

THE CAMBRIDGE ANCIENT HISTORY

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A meeting in Cambridge on ‘Greek Historiography in National Context’ would hardly be complete without a discussion of the *Cambridge Ancient History*, so I offered to provide one.¹ I must declare an interest, in that I have written for the revised *C.A.H.*—but as an ordinary contributor, who obeyed orders but was not involved in drawing up the orders.²

C. Habicht, in reviewing the revised vol. vi, was provoked by two hostile allusions to ‘German scholarship’ to protest that there are German scholars as there are English scholars, but there is no such thing as German scholarship any more than there is English scholarship.³ I take his point; but I also take the point which underlies this seminar, that the nation and the national tradition to which they belong may be an important part of that context of their own which inevitably affects all people who write about history. It may be significant that, while great classical encyclopaedias have come from continental countries, there is a *Cambridge Ancient History* but not a multi-author *Berliner Alte Geschichte* or an *Histoire ancienne de Paris*. The *Histoire générale* founded by G. Glotz shared out the work among authors volume by volume rather than chapter by chapter; Germany is giving Rome its unending *Aufstieg und Niedergang*. The nearest equivalent to the *C.A.H.* that I know, as a comprehensive history with separate chapters by separate authors, is the *Storia di Roma* founded by A. Momigliano and A. Schiavone: it has a final volume which discusses various topics outside the chronological framework of the other volumes;⁴ its Greek companion, S. Settis’ *I Greci*, sandwiches be-

¹ This paper has been revised from my contribution to the Craven Seminar on ‘Greek Historiography in National Context’ held in Cambridge from 26 to 28 May 1999. My thanks to Dr. P. A. Cartledge for inviting me to contribute to this series and to those who heard the paper and discussed it with me; also to Prof. A. J. Graham, Prof. C. Habicht, Dr. T. E. H. Harrison and Dr. L. G. Mitchell, who read a draft and helped me to improve it.

² I have written ‘The Delian League to 449 B.C.’, vol. v ch. 3 (pp. 34–61); ‘The Athenian Revolution’, vol. v ch. 4 (pp. 62–95); ‘The Polis and the Alternatives’, vol. vi ch. 11 (pp. 565–91).

³ *Gnomon* lxx 1998, 130–5 at 135: ‘In diesen Kapiteln [*sc.* on Alexander the Great] wird “German scholarship” zweimal polemisch apostrophisiert—als hätten nur deutsche Gelehrte jene in der Tat anfechtbaren Thesen vertreten. Es gibt German scholars wie es English scholars gibt, aber so wenig “German scholarship” wie “English scholarship”.’

⁴ A. Momigliano & A. Schiavone (founder edd.), *Storia di Roma*, 4 vols. in 7 (Turin: Einaudi, 1988–93). Vol. iv is entitled ‘Caratteri e morfologie’.

tween ‘Ourselves and the Greeks’ and ‘The Greeks Outside Greece’ (on the transmission and reception of Greek culture) a three-part historical volume in which each part has a chronological basis but the individual chapters are devoted to a wide range of topics.⁵ The execution of the *Cambridge Histories* has not been wholly British, as we shall see, but I think the idea that one can produce a satisfactory history by putting together separate chapters on their separate specialities by separate specialists may have been distinctly British, and it may be significant that the not-so-British Acton believed in rather more editorial direction than actually occurred.

In March 1896 the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press issued an invitation⁶ to Lord Acton, who was Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge but, far from being narrowly British, had a good deal of the continent in his background.⁷ He planned the *Cambridge Modern History*, aiming ‘to obtain the best history of modern times that the published or unpublished sources of information admit’, and believing that ‘nearly all the evidence that will ever appear is accessible now’, so that ‘we approach the final stage in the conditions of historical learning’. The *C.M.H.* was to be English in language, and ‘such as will serve all readers, ... without notes, and without quotations in foreign languages’, but not English or British in bias: ‘Our scheme requires that nothing shall reveal the country, the religion, or the party to which the writers belong’.⁸ Acton died before the first volume was published. The editors tried to adhere to his plan, though they acknowledged that ‘ultimate history cannot be obtained in this generation’. They hoped that a work with many authors would achieve a higher level of expertise than a single author could sustain, and would avoid ‘the domination of one intelligence’, but still that with editorial direction ‘instead of presenting a collection of fragments [it would possess] a definite unity of its own’.⁹

The *Modern History* appeared between 1902 and 1912; the *Medieval*, planned by Acton’s successor, the Anglo-Irish J. B. Bury, between 1911 and 1936; and it was Bury, again, who planned the *Ancient History*, which was published between 1924 and 1939. Bury was one of the editors of vols. i–vi, S. A. Cook and F. E. Adcock served for all twelve, M. P. Charlesworth for

⁵ S. Settis (ed.), *I Greci*, 4 vols. in 6 (Turin: Einaudi, 1996–). Vol. i is entitled ‘Noi e i Greci’; ii. 13 ‘Una storia greca’; iii ‘I Greci oltre la Grecia’; iv will be an ‘Atlante’, containing maps and tables.

