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Engelbert Winter, Beate Dignas, *Rom und das Perserreich: Zwei Weltmächte zwischen Konfrontation und Koexistenz (Studienbücher Geschichte und Kultur der Alten Welt)*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001. Pp. 334, Figs. 22. ISBN 3-05-003451-3. EUR 34.80.

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The progressive economic and political integration of (large parts of) Europe which just reached a new milestone in the introduction of the common currency Euro, has been accompanied for years by strong tendencies towards building a European identity. The European Union supported a number of conferences and exhibitions in order to bolster the invention or rediscovery of common traditions and histories for Europe. All the more, as they state in the preface to the volume under review, do the editors of the series *Studienbücher Geschichte und Kultur der Alten Welt* deplore the fact that German school curricula increasingly limit the teaching of ancient history to the history of nationalism, imperialism and economic competition between European powers in recent centuries. For the editors, the reduction of history to modern history and the loss of classical *Bildung* run counter to European identity-building and to intellectual orientation in general. As an antidote to ignorance, the editors see a need for interest in the classical world. They stress Greek and Roman culture and especially the Roman Empire as constituent to the spread of Christianity, the formation of an occidental world, modernity and even Europe (p.7). While this approach seems firmly grounded in the nineteenth-century idealism of Hegel, Herder and Schlegel, it takes a decisively modern turn in emphasizing the exemplary approach to diversity and multiculturalism found in the Roman Empire. In contrast to nineteenth-century approaches it also serves to bolster European, not German, identity. The series is intended not only to provide reliable guides for certain aspects of ancient history for use in universities, but also explicitly for the continued training of school teachers in class preparation, as well as for the interested public. At first glance the series is, therefore, a specific German endeavour with a political agenda following and at the same time against the lines of current zeitgeist. But the high quality of the series and the common problems about the contested importance of the antique world should also ensure an international readership.

The newest volume of the series concerns itself with the Sasanian Empire and its relations to Rome/Byzantium. The authors, E. Winter and B. Dignas, the latter now teaching at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, both have their academic roots in Münster, hence their appropriate dedication of the book to R. Altheim-Stiehl. As they mention in the opening sentences of their introduction, they consider the conflict of East and West, Orient and Occident, to be a leitmotif of history from the time of Herodotus on. In this the authors succumb to fallacy, since it is the modern scholarly tradition, developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, which contrasted these two concepts of floating geographical and ethnographic range. It does not seem the most promising beginning for a book on relations between the starting point of European ("our") identity, the Roman Christian empire, and its Oriental counterparts in the third to seventh century. It is even more interesting to see what the two authors accomplish under these auspices.

According to the series' concept the volume basically consists of two parts. Part I is a fifty-page-long summary of the history of the Sasanian Empire's relations with Rome. Part II is designed as a sourcebook with two hundred pages of primary sources in translation with commentary. As the descriptions of contexts for the sources and the commentaries are extensive, however, its scope clearly transcends the limits of a collection of primary sources. The two main parts are followed by sixty pages of appendices, starting with a useful basic bibliography, while plenty of additional references are mentioned in the nearly one thousand footnotes in preceding chapters. Other appendices include a list of the Sasanian kings of kings and a convenient detailed time table of important events in the Sasanian Empire. As not all of the assumed readership will be familiar with the entire sequence of Roman emperors, it might have been a good idea to include a list of them as well. A short and rather odd glossary tries to explain twenty-six terms or proper names. It remains the authors' secret how the list of terms for the glossary was compiled. It is certainly a good idea to explain *amicitia*, *foedus* or *magister*, but the importance of Propontis or Strymon for Sasanian history is limited at best. One is left with the impression that the glossary as printed was begun as an extensive list compiled in reference to the first primary sources but not consistently maintained throughout. In addition, it is dismaying to find the term *Saraceni* incorrectly defined as originally describing a certain discrete Arab tribe. The book closes with

extensive, very helpful indices of the texts quoted, personal names, place names and realia.

