

# 100 years of Dura Europos

Jaś Elsner

Corpus Christi College, Oxford <jas.elsner@ccc.ox.ac.uk>

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## Rationale for a review article

It was more than 100 years ago, in March 1920,<sup>1</sup> that British troops camping in the ruins of some unknown ancient fort on the Euphrates, named Al-Salihyah in Arabic, during the skirmishing that followed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of the First World War, dug a trench and excavated some astonishing wall paintings. The officers in charge, along with the Civil Commissioner, managed to call in an American archaeologist who happened to be in Syria at the end of April, James Henry Breasted, first director of the Oriental Institute in Chicago (founded the previous year, 1919). Breasted visited in May, in dangerous conditions and with the British about to withdraw. He stayed only a day, managing to clear and take photographs of the murals that depict the sacrifices of Conon and Julius Terentius in what later became known as the Temple of Bel or the Temple of the Palmyrene Gods.

That work – published as a book in 1924 – was to lead to a remarkable excavation of what was soon recognized as the ancient city of Dura Europos. The excavation was conducted first by French archaeologists, who took over the League of Nations Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon, and later by Americans from Yale University.<sup>2</sup> It is hard to overestimate the scholarly significance of this series of digs and their publications in the '20s and '30s for: the history of the borderlands between the Roman Empire and that of the Parthians/Sasanians; the history of cultural relations in the Late Ancient Near East; understanding the deployment of the Roman military in the Syrian steppe; the history of the visual cultures of Syria; the understanding of Early Christian and Ancient Jewish art; and the archaeology of the cities and fortresses in the later Empire. Indeed, in the judgment of Fergus Millar, one of the greatest recent students of the Roman Near East, “the mass of evidence” excavated from Dura, though “still far from fully digested,” has “from the perspective of the Roman Empire” given Dura “almost too great an importance.”<sup>3</sup>

The centenary of this discovery, in the year that the COVID-19 pandemic raged, was hardly noted. But the book which is the cause, if not the excuse, for this review article was published in 2020, a work which serves as a small commemoration of the inception of a project so important in the history of Roman archaeology that it is worth revisiting.

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<sup>1</sup> Incomprehensibly, Rostovtzeff 1938, 1, writes “1921.”

<sup>2</sup> Breasted’s publications from his day trip were J. Breasted 1922 and J. Breasted 1924, the latter a full monograph.

<sup>3</sup> Millar 1993, 438.

This is the 2020 publication edited by Danny Praet (P.), Ted Kaizer (K.), and Annelies Lannoy (L.), and printed by the Academia Belgica in its *Scripta Minora* series, a part of the *Bibliotheca Cumontiana*, of Franz Cumont's huge corpus of articles, reviews, and notes on Dura Europos written between 1922 and 1939. The volume is intended as a companion piece to the republication of Cumont's major archaeological monograph of his Dura excavations, *Fouilles de Doura-Europos (1922–1923)*, first published in 1926, which remains forthcoming in the *Scripta Maiora* series of the *Bibliotheca*.<sup>4</sup> Like the other volumes in this monumental project of republishing Cumont's entire scholarly corpus, this book is graced by a lengthy (in this case, superb) introduction written by K.<sup>5</sup> It is extremely unfortunate that his parallel introduction to the *Fouilles*, written and intended to be read in tandem to that of the *Minora* volume under review here, has yet to be published, which means that we have access only to half of K.'s careful re-evaluation and historiography of the Cumontian project at the site. Since he is himself a noted expert on both the Near East and on Dura in particular, K. writes with exceptional command of the issues, especially from a historical vantage point.

I have no intention in what follows of critiquing Cumont's own arguments from over 80 years ago, nor of making a song and dance about any minor points or misprints. As a republication exercise, the *Bibliotheca Cumontiana* is exemplary, and its subject – the greatest scholar of ancient religion of the first half of the 20th c. – is well worth reconsideration. The important issues for readers of a periodical like *JRA* are what Dura became, how the dig was conducted, what we know as a result of it, and what we fail to know. It is unfortunate – given the decision to put all this material together between two covers – that Cumont's two contributions to the so-called preliminary reports on the site, published by Yale University Press, are for some reason excluded, so we cannot call the *Minora* complete.<sup>6</sup> But what we can trace in this volume (as opposed to the more settled and considered monographic thoughts of the *Fouilles*) is the process of thinking and publishing in response to new archaeological discoveries from a great expert of the time – in fact (as K. shows), the man who impressed on Breasted the great importance of what he had found, who translated and published Breasted's first intervention, who led the French dig from 1922 to 1924, and who was a rather hands-off co-director of the joint Yale–French excavations of 1928–37 but nevertheless reviewed the Yale preliminary reports regularly in order to disseminate their results in the Francophone world. The focus on Cumont's essays is naturally one that plays up interest in ancient religions, especially polytheism, and plays down the extraordinary finds of Christian and Jewish places of worship with decoration. These discoveries would have a great impact in the study of Early Christian art, in the new field of Jewish art in the context of the rise of the Nazi state in 1933, less than a year after the synagogue was discovered, and in the pursuit of Jewish archaeology among the Zionist settlers in British Mandate Palestine.

In his discussion, K. has had the great advantage of a series of major historiographic endeavors of the last couple of decades which have seen, in addition to the lengthy introductions of the *Bibliotheca Cumontiana* project, the publication of a great deal of the private correspondence between the major scholarly actors of the early Dura

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<sup>4</sup> Cumont 1926.

