

the state of our evidence, but the book's juxtapositions make asking them inevitable. On the other hand, when a book spans nearly 1,000 years of history, it feels petty to criticise it for not going on; still, I would like to know, if *isonomia* lost its political sense in late antiquity, how and why did it get it back in the seventeenth century? As F. Hayek pointed out (*Constitution of Liberty* [1960], pp. 164–7), that was when the term started appearing in print, notably in Philemon Holland's 1600 translation of Livy. By 1875 the term had become so trite that a brewer-turned-sportsman could name a horse 'Isonomy' (who would go on to belie his name by becoming one of the most successful British racehorses of the era). For Hayek, as already for G. Vlastos (*AJP* 74 [1953]), and presumably for Isonomy's owner, the term signified nothing less than the rule of law. S. devotes scarce attention to this sense of the term; yet a history of the concept should make clear why it was that meaning that resonated throughout the centuries, and, if it is wrong, how the error came about.

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THE PERSIAN VERSION OF PERSIA'S HISTORY

LLEWELLYN-JONES (L.) *Persians. The Age of the Great Kings*. Pp. xvi + 432, ills, map. New York: Basic Books, 2022. Cased, US\$35. ISBN: 978-1-54160034-8.

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The Iranian past has consistently featured in the histories of others, penetrating into Mesopotamian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic and, more recently, Middle Eastern narratives of the past. It may not be wrong to say that these in some sense are given meaning as well as form by the Iranian presence. Yet our understanding of the pre-Islamic cultures of Iran especially is limited and traditionally founded on outside literary sources. The premise of L.-J.'s book is that the writings of these (mostly Greek) ancient authors are products of their prejudices and agendas and leave us with an unrealistic picture of our subject. Compounding this is said to be a comparative slowness in the development of the modern discipline of Persian studies and a Western-driven historiographical smear campaign, which paints the Persians as the tyrannical oppressors of the free world. L.-J.'s book aims to redress this imbalance and to provide the 'Persian Version of Persia's history' (p. 5).

The book sets about the task by highlighting the different cultural dynamics driving ancient Near Eastern conceptions of the past. L.-J. rightly asserts that the absence of a historical narrative, such as we get in the Greek context with Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon, does not equate to the idea that the Persians did not respond to their history. Their way of remembering was different, transmitted through song, poetry and legend, though of course that was not in itself so different to pre-Herodotean engagements with the past. An important distinguishing factor in their case was the centrality of divine-sanctioned kingship, a reality that afforded little room for contested versions and rendered details of historical events and dates only of peripheral importance. Those details are, however, mostly discoverable by the contemporary Achaemenid historian drawing on the full range of available resources.

One of the best known of the documentary sources, the Bisitun Inscription of Darius I, is discussed at length by L.-J. (pp. 103–7), who portrays the impressive rock cutting as an attempt to establish a written record, with the King as champion of the Truth (*Arta*) against the Lie (*Drauga*). The fact that this was mere propaganda masquerading as a quasi-historical narrative is something he might have explored further as it may uncover a stronger concern for earthly posterity on the part of the Persians than is sometimes taken to be the case. The strategic location, grandeur and inaccessibility of the inscription anticipate and overshadow any prospective alternatives or lies. Highlighting the incompleteness of Darius' royal inscriptions, L.-J. notes that the unsuccessful Scythian campaign of 515 BCE is nowhere alluded to and known only to us through Herodotus' *Histories* (p. 117).

Darius I features large in L.-J.'s historical narrative, which covers the period of 1000 to 330 BCE. Divided into three parts, the first explores the emergence of the Achaemenids as the dominant Iranian political force, culminating in a reading of the events that led to Darius taking and consolidating dynastic power. In Part 2 L.-J. seeks to bring us into their world through descriptions of the bureaucratic mechanism and of the various royal centres, and detail about harems and the intricacies of court etiquette. This last is particularly illuminating with discussions about the role of footstools (pp. 195–6) and the ceremonial nature of the royal hunt (pp. 199–201) helping us to appreciate a highly ordered social system realised and maintained through the performance of hierarchy. The third part focuses on the reigns of later kings, taking us down to Darius III, a monarch who is shown to have been more substantial than the cowardly, effeminate figure of the Alexander historians. Pushing back, too, against the 'rise and fall' paradigm invoked by some in the case of the Achaemenids, L.-J. argues that in actuality the late period was one of 'high empire'. The vivid and gory chronicle of dynastic succession leads him to the uncontroversial conclusion that the great failing of the Achaemenids lay in their 'terminal inability to deal with royal succession and to prepare for the orderly transfer of power from one ruler to another' (p. 337).

