

**Peter Edwell, *Rome and Persia at War. Imperial Competition and Contact, 193–363 CE*.** Routledge: London and New York. 2021. Pp. xiv + 282. 59 B/W illustrations. US\$160 hb; US\$ 44.05 e-book. ISBN 9781472418173.

With this volume, Peter Edwell comments on a variety of issues designed to supplement Dodgeon and Lieu's wellknown collection of raw sources for the first century and a half of the interactions between the Roman and Persian empires.<sup>1</sup> E. states (xi) that his book is the culmination of his own search for more evidence from the Sasanian world to incorporate into the story told by textual sources that focus almost entirely on the Roman imperial world west of the frontier between empires, and he indeed introduces more sources from the Sasanian side of the frontier, particularly surviving remnants of the material culture largely absent from Dodgeon and Lieu. Some of the other broad themes in this volume include the interactions between the two empires, in military, political, and diplomatic terms, as well as the impact of the internal processes of change in each empire on the dynamics of relations with each other. In some ways, this book is a logical successor to E.'s earlier volume on the Roman frontier with Parthia and the first two generations of Sasanian Persia.<sup>2</sup>

In his first chapter ('Introduction', 1–24), E. initially outlines the book's aims, then traverses a pair of additional subjects. The first is a treatment of sources and relevant historiography; the second is a discussion of 'Geography and topography of territorial competition between Rome and Persia'. In effect, Persia and Rome contested control (sometimes possession) of the territory that lay between the portions of Asia Minor and Syria in the Roman sphere and the northwestern regions of the Sasanian world. Armenia was the most important, but the kingdoms of Iberia, Colchis and Albania, as well as northern Mesopotamia, on both banks of the Tigris, and regions further afield, such as Arabia, enter into the equation. E. briefly surveys all these to lay groundwork for subsequent chapters. The first of these (Chapter 2: 'Rome and Parthia: conflict and diplomacy from Sulla to Caracalla', 25–56) is given over to consideration of historical background, more specifically, a survey of Rome's relationship with the Parthian regime that preceded the new Sasanian empire.<sup>3</sup> Inevitably, one primary focus is conflict over Armenia, but E. also signals the development of disputes, from Trajan onwards, about a number of additional territories in northern Mesopotamia hitherto (and sometimes briefly later) governed by dependent and semi-independent rulers.

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<sup>1</sup> M.H. Dodgeon and S.N.C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars AD 226–363. A Documentary History* (London and New York, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Peter N. Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia. The middle Euphrates, Mesopotamia and Palmyra under Roman Control* (London and New York, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> One minor issue first appears in this chapter. Ever since J. Wolski, "Arsace II et la généalogie des premiers Arsacides," *Historia* 11 (1962) 138–145, showed that Artabanus I was an unneeded emendation and not a separate ruler, the numeration of kings with this name has changed in most subsequent work, such that Artabanus V is now regularly identified as Artabanus IV or Artabanus IV (V).

Most of the remaining chapters are devoted to specific periods in the historical sequence of frontier contact. Chapter 3 ('Conflict and diplomacy between Rome and Persia from Ardashir to Philip I', 57–85) describes and assesses the first years of the relationship between the newly-minted Sasanian empire and the well-established Roman world. The early part of the chapter focuses on the respective situations in the two empires, with Persia on the rise and Rome in a decline; a brief assessment of the first military encounters follows. Chapter 4 ('Persian Triumph, Roman Defeat', 87–110) details the circumstances leading to the successes of Shapur I in the 250s and 260s and the reasons, primarily the grave situation at the Danubian frontier, for Rome's inability to mount a sufficient response to the aggression of the Sasanian regime. As in the previous chapter, and in subsequent ones as well, historical narrative is not the focus, but also not entirely absent. Instead, E. offers vignettes on specific topics related to the conflicts that fall within the scope of the chapter. Thus, short but separate discussions, where E. delves into specific topics under such headings as 'Armenia and Iberia under Persian control', 'The Persian capture of Antioch', 'The capture of Dura Europos and Circesium', and 'Captives' (on the fate of the Romans brought to Persia after the capture of the Valerian), take up much of the chapter.

Chapter 5 ('The last years of the reign of Shapur I to the Persian invasion of Carus', 111–131) addresses issues that arose during the years after the capture of Valerian. In that period, Shapur withdrew his forces to Sasanian territory to deal with internal matters; after his death in AD 270, he was succeeded by his sons Hormizd and Bahram I, each briefly, then Bahram II. E. addresses Shapur's ŠKZ and a series of rock reliefs in a section titled 'Shapur's commemoration of the victories over the Romans' (with several images of Sasanian reliefs). Also, a discussion of the Palmyrene Odenathus and the aftermath of his death precedes an account of 'The Persian invasion of Carus', the only significant invasion of either side by the other in this period. Chapter 6 ('The relationship between Rome and Persia during the reigns of Diocletian, Bahram II and Narseh', 132–156) continues the now-established pattern of short sections on relevant issues, among them 'The return of Tiridates to Armenia', 'The eastern defensive reforms of Diocletian', 'Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula', 'The treaty or foedus [sic] of Nisibis', and 'Celebrations of Victory'. In Chapter 7 ('Rome and Persia during the reigns of Constantine and Shapur II', 157–181), two sections are devoted to the impact of Christianity in the relationship between empires: 'Armenia, Christianity and the build-up to war', and 'Christianity and the threat of war between Constantine and Shapur II'. Other sections detail issues like 'Trade', 'Sources and historiography', and 'The internal situation in Persia ca. 300–25'.