<sup>5</sup> Kaizer 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Cumont 1929; Cumont and Rostovtzeff 1939.

excavations – Breasted, Cumont, and Rostovtzeff<sup>7</sup> – as well as a number of memoirs.<sup>8</sup> In certain cases – for example, the unpublished letters held in the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago – K. brings to light new material. A century on from the find, we are in a unique position to make a historiographic evaluation of its early progress. From Cumont's end, K. has done this work superbly, although we must wait for the introduction to *Fouilles* for the full picture. Someone still needs to give the same attention to Rostovtzeff's enterprise at Dura in the context of his other work and in relation to his many US and international collaborators.

### Some problems with Dura

The excavations at Dura Europos were led by one of the greatest scholarly teams ever assembled for such purposes. Franz Valérie-Marie Cumont (1868–1947) was the most distinguished expert on the religions of Antiquity (and especially the Near East) of his era, as well as being curator of Classical Antiquities at the *Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire du Cinquantième* in Brussels from 1898 to 1912.<sup>9</sup> Mikhail Ivanovich Rostovtzeff (1870–1952) was perhaps the most influential ancient historian of the first half of the 20th c., and exceptional (for that or any other time) in his long and serious commitment to archaeology and material culture, having dug and published extensively on the archaeology of the Black Sea and on Pompeii. Both men were established scholars in their 50s when the opportunities of Dura beckoned, so they brought maturity of vision and experience to the dig. Despite the stringency of finances in the difficult period after the First World War, they managed to assure adequate funding and support, notably through Rostovtzeff's excellent relations with President James Rowland Angell at Yale (President 1921–37), who had brought the Russian historian and archaeologist to the university and funded the dig through the crash and recession of the early '30s with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation,<sup>10</sup> with money only drying up at Angell's retirement in 1937.<sup>11</sup> The issue of American funding is significant since Yale's deal was to receive half the excavated materials, which would ultimately include the earliest murals ever found from a Christian church and those from the Mithraeum. That element of archaeology which is a treasure hunt for sensational finds was never entirely separable from the supply of money.<sup>12</sup> It must be said that the sensations came in a steady stream: the Christian building in January 1932, the synagogue in November of the same year, the Mithraeum in 1934.<sup>13</sup>

Yet anyone who has worked on Dura is painfully aware that the problems of the dig and its interpretative publications do not match the promise offered by the distinction of its

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<sup>7</sup> Bonnet 1997; Bonnet 2003; Bongard-Levin and Litvinenko 2004; above all, Bongard-Levine et al. 2007 (note the “dossier Doura” in the appendix, 249–342, with correspondence by many of the other archaeologists of the site); Bonnet 2008b.

<sup>8</sup> C. Breasted 1943; Hopkins 1979; Goldman and Goldman 2011.

<sup>9</sup> For Cumont's life and oeuvre, see e.g., Bonnet 1997, 1–67; Scheerlinck 2013b, 23–56.

<sup>10</sup> For Rostovtzeff's success in managing his funders and finding supplementary finance, see Baird 2018, 12.

<sup>11</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation, which ceased funds in 1938, accounted it had spent \$254,000 in all on Dura: see Baird 2018, 16.

<sup>12</sup> For some thoughts on this issue, see Hopkins 1979, 121–22; Bongard-Levine et al. 2007, 41–43; James 2019, 27.

<sup>13</sup> See the vivid accounts of these discoveries in Hopkins 1979, 89–98, 130–39, 193–203.

excavators. I summarize some issues here, from a modern perspective rather than one that would have been meaningful in the '20s and '30s – in other words, the problems of “our Dura” as opposed to the one its excavators thought they were digging up. First, as P. suggests in his brief preface to the new collection of Cumont’s essays on Dura,<sup>14</sup> with reference to the very recent destructive activity of the so-called Islamic State at both Dura and Palmyra, the history of the excavations is wrapped up in a complex of colonial archaeology the effects and motivations of which are as difficult for us to process today, as are the extremes of post- and anti-colonialist anti-archaeology demonstrated by Isis-Daesh.

The site was discovered in a war zone, its first murals the result of the building of military rather than archaeological trenches (what a resonant word “trench” is, if one wants to stress the paranoia of ideological drives governing so much of our archaeological histories). It passed from the control of one imperial power (Britain) to another (France) under an awkward pretense of moving from colonialism to self-determination characteristic of the British and French Mandates in the Near East in the '20s and '30s. The site, its excavation, and its protection were entirely dependent on the presence of troops, to such an extent that Cumont dedicated his *Fouilles de Doura-Europos* to the French officers and soldiers who protected the ancient city and performed much of the physical labor.<sup>15</sup> One reason for abandoning the dig after 1937 was that it was getting too dangerous. As P. rightly notes, the second attempt at a Dura campaign by a joint Syrian–French mission (La mission Franco-Syrienne d’Europos-Doura), which began in 1986, was abandoned for the same reasons in 2011, at the onset of the Syrian civil war. This military element, equally familiar from the archaeology of Palestine both before and after the establishment of the state of Israel,<sup>16</sup> is the foremost in a series of colonialist assumptions – whereby civilization could be imposed by Western troops, whether ancient Roman or modern British and French – shared by the early excavators and never far from what we can now identify as reprehensible forms of Orientalism.<sup>17</sup>

