Reviews


‘Speculation is like wading into a pool of crocodiles’, says Kendrick Pritchett in a discreet corner of this latest volume (p. 458, n. 664). Obscure battles between Philip II and the Athenians provoke the comment, and it’s wholly justified. But at the same time it could be a methodological manifesto. This is the fifth volume of compilation from ancient authors on Greek warfare, and the longest so far. The technique is to excerpt literary texts relevant to defined areas of the subject, and supplement the outcome with inscriptions and some reference to archaeology.

This volume deals in the first sixty eight pages with stone throwers and slingers. The next five hundred and ten pages cover booty. It’s a return to booty for Pritchett: he had dealt with the subject in volume i. Far more detail is given here. Vocabulary for booty is discussed first. B. Bravo’s study (‘Sulan. Représailles et justice privée contre des étrangers dans les cités grecques. Étude du vocabulaire et des institutions’, ASNP, 3rd series, 10 (1980): 675-987) is criticized and refuted at length (pp. 68-147). Bravo, Pritchett points out in one place, disagrees on rJusiavzein with eighteen scholia and ancient lexical references plus Wilamowitz, Jebb, Fraenkel and other scholars (p. 87). Some would wonder if such an isolated study was worth a detailed response, but Pritchett doesn’t hesitate. It’s an unequal contest — Bravo’s criticism of The Greek State at War, i (see p. 136) is massively repaid.

The next long section (pp. 152-203) deals with ‘objects of booty’ — which amounts to anything soldiers had a chance to get. Then, with ‘fate of captives’ (pp. 203-312), Pritchett’s method is at its most effective. Death, enslavement, ransom, release without ransom. Death gets eighteen pages of sources (pp. 205-223), release without ransom barely two (pp. 290-292). It was a brutal world — though in another telling footnote (p.
212, n. 313) Pritchett says ‘virtually any atrocity of antiquity can be matched in the wars of the twentieth century’. After captives, it’s raids and pirates (pp. 312-363), division of booty (pp. 363-401), sale of booty (pp. 401-438) and profits of war (pp. 438-504). Particularly important is the demonstration that the Spartans sold booty in the field after seizure, even in enemy territory, instead of taking it home. Receipts from the sale went to state funds. Slaves were not brought back to work in Spartan territory — in contrast to Roman practice (p. 415).

Detail and thoroughness are Pritchett’s keys. A book he likes is ‘a reliable and thorough study which is purely descriptive, devoid of any theorizing about ancient hoplite warfare’ (p. 35, on D. von Bothmer, Amazons in Greek Art [Oxford, 1957]). But there are points where his very thoroughness points up its own defects: he’s strong on Classical authors, referring to Livy often enough to make the reader wonder if the Greek State at War isn’t becoming a little bit Roman, but he’s weak on Jewish sources for the Hellenistic world. He doesn’t, for instance, discuss Apollonius, the general of Mysian mercenaries, ordered in 167 B.C. to kill all the men in Jerusalem and sell the women and children into slavery (II Macc. v. 24: the parallel I Macc. i. 20-32 deals first with some plundering in Jerusalem by Antiochus IV in 169). Pritchett admits to incompleteness, and granted the magnitude of his efforts it would be wrong to carp: but there’s a certain conventional canon of classicism which includes Livy and excludes Maccabees. Despite an occasional biblical reference — not only Maccabees (three texts) but, naturally, David and Goliath in the ‘slingers’ section (pp. 32-33) — Pritchett basically follows a purely ‘Classical’ track. This is a limitation.

Pritchett’s series is still incomplete. He promises a future volume on the campaigns of Alexander and the Successors ‘in Asia Minor’ (sic, p. ix). Back in vol. iv he expressed the intention of providing a general index when the series is complete. As useful as his indexes of passages from ancient authors are, having no general index is an increasingly serious handicap now that there are five substantial volumes. But these are matters of detail. This is a gigantic labour, and Pritchett himself one of those giants whose shoulders dwarfish successors will be standing on for a long time.

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