" and "barbarians," and they both tended to correlate observed human behavior with its environment (p. 8). They both also passed on to posterity the first law of historical method, which is to tell the truth and mix in nothing that is false. However, with regard to "method," as Kelley demonstrates, history also came to be associated with poetry, rhetoric and moral philosophy.

In Chapters 2-10, Kelley traces the "Two Faces" of history through Greek, Roman, and Jewish antiquity, to early Christianity, the medieval chroniclers, the embryonic national historians, the revisionists of the Renaissance and Reformation, the pre-modernist of the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, and into the modern statements of the nineteenth century. In Chapter 2, "Greek Horizons," Kelley acknowledges posterity's debt to Herodotus and Thucydides; however, as the chapter also demonstrates, the development of the Western historical tradition was more than a series of footnotes to Herodotus and Thucydides. Some critics, such as Plutarch, rejected the methodology of the founding fathers, while others drew upon both of the original paradigms to create a more integrated "concept of history." For example, Polybius shared Herodotus' interest in barbarian nations and with Thucydides he shared a utilitarian concern for political history and its assignable causes (p. 31). Also, with regard to the development of the Western tradition, Kelley shows how the Latin successors of Herodotus and Thucydides went beyond their mentors in developing a theoretical idea of history that actually embodied the "nobledream" of modern historiography, "to tell the tale as it actually happened."

Kelley rightfully concludes in Chapter 3 that Roman history began with Livy, but he also provides valuable insight into the extensive Greek prelude and Latin prehistory to Livy. While Livy mirrors the "Two Faces" of Greek historiography, his most significant contribution, as Kelley indicates, is that he provided the archetype of national history. Like his Greek predecessors, Livy was concerned with beginnings, but his focus was on the origins of the city. Kelley is to be commended for including in this chapter consideration of the development of early Christian and Byzantine historiography as some texts on the history of history remove them from their historical context by examining them independently of their Roman roots.

Based upon the content of Chapters 4-5, few if any would challenge Kelley's conclusion that "...time is long past when a sense of history can be denied to the Middle Ages" (p 129). While at times it may appear unscholarly and speculative, some early Christian writers, such as Augustine, offered interpretations on universal history that linked medieval history with the modern philosophy of history (p. 98). Christian historiography took on a Janus appearance of its own as it looked backward to an age of innocence and forward to a final, eschatological goal. For Judaism and Christianity, the purpose of history was to find a higher spiritual message behind the letter of the human record: history was to be "The Education of the Human Race." From Bede to Otto of Freising there was a growing awareness among medieval scholars, historians and chroniclers regarding historical and cultural relativity (p.129). While the medieval writers reflected a universal interest in the past and were particularly concerned with "beginnings," Kelley argues that their interest in the past was richer and more diverse than the conventions established by Herodotus, Thucydides and their Greek and Latin progeny.

Highlights of Chapter 6, "The Renaissance Retrospective," include an informative vignette regarding the historical contribution of the poet Petrarch and a more extensive sketch of the paragon of Renaissance writers, Machiavelli. Also enlightening are Kelley's comments on lesser-known contributors to the Western historical tradition, such as George Chastellain (the French Thucydides), Claude de Seyssel, an admirer of both Herodotus and Thucydides, who contributed significantly to the national tradition of Western historiography, and Polydore Vergil and Pico della Mirandola, who contributed to the development of Cultural History. As Kelly notes, while Petrarch was not an historian, his "Janus-view" of history contributed to the beginning of periodization within history, as well as to the inaccurate, but enduring appellation, "dark age," in reference to medieval history. Kelley also adds credibility to his

already persuasive thesis as he demonstrates the influence of the "Two Faces" tradition on the development of Cultural History and the writings of Machiavelli.

