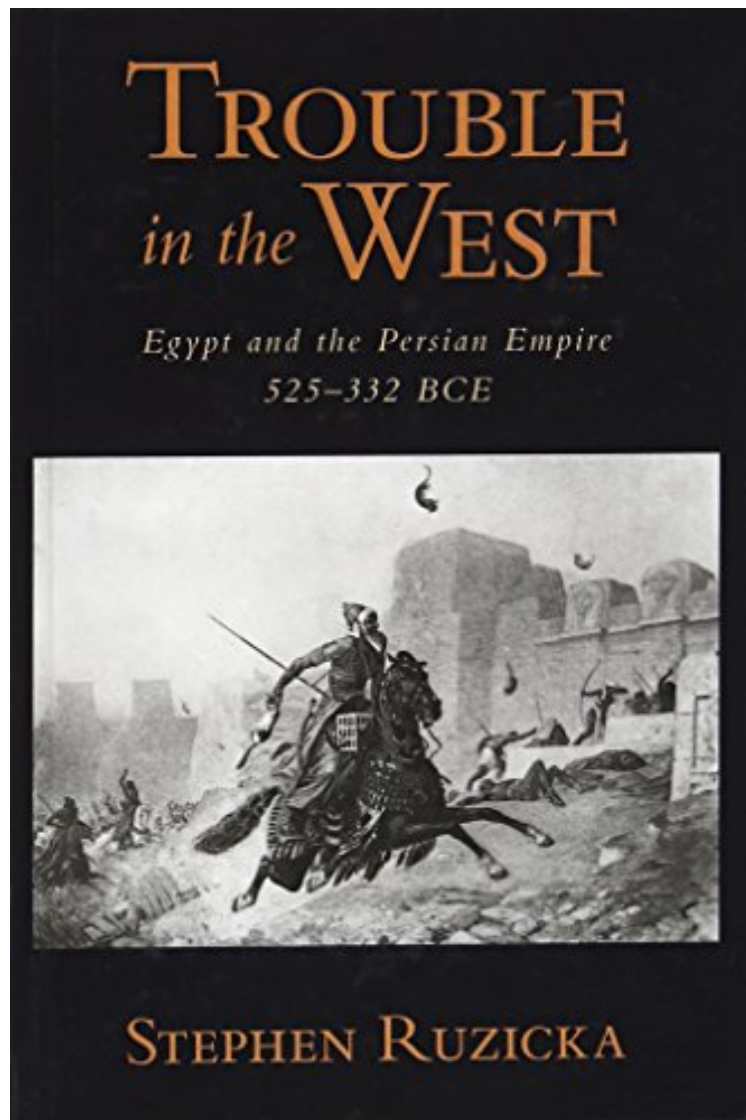


(Free pdf) Trouble in the West: Egypt and the Persian Empire, 525-332 BC (Oxford Studies in Early Empires)

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Stephen Ruzicka

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Stephen Ruzicka : Trouble in the West: Egypt and the Persian Empire, 525-332 BC (Oxford Studies in Early Empires) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Trouble in the West: Egypt and the Persian Empire, 525-332 BC (Oxford Studies in Early Empires):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Original and valuable, but also problematic...By JPSThis is a

