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TOURAJ DARYAEE & KHODADAD REZAKHANI.
*FROM OXUS TO EUPHRATES: THE WORLD OF
LATE ANTIQUE IRAN*. ANCIENT IRAN SERIES VOL. 1
IRVINE/LOS ANGELES, CA: JORDAN CENTRE
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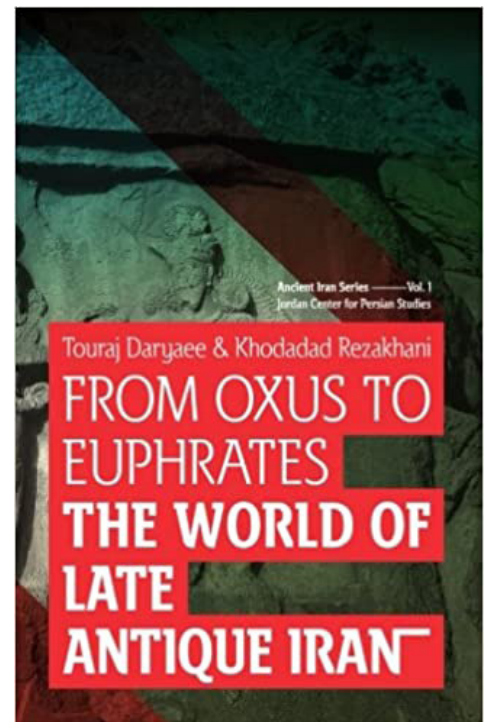
Touraj Daryaee & Khodadad Rezakhani. *From Oxus to Euphrates: The World of Late Antique Iran*. Ancient Iran Series Vol. 1 Irvine/Los Angeles, CA: Jordan Centre for Persian Studies/Farhang Foundation, 2017, xvi + 106p., ISBN 978-1-780835907.

Fourth of the great Iranian empires that pre-date Islam, the Sasanian Empire ruled for over four hundred years (AD 224-651) a vast militarily powerful centralised state. At its height the Sasanian Empire ruled from Anatolia to Central Asia, and the Caucasus down to Arabia. Militarily, the Sasanians were the only state of the Near Eastern world strong enough to force the Byzantine-Roman Empire to treat with them on an equal basis. Sasanian rule also provided the crucible from which important aspects of Iranian culture and society would form, and later be transmitted to their Islamic successors. However, in spite of the importance of the Sasanian Empire in the Late Antique and Near Eastern world, English works on the Sasanians have been practically non-existent prior to the 21st century.¹ Prior to the mid-2000's the last English language work was George Rawlinson's *Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy* published in 1876, while the standard work for decades was Arthur Christiansen's *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, which was never translated from French.² The first two decades of the 21st century however have seen renaissance in research and publication on the Sasanian Empire as a new generation of scholars such as Kaveh Farrokh, Parvaneh Pourshariati, Touraj Daryaee, M. Rahim Shayegan, and Matthew Canepa, among others, have opened up Sasanian studies to an English speaking audience. Daryaee, in particular, was responsible for the first English language synthesis on the Empire, while Farrokh has been responsible for helping establish the study of the Sasanian military.³

From Oxus to Euphrates is among the growing number of works looking at history of Sasanian Iran to be published in English since the 19th century. Its authors, Dr. Touraj Daryaee and Dr. Khodadad Rezakhani, are currently the Maseeh Chair in Persian Studies & Culture at the University of California-Irvine; and the former Associate Research Scholar of the Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies at Princeton University. At first glance this work might seem to be a bit redundant in light of Daryaee's earlier works. However, the focus of this little book is different from Daryaee's *Sasanian Iran* or *Sasanian Persia*.⁴ Daryaee and Rezakhani have

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1 Important exceptions include: the consistent contributions of the great 20th century Iranologist Richard N. Frye to the Cambridge Ancient History FRYE 2008 and the Cambridge History of Iran FRYE 1983, and his inclusion of the Sasanian's in his synthetic works on pre-Islamic Iran FRYE 1962 and FRYE 1984; articles and book chapters by Ze'ev Rubin on a variety of topics in Sasanian history RUBIN 1986; RUBIN 1994; RUBIN 2005; articles by Michael G. Morony on the Late Sasanian/Early Islamic transition MORONY 1994; MORONY 1998; MORONY 2005 and the Comparative examinations of the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires by James D. Howard-Johnston HOWARD-JOHNSTON 1996 and his articles on the great Byzano-Sasanian War (AD 602-628), conveniently compiled in HOWARD-JOHNSTON 2006.

