

cults, and traditional myths often queried by poets and philosophers as being beyond the private life or, where divinity was manifestly involved in private life, as being mysterious and unjust in its works ("the wicked flourish"; "I have sacrificed and prayed so often; why does this disaster come to me?"). This slender but packed volume is another powerful document in intellectual history.

EMILY VERMEULE  
Harvard University

WAYNE T. PITARD. *Ancient Damascus: A Historical Study of the Syrian City-State from Earliest Times until its Fall to the Assyrians in 732 B.C.E.* Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns. 1987. Pp. viii, 230.

Following a straightforward chronological thread, Wayne T. Pitard reviews the evidence pertaining to the city of Damascus and its immediate region until the time when Damascus became a province of the Assyrian empire. As a city-state, Damascus was a political entity as well as a settlement, and it is exclusively the political aspect of the city's history that can today be the object of scholarly investigation, because Damascus as a settlement (for pre-Hellenistic times) is either buried or obliterated, at any rate inaccessible.

The evidence available for a political history of Damascus in the early first millennium B.C. comes from two types of sources: the later manuscript tradition as embodied in the Bible and the contemporary epigraphic documents, primarily Aramaic inscriptions. This period of about three centuries (1000–732 B.C.) is the best documented and gets, accordingly, the lengthiest treatment by the author (pp. 81–189). In an interesting philological section (pp. 138–44), Pitard provides a new reading of the Bir-Hadad stela and concludes that the monument stems from a king of northern Syria and not of Damascus. The Biblical material is so preeminent that at times the discussion is more about ancient Israel than about Damascus (for example, on pages 115–25, where the author concludes that, contrary to the *communis opinio*, "there is virtually no information in the Biblical sources about Damascus during the time of the Omride Dynasty" [p. 124]).

For the second millennium B.C., the evidence is derived from contemporary cuneiform documents: the author discusses those on pages 27–80, and a good section (pp. 39–48) is devoted to the elimination of yet another portion of the evidence from the dossier, that is, the evidence dealing with the country of Apum, which, the author rightly concludes, is to be linked with Mari rather than with Damascus. The earlier periods, for which only archaeological evidence can be adduced, are covered in the introduction. It seems ironic that so much of the volume deals with the rejection of alleged evidence pertaining to Damascus, to the point that only on page 107 do we meet with "the first concrete historical information about the kingdom of Damascus."

The information is treated clearly and exhaustively, and one only misses such additional aids as a chronological chart, a regional geographical map, and photographs of the documents discussed in detail. On the face of it, the book appears to offer everything there is to know about ancient Damascus. But does it? The work affords an interesting comment on many a current "historical study" on the ancient Near East. The assurance with which these studies span vast time periods and the completeness of the pertinent information they make available are hardly matched by a corresponding increase of genuine historical understanding. That the volume by Pitard is a case in point may be shown on two counts. On the one hand, there is a curious unevenness in the coverage of the archaeological data. Thus, in the discussion of the early periods of the history of Damascus (for which no written sources are available), Pitard ranges as far afield as Mureibit on the Euphrates, whereas for the later periods the archaeological setting is basically ignored. Similarly, although for the prehistoric periods references are given to such detailed aspects of material culture as sickle blades and huts (p. 20), for the historic periods there is barely a mention of the large-scale destruction of important urban centers (p. 108).

The second point to be raised, in terms of the historical merits of this "historical study" (to refer to the title of the book), is that it fails to raise historical questions—other than the fact (significant as it may be) that Damascus simply existed. Important historical issues such as the development of urbanism, the dynamics of trade, and the relationship between the steppe hinterlands and the coastal cities are essentially ignored, except for occasional, peripheral references (for example, p. 25). While a great amount of detail is given, for example, about the relationships between Hittites and Egyptians (chap. 3), those details pertain largely to extraneous matters without a serious attempt at using the facts as a setting for a better understanding of the forces that shaped the history of Damascus. Thus, a historian will look at the book as a factual resource tool in which data are sorted chronologically in a manner that is commendably reliable and exhaustive. The "historical study" heralded in the subtitle, on the other hand, remains part of the agenda.

GIORGIO BUCCELLATI  
University of California,  
Los Angeles

BRUNO GENTILI AND GIOVANNI CERRI. *History and Biography in Ancient Thought.* (London Studies in Classical Philology, number 20.) Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben. 1988. Pp. 119.

Three chapters and three appendixes make up this study of Greek and Roman historiographical theories and practice. In chapter 1, "Theories of Historical Narrative," the differences between history designed for oral presentation and history expected to be published

PUBLISHED  
FEB 1990  
AMERICAN  
HISTORICAL  
REVIEW