

The Greco-Persian Wars: A Short History with Documents. Erik Jensen. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2021. 232 pp. \$49. Hardcover ISBN: 9781624669552.

The Persian Wars of the early fifth century BC were a pivotal period in Greek and Persian history – hence the inclusion of the book, *The Greco-Persian Wars* by Erik Jensen in Hackett’s “Key Moments in History” series. For the Greeks, the wars were the first true triumph over a major foreign foe with enormous financial and manpower resources; Herodotus spoke of the Persian army drinking rivers dry. For Athens the period was its coming of age as an imperial, especially naval, power; shortly afterwards it put together the Delian League, a coalition of other states which grew into a fifth century Athenian empire. And for Persians the wars showed their weaknesses, among other things, their failure to reconnoiter terrain properly before Marathon, the disruption once their lines of communication were broken in naval losses, and even the psychological effect on the army when Xerxes fled home after Salamis.

The Persian Wars have important ripple effects throughout Greek history, from the importance of naval power to fourth-century orators using the valor of the Athenians’ ancestors who fought for freedom against the Persians to Philip II of Macedonia in 337 declaring that his projected invasion of Asia was revenge for what the Greeks, especially the Athenians, suffered in the wars. More often than not, the Persian Wars are taught from the Greeks’ perspective – what did they do to defeat the enemy; what did the Persians do, or not do, to be defeated; what effect did the wars have on Greece; and so on – with very little attention to how the *Persians* viewed the wars and indeed precisely why they wanted to move into Greece in the first place. In part, this is due to the evidence: there is simply more Greek than “Persian” sources, and the latter do not cover all the events or their impact on Greece and eastern Mediterranean. But that should not limit us in the questions we ask or how we study the period – just as studying Alexander the Great from the “western” perspective and ignoring the “eastern” does not give us a balanced view.

Jensen’s short book, which I am assuming is meant to be a sourcebook for undergraduate study (the blurb for this series says it is “intended for the student-user or general audience”) is welcome because in addition to the “usual” Greek sources he gives us a range of non-Greek ones in translation – Akkadian, Aramaic, Egyptian, Elamite, Hebrew, and Old Persian – allowing us to consider both sides of the story. Jensen begins with a succinct introduction to the period. In addition to providing a discussion of the sources, this puts a welcome emphasis on how and why the advances into Greece were part of a Persian expansionist mission than simply revenge for a couple of Greek cities supporting the Ionian Revolt or the natural tendency of Persia to take over Greece eventually or even an east-west cultural clash, topics that the selected sources amplify when one turns to them.

The bulk of the book comprises translated sources, briefly introduced and with short contextual comments. This is the real strength of the book. The sources take us chronologically through the period of Persian expansion and the wars themselves and then very usefully their aftermath down to the King’s Peace of 387. This last selection shows, as I mentioned above, the ripple effect of the Wars, that a century after them the motives of individuals and states – Greeks and Persians – still dominated relations between the two powers. In effect, then, as Jensen argues

the Persian Wars do not exist in a vacuum of their own time. Further, the contrasting sources highlight that non-Greek source could be as biased as Greek ones, impact our views of the Persian Empire and even Persian kingship, and tell us that the Persians were as much “players” in the period as Greeks were – something we often overlook.

One minor quibble is that at times Jensen translates texts from Jacoby’s *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. That work has long been superseded by *Brill’s New Jacoby* (under my editorship), publication of which began in 2007.

Jensen’s aim, as his blurb states, shows the Persian Wars should be viewed through a wider and “more meaningful” context of not just Greek but eastern Mediterranean history against the backdrop of Persian imperial expansion. The sources he selects supports that.

The book also has a glossary of terms, a chronological chart, two maps, a select bibliography, and an index.

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