

Josef Wiesehöfer, Sabine Müller (eds.), *Parthika: Greek and Roman Authors' Views of the Arsacid Empire / Griechisch-römische Bilder der Arsakidenreiches (Classica et Orientalia – 15)*, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2017, 312 pp., b/w ill., ISBN 978-3-447-10764-8

Scholars dealing with the history of ancient Iran are aware that our knowledge of the first two Iranian empires—the Achaemenids and Arsacids—comes mostly from Greek or Roman sources. It is also thanks to their works that these scholars have better tools for understanding and interpreting the data contained in the few epigraphical documents and numismatic evidence (as well as that furnished by archaeological excavations) that come from these two empires and concern their histories. However, these works also cause a number of problems that are sometimes difficult to overcome, since their authors generally describe the political, social and religious realities of the Iranian world from the perspective of concepts and phenomena from the Greek or Roman world. The reason for this might be the fact that many of these authors knew of the matters and events in question from other sources, or deliberately employed concepts that their readers could understand. Many years ago, Robert Rollinger and Josef Wiesehöfer launched a series of conferences aiming for a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the data on the history of Achaemenid Iran contained in the works of ancient authors. One of the last such conferences took place between 27 and 30 June 2012 at Kiel University, with two separate parts. The first examined the works of Megasthenes and the image of India in the works of other ancient authors, while the second focused on issues concerning the form, content and date of the works of Apollodorus of Artemita and Isidore of Charax on the Arsacid state. As a result of the major thematic differences between the two parts of the conference, the papers presented at them were published in separate publications: the first in 2016,<sup>1</sup> followed in 2017 by the second, *Parthika: Greek and Roman Authors' Views of the Arsacid Empire / Griechisch-römische Bilder der Arsakidenreiches*.

The title of this volume suggests that it contains not only texts addressing the works of Apollodorus of Artemita and Isidore of Charax, but also those of other ancient authors writing about the history of the Parthians. And this is indeed the case, since the book is composed of two distinctly separate parts. The first, titled “Überlegungen zu Apollodoros von Artemita und Isidoros von Charax” (pp. 3–220), comprises eight texts. The first

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Wiesehöfer, H. Brinkhaus, R. Bichler (eds.), *Megasthenes und seine Zeit / Megasthenes and His Time*, (*Classica et Orientalia – 13*), Wiesbaden 2016.

article, M. J. Olbrycht's "Greeks in the Arsacid Empire" (pp. 3–27), presents an overview of the problems associated with various aspects of the presence of Greeks in the Arsacid state. It constitutes an introduction to the discussion on the works of Artemidorus of Artemita and Isidore of Charax, which gives an insight into the circumstances in which they were written. It reveals the complex socio-historical-cultural context in which the two authors grew up, which is also important for understanding their intellectual profile. The authors of the next three articles analyse various issues concerning Artemidorus' work, its content, and its influence on other ancient authors. J. Engels ("Strabon von Amaseia und Apollodoros aus Artemita," pp. 29–45) undertook a critical evaluation of the influence of Apollodorus' history on the works of Strabo. The fact that Strabo was familiar with it and made use of it is demonstrated by references in his *Geographika*. Unfortunately, he quotes from only a few passages from Apollodorus, meaning that they are of limited value in reconstructing the order of the work. All these references do show is that Apollodorus was very interested in the geography, history and ethnology of the eastern regions of the Arsacid Empire (which might also explain Strabo's reasons for citing him). These interests substantiate the conclusion that the question of the Parthians' relations with Rome was certainly not at the centre of Apollodorus' attention (pp. 40–41). Engels also explains his critical attitude towards attempts to attribute to Apollodorus the authorship of certain geographical descriptions contained in Strabo's works, although his name does not appear in them (p. 42). According to K. Nawotka ("Apollodorus of Artemita: Beyond New Jacoby," pp. 47–58), apart from those passages from Apollodorus' work considered in the latest edition (Brill's *Neue Jacoby*, Artemidorus of Artemita, no. 779), his name and work can also be linked to at least two other passages and two mentions, one of which allows the writing of his *Parthika* to be dated to 53 BCE (pp. 53–57). J. Engels disagrees with Nawotka (cf. pp. 38–39, 42). S. Müller ("Apollodoros als Historiograph parthischer Geschichte," pp. 59–69) is also circumspect in her opinion on the dating of the *Parthika*. Müller focuses on evaluation of Apollodorus' work and its place in historiography, questions that have long been the subject of discussion. She argues that, given how little we know about the contents of the *Parthika* or its author, any opinions on the great significance of the work, and especially its influence on Pompeius Trogus, or attributing specific views and political sympathies to its author, as well as any comments on his cultural identity, are purely speculation with no basis in fact.