2 RAWLINSON 1876; CHRISTENSEN 1944.

3 DARYAEE 2008; FARROKH 2005; FARROKH 2007; FARROKH 2018.

4 DARYAEE 2008; DARYAEE 2009

positioned this work to illustrate the importance of Sasanian Iran in the context of the period known as Late Antiquity. Late Antiquity, as conceptualised by Peter Brown, was a vast chronological and geographic field encompassing the Byzantine Roman Empire, Sasanian Iran, among other areas of Eurasia. Unfortunately, much of the study of Late Antiquity has been in the context of the Christian Byzantine Roman Empire, and frequently the Christian West. *From Oxus to Euphrates* is designed as an thematic outline history of the Sasanian Empire, based on recent research, that works to integrate Sasanian Iran into the paradigm of Late Antiquity. *From Oxus to Euphrates* consists of a Introduction and three parts: Historiography of the Sasanians, Sasanian History, and Written Source.⁵ Each part is sub-divided into a series of short un-numbered chapters. A map, a genealogical chart of the Sasanian royal family, and a bibliography round out the book.

In their introduction Daryae & Rezakhani emphasise the broad political, economic and cultural impact of the Sasanians. An impact that was not only felt in the Late Antique world, but also in the Islamic world as well. Stressing the continuity of Iranian culture, despite the collapse of the Sasanian Empire in the AD 640's, into the Islamic world, Daryae & Rezakhani highlight its deep, long-standing contribution to the Near and Middle East.

Part I: Historiography of the Sasanians – A View from the Centre, the Edge, and Afar looks at the historiographical background of Sasanian Iran in two short chapters, providing a conceptual and ideological framework for the study of period. The first chapter examines the idea of Iranshahr (The Domain of Iran and Non-Iran) and the past historiographical reception of the Sasanians. Daryae & Rezakhani argue, with cause, that while Iranshahr looms large in the Near Eastern and Persianate world, it has not been considered a discrete socio-cultural unit or civilisation as the Roman/Byzantine Roman and Chinese worlds have been. They link this in part to the negative portrayal of the Sasanians by Western, Soviet, and Islamic historiography. To the West the Sasanians were inferior to, and of lesser import, than their Roman/Byzantine Roman rivals. In Soviet historiography, and schools influenced by Soviet views, the Sasanian Empire reflects a feudal society ready for a proletarian uprising, or an overthrow by the more egalitarian Arab Muslims. From Islamic historiography we receive a view of a religiously oppressive Zarathustrianism who aided the upper-class in oppressing and exploiting their subjects. Daryae & Rezakhani argue that this lack of consideration of the Sasanians, or of idea of Iranshahr, has allowed an unbalanced and biased picture of the Near & Middle East to be painted.

With the next short chapter D & R layout just what Iranshahr was in the era of the Sasanians and beyond into the Islamic period. Initially they note, on Shapur I's great trilingual inscription as Nasq-E-Rustem, it referred to the geographic domain ruled by the great Sasanian Shahnshah. However, over time the meaning and function of Iranshahr would shift, as early on there was a Zarathustrian religious component to Iranshahr as well. By the time of Khusrau I Anushirvan, Iranshahr gained a wider meaning, encompass-

ing both Zarathustrian and non-Zarathustrian citizenry. In short, Iranshahr became not just a political designation, but a cultural one as well in which people were seen as part of the Iranian oikneme. Iranian *Farhang* (culture) included certain key aspects, such a study of Sasanian devotional and imperial history, written (Persianate) learning, and sports (both physical and mental.) Daryae & Rezakhani note that Iranshahr has had a long shelf-life, as its impact extended far beyond the fall of the Sasanian Empire throughout the Near and Middle East. This was especially true following the break-up of the Abbasid Caliphate, as numerous kingdoms began claiming connection with the Sasanian Dynasty as a way of increasing their local and international prestige. While the Sasanian dynasty may have fallen, Iranian traditions, encapsulated in the idea of Iranshahr, became a part of the memory and traditions of the region.

