

BOOK REVIEW

Religion, Society and Culture at Dura-Europos. By T. KAIZER, ed. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. xxii + 310. Hardcover, \$99.99. ISBN 978-1-107-12379-3.

If not Rostovtzeff's "Syrian Pompeii," Dura-Europos has provided important archaeological and documentary glimpses of the dynamics that shaped a town on the frontier between empires. With its evidence for Greek, Jewish, Christian, Palmyrene, and military communities (among others), Dura is often held up as a model of "multiculturalism" in the Roman world. Explicitly or implicitly (many contributors maintain the language of multiculturalism), the contributions to the present volume, stemming from a conference at Durham in 2008, work to complicate that picture and turn attention towards the town's full range of social distinctions and elisions, towards inhabitants' acts of identification and situation within a wider ancient world.

If ethnic/cultural (Greek/Syrian) and political (Parthian/Roman) distinctions have historically held a central place in imagining group boundaries at Dura, those categories are repeatedly problematized. Lucinda Dirven dismantles the concept of "Parthian art" on evidentiary and theoretical grounds, arguing against a "national art" where style choice is dependent upon political authority. Leonardo Gregoratti shows how the leading families of Parthian-period Dura instrumentalized Hellenizing cultural practices and ties to the Great King to maintain their social position. If his larger claims about a first-century CE shift in Arsacid imperial policy cannot be wholly proved from Tacitus' brief account of civil conflict in Seleucia and the lacunose record at Dura, recognizing that such conflict stemmed from social rather than ethnic divisions represents a meaningful step forward.

Michael Sommer, attempting to borrow theoretical frames from postcolonial literature, likewise shows how different claims of identity might be instrumentalized at different moments, whether for women in legal disputes or the community using the Dura synagogue. Maura Heyn and Loren Stuckenbruck explore other "Hellenizing" practices; Heyn identifies a scene in the Temple of Bel as Ariadne on Naxos derived from mime performance, while Stuckenbruck examines the relationship between Greek and Palmyrene in bilingual inscriptions.

The record from Dura also allows close analysis of other forms of identity that rarely figure in discussions of the Roman Near East, including gender. In a model of archival archaeology, Jen Baird uses contextual analysis of small finds to reconstruct the ways dress and grooming practices worked to create social distinctions, making a number of novel observations along the way, from the way small bells on women's clothing created gendered soundscapes to the way rings with attached keys evoked social prestige by mediating a relationship with an imagined strong-box at home. Jean-Baptiste Yon notes that women (usually minor players in the epigraphy of Near Eastern sanctuaries) appear frequently on steps of *salles à gradins* in some Durene temples for a limited period (roughly the first century CE), but only partially explains this phenomenon by connecting it to leading families' encroachment on sanctuary display space. Julian Buchmann likewise examines sanctuary architecture, arguing that the so-called "banqueting rooms" served a range of functions beyond priestly dining.

The way the Roman garrison re-shaped the town, its operative social boundaries, and categories of identification—a topic looming large in Durene studies—plays a minor role in the present volume, partially because two papers from the conference dealing with the topic (by Ted Kaizer and Simon James) have since appeared elsewhere. Still, Baird addresses military dress habits; Kai Ruffing summarizes and extends his earlier work to suggest that the garrison provided a market stimulus for Dura's localized agricultural (rather than Palmyrene-caravan-based) economy; and Jacqueline Austin argues for the role of military scribes in laying out inscriptions. More problematically, Cristina Marta Acqua locates images of the Roman emperor to argue that the inhabitants of Dura incorporated emperors within local institutions as part of a "voluntary expression of Roman identity;" when one discounts questionable fragmentary evidence, the picture that emerges is of a few civic monuments and a concentration of dedications by soldiers in the military zone (including near strategic guard-posts like the Palmyrene Gate). In contrast to other cities in Syria (see now H. Bru, *Le pouvoir impérial dans les provinces syriennes*, Leiden 2011), the imperial image is actually quite rare outside explicitly military contexts.

Of course, explaining material from Dura and how it triangulated identities for the town's inhabitants is as much a historiographic problem as a historical one. Choosing a frame of reference and creating a suitable context for interpretation shapes conclusions, as Susan Downey shows: many of Frank Brown's frequently re-printed reconstruction drawings are either dubious or falsifiable, dependent on

the parallels or assumptions he made. For example, Brown imagined remains under the temple of Zeus Megistos as an earlier hybrid Greek-Persian temple, reflecting his ideas about the city's mixed cultural history. In this volume, such choices of context likewise shape conclusions; for example, Tommaso Gnoli selects a Persian frame to explain the "non-canonical" features of the mithraeum decoration and thus confirms the Persian-ness of Mithraism, at least in its Durene instantiation.

Material from a town of regional significance lends itself to micro-histories; the narrow essays here embrace that approach, and each makes interesting observations in its own right. For scholars of Dura and the socio-cultural dynamics of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East, this book offers a host of new case-studies that productively turn focus away from monolithic cultural categories and towards the multiplicity of social dynamics attested in the town's rich archaeological record.

MATTHEW M. MCCARTY

University of British Columbia, matthew.mccarty@ubc.ca