

## Zitierhinweis

Shaoxiang, Yan: Rezension über: Andrew Erskine (ed.), A Companion to Ancient History, Malden, Mass. [u.a.]: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, in: Journal of Ancient Civilizations, 25 (2010), S. 103-106, DOI: 10.21245/rec.ant.1527516944



## copyright

Dieser Beitrag kann vom Nutzer zu eigenen nicht-kommerziellen Zwecken heruntergeladen und/oder ausgedruckt werden. Darüber hinausgehende Nutzungen sind ohne weitere Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber nur im Rahmen der gesetzlichen Schrankenbestimmungen (§§ 44a-63a UrhG) zulässig.

In summary, Hill's work is an admirable demonstration of the great potential that lies in comparative analysis of the texts of the Greco-Roman world and Ancient China. The only regret is that the author does not feel himself on a sounder footing when he is not in his field of expertise. In spite of the painstaking and longstanding work of gathering information, the overall impression is not positive: Hill collects and discusses an extraordinary amount of comparative material, but the presentation of such seemingly disparate material is not always clear and accurate. Many Classicist and Ancient History readers will nevertheless get some profit from the exposure to the rich and detailed material contained in Hill's book.

*Juan Pablo Sanchez*

Review article: ANDREW ERSKINE, ed., *A Companion to Ancient History*, *Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009, pp. xxxvii + 693, ISBN 978-1-4051-3150-6, hardcover, US\$199.95)

I am wondering if we should have more *Companions* in ancient history in the 21<sup>st</sup> century since we already have numerous companions from the *Cambridge Companions* and *Brill Companions*, both series very focused and up to date. The *Edinburgh Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome* (2006) contains a variety of information about the classical world which makes it a useful handbook, and also in *Blackwell's Companions*, quite a few *Companions* have appeared since the new century, covering ancient history. So far as this paper is concerned, we may list the *Companions to the Ancient Near East*, *Archaic Greece*, the *Classical Greek World*, the *Hellenistic World*, the *Roman Republic*, the *Roman Empire*, *Late Antiquity*, the *Roman Army*, and *Julius Caesar*, all of which combined together cover almost every historical stage of ancient history chronologically. Is there any further space left for a *Companion to Ancient History*?

Having read through this a book (almost 700 pages), I realized we need Andrew Erskine's *Companion*. We are familiar with his *Companion to the Hellenistic World* in the same series, which received universal praise from both scholars and reviewers and it is now in its fifth reprinting. The present *companion* continues his editorial tradition. It is very carefully designed and the contents are thoughtfully arranged. Compared with single-volume ancient history of Chester Starr's *History of the Ancient World* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) or Hermann Bengtson's *Introduction to Ancient History* (University of California Press, 1970, translated from the sixth German edition), it is a new ancient history. Starr's *History* basically studies politics though economy and culture; Bengtson's *Introduction* deals with historiography, sources, disciplines and reference works of ancient history, which might be a little outdated now. I.M. Diakonoff, a Russian Marxist historian, edited *Early Antiquity* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), including ancient India and China. It also has something to say about the economic condition and cultural achievements of the ancient civilizations. But it is a pity that the frame is mainly political. The rise and fall of dynasties played a very prominent role, and the relations between political, economic, and cultural history are mechanically interrelated. The most recent book on this topic, Neville Morley's *Writing Ancient History* (London: Duckworth, 1999) focused on methodology.

*Blackwell's companion* does not follow any of them but offers a new approach. There are eight parts and 49 chapters written by eminent scholars around the world: Evidence, Problems and Approaches, Peoples and Places, Encountering the Divine, Living and Dying, Economy, Politics and Power, and Repercussions which may be grouped into three categories, namely the work of ancient historians, the present view of ancient history, and the ancient history's relevance to today. Part I and II may be roughly ascribed to the first category and are quite theoretical. That the

---

Flavius Josephus also appears twice but with two different original works of his, and the author seems to ignore that the Justin quoted in his commentary is the Latin epitomator of the *Historia Philippica* originally written by Pompeius Trogus which appears as ARNAUD-LINDET (2003).

