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ABSTRACT

This report presents a rationale for the study of ancient history emphasizing the interrelationship of all periods of history and the arbitrary nature of the subject's division into temporal or geographical segments. Pointing out that significant discoveries are constantly being made, the author stresses the importance of the classics teacher's acquaintance with current literature on this and other relevant topics. The paper discusses the relationship of archaeology, chronology, geography, languages, and the arts with ancient history and suggests audiovisual aids and other source materials for use in the classroom. Concluding remarks focus on the classical languages vis-a-vis ancient history. An annotated bibliography is included. (CM/RL)

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## TEACHING ANCIENT HISTORY TODAY

by Hans A. Pohlsander

Ancient history is a part of universal history. The division of history into ancient, medieval, and modern history, or into European, African, American, and Asian history is not inherent in the subject matter of history itself, but rather is dictated by human limitations. The tasks of the ancient historian are not fundamentally different from those of the medieval or modern historian. Ancient history is also a part of another area of scholarship. The ancient historian depends very much on the work done in other specialized fields: classical and Semitic philology, linguistics, epigraphy, papyrology, numismatics, archaeology, and anthropology. He generally will himself possess competence in one or more of these fields.

Every historical event or development must be understood in the context of its own period, but the analogy of similar events or developments in other periods will heighten our understanding. The present shapes our approach to the past, and the past is not without relevance to the present. The present is not simply the latest in a series of unrelated "happenings." It is linked to the past in numerous ways, which are vital and significant whether they are understood and appreciated or not. Ancient history takes us back to the roots of our spiritual, intellectual, political, and legal heritage, with which we have to contend whether we accept it or reject it. Ancient history offers rich rewards to teacher and student alike. It is entitled to more than the introductory chapter of a Western civilization course.

What are the geographical, chronological, and topological limits of ancient history? This question assumes additional importance because these limits have shifted in recent decades.

Ancient history is concerned not only with the Aegean area and Italy, the two heartlands of Greco-Roman culture. Rather it must consider all the lands bordering on the Mediterranean Sea, such as Spain, North Africa, and Syria-Palestine, as well as Gaul, the Rhineland, and Britain. Wherever Greeks founded colonies and trading stations and wherever Romans established camps and towns, there the ancient historian must follow. The lands on the fringes of Greco-Roman culture have yielded some of our richest treasures and some of our finest evidence. During the Hellenistic Age, Alexandria in Egypt was the intellectual center of the Greek world; during the late Roman Empire the outlying districts outranked Rome and Italy.

More significant, ancient history today is not limited to Greek and Roman history. More and more "the barriers which separated Europe's historical tradition from Asia and Egypt have fallen."<sup>1</sup> The ancient civilizations of the Near East, ancient Greece, and ancient Rome now constitute one field of study. This view was pioneered by Eduard Meyer (1855-1930) and is now reflected in the scope of such standard works as the Cambridge Ancient History and the Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft. The justification for this wholistic approach to the ancient history of this greater Mediterranean area certainly does not lie in any ethnic, racial, or linguistic uniformity of its population, which was always

diverse. Nor must we look primarily to political unification, since Alexander's empire, huge as it was, did not include the Western Mediterranean area and since the Romans were unable to incorporate Mesopotamia and Iran into their empire.

But steady contact, both peaceful and violent, between East and West and between Greece and Rome created vital links and bonds. Phoenician ships plied both the Eastern and Western Mediterranean, and Greeks traded in Egypt and in Syria. The Histories of Herodotus are not a history of Greece alone. From Cyrus' victory over Croesus in 546 B.C. to Alexander's victory over Darius III in 331 B.C. Greek history and Persian history are inseparably linked. The three Macedonian Wars are Greek history as well as Roman history. The affairs of Antiochus III are at once Roman history, Greek history, and Near Eastern history. Cultural unity of this vast area was approached, but not fully realized, during the Hellenistic Age, when Greek culture superimposed itself on the older civilizations of the Near East and at the same time left a strong mark on the emerging culture of the Romans. This imperfect cultural unity of the Hellenistic Age paved the way for whatever religious unity Christianity, an Eastern religion, was to bring.

