

RIKA GYSELEN (ed.):

Documents, argenterie et monnaies de tradition sassanide.

(Res Orientales XXII.) 189 pp. Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l'Étude de la Civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 2014. €70. ISBN 978 2 9521376 6 9.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X15001160

The book series “Res Orientales” has for many years been publishing seminal works in ancient Iranian studies, and the scientific qualities of the director of this prestigious collection, Rika Gyselen (CNRS, Paris), are greatly appreciated by orientalist. This volume is composed of four important essays on objects and topics which could be defined as being of “Sasanian tradition”, as even though they belong to the Islamic age, they have Sasanian characteristics. The Arabs, after having conquered Iran in the second half of the seventh century, retained some Persian traditions for many years, especially in the field of administrative organization and coin production. The Umayyad reform of coinage at the end of the seventh century replaced the Middle Persian language with Arabic in administrative practices and changed Sasanian weights and measures. During this crucial period of power transition copper coins, generally called “Arab-Sasanian” coins, had different images, weights, mints and issuing authorities and they were characterized by a greater flexibility compared to the contemporary production of silver coins.

M. Blet-Lemarquand and R. Gyselen, in “Sur la composition élémentaire de quelques monnaies de cuivre arabo-sassanides” (pp. 9–27), report an elemental analysis performed by Fast Neutron Activation using a cyclotron on 22 Arab-Sasanian copper coins, with the aim of determining if there is a link between the elemental composition of a coin and the monetary type or other numismatic aspects. As could be expected, coins were rarely minted with pure copper but they could contain other materials, such as lead or tin. Two coins issued by Arab governors and the majority of those with an Iranian name were made of almost pure copper and were probably coined with ingots of new metals rather than recycled metal containing traces of impurity by its own nature. However, it is difficult to reach definite conclusions based on the examination of such a limited number of coins and it is thus necessary to carry out other studies on a wider sample of coins. Nevertheless, it seems that the “Arab-Sasanian” copper coin-making processes abided by local criteria and choices.

Ph. Gignoux, “Une archive post-sassanide du Tabaristān (II)” (pp. 29–71), continues the publication of the new archive on post-Sasanian Tabaristān, the first one may be found in *Res Orientales XXI* (pp. 29–96). Here the author analyses in detail the text of ten parchments (not eight, as it is written at p. 30) precisely dated to the post-Yazdgird Era (year 1 corresponds to 652 AD). The problems mentioned in the documents relate mainly to agriculture and money, and also the laws about the statute of wives. This archive consists of about 30 documents and is quite homogenous since they all seem to derive from the same place, the *Askēnrad* village. This new collection is of paramount importance to the study of Late Antique Iran, especially in the South Caspian region: in this area, Pahlavi was used at least until 750 AD when Tabaristān was conquered by the ‘Abbāsids. The legal character of these texts makes it possible to compare their content to the late Sasanian legal literature; in these documents the role played by Zoroastrian priests (*hērbed*) emerges: they had the duty of settling local disputes often concerning the transfer of assets in kind or the payment of interest.

R. Gyselen, “Inscriptions en moyen-perse sur la vaisselle d’argent sassanide: quelques nouvelles données” (pp. 73–178), focuses on four cursive Middle Persian inscriptions engraved on a pair of nice Sasanian *rhyta* shaped in the form of boar’s head, which

are preserved at the Phoenix Ancient Art Gallery of Geneva. These prestigious Sasanian ritual vases belonged to a certain Pērōz-Gušnasp and they weighed 52 staters per pair, as can be inferred from their inscriptions. Gyselen does not state the chronology of the two *rhyta* (inscriptions can be more recent than objects), but she studies these precious pieces of luxurious art and she also provides us with a useful and detailed catalogue of the Sasanian silverware with inscriptions, in which she collects all of the data gathered over the years on this interesting topic (pictures, origin, shapes, measurements, inscriptions and bibliography). Sasanian silver vases, since they often had the precise indication of their weight in drachmas, were not only used as prestigious gifts for Persian aristocracy and neighbouring peoples but also had a high economic value and, if necessary, they could be converted into cash, thus addressing the lack of coins that characterized the Late Antique world (see A. Gariboldi, *La monetazione sasanide nelle Civiche raccolte numismatiche di Milano*, Milan, 2003, p. 25).

The weights reported on the vases do not always coincide exactly with the theoretical weight of the Sasanian drachma (4.2/4.3 g) and goldsmiths, during the production of such objects, may have used a rounded-up theoretical weight of the drachma, but as Gyselen writes: “l’existence de tels poids d’orfèvre reste à prouver” (p. 96). Numismatists are aware that the weight of real coins is very often different from the theoretical weight of the Sasanian drachma. However, this does not mean that there was not an ideal weight of reference from which artisans could deduct a percentage to take on manufacturing expenses and for their own profit. Some vases have a very low drachma value since they were weighted during the Islamic age and thus with a theoretical reference to the reformed Arab *dirham* (2.97 g).

The article “Arabic activities reflected in the documents of the “Pahlavi archive” (late seventh and early eighth centuries) (pp. 179–89) by D. Weber concludes the volume. Here the author discusses the Islamic influences on the documents of the so-called “Pahlavi archive”, hosted partly in Berlin but predominantly in Berkeley (CA). These documents date back to the period between 750 and 850 AD and come from the region of Qom in Western Iran. In fact there are rare traces of Islamic influence in such texts, but, for instance, the *bismillāh* formula, in Pahlavi version *pad nām ī yazd* (in the name of God), was recognized as the starting sentence of some letters and it replaces the older plural *yazdān* of Zoroastrian usage. The official Arab title of *amīr*, “commander”, is also attested in some documents. All of the information collected in the volume suggests that the Islamization of Iran was slow and gradual with different patterns in different regions.

Andrea Gariboldi
University of Bologna

APTIN KHANBAGHI (ed.):

Cities as Built and Lived Environments: Scholarship from Muslim Contexts, 1875–2011.

(Muslim Civilizations Abstracts.) iv, 497 pp. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press in association with The Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations, 2014. £75. ISBN 978 0 7486 9618 5. doi:10.1017/S0041977X15001172

This volume is the third in a series that provides brief abstracts of scholarship originating in Muslim majority countries, published in various languages, and their