evidence occupies the first is both tradition and necessary for history. It deals with historiography, epigraphy, papyrology, numismatics, archaeology, oratory and literature. The writer(s) of each chapter introduces to the reader the outline of each discipline and warns the reader against many pitfalls in collecting and interpreting evidence. Part II deals with political history, economic and social history, ethnicity and culture, population, and demography, women in ancient history, environmental history, and myth respectively. The writers try to provide origins, growth and approaches of each discipline, which naturally strengthens the warnings in Part I and may be defined as continuation of it. It demonstrates each discipline's relations to evidence in some detail, historians' interest and approaches, and also the pitfalls. It is invaluable as it gives the readers some ideas about the recent trends and developments in ancient history. The reader would find that, in the new century, we begin to have a new ancient world since there we encounter women, myth, environment, ethnicity and identity side by side with political, social and economic history. We can also see how the attitudes to sources changed, what model there are in interpreting ancient history.

Part III to Part VII belong to the second category, attributed to the present view of anc which would try to tell what kind of ancient history we have now. Part III narrates history of each region in the ancient world which tries to show the peculiarities of each area. Chapters on Asia Minor and North Africa give some new insights based on the new perceptions of ancient Mediterranean. The role that the Sahara played in ancient times in this book may be provocative, but it does provide new ideas and approaches for the future. Parts V, VI and VII together may be defined as panorama of social life of ancient civilizations and discuss living and dying, economy, politics and power. Part V, Living and Dying, starts from the family, the basic social unit, then food, then eros and sexuality, then housing, then entertainment, then education, then medicine, and finally, dying. It actually covers a man's life from womb to tomb. The aim of the editor clearly is to show the life reality of the ancients, especially the ranks and files, not only the elites. It is completely new compared with the books on ancient history mentioned above. Some of the topics, such as countryside, food, eros, housing, entertainment, medicine and death, we would hardly meet in Starr, even in the new *Cambridge Ancient History*. It reflects the recent efforts of the ancient historians and at once gives us a very different but very panoramic view on the ancient world. Ancient life becomes live and specific in these chapters. Ancient economy now seems to distance far away from the models of the primitivism and modernism. The topics about the role of the Mediterranean, the countryside, and labour, appear to have their inspiration from Braudel, especially John Horden and Nicolas Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea*. There are only four chapters dealing with politics and power, which barely fill 45 pages. But its structure shows that the editor tries to give something new since power is included and the topics, for example, structure and citizenship are not so prominent in traditional political history.

Personal Perspectives at the beginning and Repercussions can be defined as the relevance of ancient history to us. It is always puzzle and perplexed when lecturers are asked by such questions as "Is it useful for us to learn ancient history?" or "Why should we study ancient history today?". Both Personal Perspectives and Repercussions can give something to such general questions since both try to find relevance between ancient history and contemporary reality. It is true that Neville Morley in his *Writing Ancient History* has made very interesting comments on this subject and his conclusion is also quite positive: ancient history does have some relevance to our personal perspective of the contemporary world. Furthermore, studies of ancient history might enhance our understanding of the present, change the present by deconstructing some myths, shaping people's identity.<sup>16</sup> But he is an English and how or what attitudes of the people in other countries like Japan are to the ancient world, we simply don't know. The writers of Personal Perspectives come from different cultural contexts. What they in fact talks about is the relevance of ancient world to the historians studying ancient history. Josiah Ober, an American classicist and political scientist, likes comprehensive studies and stresses its relevance to understanding politics. He is proud of his 'political field theory' because he is studying ancient politics and do not need to worry about the

---

<sup>16</sup> NEVILLE MORLEY, *Writing Ancient History*, London: Duckworth, 1999, pp. 133 ff..