The chronological limits of ancient history have also shifted. Upon examining recent textbooks in the field one invariably finds an introductory chapter or two on the pertinent prehistory. The dividing line between history and prehistory has been moved back, especially for Greece. The upper limit, too, of ancient history has been moved by about 300 years. Such dates as 325 (Council of Nicaea), 337 (Death of Constantine), 395 (Death of Theodosius and division of the Roman Empire), or 476 (Deposition of Romulus Augustulus) are now deemed not only too early but also misleading. The transition from classical antiquity to the Middle Ages, because it involved fundamental changes in all aspects of life, it is now felt, was not accomplished by a single event or at any determinable point of time. Rather this transition was a gradual one and was not completed until the early seventh century A.D. The transitional period is commonly referred to as late antiquity.

A survey course in ancient history offers its own rewards and its own frustrations. It is rewarding to survey the whole field and to see all the parts in the context of the whole. It is frustrating to have to dismiss in one hour (or less) what could well be a semester course. Both the rewards and the frustrations are inherent in the vast scope of the subject. Within the geographical and chronological limits described above, all aspects of ancient life are of interest to scholar, teacher, and student. Political, military, and socioeconomic aspects are central, but literature, philosophy, religion, and art are also a part of the picture. In fact, "cultural history" and the study of "civilizations" have enjoyed considerable popularity in recent decades. The historian is in the best position to achieve the synthesis that the general reader or beginning student desires. Michael Grant has accomplished such synthesis twice, first in his The Birth of Western Civilization: Greece and Rome<sup>2</sup> and then, more admirably yet, in The Ancient Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> There is no need for ancient history to be a dull inventory of battles won or cities captured. Nor, on the other hand, must it be an account of "daily life in ancient times."

The "stuff" of scholarship is accumulating at a rapid pace, as every bibliographer, acquisitions librarian, or Ph.D. candidate knows only too well. In the case of ancient history especially one might well ask whether it is really necessary to keep adding to it after so many centuries. The answer, for better

or worse, has to be "yes," not because Ph.D. candidates need dissertation topics and professors are expected to publish, but because each generation must study, reassess, and reinterpret history in the light of its own experience. Emphasis, approach, and attitude keep shifting, and so, of course, do conclusions, not only from generation to generation but also from country to country, and from scholar to scholar. From the Germans' point of view the battle of the Teutoberg Forest in A.D. 9 was not a disaster but a brilliant success. The glories of ancient Rome were consciously employed by Mussolini to advertise the glories of the new Italy. Socioeconomic aspects of ancient history have been emphasized in recent decades, thanks to the contribution of papyrology, and especially by Marxist historians; from East Germany, for instance, have come numerous studies of slavery in the ancient world. A "liberal" and a "conservative" (if these terms still have meaning) will have different views on the Gracchi brothers. The dating of the Linear B tablets from Knossos has been the subject of a controversy.

But we are not limited to reworking the same materials or applying new methods. New evidence presents itself from time to time; sometimes this evidence settles a long-standing problem, and sometimes it poses challenging new questions. What source materials do ancient historians have to work with?

The peoples of the ancient Near East recorded historical events. We have Babylonian king lists, boastful inscriptions of the Pharaohs, and Assyrian and Chaldean royal chronicles. In none of these was an attempt made to examine critically, relate, explain, or interpret. The Hebrews, who had not only the extant historical books of the Old Testament but also the lost "Chronicles of the Kings of Israel," went one step beyond this. They interpreted history in terms of the special relationship of the chosen people to the one God. Most scholars today have turned away from the extreme skepticism of the nineteenth century and accept the Bible as an authentic record that must be subjected to the same critical examination as other records.

The Greeks began to keep historical records much later, of course, than the peoples of the Near East, but the Greek Hecataeus first introduced historical criticism. Another Greek, Herodotus, is rightly called the father of history, because he wrote history of an international scope and free of national bias. Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, and Plutarch are the major Greek historians to follow.

Among the Romans historiography did not mature until the first century B.C. Before then neither the records kept by the pontifical college nor the Annales of Ennius qualify. Major names are Sallust, Livy, Tacitus, and Suetonius.

The source material of ancient history, in addition to ancient historiographical works, includes such diverse things as the stelae of Assyrian, Egyptian, and Chaldean rulers at the mouth of Lebanon's Dog River, the Athenian tribute lists, or Diocletian's Edict on Prices. Then there are coins, papyri, ostraka, and clay tablets. In the British Museum the visitor may still see the bronze helmet that Hieron of Syracuse dedicated to the gods at Olympia after his victory at Cumae in 474 B.C. Ancient battle sites deserve and receive careful study. The diversity of the material explains the ancient historian's need to work closely with specialists in other fields. A look at the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum or the Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum should

impress anyone with the mass of material. Yet, there are some questions in ancient history that defy all scholarly effort because of lack of source material. We have, for instance, few reliable population figures or similar statistics.

