

Charlotte Lerouge: *L'image des Parthes dans le monde gréco-romain. Du début du I^{er} siècle av. J.-C. jusqu'à la fin du Haut-Empire romain.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2007 (Oriens et Occidens 17). 427 pp. EUR 62.00. ISBN 978-3-515-08530-4.

In her book, Charlotte Lerouge tackled the picture of the Parthians as it existed in the literature of Rome beginning from its first contacts with the Arsacid state in the 90's BC until the end of the Parthian empire (224 AD). Among the most comprehensive monographs of the Parthians to have been published recently, and certainly the largest in French historiography of Parthian Iran, the book consists of two main parts. The first discusses generalized imagery of the Parthians in Rome and relations between the two (pp. 43–169), and part two projects an “ethnographic image” of the Parthians (pp. 173–360). Between them, the parts comprise nine chapters with these further divided into many subchapters. It must be said that the subject Lerouge chose is no *terra incognita* in ancient studies.¹

Part one first analyzes contacts between the Parthians and Rome under Sulla, Lucullus, and Pompeius, and tries to decide whether the Romans well understood the extent of Parthian power. Lerouge accepts the date 92 BC for Sulla's meeting with the Parthians (p. 43). More likely dating seems to be 94 or possibly 93 BC.² Lerouge wonders if Sulla concluded a formal treaty and maintains that the Parthians remained neutral in Eupator's war against Rome, which if fact is dubious (p. 46, n. 14). While this is not a widely accepted view in scholarship, it seems that Parthia at the time actively supported Mithradates VI Eupator, while Tigranes, Pontus' chief ally, was a loyal vassal of the Arsacids until ca. 80 BC. Through Tigranes, the Parthians under Mithradates II (123–87) intervened in the conflict between Pontus and Rome with an eye on their own sphere of influence in Commagene and Syria.³ Considering the

- 1 There already are in existence fundamental works on both chief aspects, i. e., political history (cf. J. Wolski: *L'Empire des Arsacides.* Acta Iranica 32, Lovanii 1993; K. H. Ziegler: *Die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich.* Wiesbaden 1964) and ethnographic understanding of Parthia (the excellent work by H. Sonnabend: *Fremdenbild und Politik.* Frankfurt 1986).
- 2 Cf. S. Dmitriev: *Cappadocian Dynastic Rearrangements on the Eve of the First Mithridatic War.* *Historia* 55, 2006, 285–297; M. J. Olbrycht: *Mithradates VI Eupator and Iran*, in: J. M. Højte (ed.): *Mithridates VI Eupator and the Pontic kingdom.* Aarhus 2009, forthcoming).
- 3 See M. J. Olbrycht: *Bosporos, the Steppe Peoples of the Black Sea Area and Parthian Iran in the Grand Strategy of Mithradates VI Eupator*, in: V. N. Zinkov'ya (ed.): *Bospor Kimmeriyskiy i varvarskiy mir v period antichnosti i srednevekov'ya.* Militaria. Kerch 2008, 324–325).

political situation in Anatolia, Syria, and Transcaucasia in the 90's–80's BC, more attention should be given to the Arsacids' political aims.

The next two chapters show Roman relations with Parthia from the battle of Carrhae till the time of Augustus (pp. 83–128). Lerouge supplies a brief characteristic of political relations and the Roman ideology which had become fully formed under Augustus, with the Parthians as a grand adversary playing a key role in it. They were seen as dangerous enemies whom, however, Augustus reputedly subdued through diplomacy. Lerouge rightly notes and appreciates the notions of equality between Rome and Parthia as two great powers, as expressed by several Augustus-time authors, including by *Iust.* 41, 1, 1 (pp. 119–123).

Relatively little room is devoted to Roman-Parthian relations in the period 14–224 AD, all compressed in just a single chapter (pp. 129–169). Lerouge rightly acknowledges the importance of Armenia to both powers. In her assessment of Trajan's actions, she accepts Roman propaganda too literally, treading within existing paradigms. And so, Parthamaspates' coronation, feted in Roman propaganda, was in itself a defeat for Trajan, who had tried to organize the territories won from the Parthians into provinces, and not a vassal puppet state. For the king of the Parthians and for the *Imperium Parthicum* elites, the coronation itself carried little weight as the usurper could claim no backing from any major Parthian faction.

The second part of the book supplies not only, as the somewhat misleading title suggests, an ethnographic image of the Parthians, but also an analysis of important aspects of their history. These include the beginnings of the Arsacid state, geography and the empire's territorial extent, political institutions, warfare, religion, and mores of the Parthians. Many of these issues, such as the Parthian empire's borders and military matters, clearly go beyond the declared "ethnographic image".

A valuable discourse is offered for the names records applied to the Arsacid empire (pp. 196–198). The discussion of the eastern frontier (pp. 215–223) reveals certain conceptual shortcomings resulting in an erroneous treatment of Mithradates I's (ca. 170–132 BC) eastern conquests. The relevant information from *Trogus/Iustinus* and *Diodoros* about that king's conquests reaching India is considered laudatory first, historical a distant second (pp. 219–220), as these authors are said to have simply tried to show a match for Alexander. Here, the desire to study a "picture of the Parthians" visibly biased a sober assessment of their historical attainments. In speaking about Mithradates I's eastern conquests, Lerouge should have cited such key sources as *Orosius* 5, 4, 16 and *Strabo* 11, 9, 2. Lerouge devotes much thought to fairy-tale Roman visions of the east and their dreams of conquest all the way to India (pp. 221–223). By and large, then, Lerouge does not treat the Parthian conquest of Bactria and adjacent lands as historical fact. Mithradates I's operations reaching India are

not figment of the imagination.⁴ The analysis of information on Parthia's eastern fringes virtually ignores Apollodoros of Artemita, who merits only marginal mention (p. 218, n. 125) and is absent from the index of authors.

