

Caroline Arnould-Béhar and Véronique Vassal (eds), *Art et archéologie du Proche-Orient hellénistique et romain. Les circulations artistiques entre Orient et Occident. Volume 1.* BAR International Series 2897. pp. viii + 115, 87 b/w and col ill. Oxford: Bar Publishing, 2018. ISBN 978-1-407-31644-4, paperback £34.

Caroline Arnould-Béhar and Véronique Vassal (eds), *Art et archéologie du Proche-Orient hellénistique et romain. Les circulations artistiques entre Orient et Occident. Volume 2.* BAR International Series 2934. pp. x + 133. 1 table, 89 b/w and col ill, 3 maps. Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2019. ISBN 978-1-407-31686-4, paperback £40.

In May 2017 Caroline Arnould-Béhar and Véronique Vassal held a one-day workshop on the art and archaeology of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East at the Catholic University of Paris. They followed this up with a second workshop a year later. The proceedings of the meetings are published in these two volumes, eleven papers in the first and twelve in the second. The object of the workshops was to explore the interaction between the East and West through an examination of the material culture of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East with a particular focus on forms of artistic expression. The topics covered include, among other things, funerary monuments, town-planning, architecture, sculpture, painting, and mosaics. The papers range widely both in terms of geography and timespan, but within this variety Syria, especially Dura-Europos, and Judaea are prominent. Altogether there are twenty-one contributors with the editors providing two papers each. The collection is well illustrated with some wonderful images of mosaics. At times, however, particularly in Volume 1, the maps and plans are so compressed that they would challenge even those with the best eyesight (e.g. the map of the Hauran in Vol. 1, p. 89).

The focus on cultural interaction is important and has been a defining feature of the study of the Hellenistic world since Droysen invented the concept, although ideas of what this entails have changed over time. The editors have chosen to express this interaction in terms of ‘circulation’ rather than ‘exchange’. Graeco-Macedonian culture (if we can merge those two elements) was the new factor, but it joined a variety of other competing

influences that had long been active across the Near East. ‘Circulation’ does help to convey this variety better than ‘exchange’, which implies two parties and a rather transactional encounter. What we see instead is people adopting practices from elsewhere because it suited them and ignoring those that did not (the case of Judaeian art is a good example). If there was Graeco-Macedonian influence, it might not have been direct but rather have arrived through intermediaries, such as neighbours, which all adds to the value of expressing this in terms of circulation rather than exchange. Here it is worth looking to scholars of the Roman empire where the study of the cultural transformation of the empire has increasingly moved away from simplistic models of Romanization. The resulting ‘Roman’ culture was not so much a copy of what happened in Rome or even Italy as a new culture that emerged out of a complex set of interactions across the whole empire. Scholars have turned to the concept of globalization (along with that ugly word ‘glocalization’) to explain what was happening (for instance, Hitchner 2008, cf. also Hodos 2016 for its application in archaeology more generally). The essays in the collection often consider the way in which local culture is reshaped by outside influences, although we need to remember that the ‘local’ itself is not static and is itself the result of earlier influences. Nor should we think solely in terms of western influences on local near-eastern culture. Christiane Delpace’s paper in Volume 2 shows how the development of Palmyra was affected not only by Greek influences but also by eastern ones, extending as far as away as China and India.

The first volume opens with a paper by Pierre Leriche, co-director of the French-Syrian Mission at Europos-Doura (or Dura-Europos as English scholarship tends to know it). He argues that the idea (for which we can probably hold Plutarch responsible) that Alexander and the successors founded cities to promote Greek civilization is exaggerated (cf. Plut. *Fort. Alex.* 5, 328c-29a). Many places that became cities were not founded as cities and he highlights among others Dura, which was originally a fortress and only acquired its Hippodamian layout in the second century BC. It is, as Leriche points out, important not to mistake the consequence for the cause (p. 12). Dura features in several papers across the two volumes, either as the main subject or a key element. In exploring cultural interaction it offers an interesting perspective, because Dura began its life imposed from outside by a conquering people and then absorbed many influences, including local ones, as the native population were drawn towards the fort. There is a similarity here to the way cities in the west developed out of Roman legionary forts,

such as *Castra Mogontiacum* (Mainz) on the Rhine. Ségolène de Pontbriand offers a lucid survey of the variety of influences on Dura as a city that somehow survived for centuries in the border area between Romans and Parthians, at various times occupied by each. Its influences are evident in its religious diversity, temples to Greek Zeus, Parthian Bel, and Roman Mithras as well as a Jewish synagogue. Roman Dura is the subject of Gaëlle Coqueuegniot's paper on the creation of the city's 'Roman market' from the mid-second century AD onwards. The erosion of public space seems to have been already under way during the Parthian period of the city, but it increased under the Romans with a building modelled on the *macellum*, more familiar in the western empire.