More fundamentally, the time spent at the site by its principal excavators amounts to what might be described as extraordinarily good value if one assesses academic achievement according to the ratio of scholarly production to time invested in the work. Breasted was at Dura for a day, from which he produced an article and a monograph;<sup>18</sup> Cumont’s first season lasted ten days (in 1922) and his second mission just over a month (October 3–November 7, 1923), the direct results of which were about 200 pages of articles in the book under review (21–250) and the two volumes of *Fouilles*.<sup>19</sup> He came twice more: for a week in the spring of 1928 and to see the Mithraeum in 1934. These coincided with the only occasions when Rostovtzeff went there, making trips of 11 days in 1928 and of just over two months in the freezing cold from January to March 1934.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the hands-on work was almost entirely done by others – often the military, some of it led by able excavators like Robert du Mesnil du Buisson, Clark Hopkins, Frank Brown, Alfred Bellinger, and C. Bradford Welles, and some of it by apparently less competent

<sup>14</sup> Praet 2020; on ruination, see esp. Baird 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Cumont 1926, unnumbered page between the title and p. i; Praet 2020, vii.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Lockard and Elsner 2020, 310–12.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Wharton 1995, 17–23, 165–66; Baird 2014: 31–32, 56; Baird 2018, 5–6.

<sup>18</sup> J. Breasted 1924, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Kaizer 2020, xxviii.

<sup>20</sup> For the dates, see Bongard-Levine et al. 2007, 297, 319, 324.

figures like Maurice Pillet.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Cumont at least had never had direct excavation experience before he took on Dura, although he had traveled extensively in the East and was an acute armchair art historian.<sup>22</sup> These were gentleman amateurs, occasionally out in the field alongside the young soldiers.<sup>23</sup>

However, the greatest problem was precisely the academic expertise of the principals and their role in what Millar elegantly described as matters of “conception and interpretation. Preconception one might say.”<sup>24</sup> Those preconceptions were teleologies that governed the two principals’ interest in Dura and operated to formulate the conceptual frame within which the dig was conducted. They determined not only that the findings could be so swiftly published in Cumont’s *Fouilles* and Rostovtzeff’s series of *Preliminary Reports*, but also that these were not “in character preliminary reports at all, in the sense of formal presentations of raw data, [... but were] much closer to general narratives, on the one hand, and to discursive and wide-ranging interpretations, on the other.”<sup>25</sup> Again, the need to keep the interests of funders high is not irrelevant to the speed and interpretative excess of the publication project, but it could not have happened in this way unless there was a ready-made frame in which to fit the material, guaranteed by the scholarly reputations and expertise of two of the greatest intellects of their time.

I seek to unmask a little of this conceptual frame, since it is so unfamiliar to any student of modern archaeology or ancient history – indeed aspects of it are downright weird – while at the same time being profoundly rooted in the cultural and intellectual arguments of the late 19th c., during which both Cumont and Rostovtzeff received their training and reached maturity.<sup>26</sup> The historiographic project, although hitherto not properly attempted, is essential to any archaeological understanding of Dura because – especially since the near destruction of the site by the so-called Islamic State – any remaining excavation *must begin with the archive* and the preliminary reports: that archive is crucially framed, and I suspect fundamentally vitiated, by the limitations and peculiarities of the theoretical agenda which governed its assembly and the writing of field reports.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Pillet was field director from 1928 to 1931. During his period in charge no findspots were recorded, although his dismissal only came after the incompetent digging of trenches to save time and money led to the collapse of a wall and the deaths of three workers, as well as injuries to others. See Baird 2018, 9–10, 40.

<sup>22</sup> For some discussion, see Krings 1998; Leriche and Gaborit 1999; Krings 2004; Bonnet and Krings 2008; Scheerlinck 2013a.

<sup>23</sup> For some of the archaeological limitations and errors, see James 2019, 26–30.

<sup>24</sup> Millar 1998, 474. Millar’s objections to the principals’ frame are (as usual with him) not fully articulated but interesting. I suspect they are partly grounded in his deep commitment to administrative issues as central to the conduct of empire (represented by his great book, Millar 1977) and his sense that these are underplayed, and partly through his still more profound investment in the history of Palestine and Late Ancient Jewry (as in, e.g., Millar 1993 and many other works), which puts him squarely against the Hellenistic–Iranian–Aryanizing drives discussed below.

<sup>25</sup> Millar 1998, 474.

<sup>26</sup> James 2019, 3, offers an inadequate trio of imprecations (“text-led,” “text-driven,” and “text-based”) in summary of the problem with the Cumont–Rostovtzeff approach. The present review is intended to flesh out the issues.

<sup>27</sup> On the archive of Dura, see Baird 2011; Baird 2018, 39–62. For some historiography, see Gelin 1997 and Yon 1997.