Lerouge describes in detail the land of Parthyene (pp. 226–244). Like A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White⁵ she believes that originally the Parthian state was limited to lands north of Kopet Dagh (pp. 228–229), which is wrong if Polyb. 10,28–31 is to be believed. A discussion of a strictly geographically and politically understood Parthia/Parthyene would require a closer study of sources for Alexander's era. Already by then, Parthia/Parthyene as a province of north-eastern Iran had expanded to include lands as far as the Caspian Gates in the west. This is not an extent only achieved by the Arsacids, as Lerouge would have us believe (pp. 230–231).

Honest coverage is given to Parthian political institutions. The author analyzes a passage by Poseidonios apud Strab. 11,9,3 on how the Parthians elected a king. The passage speaks of a dual senate existing. In this reference, the meaning of the verb *καθιστάναι* (pp. 245–255) is disputed. Lerouge correctly concludes that the account does not suggest that the Parthian monarchy was elective but rather that the senate played an advisory role (p. 250). Lerouge rejects Wolski's hypothesis that the term *βασίλαιοι* could refer to governors (p. 250, n. 15). Here, however, it would be worth citing Plinius 6,112 and his phrase about 18 kingdoms (*regna*) in Parthia. The author points to the considerable importance of priests (*μάγοι*) under the Arsacids (pp. 254 f.), but their status certainly was not as elevated as under the Sasanians.

Lerouge offers a detailed discussion of the Arsacids' royal banquets as described by Poseidonios. She rightly points to similarities between Poseidonios' account and the relevant fragment by Herakleides on 4th-century Persia (p. 257). Furthermore, she cites Tang-e Sarvak and Hatra reliefs as material useful for her analysis (p. 258). Poseidonios relates the original custom of the Parthian king tossing bits of food among courtiers. A similar practice was observed among Thracians by Xenophon (*Anab.* 7,3,21). Lerouge sees Poseidonios' descriptions as an illustration of Parthian despotism (pp. 260–267).

Much space is devoted to warfare (pp. 273–321). In studying respective wars of the Parthians against the Seleucids, Lerouge belittles the struggles under Seleucos II (p. 274). In terms of Parthian armament and tactics, the chapter has little originality, but valuable insights are offered on the overall character of the military and its perceptions by Roman authors. The author

4 Lerouge fails to quote the seminal book by P. Daffinà: *L'immigrazione dei Sakā nella Drangiana* (ISMEO 9), Roma 1967. Another notable, if not wholly successful publication is J.R. Gardiner-Garden: *Apollodoros of Artemita and the Central Asian Skythians*. Papers on Inner Asia, No. 3. Bloomington, Indiana 1987, as it offers some interesting proposals.

5 From Samarkhand to Sardis. London 1993.

points to Trogus/Iustinus' accounts and tries to justify the opinion held by the ancients that Parthian warfare was Persian and Scythian in origin (pp. 303–305). During the late Republic, the Romans thought highly of Parthian military prowess, especially after Carrhae and Pakoros' invasion. Among Roman opinions (pp. 305–308), Lerouge rightly stresses not only the many voices of poets, but, more importantly, of dispassionate historians like Fronto, who said, *olim adversus Romanos intentum et infestum et instructum, bellis exercitatus ac tam ab insidiis Romanorum* (Princ. Hist. 9). Other views of Parthia were also persistent: In an instructive set of accounts, some Roman authors dismissed Parthians as unskilled at hand-to-hand combat, poor at poliorcetics, perfidious, treacherous, and lacking perseverance (pp. 308–317). Lerouge makes an interesting comparison of accounts of two wars: the campaign of Ventidius in which he defeated the Parthians in 38 and the campaign of Antonius of 36 BC. Both differ greatly in their descriptions of the Parthians, partly reflecting the respective authors' prejudices (pp. 310–313).

In religious matters, valuable remarks are offered about Mithra (pp. 327–330) which aptly point to the ceremony with Nero and Tiridates (66 AD) and to Parthian coins as an important source on beliefs. Lerouge discusses the possibility that Roman Mithraism derived from Parthia.

In the summary, Lerouge notes that stereotypical notions about Parthians as known from Roman accounts largely continue Greek prejudices against the Achaemenid Persians (pp. 360 f.). In the end, the “ethnographic image” and “political image” prove inextricably bound up (p. 363). The work concludes with a comprehensive bibliography (pp. 365–390).

The concept of the book seems not thoroughly thought out as both parts, political and ethnographic, intertwine throughout (such as in the military and in political institutions). At times, the reader is at a loss about whether the author is citing Roman notions or is trying to uncover historical truth.

Despite its shortcomings, Lerouge's book is a valuable contribution to the study of Parthian history. The author has put in much effort into compiling sources and presenting views existing in scholarship. Often she contributes her own findings and valuable remarks. What with the book being Lerouge's scholarly debut, it deserves appreciation.

Marek Jan Olbrycht, Rzeszów (Polen)
marekolbrycht@wp.pl