REVIEWs


While new links in the Cambridge Ancient History chain continue to be forged, reprints appear and confirm the series' status as a standard text. Second edition volume IV, covering 525 to 479 BC, appeared first in 1988, and achieved its third reprint in 1999. The unusually short timespan proposed in its title is a significant pointer. Volumes V and VI have neutral titles in the second edition: The Fifth Century BC instead of the first edition's Athens 478-401 BC, and The Fourth Century BC instead of Macedon 401-301 BC. Not volume IV, whose predecessor was called The Persian Empire and the West. Although the new title is less clearly Herodotean, it implies an identical metanarrative: clash of Persian despotism and Greek freedom.

Part I (1-286), on the Persian empire, strengthened by sixty years of research, is an enormous advance on the seventy-five pages or so covering equivalent ground in the first edition. The chronological scope here has nothing to do with the forty-six-year span referred to on the cover. There was a small surge in the eighties of codifications of work on the Achaemenids, but the CAH account is as good an introduction for beginners as anything in J.M. Cook's The Persian Empire (London, 1983), M. Dandamaev's Political History of the Achaemenid Empire (Leiden,
1989), or the *Cambridge History of Iran II* (Cambridge, 1985), in which the equivalent chapters are by J.M. Cook and A.R. Burn.

By contrast, Part III (623-780), on Italy, Sicily and the Carthaginians, has barely expanded in length, by comparison with R. Hackforth’s and R.S. Conway’s chapters on the same areas in the first edition. Economical chapters by David Ridgway, Edward Togo Salmon, J.H.W. Penney and David Asheri show the complexity of the issues. Again, the timespan runs back well before 525, though the lower limit is the early fifth century.

The heart of the volume is in the series of chapters in Part II presenting a rereading of Herodotus’ Persian War. Not all has developed as writers in the first edition might have expected. Oswyn Murray, writing on the Ionian Revolt, points out that Chios and Miletus, until their defeat, were larger and richer than Athens, and the ‘two greatest cities of the Greek world’ (490). He examines how Persians’ claims to be enlightened rulers ceased to convince in Ionia, when the Persians had ‘an excellent record in respecting the prejudices and traditions of peoples far more difficult than the Greeks’ (475: he means the Jews, unfairly). In Susa and Babylon, victory over Ionia cannot have appeared to be a preliminary. In the 480s, with mainland Greeks, country cousins of the Ionians, divided, even the setback of Marathon hardly seemed to foreshadow failure for the attempt to add all of Greece to the Persian empire. Allies were available. Sparta had no record of anti-Persian action. The Spartans and Athenians failed to attract Sicilian support. For them in 481 to call their alliance ‘the Greeks’ (cf. 543-4) was optimistic.

Chapters 9 to 11, on the Persian expeditions in 490 and 480, are by N.G.L. Hammond (9 and 10) and J.P. Barron (11, on the 479-8 campaigns and their aftermath). They complete the story of Greek victory, with stress (from Hammond) on how individual rulers can plan, but free states cannot (‘Sparta and Athens procrastinated in the manner which seems typical of free states’ [540]; ‘[Xerxes’] … planning was certainly thorough and capable, and far superior to the planning of some Greek states’ [587]). Barron is more inclined to believe in coherent formation and implementation of policy by the Athenians (e.g. at 619-22).
Hammond’s reading of Herodotus suppresses many difficulties. His Themistocles, overcoming the drawbacks of democracy to preserve freedom against oriental hordes, is placed in false antithesis against the decision-making system he was part of. Xerxes, too, is falsely isolated from the structure he sought to direct. So Hammond makes his retreat after Salamis into a mystery (581-5). But the supply problem was real, and the defeat as such reduced his power. His Egyptian contingent sailed away home. Control of his empire was always conditional, his freedom to plan against his subjects’ better judgement never untrammelled. Obedience is a paradox in free societies (as Herodotus’ Demaratus knew), but authoritarian control can break down as easily. The story of the triumph of (European) freedom in 479 needs to be told more critically in our time than Hammond and his fellow-editors have done in CAH IV².

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