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xšnaoθrahe ahurahe mazdā

Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286š/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad

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Part II

Reviews

Smith, Kyle. *The Martyrdom and History of Blessed Simeon bar Sabba'e*. Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac: Text and Translation, 3. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press LLC, 2014. Pp. liv+233. ISBN 978-1-4632-0245-3.

Since the first publication in 1748 of the Syriac texts, and their Latin translations, of the acts of the martyrs of Sasanian Iran by Stephanus Assemani, numerous works of research are undertaken on these texts. The Syriac version of most of these texts were edited and published in the second and fourth volumes of Paul Bedjan's *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*. However, an accurate and critical translation for all of these Syriac texts has not yet been presented, which has limited their availability to the researchers unfamiliar with the Syriac language. Fortunately, a new series called "Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac: Text and Translation" is now published by the Gorgias Press in recent years with the aim of producing authoritative translations of the Syriac Martyrological texts composed from the fourth century into the Islamic Period, together with their original Syriac texts.

The book of the *Martyrdom and History of Blessed Simeon bar Sabba'e* is the third volume of this series. The Acts of Simeon bar Sabba'e, the Bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, is of special importance among the other martyrological texts from the time of Shapur II. Two Syriac narratives of the Acts of Simeon (different in Length, time of writing and details) are available. The first narrative is older and exists in four manuscripts, with the manuscript Vat.Syr.160 being the oldest (sixth century). This narrative begins with ܩܘܪܒܢܐ (Martyrdom), while the second narrative, which has survived in the form of two manuscripts Vat.Syr.161 (ninth century) and Brit.Lib.Add.12,174 (12th century), begins with ܩܘܪܒܢܐ (History). As a result, Smith has labeled them "Martyrdom" and "History" to differentiate between the two, while most of the previous works recognized them as "Narratives A and B". Despite the differences between the two narratives, it is possible that they both originated from a single older text that has not survived (Wood, 2013: 55).

The Syriac texts of both narratives, along with their translations, were never published together before. The most notable feature of Smith's work is that both narratives, and their translations, have been put in a single volume, for both of them need to be studied together.

Smith's book has four parts: Introduction, Text and Translation, Bibliography and a useful Index. The introduction itself has six parts. The first part, which can be considered the most important, suggests new approaches toward reading the texts of the Syriac Acts, of which he mentions two. The first one is a Bollandist approach that tries to extract historical data from the text, while the second regards them as merely literary

works. Smith himself considers the second approach. I would like to emphasize that while we should not totally trust these texts as Smith has correctly mentioned, it is also impossible to neglect the importance of some of the presented data such as the administrative features of the Sasanian state, historical geography, legal system, onomastics and prosopography. On the other hand, although Smith suggests that these texts are not historical, the researcher can deduce notable and sometimes crucial data by using a targeted and genuine methodology. The recent papers of Christelle Jullien (2004 a, 2004b, 2007) clearly demonstrate how it is possible to extract useful information from these texts to answer the questions regarding the history of Sasanian Iran. Moreover, Smith has shown, in this part of the introduction, the reason why the dates presented in the texts are unreliable. The symbolic connection of the date of Simeon's execution to the time of the Crucifixion of Christ is just an example in this regard.

In the same part of the introduction, Smith suggests that considering the extensive remarks of the persecution of Christians during the reign of Shapur II, these claims should be regarded with skepticism. The persecutions are widely mentioned in the Syriac texts (so-called ܩܘܪܒܢܐ / Our persecution), which has made them a source for dating these texts (for dating systems in Persian martyr acts, see Stern 2004). However, according to Smith, there is no primary source to attest the existence of a religious persecution of Christians during the middle of the fourth century, except for the martyr acts and the brief mentions of Aphrahat (Also, see Smith 2011).

In the second part of the introduction, Smith examines the first narrative, the "Martyrdom". There is no information regarding the author and the exact date of the text's writing. But, the *Martyrdom* was probably composed in the early fifth century.