⁶ Cf. *TLS* 22.iv.1939, 232–29 (*sic*) at 232.

⁷ On Acton see O. Chadwick, *Acton and History*, C.U.P., 1998, and the review by M. O’Brien, *TLS* 23.x.1998, 29.

⁸ Acton’s letter to contributors, published in Acton, ed. J. N. Figgis & R. V. Laurence, *Lectures on Modern History* (Macmillan, 1906), 315–8 app. i.

⁹ *C.M.H.* i (ed. A. W. Ward, G. W. Prothero & S. Leathes, 1902), pp. v–viii preface.

vols. vii–xii and N. H. Baynes for vol. xii: of these Adcock probably played the largest part.¹⁰ The *Medieval History* announced its intention of following the same principles as the *Modern*;¹¹ in the *Ancient History* this seems to have been taken for granted.

The *Ancient History* was originally intended to be in eight volumes,¹² but as early as vol. iii the scheme broke down: what was to have been iii became iii and iv,¹³ and in the end there were twelve volumes of text, accompanied by five volumes of plates. The first six volumes, on the near east and Greece (with a little on Carthage and the Etruscans), were solidly British apart from one chapter by R. A. S. Macallister of Dublin and four by W. S. Ferguson of Harvard (a Canadian by origin); vols. vii–xii were a far more international enterprise, with contributors from a wide range of countries. Comparison with general histories produced in other countries in the first half of the twentieth century does not suggest that there was anything strikingly British about the contents, though the French took more interest in social history, and Tarn's Alexander was certainly a product of Tarn's background as a British gentleman.

Most reviewers, both in the U.K. and abroad, expressed approval; but there were strong attacks on the first half by A. W. Gomme in *Classical Review*¹⁴ and by D. McFayden in *Classical Journal*.¹⁵ H. M. Last was critical of the first volume, in the *Oxford Magazine*, but he contributed to the Roman volumes, and expressed approval in reviewing vol. xii for *Classical Philology*.¹⁶

Acton's intention for the *Modern History* had been that, although separate contributors should write separate chapters, there should be firm editorial control to make each volume a coherent whole rather than a collection of fragments. I cannot judge the *Modern* and *Medieval Histories*, but that principle did not survive into the early volumes of the *Ancient History*: the preface to vol. i admitted that contributors had been allowed to disagree with one another;¹⁷ and, notoriously, in vol. iv J. A. R. Munro put the Marathon campaign in 491 while E. M. Walker kept to the orthodox date of 490. Other aspects which aroused complaint were that the work was not suitable either

¹⁰ Cf. P. Wilkinson, *Frank Ezra Adcock* (King's College, Cambridge, 1969), 257, for which I am indebted to Prof. A. J. Woodman.

¹¹ *C.Med.H.* i (ed. H. M. Gwatkin & J. P. Whitney), p. iii.

¹² Cf. H. M. Last, *Oxford Magazine* xlii 1923/4, 138–42 at 138.

¹³ Cf. A. W. Gomme, *CR* xl 1926, 160–2 at 160.

¹⁴ *CR* xxxviii 1924, 161–9, on vol. i; xxxix 1925, 203, on vol. ii; xl 1926, 160–2, on vol. iii; xli 1927, 64–8, on vol. iv; xlii 1928, 183–9, on vols. v and vi.

¹⁵ *CJ* xxii 1926/7, 393–6, on vol. iv; main attack xxiii 1927/8, 141–5, on vol. v.

¹⁶ *Oxford Magazine* xlii 1923/4, 138–42, on i; *CP* lxi 1940, 81–90, on vol. xii and plates v.

