

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