

Preface to the English Translation

The text of the book that is presented here to English-speaking readers differs very little from the French edition published by Éditions Fayard in June, 1996. Yet during the first stage in the process of translation, in the late 1996 and early 1997, I had hoped to make systematic modifications and additions to the original text in a way that took account of publications which had appeared after the latest revisions to the French manuscript, in September 1995.¹ A succession of delays in the preparation of the American translation dissuaded me from carrying out this enterprise, and here I would like to explain my decision to my readers.²

I have chosen to present updates and very detailed assessments of research in another form, the *Bulletin d'Histoire Achéménide* (BHACH), organized in a way that follows the thematic structure of my book. Its aim is to give scholars periodic opportunities not only to become acquainted with recent bibliography, but also to have a critical analysis of it. The first number (BHACH I) took the form of a long article published in Supplément 1 to the journal *Topoi* (1997, pp. 5–127).³ In it, I analyzed about 450 titles (articles and books) published between October 1995 and October 1997. The second *Bulletin* (BHACH II) appeared in 2001, in book form.⁴ Following the same plan, I analyzed more than 800 titles published between October 1997 and October 2000. To make it easier to use, BHACH II is accompanied by indexes which also cover the material in BHACH I. One of those indexes (pp. 327–30) makes it possible for readers to find the pages in my 1996 book that need to be revised in the light of new publications. Furthermore, the recent creation of a website specifically devoted to Achaemenid research

1. I point out that Ursula Weber and Josef Wiesehöfer have brought out an enormous Achaemenid bibliography, exhaustive and minutely classified (*Das Reich der Achaimeniden: Eine Bibliographie* (AMI, Ergänzungsband 15; Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1996).

2. A single significant addition has been made in the part of Chapter 9 devoted to customs and exchange: I have introduced an extraordinary document dealing with customs in Egypt, drawing on the main expositions and conclusions of the study by myself and R. Descat, “Un registre douanier de la satrapie d'Égypte,” in N. Grimal and B. Menu, eds., *La commerce en Égypte ancienne* (IFAO Bibliothèque d'Études 121; Cairo, 1998) 59–104. Subsequently, I decided to stop introducing new material and discussion.

3. Supplément 1 to *Topoi* (distributed by Boccard, in Paris) included papers from a meeting organized at the Maison de l'Orient (Lyon), March 31–April 1, 1997, published under the title *Recherches récentes sur l'empire achéménide*. Almost twenty colleagues from various countries responded to an invitation from Jean-François Salles and Marie-Françoise Boussac to discuss my book, at that time newly published by Fayard.

4. *Bulletin d'Histoire Achéménide* II (Paris: Éditions Thotm, 2001), 334 pp. (see <http://www.thotm-editions.com/editions/bhachII02.htm>). This volume inaugurates a new series, *Persika*, undertaken on the initiative of the “Chaire d'histoire et de civilisation du monde achéménide et de l'empire d'Alexandre” with the cooperation of the Collège de France.

(www.achemenet.com) also gives scholars access to documentary and bibliographic resources on a continuing basis.⁵

I have discussed one of the methodological questions raised by a systematic update, a question that is not limited to Achaemenid studies, in the “Noruz Lecture” presented at the Foundation for Iranian Studies (Washington, D.C., March 23, 2001) under the title “New Trends in Achaemenid History.”⁶ There, with reference to the updates in *BHach I* and II, I stated:

When one strives to follow and evaluate research and publication on a day-to-day basis and in an exhaustive manner, one unavoidably develops a permanent habit of painful epistemological questioning of the real results of the research. This question is particularly difficult to resolve in the Humanities, where accumulated erudition and bibliographic tautology sometimes take the place of evidence that is accepted but misleading for scientific innovation. To speak bluntly: what is really *new* in what is published *recently*? In our domain, what are the signs that permit us to assert that this or that study marks *progress* in the order of knowledge? The answer may seem easy as long as one is dealing with publications of documents, but it is quite a different matter when one considers interpretive publications. And even among publications of documents one has to make distinctions: some of them add only one unpublished document in a series that is already known, without modifying the general sense by much; others, on the other hand, call attention to documentation that in itself may suggest wholly new lines of interpretation.

Then, after presenting results from excavations at Ayn Manâwir in Egypt, I concluded:

In this respect, the discoveries and publications on Achaemenid Egypt that I have presented in brief are not just *recent*, they are really *new*, and they open prospects of fundamental new growth in the near future.

