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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty Years of the Roman Dominion* by Alfred J. Butler and P. M. Fraser

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*The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty Years of the Roman Dominion.* By ALFRED J. BUTLER, 2nd edition edited by P.M. Fraser. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978. Pp. lxxxiii, 563, 83, 64. \$37.50.

A.J. Butler's pioneer work on the Arab conquest of Egypt and the immediately preceding period of Byzantine and Persian rule appeared over three-quarters of a century ago. It is a work in a style no longer to be found: much less fully documented for the most part than a modern work on the subject would be, it is nonetheless vigorously critical in the use of sources; and Butler's vivid style and freedom in passing judgment on historical figures are hardly to be found in the cautious scholarly books of today.

As the work has long been out of print and yet is to this day not yet replaced as a standard work, the willingness of the Oxford University Press to reprint the work is welcome. To the original book have been helpfully added two somewhat later and hard-to-find pamphlets by Butler on related topics ("The Treaty of Miṣr in Ṭabarī" and "Babylon of Egypt"), and P.M. Fraser has increased the utility of the reprint by supplying a 39-page bibliographical introduction avowedly aimed at providing the modern reader with a guide to the principal literature bearing on the subject since the publication of the book in 1902.

The bibliography has three parts: (1) re-editions of and additions to the source material; (2) some general bibliography on Byzantium and its empire, especially Egypt; and (3) a bibliography by chapters. The various parts are very uneven in the degree to which the significance of the material cited for Butler's work is brought out. The reader will be struck by Fraser's remarkable erudition on a vast array of subjects and above all by the extraordinary variety of topics and source materials drawn on for this bibliography. It is doubtful that any other scholar could command such a diverse wealth of information on this period of Egypt's history.

Closer inspection leads one to suspect that this breadth of learning has not been without its costs in comprehensiveness on any one subject and in accuracy. From recent investigation I am most familiar with the papyri of Heraclius' reign, and a comparison of Fraser's list (given with a stated intention of being complete) of Greek papyri on pp. xlvi-xlvii with that compiled by K.A. Worp and me (*Regnal Formulas in Byzantine Egypt*) *BASP* Suppl. 2, Missoula 1979; cf. also our *Chronological Systems in Byzantine Egypt* (*Stud. Amst.* 8, Zutphen 1978)) is not reassuring: overall, there are six omissions, eight texts assigned to the wrong year, eight doublets (multiple editions of one text cited as if different papyri) and one wrong reference (*PSI* 773 cited as *PSI* 611); one of the wrong year references is also to an obsolete edition (*SB* 6271 referred to instead of *SB* 8986). Twenty-three errors out of a total of sixty-two texts included or needed is not very creditable. The treatment of Coptic is very sketchy on the documentary side (p.lxxx is entirely inadequate, lacking above all a reference to A.A. Schiller, "The Budge Papyrus of Columbia University," *JARCE* 7 (1968) 79-118). Any user will find similar lacunae in other sections, and it would be tedious, unprofitable and ungrateful to list more at random.

Equally serious is the inequality of treatment given to various chapters in the third part of the bibliography. Some of this may be ascribed to legitimate diversity in the growth of source material and scholarly work on the various topics since Butler wrote, but it is more disconcerting to find that on some points (e.g. pp.lxv-lxvi, lxxvi-lxxxiii) Fraser explains in detail the import of new material, while in others (e.g. most of pp.lx-lxv) we get little more than bare references. In general, it seems that the bibliographical supplement is less a guide through Butler with reference to newer work than it is an independent bibliography tied into Butler at certain points. In other words, the supplement is less closely integrated into the original work than would be optimal.

Such are some of the problems in the bibliographical supplement. The reader will do well to be on his guard and to regard this section at best only as a starting point.

Nonetheless, it would be remarkable if any user of the book failed to benefit from the breadth of interest and knowledge Fraser shows here, and every discipline would do well to emulate his concern for the broader context of specialized studies. If the bibliography is not all we could hope, it is at least a lot more than we had or are likely to get elsewhere. Students of late antiquity owe a debt of gratitude to Fraser and the Oxford University Press for this new edition of Butler.

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*Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army.* By DONALD W. ENGELS. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978. Pp. xiv + 194.

The study of Alexander the Great has undergone a revolution in the last quarter-century; scholarly attention has moved from subjective interpretation of personality to progress principally in two directions. First, the longstanding prejudice in favor of Arrian and against the writers of the Alexander vulgate (i.e. Diodorus, Curtius and Justin) has been strongly challenged. In particular, Ptolemy son of Lagos, Arrian's principal source, has been shown to be by no means as objective and comprehensive as was once thought (see e.g. the pioneering article of C.B. Welles, "The Reliability of Ptolemy as an Historian," *Miscellanea di Studi Alessandrini in memoria di A. Rostagni* (Turin 1963) 101-116 and the good discussion of A.B. Bosworth, "Arrian and the Alexander Vulgate," *Alexandre le Grand: Entretiens Hardt* 22 [Geneva 1975] 1-33). Secondly, a concerted attempt to understand Alexander's context, especially the Macedonian background, has made many of Alexander's actions seem more rationally explicable and less dependent purely on his personality than they often appear in the sources and in modern works; here the brilliant studies of Alexander's relations to the Macedonian nobility by E. Badian may be cited as exemplary of an entire school of thought.

Donald Engels owes a considerable amount to both of these currents in his attempt to assess the effect on Alexander's strategy of terrain, transport and supply. Engels has repeated occasion to assess favorably (e.g. pp. 7, 84, 87, 101) the geographical information provided by Curtius; and if Diodorus is not so helpful, that is the fault of his brevity. By contrast, Arrian reflects Ptolemy's desire to give the impression that logistical considerations played little part in the expedition. Engels thus treats the sources much on a par, with all information subject to critical scrutiny.

It is the other direction, however, which provides the main theme of this book: Alexander's actions can be properly understood only when they are viewed in the context of the physical realities of his situation. Engels seeks to answer two questions: how did Alexander's army get its provisions, and what effects did the necessity of finding them have on the strategy and tactics of the Macedonian army? The ancient sources are sometimes informative about the geographical context, but almost never about supplies. The method followed, therefore, begins from the terrain and looks to the sources for confirmation of the conclusions reached.

Engels begins with a general assessment of the army's capabilities, the result of which is the view that any unmechanized army could draw provisions by land only within a four-day radius because transport animals or personnel would consume in a longer round trip as much as they could carry. On the other hand, a land army could itself carry no more than 7-10 days' provisions (less in the desert where water must be carried), no matter how numerous the pack animals. For each movement of the Macedonian army, these general principles are applied to the terrain over which the army was to travel and the resources of the area.