

THE PARTHIANS

ELLERBROCK (U.) *The Parthians. The Forgotten Empire*. Pp. xxx + 331, b/w & colour ills, colour maps. London and New York: Routledge, 2021. Paper, £34.99, US\$44.95 (Cased, £120, US\$160). ISBN: 978-0-367-47309-9 (978-0-367-48190-2 hbk). doi:10.1017/S0009840X22001755

This book is based on the second edition of *Die Parther. Die vergessene Grossmacht*, which was published in 2015 (first edition 2012) by archaeologist S. Winkelmann, a specialist in Central Asia, and E., a coin collector and German physician passionate about the Parthians. Even if the internal organisation of the book is more or less the same as in the German one, E., now the sole author, did not merely translate the German text into English: he re-wrote it for the most part, added a few developments and summarised other ones. The purpose of the book is the same as it was in 2012: to place the Parthian Empire, ‘little known to the general reader’, ‘in the light it deserves in history’ (p. xxiv). In order to achieve this goal, the book contains eleven chapters that aim at providing readers with a general overview of the Parthian Empire: (1) ‘The Parthian Empire: a First Approach’; (2) ‘History of the Great Empires in Iran’; (3) ‘History of the Parthian Empire’; (4) ‘The Structure of the Parthian Empire’; (5) ‘Vassal States and Kingdoms under Parthian Influence’; (6) ‘The Parthian Empire and the Peoples of Eurasia’; (7) ‘Cities and Architecture in the Parthian Empire’; (8) ‘Trade and Business in the Parthian Empire’; (9) ‘Insights into Social Life in Parthia’; (10) ‘Parthian Art: Art in the Arsacid Kingdom’; (11) ‘The Parthian Empire and its Religions’. There is no conclusion.

The German book met with negative reviews from renowned German scholars such as U. Hartmann (<https://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/reb-18511>), E. Kettenhoffen (<https://www.fera-journal.eu/index.php/ojs-fera/article/view/74>) and N. Schindel (*Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Numismatischen Gesellschaft* 54 [2014]). They pointed out the lack of scientific accuracy of the book, which did not contain footnotes or endnotes, ignored the ancient sources, offered a very short bibliography and was marred with numerous factual errors: the book clearly did not meet the standards of scientific literature. The four chapters written by Winkelmann, which dealt with Parthian architecture and the cities of the Parthian Empire, the relationships between the Parthians and the nomadic people, the Arsacid army and Parthian art, were, though, acknowledged as being of a much higher level and giving generally valuable information. This is not surprising as Winkelmann is considered a specialist of Eurasian archaeology.

In the second edition (2015), which the book under review is based on, some of the critical comments were taken into account by E.; each chapter contains endnotes, which refer to ancient sources or modern titles; there is a bibliography of more than 20 pages; one can find indexes (general index, index of names, index of geographical names); and some of the grossest errors pointed out by the reviewers were corrected (e.g. the false translations of the Greek legends carved on Arsacid coins). The quality has further improved in the 2021 English edition with the addition of many pictures (90 new photos according to E., p. xxiv), especially in the chapter related to Parthian art. These pictures, some of them photos taken by E. on a trip to Turkmenistan, are of a high standard: they are undoubtedly the strong point of the book. As far as the content is concerned, E. provides readers with bibliographical updates (e.g. p. 4, about the use of the term ‘Parthian Commonwealth’, which was suggested by A. De Jong in: L. Dirven’s *Hatra* [2013];

p. 21, a reference to N. Overtoom, *Journal of Historic Studies* 7 [2019]; p. xxiv and p. 71, twice the same quotation of a 2018 paper by L. Gregoratti). This publication, though, still cannot be seen as a reliable work tool and should be read with great caution.

First of all, one may regret that E. was not content to translate Winkelmann's chapters, which were the better ones in the German editions. One can think especially of the chapters dedicated to Parthian cities and architecture, and to Parthian art: as abundantly illustrated as they may be in the book under review, they have lost much of their content, and this is a real loss. The chapter entitled 'Trade and Business in the Parthian Empire', which in the German book offered overviews about the Silk Road, is now devoted in its biggest part to a presentation of the Arsacid coins and legends, which is out of place in this chapter. As for the Silk Road, it has vanished.

More generally speaking, the main problem in this edition, as in those of 2012 and 2015, is that E., passionate as he may be about the Parthians, does not have a real and thorough knowledge of the ancient world. This drives him to commit once more, in this book, serious errors. Not all the mistakes that had been pointed out in 2012 were corrected in 2015, and, logically, they are found again in the book under review: I think in particular of the epithet ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ, which was carved on the first Arsacid coins, and is still translated as 'autocrat' (pp. 27, 72, 171).