Apart from the two Syriac versions, there exists an important Greek version of Simeon's acts. This narrative is found in the second book of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Sozomen, which probably was completed in AD 443 other than the story of Simeon's martyrdom, this Sozomen mentions the execution of several other Persian martyrs during the reign of Shapur II and a narrative of Constantine the Great sending a letter to Shapur II in support of the Christians in the Sasanian Empire. Smith examines Sozomen's narrative and its connection to the Syriac narratives of the Acts of Simeon in the third part of the introduction.

Smith introduces the second narrative, the "history," in the fourth part of his introduction. As with the first narrative, nothing is known about its author or the time of its writing. However, it is certainly older and more voluminous than the first narrative, so much so that in the standard and edited version of it published by Michael Kmosko, it is almost three times larger in volume than narrative A.

The fifth part includes some notes about the text and its translation, and the sixth part introduces the manuscripts and the research background of the Syriac narratives of the Acts of Simeon.

The English translation of both of the Syriac narratives of the Acts of Simeon was presented in Smith's Ph.D thesis in 2011 for the first time. However, this thesis remains unpublished. As expected, we deal with a proper and qualified translation. But the Syriac text is the same as the edited version of Michael Kmosko in 1907 with the Serto script. This causes an inconsistency with the previous volumes of the Gorgias Press's series of "Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac" that have been published in the Estrangela script. It seems that presenting a unified and standardized method should be a proper way to present a series at this level.

The publication of other volumes of this series will undoubtedly be a great help to gain a better understanding of these resources and their usage.

Sajad Amiri Bavandpoor

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Mayor, Adrienne. *The Amazons. Lives and Legends of Warrior Women Across the Ancient World*. Princeton University Press, 2014. \$29.95 / £19.95. ISBN: 9780691147208.

In this lively and engaging exploration, Adrienne Mayor attempts to pull together all the evidence for Amazon warrior-women in antiquity. Her rich material ranges from Greek myths, through Athenian pots, to the human skeletal remains found on the Steppes of Central Asia. She tries to locate Amazons in reality, moving beyond the notion that they were symbolic figures of myth. The Amazons were genuine semi-nomadic warrior women, she claims, the original High Planes Drifters, whose world-wide infamy brought them into the orbit of successive western and eastern civilizations. These women were skilled horse riders who shot arrows, enjoyed mares' milk, tattoos, and drugs, and wore the trousers. None of this is new, but Mayor pulls the evidence together intelligibly. What is novel is her attempt to bring the patchy evidence for the lived-experience of the real horse-women of the Steppes in line with Classical mythology.

We learn that Homer's Amazons were an eastern group of men and women. The warrior exploits of the females of this "Amazon" race grew, and the sexy myth of a race of superwomen was born. The clichés followed. The popular one-breast myth developed as Greek authors forced the Greek language to accommodate this most compelling of factoids. Mayor is right - the origin of the word "Amazon" has nothing to do with bosoms. There are no grounds either for the myth that Amazons were wedded to their virginity. Nor were Amazons man-hating dykes; au contraire, many of those legendary girls liked nothing more than a bit of man-lovin'. Numerous Amazon women fell for the charms of strapping Greek heroes, albeit sometimes at spear-point.

Mayor's "Encyclopaedia Amazonica" (her term) forces us to interact with the Amazons as one great, thunderingly complex, homogenous group, real and imagined. And as vivid, compelling, and detailed as her study undoubtedly is, this is problematic. Throughout the ages men have shaped the Amazons according to the needs of the day. There has never been one thing called an "Amazon", but there have been centuries-worth of countless "Amazon-types" created as part of a shifting (often illogical) narrative.

When the Athenians witnessed the bulldozer-like onslaught of the Persian Empire, this little-understood Eastern enemy (a terrorist threat, no less) was filtered through the familiar myth of the Amazons, who were reworked and reimagined Iranian-style. "Amazon" and "Persian" became synonymous, and the Athenians felt better for it: Amazon and Persian were reviled and fetishized in equal measures. The Greeks had vanquished the (legendary) Amazons in the dim and dis-

tant pass, and now the Athenians could take on the (very real) Persians too. They were simply "Amazons" by any other name.