¹⁷ *C.A.H.*, i, pp. v–x at viii–x.

for general readers, who would find it hard going and would be puzzled by many unexplained details, or for serious students and academics, who would need far more indications of the sources on which statements were based and of what was controversial and what was not; that partition between contributors had led not only to the loss of things which were nobody's responsibility but also to a failure to bring out what was most important in the periods under discussion; and that the volumes displayed an old-fashioned preoccupation with political and military history. Last in commenting on the improvement reached by the end remarked, 'It has been discovered that a text intelligible to the general reader can be combined with notes which give it value for the scholar; and the editors, becoming more assertive with experience, have contrived to impose on the contributors to later volumes a harmony, not indeed in their opinions on points of detail but at least in their conception of the nature of their undertaking, which once was conspicuously to seek'.¹⁸ The *TLS*, saluting the completion of the project, lamented that 'the ideal of a clean page and a uniformly English text has ... succumbed to the scruples of an age of researchers; ... but in the absence of polemic, in the catholicity of its authorities, in the harmony of contributors and contributory aspects the architect's vision has triumphed'.¹⁹

I leave my general comments until after I have said something about the new edition.

The *Modern History* again led the way: the main text volumes and an atlas were published between 1957 and 1970, with a companion volume, discussing outside the chronological framework of the other volumes such topics as Industry, Peasants, Bureaucracy and The Scientific Revolution, following in 1979; two of the main text volumes have had a second edition. But this time the *Ancient History* got ahead of the *Medieval*: the first volume of the *Medieval History* did not appear until 1995; but the *Ancient History*—the only one which has not this time added the word *New* to its title—began with vols. iii in 71 fascicles between 1961 and 1971, and revised them into four half-volumes between 1970 and 1975. There was then a pause, but revision and extension of the rest began with vol. iii. 1 in 1982 and is now nearly complete: whereas the old edition ended with Constantine, the new, reflecting the reclaiming of the later Roman Empire for Ancient History which has taken place during the second half of our century, will run to the end of the sixth century. This time there are no chalcenteric editors serving for the whole duration of the enterprise.

As a contributor to the new edition I was instructed to 'summarize present knowledge', for readers 'of the same intelligence as the writer, but with-

¹⁸ *CP* lxi 1940, 81–90 at 82.

¹⁹ *TLS* 22.iv.1939, 232–29 (*sic*) at 232.

out specialized knowledge', for instance 'specialists in some other historical period or ... graduate students in [my] own field': there is no longer an attempt to cater for the 'general reader' of the first edition. Accordingly the new edition is much better than the old at citing ancient sources and modern discussions, at presenting arguments as well as conclusions, and (with most contributors) at indicating what is controversial and what is not. It has suffered much more than the old from the slowness of some contributors, with the result that fast contributors found that their chapters were rather elderly by the time they were published. Though a hostile reviewer in Oxford remarked, 'quite without satisfaction', that it was more of an Oxford Ancient History,²⁰ there are some Cambridge contributions, and there are also a good many contributions from a range of countries outside the U.K., though not many of those are on the traditional main thread of Greek and Roman history. The original edition had only one female author (E. Strong on Roman art), though women were allowed to translate chapters written in foreign languages by men; but the new has several, and there are women among the editors of the Roman volumes. I think even hostile reviewers regard most of the chapters as good at doing what the authors were asked to do—but that leaves two major problems, to which I shall devote the rest of my time.

First, what should the authors have been asked to do? On what subjects should chapters have been commissioned? Already in the 1920's the near-eastern and Greek volumes of the original edition seemed to some critics to be too much preoccupied with political and military history: there was a heavy preponderance of narrative of public figures and events; there were some separate chapters on literature, religion, philosophy and art; the only major attempt to deal with economic and social matters was a chapter by M. N. Tod at the beginning of vol. v. In the new edition the narrative chapters are still there, but a great deal has been added that was not in the old. In these first six volumes v, on the fifth century, has the most traditional appearance; but even that claims to have been 'more explicit on questions of historical method', and, in what is misleadingly denominated ch. 8.a–h, it has what are really eight chapters—covering 200 pages, two-fifths of the total text—on Art; Classical Cities and Sanctuaries; Rebuilding in Athens and Attica; Panhellenic Cults and Panhellenic Poets; Athenian Cults and Festivals; Athenian Religion and Literature; Society and Economy; and Athens as a Cultural Centre; and these chapters profess 'to show the cultural achievements in their historical, social and religious contexts'.²¹ Vol. v is narrowly Greek, which is partly responsible for its traditional appearance; but

²⁰ F. Millar, *JRS* lxxxv 1995, 236–43 at 236.