## Some deep assumptions

### *Cumont*

Cumont became, like Rostovtzeff, an exile in middle age. For reasons that remain somewhat obscure, his liberal politics and anti-clericalism led the Belgian Government to refuse his promotion to the Chair of the History of Religions in Ghent in 1910.<sup>28</sup> Cumont's father and brother were Freemasons, and it is possible, though not certain, that this was the heresy that underpinned the resistance to him – potentially alongside his lifelong interest in mystery religions.<sup>29</sup> The family wealth meant that he did not need an income: Cumont resigned from the university and from his position in the Brussels museum and went into exile from 1912 as an independent scholar, living mainly in Rome and Paris.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Rostovtzeff, in a moving letter addressed to Cumont in Sweden, written in support of “mon cher ami” when he heard of the resignation, foresees his own exile.<sup>31</sup>

For all his own writing and the vast industry of historiography recently generated about him, the causes of Cumont's ideological drives remain opaque (at any rate to me), although their parameters are clear. He was a leading scholar in what might be thought a golden age for the study of ancient religions between the Belle Époque and the Second World War,<sup>32</sup> and a major mover in the great international congress on the history of religions that met every four years from 1900.<sup>33</sup> His religious Orientalism, dependent especially on German models of the history of religions, and a development of the approaches of such scholars as Johann Gustav Droysen (1808–84),<sup>34</sup> is highly complex but involved locating the origins, significant agency, and positive force of much of Greek and Roman religious culture in influence from the East.<sup>35</sup> The vitality of that force lies essentially in its place in explaining Christian origins, which cannot be entirely unconnected with displacing the more traditional Jewish genealogy from the study of Early Christianity.<sup>36</sup> In the preface to his much reprinted and translated bestseller, *Religions orientales* (first published in 1906),<sup>37</sup> Cumont puts it this way:

We have investigated only the internal development of Roman paganism ... and have considered its relation to Christianity only incidentally and by the way. ... Theologians were for a long time more inclined to consider the continuity of the Jewish tradition than the causes that disturbed it; but a reaction has taken

<sup>28</sup> On “L’affaire Cumont,” see Bonnet and Praet 2017, esp. the contributions of both editors (i.e., Bonnet 2017 and Praet 2017). The most recent general account is Praet 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Scheerlinck 2013b, 23–24. On the evidence and its uncertainty in relation to Cumont's own affiliations to Freemasonry, see Bonnet 2008a.

<sup>30</sup> See Bonnet 1997, 12–16, and appendix 2, 495–512, with the documentation and a commentary on “l’affaire de Gand.”

<sup>31</sup> See Bongard-Levine et al. 2007, 62–63, no. 5, written on 14/27 March 1911 (i.e., dated according to both the Julian and Gregorian calendars).

<sup>32</sup> For an outstanding introductory sketch, see Gagné 2019 (esp. 72 on Cumont).

<sup>33</sup> On the conferences, see Molendijk 2010.

<sup>34</sup> See Meyer 2009, 194–95; Bonnet and Van Haepere 2009, xxiii–xxix. On Droysen's religious history, see Momigliano 1970; Payen 2006.

<sup>35</sup> For extensive discussion, see Scheerlinck, 2013b, 103–218.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., Alvar 2008, 6–12, 25–26; and Gordon 2013, 86–90, who attributes the key post-war demolition of these assumptions (hardly separable from universal guilt about the Holocaust) to Cumont's great scholarly nemesis A. D. Nock: Nock 1951.

<sup>37</sup> On the reception of the book, see Bonnet and Van Haepere 2009, xliiv–lxxiv.

place and today they endeavour to show that the church has borrowed considerably from ... the pagan mysteries. ... In considering the Roman empire, the principal fact is that the Oriental religions propagated doctrines, previous to and later side by side with Christianity, that acquired with it universal authority at the decline of the ancient world.<sup>38</sup>

The phrase “only incidentally and by the way” in relation to Christianity means the conceptual framing device for the whole project. The claim for movement away from Jewish continuity to pagan mystical inspiration in Christian origins makes the case for a vibrant, emotionally compelling paganism (i.e., the opposite of the legalistic model of Roman religion of his time, associated with the likes of Theodore Mommsen,<sup>39</sup> but the full passion of religious fervor).<sup>40</sup> Despite Cumont’s own complicated personal relations with Roman Catholicism, this is very much a Catholic model of Christianity founded on pre-Christian Antique Rome wherein the Jews are necessary but not sufficient, and in key issues (like the naturally hegemonic nature of the religion) only incidental. The model, with its cocktail of Iranian, Semitic, and Hellenistic elements, is well presented in his account of Mithraism:

The basal layer of this religion, its lower and primordial stratum, is the faith of ancient Iran, from which it took its origin. Above this Mazdean substratum was deposited in Babylon a thick sediment of Semitic doctrines, and afterwards the local beliefs of Asia Minor added to it their alluvial deposits. Finally, a luxuriant vegetation of Hellenic ideas burst forth from this fertile soil and partly concealed from view its true original nature.<sup>41</sup>

As Richard Gordon puts it succinctly: “The concealed agendum was the question of the uniqueness, and by implication, validity, of Christianity; at the same time, it was the model of that religion which provided the agreed terms of discussion.”<sup>42</sup> The position is not incompatible with a moderate version of the Aryanist models which became dominant in European (especially German but also French) scholarship from the late 19th c. to the first half of the 20th c.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Rostovtzeff*

Rostovtzeff was one of the most prolific, wide-ranging, and profound ancient historians of any area of Antiquity since the modern discipline began. His ideological frame was also one of the most complex. He had exceptional command of the technical aspects of his trade (epigraphy, papyrology, the ancient languages and sources) and regularly

<sup>38</sup> Cumont 2009, 6–7, 12–13. In the English edition of Cumont 1911, xiv, xxii–xxiii. See, e.g., Bonnet and Van Haepelen 2009, xvi, xviii–xix, on Judaism.

