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Jason M. Schlude and Benjamin B. Rubin, eds. *Arsacids, Romans, and Local Elites: Cross-Cultural Interactions of the Parthian Empire* (Oxford & Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2017, xvi and 158pp., b/w illustr., pbk, ISBN 978-1-78570-592-2)

Each of the seven papers brought together in the volume *Arsacids, Romans, and Local Elites* constitutes an innovative approach to re-thinking the Parthian Empire ruled by the Arsacid dynasty (247 BC–AD 224) and its relations with Rome. The Parthian Empire has been studied frequently in opposition to other, better-documented, contemporary rivals because the lack of a continuous narrative history leaves gaps in our understanding of personalities and the realpolitik of the Arsacid dynasty. We often see the Parthian rulers as passive recipients of Roman policy but here we are invited to consider the Arsacid kings as active rulers who engaged with their power base and represented themselves and their dynasty. This fascinating volume moves towards reversing the traditional approaches to Partho-Roman relations by looking at the cross-cultural interactions of the Arsacid kings and the ruling local elites, in light of their engagement and dialogue across their western frontier.

Each of the papers was delivered as part of the annual meeting of the American School of Oriental Research panel on Parthia across 2012–2014. These papers

were not constructed to be part of the same themed or coordinated panel but are connected through subject as well as a cross-cultural theoretical approach that looks at the interactions of the Parthian Empire with its neighbours as a means to access the nature of Arsacid rule. The chapters concentrate broadly on three main areas that investigate aspects of diplomacy and dialogue, cultural appropriation, and relations across geographical borders with near neighbours. Organised chronologically, the chapters cover topics that extend across most of the period of entrenched Arsacid rule from the third century BC to the third century AD.

Jeffrey Lerner (Ch. 1) focuses on the symbol of the Parthian archer who appears on the coins of the earliest ruler of the Arsacid dynasty, Arsaces I. The image of the seated archer was used subsequently across the region in various guises by different kings of the dynasty. Lerner explores how the employment of this symbol of Achaemenid power is adapted by the Parthians, tracing the significance and interpretation of the figure across various kings. The paper presents the

Parthian archer as an Achaemenid echo but one that had also become significant to Seleucid monarchs in the guise of Apollo. The key theme here is the attempt to resist a single interpretation for the archer figure. It may well have been designed to reach a wider audience reflecting the Arsacid kings' interest in appealing across the multi-lingual and multi-cultural population. In fact, the assessment of the coinage as a means by which the subsequent Arsacid kings could engage with their 'Asiatic Greek and Persian' populations convinces (p. 14). The fluid identity of this figure, from Arash to Mithra and Apollo/Helios, enhances the notion of a vibrant cross-cultural dialogue in play in the early centuries that saw the rise of the Parthians in the face of shrinking Seleucid power.

Jake Nabel's paper (Ch. 2), 'The Seleucids Imprisoned', addresses the demise of the Hellenistic Seleucid dynasty and traces aspects of the influence it had on both groups of 'barbarians' (p. 25) who defeated and annexed their lands, namely the Parthians and Romans. As Nabel notes, the subsequent 'carve up' of the Hellenistic Greek world by the two expanding Empires would have profound and enduring impact on the cultures of both conquerors. This chapter parallels the rise of the Parthians and Romans and focuses on the common practice of hostage taking and the lessons learned from looking at examples of Seleucid captives. By viewing the captive clients as agents in the construction of ideas around employing hostages, the chapter helps to illuminate the development of foreign relations between Parthia and Rome in the later first century BC to mid-first century AD. Nabel convincingly argues that both Roman and Parthian rulers employed Arsacid hostages in Julio-Claudian Rome as part of domestic strategy. Domestic concerns predominated, and the lessons of

Seleucid hostages prevailed in their usefulness, as trophies for domestic consumption and occasionally as agents in unleashing dynastic mayhem.

Kenneth Jones (Ch. 3) asks the reader to completely disregard the almost 'unanimous opinion' (p. 51) of ancient and modern writers on the adventures of Marc Antony in the east. Titled 'Marcus Antonius' Median War and the Dynastic Politics of the Near East', this is an intriguing look at the intentions of Antony's much maligned, and difficult to understand, eastern campaigns against the Parthians. The author implies that Antony was looking to a settlement with the Parthians through negotiation and cultural engagement with the intention of sealing the deal with a marriage (p. 59). That Antony acted in the fashion of a Hellenistic dynast in the guise of a triumvir is one of the most significant charges made against him in the propaganda war that followed. Jones also points out that Augustus, once the civil war was won, basically continued the strategy set out by Antony but could not be seen to be doing so. The chapter ties together many loose threads in Augustan diplomacy and encourages the reader to consider the evidence in a different light by looking at the realpolitik of Augustan Rome. Here again we can see that the force of domestic politics was used to camouflage the realities of Partho-Roman relations in the late first century BC.

By exploring the important role that Partho-Roman embassies played as vehicles for cross-cultural exchange and peace, Schlude and Rubin (Ch. 4) challenge the traditional notions of embassies in antiquity. The authors pick up on one of the most famous women of the Parthian world and the projection of her image in the context of both Parthian and the broader Hellenistic notion of gendered authority and divine right to rule. This

rise of the Parthian queen Musa from Roman slave and 'gift' for the Arsacid king Phraates V to her appearance on the coinage as an equal to her son and heir is employed as an example. The paper picks up on themes of ruler cult, divine rule, and cross-cultural dialogue that are explored by Lerner (Ch. 1), but here the authors also engage with ideas of gendered divinity as a means of creating dynastic legitimacy. One of the most interesting aspects is the way it represents the Romans of the Late Republic clearly utilising the means and message of the Hellenistic monarchs, and at the same time reflecting the constraints of Roman traditions, before and during the rule of Augustus. The chapter is an exploration of the material evidence for the embassy; while focussing necessarily on Augustus there is also some assessment of Nero's political engagement as well. The authors note that there is much more non-violent diplomatic engagement between Rome and Parthia than is often given credit for, and this perhaps illustrates the importance and success of diplomatic embassies over the first century AD.

