

only a nodding acquaintance, *Learn Latin* can unhesitatingly be recommended. Latin masters with fractious pupils please note!

Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums

DAVID BEEVERS

P. BRIANT: *Histoire de l'empire perse de Cyrus à Alexandre*. Pp. 1247, 59 ills. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1996. ISBN: 2-213-59667-0.

There are not many syntheses of the history of the Persian Empire coming from the pen of a single author. The best known and most used are A. T. Olmstead's magisterial work *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago, 1948) and J. M. Cook, *The Persian Empire* (New York, 1983). To write a general history of the Persian Empire is an extremely difficult task: there is a huge quantity of evidence of all kinds coming from the Near East itself, plus the Greek perspective given by contemporary Greek writers. For a long time, the vast majority of academics relied upon the Greek view. The situation is currently in flux. More attention is being paid to Near Eastern sources but not to the exclusion of all other perspectives. B.'s is the best reflection of the new approaches to the subject. It is long, but B. puts this length to very good use. It is architecture on a grand scale and it is very difficult to review it except at length and in detail.

This is not just a general history of the Persian Empire, bringing together all existing literature. It is a high-quality academic book in its own right. In the prologue (pp. 23–40) B. gives a short discussion of existing sources, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. The history itself is divided into six parts, mainly chronological but also thematic, and eighteen chapters. Here is not just the history of the Persian Empire but of the whole of the ancient world in relation to the Persians. All aspects are treated with great care and knowledge. Wherever possible, the author gives straightforward answers and his own opinions; where lack of evidence prevents this, he explains the problem and discusses what evidence does exist.

The reader will find in this book material on every facet of the Persian Empire: politics, economics, religion, diplomacy, culture, art, communications, etc. The book is impressive testimony to B.'s ability to handle all kinds of evidence—much of it extremely diverse. The bibliography (pp. 1079–1145) and the extensive bibliographical commentary (pp. 905–1078) would stand alone as a great contribution to the subject, being full and up to date.

Of course, in a book such as B.'s it is always possible to find something with which there is disagreement—it is in the nature of wide-ranging works, especially those such as this which are no mere exercise in mechanical synthesis but the outcome of many years of investigation and thought by a particular author. Obviously B. is more familiar with some regions than others. The main point is that he has created a magisterial new history of the Persian Empire, much broader than Olmstead's, and drawing on the expanded knowledge of the last fifty years. Olmstead's book was a testimony to the study of problems by his own and previous generations. B. has the advantage of presenting much that was unknown or uncertain to his predecessors.

The importance and interest of the book are not confined to academic specialists. All students of the subject should regard it as essential reading. Thus, the sooner an English translation of it is made the better.

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C. CALAME: *Mythe et histoire dans l'Antiquité grecque: La création symbolique d'une colonie*. Pp. 185. Lausanne: Editions Payot, 1996. Paper, Sw. frs. 36.70. ISBN: 2-601-03189-1.

This book continues the study of myth, a topic well established and popular in modern classical studies. It demonstrates once again how difficult it is to determine what is myth and what is history. It is a slightly uneasy mixture. Its first part discusses mythology (pp. 9–55); the rest (pp. 57–162) is the story of the foundation of Cyrene, a Greek colony in modern-day Libya; there is a coda (pp. 163–9) entitled 'Ni Mythe ni Histoire'.

The first chapter is theoretical, discussing myths and mythology in ancient Greek society. This is a useful short essay, largely summarizing existing knowledge and themes. It is difficult to detect the author's own thoughts and interpretation. Those wanting a more comprehensive discussion should read works such as: L. Edmunds (ed.), *Approaches to Greek Myth* (Baltimore and

London, 1990), D. C. Pozzi and J. M. Wickersham (edd.), *Myth and the Polis* (Ithaca and London, 1991); and I. Malkin, *Myth and Territory on the Spartan Mediterranean* (Cambridge, 1994). These three books contain much fuller bibliographies than that given by C. (pp. 171–2).

