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Peter Wick, Markus Zehnder. *The Parthian Empire and its Religions. Studies in the Dynamics of Religious Diversity: Das Partherreich und seine Religionen. Studien zu Dynamiken religiöser Pluralität.* Gutenberg: Computus, 2012. 218 S. ISBN 978-3-940598-13-4.

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P. Wick u.a. (Hrsg.): The Parthian Empire and its Religions

The book under review is the latest fruit of the existence of a transdisciplinary research consortium at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (the Käte Hamburger Kolleg "Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe") which has produced a publication consisting of a combination of papers delivered at a conference in Bochum in 2008 and articles which provide a thematic complement to this.

The idea behind this volume is to shed more light on the religious makeup of the Parthian kingdom - a topic whose importance has perhaps not been fully realized in previous scholarship. Indeed, the position of the Parthian kingdom can be aptly characterized as "Mittellage" (p. 11) in both geographical and chronological terms. Namely, it spanned a vast geographical area from East to West and so "connected the vast steppe lands in central Asia, the area of the Caspic Sea and the Caucasus with Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, bordering Asia Minor to the west and the Indus river to the east" (p. 9). Such a vast kingdom included many religious traditions (Greek-Macedonian, Jewish, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Indian, Christian and many other local and mixed religious traditions that often escape any strict labelling) which did not remain in isolation but creatively influenced each other. Therefore, the task taken on by the authors to present the religious makeup of the Parthian kingdom in ten papers is certainly very important and worthy of attention.

The first paper by Dieter Metzler ("Aspekte religiöser Vielfalt im Partherreich") gives an overview of the religious makeup of the Parthian kingdom. The main impression one gets from this paper is that of striking religious diversity within the confines of the Parthian realm. Namely, Metzler surveys basic evidence for the presence of Zoroastrian, old-Oriental (understood as local Semitic cultures, e.g. in Babylon, Assur or Hatra), Greek, Jewish and Christian traditions. Separate attention is also given to the extant evidence for religious inclinations of Parthian rulers and members of Parthian elites (and they turn out to be both Zoroastrian and Hellenistic). Furthermore, Metzler stresses that all these various traditions did not live in isolation, but interacted.

Markus Zehnder's first paper in this volume ("Religionspolitik im antiken Vorderen Orient: Assyrer und Parther") is devoted to a comparison of the religious policy of the Neo-Assyrian and Parthian empires. It starts with a theoretical consideration of various possible models of interaction between "Regierungseliten", "religiosen Eliten" and "Volk" and then gives a thorough presentation of the religious policy of the Assyrians. In Zehnder's view, the Assyrian policy towards other peoples and their religions, though it did not in general include religious persecution and forced conversion *per se*, was marked by the belief that Assyria alone presents the *kosmos* and consequently that the Assyrians are called to subdue and bring order to the surrounding chaos on behalf of their patron deity, Assur. Such a view makes the Assyrian model gravitate towards "homogenization" (p. 12). In the case of the Parthians, Zehnder also presents the available data and concludes that their approach was characterized by a great deal of tolerance towards different local cultures in their empire. In turn, the Parthians themselves exhibited inclinations towards both Iranian cults and Hellenistic culture.

Two papers are devoted to numismatic issues. First, Linda-Marie Günther ("Seleukidische Vorbilder der parthischen Münzikonographie") shows that some stylistic features of figures of Apollo (an omphalos-like object and a bow) and Heracles (in a standing or sitting pose) on coins struck on behalf of the Parthian kings were adopted from the repertoire of the Seleucid coinage. At the same time, the iconography of Apollo and Heracles was creatively transformed so that it could be understood by both Hellenized and non-Hellenized subjects

of the Parthians. For instance, the motif of a bow without an arrow was more appropriate for "the king of the kings" as someone with a supernatural disposition. Secondly, Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis ("Parthian Coins: Kingship and Divine Glory") offers an inventory of iconography on coins and reliefs as well as of inscriptions which are of religious character and can be interpreted as serving the religious legitimization of the kingship.

In her paper "Feindeskinder an Sohnes statt. Parthische Königssöhne im Haus des Augustus" Meret Strothmann suggests first that sending young Parthian princes to Rome (frequently labelled as sending hostages) can be understood as an aspect of *amicitia* between Rome and Parthia and secondly that, once in Rome, the Parthian princes were treated as members of *familia Caesaris*. In his second paper in this volume, entitled "Religious Dynamics in the Parthian Empire". The cases of Hatra and Arbela", Zehnder gives a survey of evidence for the religious makeup of Hatra and Arbela (Adiabene). In the case of Hatra, Zehnder thoroughly presents onomastic, epigraphic and iconographic data with the purpose of sketching the ethnic makeup as well as cultural and religious inclinations of Hatra's population. Zehnder also takes a closer look at some select issues: the characteristics of the cult of Heracles, the existence of a specific cult in Hatra for the Arabs only, the existence of a Christian community, the appearance of Hatrean kings as priests, and finally "dog" as Nergal's epithet. As for Arbela, Zehnder's presentation is limited to brief comments on Josephus' *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 20, 17-96 and a summary of the content of the Chronicle of Arbela (preceded by brief remarks on the discussion on its authenticity).