<sup>39</sup> See Adrych and Dalglish 2020b, 60–62.

<sup>40</sup> See Adrych and Dalglish 2020a, 84–89.

<sup>41</sup> Cumont 1903, 30–31.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon 2016.

<sup>43</sup> For a history of this, rooted in paradigms of philology, race, and religion, see Olender 1992; on the work of Ernest Renan (quoted by Cumont 2009, 17 and 251), see Priest 2015. For some of Cumont’s investments in the racial-religious models of his time, see Scheerlinck 2013b, 219–48, expanded in Scheerlinck et al. 2016; also Praet 2021, 439–41. What he meant by an Aryan underpinning of Persian, Mazdaean, and ultimately Mithraic culture and religion has not been fully investigated: see, for instance, Cumont 1903, 4 (on the Aryan origins of Mithra); and Cumont 2009, 215–16, 226–27 (on Persian religion as descended from Aryan nature worship), 228.

demonstrated what is perhaps the most consistent integration of material culture (including all forms of art history and archaeology) shown by any historian of the ancient world.<sup>44</sup> His interests stretched across all periods from Archaic to Late Antique, and over all areas of Eurasian antiquity. Today he is most famous for his two great books on the social and economic history of Antiquity; the second, dedicated jointly to his wife and to Cumont, was published as the Second World War was raging.<sup>45</sup> These are extraordinary projects of narrative and analytic history, inclusive of but not dependent on material culture – narratives in which the Russian bourgeois exile from the Bolshevik Revolution took on the enemy’s own economic discourse to deliver a riposte to the Soviet regime. This came in the form of a hymn to the unity of the urban bourgeoisie and rural peasantry in creating enlightened imperial peace, and a lament for the weakness of the middle class, “the foundation of the Empire” unable to support the fabric of a world state.<sup>46</sup> While the terminology of proto-capitalism in both books is in concord with their author’s exilic American context, in many ways both read like a nostalgic celebration of an idealistic fantasy of enlightened empire moving to social democracy in the continuing late imperial Russia of some alternative universe, coupled with grim reflections on the causes of its ending. That parallel universe to the current world was Antiquity in the Rostovtzeffian vision.<sup>47</sup>

These works are quite remarkable gestures from the refugee *imaginaire* – all the while embedded in empirical scholarship (the second with an entire volume of notes) – but they are in some way tangential to other major strands of Rostovtzeff’s Russian and exile work, including the Dura project. As a member of the late Romanov intelligentsia, Rostovtzeff’s ideological frame was molded at a time of radical political change and liberalization, of extraordinary intellectual openness and creativity in the academy,<sup>48</sup> and of significant imperialist nationalism around the notion of a Holy Mother Russia.<sup>49</sup> A significant foundation of this project was the desire to use archaeology in the region around the Black Sea to prove that the twin strands of civilized Hellenism and an Iranian religion, as

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<sup>44</sup> There are many studies of Rostovtzeff now. See, e.g., Andreau 1988; Wes 1988; Wes 1990; Shaw 1992.

<sup>45</sup> Rostovtzeff 1926b and Rostovtzeff 1941 (dedication on xv).

<sup>46</sup> See the preface to Rostovtzeff 1926b, vii–xvi: “an alliance between the Italian *bourgeoisie* and the Italian proletariat” (viii); “the foundation of the Empire, the urban middle class” (ix); cf. the opening of the last chapter, with its paeon to “the constitutional Empire of Rome, based on cities and on the city bourgeoisie ... a period of calm and of peaceful development ... the most important institution of the ancient world with which ancient civilization stood and fell – the city-state ... the enlightened constitutional monarch, assisted by an influential and well-trained body of experts” (449–51). Likewise, the last chapter of Rostovtzeff 1941, 1054–98, 1115–26, 1304–11, celebrates the liberal, educated, civilized bourgeoisie of the Greek diaspora. For the underlying campaign against Bolshevism, see Rostovtzeff 1920, a fascinating polemical tract against the Revolution published by the Russian Liberation Committee in London, which concludes “A sick, contradictory, reactionary class-ideology, a total impotence in creative work and great virtuosity in destruction. May God save Russia; and may He protect the rest of the civilized world from the same sufferings!”

<sup>47</sup> See especially Rostovtzeff 1926a, 10: “The ancient world experienced, on a smaller scale the same process of development which we are experiencing now” and “The modern development ... differs from the ancient only in quantity but not in quality.”

<sup>48</sup> On academia in late imperial Russia, see, e.g., Byford 2007; Nethercott 2019.