My point is that a thorough updating cannot be brought about in a satisfactory manner only with hundreds of bibliographic additions, heaped up one on the other. As publications accumulate, so the risk increases of burdening the text and the bibliographic notes with updates superimposed over one another, and of making the text more difficult to consult rather than more useful. Furthermore, in such a case the appearance of exhaustiveness would be largely an illusion, for two reasons. First, any book, however up-to-date its bibliography may be, is subject to some bibliographic lapse by the time it has appeared.⁷ Furthermore, as I have indicated, many added references really add

5. The creation of this web site also responds to purposes specific to the overall framework of Achaemenid history, that is, an aim to transform what has been a virtual scientific community into an actual scientific community: see my “Call for Collaboration” (Paris, 2000), available for downloading at <http://www.achement.com/pdf/call.pdf>, as well as the proceedings of a colloquium that I organized at the Collège de France, Dec. 15–16, 2000, “Achaemenid History and Data Bases on the Internet: an Assessment of Work in Progress and Prospects for Future Developments,” available at <http://www.achemenet.com/pdf/colloque/resumes.pdf>. With the agreement of the editors of *Topoi*, the entire text of *BHach I* can be found on the site at <http://www.achemenet.com/bibliographies/bhach1.htm>.

6. An English version is available at <http://www.fis-iran.org/achemenid.htm>; the French text is available at <http://www.achemenet.com/ressources/enligne/jasr/jasr01/htm> under the title “L’histoire de l’empire achéménide aujourd’hui: nouvelles tendances, nouvelles perspectives.”

7. By way of example, I may mention that as I write this preface, in early July, 2001, the provisional bibliographic list for *BHach III* (which is intended to appear in 2003) already includes more than 150 titles, including some important books and articles.

nothing new, so it would be necessary to introduce a clear hierarchical distinction between “recent” and “new,” and to justify in detail the criteria for selection—precisely as I tried to do in my *Bulletins* of 1997 and 2001.

All this being so, I freely admit that taking into account the most innovative publications that appeared between 1995 and 2000 would make it possible to amend and detail many of the discussions in this book and to enrich significantly the iconographic documentation. If I have chosen nonetheless to present the American version practically in the same form as the initial French book, it is also because I have judged—whether rightly or wrongly the reader may decide—that the general image of the Achaemenid Empire that I expounded in 1996 has not been fundamentally modified.

Consider a particularly significant example, Chapter 16, in which I present a regional analysis of the empire and attempt an interpretation of relations between center and periphery, in the form of a prospective assessment (pp. 693ff.). The point of view that I adopt and defend there is that the documents discovered between about 1970 and 1995 put in serious doubt the “(pseudo-)statistical hypothesis of a scanty Persian presence and an inconsequential imperial occupation, based on bodies of evidence that are obsolete or reduced to a regional perspective” (p. 764). For this purpose, in the corresponding documentary notes (pp. 1029–1031) I present an assessment of recent discoveries, region by region. On the face of it, this section should be rewritten, since many new discoveries made available since 1995 ought to be included. But even if some discoveries treated in the 1996 version of the text remain under discussion,⁸ I believe that overall the documents published between 1995 and 2000 tend rather to confirm the historical interpretation that I presented in the book, whether in the matter of the maintenance of organic links between central authority and the provinces,⁹ or in the matter of the policy adopted toward local or national sanctuaries, or in the matter of the spread and adaptation of Persian imagery in various countries,¹⁰ or even in the matter of the economic condition of the empire at the arrival of Alexander.¹¹ At the same time, wherever one or another interpretation has given rise to reservations and/or polemics, the reader can easily come to grips with it by consulting *BHACH* I and II and the indexes of *BHACH* II.¹²

8. For example, concerning the interpretation of the Elamite tablets found in Armenia (French edition, pp. 962–63; below p. 938), see the treatments discussed in *BHACH* I, 25 and *BHACH* II, 44. The discussion is obviously not closed.

9. To take only one example, the discovery of settlements, qanats, and hundreds of demotic documents dated to the reigns of Artaxerxes I and Darius II at the site of Ayn Manâwir is particularly striking (see most recently *BIFAO* 100 [2000], 469–79, as well as the description of the work by Michel Wuttmann at <http://www.achemenet.com/recherche/sites/aynmanawir/aynmanawir.htm>, and my remarks in *BHACH* I, 32–34 and 88–90, and II, 62, and in *Annales* 1999/5, 1130–35). The new discoveries tend to support the position that I took on pp. 520 and 1006–08 on the maintenance of links between the center and the Egyptian province throughout the fifth century B.C.

10. On these topics, to which I return at various points in the book, see now the specific treatments in *BHACH* I, 94–97, II, 176–184 (on religious policy), and I, 98–104, II, 911–206 (on the spread of images).

