



## F. W. WALBANK

It must have been in 1947 or 1948 when I told Frank Walbank that (Soviet) Russian reviewers of his books, though thinking that his attempts at being a coherent Marxist were not very successful, had a healthy respect for his scholarship. I was referring chiefly to the review of his *Philip V of Macedon* (1940) by D. N. Tarkov in *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 1947, 4, 97–101, but I believe that some direct discussion of his *The Decline of the Roman Empire in the West* was also involved. Walbank was pleased both with the positive and the negative side of the judgement. At that time information on what people wrote in Russia about ancient history was less widespread than it is now (though there are unfortunate signs of a new contraction on both sides). I do not therefore delude myself that I can again bring Walbank a piece of news if I round off my previous report by adding that in the year 1984 the Russian historians have not substantially changed their opinions about him. In *V.D.I.* 1984, 2, 204–10 he is the subject of a special review article, 'Frank Walbank and his conception of Hellenism', written by two distinguished specialists, V. I. Kashcheev and A. S. Shofman.

The point of this reference to two Russian papers written at a distance of almost forty years is that it emphasizes some of the most important aspects of Walbank's personality. First of all, it is impossible to think of him as a man and as a historian without bearing in mind the pre-war atmosphere of discussion on ancient and modern problems of civilization. This is of course also true of the other two Persons of the Great Trinity of contemporary British ancient historians—Sir Ronald Syme and the late A. H. M. Jones—but even in Jones the concern for the modern world was less pressing and explicit than it was and is for Walbank. Perhaps there is here a difference between the Cambridge (and Peterhouse!) man and his two Oxford peers. This concern for the destiny of modern Western civilization was nurtured by reading not only Marx and Lenin, but Spengler and Toynbee. It is still evident in the mature re-elaboration of the *Decline of the Roman Empire* (1946) under the title *The Awful Revolution* of 1968 (passing through a Japanese version in 1963 which I recommend as a subject for a dissertation less useless than others in the fashionable field of history of historiography). It is also to be found, together with some poignant personal recollections, in the Presidential Address to the Classical Association, 'An Experiment in Greek Union' (1970).

There was never any danger of dogmatism or of easy generalization in Walbank's work. His early interest in the economic history of the Roman Empire was shaped by the Cambridge tradition of such studies. He was soon asked to contribute a substantial chapter to the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe* on 'Trade and Industry under the Later Roman Empire in the West' (Vol. II, 1952). What is more, Walbank had behind him another formidable Cambridge tradition, that of research on Hellenistic political history and of interpretation of Hellenistic texts. It is Walbank's singular achievement—on which his reputation will rest in Russia and everywhere else well beyond our century—to have in fact unified the two Cambridge trends of the interpretation of Hellenistic civilization as a whole and of the interpretation of individual Hellenistic texts. If his most recent book, *The Hellenistic World* (1981), brings us back to W. W. Tarn, his three volumes of the great commentary on Polybius (1957–79) rank as high as Headlam's *Herodas* and Gow's *Theocritus*. I still feel some pride in having helped to persuade the Clarendon Press in dark years to entrust Polybius (rather than Tacitus) to Walbank.

Walbank would not be the historian he is without his deep commitment to rationality, social justice and international understanding. I have often wondered how much of that is owed to his family background, and in particular to his father, a rationalist schoolmaster. But it is ultimately his meticulous scholarship, his good judgement in evaluating sources, and his attention to dissenting views that give substance to his work: not only that which I have already mentioned, but his *Aratus of Sicyon* (1934) and *Polybius* (1972), together with the many distinguished articles which one hopes to see collected one day. Where international understanding and scrupulous attention to dissent most obviously meet in Walbank is in dealing with criticism of his own work. Firm in defending his own opinions, he is correspondingly fair in respecting disagreement. I can be a good witness to this, as

our friendship developed in the early 'forties from my review of his *Philip V* in the *Oxford Magazine* 1942 and from subsequent discussions about Alcaeus of Messene. Later occasional disagreements on Polybius and other topics only reinforced our friendship.

Much more could be said about what Walbank has received from Continental scholars of the previous generation (such as G. De Sanctis, F. Oertel, and M. Holleaux) and about what he has both received from and given to friends of various nations on both sides of the Atlantic. I shall only mention the name of a mutual American friend, the late J. A. O. Larsen, who would have been happy to take part in this homage to Walbank. The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, of which he is a past President, and the *J.R.S.*, of whose editorial board he has been a very active member, have greatly benefited from these wide sympathies.

Apart from visits to the United States and elsewhere, Walbank has spent most of his time teaching in the University of Liverpool, first as a Lecturer and Professor of Latin, then as Professor of Ancient History. It must be put on record that this University allowed him the concentration from which his commentary on Polybius has emerged. But it was natural that he should return where he started—to Cambridge and to Peterhouse, where he is now an Honorary Fellow. He is editing two of the volumes of the new *Cambridge Ancient History*. The passing of time has only confirmed how deep is the Cambridge imprint on this great and unpretentious scholar.

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