<sup>49</sup> See, e.g., Tolz 2011, 23–46; Svetlikova 2013, 51–89, on P. A. Nekrasov’s ideology of divinely inspired autocracy founded in mathematics.



exemplified by the Scythians, were native to Russia and hence Russian identity.<sup>50</sup> Crucial to this venture, and in deep sympathy with the atmosphere of occultist spirituality that infused pre-revolutionary upper-class Russia in the so-called Silver Age (emblemized by Rasputin at the imperial court),<sup>51</sup> is the “conception of monarchy by the grace of god”: a god with deep indigenous origins which Rostovtzeff located through archaeological discussion in the visual cultures of the Scythians as rooted in Iranian influence.<sup>52</sup> None of this is unrelated to the deep Eurasian fantasy of late imperial Orientalism in Russia – not to be confused with Edward Said’s model of Orientalism – an Orientalism that was fundamentally a romantic and spiritual drive to animate the Asian element of Russian identity.<sup>53</sup> The key elements in this heady ideological mix that emerge in Rostovtzeff are: sacrality and religion (the deep ancestor of Russian Orthodoxy); monarchy (the deep ancestor of the Tsarist system); and an Eastern, and not Mediterranean, spiritual origin founded in the interface of Iranians and Greeks (that is, a set of Russian origins free of the West, as if the key links were the Orthodox line from Constantinople [the second Rome] to Moscow [the third Rome] without need for the first Rome).

We may flesh out some aspects of this uniquely Russian Orientalism in Rostovtzeff’s later works, written in exile. The cardinal theme of an Eastern center of spiritual monarchy is expressed in his view that:

Iranian conceptions, which have such a long history in our [i.e., greater Russia’s] half-Iranian south, filtered far into the West, conquering the minds and hearts of those who were not satisfied by the half-barbarian elements of their local religions or by the Greek religious ideas entirely foreign to the West.<sup>54</sup>

The turn to the East as opposed to the West in terms of core origins comes from Rostovtzeff’s teacher, Nikodim Kondakoff (1844–1925), who built an Eastern model for the origins of Byzantium.<sup>55</sup> But in antique studies the influence of Cumont, and especially his work on Mithraism as an Iranian religion that moved westward, is palpable here. This influence became the foundation for the friendship at the core of the Dura dig. Cumont’s theory of an Iranian (i.e., Aryan) origin and underpinning of the Mithras cult that spread west through the Roman Empire was an unshakably established academic truth for almost a century after it was first conceived in the 1890s, until it was irretrievably demolished for

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<sup>50</sup> See the excellent accounts of Meyer 2009 (with 192–95 on the influence of Cumont) and Meyer 2013, 1–94, esp. 22–23, 32–37, notably 90–94 on Rostovtzeff, 245–53, 302–8.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Greene 2006 and 2010 on revivalism in formal religion; Mannherz 2012 on occultism; Svetlikova 2013 on the heady mix of reactionary monarchism, antisemitism, Aryanism, and mathematical mysticism; Carlson 2015 on theosophy; Emerson et al. 2020, sections II–V, for a rich range of issues. One might mention figures like Madame Blavatsky and George Gurdjieff among the spiritualists; the Classical philologist, symbolist poet, and Nietzschean Vyacheslav Ivanov; and Andrei Bely’s novel *The Silver Dove* (1909). For Rostovtzeff’s place in this and its influence on, e.g., the opening of Rostovtzeff 1927b, 2–23, see Wes, 1990, 59–74. For the influence of Ivanov on Rostovtzeff, see Bongard-Levin et al. 1993; Rudich 1998, 51.

<sup>52</sup> See Rostovtzeff 2011 (first published in Russian 1913), 96–98 (quote at 97), 100, 107–9 (for “Irano-Semitic” and “Mazdaean” roots of this sacralization of kingship), 118–19 (for the resurgence of “Iranization” after the 2nd c. CE leading towards the “one supreme god”); with discussion by Meyer 2011, 82–92.

<sup>53</sup> For a conspectus from politics via academia to poetics, see Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010; Tolz 2011; Feldman 2018; Volkov 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Rostovtzeff 2011 (1913), 147 (his concluding sentence).

<sup>55</sup> See Lidova 2020, 139–49.

lack of any conclusive or compelling evidence in the 1970s.<sup>56</sup> It crucially underwrites Rostovtzeff's Iranocentrism.<sup>57</sup>

The need for finding mechanisms behind "the mixture of Greek and native elements in Babylonia" underpins Rostovtzeff's interest in Seleucid seals and bullae.<sup>58</sup> Such a model of inquiry also underlies a range of other books written by Rostovtzeff in exile: notably *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* (1922), where he roots the "animal style" of the Neolithic and later (so important for finds in Russia) in Mesopotamia and Iran;<sup>59</sup> and his subsequent *The Animal Style in South Russia and China* (1929), which places the Scythians (who were "almost pure Iranians with a slight admixture of Mongolian (or Turkish?) elements") at the center of Eurasian cosmopolitanism from Greece to China.<sup>60</sup> Rostovtzeff's remarkable catalog of Han bronzes from the Loo Collection makes the case about Western influence on Chinese art from Greece, Mesopotamia, south Russia, and especially Iran most strongly; the point is made more generally in his fine stylistic analyses of specific objects.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, the other core element – religion itself – is the theme of *Mystic Italy* (1927). It is this topic which remains the driving presentist agenda in Rostovtzeff's work once the sacred Russian Empire had been toppled. He attacks materialism repeatedly, contrasting it (in Antiquity) with the forces of the spirit:

penetrate beneath the outward show of materialism and hedonism, and we shall see how strong was the religious and mystic current even in the happiest days of the Roman empire ... It is evident that materialism was a lost cause. ... The triumph of the Christian faith, and of the religious conception of life which our modern self-confidence and our materialism try in vain to throw overboard.<sup>62</sup>

The contemporary parallels (should we read "dialectical" with "materialism"?) and targets are clear, but still more explicitly so here:

We live in an age which can be compared with the Hellenistic epoch in the history of the ancient world. We believe in our almighty mental power. We are confident we are able to conquer nature and reform human life. Religion is for a good many of us a survival, a tradition, a social and moral concept. And yet religion is not dead. From the depth of human conscience, mystic aspirations in their higher and lower aspects are coming up afresh, especially among those peoples who have learned a bitter lesson in the turmoils of revolution led by the materialistic aspect of socialist teachings. ... For good or for bad? Are we nearing a time when religion will be vanquished and eliminated? Or is this the turning point by which

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<sup>56</sup> See esp. Gordon 1975.

