

of institutions that could, as the title of the book suggests, provide the “cornerstones of a federal democracy”.

**Charles Tripp**

BEATE DIGNAS and ENGELBERT WINTER:

*Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals.*

xvi, 347 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. £17.99.

ISBN 978 0521 84925 8.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X09990140

This is the expanded and revised English translation of the German original, *Rom und Persereich im Spätantiken: Zwei Weltmächte zwischen Konfrontation und Koexistenz* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), co-authored by Dignas and Winter. The merits of the German edition are further reinforced in this English translation by the introduction of several of the suggestions made by reviewers of the German publication. The present work is primarily a sourcebook for the student and scholar of Late Antique and Near Eastern history. It is a welcome addition to the often-overlooked study of the Sasanian Empire in comparison with its Western neighbour. The German original attracted some criticism, mainly from Near Eastern specialists, because of the “eurocentrism” of the authors’ perspective, and it is apparent that this spectre of criticism haunts the authors who have made efforts to address this accusation throughout this revised translation. In some respects this is inevitable as the book focuses on providing textual rather than archaeological evidence. As the majority of the extant written sources are Roman, it is natural that the narrative and analysis are heavily influenced by the concerns and perceptions of the written source material. A clearer portrait of the Sasanian Empire would have entailed a more extensive presentation of the surviving material evidence for this period, something which is outside the stated scope of the authors. Undoubtedly, the book would benefit from this combined approach; yet the authors are conscious of this limitation and their awareness is commendable even if they do not necessarily always succeed in their intent to present the history of Roman–Sasanian relations “not according to Western needs” (p. 2).

The book is divided into two parts: the first consists of a useful concise historical summary of Roman–Persian relations from the third to seventh centuries AD (Part I: Narrative, pp. 9–52), including a short survey of Roman–Parthian relations between c. 250 BC and the beginning of the third century AD. The second, and more extensive, part (Sources and contexts, pp. 53–265) is divided into nine thematic chapters where the primary source material (Greek, Latin, Persian, Syriac, Arabic and Armenian) is presented in new English translations coupled with brief introductions to the sources, their authors and commentaries on main points of the texts. These thematic sections are further divided into sub-chapters. The volume is complemented by fourteen maps, adapted from other scholarly works and differing from those included in the German original, and eighteen illustrations of Roman and Persian material evidence. Three comprehensive, updated appendixes offer a list of Roman and Persian rulers, a chronological table of important dates and events and a glossary. The book concludes with an extremely useful forty-two page bibliography and indexes of sources, translated sources, names and place names, in addition to the general index. There are relatively few errors but some typographical mistakes and, more seriously, some erroneous geographical attributions in the maps.

The nine chapters of the second part cover the following themes: Political goals, Warfare, Military confrontations, The diplomatic solutions, Arabia between the Great Powers, Shared interests: continuing conflicts, Religion: Christianity and Zoroastrianism, Emperor and King of Kings, and Exchange of information between East and West. Most studies of Roman–Persian relations focus on military activity and diplomacy as this reflects the interest of the majority of the sources who were concerned to provide details of these periods of crisis between the two Empires. It is perhaps to be expected that the largest section of the second part of this book is devoted to military affairs and diplomatic exchanges, but the remaining chapters do much to redress this imbalance and provide an opportunity to introduce some interesting Persian material as opposed to the mostly political and military fare of the Graeco-Roman sources.

Particular attention should be paid to the chapters on “Warfare” (ch. 2) and “Emperor and King of Kings” (ch. 8) as well as the sub-chapter on Armenia (ch. 6.26) which have been added to this edition and do not feature in the original German. These new sections allow the exploration of three topics that are crucial for a deeper understanding of the relations between the two Empires, albeit briefly. Nevertheless, they serve to draw the reader’s attention to primary sources which are often neglected even by specialists. The focus on relations with Armenia and Arabia in their own right as important regions rather than buffer zones between the two Empires is a step in the right direction and marks a departure from other studies which do not address these areas with the same consideration.

To conclude, this is an excellent textbook introduction to Roman–Persian relations of the Late Antique period for specialist and non-specialist readers alike. It will, undoubtedly, prove popular in introductory and survey courses. The book’s main virtue is that it makes accessible a wide range of sources in translation and does so in a very readable and user-friendly manner with repeated cross-references between the two parts of the book. Disputes between specialists about the interpretation of the textual evidence, the selection of passages, the lack of archaeological data and the over-emphasis on a distinction between East and West should not detract from the fundamental strengths of this book. These issues should perhaps be addressed in a detailed synthetic work on Roman–Persian relations for which this book provides an ideal springboard.

**Maria Kouroumali**

WHEELER M. THACKSTON (tr.):

*The Gulistan of Sa’di: Bilingual English and Persian Edition with Vocabulary.*

xi, 253 pp. Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 2008. \$60.

ISBN 978 1 58814 058 6.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X09990152

In recent decades, the richness of medieval Persian literature has become common knowledge across the globe thanks to popular translations of the poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi, who has even become the best-selling poet in North America. During the last few years, the poetry of Hafiz has started to attract a similar level of interest, albeit through “channelled” translations by Daniel Ladinsky. These phenomenal rises in popularity would seem to have a precedent in the nineteenth-century fascination with the translated quatrains of the mathematician and minor