

Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran. Matthew P. Canepa. University of California Press. 2009. 456 pp. (ISBN-13:9780520294837).

Between Two Eyes of the Earth is written by Matthew Canepa, a prominent author in the field of art and archeology. Although Irano-Hellenic art has been discussed by many scholars for a hundred years and distinguished works have been published (Schmitt 1994; Gignoux 2014; Miars 2014), the title of this book is unique.

There are many untold stories about the cultural and artistic fields between the two glorious poles of the ancient world, Iran and Rome. However, the author of this book has tried to provide rigorous inferences to the reader by comparing and contrasting Hellenic and Sasanian heritages with each other. The author also prepares a precise list of the most important references for Iranian-Hellenic arts studies in the bibliography, which in turn is a great indication of mastering the field of study. The grants used by the author as well as the name of the publisher (University of California) also lend credit to the book.

Although the new and unfrequented sections are straightforward and comprehensible for professional readers, I would like to mention three general points in the book that pose questions. My questions are thematic and can be used to illustrate some general aspects. First, some parts of the book have also been seen in previous scientific books. In other words, the book can be called a “compilation” of previously published essays. The author mentions different items such as the routes where Iranians and Romans met each other from Mesopotamia to Central Asia and India to China (p. 24), political relations, descriptions of rock relief from Fars to Kirman-shah (p. 72), and occasionally some references to Sasanian silver vessels, trade relations, Islamic references, and even reconstruction of some Pahlavi words which are not novel in the field of Iranian studies. However, the value of Sasanian art heritage has not been properly reflected by the author. It is not the only point which is missed. The author has also neglected to mention the rich Sasanian heritages in the Far East and political relations with China. The book does not narrate any point about the valuable Sasanian items found in Gyeongju (South Korea). The author has also failed to present texts such as *Kush-nameh* and *Mojmal-al-Tawarikh*. The author writes about Constantinople (p. 10-12) without indicating the *Book of Roads and Kingdoms* (*Kitāb al-Masālik w’al-Mamālik*) (pp. 92-93) by the Persian geographer Ibn Khordadbeh, which is a necessary complement to the topic. Second, although the author tries to compare artistic

relations between Rome and Iran impartially, the entire book shows that it has only one “Eye,” not two. It seems that Hellenic culture is the cornerstone for the references. However, this kind of one-sided unconscious attitude originated in centuries past when the Greeks used the term “Berbers” for other nations in the East. The introduction of the book starts with (narration): “God effected ... the most powerful kingdom of Romans ... and prudent scepter of the Persian State” while Sasanian heritages and many post-Sasanian texts such as *Shah-nameh* ignored the term⁴. Shadows

of contradiction can be seen in some parts of the book (pp. 30-40). As a matter of fact, the Parthians and the Sasanians committed little exaggeration or forgery in relation to the Romans. As evidence to this claim, I can refer to the majestic portraits of defeated Roman kings in Fars Province (under Shahpur the Great). A comparison of these drawings with what the West portrays about the Parthians (Rome’s ruins) could indicate Western artists’ imaginations that the Parthians (East) were Berbers. The author also writes about mythic subjects. Some refer to Iranian mythic kings such as Fereydun and Jamshid (p. 126). In fact, there are two kinds of narrations about Fereydun and Jamshid. The first narration is a natural tradition which comes from Avesta and Pahlavi manuscripts, and the second narration is a modified tradition which is affected by the collapse of the Sasanian Empire. The changes in the narration occurred because of the Arab invasion of Iran. Therefore, a question comes up: according to *Shah-nameh*, why was Jamshid killed in China? Why did Jamshid and Fereydun appear in different places, sometimes in China, sometimes in India and occasionally in Silla (*Kush-nameh* and *Mojmal-al Tawarikh*)? The fact is that to have a better grasp of the art and culture of the Sasanians, it would be suitable to study Iranian art and texts to explain the diffusion of Sasanian art and culture through the “political immigration” to China and “religious immigration” to India following the collapse of the empire. However, while doing that, the critical role played by the Parthians in transferring Hellenic arts to the Sasanian period would be noticeable. It would also be useful to explore some other areas also such as if the lion portrait on the Nara curtain in Japan is the same as the portrait of the Iranian lion of Silla.

⁴ In all Iranian documents (i.e., coins or inscriptions and texts), Iranian kings introduced themselves first and then mentioned their rivals or foreigners (cf. *Chatrang* text, *Shah-nameh*: Khosrow and Qaysar). May I consider the above narration as a false report?

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