Countless other factual errors are scattered throughout the book, mostly new ones. For example, it is not true that the sculptures of Oriental slaves that adorned Roman houses (cf. R. Schneider, *Bunte Barbaren* [1986]) must be seen as proof that 'Parthian servants worked in the houses of wealthy Romans', as E. writes on p. 8 (and wrote in 2015). It is not true that Alexander the Great 'was raised in early youth with Iranian culture and Iranian ideas' (p. 19). It is not true that behind the rivalry between Arsacids and Sassanids 'lies a dispute between ... the Arsacids, who derived from the nomads having founded the Parthian Empire, and ... the "Iranians", to which the family Sasan belonged' (p. 66). Antiochus I of Commagene did not 'govern his empire independently of Rome' (p. 105): he dominated a small kingdom and was tightly controlled by the Romans. For this reason Commagene should not be listed among the vassal states and kingdoms under Parthian influence, as it is on pp. 105–6. Sad as it is, it is not true that the archaeological excavations at Seleucia on the Tigris have revealed '30000 inscriptions originating from the state archives of the Seleucids and therefore providing eloquent testimony to their administrative structure' (p. 140): the stamps from Seleucia are very interesting, but they cannot be considered as 'inscriptions', and no civic inscription emanating from this huge city has been found. No theatre was found in Dura-Europos (p. 188).

Moreover, it is obvious that E., too often, relies on second-hand quotations as far as the ancient sources are concerned. Just one example among others: on p. 191 one reads that, according to Plutarch, 'the *gōsān* sang the deeds of Parthian heroes, but also sang songs mocking the Romans'. The endnote refers not to one of Plutarch's works, but to an article from the *Encyclopaedia Iranica online* (wrongly quoted as www.iranica.com, instead of www.iranicaonline.org) relating to pre-Islamic music, which refers itself to Plutarch's *Crassus*. Unfortunately, this reference is not correct: Plutarch never mentioned the Parthian *gōsān*. E. obviously did not check this source.

The map on pp. 2–3 is entitled 'The Parthian Empire 114 A.D.'; however, it mingles several historical periods: Sasanid locations like Bischapur or Firuzabad are shown as well as brown arrows symbolising the 'greater invasions' of the Saka (145 BCE) and of the Arabs (seventh century CE).

The conclusion is that only serious scholars can make use of this book, for its beautiful and useful pictures. General readers, on the contrary, are at risk of being misled on many issues.

Université Paris-Nanterre

CHARLOTTE LEROUGE-COHEN

ccoehen@parisnanterre.fr

ASPECTS OF NETWORK THEORY

FOXHALL (L.) (ed.) *Interrogating Networks. Investigating Networks of Knowledge in Antiquity*. Pp. x+134, figs, ills, maps. Oxford and Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2021. Paper, £16.95. ISBN: 978-1-78925-627-7.

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Network theories and methodologies have emerged as key tools in elucidating the mechanisms of ancient interconnectivity in the past two decades. Network-based approaches, which focus on elaborating relationships between entities and their associated structures and patterns, materialised in the social sciences in the 1930s. Social Network Analysis (SNA) saw an uptick in development over the 1970s and first infiltrated archaeological research at this time (T. Brughmans, ‘Thinking Through Networks’, *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* [2013]). The surge of network models and theories in archaeological research, however, occurred in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. New paradigms that stressed the interconnectivity of microregions were already reformulating the trajectories of ancient Mediterranean societies back in the 1990s and 2000s, but some early approaches were criticised for being overly static and timeless. The work of many ‘second wave’ studies of Mediterranean interconnectivity fruitfully employed networks – from formal network analyses to more generalised ‘network thinking’ – to uncover the deeper mechanisms that configure human and object relationships, bridging micro- and macro-scales.

These new approaches are not without drawbacks, and the volume under review brings a critical lens to the utility of network approaches in the study of Mediterranean and European prehistory. It is the result of an interdisciplinary research programme, ‘Tracing Networks: craft traditions in the ancient Mediterranean and beyond’, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, and a conference funded by the British Academy. The papers focus on the interpretative and explanatory potential of network thinking across a range of case studies. They demonstrate the potential of networks to provide a truer picture of the socio-economic trajectories of ancient societies, yet also offer considerations on how we might alter assumptions built into network thinking so that our models better reflect reality.

Following an introduction, the volume is divided into seven chapters and an index. The first two chapters bring theoretical and methodological considerations to networks and their material traces. Foxhall (Chapter 1) interrogates assumptions built into formal and conceptual network models, problematising in particular the tendency to ‘overstate the roles and agency of material things in human social relationships and societies’ (p. 3). This tendency extends to the use of material remains as proxy data for reconstructing