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# Forum Antike

Online



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## Digging deep into the cover-texts for Phylarchus' *Histories*. Horizontal analysis of intermediate authors in approaching historical fragments

Phylarchus of Athens (or Naucratis) lived in the third century BC, and is the only author known to have written a continuous historical narrative covering the period 272-220 BC. In antiquity, the *Histories* was part of the mainstream of Greek historiography, particularly with its account of the third-century BC Sparta. It is therefore interesting that the attention and regard for his work in modern scholarship tended to be quite the opposite. Phylarchus is usually viewed as “sensationalist” historian, inclined to thrill and excite the reader rather than to bring truth about the past, or as propagandist for the policy and actions of the Spartan kings, especially Cleomenes III.

The relatively little interest in, as well as certain misunderstandings of, Phylarchus are partly caused by the fact that the extensive original text of the *Histories*, comprising twenty eight books, has been lost. It is now accessible to us only through intermediate authors or cover-texts, i.e. those works that used Phylarchus for their own writings. The three major cover-texts for Phylarchus are Polybius of Megalopolis, Plutarch of Chaeronea and Athenaeus of Naucratis. Each of them belonged to a specific social and literary milieu, each had his own peculiar interests and purposes, which impacted the way he read Phylarchus. It is thus essential to treat the texts in which we dig for the *Histories* as material for thorough scrutiny and interpretation, rather than as mere “repository” of fragments (the latter a problematic notion itself). Before we say anything about the contents, aims or themes of Phylarchus' work, we shall first explore the strategies of the intermediate authors, their methods of handling sources, and try to describe how these influence the “transmission” of the *Histories*.

The lecture provides an overview on a reexamination of Phylarchus' historical reliquiae, together with an outline how a horizontal analysis of the cover-texts in question can be approached. By highlighting several instances of problematic representation of Phylarchus' narrative, it gives an idea about the methods employed and the advancements such enquiry can bring in our understanding of the historian. It also points out some challenges and difficulties that the task presents.