

Ted Kaizer (ed.): *Religion, Society, and Culture at Dura-Europos*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press 2016 (Yale Classical Studies 38). xxii, 310 p., 64 ill. £ 70.99. ISBN: 978-1-107-12379-3.

The book is comprised of fourteen contributions to which an introductory note by the editor is added. A part of the papers was presented at a colloquium with the same title held in December 2008 at the Department of Classics and Ancient History of Durham University (UK), another part was added later (see Acknowledgments, xvii–xviii). From the Preface (xv) the reader is informed that no mentions of the destruction of the site at Dura-Europos from 2011 onwards would be referenced anywhere else in the contributions, although some of the contributors intended to do so. Perhaps, in this way, the living memory of the ruins of Dura-Europos, as they once were will be perpetuated. I fully agree with the unspoken statement which emerges from the lines written by the editor in the preface, namely, that what happened at the site (and throughout Syria) starting in 2011 and the assessment of the destruction of the cultural heritage are the subject of other investigations which will have to be carried out once the current conflict(s) have ended, and not only by the scholars dealing with matters of Antiquity.

The “Introduction” (1–15) by the editor Ted Kaizer, makes a journey from the time Dura-Europos was identified by 19th century travellers and early scholars, to the way Dura-Europos can be seen today by the wider public and scholars alike, through collections in museums in Syria and the Western world. Although the reader is informed that the book is not a “challenger” to the work of the *Mission Franco-Syrienne* (8), it surely is a book addressed primarily to the Anglophone scholarly community, as the papers are all written in English. In Antiquity, at least ten different dialects and scripts are known to have existed in the town founded on the banks of the Euphrates river (4). Perhaps the papers should have reflected this richness and variety by ways of contributing in different international modern languages.

The first major contribution is written by Leonardo Gregoratti and entitled “Dura-Europos. A Greek Town of the Parthian Empire” (16–29). It gives the reader an insight into the history of Dura-Europos during the Arsacid period, especially from the first century AD until 165 AD, and the way the city was presumably seen by Roman historiography (Tacitus and Flavius

Josephus)<sup>1</sup>, paying attention to other Hellenic settlements under Parthian rule, in particular Seleucia, and even Susa. It seems that in Dura-Europos, the Hellenized elite (which is defined as a social construct), ruled over the rest of the population, and the example of Lysias' family shows how they took power locally, being second only to the Great King.

The contributions then turn to the period of the Roman rule at Dura, roughly stretching from the middle of the second century AD to the middle of the third century AD. Jennifer A. Baird in her "Everyday Life in Roman Dura-Europos. The Evidence of Dress Practices" (30–56), gives an insight on the materiality of dress practice found in Dura, from textiles to earrings and *fibulae*, highlighting their distribution and functionality, or in some cases, even their prices. Finally, the paper analyses these artefacts from a gender-based angle (as much as the limits go for such an approach), differentiating the finds from the ones used only by the military personnel, to the ones used only by women (most probably of the elite).

Michael Sommer's, "Acculturation, Hybridity, Créolité. Mapping Cultural Diversity in Dura-Europos" (57–67) starts his *exposée* with a theoretical framework on modern concepts (acculturation, hybridity, créolité) used by scholars and applies them on two distinct cases in Dura (57–61). First, it is shown how the wall paintings of the synagogue can be integrated methodologically into the frame, as the visual 'messages' are portraying important episodes of Jewish theology and Jewishness, still depicting the Great Temple with a Greco-Roman temple façade, remarkably, as the author observes, in a town where religious architecture "looked strikingly unclassical" (66). On the other hand, the portrayal of the story of Mordecai and Esther transpires another message. The Jewish community was 'taught' the moral of the story that the historical background of Jewish diaspora shows that it can develop in a world of otherness, such as the community of Dura was. The theoretical framework is applied yet in the second case study, namely papyri mentioning three distinct women in different legal documents, not only from Dura but also from the Middle Euphrates. The situation shows how these women acted basically with no guardian, explicitly pointing out Roman law when it suited them. As already the author observed, Roman law had been applied randomly at the Eastern fringes of the Roman world.

1 See also E. Dabrowa: Tacitus on the Parthians. In: *Electrum* 24, 2017, 171–189 for an analysis on the work of Tacitus.

Lucinda Dirven's "The Problem with Parthian Art at Dura" (68–88) begins with the historiography and methodological problems of the so-called 'Parthian Art' as defined by the major contributions by Michael Rostovtzeff and Daniel Schlumberger. Their view considers the Syrian-Mesopotamian cities in the periphery, while the core had to be the yet unknown art of Ctesiphon, a view which the author herself rejects as a label (73).

Maura Heyn's contribution called "Gesture at Dura-Europos. A New Interpretation of the So-called 'Scène Énigmatique'" (89–98) gives a new interpretation of the scene painted on the east wall of the *pronaos* of the temple of Bel. According to the author, the scene depicts the discovery of Ariadne by Dionysos on the island of Naxos. I am inclined to acknowledge the fact that we are dealing with a Dionysiac scene. However, what the author failed to provide with an answer is the question of the ties between Dionysos and Bel in sanctuaries dedicated to the former deity, or to put it more bluntly: why is there a Dionysiac scene depicted in a sanctuary consecrated to Bel? Although this aspect deserves a more thorough enquiry, it should be noted that in Dacia, both at Tibiscum and Porolissum, where sanctuaries dedicated to Bel were archaeologically identified, it seems that they formed some sort of 'sacred areas' together with sanctuaries dedicated to Liber Pater.<sup>2</sup> It seems that the religious appropriation of Liber Pater/Dionysos to Bel was quite common in the Roman world, not only in the regional milieu of Dura-Europos and both the Durene and Dacian examples are exponential in this regard.