With the final chapter of part I, "The Idea of Late Antique Iran," Daryae & Rezakhani consider the place of Sasanian Iran within the framework of Late Antiquity. Here they note that Late Antiquity tends to have a Romano-Byzantine & Christian focus. This focus is despite the efforts of Peter Brown, the scholar most closely associated with the rising popularity of Late Antiquity, to treat the Romano-Byzantine & Sasanian geographic regions as one whole within the Late Antique periodisation. While, as a whole, Late Antique historians acknowledge the importance of Sasanian Iran, in practise the Iranian Plateau has usually been overlooked or ignored. Daryae & Rezakhani touch on the efforts of a number of Iranians scholars of bridge the gap between Late Antique historiography and that of Sasanian Iran, including such historians as Michael Morony, Touraj Daryae, Scott McDonough, Parvaneh Pourshariati, Khodadad Rezakhani amongst others. They argue that even though Sasanian Iran was not directly on the Mediterranean Basin, its impact on the mediaeval world was just as large as that of the Christian West or the Islamic world. Finally, they call for an expansion of the geographic borders of Late Antiquity, from a Mediterranean focus to a Eurasian focus. This would allow historians from separate civilisations to forge greater connections between disciplines and foster an exchange of ideas.

Part II: Sasanian History

With part II of *From Oxus to Euphrates* Daryae & Rezakhani move from considerations of the theoretical framework of the Late Antique Sasanian world, to the history of Sasanian Iran itself. In the follow six short chapters that comprise part II, Daryae & Rezakhani consider: Political History, Sasanians and the East, Ideology-Empire-and Glory, Economy & Trade, Religion, Languages and Literature. A Postscript serves as a conclusion and a restatement of Daryae & Rezakhani's thesis.

-Political History-

This chapter marks the longest chapter of Part II, focusing on the beginnings of the Sasanian dynasty down to the death of the final Shahnshah Yazdgerd III in AD 651. Here, Daryae & Rezakhani emphasise that the roots of the Sasanians lay in the Arsacid period from 211BC to AD 223. During this time the Kings of Persis, the heartland of the old Achaemenid dynasty, had enjoyed considerable autonomy

⁵ DARYAE & REZAKHANI 2016, viii

ruling as subordinates of the Arsacid King of Kings. While Ardashir I was the founder of the empire, it was his father Pabag who initiated the rebellion against, first the local ruler of Persis, and then the Arsacids themselves. The early third century in which the Sasanians arose is marked by sustained unrest across much of Eurasia. In the immediate vicinity the Arsacids were caught in a cycle of infighting and civil wars, while the Kushans and Indo-Parthians were both under pressure and in decline. Further to the west the Roman Empire was on the verge of the systemic crises that would paralyse and destabilise the Empire for nearly fifty years. It is also important to note that much of the early history of the Sasanians, particularly Ardashir, has been viewed through the works of Roman historians who saw the Sasanians as the rebirth of the great Achaemenid Empire of Cyrus II and Darius I. The authors emphasise that the question of how aware the early Sasanians were of the Achaemenid Empire is still a matter of passionate debate, though it seems that there was some awareness by the early Sasanians of their Achaemenid past. Daryaee & Rezakhani quickly sketch the main outlines of Sasanian history, covering both the main personalities and events. Throughout the narrative they rightfully emphasise the importance of the Eastern and North-eastern frontiers to the Sasanians, even though the Romano-Byzantine sources put a primacy on Sasanian policies in the border regions of the two empires. Daryaee and Rezakhani go on to stress the crucial importance of the reigns of Kavad I and Khusrau I in the 6th century in the administrative and political development of the Sasanians. During the reign of these two important Shahanshahs, the administration of the empire was increasingly centralised, often at the expense of the greater nobility, and Sasanian military prestige was restored as their military forces regained parts of former Sasanian possessions in Central Asia. In looking at the final period of the Sasanians the authors stress the significant impact of the decades long conflict between the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires on the stability of the Sasanian State.⁶ The length of the war, disputes over strategy, and a counter-offensive by the emperor Heraklios into the heart of Sasanian dominions led to the removal of Khusrau II. In turn, this ushered in a period of factionalism and division, during which a series of short-lived rulers cycled through until Yazdegerd III consolidated his control. Unfortunately for the Sasanians, Yazdegerd's consolidation came to late as the Arab armies of the Rashidun Caliphate began the conquest of Sasanian territories shortly after AD 634. After several defeats Yazdegerd would wind up dying near Merv in AD 651, while his family would flee to the court of the T'ang Emperor Kao-t'sung. While the House of Sasan sought the aid of the T'ang Empire against the Arabs, ultimately the family became part of the T'ang administration of the Western Regions and passed from history.⁷ Daryaee & Rezakhani close this chapter rec-

6 Historian James D. Howard-Johnston rightfully calls this the 'Last Great War of Antiquity.' See HOWARD-JOHNSTON 2010 for the most recent synthesis of his research.

