EX ORIENTE LUX?

W. BALL: *Rome in the East. The Transformation of an Empire.* Pp. xix + 523, pls, figs. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. Cased, £65. ISBN: 0-415-11376-8.

J. CURTIS (ed.): *Mesopotamia and Iran in the Parthian and Sasanian Periods. Rejection and Revival c. 238 BC–AD 642. Proceedings of a Seminar in Memory of Vladimir G. Lukonin.* Pp. 80, ills, pls. London: British Museum Press, 2000. Cased, £20. ISBN: 0-71411146-5.

Warwick Ball does not cite Bernal or he might have claimed to be doing a *Black Athena* for Rome's debt to Semitic and Iranian influences, since his project is a polemical reinterpretation of Rome's domination of the Near East. The main target is Fergus Millar's *The Roman Near East* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), which charted the western, in particular Greek, nature of public life in the Levant, above all through the epigraphic record. For B., a near-eastern archaeologist, physical remains are paramount and his long discussion of eastern influences on urban design, building types, architectural forms, and stylistic decoration (Chapter VII, which occupies one-third of the book) is the most informative and suggestive part of the book. Outside his professional area, B. works at second hand, as he admits, and major gaps in the bibliography sound the alarm: Barnes, G. Fowden (also E. K. Fowden's recent book on Resafa would have been of central interest), Lee, Liebeschuetz (on Antioch, as well as the trailers for his imminent book on *The Decline and Fall of the Late Roman City*), Matthews (on Palmyra as well as Ammianus), Mitchell (whose *Anatolia* [Oxford, 1993] offers a model of how the interaction of classical and local cultures might be studied), Potter, and Whittow (*JRA* review of Shahid as well as *P&P* article on eastern cities) are all missing. B. might dismiss their arguments as further examples of western misrepresentations of the power of eastern tradition, but the failure to engage with these devalues his own thesis. Traditional Eurocentric ancient historians will also be troubled by several minor errors: Tigris for Euphrates (p. 19 Pl. 1 caption), Pompey preferred to Lucullus because of his triumviral status (p. 20), a Persian recovery of Mesopotamia in 298 (p. 23), 634 as the date of Heraclius' recapture of Antioch (p. 28), the destruction of Apamea by Khusro in 540 (p. 161: correctly Adarmahun in 573), a contradiction about the fate of Zenobia in 540 (contrast p. 65 and p. 12), misconceptions about Alexander's introduction of *proskynesis* (pp. 437–8).

In principle B.'s interrogation of Millar's Hellenic Middle East has merits, at least to the extent of urging scholars to consider all the various influences on the cultural construction of the populations of Rome's eastern provinces, but the presentation is flawed. Although the period covered is supposed to be the millenium from Alexander to Muhammad, and the Islamic conquest of the seventh century is the ultimate demonstration of the superiority of Semitic races over Westerners, B. is shaky on the sixth century: he seems unaware of the evidence of Menander Protector and Theophylact or of the positive interpretations of late antique urban history advocated by Whittow and Ward-Perkins (among others), and does not cite relevant recent literature on the Arab conquests and early Islamic state (e.g. Donner, Kaegi, Hugh Kennedy). The mid-fourth century and the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire provide the real terminus for the investigation. The volume's geographical scope is also uncertain: at times Troy and Constantinople are part of the demon-

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stration of the dominance of eastern influences on the Roman Empire, but Anatolia and Armenia are excluded from the study. B. justifies this because of the enormity of the subject, but his knowledge of material remains from within modern Turkey is also clearly inferior to his grasp of Syrian and Jordanian evidence (of which he provides numerous excellent photographs): thus sites like Edessa, Constantina, Nisibis, and Dara are presented sketchily.

B.'s overall approach is as determinedly anti-western as Millar's is pro-Graeco-Roman, and so is just as suspect. B. accepts that Rome was the aggressor in its conflicts with Parthia and Iran (p. 9), on shaky grounds. The lack of evidence for destruction during the 540s in the 'Dead Cities' above Antioch does not prove that Sasanid invaders protected the Roman countryside (pp. 27, 231); the connection of these prosperous villages with a flight of middle-class Antiochenes to the countryside is merely one possible explanation for their development (pp. 232–3), but is somewhat at odds with the economic link that is urged with the continuing consumer demands of Antioch. B. is right to note that academic priorities have affected the availability and interpretation of evidence for urban continuity in the Middle East, but his relentless insistence on the thinness of the veneer of Roman urbanization is not backed up by solid evidence: even if there were plenty of physical cities in the area before Alexander's conquests, the Seleucids introduced new forms of social organization which were then further transformed by the Romans. Their physical appearance incorporated many eastern elements, for example processional ways, colonnaded streets, or temple enclosures, on all of which B. is illuminating, but they were also different from what had been there before. The epigraphic record matters as well. Like Bernal, B. advocates a thesis which is rather less radical then he imagines: recent studies of Asia Minor have urged the important influence of local traditions and beliefs on Greek and Roman incomers, while Millar does not deny the very substantial eastern input into the public appearance of Roman cities and the behaviour of their inhabitants, even if he does not accord these a separate cultural identity.

John Curtis edits a collection of papers presented at the fourth Lukonin memorial seminar, held at the British Museum in 1997: R. N. Frye, 'Parthian and Sasanian History of Iran'; V. S. Curtis, 'Parthian Culture and Costume'; G. Herrmann, 'The Rock Reliefs of Sasanian Iran; P. O. Harper, 'Sasanian Silver Vessels: the Formation and Study of Early Museum Collections'; St-J. Simpson, 'Mesopotamia in the Sasanian Period: Settlement Patterns, Arts and Crafts'; G. Azarpay, 'Sasanian Art Beyond the Persian World'. Granted the brevity of the pieces, only those with a narrow scope can succeed: Vesta Curtis is informative on Parthian dress, and Azarpay throws out interesting ideas about the development and appeal of Sasanian royal iconography; by contrast, Harper provides little information about the construction of the major collections of Sasanian material, and Simpson can only peck at an enormous subject.

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AD FONTES

M. Maas: *Readings in Late Antiquity: a Sourcebook*. Pp. lxviii + 375, maps. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. Paper, £19.99. ISBN: 0-300-07148-5.

Producing a sourcebook is, I sometimes think, a brave undertaking—and almost

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