Schlude and Overman's study (Ch. 5) of Herod the Great, client king and Hellenistic monarch of Judea sets out to examine the figure of Herod as a way to reflect a regional view from the perspective of local elites. Herod, often perceived as a pawn of Roman policy, is viewed here in light of his own interests. He is shown as a figure both negotiating and engaging with the eastern and western powers exerting pressures on the region. Ultimately Herod was Rome's man and owed his position of king to Rome as a direct reaction to Parthian intervention. As Schlude and Overman point out, however, he could not ignore the Arsacid kings and his policies reflect the interests of Herod first and foremost but also imply his constant negotiation between the constituent parts

of his community: those facing east and west. The example of the visit of the Magi to the birth of the infant Jesus (p. 102) (among others) is used to contextualise the problem of our evidence for contact and influence between Judea and Parthia in the period of his rule. As our best-documented client kingdom between Rome and Parthia, the study of Judea and its policies opens up the possibilities of new interpretations as indicated in much of the recent scholarship cited.

Provincial relations and the reaction of local elites in the north of Mesopotamia are covered in Peter Edwell's paper on the regions of Osrhoene and Mesopotamia (Ch. 6). The final century of Parthian rule, which led to the weakening and demise of the Arsacid dynasty, is viewed with a focus on the way that local rulers negotiated with shifting power under the growing military pressure and the economic presence of Rome. The aggressive stance of the second century Roman Emperors, first Trajan and then the Antonines and Severans, against the Parthian Empire meant that the cities of northern Mesopotamia had to negotiate this new dynamic. The paper assesses the changed political dynamic in these regions but also the knock on effect of this on the economic and cultural environment (p. 111). Edwell rightly points out that the Roman reorganisation of the region under Trajan was short-lived and assesses material evidence from Dura Europus that illustrates Parthian continuities there. Lucius Verus' war against the Parthians is considered the agent for longer-term structural changes in the region. The range of evidence surveyed here includes some fascinating unpublished Roman coins (p. 118) from the Edessa mint. With images of local kings and mid-second century Roman empresses appearing together on coinage, Edwell convincingly argues that Osrhoene with its capital Edessa functioned as a Roman client in this period. The article approaches the region through specific,

city-by-city assessment of the cross Euphrates and northern Mesopotamian territories over the period of the mid-second to early third centuries, and provides an excellent methodological template to read the impact of growing Roman influence in the face of Parthian demise.

Events in 2015 that saw the Iraqi city of Mosul looted by Daesh/ISIL are the catalyst for Björn Anderson's study of the Parthian period sculptures from the city of Hatra (Ch. 7). The Mosul museum housed many of the portable antiquities from Hatra and video evidence illustrates that up to twenty items from Hatra have been destroyed (p. 138). The paper's aim is to assess Hatra in its role as a city between Roman and Parthian control through its sculptural heritage. As a strategically placed Parthian city coveted by the Romans, Hatra was placed under siege by both Trajan and Severus but resisted conquest until the Sasanian kings had taken control of the region. At that point Hatra went over to the Romans, housing a garrison that led to a Sasanian siege and the eventual abandonment of the city. In discussing the style and influences brought to bear on the rich sculptural heritage from the Hatra, Anderson sets out the scholarly arguments that have, until recently, tended to focus on a western cultural influence, or elevate the indigenous approach rather than examine what 'Parthian' art might have looked like. Assessment of the sculptures along with carefully reproduced drawings allows for a glimpse into the way the various cultural influences are reflected in the material evidence and monumental artistic output. When a statue shows 'Syrian, Iranian, and Greek elements' (p. 145) the assessment is not of imitation but of reworking by artists who develop a unique vocabulary that speaks to a local audience with local style and tastes. Comparison here is made

with the art of Petra as a parallel urban environment where local cultures incorporated degrees of cultural variation in their architecture and art. The examples celebrate plurality and complexity, illustrating the variety of long standing influences that the Parthians embraced in their artistic output.

Each of the papers in this volume strives to contribute in methodology and in broader contextualisation to a new engagement with the Parthian Empire as a power in its own right and within a broader continuum. The recent trend of bringing the Arsacid rulers into the fold of Mediterranean and Near Eastern dynastic studies reflects the increased interest in the Partho-Sasanian world and this volume does a great deal to move beyond the simple depictions of Parthia as the 'other' and enemy of Rome. The striking parallels between the policies in the eastern/western regions of their respective empires and the methods of cross-cultural dialogue are emphasised throughout while innovative approaches to the existing material and literary sources are applied. What is so convincing here is that, without offering any brand new evidence to the debate, all of the authors (to varying degrees) have been able to employ our existing material and literary evidence to bring an innovative and alternate reading of Partho-Roman affairs across the period of their engagement. There is much of interest here and if the results are not unanimously convincing they certainly bring a new dialogue to the understanding of the Parthian world and the rule of the Arsacid kings, as well as the Roman interactions with them.

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