The interest of the authors of the next four articles lies in Isidore of Charax's *Stathmoi Parthikoi*. As with Apollodorus of Artemita, we know little about Isidore, which makes it difficult to determine not only the approximate time when he lived, but also the date when his work was written. Scholars also disagree on the objective and nature of the publication itself: was it an independent work, or just part of something larger? M. Schoultz seeks to answer some of these questions ("Isidor von Charax und die literarische Gattung der *Stathmoi*," pp. 71–85), concluding that Isidore's work was commissioned by Emperor Augustus in conjunction with the mission of Gaius Caesar (1–4 CE) (p. 72). Yet it cannot be included outright in the category of either *periploi* or *itineraria*. It is possible that the *Stathmoi* may have been used for military and propaganda purposes.<sup>2</sup> The time

<sup>2</sup> "The use of Isidor's work is quite conceivable for military purposes, as is probably also a use in propagandistic intent to illustrate the expansion of the Roman Empire across the known world" (p. 81).

when Isidore wrote and the nature of these writings is also explored by U. Hartmann (“Die Parthischen Stationen des Isidor von Charax: eine Handelsroute, eine Militärkarte oder ein Werk geographischer Gelehrsamkeit?,” pp. 85–122), who makes a number of interesting observations concerning Isidore and his work that differ substantially from Schuol’s conclusions. For instance, he rules out the suggestion, frequently accepted by many scholars, that Dionysus of Charax, mentioned several times in the *Historia Naturalis* as the author of a work on Parthian geography, was Isidore. The most important of the author’s observations is his conclusion that the *Stathmoi* is an academic work lacking in all the practical uses that had previously been assigned to it (pp. 116–117).<sup>3</sup> S. Hauser performs an analysis of problems mostly involving identification of the topographic points that Isidore mentions and establishing the actual distances between them (“Isidor von Charax – Annäherungen an der Autor, den Routenverlauf und die Bedeutung des Werkes,” pp. 127–187). Also worthy of note are his findings regarding Isidore and the *Stathmoi* (pp. 129–134, 160–165), which frequently coincide with Hartmann’s conclusions. R. Schmitt examines Isidore’s work from a linguistic point of view (“Isidors, *Stathmoi Parthikoi* ‘ aus Sicht der Iranischen Toponomastik,” pp. 189–220). The author’s analysis of the toponyms appearing in the work lead to the conclusion that Isidore was much more familiar with the western part of the Parthian Empire than the eastern.

The second part of the volume, “Bilder der Parther bei Josephus, Trogus-Justin, Tacitus und Arrian” (pp. 223–305), is much shorter, with only four texts (E. S. Gruen, “Josephus’ Image of the Parthians,” pp. 223–240; S. Müller, “Das Bild der Parther bei Trogus-Justin,” pp. 241–257; M. Heil, “Die Parther bei Tacitus,” pp. 259–278; C. Lerouge-Cohen, “L’image des Parthes chez Arrien. Pour une révision de l’édition Teubner des *Parthika*?,” pp. 279–305). One gets the impression that the idea of including this part in the conference proceedings emerged considerably later. The difference between the two sections is evident both in the presentation and in the more general nature of the articles in the second one. The lack of coherence between the two parts is also demonstrated by the authors’ failure to take into account the conclusions from the articles in the other section, at least those that are significant for the subjects they analyse. Lerouge-Cohen’s article stands out from the other texts in this part. The author points to the distinct inconsistencies between certain passages that scholars have identified as belonging to Arrian’s work. She presents the arguments for removing excerpt F 20 from them, on the basis that the description of Parthian war art that it contains stems from a much later period than the time when the *Parthika* was written (pp. 294–303). Secondly, the author concentrates on the way in which Arrian presents the question of the Parthians’ origins and the historicity of the state’s first rulers (pp. 281–294). This is significant as it presents a different picture from the one we know from Pompeius/Justin’s version of events. There is no doubt that Arrian did not have his own view on the subject, but rather called upon one of the two traditions regarding the Parthians’ origins and their first rulers, whose authors were Greek Hellenistic authors.

Given the profile of this book, reading it will not be equally satisfying to all researchers on the history of the Arsacids. However, it can be recommended to all those with an

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<sup>3</sup> “Die *Stathmoi Parthikoi* sind ... weder als Handelsroute noch als Militärkarte zu lesen, sie sind ein Produkt hellenistischer geographischer und ethnographischer Gelehrsamkeit” (p. 116).

interest in this history from a methodological standpoint. The conclusions made in the various texts show that critical analysis of even the smallest historical sources is worth the effort. It even makes sense when its results lead to entirely different conclusions. This kind of situation frequently makes it necessary to test opinions that have long been held, and consequently creates a new perspective on old problems.

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