<sup>57</sup> Meyer 2009, 191–96; Meyer 2011, 85–88. In Rostovtzeff 1926a, 67, we find "Aryan, or Iranian," which is not an antithesis but an identity, as revealed in the index at 408: "Aryans (Iranians)."

<sup>58</sup> Rostovtzeff 1932, 22, and cf. 90: "How much or how little these Greeks learnt from the Babylonians we are not able to judge. One thing of which we may be sure is that they were strongly influenced by the Babylonian religion and especially by astrology. ... We must not forget that what the Parthians received and absorbed of Greek civilization, religion and art came from Babylon, especially Seleucia, though to a certain extent also from Mesopotamia and Palmyra."

<sup>59</sup> Rostovtzeff 1922, 191–209, with some discussion by Wengrow 2014, 1–18.

<sup>60</sup> Rostovtzeff 1929, quote at 21.

<sup>61</sup> See Rostovtzeff 1927a, 4–7, 47–50, 52–56, 59–67, for the general case; 15, 41, 43, for some specific and ad hoc discussions of objects.

<sup>62</sup> Rostovtzeff 1927b, 20–22.

our road will lead to a revival of mystic aspirations which may work the end of our proud civilization?<sup>63</sup>

The relative absence of religion in the two major historical projects of Rostovtzeff's American years – absent because, I would argue, Rostovtzeff chose the socioeconomic weapons of his Marxist enemy to argue the case *for* the bourgeoisie against Bolshevism<sup>64</sup> – and the lack of interest until recently in his Russian and Eurasian projects have led to both a misunderstanding of his liberalism, since it is in profound conflict with secularism,<sup>65</sup> and an overestimation of its commitment to capitalism in an American sense.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, the long oblivion of a lost and forgotten *imperial* Russia in the age of the Cold War has meant a failure to put issues of Russian nationalism (conceived as monarchical and anti-Soviet) at the occluded (or we might say concealed) center of everything Rostovtzeff wrote. That is clearly the case with two social and economic histories written against Bolshevism, and with the texts obviously about Russia, but I would argue that it is also not irrelevant either to his early work on Italy and on the colonate, or – and here I come to the principal concerns of this review essay – to the Dura project. The study of the colonate and the creation of serfdom as an institution had a different meaning for Russians than for others. Only in 1861 did Czar Alexander II emancipate the serfs, inaugurating a new era of liberalism (and liberating Rostovtzeff's own teacher, Kondakoff).<sup>67</sup> (One might even suggest that, to a Russian liberal, Late Antiquity only ended in 1861.) In the archaeology of Pompeii, it is often forgotten that Rostovtzeff's major and lasting contribution was the invention of the so-called "sacro-idyllic" model of landscape painting, in a monograph-length paper of almost 200 pages in German.<sup>68</sup> The premise was that Campanian wall painting was an imitation of Hellenistic models, which were therefore his real subject. What the imagery showed was a sanctification of landscape and of the land itself, located in the East; it laid a pictorial claim to a sacred territory by contrast with the Roman West. The logic of such argumentation was the product of a pre-revolutionary ideological perspective that linked the holy East (a world that included Scythia, Iran, Babylon, Syria, and Palestine) to Christian Constantinople and ultimately to Mother Russia.<sup>69</sup> The model is founded in part on the work of Kondakoff.<sup>70</sup>

These themes all culminate in the long excavation of Dura. They are expressed most explicitly in Rostovtzeff's books on the caravan cities and on Dura Europos itself.<sup>71</sup> In

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<sup>63</sup> Rostovtzeff 1927b, 22.

<sup>64</sup> He himself was quite aware of the absence and excuses it on these grounds: "I regret I have been unable in this volume to deal with ... the spiritual, intellectual and artistic life of the Empire. ... To have included them would not only have meant a doubling of the size of the book but would have involved a constant shifting from one aspect of the subject to another without a proper investigation of any one of them" (Rostovtzeff 1926b, xii).

<sup>65</sup> Notably Momigliano 1954, 345, is quite wrong to say "Rostovtzeff, although he studies ancient religion, can hardly be said to have been aware of the profound impact that the religious needs of man have had upon his development."

<sup>66</sup> A flaw in Reinhold 1946, 362–63, which was in fact otherwise a rather acute critique that certainly "got" the presentism of the enterprise.

<sup>67</sup> Rostovtzeff 1910.

<sup>68</sup> Rostovtzeff 1911.

<sup>69</sup> For some discussion, see Elsner 2021 (forthcoming).

<sup>70</sup> For the paradigm, see Lidova 2020, with 142 on Rostovtzeff; for Kondakoff's influence, see, e.g., Shaw 1992, 221–22.