Chapter I.1 gives an outline of Parthian (Arsacid) history from the viewpoint of Arsacid -- Roman conflicts. It might be this perspective which impedes the authors from departing more emphatically from traditional views. Thus, their own explicit critique that the Arsacid Empire has long been underestimated and described from a purely Roman point of view finds no clear echo in their own narrative. Nevertheless, this summary is certainly useful and well written. In this respect the high expectations raised by the first chapter are never disappointed throughout the book. And it well deserves of the best compliments one can give an author: this book is an excellent read (at least for specialists).

Chapter I.2 (pp. 37-71) outlines the history of Roman -- Sasanian political relations from AD 224 to AD 651 as background for the sources in Part II. This chapter emphasizes the long string of wars fought between these two powers until one was destroyed and conquered by Muslim troops while the other lost its possessions east and south of Anatolia to the new power. The internal affairs of the Sasanian Empire, its organisation or its eastern border, are mentioned only if judged essential to understanding decisions in Sasanian dealings with Rome. The exceptions are frequent references to the importance of Zoroastrianism and Christianity, which - in contrast to chapter II.6 - are repeatedly stressed as a source for political conflicts within the Sasanian Empire or with Rome.

Throughout Part I the authors refer to the sources gathered in Part II, and within Part II the sources are heavily cross-referenced. All chapters of the book are thus closely interwoven. In fact, the reader is stimulated to flip back and forth through the volume. The book is therefore a fine example of interactive media, which advertising and public opinion seem to connect solely, and erroneously, with new media such as CD ROMs. It also shows that the entire organisation of the book and the chapters is very well thought through.

Part II addresses a number of aspects in much more detail. This sourcebook part of the volume is organized in seven chapters, 1. Sasanian aims in foreign policy (pp. 75-85); 2. military conflicts (pp. 87-140); 3. diplomatic solutions, i.e., peace treaties (pp. 141-81); 4. policy concerning Arabs (pp. 183-203); 5. common interests of Sasanians and Romans and reasons for continued conflicts (pp. 205-27); 6. religious policy, Christianity and Zoroastrianism (pp. 229-50); and 7. the exchange of ideas between east and west (pp. 251-71). All in all, Part II contains sixty-five literary sources in translation, nine maps and eight reproductions of coins or reliefs. The sources are numbered according to topics from M 1 to M 34 (M for Material) and include further subdivisions. Most of the texts stem from Roman authors. Ph. Huyse contributed translations of Persian sources, M. Springberg-Hinsen provided translations of Arab and Syriac texts. All translations share an excellent readability.

In any collection of sources, everyone will miss a certain author or passage and find others superfluous or not representative for their supposed purpose. In this case the sources are consistently well chosen and adequately illustrate the authors' points of view. Even more important, Winter and Dingas offer an admirable, effortless dialogue between their commentaries and the classical sources. Transitions or connections between sources are extremely well organized and written. The introductions to the work of individual authors are particularly well written.

Another excellent feature of the volume is the inclusion of a good selection of nine maps reproduced from other books. Still unusual today for a book written by historians, it incorporates several illustrations of coins and major works of political art, such as the arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki and the relief in Bishapur in which Shapur I commemorated his victories over three successive Roman emperors. While this is a step in the right direction, a greater integration of archaeological sources would have improved the book still further. Our understanding of the Sasanian Empire - admittedly not the aim of the book, which concentrates on its western contacts - depends heavily on archaeological sources, such as settlement systems and glyptics.

The sheer number of pages devoted to military conflicts and peace treaties (chapters II.2 and 3) reveals the authors' main interest; this emphasis also reflects much of western scholarship, along with the personal research interests of E. Winter, who is well known for his study of Roman-Sasanian peace treaties. In addition, many or most of the sources in other chapters also address the question of war and peace (see, e.g., the discussion of Roman-Arab-Sasanian relations in chapter II.4). To some extent, of course, this results from the textual tradition of the Roman Empire which was far more interested in the Sasanians in times of crisis than in peace. On the other hand, the peaceful exchange between the empires deserved some more attention. It is telling that the subject of common interests, such as extensive trade and the joint defense of the Caucasus against northern "barbarians", occupies comparatively little space (chapter II.5). This aspect, too, is often neglected, although it illuminates the intensity of common interests and joint businesses of the two empires. Thus the detailed discussion of the topic by the authors is a welcome step towards a more nuanced view on Sasanian-Roman relations.