11. The discovery of a network of qanats at Ayn Manâwir also contributes to the discussion on pp. 807–8 about the relationship between the levying of tribute and investments in production, that is, about the economic rationality of the Achaemenid imperial system; see the studies collected in Pierre Briant, ed., *Irrigation et drainage dans l'Antiquité: qanats et canalisations souterraines en Iran, en Égypte et en Grèce* (Collection Persika 2; Paris: Éditions Thotm, 2001).

12. See especially *BHACH* II, 327–31: “Index des discussions.”

In short, in order to be full and effective, a revision would have to be carried out on a strategy that is both selective and synthetic. But to do so would involve no more or less than writing a new book, or at least a fundamentally altered book.¹³ That is not the purpose of the American translation made available today. The purpose is simply to put before English-speaking readers a book that was published in French five years ago. My book of 1996 represents a state-of-the-question, valid at a given moment, of the work carried out by many scholars, as well as a the state of my own historical reflections. Readers of the French edition and of the American edition can easily avail themselves of the several reviews published since the appearance of the *Histoire de l'empire perse* in 1996.¹⁴ And if they want to know about the development of the author's thought, including his *pentimenti*, they can also consult the bibliographic tools that I have made available, as well as the updates that I have published, both on primary documents¹⁵ and on problems of historiography and method.¹⁶ I have no doubt that readers will be able to dispute the theses and interpretations of this book on the basis of their own thinking, but also in the light of publications that are recent and sometimes even publications that are new.

Paris, July 7, 2001

13. This is the consideration that eventually dissuaded me from introducing new and important iconographic documents that can be found with reproductions and commentaries in *BH Ach I* (pp. 11, 16, 18, 21f., 26f., 34, 41, 67, 69, 74, 101) and *BH Ach II* (pp. 34, 36, 40f., 43, 45, 47f., 58, 60l, 64, 69, 76, 110f., 116, 192, 195f., 198f., 202f., 205), though it would be technically simple to do so. The main and indispensable correction to illustrations in the French publication consists of adding to the list of illustrations (pp. xiff.) an indication of the source of the drawings reproduced here, unfortunately forgotten in the page proofs of the 1996 French version.

14. A list can be found in *BH Ach II*, 9 n. 8. As usual, some are merely descriptive, while others present a deeper consideration of Achaemenid history today (see especially Matthew Stolper, "Une 'vision dure' de l'histoire achéménide (Note critique)," *Annales* 1999/5: 1109–26).

15. In particular, I have published drastic revisions of some Greek inscriptions pertinent to Achaemenid history, namely the inscription of Droaphernes and the Xanthus Trilingual in two articles published in 1998 ("Droaphernès et la statue de Sardes," in M. Brosius and A. Kuhrt, eds., *Studies in Persian History: Essays in Memory of David M. Lewis*, Achaemenid History, 11 (Leiden), 205–26; "Cités et satrapes dan l'Empire achéménide: Pixôdaros et Xanthos," *CRAI*: 305–40) and the letter of Darius to Gaddatas in a study in press (available in pre-publication form at <http://www.achemenet.com/ressources/souspresse/manuscrits01.htm>). In the latter article I concluded that the document is a falsification, of Roman date, and I therefore propose that it should be eliminated from discussions of Achaemenid history. Given that this is one of the most celebrated documents in Achaemenid historiography, it is also one of the texts most frequently cited in my book (see the index, p. 1146, s.v. ML 12). This last example shows clearly how difficult it would have been to patch up the original text in a satisfactory manner.

16. For example: "The Achaemenid Empire," in K. Raaflaub and N. Rosenstein, eds., *Soldiers, Society and War in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 105–28; "L'histoire de l'empire achéménide aujourd'hui: l'historien et ses documents," *Annales* 1999/5, 1127–36; "Inscriptions multilingues d'époque achéménide: le texte et l'image," in D. Valbelle and J. Leclant, eds., *Le décret de Memphis* (Actes du Colloque de la Fondation Singer-Polignac, Paris 1^{er} Juin 1999) (Paris: de Boccard, 2000), 91–115; "Histoire impériale et histoire régionale. À propos de l'histoire de Juda dans l'Empire achéménide," in A. Lemaire and N. Saboe, eds., *Congress Volume Oslo 1998* (VT Suppl. 80; 2000) 235–45; "Darius III face à Alexandre: mythe, histoire, légende," *Annuaire du Collège de France, Résumé des cours et conférences 1999–2000* (Paris, 2000) 781–92 (also available at <http://www.college-de-france.fr/college/annuaire-scientifique/cours99–2000/briant/briant.pdf>); *Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France* (Paris, 2000).