L.-J. writes in an easy manner and has an impressive command of the range of disciplines impinging on the subject. The archaeological (e.g. pp. 42–3, 45, 53–4, 80–1, 156–9, 204–5), linguistic (pp. 34–5, 176, 187, 197) and iconographic (pp. 111–12, 205–7, 278) detail serve to complement the underlying historiographical aspect. In saying that, it does sometimes feel as if we are in the realm of historical fiction, as L.-J. imagines moments in the past or key figures in his story, such as Cyrus the Great. 'His complexion was browned by the sun and the wind . . . around his eyes there were deep furrowed lines, paler than the rest of his face, the result of habitually squinting into the sun, attempting to spot his falcon as she mounted the skies' (p. 52). This is not without effect, though, and in the knowledge that the descriptions of sites and landscapes draw on autopsy, readers may justifiably feel they are garnering a vivid sense of the Achaemenid world.

Readers with Classical interests might be disappointed by the absence of citations for extracts (usually just the author's name is provided), although they are more likely to be surprised at the range and number of such references given the project to establish a Persian version of the Persian past. One might, indeed, wonder why L.-J. did not dispense with the inherently problematic Western sources altogether, having made the reasonable argument that they were not helpful, if not always counter-productive, in producing an indigenous world view. As he demonstrates through his work, the growing body of local evidence, and, one might add, of international scholarship (see e.g. the recent output of C. Tuplin and J. Ma [edd.], *Aršāma and his World* [2020]), make any reliance on them increasingly unwarranted.

As Classical sources are prominent and generally characterised as biased, it bears mention that most, if not all, Greek authors had few illusions about the lack of parity between

the sides. Typically, they referred to the Persian monarch as ‘the King’, so recognising him as superior to all other kings. This consciousness manifested itself across the literary spectrum. In his *Persians*, in having the queen ask, ‘My friends, where is this Athens they speak of?’ (line 231), Aeschylus is not portraying her as ignorant (though doubtless some in his audience would have taken the question to mark her as such) but is alluding to the geopolitical reality. Similarly, Herodotus, in a passage used by L.-J. for exactly the opposite purpose (pp. 12–13), reveals that King Darius had never heard of the Athenians prior to their involvement in the burning of the temple at Sardis.

The Greek historian is singled out for special censure for his caricaturing of Xerxes as ‘a narcissistic tyrant’ (p. 233). The description of the King’s famous decorating of a tree by the roadside near modern Sarigöl in western Turkey is used to illustrate the point. ‘It was Herodotus’ way to show that Xerxes was quite unhinged, unfocused, and unworthy of a victory over so fine a people as the Hellenes’ (p. 234). To my mind, though, that reading does not do Herodotus justice. His recording of this extraordinary, one might say beautiful, moment, is a way of highlighting the King’s unique relationship with the earth. This is an extension of the ideology embodied in the *paradeisoi*, the royal parks laid out with orderly rows of trees and water channels to symbolise the King’s mastery over the earth.

L.-J.’s contribution to the field of Achaemenid historiography is bold and, in its own terms, largely successful. My own sense is that his contribution would be stronger if the polemic was moderated and more emphasis laid on the collaborative nature of the diverse sources that clearly indicate a singularly rich ancient civilisation. The fear of it as a power has persisted in the Western mind ever since, as Iran’s modern isolation attests. That this severe attrition requires favouring a range of regional actors distinctly lacking in terms of democratic standards is an irony I am sure L.-J. appreciates.

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THE STORY AND RECEPTION OF MARATHON

NEVIN (S.) *The Idea of Marathon. Battle and Culture*. Pp. xii + 236, ills, maps. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Paper, £24.99, US\$34.95 (Cased, £75, US\$100). ISBN: 978-1-350-15759-0 (978-1-7883-1420-6 hbk).

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This clearly and engagingly written book takes readers on a journey from the events leading to the battle of Marathon in 490 BCE, through the battle itself and its immediate aftermath, the subsequent Persian invasion of mainland Greece, to the many ways in which the battle and its cultural significance have been used and interpreted from antiquity to the present day. The great strength of this book is not just in its recreation of the narrative of the battle or excellent discussion of the historiographic problems surrounding it (as with many other recent books, such as R. Billows, *Marathon* [2010]; P. Krentz, *Battle of Marathon* [2010]; and D. Fink, *Battle of Marathon* [2014]), but also in its exploration of cultural history. Another particularly strong feature is that the book accords the