

Pierre Briant. *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*. Translated by Jane Marie Todd. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2015. Pp. xx, 579. \$39.95 (hd.). ISBN: 978-0-674-49309-4.

This volume is an extended meditation on the historical development of the character of Darius. The many centuries since his life and then his rediscovery by western early modern scholars have afforded room for the king's life and personality to be both lionized and vilified, and in multiple iterations. Briant examines this long and fluctuating biography of Darius, historical personage, and in so doing he unravels how receptions of the evidence and changing interpretive modes have shaped the historiographical process. It is rare that readers should have access to so much detailed reflection on a single character who is normally—as indicated in the title—treated as ancillary to another figure, and so they would profit by receiving it as a study on how 'great man' history has compelled and will continue to impose on our evaluations of the past.

Briant has divided his volume into five sections, each comprising one or more chapters but each with a fairly specific focus. 1, 'The Impossible Biography' presents the case for Darius' obscurity and the difficulty of accessing his story in both the ancient evidence and in the trends of Alexander scholarship. 2, 'Contrasting Portraits' examines how different literary and visual contexts generated the ancient portrayals of the king. 3, 'Reluctance and Enthusiasm' deals with Darius as one of the Persian Great Kings, and the ways that stories associated with the Achaemenid royal enterprise provided a template for judging Darius III's actions. 4, 'Darius and Dārā' addresses Persian versions of Darius' story. 5, 'A Final Assessment and a Few Proposals,' concentrates on how representations of Darius' character and behaviour have generated exempla for royalist discourses around military success and failure. The end matter provides bibliographies for ancient and modern sources, a list of citations, 'thematic notes' providing an annotated further reading list on each chapter's themes, illustration credits (of which there are an abundance), and an index.

As the English edition of his 2003 work *Darius dans l'ombre d'Alexandre*, this volume afforded Briant the opportunity to reassert the significance of his topic and address briefly some of the criticisms levelled in reviews of the earlier version. He shares how those reactions caused him to reflect upon his methodology, particularly the use of Greco-Latin literature as a source for Achaemenid history. He counters that recent archaeological discoveries along with later Persian literary traditions counterbalance the Classical viewpoints, and that using them comparatively, as he does here, allows for re-evaluating reactions to Darius.

Briant pursues several angles of approach, rather than a strictly chronological survey of Darius scholarship. These weave throughout the volume, rather than being the basis of separate chapters, and in that respect they are some of the more interesting aspects of the work.

One angle aims at the king's body and the materiality of Darius' existence. The king's physical presence in the upper country, his absences from battle, movements with the court, his diet, his clothes, the burdens and dangers of his royal paraphernalia all receive attention as the starting points for tracing the moralizing judgements of history. Briant pulls together a variety of visual representations of Darius or visual comparanda—numismatic, reliefs, the Naples Mosaic, early modern and modern paintings—as well as other physical evidence for his existence, including the funerary archaeology at Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam. In addition to comprising that body of non-traditional evidence Briant utilizes to fill in the picture of Darius, this collection of material, architectural, and art historical sources also focuses attention on the physicality of Achaemenid kingship and the importance of the visual narrative of this history.

Mimesis is the object of a second angle of analysis. In Briant's view it was long ago established as historiography's rhetorical agenda (135ff.) and has ever since subsumed historical facts to the drive for communicating exempla on good and bad kings (294–5). He presents Darius' story as one of imitation of greater ancestors and adversaries, or rather the failed attempts at it. Briant does not add much to the timeline for Darius' existence, instead he ponders how the logic of mimesis has shaped, skewed, and obscured the representations of the Persian king, his family, his choices, and his legacy. He intends not to forward a single cohesive alternative biography for Darius in response to rivals, which would be just another addition within the mimesis methodology. Using the materiality of the Achaemenid royal culture to clarify our view, he wants to treat Darius' image as a foil for viewing beyond the limitations of historical traditions, especially those from the Classical literary corpus.

A third angle, which may be of interest to readers, is the shame of Darius' legacy as received from the mimesis history model. The main logic is that Darius deserves to be overshadowed by Alexander because he failed to live up to the standards of his ancestors and failed to meet the opportunity for glory posed by Alexander's challenge for the Achaemenid kingship. The markers of Darius' shame are to be read plainly in his absences from the political action, his flights from battle, and the ways he allowed his courtly trappings to insulate him from handling affairs personally and indulge in indecision. Briant's argument against mimesis history pulls at this logic of royal ineffectiveness and shame by tracing out how the historiography of the Classical material has fixed upon certain shameful characteristics, raising questions about the reliability of resulting judgements and turning the embarrassment back on historians. We get the sense that all this time we have misread the cues Darius and his followers were giving, and face the implication that Darius and Alexander's encounters may have been shaped more by cultural ignorance than by some sort of shared warrior ethos.

Briant's argument for resisting the traditional modes for interpreting Darius' behaviour and personality is one from within, working its way up from inside the

traditional body of work on the king, and so this volume will be essential reading for those with a particular interest in Alexander historiography. For others curious about ways we might deploy a wider range of material evidence and literary evidence from non-Classical traditions when tackling old and well-trodden fields of research, there is much here to interest and provide ideas.

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