After the Persian Wars, the Amazons were tamed and eroticized in stories of Greek heroes and their Amazon lovers. Added to the legends (as historiography encountered myth) was that of Alexander the Great who not only encountered a group of Amazons during his eastern campaigns, but even bedded the Amazon queen Thalestris - a vivid and lasting metaphor for the conquest and unmaning of Asia.

How close any of this brings us to the tattooed horse-women of Central Asia is highly debatable and Mayor never successfully deals with that rift. Ultimately this winning book is a rich compendium of Amazon-related "data", but fails to make a convincing case for the splicing together of myth and history.

Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones

Llewellyn-Jones, Lloyd and James Robson. *CTESIAS' History of Persia: Tales of the Orient*. London / New York: Routledge, 2010. Pp. x + 253. ISBN 978-0-415-36411-9

Ctesias of Cnidus was among the ancient Greek historians who wrote about the history of the Achaemenid Empire. He travelled to Persia and lived at the Achaemenid court for an extended period of time (Brosius 2011), where his medical skills made him a successful and respected person (Stronk 2004-2005). His books are about the history and culture of India, Assyria, Media and Persia (Schmitt 1993). "CTESIAS' History of Persia", published in 2010, contains an introduction by Llewellyn-Jones and a translation by James Robson.

The introduction of the volume under review has eight parts. Llewellyn-Jones begins the Introduction compared with the *Persica* to Giles Foden's novel *The Last King of Scotland*, in which the central character, a Scottish doctor, becomes the private physician to Idi Amin Dada in Uganda (Nichols, 2011: 400). The author's depiction of Ctesias' life is presented in the first part because it is important to put him into his own historical context. Ctesias' arrival in Persia coincides with the battle of Cunaxa.¹ Ctesias had been living in Persia for seventeen years as the king of king's private physician, and then he left the Persian heartland for Cyprus, on his way back home to Greece where he started to write his work.

The second part is about *Persica*, a work that has only remained in fragments in form of testimonia, epitomes, excerpts, direct quotations and paraphrases. After a short comment about *Persica*, the author responds to the critiques of Ctesias (part 3). He points out that Ctesias has been a neglected source for historians,² although more recently a new understanding of him, presenting Ctesias as a reflection of the Achaemenid society and its sources, has been put forward. Constructing Ctesias (the fourth part) concludes the previous section. Llewellyn-Jones compares Ctesias with Plutarch, who has been similarly rehabilitated by modern historians after a period of neglect.

He believes that "it is for the Indica that Ctesias has been blighted with the bad reputation as a liar" (p.35). There is a good argument in favor of rehabilitating Ctesias' *Persica*. Llewellyn-Jones emphasizes that the choices made by later authors like Nicolas of Damascus, Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch and Photius were the reason behind Ctesias' reduction of authenticity. Llewellyn-Jones is correct in his claim that Ctesias' accuracy depends on the reliability of the secondary sources.

¹For Cunaxa, see Pancritius 1906; Briant, 1996: 634-49.

²For example, see I.M. Diakonoff's discussion in his basic book about Ctesias' reliability (Дьяконов, 2012: 23-30)

In the next part of the introduction, the author discusses Ctesias's position among ancient Greek historians' worldview regarding the east. Persia is a general name for Greek history writing in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Ctesias' *Persica* has been under effect of earlier works and has affected on later ones. The author also compares between Herodotus' *Histories* and Ctesias' *Persica* and concludes that "it is difficult to think that he aimed only at creating a parody around the figure of the revered Herodotus. The *Persica* is more than a literary joust. In fact, Ctesias simply envisaged his interaction with the Persian world differently from Herodotus." (p.52)

The sixth part is about Ctesias' sources where it is posited that he knew (Old) Persian (p.55). Ctesias claims to have received information from Queen Parysatis herself. For confirming this claim, Llewellyn-Jones refers to the Persian vocabulary found in Photius' epitome. Ctesias has lived at the court, therefore he could use "spoken word" as a source for his history writing. The author believes that Ctesias' claim to access to royal archives should be understood as the possibility of his access to Epic narratives which were common in that time.