²¹ Cf. vol. v, pp. xiii–xvi preface at xv.

that is because vols. v and vi are intended to be taken together.²² Vol. vi has Regional Surveys for periods which vary by region but approximate to the fifth and fourth centuries: these are disguised as just two chapters, on Persian Lands and Neighbours and on The West and North, but they occupy more than 300 pages. There is also a chapter on Society and Economy, and there are five chapters in one on Greek Culture and Science. Together the chapters I have mentioned amount to about 440 pages, just half of the total text. In the new edition the narrative chapters for the most part ask traditional questions and rely on written evidence, but in both the framing of the questions and the interpretation of the evidence there is an advance in sophistication on the old edition.²³ The other chapters are wide-ranging in the questions which they ask, the evidence which they adduce and the approaches which they adopt. There has been a similar increase in breadth in the Roman volumes (but they do not play the same games with chapter-numbers as the Greek volumes).

So the scope of ancient history has been widened a good deal between the old edition and the new. Has it been widened enough? By the standards of today—perhaps rather less by the standards of twenty to forty years ago, when the revised *C.A.H.* was planned—it is a conservative widening. The organiser of our seminar, who did not write for the *C.A.H.*, has been stimulated to edit an alternative Cambridge history, the *Cambridge Illustrated History of Ancient Greece*, which was published last year and is much more radical.²⁴ This aims ‘to give the proper space to women, slaves, foreigners, non-citizens and non-Greeks, as well as to ... the adult male citizens. ... “Emphasis is on from-the-bottom-up worm’s-eye view of history.”’²⁵ In practical terms, this means that narrative is reduced to one chapter, which focuses more on processes than on individual men and events; the other chapters are devoted to such topics as Rich and Poor; Women, Children and Men; Work and Leisure; and Performance; with the older preoccupations of history revisited in chapters on Power and the State; and War and Peace. Here as in the new *C.A.H.* the chapter numbering is significant: there the non-narrative chapters are implied to be fewer than they are; here there are twelve numbered chapters, but the Historical Outline is an Intermezzo without a number. According to the dust jacket (for which the editor is probably not to be blamed) the *Cambridge Illustrated History* is ‘uniquely comprehensive and authoritative’.

²² Cf. vol. v, pp. xiii–xvi preface at xiii.

²³ I stand by this statement, while accepting the force of Dr. M. Beard’s warning, at the seminar, against the facile assumption that we are superior to our predecessors.

²⁴ P. Cartledge (ed.), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Ancient Greece* (C.U.P., 1998).

²⁵ A. Elder, *BSA Newsletter* i Autumn 1998, 12 (second sentence quoted from Cartledge).

That leads to a second and more fundamental objection to the *Cambridge Histories*, which would be expressed by those extreme relativists who press the point that there cannot be an objective history, to the extent of insisting that all historians construct their own history and one historian's construction has as much validity as another's (though the cynic receives the impression that nevertheless these people's constructions are deemed to be good and their enemies' constructions bad).²⁶ For these relativists there can be no such thing as an authoritative history; the attempt to provide one is unsound; and when the work is shared out among different contributors the result is neither the authoritative history that is elusively aimed at nor the individual history which one person might construct. Indeed, from this point of view the impersonality which the scheme of a multi-author work forces the contributors to adopt lessens the value even of the individual contributions as personal constructions: sources and modern discussions are duly footnoted, but deriving the results from them appears to be a quasi-mathematical exercise, and the contributors do not overtly engage with the ancient sources and modern scholars to confront in their own persons the personal constructions of others from which they have to work. According to one reviewer the *Storia di Roma* is better than the Roman volumes of the new *C.A.H.* in that respect, but even it does not go as far as it might.²⁷

I have a vested interest, as some one who devoted a certain amount of work and a certain amount of professional pride to writing chapters for the new *C.A.H.*, and who does not want to think that he was wasting his time. But I have views on how historians ought to do their job, and I do not think my views would be significantly different if I had not written for the *C.A.H.* If I were to resort to the -isms which I normally try to avoid, I should say that I am a pluralist but not a relativist.

I am a pluralist, as I indicated as long ago in 1971/2 in a review of M. I. Finley's Cambridge inaugural lecture.²⁸ In recent years there has not been a consensus on the kind of investigations which ancient historians ought to pursue, and the first category of opponents to the *C.A.H.* are people who think it has not been pursuing the right kind of investigations. I think there is still a place for the detailed study of the history of leading figures and events—and yes, in the Greek world those leading figures are native, free

²⁶ See, e.g., F. Millar, *JRS* lxxxv 1995, 236–43 at 236, on vol. ix; C. Smith, *JRS* lxxxvii 1997, 241–8 at 246–8, on vol. x and the Momigliano & Schiavone *Storia di Roma*; R. Alston, *CR* xlviii 1998, 11–35, on vol. x.

²⁷ Smith, *op. cit.*, 247–8.