valuable book because it deals with an original and little-known subject, or, more accurately, a subject that does not seem to have been covered before. This book is about the wars between the Persian Empire and Egypt during a period of almost 200 years, as the latter struggled to escape the domination of the former. As another reviewer has alluded to, "Trouble in the West" is one of a growing number of books that seeks to put the history of this period into perspective and escape the somewhat distorted view that we have inherited from the Greek (followed by the Roman) sources. This revisionist effort began in the mid-1990s with remarkable works on the history of the Persian Empire using Persian and Babylonian sources alongside Greek ones (for instance Pierre Briand). "Trouble in the West" is also part of this effort, although its focus is on the relationships between the Persian Empire and Egypt, and how these shaped events in the whole of the eastern Mediterranean, much more than the relations between the Persian Empire and the cities of Greece did. To a large extent, the author makes very valid, interesting and, at times, fascinating points in showing the interactions between rebellions in Egypt and in the Greek cities of Asia Minor, starting with the very first one - the Ionian revolt of BC 499 - which triggered the so-called Greco-Persian wars. He also shows very well to what extent the Great King's interventions in Greek conflicts, from the Peloponnesian War onwards, were aimed at preventing the Greeks from providing help to Egyptian "rebels" (in the eyes of the Persian monarch, of course). Being the "peacemaker" among the Greek cities also allowed him to secure for himself the Greek hoplite mercenaries and seamen that he could use to put down the Egyptian revolts while denying them such support. Another interesting point is the importance of what the author terms the "middle territory" (roughly modern Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and Syria, but also Cyprus) for both Persia and Egypt, with the dominant power being the one able to control these territories, use their resources to its own advantage, and deny them to its rival. Here again, the thesis is a very interesting one. It contrasts a - mostly defensive - strategy on the part of Egypt, for whom these territories were a vital buffer and protection against land invasion, in addition to providing rare resources which Egypt lacked (timber, in particular) with a mostly aggressive one where the Persian Empire needed to conquer both these territories (for their naval resources) and Egypt to secure its southern flank and be able to continue to expand towards the west. This is perhaps where the author starts going too far. The effort to reassess the Persian Empire's priorities is a very valuable one. To a large extent, it is true that the King of Kings could afford to "lose" the Greco-Persian wars (Xerxes would have presented them as victorious, of course, since he had burned both Eretria and Athens) whereas in the long-run, neither he nor his successors could not let Egypt slip away. However, he could no more afford to lose permanently Western Asia Minor than he could afford to lose Egypt. The real issue for the King of Kings seems therefore to have been the traditional risk of having to fight two wars simultaneously on two fronts. Moreover, as soon as he tried to concentrate his overwhelming forces to "solve" one problem, unrest on another front would erupt, whether this other front be the Greek cities of Asia Minor through Athenian or Spartan attempts to control them or the attempts of some of his satraps and dynasts to become independent, break away from the Empire or challenge the King of Kings for the crown (when the Persian dynast was related to him). Rather than only the crucial importance of Egypt for the Persian Empire, what really seems to have been the main problem were the multiple and sometimes simultaneous threats that its absolute monarch had to face both externally, as far away provinces rebelled and attempted to break-away, and internally, within his own Court and from his own Satraps. The author also presents these relations as being part of a multi-secular trend where whoever was in control of either the "core east" (more or less modern Iran and Iraq) or "the core West" (Egypt) wanted and needed to control the "middle territory". This trend, allegedly, starts with Ancient Egypt and its clashes against the Babylonians and Assyrians, runs through the two centuries covered in this book, explains the tensions between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies and then between the Romans on one hand, and the Parthians and Sassanids on the other. Even the First Crusade and the Byzantine Emperor of the time (Alexis I Comnene) get dragged into this rather sweeping explanation with this supposedly marking "the beginning of the modern, still enduring phase of the East-West conflict", according to the author. Accordingly, I had a rather serious problem with this book, because such an "explanation" with the benefit of hindsight seems rather controversial, certainly far-fetched and somewhat superficial. I doubt, in particular, that the strategic context at the time of the First Crusade had anything in common with that of the Persian Empire, its need to conquer Egypt and its inability to subdue it. Finally, I had another problem with this book: it could have done with a good editor given the rather huge number of repetitions that it contains. This does not help in making it readable or accessible and it can even be at times annoying, especially when the author feels obliged to summarize the point that he has just made on the previous page. If it had not been for this, I might have rated this book four stars, despite the rather far-fetched and controversial opinions of its author...

Trouble in the West provides the first full and continuous account of the Persian-Egyptian War, a conflict that continued for nearly the two-hundred-year duration of the Persian Empire. Despite its status as the largest of all ancient Persian military enterprises--including any aimed at Greece--this conflict has never been reconstructed in any detailed and comprehensive way. Thus, Trouble in the West adds tremendously to our understanding of Persian imperial affairs. At the same time, it dramatically revises our understanding of eastern Mediterranean and Aegean affairs by linking Persian dealings with Greeks and other peoples in the west to Persia's fundamental, ongoing Egyptian concerns. In this study, Stephen Ruzicka argues that Persia's Egyptian problem and, conversely, Egypt's

Persian problem, were much more important in the eastern Mediterranean and Aegean worlds than our conventional Greek-centered perspective and sources have allowed us to see. In looking at this conflict as one stage in an enduring east-west conflict between successive Near Eastern imperial powers and Egypt--one which stretched across nearly the whole of ancient history--it represents an important turning point: by pulling in remote western states and peoples, who subsequently became masters of Egypt, western opposition to Near Eastern power was sustained right up to the 7th century Arab conquests. For classicists and historians of the ancient Near East, *Trouble in the West* will serve as a valuable, and long-overdue, resource.

"Overall, Ruzicka has written an excellent scholarly monograph based on a wide and deep knowledge of the ancient texts and modern scholarship. It is particularly impressive that he produced a very readable narrative history of this complex subject."--Anthony J. Papalas, Bryn Mawr Classical About the Author Stephen Ruzicka is Associate Professor of History, at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and author of *Politics of a Persian Dynasty*.