The single longest chapter (II.2) collects sources on the large number of repeated wars between the two powers, which began almost immediately after the Sasanian overthrow of the Arsacid dynasty and ended on the eve of the Muslim conquests. Despite repeated Sasanian operations in Syria and Cilicia in the mid-third century and Roman invasions into Mesopotamia in AD 242-44, 262-264, 283 and 363, the periods of intense warfare until AD 371 largely focused on the precise border in upper Mesopotamia (Nisibis and its hinterland) and especially Armenia. The authors nicely confront Roman and Sasanian propagandistic sources on these matters. Some further improvement would be the inclusion of the Armenian point of view, which remains unconsidered throughout.

A special case is the Armenian war of 371 to 377, which ended in the partition of Armenia. According to Herodian (source M 8, p. 112) Shapur II broke the peace treaty with Iovian of 364 while invading Armenia in 371. The case is repeatedly mentioned by Winter and Dingas as a prime example of Sasanian aggressive policy (pp. 53-4, 113). But a fresh look at source M 18 (pp. 155-58), Ammianus' own report on the stipulations of the treaty of 364, shows that it is the Romans who broke the treaty as they had agreed not to offer any help to the Armenians in the event of a Sasanian invasion.

In 377 the Armenian conflict was finally settled by Armenia's division in two parts, later validated by a formal treaty in 387 (?) between the Romans and Sasanians. Winter and Dingas correctly describe this as a precondition for improved relations (p. 114). Accordingly, despite the chapter's title, the sources M 9-11 on fifth-century developments do not report on military conflicts between the powers. The excellent relations find their expression in Arcadius's decision to place his son Theodosius under the tutelage of Yazdegerd I, which earns a sympathetic description here. Arcadius' unusual step set a precedent for later tutelages of Justin over Khosroes I and of Mauricios over Khosroes II. The latter finally led to the longest wars between the empires after Phocas had removed Mauricios (pp. 136-40). But already in the sixth century wars repeatedly broke out over Armenia, over raids by Arab allies or over Yemen (pp. 122-33, M 12-14, and also M 25, pp. 200-05). Interestingly enough, the authors cite a number of sources attesting to the important, growing internationalization of these conflicts involving Hephthalites, Huns, Khazars, Goths, Arabs, and Yemenites.

Closely related to the military side of wars are the peace treaties between the two empires. This important group of sources is rightfully quoted *in extenso* in chapter II.3. The number and substance of detailed contractual terms provides unique insight into highly developed international conventions. Together with the large number of known diplomatic legations, evidence for which would have been welcome in the selected sources, they testify to close diplomatic relations between the two powers. The authors repeatedly accentuate that the public and especially the two emperors who addressed each other as brothers, regarded the empires and their rulers as equals.

In many of the diplomatic missions in the fifth to seventh century the Sasanian authorities entrusted Christian clergy, specifically bishops and even the head of the Apostolic Church of the East (throughout the book called "Nestorian", a name which should be avoided). We would have wished to see some sources for this important fact, which attests to the high status of Christians in the Sasanian Empire. This because older scholarship purported a sacred alliance between kingship and Zoroastrianism and described the history of Christianity within the Sasanian realm as one of repeated persecution and constant deprivation of rights. Nearly twenty years ago, seminal articles by S. Brock and Ph. Gignoux ¹ led to a shift in scholarly opinion on both questions. Increasingly, the persecution of Christians within the Sasanian Empire is judged less as systematic, ubiquitous and continuous, and more as sporadic and local. This is not to say that Christians were never eyed with suspicion, especially in situations of crisis. But in general we hear less about religious intolerance in the Sasanian Empire than in the western sphere, where Christians were repeatedly persecuted until the early fourth century and pagan cults continually banned after the emperors themselves became Christians. Interestingly, the authors include Diocletian's edict to persecute Manichaeans (M 30a), which demonstrates the intolerance of Roman rulers at a time when Christians flocked eastward. Winter and Dingas seem well aware of the important ways in which their chapter (II.6) on religion departs from traditional views. But occasionally, especially elsewhere, they fall back on older opinion, seemingly those expressed in the secondary literature they consulted preparing the manuscript (e.g., pp. 61, 203). Most notable are the quotes of Ostrogorsky, for whom the seventh century wars turned into a clash of religions and a forerunner of the medieval crusades (quoted p. 69 and p. 139). Some editing would have been advisable. But these are minor points in comparison with the splendid overall impression.