7 By AD 630-640 the T'ang Empire under Li Shi-min (T'ang Tai-Tsu) and his son Kao-t'sung had become the major military power present in Central Asia. Presumably, in part this was due to the chaos that engulfed the Sasanian Empire after the removal of Khusrau II. Chaos that prevented the Sasanians from reasserting their control over Transoxiana after the collapse of the Eastern Gök Turkic Empire. For a brief introduction see (SHUN-YING /YAO 1999) pp. 343-350, while in-depth coverage of T'ang foreign policy vis

ognising the longevity of Sasanian mystique, as memory of the Sasanians would continue well into the Islamic period of Iran.

-Sasanians and the East-

Here Daryaee & Rezakhani highlight the important though oft-overlooked fact that the most critical territory of the Sasanians was not their Mesopotamian front with the Romano-Byzantine Empire, but their North-eastern territories in Bactria, Sogdiana, and Transoxiana. This importance is clear from the continuous efforts of the Sasanian state to directly and indirectly control this region. While the Sasanians traditionally are seen as more centralised than their Arsacid predecessors, there were some elements that carried over between the two states, particularly in the East. Here, the Sasanians initially went with indirect rule. Through numismatics we know of a cadet branch of the Sasanians, the Kushano-Sasanians who ruled territories in Bactria, Sogdiana, and perhaps Gandhara during the 3rd and 4th centuries for the Sasanians. After the 4th century Daryaee & Rezakhani highlight the increasing instability of the Northeast, particularly after the mid-5th century, as steppe migrations pushed first the Kidarites, and later the Hephthalites into Transoxiana. Most dangerous to the Sasanians were the, still relatively unknown, Hephthalites who would come to dominate areas of Central Asia, Bactria, and all of Transoxiana. In the later part of the 5th century the Hephthalites repeatedly defeated the Sasanian Shah Peroz, eventually killing him in battle, and would exercise a significant influence over the empire into the 6th century. Only under Khusrau I Anushirvan, in AD 558, did the Sasanians regain their dominance in the East through an alliance with the Gök Turk Empire. Daryaee & Rezakhani note that after the fall of Sasanian Mesopotamia and Fars to the armies of the Rashidun Caliphate, it would be Bactria and Transoxiana that provided the last and longest resistance to Islamic rule.

-Ideology, Empire, and Glory-

With this chapter, Daryaee & Rezakhani emphasise the importance of the idea of *Iranshar* to the Sasanian state. Once again they highlight the fact that *Iranshar* combined notions of kingship, religion, and territory into a new whole that was unique to Iranian history. In addition, this ideology, and the individual elements that underlay it, were not static. Sasanian kingship evolved from being a divine king to a cosmokrator, while also central to royal ideology was the concept of *xwarrah* (glory). *Xwarrah* was granted or withheld from Sasanian rulers based on the judgement of Ahura Mazda, and it was only through the granting of *Xwarrah* that the Shahanshah earned the right to battle Iranian enemies. The importance of the Shah within imperial ideology must also be stressed, as the Shah in many ways was the empire made manifest. His well-being was critical to the well-being of the empire as a whole, so the period after the death in battle of Shah Peroz in AD 484 can be seen in this light as one in which the very stability of the empire was threatened.

-Economy and Trade-

The Sasanian economy was primarily based in both the a vis Central Asia can be found in (PAN 1997).

cultivation of crops and stock-raising. Daryae & Rezakhani emphasise that large amounts of Sasanian territory suffered from acute lack of rain and were relatively unfertile. While Mesopotamia had an ancient agricultural tradition dating back millennia, for other areas the Sasanians had to conduct large scale irrigation projects to increase the usability of marginal lands. Significant hydraulic systems, such as the great underground aqueducts or Qanats, and the introduction of new crops, like cotton, allowed these areas to become commercially viable. Sasanian involvement in international trade was enormous, as they competed with the Byzantine Empire over the Silk trade. Sasanian trade networks were incredibly widespread, stretching East to Sri Lanka and Malaysia (where there was a colony of Sasanian merchants for many years.), while Sasanian merchants were highly active on the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean. In addition to their trade relations with the Byzantine Empire, Gupta India, and Southeast Asia, the Sasanians trade relations with China were active both on land and sea. Sasanian silver coins have been found along the Southeast coast of China, where at least three Chinese cities had trade connections with the Persian Gulf. Daryae & Rezakhani also note that, in addition to international trade, domestic trade was a very vibrant part of the Sasanian economy. Joint partnerships (*Hambayih*) of companies and religious communities were the primary agents of trade. Commercial activity in urban areas was conducted in the *Wazar* (Bazaar), which remains the primary economic centre in Iranian and other Near/Middle Eastern cities today.

