With this massive study, Michal Marciak endeavours to write the political and cultural history of the three small kingdoms Sophene, Gordyene and Adiabene. Although the first to do so in a single volume, Marciak is not venturing into unexplored territory, considering that these regna minora have received their fair amount of scholarship. Marciak is, however, a good candidate for this daunting task, as he has already published extensively on the subject including a monograph on Adiabene.1

Following an introduction to previous studies (p. 1–8), the book is divided into three lengthy chapters on Sophene (p. 11–160), Gordyene (p. 163–254) and Adiabene (p. 257–418). Each of these is subdivided according to historical geography, cultural landscape and political history. The book closes with a regional perspective and general issues (p. 419–34). In addition, no less than 78 illustrations and maps aid the reader on his journey through Sophene, Gordyene and Adiabene.

All three kingdoms emerged in the power vacuum between the Seleucids and the Parthians, and many of the rulers had commenced their careers as satraps of the former before aiming for independence. Owing to their different strategic positions, Sophene east of the Euphrates and between the Tauros and Antitauros mountains, Gordyene north of modern Cizre and south of the Bohtan river and Adiabene east of the Tigris between the Upper and Lower Zab, they attracted the attention of Greater Armenia (in the case of Sophene), Rome and Parthia and eventually the Sasanians. Regional politics presented the kingdoms with opportunities but also posed risks. The rise to power of Tigranes led to the end of Sophene and later Gordyene as independent kingdoms. Furthermore, the latter became subject to its neighbour Adiabene, when this kingdom expanded across the Tigris in the late first century BC. Eventually, Sasanian rule deprived Adiabene of the semi-autonomy this kingdom had enjoyed under the Parthians. While Sophene and Gordyene both experienced Roman rule for a number of years this was not the case with Adiabene. Marciak holds that the many Roman invasions of Adiabene were only short-lived and mostly restricted to the area west of the Tigris, thus not comprising Adiabene proper (p. 378–9; 381; 391; 398; 418).

Being squeezed in between Seleucids, Armenians, Romans, Parthians and lastly Sasanians left its cultural mark on the three kingdoms in various ways. Sophene was not originally Armenian and the kingdom supported the Romans during Lucullus’ invasion (56–8). Sophene was thus not as heavily exposed to Armenian culture as has been thought. Rather, Iranian culture appears to have struck early roots under the Achaemenids (p. 111–2). Gordyene and Adiabene had a Semitic

population, which in the case of Adiabene also came to include a substantial and distinct Jewish population, at least toward the end of the first century AD. Passing into Sasanian dominance both areas were exposed to an extensive Iranization. To this must of course be added Hellenistic culture, which left its traces in different ways. The extent to which these three areas were dominated by their neighbours also appears to have determined the form of Christianity, a Mesopotamian, rather than Armenian (in the case of Sophene, 64; 433), which developed into Syriac-speaking communities.

When sorting out the geography and cultural and political history of these minor, and short-lived, kingdoms from the Hellenistic period until Late Antiquity, MARCIAK draws on a wide array of sources, Greek, Latin, Armenian, Sasanian, to mention only a few, thereby winning the admiration of at least the present reader. This study of Sophene, Gordyene and Adiabene will no doubt be the standard work for many years to come.

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Voici un ouvrage majeur de géographie historique portant sur la vallée de l’Euphrate, « l’un des fleuves les plus célèbres du monde » 1. Il s’agit, en fait, de l’Euphrate syrien, c’est-à-dire la vallée moyenne de ce fleuve, entre Biredjik-Zeugma en Turquie jusqu’à Baghouz-Abou Kamal à la frontière de la Syrie avec l’Irak, soit environ 450 km.

Par chance, la matière de cet ouvrage remonte à la fin du XXᵉ siècle et au début du XXIᵉ siècle, c’est-à-dire avant l’épouvantable guerre qui y sévit depuis huit ans. La vallée de l’Euphrate était alors en plein bouleversement depuis que l’état syrien y a construit deux barrages à Teshrin et Tabqa, entre mars 1968 et juillet 1973, et que la Turquie avait lancé le grand projet GAP prévoyant la construction de 22 barrages dont neuf sur le bas Euphrate turc 2. C’est alors que l’antique Samosate a été submergée, en 1989, par les eaux du barrage Atatürk, sans qu’aucune recherche n’ait été tentée sur la patrie de Lucien... C’est pour éviter pareille catastrophe patriomoniale que la Mission franco-turque de Zeugma-Biredjik a été créée en urgence

1 Selon Pietro delle Valle (1614).
2 Gaziantep, Adiyaman, Diyarbakır, Urfa, Mardin, Siirt, Sırnak, Batman et Kilis. Le partage des eaux entre Turquie et Syrie a été réglé par le protocole de de 1987 qui n’est pas un « vrai traité », mais qui demeure la base de référence dans toutes les discussions.