

**MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT
OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE**

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Arnold J. Toynbee, Review of *The Cambridge Ancient History*, edited by J.B. Bury, S.A. Cook, and F.E. Adcock, vol. IV, *The Persian Empire and the West*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1926, in «Nation and the Athenaeum», XXXIX, 12, June 26, 1926, pp. 355-357.

GREEK AND PERSIAN

By Arnold J. Toynbee

The sources and subject of this volume differ rather markedly from those of its predecessors. The ancient civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Aegean finally pass into the background or disappear altogether from the scene, and younger societies – the Greeks on the one side and the Syrians and Iranians on the other – come forward upon the stage, or, rather, descend into the arena, for their first contact is a clash of arms and not an interchange of thoughts and feelings. At the same time there flows in, with the Greeks, a stream of historical literature which is not only a more copious but a more certain source of information than the archeological evidence out of which the record of the first three volumes is mainly constructed. In those volumes, the archeological evidence seemed to offer a firm foundation in contrast to the quicksands in which the literature of the Old Testament and the Greek Epic threatened to engulf the historical explorer. In the present volume, the archeological foundation is crowned by a superstructure of historical literature, and this at once initiates us into that spiritual side of human life on which archeology seldom throws more than a fitful gleam of light.

It must be noted that, at this stage, the stream of literary history flows from the Greek side only. A few hundred lines carved on the rock-face of Bisutun are the only personal record that Darius has left us; and though they give us a vivid glimpse of one great man's personality, this isolated literary record is more than offset by the comparative scantiness of the archeological evidence of this date from Western Asia. Archeology has told us much more – so far – about certain earlier periods of Egyptian and Mesopotamian history than about the Persian Empire in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. This difference in the amount and character of the information from the Greek and Oriental sides is inevitably reflected in the construction of the present volume of the Cambridge History. The rise of Athenian democracy is treated in 92 pages; the creation and organization of the Middle Eastern

Universal State by the Persians in 65; and the conflict between city, state, and empire – our whole record of which comes from the Greek side – in about 130.

It is astonishing to be reminded how very little we know of the Achaemenid Empire from within – and yet that little is enough to make us feel that there, behind the veil, things were happening which may be of no less ultimate importance in the long history of Mankind than those contemporary events in Greece which are so brilliantly illuminated by the work of Herodotus. We discern, emerging from we know not where, the new vision of a world-state, benevolently tolerant of all nationalities and all religions so long as these consent on their part to live at peace with each other. That ideal was, of course, never perfectly realized in the Achaemenid Empire, any more than the ideal of democracy was perfectly realized in Athens. Nevertheless, two political conceptions which thenceforth were to play an equally important part in the life of Mankind took definite form at this time in these two neighbouring societies.

The conflict between the embodiments of democracy and the world-state was dramatic. It was a struggle between David and Goliath, a contest between the freshness of spring and the mellowness of the Indian summer. The sharpness of the contrast fades, however, when we pass from the political to the religious plane and compare the religion of Zoroaster with the mystery religions and pre-Socratic philosophy of Greece. The account of these, by Mr. F.M. Cornford, is the most interesting chapter in this volume. To the student of religion and philosophy its fascination will be sufficient in itself; but the historically minded inquirer is left with an unsatisfied – perhaps unsatisfiable – curiosity regarding the source of this amazing fountain of spiritual activity. Did the philosophical speculation of the Greeks and the deep religious emotion which accompanied it (in Italy, at least) spring quite independently out of that underlying attitude of mind which seems to be common to primitive Mankind in all places and times? Or was the spring fed by subterranean channels? The simultaneous appearance, in Greek and Iranian thought, of the conception of a cosmic conflict between light and darkness would seem to be more than a coincidence, and here it is easy to see how a mental influence could have been conveyed. Far stranger is the apparently sudden emergence, in the Greek world, of those ideas regarding the transmigration of souls, the wheel of existence, and the desirability of escape from it, which seem exotic in a Greek environment, but which had been dominant for some centuries in India. Is a channel of

mental communication between Greece and India conceivable at this date? It is perhaps possible that the Greek colonies planted on the northern shores of the Black Sea during the seventh and sixth centuries may have interchanged more than material commodities with the civilized peoples at the opposite extremity of the great Eurasian Steppe – but this is a mere speculation.

This new intellectual and spiritual leaven in the Greek world, whatever its origin, worked most actively in the Far West of the Greek world of that time. Other chapters in the volume introduce us to the non-Greek peoples of the Western Mediterranean – Carthaginians, Etruscans, and Italians – and prepare us to see our own part of the world brought, for the first time, into the main current of human history.