

LORI KHATCHADOURIAN:

Imperial Matter: Ancient Persia and the Archaeology of Empires.
 xxxviii, 288 pp. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. \$34.95.
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The Achaemenid Empire, perhaps the first “global” empire, has become a key, renewed case study and focus for scholars interested in ancient Near Eastern empires and classical studies. Take, for example, Waters’ and Janett Morgan’s recent overviews and analyses on the Achaemenids from different points of view (Janett Morgan, *Greek Perspectives on the Achaemenid Empire: Persia through the Looking Glass*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016; M.W. Waters, *Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire, 550–330 BCE*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Khatchadourian’s work provides a new perspective on how the material world reflected Achaemenid power, from mundane, everyday objects to more grand architecture and palaces. The Achaemenids balanced a world where they ruled and governed numerous subject populations, but they also believed that they brought happiness and order to the world, where subjects were all too willing to accept Achaemenid rule according to their propaganda. The Achaemenids did bring a new style of governing that did not emphasize their people and god(s) as having overcome other populations but their material display and attempts to integrate foreign populations shows a different style of governing in the ancient Near East. This work helps to put this in perspective, where that relationship between those governed and the Achaemenids is put into a material perspective that helps us to understand this world.

The first part of the volume expresses the structure of satrapies and what it meant to be governed by the Achaemenids, encapsulating the discussion in social theory and use of proxies that expressed Achaemenid subject and ruler relationships. Khatchadourian points out how our perspective of the Achaemenid governing system of satrapies has been coloured by later views. The second part of the book takes that framework and demonstrates its material manifestations in the art, architecture and other material culture of the Achaemenids. The reality was locals often imitated the Achaemenids just as the Achaemenids also integrated foreigners, including their styles and other material aspects. In effect, it was a complex world of mutual syncretism. This is evident in diverse places such as Armenia and the Caucasus as well as in Persia itself. The book offers a new way in which we can view this material world, through a local, larger, and more encompassing lens.

The book is thoroughly researched and many key historical and archaeological works are well integrated. Topics brought up at the end, such as ISIS’ media campaigns and cultural destruction, and Russia’s annexation of Crimea, which the author attempts to relate to the framework presented, were not clear to me. Some parts of the book, particularly the language, sometimes required rereading to understand the main point. However, I think this is understandable in the new framework presented, which also incorporates a wide and complex number of topics. I do think this book offers new insight into the Achaemenids and I learned a great deal from this volume that will help me in my own research. There are some important dynamics that are not sufficiently addressed, particularly the increasing internationalization found within cities of the Achaemenid Empire. Cities such as Babylon became culturally diverse – the social diversity found within the great cities and across the vast

empire now became widely expressed. Foreigners thrived in new places, as seen in Elephantine or Babylon. We cannot overemphasize the importance of Aramaic, which became standardized in this period, as it developed as a true common language spoken across this empire (H. Gzella, *A Cultural History of Aramaic: from the Beginnings to the Advent of Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 2015). In effect, the Achaemenid world became multicultural and they tried to develop a new system that effectively addressed this diversity. It was a model that seemed successful, and we see that later empires often emulated Achaemenid achievements.

Overall I found this book highly informative and novel in its insights. I strongly recommend it for readers interested in the ancient Near East and empires more broadly.

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THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

ALI AHMAD HUSSEIN:

The Rhetorical Fabric of the Traditional Arabic Qaṣīda in Its Formative Stages: A Comparative Study of the Rhetoric in Two Traditional Poems by ‘Alqama l-Faḥl and Bashshār b. Burd.

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Early Arabic poetry (sixth to mid-eighth century) differs significantly and in many respects from the poetry of the Abbasid era (750–1258) and later times. The early poetry mirrors the worldview and concerns of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Bedouin society; by contrast, Abbasid poetry is urban and reflects the ideas and values of the elites of the Muslim empire. Another major element that distinguishes Abbasid from pre-Abbasid poetry is its rhetorical texture, that is to say, the various tropes, figures of speech and other rhetorical embellishments employed in the poems. Early Abbasid poets are generally believed to have used tropes and figures of speech more frequently than and differently from their predecessors, so that their style was perceived as novel/original (*badī‘*). The Abbasid prince, litterateur and critic Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (d. 296/908), who devoted a monograph to the “New Style” (*badī‘*), recognized five figures as its most typical phenomena: the metaphor, the antithesis, the paronomasia, anticipating the rhyme-word by means of a cognate used earlier in the verse, and “dialectical [i.e. complicated] reasoning”. In his view, however, the New Style was nothing novel, since previous poets, too, used figures of speech; the only difference was that the “moderns” employed rhetorical elements consciously and more frequently. Modern scholars interpret this view as an attempt by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz to legitimize the New Style.

Hussein sets out to examine how different the rhetorical texture of Abbasid from that of pre-Abbasid poetry really was. To do this, he compares two odes of almost equal length (c. 55-lines long) by two poets representative of the two periods, focusing on the rhetorical fabric of the poems: ‘Alqama al-Faḥl (d. c. 603) is one of those