The next part (on Ctesias' literary style) considers his role as the creator of a form of historical romance. Novella was a growing hallmark of literature during Ctesias' lifetime. Llewellyn-Jones believes that Ctesias' *History* is mixed with fables and fantastic tales, gossip and prejudice, stereotypes, and speculations, amongst other things (p.80).

As a conclusion in the last part of introduction, the reader finds out that Ctesias is not a straightforward historian. In fact, he is poet-cum-novelist working within the framework of history. But Llewellyn-Jones exaggerates about the quality of Ctesias sources (see above).

In the next section of the book, James Robson gives us his translation of Ctesias' *History of Persia*. There are several translations of Ctesias' work. Gilmore's translation (1888) is now considered a Classic. Jacoby (1958), König (1972), Auburger and Malamoud (1991), Lenfant (2004) and Nichols (2008) are among the later translators of Ctesias'. In 2010, J.P. Stronk also published his translation of this text into English (for a review of Stronk, see Nichols, 2011: 401-2).

This section includes two parts: Testimonia and Fragments, which are given reference numbers beginning with T and F. The Testimonia, which are about ancient awareness of the life and the works of Ctesias come from sources like Strabo, Diodorus, Photius, Eusebius, Plutarch, etc that already were used in the introduction. For example, we find out that "Ctesias, [was] son of Ctesiarachus or Ctesiochus, from Cnidus" (T1), or "... While fighting alongside Cyrus, was seized by Artaxerxes..." (T2), and "... no account of the ancient history of the Persians, Medes, or Syrians is hugely

trustworthy owing to the historians' naivety and penchant for fables" (T11a).

James Robson emphasizes that primary concern has been to deliver a version of the fragments of Ctesias that tends towards the literal rather than the literary. The translation and the system of numbering is that of Lenfant (2004), who follows Jacoby in FGrHist 688 (Bigwood, 2010: 100).

In the next part, we can read the translation of all that is left about the Persian culture and history in Ctesias' work. The outline of the history of Persia includes:

Books 1–3: Assyrian history, books 4–6: Median history and books 7–23: Persian history (from Cyrus the great to Artaxerxes II).

Ctesias' history of Assyria begins with the kingdom of a fictional ruler, named Ninus and continues with describing his heroic works. A queen, named Semiramis comes after him and Expands the Empire's Glory. After Semiramis' death, the Empire falls because of decadence of later kings.

Median history (books 4-6) includes a list of kings which is truly different with Herodotus', Although some accounts are similar such as the war between the Medes and the Saces.

Persian history of Ctesias includes books 7-11 is about Reign of Cyrus II, books 12-13, which inform of reigns of Cambyses II, the Magus, Darius I and Xerxes I, and the rest of Persica relates Reign of Artaxerxes I til Artaxerxes II. Persica' Schema is limited to events on a personalistic level and his Persian Empire is the court with a few glimpses of satrapal activities.(Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1987: 35)

James Robson has also assigned two parts to those fragments which are about Awareness of "list of distances and list of kings" (p.215) and "miscellaneous comments on the Persian Empire" (pp. 216-219). More sections are provided as appendices, including a glossary of authors who have quoted from Ctesias in their books, genealogy of the Achaemenid royal family, the map the of Achaemenid Empire and a useful bibliography.

The importance of Robson's work is on presenting a new english translation of Ctesias' persica, "including fragments and testimonia of the Persica that have only been attributed to Ctesias in the last few decades" (p. viii). Also, Llewellyn-Jones' introduction is useful for readers and completes Rabson's translation.

Yazdan Safaee

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