Ancient Geography: The Discovery of the World in Classical Greece and Rome, Duane W. Roller. I.B. Tauris, London (2015). 294 pages, £69 hardcover.

In his latest book Roller takes us on a journey through time and space, tracking the steps by which geographical knowledge of the world was acquired, accumulated, transmitted, and, at times, lost. For Roller, the history of ancient geography boils down to two main aspects: the steady increase in topographical information, often limited to collections of toponyms ordered in a linear way, contained, for instance, in the reports of ancient explorers and travellers; and the creation of a cosmic architecture, within which the *oikoumene* or 'inhabited world', its regions, and any other piece of topographical data would find their place. The sources for both approaches are diverse: thoughts on the organisation of the world can be discerned (for instance) in Homer's description of Achilles' shield (see book 18 of the *Iliad*), the works of the early Milesian philosophers, the narrative of Herodotus, the writings of Aristotle and his students, and, of course, the work of geographers such as Eratosthenes or Strabo; these same sources provide rich topographical information. A host of other sources, in both poetry and prose, often preserved only in fragments, complement such mainstream texts. Roller is fully aware of the complexity of his source material and the difficulties it entails; not the least of his achievements is that he manages, in a straightforward style that eschews jargon, to offer a rounded picture which gives due attention to both well-known and less familiar authors.

The chapters of the book fall into a tripartite structure along chronological lines: the archaic and classical period, from Homer to Aristotle (chapters 1–3); the Hellenistic period, from Alexander and Pytheas to Eratosthenes (chapters 4–6); and, after a 'hinge' chapter on the 'New Roman world', covering Polybius and

Poseidonios, but also Caesar's exploration of Gaul, three more chapters (8–10) on the Roman imperial period, from Augustus to the later roman empire.

Throughout, theory is kept to a minimum: there are at times remarks that might lead to an in-depth discussion, but they are rarely followed up, not even in the footnotes. Thus, for instance, the statement that 'the catalogue is like a map, and it is selective in ways that will never be understood' (p. 13, on the Iliadic *Catalogue of Ships*) is not developed; this is a lost opportunity for explaining in what ways a catalogue is like—and unlike—a map. (A general discussion of maps and mapping is relegated to a short appendix at the end.) Similarly, Roller is aware that geography is not just accumulation of information, and that it can 'do' things: for instance, talking of Pindar's narrative of the voyage of the Argo, he adds that this is 'the earliest known example of manipulating geographical data for political purposes' (p. 61). But these remarks remain occasional: this is not a book about changing perceptions of space, or about constructions of space, but a book about changes and progress in the 'technical' knowledge of the inhabited world.

As a result of this particular focus, some chapters fall below the degree of insight and sophistication achieved in current scholarship, in particular those on the archaic and classical period. In line with Roller's emphasis on topographical knowledge, the travels of the heroes are used to suggest the range of geographical knowledge available in the eight and seventh century BCE; but while the Homeric and Hesiodic poems offer splendid material for discussion of perceptions of space, using them to mark increase in specific topographical knowledge is problematic. The Iliadic *Catalogue of Ships* is briefly discussed as the one instance of 'pure geography' (p. 22–23) in the Homeric poems, but is there such a thing as 'pure geography'? In Herodotus, geography is viewed from different perspectives by different actors; it is a

battlefield of power. One cannot but agree with Roller that 'The importance of Herodotus to geographical knowledge cannot be overestimated, as he brought together all that had been known about the inhabited world up to his time' (p. 65), but it is also fascinating to realise that Herodotus problematized this increase in geographical knowledge, tracing clear connections between geographical exploration and imperialist designs. In one famous passage of *The Histories* (book 4, chapter 45, sections 2–5), Herodotus wonders who ever gave names to the continents, and why furthermore women's names. This passage is not, however, mentioned; Roller prefers to list the areas which we can assume, on the basis of Herodotus' narrative, to be reasonably well known to the Greeks. References in the footnotes might have helped the interested reader pursue these issues; but in the case of Herodotus, for instance, these are limited to George Rawlinson's monumental, but dated, translation (1859). There is some coverage of geography in literature (Pindar, Aeschylus); but, on the whole, the section on the archaic and early classical period is the least satisfactory.

With the next chapters, however, Roller reaches a period on which he has himself produced important work (a translation of and commentary on Eratosthenes, and an annotated translation of Strabo's *Geography*, published in 2009 and 2014 respectively), and the greater degree of expertise is immediately visible: the fascinating chapters on Pytheas and Alexander and on their legacy mark a clear change in gear. Quite a lot of space is given to the rather shadowy Pytheas; here, Roller can rely on his earlier study of Greek and Roman exploration of the Atlantic (*Through the Pillars of Herakles*, 2006), and this registers in the density and richness of the exposition. With Alexander, the linkage between power, empire, and geography is given prominence: the geographical manipulations undertaken by Alexander's historiographers, designed to magnify Alexander's achievements, are an impressive

example, well worked out, of how power determines geography. But the crowning point of the book is the chapter on Eratosthenes, the man who invented geography in its modern sense: among his many achievements is the drawing of a prime meridian and prime parallel, meeting at Rhodes, which rendered it possible to plot the position of the *oikoumene* on the earth.

The third part of the book charts Rome's involvement with exploration and tracing the limits of the world. Chapter 7, 'The New Roman World', neatly combines broad synthesis (e.g., on Polybios) with detailed discussions. Roller is at his best with 'the epic tale' of Eudoxos and the attempts to discover a new route to India, a story preserved by Strabo, who was basing himself on a lost work of Poseidonios *On the Ocean*—here, the footnotes are helpful, pointing the interested reader to Kidd's commentary on Poseidonios as well as to other recent literature. The following three chapters emphasize, again, the role of trade and military expeditions in the increase in geographical knowledge (we are, for instance, given fascinating insights into Juba II and the exploration of the African frontier), but also its systematization: with Agrippa's map, but also with the works of Strabo, Mela, Pliny, and Ptolemy, the only geographical works, *stricto sensu*, to have survived from the ancient world.

To conclude: notwithstanding the criticisms above, Roller has provided the curious reader with a very readable and fairly detailed narrative; apart from the recent short introduction by Daniela Dueck, *Geography in Classical Antiquity* (2012), which is very differently organized, according to themes ('descriptive geography', 'thematic geography', 'practical geography'), the last such survey of ancient geographical thought in English is J. Oliver Thomson's dated *History of Ancient Geography* (1948). Roller's book fills a gap, and fills it very effectively.

Paola Ceccarelli

UCL, United Kingdom