The last 200 years have seen a spectacular increase in the total amount of written material. Here is a list of major finds or breakthroughs:

- 1799: the Rosetta Stone
- 1835-47: Rawlinson's work on the Behistun Monument
- 1840: the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser
- 1854: Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh
- 1868: the Moabite Stone
- 1887: the Amarna Letters
- 1890: Aristotle's Constitution of Athens
- 1897: a major portion of the Parian Marble
- 1901: the Code of Hammurabi
- 1906: the Hittite archives at Boghazkoy
- 1914: the Antioch (Pisidia) copy of the Res Gestae
- 1927: the decrees of Augustus at Cyrene
- 1939: the Linear B tablets at Pylus
- 1947: the Dead Sea Scrolls
- 1959: the decree of Themistocles at Troezen

Every archaeological find—excavations go on all the time—adds to our total knowledge and calls for some slight adjustment of the total picture. A major, unexpected find can render whole chapters obsolete. Systematic exploration and excavation of ancient sites has been carried on for less than a century, but the results have been spectacular. Most remarkable contributions have been made in a few short years by underwater archaeology.

Sometimes "source material" must be discarded. Thus fifteenth-century scholars showed the "Donation of Constantine" to be spurious, and the "Letters of Phalaris" suffered the same fate under Bentley's critical examination in 1697. Inscriptions and coins sometimes turn out to be fakes, and others are of limited value because their origin is not known.

The teacher of ancient history, then, must be familiar with recent literature, and kept abreast with the results of recent research.

All historical events take place in time. A possible causal relationship between events can be understood only when their chronological relationship is known to us. For this reason the ancient-historian establishes systems of relative chronology, such as the Egyptian dynasties or Troy I to VIIa, whenever our system of absolute chronology, i.e., B.C. and A.D. dates, is impossible or insecure. In some cases and in some ways a system of relative chronology serves the ancient-historian better than an absolute chronology. The ancient-historian's concern for chronology is due, of course, to the nature of his source materials. The ancient world knew a multitude of ways of reckoning time; eras and calendars sometimes differed from one community to another. Eusebius of Caesarea and St. Jerome are known for their efforts to reconcile the major systems one with another. Thorny problems of chronology remain with us today. The dates of Hammurabi or of the kings of ancient Israel ("high" chronology and "low" chronology) differ from one textbook to another, 511 or 510 B.C. is not universally accepted as the end of Roman kingship, and A.D. 312 has been

questioned as the date of Constantine's victory at the Mulvian Bridge. It is ironical that even the event on which we base our B.C. and A.D. dates is by no means of certain date. A good portion of all research in ancient history quite properly and necessarily is devoted to chronological problems. Chronology has been called the "eye of history," as Hermann Bengtson points out.<sup>4</sup>

In the classroom this means that both teacher and student will have to put much emphasis on chronology. The tentative nature of most of our earlier dates and of some of our later dates will have to be explained, likewise why we have dates such as 387/6 B.C. Some students have great difficulty putting events in their proper place in time. This is especially true whenever material is not presented in chronological order; and indeed often a strictly chronological arrangement would be quite inferior to other types of arrangement. Furthermore, today's teachers and students have often been warned against memorizing dates and other forms of rote learning. Chronological and genealogical tables will have to be provided by the teacher whenever they are not contained in the basic text adopted for the class. It does not necessarily follow that the student should commit to memory every item of information provided by such tables. Parallel chronological tables will support a synchronic view.

All historical events also take place in geographical space. To Hecataeus and Herodotus history and geography were one. Although geography today has lost much of its historical orientation and has established bonds with some of the natural sciences as well as with the other social sciences, it continues to be of the utmost importance to the historian. Hermann Bengtson remarks that geography is not to be regarded as a science ancillary to history, but that geographical knowledge is a prerequisite for historical understanding.<sup>5</sup>

The natural features of the land—and of the sea—determine to a large extent and very directly the economic prosperity of the people and to a lesser extent and less directly their social structure and political organization. Military planning and diplomacy to this day are shaped by geostrategic and geopolitical factors. These factors were of even greater importance in antiquity because of man's lesser ability to harness and control the forces of nature. But ancient man did in fact make himself master of nature to an amazing degree. The irrigation works of the Babylonians, Egyptians, and (less well known) the Nabataeans, Xerxes' bridges and canal, and Roman flood-control measures on the Tiber are cases in point. The cedars of Lebanon and the copper of the Sinai peninsula were factors in the foreign policy of ancient Egypt. The coast of Lebanon provides good natural harbors, that of Palestine does not; thus the Phoenicians were a maritime people, while the ancient Israelites were not. The climate of Greece, favorable to open-air life, encouraged Greek civic-mindedness, and the mountainous terrain of Greece encouraged Greek particularism. The mountains of Etruria were rich in iron ore, and the Etruscans were good miners as well as good ironworkers. The Romans were slow in taking Nabataean Petra, a mountain fortress easy to defend and hard to conquer.