The inevitable war between empires did not break out until the reign of Constantius II, treated in Chapter 8 ('Conflict and diplomacy between Rome and Persia under Constantius II and Shapur II', 182–211). Other than a respite for a portion of the 350s, wars and battles at the intersection between empires (and elsewhere in the Roman world) were more or less constant in the years of Constantius II's rule: three sieges of Nisibis, a nocturnal battle at Singara, and the Persian capture of Amida are among the

specific events considered in the chapter. Shapur II's successes in the late 350s and early 360s induced Julian to undertake an ill-fated campaign against his Persian counterpart in 363, which E. addresses in Chapter 9 ('The Persian invasion of Julian and its aftermath', 212–243), with several sections devoted to specific aspects or events of the invasion. The last part of the chapter considers the treaty made after Julian's death by his successor Jovian, the differing reactions to the campaign and the treaty, and the aftermath of both. The narrative ends with Chapter 10 ('Conclusion', 244–254), followed by the 'Bibliography' (255–273) and an Index (275–282). Quite usefully, the Bibliography prefaces the standard listing of 'Modern scholarship' with sections on 'Inscriptions, coins and papyri' and 'Ancient texts' (including editions).

The survey above does not do justice to the rich variety of subjects treated in the many segments of the book's chapters. One consequence of E.'s choice of technique is that it leads at some points to a disjointed storyline, in the sense that narrative flow has been relinquished in favor of informative short discussions. That may matter to some readers, but perhaps not to others: basically, it depends on readers' reasons for consulting E.'s volume. Rarely, references to source material and discussions of issues are not as complete as they might be. To take one example, E. writes (121) that "just before [Odenathus'] murder either at the hands of a cousin, Maeonius, in Emesa, or due to a conspiracy involving the emperor, ...." There are also texts which suggest that Zenobia was the force behind her husband's death, ostensibly to protect the interests of her children. Given that Zenobia and her son Vaballathus led the rebellion that followed, it was perhaps worthwhile to consider her potential role in her husband's assassination. Was she frustrated by Odenathus' unwillingness to pursue a broader power than he was content to exercise, did she simply take advantage of the situation, or are the accounts of her involvement merely an obvious conclusion drawn from the fact that she benefitted from his death? A few words on Zenobia in the context of the assassination (E. does discuss the rebellion) would have been useful for E.'s readers, if only because to some of them she may be the most interesting figure in the period covered by the book.

As mentioned in the bibliographic information at the head of this review, E. and the publisher have included a generous number of images in the volume, and there are also 3 maps, though no list of either has been included. Representations of relevant coinage appear regularly; most of them are reproduced reasonably well. Similarly, most of the photographs sprinkled throughout the book have come out fairly well. Unfortunately, some photographs of sites and rock-carved reliefs, mostly relevant to the discussion of Shapur I, lack the sharpness and clarity of other images. For what it is worth, I was able to compare these photographs to the electronic images in the digital version of the volume; the electronic images are sharper and more clear than the printed images, but that is also true generally. The book appears to be mostly free of typographical or other errors. I noticed three worth mentioning here. The caption for Fig. 6.3 notes that Galerius' tomb is visible in the background; whether Galerius originally planned his Rotunda to serve that purpose is unknown, but he was buried

near his mother Romula at an imperial estate named Romulianum (= *Felix Romuliana* = Gamzigrad, now a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site near Zaječar in Serbia). Secondly, in reference to the appointment of Hannibalianus as king of the Armenians, Constantius appears once (169) in error for Constantine, though the latter is twice named correctly in the context. Thirdly, the remark that “the usurpation of Procopius preoccupied the Romans before the emergence of the new Valentinian dynasty” (236) obscures the historical reality that Valentinian and Valens assumed their thrones in February and March 364, well before Procopius revolted in late September 365.

For some twenty years, I regularly taught a seminar on source analysis, with Lieu’s and Dodgeon’s volume as the textbook. For that purpose, the sourcebook was adequate, since the development of a narrative was not the point. Nevertheless, I can say with conviction that I wish that E.’s book had been available, given its focus on individual items relevant to the study and understanding of the sources. Now that E.’s volume does exist, instructors and students will naturally employ it as a useful supplement; fortunately, the e-book at least is sensibly priced. But that is not the only audience for E.’s book: it is also required reading for historians and others who wish to acquire a better sense of a myriad of specific issues on both sides of the Romano-Persian frontier in the third and fourth centuries AD.

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