

JOSEF WIESEHÖFER. *Das Frühe Persien: Geschichte eines antiken Weltreichs*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1999. 128 pp., maps, ills., diagrams, index.
 MICHAEL WITZEL. *Das Alte Indien*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003. 128 pp., maps, timeline, index.

These slim volumes by two distinguished academics in C. H. Beck's *Wissen* series are concise, "scientific-popular" narratives for a wide-ranging readership. Neither as commercially nor popularly appealing as, say, ancient Egypt or Greece, Iran and India are included here though most American and British publishers would balk nowadays at including these lands in a similar initiative. One is hard pressed to locate highly popular works on early Iran or India by leading publishers: Time-Life Inc. included both in a history of mankind series during the 1960s and these volumes appeared in a different format in the 1990s. But India and Iran were ill served and not authored by scholars of the stature of a Bowra, Hadas, Kraeling, or Schaefer, whose elegant essays in sumptuously illustrated volumes became ubiquitous in homes as well as high school and university libraries. Thankfully, Wiesehöfer and Witzel have redressed this.

Both scholars predicate their research on the *histoire événementielle* approach while incorporating enough political and economic data as possible within a reasonable compass. They also provide summations of the current *Forschungsstand* without interjecting individual viewpoints or *non liquets* of their disciplines that are inconsequential to the lay reader or incoming undergraduate for whom both books are sound introductions: Wiesehöfer's work is now also available in an Italian edition as *La Persia antica* (Bologna, 2003). For him Iran denotes the heartland, *Iranshahr*, so there is naturally no discussion of *Iran extérieur* or the Silk Road, where Iranians played a pivotal role in thought and trade for more than a millennium and where too, following the Arab conquests, was witnessed the brilliant Perso-Islamic efflorescence. Rather it is Witzel who mentions Iranian and Hellenistic influences along the Indo-Iranian borderlands. In remarking about the Rabatak inscription's significance, Harry Falk had ingeniously proposed, two years prior to Witzel's publication, that A.D. 127/128 must be the *first* Kanishka era. Witzel could have woven this into the discussion but, one supposes, felt it prudent to simply state that

the decade between the earliest and latest eras remain disputed among historians. The obscure Kushans (omitted in the index) will doubtless find their place in the sun if the Afghan government holds good to its announcement that the Tilya-tepe hoard may be exhibited abroad in the coming months. Read Grand, not "Great" Trunk Road for the *überlandstrasse* from Taxila to Bengal (p. 81); AD 78, not "77" for the start of the Saka era (p. 100); and to the bibliography add Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (Berkeley, 2002).

One notices that both authors conclude at the end of the "classical" or "ancient" epochs of the Guptas in India and Sasanians in Iran. Broad correspondences, at least to this reviewer, are plainly conspicuous: both divines and sovereigns, to forge an identity and bolster authority, unabashedly promoted an "official" Hinduism or Mazdeism to the detriment of other Iranian or Indian creeds such as Manichaeism, Mazdakism, Nestorianism, Shaivism, Jainism, and Buddhism; moreover, these were ages of luxuriance, chivalry, and courtly literature purporting power and resplendence, but set against the backdrop of class and caste hierarchies, external warfare, internal intrigue, and regular turmoil.

Small wonder twentieth-century Hindu and Persian nationalists ironically if dimly appropriated the Guptas and Sasanians into their scurrilous discourses. Both authors fittingly conclude by castigating partisans of skewed scholarship.

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CHRISTELLE JULLIEN AND FLORENCE JULLIEN. *Apôtres des confins: Processus missionnaires chrétiens dans l'Empire iranien*. Res Orientales 15. Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l'Etude de la Civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 2002. 318 pp.

It is almost a century since J. Labourt published *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide* (Paris, 1904), and although there have been many subsequent studies of different aspects of Nestorian Christianity in the Sasanian empire by scholars such as O. Braun, E. Sachau, F. Nau, J.-M. Fiey, G. Wiessner, S. P. Brock, P. Gignoux, and others, M.-L. Chaumont's *La christianisation de l'empire iranien* (Louvain, 1988) is