Many parts of the Mediterranean world apparently were much less arid in antiquity than they are today. It was once customary to suspect radical climatic changes, especially a marked decrease in the annual rainfall. Today the blame is put, more correctly, on deforestation and neglect of vital irrigation works. Some natural disasters, however, materially affected the course of history. The destruction of the Minoan palaces may have been caused by a natural



disaster rather than by invasion or domestic upheaval. A seaborne Persian expedition against Greece was turned back by shipwreck at Mt. Athos in 492 B.C. Twelve years later off Magnesia and Euboea the Persian fleet suffered substantial losses that contributed to Persian failure then. On the other hand, the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in A.D. 79 or the destruction of Salamis and other Cyprian cities by earthquake in A.D. 332 and 342 did not seriously threaten the economy or security of the Roman Empire.

Good maps, both physical and political, are an absolute must in teaching ancient history. Many students will bring no skill in reading a map, and such terms as "lower Egypt" and "upper Egypt" will be confusing unless carefully explained. A good map is one that is clear and accurate, based on sound scholarship, not one cluttered up with a list of the Olympian gods or pictures of famous monuments. Most textbooks feature maps, but no textbook has enough maps to make an atlas superfluous, and no textbook should be expected to do so. The student will learn much from constant reference to an atlas. He will learn even more from making his own maps. Excellent wall maps and desk outline maps may be obtained from the Denoyer-Geppert Company, 5235 Ravenswood Avenue, Chicago, Ill. 60640. The National Geographic Society, 16th & M Streets N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, offers excellent maps too small for classroom use but suitable for home use.

The teaching of ancient history readily lends itself to the use of other audiovisual materials, such as films, filmstrips, slides, tapes, and records. Many commercial firms, and some professional organizations have in recent years produced a vast amount of such materials. Teachers should be warned that not all audiovisual materials have been prepared with the necessary scholarly care; it is best to buy these things on approval. Some filmstrips feature fine photography but poor captions. Many filmstrips and films attempt to cover too much ground and hence are more suitable for a social-studies "unit" than for a course in ancient history. A slide collection affords choice and flexibility, requires little storage space, and can be built up gradually. The use of any audiovisual materials must be carefully planned; it is never a time-saver. Annual surveys of audiovisual materials in the field of classical studies have been published for the last fourteen years by Elizabeth E. Seittelman in the Classical World.

Students are generally quite interested in original objects that can be introduced into the classroom: coins, lamps, potsherds, papyrus fragments, and small objets d'art. High-quality reproductions of ancient works of art are fairly expensive but can be valuable for teaching purposes. Numerous dealers both in original objects and in reproductions are located in New York City.

To many a student history "comes to life" in a museum. For ancient history the major collections in the United States are those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the University Museum in Philadelphia, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Other collections are not to be forgotten: the Fogg Museum of Harvard University, the City Art Museum in St. Louis, the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, the Toledo Museum, and the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology of the University of Michigan.

Travel and study in Mediterranean countries are now possible for more students than ever before. A firsthand acquaintance with at least some of the major historical and archaeological sites is a valuable asset. To thousands a visit to Byblos, Delphi, or Cumae has been an unforgettable experience.

Ancient history has special meaning to the students of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The study of history and the study of language and literature can complement each other. But it is to be stressed that a knowledge of one or more of these languages is in no way a prerequisite for the profitable study of ancient history on the secondary or undergraduate level. Quite often, however, the study of ancient history motivates students to pursue other aspects of antiquity.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Geschichte der Philologie (Leipzig: Teubner, 1959), p. 72.
2. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
3. New York: Scribners, 1969.
4. Einführung in die alte Geschichte, 5th ed. (Munich: Beck, 1965), p. 22.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

## BOOK SUGGESTIONS

### I

Texts should be of recent date, based on sound scholarship, and well written; they should have maps, indices, charts, tables, and bibliographies.