-Religion-

While Sasanian rule is most associated with Zoroastrianism, Daryae & Rezakhani underline the fact that, despite being the state religion, other faiths were accommodated in Sasanian Iran. Manicheism saw its origins in Sasanian territories during the 3rd century, as Shah Shapur I allowed the prophet Mani to preach and elaborate his theology. Christians, particularly Nestorian Christians, after earlier periods of persecution, established a thriving religious community with a Patriarchal seat. Jews were also long-established and engaged in agriculture, artisanal work, and commerce. It would only be in the 5th century that the Zoroastrian religious establishment would gain a greater share of power at court, as they would come to fill large numbers of governmental positions.

-Language and Literature-

In this final short chapter Daryae & Rezakhani put emphasis on the fact that Middle Persian was the official language of the empire, others were employed as well. Nowhere is this more evident than on the great trilingual inscription of Shapur I in middle Persian, Parthian, and Greek at Naqsh-e Rostam.

When reading *From Oxus to Euphrates* one must keep in mind the constraints of Daryae & Rezakhani's design for this book, namely that this is a concise introduction to the state and civilisation of Sasanian Iran during Late Antiquity. The organisation of the book offers a clear thematic view of Sasanian Iran, while foregrounding it in the context of the framework of Late Antiquity. In particular, the overview and

discussion of the place of the Sasanians in current scholarship of Late Antiquity highlights the lack of engagement with areas of the world outside the Christian Mediterranean. The layout of the thematic chapters reminds the reviewer of N.H. Baynes & H. St. L. B. Moss's *Byzantium: An Introduction to East Roman Civilisation*, however the two-author approach allows for a consistent authorial voice and avoids the inconsistent quality found in multi-authored works.⁸ The one area of *From Oxus to Euphrates* that is disappointingly lacking is its coverage of the Sasanian military. While its capabilities are sometimes discussed in the context of a Shah's reign, the lack of a distinctive chapter examining the military is disappointing. Thanks to the work of Kavah Farrokh, Katarzyna Maksymiuk, Ilkka Syväne, and Marek Woźniak in the first two decades of the 21st century, research and writing on the Sasanian military has preceded apace. The relative wealth of publications on the Sasanian military, particularly from the Siedlce University in Poland, makes the lack of coverage in this book more puzzling. In terms of the critical apparatus this work is a bit lacking. The index is sparse and relatively limited. While a map of the Sasanian Empire is included, it is a very basic adaptation of a map originally drawn for the Encyclopaedia Britannica several decades past, and does not actually indicate what period of Sasanian history it depicts. Given the talented historical cartographers out there, this reviewer does not feel it to much to ask that a good up-to-date map or maps of the empire is to much to ask. While the bibliography is well organised, since *From Oxus to Euphrates* is an introductory work a bibliographic essay, providing guidance as to what books or articles should be the next point of call, would aid the reader in their exploration of Sasanian Iran. Finally, and this seems to be a characteristic of Daryae's works, no explanation or description is given for the system of transliteration used for Sasanian names. In particular the authors sometimes switch between two different spellings, i.e. Khosrow and Khusro.

However, none of the above comments should detract from the great value of Daryae & Rezakhani's work. *From Oxus to Euphrates* is a work of critical importance not only to students of Iranian history, but also to Byzantine, Central Asian, Indian, and Late Antique historians. Daryae & Rezakhani's writing is clear, readable, and easily understandable. If anything this reviewer hopes that the two authors will go on to expand this little book into a larger and more detailed work on Sasanian Civilisation. While this is not the definite comprehensive history of the Sasanian Empire, it is an excellent introduction, which can then be supplemented by other works. Highly recommended as a main text for undergraduate Ancient and World History students and the general reader.

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⁸ BAYNES/MOSS 1948.

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