Next, Geoffrey Herman offers a brief overview of sources on "the Jews of Parthian Babylonia". His discussion includes three groups of sources: "Contemporary Non-rabbinic Sources on the Jews of Parthian Babylonia" (mainly Josephus), "Contemporary Rabbinic Sources on the Jews of Parthian Babylonia" and finally "Sasanian Rabbinic Sources on the Jews of Parthian Babylonia. Herman places particular emphasis on the striking change in recent scholarship which came to realize that Babylonian rabbis in the Sasanian period tampered more aggressively with their sources on Babylonian Jews in the Parthian period than previously acknowledged (through embellishment or even invention of these traditions) and consequently we can hardly rely on them in order to reconstruct the Parthian period. In his paper entitled "Jewish Acculturation to Persian Norms at the End of the Parthian Period" Yaakov Elman examines rabbinic traditions concerning two rabbis, Abba Arikha (known as "Rav") and his colleague, Samuel, who lived at the turn of the Parthian and Sasanian periods. According to Elman, these traditions show a great deal of acculturation of both rabbis (and consequently their contemporaries) into the surrounding Parthian and Sasanian culture, e.g. the adoption of the custom of temporary marriage by Rav or the visit to the Beit Abidan (being probably an annex building of a Zoroastrian temple where interreligious discussions were held) by Samuel.

Marco Frenschkowski gives a detailed overview of the relationship between Christians and Zoroastrians under both the Parthians and the Sasanians ("Frühe Christen in der Begegnung mit dem Zoroastrismus: Eine Orientierung"). His overview includes different perspectives - literary, theological, social and political. To be precise, Frenschkowski first surveys possible Iranian influences on New Testament and early Christian literature (esp. Mt 2 and Revelation), and then turns to references to Zoroastrianism among the "Church Fathers" and in gnostic literature. The knowledge of Greek and Latin "Church Fathers" is frequently shown to reflect "mehr antiquarische Belesenheit als ethnologisches Problembewusstsein" (p. 171), while at the same time Frenschkowski stresses that Christian authors in Armenian and Syriac show a detailed knowledge of Zoroastrianism. A considerable part of Frenschkowski's paper gives a sketch of the history of Christians under Parthian and Sasanian rule. Here Frenschkowski suggests an in-depth explanation of the conflicts in theological and social terms; what is more, he aims to include not only Christian, but also the Parthian and Sasanian perspectives of this conflict.

The last paper in the volume is that of Peter Bruns ("Weltentstehung und Schöpfung bei Bardaisan von Edessa") who analyses the cosmogonic views of Bardaisan of Edessa. Indeed, Bardaisan's thought can be seen as another good example of the creative amalgamation of different cultures typical of the Parthian kingdom: to Bardaisan, the act of creation was an act of "Zufall", and his interpretation of five "classical elements" is permeated with gnostic, Syrian and particularly Zoroastrian ideas, as Bruns aptly shows.

This book is certainly of high quality and will be useful as a good introduction for scholars aiming at specific research issues. However, a few more critical remarks, as usual, could perhaps be made. Metzler's paper plays an important role in this volume as a very useful introduction written by an eminent scholar who has many times made important points about the religion of the Parthians. See Dieter Metzler, Das Pferd auf den Münzen des Labienus - ein Mithras-Symbol?, in: Sencer Şahin / Elmar Schwertheim / Jörg Wagner (eds.), Studien zur Re-

ligion und Kultur Kleinasiens. Festschrift für Friedrich Karl Dörner, Bd. 2, Leiden 1978, pp. 619-638; Saddled Horse without Horseman - a Religious Symbol of the Parthian Time, Miras (Ashgabat) 2 (2002), pp. 162-167; Arsakiden und andere parthische Fürsten als Anhänger fremder Religionen, in: Anabasis 1 (2010), pp. 226-235. Let me only add that it is controversial whether the presence of the Jews in the Parthian kingdom can be seen as a direct continuation of the exiles from northern Israel (8th c. BCE) and Judah (6th c. BCE). We know very little about the fate of the former in particular Our knowledge is limited to scarce onomastic evidence. See Bob Becking, The Fall of Samaria. An Historical and Archaeological Study, Leiden 1992, pp. 62, 92-93. and such a view touches on another controversial issue - it presupposes that the people deported by the Assyrians and the Babylonians might already have adhered to what became known only a few centuries later as Judaism, and whose most remarkable developments are certainly to be dated to the period after the 8th c. BCE (including "rigoroser Monotheismus" on p. 21). For a great deal of variety in what is known as "Second Temple Judaism" see George W. E. Nickelsburg, Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins. Diversity, Continuity, and Transformation, Minneapolis 2003. For the fact that the term Judaism is not frequently used up to the 1st c. CE and therefore must be treated with caution when describing the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods (not to mention the 8th c. BCE), see Steve Mason, Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History, in: Journal for the Study of Judaism 38 (2007), pp. 457-512.