While it is common knowledge that the Reformation resulted in a rewriting of history, too often an excessive amount of significance is assigned to Luther's assault on canon law and papal supremacy for the rewriting. Kelley gives a more comprehensive interpretation of the "Reformation Tradition," (Chapter 7) as he maintains that while it is true that Luther ignited a major controversy with his attack on orthodoxy, the rewriting of history was also due in part to the struggle between ecumenical councils and the papacy regarding leadership within the Church, and the growing national traditions in England, France, Germany and Spain, that sought independence from Rome.

Kelley's erudite comments illuminate the major contributions of Reformation scholars to the Western tradition of historical thought; however, his conclusions on the Reformation practitioners' use of the "first law of historical method" (which was to tell the truth and mix in nothing that was false) is debatable. According to Kelley, "...even the most committed historians contributed, if only inadvertently, to the project of historical inquiry, to tell the truth, be humanly useful, and perhaps even be a way to wisdom." Useful it was, but whether it was through malice, hatred, fear or partisanship, it is certain that practitioners in the church-state conflict spread lies. Down to the end of the fifteenth century most scholars saw history as an art, but, as Kelley demonstrates in Chapter 8, "The Science of History," by the sixteenth century there was a growing tendency to raise history above the arts by developing a systematic method oriented toward universals rather than particulars. One of the earliest efforts to explain history as a science is found in Jean Bodin's *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, in which Bodin argues that history is similar to law in that both can be used to describe and judge the actions of

humanity. Also, like jurisprudence, history covers the whole world of nations, its practitioners need an understanding of public affairs and it requires a method of correct understanding (p. 198). From the jurists, historians also came to place a higher value on documentary evidence which resulted in Jean Mabillion establishing a set of rules (1681) to authenticate and criticize medieval charters and documents.

Nowhere is the author's erudition more apparent than in his coverage of "Philosophical History" (Chapter 9), which deals with the Enlightenment contribution to Western historiography. It is true, as Kelley maintains, that Enlightenment history took on different meanings based upon national prejudices. In general the Italians followed the lead of the humanists, the English and Scots were inspired by Bacon and Locke, the French reflected Cartesian rationalism and Lockean empiricism, and Germany followed Luther's spiritualism, eclecticism and a kind of "proto-historicism." Highlights of the chapter include an informative account of Vico and Gibbon and a most learned summation of the Scottish contribution to "Conjectural History." For the French contribution Kelley focuses attention, predictably, on Voltaire and, to a lesser degree, Condorcet. The French cared little for the history of war and politics, preferring instead to focus on the progress of science and the human spirit from antiquity to the present. Their intent was not so much to understand the world, but to improve it. The author's coverage of Germany clearly reveals how the Enlightenment there differed significantly from the rest of Europe as in Germany the Enlightenment was on the side of theology, while in France, England and Scotland, the study of history continued to be associated with law and jurisprudence (p.244). Also noteworthy is Kelley's coverage of J. G. Herder, whose efforts to establish a more coherent philosophy of history, resulted in a contribution that, like Voltaire and Gibbon, exceeded those of any academics.

In his final chapter, "Modern Historiography," Kelley maintains that after twenty five-hundred years the visages of Herodotus and Thucydides are still visible in Western historiography. They can be seen in the histories dealing with cultural values and human self-knowledge on a world scale and in the pragmatic history devoted to questions of local politics and power. They can also be seen in historicism, which Kelley defines as a way of "characterizing the cast of mind that carries on historical inquiry in the spirit of especially Herodotus, that is, the art of asking perhaps naive (if not objective) questions about human behavior in time" (p. 268). Thus, Kelley ends his book where most accounts of the modern study of history begin, with the rise of historicism, the academic and professional organization of history and the classics of nineteenth-century historical narrative.

The *Faces of History* is a companion volume to Kelley's highly praised *Version of History from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* and it will be an invaluable resource to anyone seeking an overview of the Western historiographical tradition. Professors, graduates students and undergraduates alike will find much to enlighten and inform in this book and while the foreign phrases Kelley integrates into the text may be a little troublesome to undergraduates, this book should be required reading wherever historiography is taught.

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