II. Monographien mit übergreifender Thematik

dedicato il quarto capitolo, preludio a quello incentrato sulla figura dell’ultimo ribelle attivo in questa regione, Rafi b.Layth. A differenza di Muqanna, Layth era arabo essendo stato il nipote dell’ultimo governatore omayyade del Khorasan. Una volta riconciliatosi con gli Abbasidi, egli sarebbe stato eliminato solo successivamente senza grande clamore. Il capitolo conclusivo chiude anche la serie delle grandi ribellioni contro il califfato arabo degli Abbasidi e lascia spazio a una nuova era per la storia dell’Asia centrale e della Sogdiana in particolare, vale a dire l’avvento di dinastie di stirpe iranica oramai islamizzate come quella dei Ta-hiridi (circa 821–873) e dei Samanidi (circa 819–1005).

Come si diceva sopra, questo studio è senz’altro indispensabile per chiunque desideri approfondire diversi aspetti della storia dell’est iranico e dell’Asia centrale nella prima epoca abbaside. Qualche accenno agli studi di storia dell’arte sogdiana avrebbe potuto certamente arricchire ulteriormente il valore di questa pregevole opera. Per esempio, laddove l’autore tratta delle tecniche di assedio proprie degli arabi che utilizzavano anche le catapulte, ignote invece ai turchi (pagina 244), egli avrebbe potuto citare un articolo molto interessante di Boris Mar-shak incentrato proprio sulla ricostruzione di uno di questi marchingegni tra le pitture degli inizi dell’VIII secolo a Penjikent (Подъемная машина в храме древнего Пенджикента, Прошлое Средней Азии, Душанбе, 1987: 95–103). Si tratta comunque di un’osservazione di poco conto che niente toglie al lodevole lavoro di Yury Karev nel presentare un ottimo libro per il quel tutti gli studiosi di faccende relative all’Asia centrale dovrebbero essere enormemente grati.

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This is a revised and expanded translation of the author’s book Geografia wojen rzymsko-irańskich. Działania Rzymu i Iranu w okresie sasanidzkim (2012). The core of the book is an atlas with commentary and bibliography to the military conflicts between the Roman and Sasanian empires AD 229–628, as well as changes in territories and borders following wars and peace treaties.

The book starts with a brief introduction to the project and a short historical sketch. The following atlas is divided into three parts: Military operations (23 maps), territorial changes due to peace treaties (four maps), and border changes (eight maps). Three additional maps show the Strata Diocletiana, landforms and altitude. While the maps on territorial changes visualize the annexation and ceding of territories, the border maps delineate the imperial frontiers in selected periods.
Each of the maps in the two first categories is accompanied by a short summary of events, a list of sources attesting activities in different locations, and a bibliography.

The references to sources mentioning places depicted in the maps are very useful, and solves the problem acknowledged by the author: that many of the sources contain dubious information, which is nevertheless of interest to the scholarly reader. The bibliography for each conflict contains references to relevant specialized studies as well as passages in general surveys of the history of the region. The bibliographies are up to date and include references to works in Russian and Polish, rarely cited by scholars from Western Europe and North America. This will no doubt be a valuable point of departure for students and scholars interested in particular periods and event.

Readers with interest in particular conflicts or topics are likely to take issue with some of the explanations provided for imperial policies and military campaigns in the historical sketch. This reader is, for instance, doubtful whether control of trade routes was ever a main motivation for wars between the empires, as the author suggests in a number of cases. A historical summary such as this, however, must necessarily simplify. Full references are given to the literature consulted, and the sketch fulfills its role as a narrative framework for the ensuing atlas.

While the historical part of the work is in most ways impressive, more effort and resources could have been invested in the maps. These are low-resolution and very basic, in grey, white and black, with sparse legends, thin lines, and arrows so small that directions are hard to discern. With the ready availability of sophisticated, but easy-to-use cartographic software this important work had deserved the use of colours, patterns and high-resolution base maps which would have made it easier to read and use. It would also have been good with a map showing isohyets in this region spanning both deserts and rich agricultural land, and perhaps some depicting polities and population centres at different times.

That said and more importantly, this is a highly welcome publication that will fill functions both as a point of departure for research and studies and as a companion volume to the many scholarly studies and sourcebooks which exist within the field, but lack detailed maps.

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This slim book of about 100 small pages – including a ‘lexicon’, a list of ancient authors, a brief bibliography and 16 pages of illustrations – published in the series Illustoria is an easily read presentation of a ‘new’ military weapon introduced