Further, Zehnder's presentation of the available data from Hatra is very thorough. However, some interpretations of this data, especially of the onomastic data, are controversial. That is to say, Zehnder uses personal names as patterns of ethnicity (and as patterns of culture and politics, which seems to be more justified). For instance, to Zehnder "the appearance of some Greek names may hint at the existence of a small Greek community in the city" (p. 104). On the contrary, it is widely known that Greek names were used by local peoples throughout much of the ancient Near East as a means of culture absorbed by education (and not by birth), and mostly did not reveal one's ethnicity. Likewise, if we assume that the local population in and around Hatra was, generally speaking, Semitic, then the appearance of foreign names - Iranian and Greek - should be interpreted as indicators of cultural and political affiliation of their bearers in the first place (and this interpretation is quoted by Zehnder on pp. 104-105, n. 10, but only as one possible option; his preference in the main text is towards names as patterns of ethnicity). While interpreting Iranian or Greek names as belonging to ethnic Parthians (or Greeks) in Mesopotamia can on occasion be the right guess, in most cases will be a mistake.

As far as Zehnder's presentation of the religious situation in Arbela is concerned, the paper has one essential flaw in its assumptions. Namely, Zehnder takes Arbela as its geographical focus, but in fact speaks interchangeably about Arbela and Adiabene over the course of his paper. Zehnder treats both notions as synonyms, but they are not. Perhaps Arbelitis (the region between the river basin of the Zabs with Arbela as its main city) is what Zehnder means by Arbela (the main city of Arbelitis - note too that the name Arbela does not appear in *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 20,17-96; it is only an assumption that all scenes set at the royal court in this passage are to be located in Arbela). One could perhaps understand Adiabene as Arbelitis during some historical periods, but even then there is a great deal more available data about religious practices in Adiabene than that presented by Zehnder: Parthian sarcophagi in Kilizu, Strabo's text about Anahita or Nanaia, Tacitus' description of the cult of Heracles with some distinctively Iranian features, to give only a few examples. Tac. ann. 12,13; Strab. 16,1,3-4. See also Michał Marciak, Izates and Helena of Adiabene. A Study on Literary Traditions and History, Proefschrift Universiteit Leiden, Leiden 2012, pp. 147, 159-173 <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/20137> (07.12.2012). What is more, Parthian Adiabene certainly included Nineveh, and there is a lot of archaeological data of religious significance from that city. Michał Marciak, Seleucid-Parthian Adiabene in the Light of Ancient Geographical and Ethnographical Texts, in: Anabasis 2 (2011), pp. 179-208; Marciak, Izates, pp. 165-170. Furthermore, there are a few minor things to be corrected in Zehnder's treatment of Arbela (Adiabene): I cannot see how the names Izates and Monobazos can be called Hellenistic. They are indeed recorded in Josephus in Greek, but widely and convincingly interpreted as being of Iranian origin. Marco Frenschkowski, Iranische Königslegende in der Adiabene. Zur Vorgeschichte von Josephus: Antiquitates XX, 17-33, in: Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft 140 (1990), pp. 213-233, esp. 216-218; Tal Ilan, Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity. Part I: Palestine 330 BCE-200 CE, Tübingen 2002, pp. 351-352; Marciak, Izates, pp. 181-182. The inclusion of Adiabene in "Trajan's provincial system" is disputed. Fergus Millar, The Roman Near East: 31 BC - AD 337, Harvard 1993, p. 101. The king of Adiabene at the time of Trajan's invasion was actually called Mebarsapes, and not Meharsapes, Cass. Dio 68,22.

Talmudic traditions concerning a rabbinic academy in Arbela are likely to be dated only to the late 3rd c. CE. David Goodblatt, The Jews in Babylonia, 66-235 CE, in: Steven T. Katz (ed.), The Cambridge History of Judaism, Vol. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period, Cambridge 2006, pp. 82-92, esp. 84.

In my opinion, this book is a valuable publication about the religious aspects of the Parthian kingdom and can be particularly useful as a good overview and introduction for further research.

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