If there are problems with the book they are on a different, rather ideological level: the tangible eurocentrism which taints the book's achievements. This is not to say that the authors are extreme in their views; indeed, quite the opposite is true. Again and again, the credibility of Roman sources is carefully assessed (e.g., pp. 89, 91) and cautious consideration is given to several possible explanations or contradictions between sources (e.g., p. 96). Nevertheless, the authors bear the weight of two hundred years of pro-Roman, eurocentric scholarship on Roman-Sasanian relations. Thus, even though they seem eager to avoid the problem, they do

not manage to escape a biased view. Some examples shall substantiate this claim.

A surprisingly large space (chapter II.1) on Sasanian aims in foreign policy is devoted to the question of the Sasanians as self-styled heirs to the Achaemenids, echoing the claim that the Sasanian political agenda involved the reconquest of the earlier empire's possessions (M 1-2, p. 75-85; resumed pp. 139-40 and 143). This question, hotly debated in the 1980s and excellently summarized here, might be of interest in itself. Introduced in the first chapter on sources, however, it sets the tone for the entire book, insofar as the Sasanians appear aggressive right from the beginning, aiming at Roman territory. Moreover, there is no corresponding chapter that describes Rome's aims in the region. Without explicitly stating so, this suffices to posit the Sasanians as aggressors and the Romans instead as rather peaceful defenders of their property (that is, the countries Rome conquered in bloody wars fought against the will of the inhabitants).

Again, the authors are not blind to Roman aggression, which they note on several occasions (pp. 135-36, 262). Yet, the invasions of Odainath 262-264, Carus 283 or Julian in 363, are not even considered acts of aggression. Most of the time the authors still follow Roman sources attributing the responsibility for wars to the Sasanians, or they intersperse their narrative with gratuitous references to the generally aggressive tendencies of Sasanian policy (e.g., 48, 54, 55, 140, 203, 208). In this peculiar perspective, even Sasanian lack of aggression during the fifth century calls for explanation in the form of problems on the Sasanian eastern border (p. 56). Yet, as mentioned on the very same page, relations were so good that Romans accompanied the Sasanian army on its eastern campaign. That the Sasanians exercised restraint while the Romans conquered Palmyra is rather excused by the short reigns of one, and three years by Hormizd I and Bahram I during the years in question (p. 45). The argument seems rather weak, and its validity is further diminished with the report, only seven sentences later, of Carus' military attack, carried out only a few months after his accession to the throne. In an annoying example of the traditional eurocentric view, Diocletian's knitting together of questions of trade and security is blamed on Sasanian aggressive, expansionist policy, which, in contrast to that of their predecessors, did not accept Roman primacy (p. 216). Pardon? Where, when and how did the Arsacids ever accept Roman preeminence? And why is Sasanian deviation from (obviously expected) subordination to be judged as aggressive?

We should never forget that in Armenia, for example, Romans and Sasanians fought over areas both contestants held to be either integral or important to their respective territories. But Winter and Dingas, influenced by the prevailing literature, tend to interpret Sasanian victories in contested areas as threatening the balance of power, while Roman success in the same arena is either applauded or tacitly accepted. Why are the Romans justified in intervening in Yemen on behalf of their interests while the Sasanians are not (pp. 132-33)? Other lopsided views likewise startle the alert reader. Why, for example, are Sasanian diplomatic missions dismissed as attempts to improve the Sasanian position (p. 58, 59) while Roman missions show genuine interest in peace (pp. 87, 126)?

