

M. Blömer, M. Facella, E. Winter (eds.), *Lokale Identität im Römischen Osten. Kontexte und Perspektiven. Erträge der Tagung „Lokale Identität im Römischen Nahen Osten“*, Münster 19–21 April 2007 (*Oriens et Occidens* 18), Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2009, 240 pp., b/w. ill. ISBN 978-3-515-09377-4

The Roman Near East fascinates scholars with its diversity of local traditions derived from the region's long and rich history. A close study of them allows us to determine their sources and trace how they combined over time, how they evolved and merged to create new entities. A study of such local traditions yields a vast wealth of new details which permit a better understanding of the history of communities that cultivated them. Local identity in the Roman Near East was the subject of a conference in Münster several years ago. Among those present were a number of historians dealing with the impact of Roman culture on local communities in the East, or, in a broader sense, the cultural aspects of Roman rule in the eastern Mediterranean. Many of them use the new research method, so far employed mainly in archaeological studies, which consists in simultaneous use of written evidence and various types of material evidence to reconstruct and interpret historical events. The volume in question contains ten articles whose subjects concern various aspects and manifestations of local identity. Many touch upon religious matters. For a review of their subject matter, we may quote their titles: M. Blömer, *Stelen mit Darstellungen lokaler Wettergottgestalten im römischen Nordsyrien*, pp. 13–47; P. Haider, *Religiöse Vorstellungen in Ninive und Assur während der hellenistischen und parthischen Ära*, pp. 49–74; U. Hartmann, *Orientalisches Selbstbewusstsein im 13. Sibyllinischen Orakel*, pp. 75–98; A. Kropp, *King – Caesar – God. Roman imperial cult among Near Eastern „client” kings in the Julio-Claudian period*, pp. 99–150; A. Lichtenberger, *Tyros und Berytos. Zwei Fallbeispiele städtischer Identitäten in Phönikien*, pp. 151–175; F. Millar, *Libanios' Vorstellungen vom Nahen Osten*, pp. 177–187; W. Oenbrink, „... nach Römischen Art aus Ziegelsteinen ...” *Das Grabmonument des Gaius Iulius Samsigeramos im Spannungsfeld zwischen Fremdeinflüssen und lokaler Identität*, pp. 189–221; A. Schmidt-Colinet, *Nochmal zur Ikonographie zweier palmyrenischer Sarkophage*, pp. 223–234; M. Sommer, *Imperiale Macht und locale Identität: Universalhistorische Variationen zu einem regionalhistorischen Thema*, pp. 235–248; O. Stoll, *Kentaur und Tyche – Symbole städtischer Münzprägungen*, pp. 249–340.

Reading these texts gives many opportunities to rethink the role and nature of factors which determine local identities. They also cause one to reflect that although a certain pattern of Romanization applied in the entire Near East, the effects varied and largely depended on the strength and persistence of religious and cultural traditions in respective communities subjected to such influence. This means that each community which nourished its local tradition requires individual treatment and description. The papers included in the volume serve to confirm that such a research perspective is correct.

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Karin Mosig-Walburg, *Römer und Perser. Vom 3. Jahrhundert bis zum Jahr 363 n. Chr.*, Computus Druck Satz & Verlag, Gutenberg 2009, 383 pp., ISBN 13: 978-3-940598-02-8

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in Roman-Persian relations in the Sassanid period. This can be seen in the large number of new books and studies devoted to this subject and to other aspects of the Iranian history of the time. This renewed interest was likely spurred by intensified research into the Late Empire (4th–7th centuries A.D.) which calls for close analysis of Roman-Persian relations and their impact, whether direct or indirect, on various areas of life in the eastern Roman Empire. Increasingly often, scholars reach for previously disregarded works by Late Roman, Armenian, and Oriental authors. These offer a radically different perspective of long-known events and help to verify their interpretations, some formed many decades ago.

One example of the new insight into the subject is the habilitation dissertation by Karin Mosig-Walburg. The author considers Roman-Persian relations from the beginning of the Sassanid state till the peace concluded between Shapur II and Emperor Jovian in 363 A.D., with a focus on the period chronologically marked by the truce between Diocletian and Narses (298) and the peace of 363 A.D. (cf. pp. 11–15). A discussion of Roman-Persian relations from the ascent to power of the Sassanid dynasty's founder Ardashir I to the time of Narses is found in Chapter I: *Rom, Persien, und Armenien im 3. Jahrhundert* (pp. 19–89). Significantly, it emphasizes the importance of Armenia as a vital part in those relations in the 3rd century A.D. (pp. 63–89). Chapter II: *Der Krieg zwischen Narse und Diocletian und der Friedensvertrag des Jahres 298* (pp. 91–148) describes in detail questions concerning the war Diocletian waged against Narses and the clauses of the truce which concluded it. An assessment of this truce, as seen from both sides, is the subject of Chapter III: *Die Bewertung des Friedensvertrages des Jahres 298 vom römischer und von persischer Seite* (pp. 149–155). Subsequent chapters present a chronological order of Roman-Persian relations up to the 330s. (IV: *Die römisch-persischen Beziehungen vom Jahr 298 bis zum Beginn der 30er Jahre des 4. Jahrhunderts*, pp. 157–192) including the period of fighting in those years, concluded with a truce in 337, in which Armenia also played a significant role (V: *Der Beginn des römisch-persischen Krieges in den 30er Jahren des 4. Jahrhunderts*, pp. 193–266). In a separate chapter, the author questions the point, so far fully accepted as true, about Constantius I and Constantius II using the religious question in relations between Rome and the Sasanids (VI. *Die Rolle der Religion in der Perserpolitik Constantins I. und Constantius' II*, pp. 267–282). The last two chapters concern the Persian expedition by Julian the Apostate (VII. *Der Perserfeldzug Julians*, pp. 283–304) and the truce with Persia which, after this emperor died in 363, was signed by his successor (VIII. *Der Friedensvertrag des Jahres 363*, pp. 305–324). The book closes with a synthetic summary of the author's findings (IX. *Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung*, pp. 325–332).

With its innovative approach, Mosig-Walburg's work stands out among the papers published so far devoted to Roman-Persian relations in the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. The author devoted much attention to assessing the credibility of sources; in the process, she formulates many valuable remarks as to their relevance to a reconstruction of historical events. Equally interestingly, she shows Armenia as an underestimated participant in a diplomatic game between Rome and the Sasanids, and offers a well-grounded polemic with the accepted view about the presence of Christians in the Sasanid empire as largely influencing the political relations between the two states.

Students of the history of Rome and Iran in the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. will find in Mosig-Walburg's book many new, convincingly presented interpretations of known events. I have no doubt that this work will be included in the canon of literature on the subject.

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