The paper of Jean-Baptiste Yon explores the topic of "Women and the Religious Life of Dura-Europos" (99–113), focusing on the pre-Roman period, where women who were members of the most prominent Durene families, were encountered epigraphically in the *salles à gradins* of the sanctuaries of Artemis, Atargatis and Azzanathkona. The author contextualizes the finds both chronologically and geographically in order to outline the reasons why the attestations of women in these *salles à gradins* are encountered specifically in this timeframe, while in Palmyra, for example, the epigraphic evidence of

2 See for a brief mentioning alongside previous bibliographic references in D. Deac: Materialitatea religioasă la Porolissum. Studiu de caz: cultul lui Silvanus. In: D. Băcuț-Crișan (et al.) (eds): 100 de ani de arheologie în județul Sălaj (1918–2018). Cluj-Napoca 2018, 147–159 and 225–228, nos. 74–80.

women in religious contexts is based on a totally different, less visible, paradigm.

Julian Buchmann's contribution deals with the "Multifunctional Sanctuaries at Dura-Europos" (114–125). The author uses both ancient and modern analogies in his effort to demonstrate that the rooms with benches found in the sacred confinements of temples at Dura were not specifically designated for the priests and their ritual meals after they performed the sacrifices, but also used by travellers, merchants and others who were temporarily visiting Dura.

"The Mithraeum of Dura-Europos. New Perspectives" (126–143) is authored by Tommaso Gnoli and is based on the reinterpretation of the two famous reliefs found in the cultic niche as well as the frescoes found in the sanctuary. Based on the new interpretation, the author raises the question whether the assumed general overview for the last almost half a century of the Western origin of the Mithras cults should be re-evaluated, returning to the initial arguments of Franz Cumont who proposed a diffusion from Iran to the West.

Cristina Marta Acqua's "Imperial Representation at Dura-Europos. Suggestions for Urban Paths" (144–164) deals with the Imperial evidence the author encounters both in the military and civilian milieu, stressing on the significant differences between them. To give one example, as the sources are primarily written, the usage of Latin in the military milieu, respectively of Greek in the civilian one is one defying argument (159–160). She reaches the conclusion that these pieces of evidence were "strategically" located in the settlement (163–164).

Jacqueline Austin's paper called "Thoughts on Two Latin *Dipinti*" (165–176) analyses two dipinti found in the area of the *principia* and the so-called "scribal complex" and, adding P. Dura 54, the famous *Feriale Duranum*, argues for the model of commissioner-ordinator-craftsman (craftsmen) model. What also transpires from her conclusions is that different types of scripts were used depending on taste and occasion in various parts of the Roman world, focusing on the similarities in style of a text from Mérida, in Spain, with P. Dura 54. Perhaps another example should be given here. A brick of hypocaust system (*bessalis*) found at Porolissum (Roman Dacia) has a similar

styled script as the examples from Dura and Mérida, although more rudimentary executed.<sup>3</sup> What is remarkable is the fact that the actual funerary monument was found, bearing the exact inscription, including the identical style as the text on the brick.<sup>4</sup> This example gives further insights on the model commissioner-ordinator-craftsman (craftsmen), as it shows how the *ordinator* created the model on a brick before burning (under the supervision of the commissioner ?), while the craftsman copied it precisely on the funerary monument.

Another paper on epigraphy is Loren T. Stuckenbruck's contribution called "The Bilingual Palmyrene-Greek Inscriptions at Dura-Europos" (177–189). Here, the author starts with an overview and typology of Palmyrene bilingual inscriptions (178–181) and the relations between the Aramaic and Greek texts, for which the Palmyrene inscriptions are an important source due to their high number. Few such inscriptions are found at Dura and are contextualized in the wider frame: 1) inscriptions that do not contain the same text (181–182); 2) texts where one version is longer/shorter than the other (182–184); 3) texts which mostly overlap (184–185); 4) overlapping texts with specific formulas for each language (185–188); 5) word for word translations (188).

Kai Ruffing authored the paper "Economic Life in Roman Dura-Europos" (190–198). The author concentrates on the economic agents evidenced by different types of sources, the impact of Roman military in terms of economic growth, and how economy itself played a significant role in the cultural contacts and the acculturation sequences.

The penultimate paper is authored by Susan B. Downey, "The Dangers of Adventurous Reconstruction. Frank Brown at Europos-Doura" (199–205), in which she provides a critical approach on the restorations made by Frank Brown, taking the examples of The Citadel Palace, the first phase of the Temple of Zeus Megistos, the painting in the Temple of Adonis and the ones in the Temple of Zeus Theos. Lisa R. Brody's paper called "Dura-

3 IDR Suppl. II (2016), CLXXX (photo and drawing), with previous bibliographic references. Text: *D(is) M(anibus) Eustina/ Afri vixit (annis) XXX A(elius?) I(u)st/i(nus?) l(ibertae) b(ene) m(erenti) p(osuit)*.

4 AE 1974, 549.

Europos and Yale: Past, Present, and Future” (206–218) presents the magnificent artefacts preserved at Yale from a museological perspective.

The book ends with 54 plates (numbered I–LXIV, 219–273), with the illustrations used in the contributions, a bibliographic list of all the papers (275–299), an index of sources (304–305) and finally a general index (307–310).

From epigraphy and religion to art and the contemporary destiny of the evidence found in this famous city called by modern historians the “Pompei of the East” (1), the book delivers a comprehensive, at times very vivid and detailed image on different aspects related to Dura-Europos, provided by some of the most excellent specialists in the field. Undoubtedly, it stands out as a leading contribution into the understanding of both Dura-Europos and, *in extenso*, the broader context of the Graeco-Roman East in which it developed.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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