The second chapter is more successful. After discussing all mythological evidence on the foundation of Cyrene, C. provides a brief but masterly study of Pindar's Pythian Odes (Nos 4, 5, and 9). Apollonios of Rhodes is discussed cursorily. Much more space is devoted to other sources, including the problem of myth and fact in the writings of Herodotus. C. has interesting observations to make on the chronology provided by Herodotus (pp. 128–55).

The concluding chapter, a short discussion of mythology from Homer to Strabo, with reference to Cyrene, clearly demonstrates that foundation myths flow from the poetic imagination of the Greeks and have nothing in common with historical facts.

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S. C. TODD: *Athens and Sparta* (Classical World Series). Pp. xi + 83, 21 figs. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996. Paper, £7.95. ISBN: 1-85399-398-0.

The 'Classical World Series' of Bristol Classical Press is aimed at newcomers to the subject. By standardizing on a format of rather few pages, the series gives uneven coverage. Thus, compared, say, with N. R. E. Fisher's volume in the series (*Slavery in Classical Greece*), T. here faced a severe task of reduction in covering in a similar space the history of the two best documented Greek cities, from the fifth century down to Roman times. T.'s work is sound and accessibly written, with material divided clearly between the chronological and the thematic. His viewpoint is that of political culture; thus the trial of Sokrates is briefly noticed in the context of 'show trials' (p. 56) rather than as a phenomenon of religion or of personal ethics. The tone is non-controversial and agreeably honest in warning the student against modern, as well as ancient, biases; for example, that Athens was 'democratic and good' while Sparta was 'evil and totalitarian' (p. 9), and that the 'nice' Delian League metamorphosed into a 'nasty' Athenian empire (p. 19). T.'s own morality may be hinted at, in his defence of the Athenians as 'democratic' and in his description of Spartan arrangements as a 'spurious equality' (p. 27). He is right to point out the 'persuasive rhetoric of the Spartan term "similars"', *homoioi*, and to wonder whom it was aimed at. (The vases of sixth-century Lakonia, with their Alkman-esque images of luxury, and therefore of inequality, are well emphasized.)

The ghost of Thucydides presides uneasily over the volume. T. wishes not to seem to privilege Thucydides in respect of reliability. He writes 'What makes Thucydides important is his influence'. He describes Thucydides, 'with pardonable exaggeration' as 'the inventor' of the Peloponnesian War (p. 45). T. claims that the 'history of . . . images' of Athens and Sparta 'forms the focus of this book' (p. 9). But this fashionable position is not maintained. Images are not here a main focus of interest in their own right; T. has too healthy a respect for truth-function. As an author of images influential down the centuries Plutarch might have had a better claim on study than Thucydides. Yet T. describes Plutarch as 'unfortunately' one of the most detailed sources for the Spartan *agôgê* (p. 68). Why 'unfortunately'? Presumably, because Thucydides would have been a more reliable witness to the truth. T. should have avowed this openly, to himself and his readers. (Plutarchan scholars might here enter a protest of their own, based on the biographer's increasing respectability as a faithful reproducer of source material, and on the likelihood that for the *agôgê* he drew heavily on Aristotle's *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians*.)

Students can readily be taught to patronize the Greeks (or almost any other culture), as T. is aware. By treating ostracism as 'odd' (p. 26), T. may unintentionally do this. He might better have stressed the rationality of ostracism as a counter to inconsistency (rather than deadlock) in policy, in an assembly whose composition and political complexion might change greatly within days. Thucydides is patronized as having a 'fetish for precise dates' (p. 47). On the principle that students should be taught to understand rather than to condemn, might T. not better have explained Thucydides' anxiety by reference to that salient fact of Greek history: the vulnerability of chronology?

In short a workmanlike book, slightly lacking in focus. The publishers should have provided an index.

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