

BOOK REVIEW

Empire, Authority, and Autonomy in Achaemenid Anatolia by ELSPETH R. M. DUSINBERRE. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xxvi + 374. \$ 40.99. Paper. ISBN 978-1-107-57715-2.

In a world where various forms of imperialism still exist, it is interesting to look at the way how (the idea of) Empire worked for the Achaemenids. Dusinberre has looked into this matter, specifically for Anatolia—a region she is very familiar with as her 2003 book *Aspects of Empire in Achaemenid Sardis* attests. However, in that book she organized the treatment of evidence (largely confined to the city of Sardis) after the type of evidence, in the current one she presents the material—for a much larger area—thematically. Due to its treatment of many varied types of sources (archaeological, epigraphical, literary, art historical), necessary to create the comprehensive picture that Dusinberre presents, the book seems to be aimed primarily at an academic audience. In spite of its scholarly aims and contents, the book is nevertheless—in my view—(relatively) accessible and a pleasure to read.

The publisher's blurb summarizes Dusinberre's book neatly: "The Achaemenid Persian Empire (550–330 BCE) was a vast and complex sociopolitical structure that encompassed much of modern-day Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, and included two dozen distinct peoples who spoke different languages, worshiped different deities, lived in different environments, and had widely differing social customs. ... Through a wide array of textual, visual, and archaeological material, Elspeth R. M. Dusinberre shows how the rulers of the empire constructed a system flexible enough to provide for the needs of different peoples within the confines of a single imperial authority and highlights the variability in response. This book examines the dynamic tensions between authority and autonomy across the empire, providing a valuable new way of considering imperial structure and development."

As indicated in the first paragraph of this review, Dusinberre's book has been structured thematically, basically a chapter dedicated to each theme (imperial control, religion, education, diet, to name some). What strikes the eye is both the

diversity and the varying amount of evidence present for each of these themes. Some themes (like education) are hampered by the near absence of viable data, while others (like diet and death: the latter I find an excellent contribution to our knowledge and understanding of how people in Anatolia incorporated Achaemenid elements into their funerary culture) are blessed by a relative wealth of evidence.

Whenever the amount of evidence is poor, I think Dusinger deals as well with the problem as might be expected, relying more heavily on literary than on material evidence, the type of evidence she prefers in the chapters where both types are present. The risk of bias in the literary evidence, however, remains—in my view regrettably—largely unattended by Dusinger. For instance, she appears to ignore the fact that some authors may well have been more informed than others. In this respect a discussion on minimalist-maximalist attitude, i.e. the extent one can rely on literary sources might have been really helpful.¹

As the title of the work indicates, Dusinger confines her study largely to Achaemenid Anatolia, which thereby serves as a kind of exemplum for Achaemenid imperial practice.² Methodically, I think, few can argue with her approach and its results. Nevertheless I sometimes felt slightly uncomfortable with the strict way she sticks to her approach. As the publisher's blurb, quoted above, rightly states, the Achaemenid *Empire* (my emphasis) encompassed many regions and many peoples. An excursion to (cautiously) compare the situation in (or of) Anatolia with that in other parts of the empire would—as far as evidence goes—have been extremely welcome. In the same category would have fitted an excursion into the afterlife of Achaemenid Anatolia during the succeeding Antigonid and (after 301 BCE advancing) Seleucid kingdoms. Many of the practices Dusinger describes did not disappear with the Achaemenids and, therefore, such an excursion could contribute to the understanding of Achaemenid imperial elements in their relation(s) to Anatolian local and/or regional ones.

¹Elementary in such a discussion is at present: Hall, J. M., *Artifact and Artifice: Classical Archaeology and the Ancient Historian*, Chicago 2014. Though this book had not yet been published when Dusinger composed hers, the subject itself obviously is a long debated one that Dusinger largely passes by.

²The book under scrutiny in a way deepens our understanding of one (geographical) area that already figures, though obviously less pregnant, in Gruen, E. S. (ed.), *Cultural Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Los Angeles, CA, 2011. In this book Margaret Miller wrote a contribution on drinking in Achaemenid Anatolia (97–134).

Since a good deal of Dusinger's evidence in the various themes is of art historical nature, it is obvious that the illustrations in this book are many and, necessarily, (almost) all of good or excellent quality. They support many of Dusinger's observations. I was less impressed by the quality of the maps and the fact that some of them are used more than once (a simple: see figure so and so on page xx could suffice). Also the added value of inscribed aerial pictures instead of plain, well-drawn maps eludes me at all. As with fig. 18 (page 25), such maps distort the geographical dimensions and only allow for a limited amount of information. Only occasionally, as in fig. 25 (page 47) which shows (some of) the relief of the Taurus mountains against the Cilician plain, such aerial pictures may add to our understanding, though here as well the geographical distortion is obvious. In a work aimed at academic use I find the use of endnotes instead of footnotes obnoxious, distorting the coherence of text and note. The bibliography is extensive, up to date, and really helpful. The index, regrettably only limited to a general one, is succinct but sufficient.

Nevertheless, in spite of the critical remarks in the preceding two paragraphs, I am happy with the final result of Dusinger's attempt to bring her audience up to date through a review of the available evidence on Achaemenid influences upon local and/or regional communities in one of the provinces constituting the Achaemenid Empire. The book, moreover, is well taken care of and only counts few typos. For everyone taking either Achaemenid or Anatolian studies seriously, this absolutely is a book to own.

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