Josef Wiesehöfer, Sabine Müller (eds.). *Parthika. Greek and Roman Authors' Views of the Arsacid Empire*

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/48025>

DOI: 10.4000/abstractairanica.48025

ISBN: 1961-960X

ISSN: 1961-960X

Publisher:

CNRS (UMR 7528 Mondes iraniens et indiens), Éditions de l'IFRI

Electronic reference

Vito Messina, "Josef Wiesehöfer, Sabine Müller (eds.). *Parthika. Greek and Roman Authors' Views of the Arsacid Empire*", *Abstracta Iranica* [Online], Volume 40-41 | 2019, document 8, Online since 15 July 2019, connection on 23 April 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/48025> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/abstractairanica.48025>

This text was automatically generated on 23 April 2021.

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Josef Wiesehöfer, Sabine Müller (eds.). *Parthika. Greek and Roman Authors' Views of the Arsacid Empire*. (Classica et Orientalia, 15), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017, 312 p. including indices, ISBN 978-3-447-10764-8

- 1 The Roman and Parthian empires shared the political control of the ancient world in two spheres of influence that were separated by the river Euphrates: the Roman sphere to the west of this natural and conceptual border, the Parthian to the east. The perception of this polarization clearly emerges from what we know of the Parthian empire and Arsacid dynasty through Roman literary sources, and is perceived in modern scholarship as the reflection of the accrued importance Roman authors gave to the Parthian empire with regard to politics, ideology and propaganda, so as to legitimate Roman military intervention and praise the policy of Roman emperors: a military or diplomatic victory against the Parthians was regarded as particularly prestigious.
- 2 There can be little doubts that the Parthian empire was Rome's major opponent in the East from the 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD, and the idea of a division of the *orbis* between the Roman and Parthian world probably originated soon in the first decades of the common era.
- 3 This is what we can infer from the Roman view, however, for in the multi-lingual and multi-cultural Parthian empire oral tradition prevailed and almost nothing is known of historiography, perception, reception and interpretation of the images of Rome east of the Euphrates.

- 4 According to the relevance of what is often defined as the 'Parthian factor' for Rome in modern literature, some scholars characterize the history of the Middle East in that period as a history of the opposing and co-operation of planning and action of Romans and Parthians. In addition to this background, it could be also assumed that the history of the Parthian empire was the focus of Roman interest, as well as information on land acquaintances, institutions, and events, and this would have been reflected in the cultural and collective memory, for posterity, in literary and pictorial testimonies.
- 5 If information on the Parthian empire handed down from the Roman view is examined critically, it appears that the images of the Parthians –often stereotypes– have been preserved from narrow perspectives, however: a key role is, for instance, the parallelization of the regions under the rule of the Parthians with the Achaemenid Empire. The tendency of equality led to the transfer of the stereotypes for the Persian Empire, known from Greek literature, to the Parthian. Roman images of the Parthians were mostly used as a foil for the construction of their own identity, and were thus often only a discursive element of self-reflection. Accordingly, such ideologized images played a pivotal role in the context of legitimation, political self-expression or ruling praise.
- 6 This volume aims to contribute to the discussion on the nature and dimension of the literacy on the Parthian empire by bringing together the contributions presented to the conference 'Bilder des Orients', held at the *Institut für Klassische Altertumskunde* of the University of Kiel in 2012: it is divided in two parts, the first dealing with the works of Apollodorus of Artemita and Isidore of Charax, the second with Josephus, Trogus-Justin, Tacitus and Arrian.
- 7 The arguments discussed in these miscellanea show that the images of the Parthian world and empire in Roman authors are often less concerned with reality than with the inner view of the authors themselves, who probably had in their minds a schematic repertoire of cultural associations. A more critical view of the Greek-Roman testimony on the representation of the Parthians, their empire, and their population, need to be more accurately developed in the future.

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