- Boak, Arthur E.R., and Sinnigen, William G. A History of Rome to A.D. 565. 5th ed. New York: Macmillan, 1965.
- Bourne, Frank C. A History of the Romans. Boston: Heath, 1966. (Distinguished by its clear organization and fine maps and tables.)
- Burn, A.R. The Pelican History of Greece. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966. (Inexpensive and containing a wealth of information, much of it unusual. From the beginnings to the Roman conquest.)
- Hammond, N.G.L. Greece to 322 B.C. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963. (Perhaps too difficult for students, but well documented and therefore valuable for teachers.)
- Haywood, Richard M. Ancient Greece and the Near East. New York: McKay, 1964. (Well written and up-to-date. The ancient Near East and Greece from the beginnings to Alexander the Great.)
- Ancient Rome. New York: McKay, 1967. (Contains chapters on the Hellenistic world.)
- Heichelheim, Fritz M., and Yeo, Cedric A. A History of the Roman People. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962. (Widely used and richly illustrated.)
- Jones, Tom B. Ancient Civilization. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1960. (Ancient history in a one-semester course. Emphasizes cultural developments and their causes.)
- Katz, Solomon. The Decline of Rome and the Rise of Mediaeval Europe. Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1955. (From the series The Development of Western Civilization. A brief but excellent survey.)
- Orlinsky, Harry M. Ancient Israel. 2nd ed. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1960. (From the series The Development of Western Civilization. A brief but excellent survey.)
- Roebuck, Carl. The World of Ancient Times. New York: Scribners, 1966. (Ancient history in a one-semester course.)

- Schwantes, Siegfried J. A Short History of the Ancient Near East. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1965. (An excellent, brief presentation. Ideal for courses in art, literature, or religions of the ancient Near East.)
- Scramuzza, Vincent M., and MacKendrick, Paul L. The Ancient World. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958. (Ancient history in a one-semester course.)
- Smith, Morton. The Ancient Greeks. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1960. (From the series The Development of Western Civilization. A brief but excellent survey.)
- Starr, Chester G. The Emergence of Rome as Ruler of the Western World, 2nd ed. Ithaca, N.Y.; Cornell Univ. Press, 1953. (From the series The Development of the Western World. A brief but excellent survey.)
- A History of the Ancient World. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965. (Ancient history in a one-semester course. Includes India and the Far East.)

## II

The best translations of the Greek and Roman historians are those published by Penguin Books. They are generally of recent date and accompanied by good introductions. There are also a number of good anthologies:

- Alexander, Paul J. The Ancient World to 300 A.D. New York: Macmillan, 1963.
- Brown, Truesdell S., ed. Ancient Greece. New York: Free Press, 1965. (From the series Sources in Western Civilization. Includes extensive introduction.)
- Hadas, Moses, ed. A History of Rome. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956. (With connecting narrative.)
- Kagan, Donald. Problems in Ancient History. 2 vols. New York: Macmillan, 1966. (Draws upon both ancient sources and modern works and meant to accompany standard texts. Helpful in stimulating discussion.)
- Pritchard, James B., ed. The Ancient Near East. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1958. (Abridgement of same editor's Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.)
- Sinnigen, William G., ed. Rome. New York: Free Press, 1965. (From the series Sources in Western Civilization. Includes extensive introduction.)

## III

Atlases differ greatly in purpose, design, and price.

- Grundy, G.B. Murray's Classical Atlas for Schools. London: Murray, 1917. (Excellent and inexpensive.)
- Scullard, H.H., and Van der Heyden, A.A.M. Shorter Atlas of the Classical World. New York: Nelson, 1962. (A good introduction to the classical world.)
- Treharne, R.F., and Fullard, Harold. Muir's Atlas of Ancient and Classical History. 6th ed. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963. (Excellent and inexpensive.)

Van der Heyden, A.A.M., and Scullard, H.H. Atlas of the Classical World. New York: Nelson, 1960. (Also much more than an atlas. Contains pictorial essays on the Greek and Roman world.)

Wright, George E., and Filson, Floyd V. The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956. (Only one of several good biblical atlases. May be used as a concise history of the ancient Near East.)

#### IV

Periodical literature on ancient history can be gleaned from a large number of journals in the fields of history, archaeology, classics, and Near Eastern studies. The American Historical Review regularly devotes one section to ancient history. Historia, published in Germany, restricts itself to ancient history, with contributions in German, French, and English. Archaeology, another excellent journal, is not restricted to classical and Near Eastern archaeology.

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