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CTESIAS History of Persia Tales of the Orient

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Llewellyn-Jones, Lloyd and James Robson. *CTESIAS' History of Persia: Tales of the Orient*. London / New York: Routledge, 2010. Pp. x + 253. ISBN 978-0-415-36411-9

Ctesias of Cnidus was among the ancient Greek historians who wrote about the history of the Achaemenid Empire. He travelled to Persia and lived at the Achaemenid court for an extended period of time (Brosius 2011), where his medical skills made him a successful and respected person (Stronk 2004-2005). His books are about the history and culture of India, Assyria, Media and Persia (Schmitt 1993). "CTESIAS' History of Persia", published in 2010, contains an introduction by Llewellyn-Jones and a translation by James Robson.

The introduction of the volume under review has eight parts. Llewellyn-Jones begins the Introduction compared with the *Persica* to Giles Foden's novel *The Last King of Scotland*, in which the central character, a Scottish doctor, becomes the private physician to Idi Amin Dada in Uganda (Nichols, 2011: 400). The author's depiction of Ctesias' life is presented in the first part because it is important to put him into his own historical context. Ctesias' arrival in Persia coincides with the battle of Cunaxa.¹ Ctesias had been living in Persia for seventeen years as the king of king's private physician, and then he left the Persian heartland for Cyprus, on his way back home to Greece where he started to write his work.

The second part is about *Persica*, a work that has only remained in fragments in form of testimonia, epitomes, excerpts, direct quotations and paraphrases. After a short comment about *Persica*, the author responds to the critiques of Ctesias (part 3). He points out that Ctesias has been a neglected source for historians,² although more recently a new understanding of him, presenting Ctesias as a reflection of the Achaemenid society and its sources, has been put forward. Constructing Ctesias (the fourth part) concludes the previous section. Llewellyn-Jones compares Ctesias with Plutarch, who has been similarly rehabilitated by modern historians after a period of neglect.

He believes that "it is for the Indica that Ctesias has been blighted with the bad reputation as a liar" (p.35). There is a good argument in favor of rehabilitating Ctesias' *Persica*. Llewellyn-Jones emphasizes that the choices made by later authors like Nicolas of Damascus, Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch and Photius were the reason behind Ctesias' reduction of authenticity. Llewellyn-Jones is correct in his claim that Ctesias' accuracy depends on the reliability of the secondary sources.

¹For Cunaxa, see Pancritius 1906; Briant, 1996: 634-49.

²For example, see I.M. Diakonoff's discussion in his basic book about Ctesias' reliability (Дьяконов, 2012: 23-30)

In the next part of the introduction, the author discusses Ctesias's position among ancient Greek historians' worldview regarding the east. Persia is a general name for Greek history writing in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Ctesias' *Persica* has been under effect of earlier works and has affected on later ones. The author also compares between Herodotus' *Histories* and Ctesias' *Persica* and concludes that "it is difficult to think that he aimed only at creating a parody around the figure of the revered Herodotus. The *Persica* is more than a literary joust. In fact, Ctesias simply envisaged his interaction with the Persian world differently from Herodotus." (p.52)

The sixth part is about Ctesias' sources where it is posited that he knew (Old) Persian (p.55). Ctesias claims to have received information from Queen Parysatis herself. For confirming this claim, Llewellyn-Jones refers to the Persian vocabulary found in Photius' epitome. Ctesias has lived at the court, therefore he could use "spoken word" as a source for his history writing. The author believes that Ctesias' claim to access to royal archives should be understood as the possibility of his access to Epic narratives which were common in that time.

The next part (on Ctesias' literary style) considers his role as the creator of a form of historical romance. Novella was a growing hallmark of literature during Ctesias' lifetime. Llewellyn-Jones believes that Ctesias' *History* is mixed with fables and fantastic tales, gossip and prejudice, stereotypes, and speculations, amongst other things (p.80).

As a conclusion in the last part of introduction, the reader finds out that Ctesias is not a straightforward historian. In fact, he is poet-cum-novelist working within the framework of history. But Llewellyn-Jones exaggerates about the quality of Ctesias sources (see above).

In the next section of the book, James Robson gives us his translation of Ctesias' *History of Persia*. There are several translations of Ctesias' work. Gilmore's translation (1888) is now considered a Classic. Jacoby (1958), König (1972), Auburger and Malamoud (1991), Lenfant (2004) and Nichols (2008) are among the later translators of Ctesias'. In 2010, J.P. Stronk also published his translation of this text into English (for a review of Stronk, see Nichols, 2011: 401-2).

This section includes two parts: Testimonia and Fragments, which are given reference numbers beginning with T and F. The Testimonia, which are about ancient awareness of the life and the works of Ctesias come from sources like Strabo, Diodorus, Photius, Eusebius, Plutarch, etc that already were used in the introduction. For example, we find out that "Ctesias, [was] son of Ctesiarachus or Ctesiochus, from Cnidus" (T1), or "... While fighting alongside Cyrus, was seized by Artaxerxes..." (T2), and "... no account of the ancient history of the Persians, Medes, or Syrians is hugely

trustworthy owing to the historians' naivety and penchant for fables" (T11a).

James Robson emphasizes that primary concern has been to deliver a version of the fragments of Ctesias that tends towards the literal rather than the literary. The translation and the system of numbering is that of Lenfant (2004), who follows Jacoby in FGrHist 688 (Bigwood, 2010: 100).

In the next part, we can read the translation of all that is left about the Persian culture and history in Ctesias' work. The outline of the history of Persia includes:

Books 1–3: Assyrian history, books 4–6: Median history and books 7–23: Persian history (from Cyrus the great to Artaxerxes II).

Ctesias' history of Assyria begins with the kingdom of a fictional ruler, named Ninus and continues with describing his heroic works. A queen, named Semiramis comes after him and Expands the Empire's Glory. After Semiramis' death, the Empire falls because of decadence of later kings.

Median history (books 4-6) includes a list of kings which is truly different with Herodotus', Although some accounts are similar such as the war between the Medes and the Saces.

Persian history of Ctesias includes books 7-11 is about Reign of Cyrus II, books 12-13, which inform of reigns of Cambyses II, the Magus, Darius I and Xerxes I, and the rest of Persica relates Reign of Artaxerxes I til Artaxerxes II. Persica' Schema is limited to events on a personalistic level and his Persian Empire is the court with a few glimpses of satrapal activities.(Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1987: 35)

James Robson has also assigned two parts to those fragments which are about Awareness of "list of distances and list of kings" (p.215) and "miscellaneous comments on the Persian Empire" (pp. 216-219). More sections are provided as appendices, including a glossary of authors who have quoted from Ctesias in their books, genealogy of the Achaemenid royal family, the map the of Achaemenid Empire and a useful bibliography.

The importance of Robson's work is on presenting a new english translation of Ctesias' persica, "including fragments and testimonia of the Persica that have only been attributed to Ctesias in the last few decades" (p. viii). Also, Llewellyn-Jones' introduction is useful for readers and completes Rabson's translation.

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