SOME RECENT BOOKS


This chronologically arranged collection of essays by various contributors is the product of a colloquium on the theme of generational conflict in the ancient world sponsored by the 1970/71 Committee of the American Philological Association.

The quality of the essays varies considerably. The introductory essay questions the universality of generational conflict, defined as tension between young and old, and attacks the theory offered in Chapter Six that generational conflict was recognised in the ancient world as an 'everlasting threat to political stability'. It provides valuable background for the other essays on the social organisation, education and values of the ancient cultures, including the eastern ones. The conclusions reached are that generational conflict was common when a crisis occurred to quicken the consciousness of the youth, but that this conflict very seldom entered the arena of political decision-making. Youth programmes did not emerge even in late fifth-century Athens, yet there conflict is evident, spurred by the growth of the democracy which tended to equalise young and old as never before and the growth of Reason which questioned traditional values, and quickened by the crisis of the Peloponnesian War.

It is true that some Athenians despaired of the effects of the New Education promoted by the Sophists on some of the youth, their questioning attitudes to state religion and morality and their apparently anti-democratic tendencies; but we do not find the youth directing the revolution of 411 B.C. for instance, nor even playing the greater part in it: Alcibiades was hardly a youth at about 40 and the Hellenic Youth employed by the Four Hundred were used only as instruments to terrorise the opposition. Thucydides refers elsewhere to the younger men in the revolutionary party in this same sort of violent context, but they are only a part of the wider membership of the oligarchic clubs. Significantly the movers of the revolution do not seem to be young.

The essay recognises that the terms *presbyteroi* and *neōteroi*, although broadly distinguishing age groups which may have polarised within Athens, nevertheless had become political terms of praise and blame by the end of the fifth century, and *neōteros* could be applied to a man well beyond what we should consider a youthful age. That these did become value terms was entirely to be expected in a patriarchal society that felt its generational tension, in spite of the levelling effect of democracy. In the Sicilian debate in Thucydides, for instance, Nicias calls Alcibiades, a man of 36 years of age, *neōteros*, and appeals to the *presbyteroi* not to be daunted by his supporters.

It is possible that Alcibiades appealed more to the young than the old, but (paradoxically) he emerges in that debate as the champion of harmony between
young and old, which he says was traditional at Athens, and not at all as a leader of youth as his older opponent Nicias implies. Moreover, it is noticeable that the distinction Nicias draws between young and old is not apparent when it comes to voting: the young may have different motives from the old, but both are of one intention. The generational conflict has no positive effect on decision-making on that occasion.

Some of the essays have less food for thought, and some are less well researched. Chapter One on Homer, for instance, has very few acknowledgements even where there is marked deviation from a recognised authority like M.I. Finley on the role of Nestor in the *Iliad* (*The World of Odysseus*, Viking Compass edition 1965, pp.122-4). There is besides so little evidence of generational conflict of values in the *Iliad* that one wonders whether the subject deserves treatment at all.

Other essays again are intelligent, well-written and entertaining, such as Chapter Four where the author discusses how the theme of generational conflict is handled in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. One could wish that the understanding he shows of his source was shared by all contributors; but in Chapter Ten on generational conflict in Catullus, the author disregards the complexities of the problem of the relationship between the views presented in the poems and Catullus’ own, ignoring the possibility that in a poem of such a traditional form as a wedding song (Nos. 61 and 62), very much of what is said may be simply what is expected of the traditional form, not autobiographical evidence of the poet’s own beliefs.

Some essays are disappointingly short: in Chapter Five, of three pages’ length on the generational conflict in Thucydides, more thorough discussion of precisely what impact the conflict did have on political decision-making is called for, and the theme deserves a much more systematic, comprehensive and accurate treatment; e.g. what evidence is there for referring to the ‘younger’ Ephor Sthenelaidas (p.121)? Again, in advising the Athenians do the Corinthian envoys ‘point to the experience of their own mature age’ as being a wiser guide than any other (p.119)? Or do they merely call on the longer memories of the older generation of Athenians so that they will verify the Corinthian record of past favours to Athens for the benefit of the younger men with shorter memories?

In Chapter Nine the idea that the Roman Revolution had its formal cause in the cultural revolution among the young is explored. The author appears to believe that the *populares* were marked out from the *optimates* less by their methods as is generally accepted than by their policies and programme and their new cultural outlook. He speaks of a ‘*popularis* movement’ and Gaius’ being elected ‘as a *popularis*’ as if the ideas of the *populares* were more distinctive than their methods. Consequently he ignores Tiberius’ considerable senatorial backing for his reforms before he resorted to unacceptable methods and exaggerates senatorial opposition to the substance of his agrarian bill.
Of particular interest to readers of *Prudentia* will be the suggestion in the first and last chapters that there was no generational conflict in Imperial Rome.

The book is not of great value for scholars and the chronological table of ancient authors on p.13 suggests, in any case, that it is aimed at a popular audience.

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The enormous increase during the last twenty years in our knowledge of the New Comedy has not as yet been accompanied by a similar gain for the average undergraduate, the non-specialist and the Greekless reader. There is a pressing need for text-accompanied translations and for general guidance through the papyrological maze. Webster’s *Introduction to Menander* is not a book for the untrained. Professor Sandbach has now produced just such a general introduction to the ancient comic drama, that has a great deal to offer, especially in the field of Greek New Comedy. In roughly equal thirds he deals with Old Comedy, the Greek New Comedy and Roman Comedy, and adds a glance down the centuries following Terence, a discussion of various technical matters of the Old Period, a Glossary and a ‘Select Bibliography’.

The arguments in favour of the inclusion of Old Comedy in this volume must have been overwhelming, but the result is not quite satisfactory. In comparison with the later period, S. does not provide much discussion of various problems in the Old Comedy, though the quality of his discussions of the later period suggests that a few remarks on, say, the structure of *Frogs* might have been generally enlightening for the whole period. The existence of Dover’s *Aristophanic Comedy* obviously both eased and complicated S.’s task. No real effort is made to demonstrate the continuity of the tradition. S. would not, I think, hold that ‘the ghost of Aristophanes is ... an irritating irrelevance when one is considering Menander’ (Arnott, *G & R* N.S.15 (1968) 1), but no clear view emerges from the book; seeking to trace change through the Middle Period (pp.55-8) is obviously an inconclusive study. The direct juxtaposition of Aristophanes and the New Comedy (e.g. Ar. *Wasps* 1 ff. — Men. *Heros* 1ff; Ar. *Wasps* 605ff. — Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus* 705ff; Knemon’s speech and the parabatic tradition; the finales of the comedies etc.) would have been illuminating for S.’s intended readership. Reference to the Old Comedy would have produced a more satisfactory treatment of the postponed prologue (p.81).

Two sizeable chunks of the work are devoted to plot summaries of the *Acharnians* and the *Samia*. The former seeks to recreate the atmosphere of the