Among the finds at Dura in the early 1930s was the synagogue with its extraordinary wall-paintings of the mid-third century AD, now in the National Museum of Damascus (unfortunately the photograph of the western wall is too small to make out, Vol. 1, p. 20). Particularly striking in these vivid painted scenes are the images of people, including the imposing figure of Moses. Early Jewish art has often been viewed as aniconic but becoming less so from the late second century AD (cf. Hachlili 2013: 283-4). Whether this is enough to explain the rich iconography of the Dura synagogue is uncertain; it may be that the Jewish population, distant from their homeland, were influenced by neighbouring cults within the city (cf. for instance the paintings from the temple of Bel, in colour and easy to see, Vol. 1, p. 19). Arnould-Béhar in her Volume-2 paper on the non-figurative tradition in the art of Roman and Byzantine Palestine seeks to nuance the transition. For her the aniconic nature of earlier Jewish art has been overstated; human figures do appear but in forms that are simplified or incomplete. At the same time this aniconic tendency finds continued expression in the image of the empty arch or niche. Here we see very ancient traditions continuing in the face of Graeco-Roman culture, but other art forms such as mosaic with a less embedded tradition may have been readier to reproduce the human form. This Jewish preference for the avoidance of human and animal figures offers an interesting avenue for the study of the interplay of local and outside cultural influences. It could result in the greater use of vegetal decoration, but the form that such decoration took could itself appropriate elements from elsewhere. Plants, especially ivy and vines, played an important part in the decorative schemes of Herod's palaces, especially the Herodium. This may reflect contemporary taste or Jewish practice, but Michael Fuchs suggests a further influence, the god Dionysus. As evidence for the connection he points to an intriguing late Republican Roman

coin with the legend 'Bacchius Iudaeus', which he interprets as identifying the Jewish God with Dionysus (on this coin he might usefully have looked at Scott 2015). Arnould-Béhar's paper in Volume 1 considers the vegetal decoration on Judaeian tombs, ossuaries and sarcophagi, while both of Vassal's papers examine floral and geometric motifs, first in Herodian mosaics, then in those at Magdala in Galilee. There are many connections between these papers on Judaea, but here as elsewhere in the volumes the editors leave it up to the readers to make them. Two even share the same illustration, an elegantly decorated sarcophagus from the Tomb of the Nazirite on Mt. Scopus (Vol. 1, p. 65 and 81).

The criss-crossing and diversity of cultural influences comes out nicely in the paper by Annie Sartre-Fauriat on the funerary art of the Hauran of southern Syria. The distance from the centres of power gave a certain resilience to the region's indigenous practices (a point made with reference to the Hellenistic period in the paper by François Villeneuve). Here it is possible to find funerary monuments that combine local, semitic names, the Greek language and a form of art that owes something to both Graeco-Roman and local influences. Noticeable here in a semitic context is the use of portraiture, initially rather schematic, but becoming more life-like over time. Yet the realism is stylised and seems far from offering a faithful representation of the dead; as Sartre-Fauriat puts it of two monuments: 'Berès 15 ans a des allures de matrone quand Ioulia 63 ans ressemble à une jeune fille' (Vol. 1, p. 93). What caused the emergence of portraiture is unclear: the extension of Roman power and the influence of the Herodian dynasty have both been proposed. But while the character of the art can be explained through a combination of external influence and local practice, a third factor also intervenes: the environment. The sculptors were constrained by the stone they used, local basalt which, unlike marble, was hard to carve. Morvillez' paper on gardens also reminds us to keep environmental factors in mind; in explaining the apparent absence of gardens from the houses of the East he argues that one explanation may be as simple as a shortage of water to maintain them (although this doesn't explain the lack of domestic gardens in well-watered Apamea).

Syria plays an important role in these discussions of cultural interaction in the Hellenistic and Roman period. Many of the sites there are not currently accessible and have suffered badly during the fighting that has overwhelmed the region since 2011. The damage inflicted on Palmyra and the execution of the archaeologist Khaled el-Asaad there are well-

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known, but other sites have received less publicity (<https://en.unesco.org/syrian-observatory>). Dura-Europus and elsewhere are reported to have been extensively looted (Casana 2015). Pierre Leriche concludes his paper (p. 13) by counselling archaeologists to be vigilant in the face of the destruction of archaeological sites, often before they have been adequately studied. He reminds readers that this is not limited to the consequences of war. Technological progress is another common cause of destruction and often a more devastating one, as the impact of dams on Samosata and Zeugma demonstrate (on the bureaucratic challenge of salvaging some of Zeugma, see Hodges 2020).

It is not possible to cover all the papers contained in these two volumes in detail. There is a report on a mausoleum at Sebaste/Samaria, itself damaged in the late 70s and early 80s in a clumsy attempt to move it (Jean-Sylvain Caillou and Hani Nour Eddine) and another on a third-century-AD funerary mosaic from the Syrian city of Amrit, discovered in 1976 and newly restored in 2008 (Komait Abdallah). A couple of papers explore Nabataea, both its use of the Doric order (Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy) and its religious art (Delphine Seigneuret). Other topics include techniques for creating colour and the way knowledge of them spread (Phillipe Jockey), the many different types of funerary stelae to be found in northern Syria (Nicolas Bel), the funerary character of the rock-cut reliefs from the region of Byblos (Bilal Annan), the iconography of the coins of Agrippa I (Christian-Georges Schwentzel). Gérald Finkielsztejn's paper on imported amphorae in the southern Levant updates some of his earlier studies. Those by Anne-Marie Guimier-Sorbets and Hédi Dridi are only tangentially concerned with the Near-East, but still address questions of cultural interaction. Guimier-Sorbets treats the development of depictions of the Nile and their appearance outside Egypt, including in Italy, while Dridi collects the archaeological and epigraphic evidence for Carthaginians in the Aegean.

In conclusion this is a rich and varied collection that gives a good impression of the vitality of current French scholarship on the Near East. It poses an important question and for the most part the contributors stick to their brief. Together they do an excellent job of bringing out the complexity and diversity of the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

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