²⁸ *DUF* xxxiii 1971/2, 148–9, on M. I. Finley, *The Ancestral Constitution* (C.U.P., 1971). Cf. my own inaugural lecture, 'What Alcibiades Did and What Happened to Him' (U. of Durham, 1985), 202.

adult males. Additional evidence still turns up, there is an awareness of additional ways in which interpreting the evidence is far from straightforward, and the effect on us of the context in which we live and work means that we can sometimes see things which the great scholars of a century ago did not see. But of course this is not the only kind of history. Some of my own work has been of this kind, but much of it has not: I have devoted a lot of my attention to the working of political machinery, not only in classical Athens but across the whole Greek world and throughout antiquity;²⁹ trade is being rehabilitated, after a period in which its extent and significance were minimised;³⁰ it has been fashionable recently to focus on various categories of inhabitants of the Greek and Roman world who are Other than the leading native, free adult males;³¹ and so on. There should be room for all these approaches. I welcome the greater breadth of the new edition of the *C.A.H.* in comparison with the old; I welcome the still greater breadth shown by more recent work, such as that which is represented in the *Cambridge Illustrated History*. Our objective is to study the Greek and Roman world in all its variety, and to make it intelligible and interesting to ourselves and to other people who live in our world: our world affects the questions we want to ask, the approaches to them which we think worth trying, the answers to them which we find acceptable. Every kind of investigation which genuinely helps us to do that is to be encouraged.

But I am not a relativist, as I have indicated in a more recent review article.³² We are still subject to change, but the world of the Greeks and Romans is not, and we are not at liberty to construct it in whatever way we like. It is indeed for us to approach that world in our own way, to decide what questions we need to ask and how we ought to look for answers to them, to stress this but not that, to make connections which we think important and not to make connections which we think unimportant; but in doing this we are trying to do justice to people and communities who actually existed and to a varied and extensive body of evidence about them. No construction can do total justice and no injustice, because no one construction can be complete, because we are not Greeks and Romans, because there are many things which we do not know and many things to which we are blind;

²⁹ See most recently P. J. Rhodes with D. M. Lewis, *The Decrees of the Greek States* (O.U.P., 1997).

³⁰ See for instance R. Osborne, *Antiquity* lxx 1996, 31–44; H. Parkins & C. Smith (edd.), *Trade, Traders and the Ancient City* (Routledge, 1998).

³¹ See for instance P. Cartledge, *The Greeks* (O.U.P., 1993): he attributes interest in the concept of the Other particularly to E. Levinas.

³² *Polis* xv 1998, 75–82 at 78–80, on J. Ober, *The Athenian Revolution* (Princeton U. P., 1996).

but some constructions are better than others, and not only because they cater for our own needs better than others but because they do more justice and less injustice to what we are studying than others.³³ If we are serious historians, our job is not to indulge ourselves but to engage with our subject-matter. This means also that, while it is a good thing to search our souls from time to time, to become conscious of what we mostly do subconsciously, to become aware of our own prejudices and presuppositions, we must retain a sense of proportion and remember that we are searching our souls in order to do history better, not doing history in order to search our souls better.

And what of the *Cambridge Ancient History*? Was it worth compiling? Was it worth revising? I should say yes. I do think that it is worthwhile to perform an act of consolidation from time to time on the conservative kind of history which the *C.A.H.* represents, and that that consolidation can be done successfully in a work by many authors from many places. There are not many among us who could rival Busolt or Beloch; but by now there is a century or more of serious historical scholarship to be taken into account, as well as a body of evidence which, thanks to inscriptions, papyri and other finds, continues to grow. If it was true when the *Cambridge Histories* were begun, a century ago, it is now much more true that nobody can be a real expert except in a limited field. There is always a danger in a multi-author work that important things will disappear into the gaps, but if the planning is well done the gaps will not be too serious and the individual contributions will be valuable summaries of the state of work in their area. But few people will read straight through even one volume of nearly a thousand pages unless they have to review it, and I think the planners of the new edition were right to abandon the 'general reader' of the old and take a narrower view of their audience. And I will venture to say even that they were right to make their broadening of scope fairly conservative. Of course one can think of topics which could appropriately have been included but were not; but the approach of the *Cambridge Illustrated History* is so different that I doubt whether its material could have been fitted successfully into the same framework as the other. But I think Cambridge can be proud of both.

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³³ As my colleague Dr. D. S. Levene puts it, historians may say that Brutus killed Caesar or that Brutus murdered Caesar or that Brutus assassinated Caesar, but not that Caesar killed Brutus.