separation between politics and legitimacy, legitimacy and justice(pp. 1-3); Peter Derow thought that 'studying ancient history can (and should) contribute our understanding of the world around us and enhance our awareness of much that is going on in it' because 'history does not repeat itself, but people are people'(pp. 3-4); The Italian Giardina is not so positive, but still put forward some interesting comments about the relevance of ancient Rome and contemporary world; Welch emphasizes the popularity of ancient history in Australia. Her explanation that 'ancient history puts us in touch with the serious debates of the past and different ways in which antiquity (and not just classical antiquity) has been reinvented by later generations' sounds hymns; McLynn would be more optimistic if he knows that ancient history is becoming more popular in East Asia and Japan, Korea and China have established a regular forum in ancient history since 2007. The final part, Repercussions, can be defined as the continuation of Personal Perspectives that opens the volume since it deals with various historical roles of ancient history after the collapse of the classical civilizations, but focuses on social and national levels. Every one must be interested when he discovers that the supposed symbol of the Macedonian kings became a serious problem between Greece and newly independent Republic of Macedon (pp. 560-562). He would also find it very interesting when he realized the past came to life in modern France, Germany and Italy (unfortunately in the latter cases under the regime of the fascism) and played some role in establishing the national identity by shaping their past in each of these countries respectively (pp. 556-557). Neville Morley must be happy when he reads this part because his main thesis received some confirmation here. Actually, we can find more instances if we only go a little further east. In the 15-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Russian tsars claimed they were the successors of the Roman Empire. In the 1950s and 1960s China also needed ancient history to justify its ideology by substantiating the truth of the universality of slave mode of production. Even today, scholars still compares American history and Roman history and are talking about "Perils of Empire", warning the American people that the American expansionist policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century might damage their liberty at home;<sup>17</sup> or Classical Antiquity and the Politics of America which demonstrates that ancient republics and democracies never disappear from the American political agenda. <sup>18</sup>Many of the political scientists would find some inspirations from the classical world when they talk about the improvement of modern democracy.<sup>19</sup>

There is a very good bibliography and index. I mean the bibliography attached to each chapter. It is better to make some comments, however partial and biased, than only give a list of authors and titles. The massive bibliography after the text gives some ideas about the recent trends in ancient history.

This book is a companion to ancient history as it is conventionally defined, that is to say, the history of the ancient Mediterranean. According to this definition, the evidence from near east and Egypt should be included. But it seems that not many authors paid enough attention to non Greek-Latin sources. This is really conspicuous since Egyptian and Mesopotamian history is included in Part III though history of ancient near east only covers the period before the Persian Empire and Egypt only under the Pharaohs. Being a companion to ancient history, readers would be interested in the roles non Greek-Latin sources play in the authors' construction and also the fate of these regions under the Greek and Roman rules. It may be also a little strange that political institution are omitted from Part VII Politics and Power, especially when we find both historians (Robert Morstein-Marx and Hans Beck) who deal with politics pay some respect to Mommsen's *Romische Staatsrecht* and due attention to institutions. For the present reviewer, one of the peculiarities of ancient Greece and Rome is the formation of polis which was clearly different from

<sup>17</sup> MONTE L. PEARSON, *Perils of Empire: the Roman Republic and American Republic*, Edison: NJ: Algora Publishing, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> MICHAEL MECKLER, ed., *Classical Antiquity and the Politics of America*, Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> PAUL WOODRUFF, *First Democracy: the Challenge of an Ancient Idea*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

the city-states in Sumer and ancient China, maybe also from its contemporary counterpart in Phoenicia. When we try to catch contemporary scholarship, should we not keep some old valuables? It is really not easy to make a choice since there are so many fields that need to be covered. There are also few misprints. I am a little confused when I found Rostovtzeff wrote a *Social and Economic History of the Roman World* (p. 62), not a *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*.

Finally, what kind of ancient history does Professor Erskine provide us with? Politics and institutions of course are and will still be important. But there will be many more areas to be studied, especially the ancients' life. What kind of house they had? What kind of love and sexuality they had? How were the ancients educated? What entertainments they had? What did they think about their religion? What their attitudes were to death and life? What did they think about Romanization? Does the ancient world have any relevance to the contemporary world? In sum, what life did the ancients live? Those who are interested in all those questions would find something they want from this Companion.

*YAN Shaoxiang, Capital Normal University*