Once alerted to the problem you will find on several levels the remnants of the idea of Roman, western superiority. In contrast to the traditional literature, we hear not only about deportees brought into the Sasanian Empire but also about deportations by the Romans (p. 262). This rather balanced view is demolished once the reasons for deportations and their results are described. Deportees from the Roman Empire are portrayed as bearers of civilisation (p. 42. M 33, pp. 264-65), who introduce technological and infrastructural western know-how, for example bridges and waterworks. Deportations from the Sasanian Empire to Roman territory, where deportees worked on the fields (like most of the Romans in the Sasanian Empire), are simply explained as propagandistic. A look at archaeological research on Arsacid and Sasanian irrigation systems in Mesopotamia, or the description of the bridge connecting Coche and Ctesiphon across the Tigris river, should suffice to question the eurocentric topos of superior western knowledge.

In this connection nobody can be surprised to find a chapter on Sasanian interest in western civilisation (sources M 34, pp. 267-71) but no complementary chapter on Roman interest in eastern culture. That this interest existed is demonstrated not only by the volume of trade but also, for example, by a passage by Agathias reporting the high esteem in which Roman pagan philosophers held the Sasanian king of kings. (The text is cited, but concealed in a footnote.)

It might be unfair to criticize the authors so severely for their eurocentric approach, which is far less extreme than what is found in many other publications. What disappoints is that prejudices prevail even in such an excellent book. The book, after all, describes wars that took place fifteen hundred years ago, in contested areas both parties claimed as theirs. Why, then, should modern historians side with one of the parties? Does this practice persist because of the European identity-building mentioned in the introduction by the series' editors? Surely this is not what they intended. There is no need to continue fighting these wars and transferring them into the mythical realm of the eternal fight between West and East, Occident and Orient. That Winter and Dingas are aware of these fallacies is obvious from their well-intended, but somehow patronizing

introduction. There they emphasize the need for a shift towards a less biased view. Their generally excellent volume demonstrates how difficult it is to cast off deep-seated resentment.²

As with too many German books, this one most certainly will not receive in the US the attention it deserves. Since both of its parts, an introduction into the topic and a first-rate sourcebook on Roman-Sasanian relations, are of high quality, an English edition should be considered. The book would fill the lacuna of a textbook on this subject³ and contribute greatly to a better understanding of the development of international diplomacy. A translation would also offer the opportunity to reconsider and omit the eurocentric approach to the topic, particularly if the American tendency to react much more sensitively to questions of orientalism prevails through the current political climate.⁴ A less biased, more balanced and especially better-informed view on the Sasanians, and on eastern cultures in general, is long overdue and seems more urgently needed than ever.

Notes:

^{1.} S. Brock, "Christians in the Sasanid Empire: a Case of Divided Loyalties", in: St. Mews (Ed.), *Religion and National Identity*, Studies in Church History 18, 1982, pp. 1-19; Ph. Gignoux, Church-State Relations in the Sasanian Period, *Bulletin of the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan* 1, 1984, pp. 72-80.

^{2.} On the topic in general, see S.R. Hauser, "Greek in subject and style, but a little distorted": Zum Verhältnis von Orient und Okzident in der Altertumswissenschaft, in: S. Altekamp et al. (eds.), *Posthumanistische Klassische Archäologie. Historizität und Wissenschaftlichkeit von Interessen und Methoden*, München 2001, pp. 83-104.

^{3.} The book by M.H. Dodgeon and S.N.C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars (AD 226-363): A Documentary History*, London/New York 1991, covers the first third of the period only.

^{4.} The single most disappointing sentence of the entire book is a quote of Edward Said in the introduction, p. 22. In a flagrant misrepresentation, occidentalism is understood as a focus on western matters, which completely inverts the meaning of the term. By analogy to orientalism, that is, the misrepresentation of the Orient, occidentalism refers to the misrepresentation of the west. Clearly, the authors never familiarized themselves with Said's work. An accessible introduction to and discussion of the problem of orientalism and its legacy in *Altertumswissenschaften* is now available in the article Orientalismus, in: *Der Neue Pauly: Rezeptions- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte* Bd. 15/1, Stuttgart/Weimar 2001, Sp. 1233-1243.

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