<sup>71</sup> Rostovtzeff 1932 and 1938.

the former, Dura becomes the fundamental node of caravan trade to Palmyra and the West from the Euphrates, and eastward from Mesopotamia and Iran;<sup>72</sup> yet the account is above all about the religious buildings and finds.<sup>73</sup> In the latter, after a sketch of ancient Eurasia from Greece to India, he states that what he wanted from the excavation was “to throw light on the problem and origin of the Greco-Semitic civilization of Mesopotamia which was unquestionably from its early beginnings linked with the equally enigmatic Greco-Iranian civilization of Parthia. And Dura has not disappointed me.”<sup>74</sup> Notably:

There is found a kind of religious *koinē*, familiar to all the Semites and to the semi-tized Greeks and Iranians throughout Babylonia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Arabia. This *koinē* was probably evolved in the Hellenistic epoque and accepted both by the Parthians and the Romans. The greatest creation of the *koinē* was solar henotheism, which in this period became more and more accentuated.<sup>75</sup>

In other words, the drive for the Dura project and the excavation of “Pompeii of the Syrian desert” was the great sacro-Iranian model (derived from Cumont, especially his work on Mithras) of a Eurasian center, ancestral to modern Russia, where civilization burgeoned at the nexus of the caravan cities between East and West.<sup>76</sup>

### Some upshots and some ways forward

For the Cumont–Rostovtzeff axis, Dura was crucial as prime evidence for cultural and especially religious fusion at the very borders of the Persian and Roman empires.<sup>77</sup> The frame of their approach (and that of their followers) has been characterized as “text-led,”<sup>78</sup> “inadequately exploiting ... the rich archaeological data they recovered – and which they did not fully publish.”<sup>79</sup> The price of this, in the history of the site’s excavation, recording, and publication, was a downplaying of the civic aspects,<sup>80</sup> the private houses,<sup>81</sup> and the military dimension,<sup>82</sup> and an up-playing of the religious sites and their (admittedly

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<sup>72</sup> Rostovtzeff 1932, 105. This led to wealth, which in turn underpinned the patronage of sacred buildings (105–6); it was all undermined by war when the town effectively became a fort (114–19). For the “mirage des cités caravanières” shared by both Cumont and Rostovtzeff, see Bongard-Levine et al. 2007, 23–27.

<sup>73</sup> Esp. Rostovtzeff 1932, 178–216.

<sup>74</sup> Rostovtzeff 1938, 6–9 (quote from 9).

<sup>75</sup> Rostovtzeff 1938, 66, cf. 81, 89–90.

<sup>76</sup> For the Pompeii parallel, see Rostovtzeff 1938, 2–5 (quote at 2). For comparisons with south Russia, see, in the same work, 3, 4, 7, 63, 64, 95, and 98.

<sup>77</sup> E.g., Cumont, 1926, x.

<sup>78</sup> James 2019, 3; but the point was elegantly made much earlier by Goodenough 1964, 4–5, in his account of the synagogue: “In their remarks about the Dura Synagogue scholars have thus far united only in feeling that explanation of the paintings must begin by orienting the paintings with their own conception of Judaism. Few scholars, that is, began with the paintings themselves: practically all began with this or that body of Jewish literature, with which they insisted the paintings agreed.” Of Cumont’s magnum opus on Dura, nearly half was devoted to parchments and inscriptions, while most of the rest was about religious buildings and objects: Cumont 1926, 281–454, on “les parchemins” and “les inscriptions”; 29–240, on temples, etc.

<sup>79</sup> James 2019, 8.

<sup>80</sup> See now James 2019, 286–313.

<sup>81</sup> Baird 2014, 14–20.

<sup>82</sup> See now James 2019, e.g., 17: “Dura’s original excavators never worked up their developing understandings of the military base into a fully coherent and detailed account.” For the limitations of Rostovtzeff’s understanding of the military, see James 2019, 22–25.

impressive) visual culture. Even in the areas which the two principals' interpretative focus illuminated, such as the cultural mix at the militarized borderlands of great empires,<sup>83</sup> or issues of religion itself, the teleological frame of their approach erected at least as many obstacles as it has opened opportunities. Clearly, there is fundamental Orientalism governing the excavators' assumptions – but we need to beware of the specter of Said's notions of a passive Orient in approaching the Orientalism of the 19th- and early 20th-c. study of religion.<sup>84</sup> For both Cumont and Rostovtzeff, deeply invested in the *ex oriente lux* model of the history of religions, where the bright dawn from the East came to enlighten the West, and in which the energies of mystery and revelation counted as key to civilization, the East – whether Mesopotamian, Persian, or Syrian – carried plenty of positive agency.<sup>85</sup>

If one looks at the involvement of the principals in the publication of the site, the most important building to them was clearly the Mithraeum, which they published together in the Preliminary Report of 1939.<sup>86</sup> Yet, even as the French–American expedition was proceeding, issues in the outside world conspired to change the conceptual frame. The plight of German Jewry after Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and before the dig was suspended in 1937/8, what happened to Jews across the whole of Europe between the end of excavations and Cumont's death in 1947, and then the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 all turned the prime focus of discussion to the synagogue (in the monographs of Eleazar Sukenik, Carl Kraeling, and E. R. Goodenough, as well as du Mesnil),<sup>87</sup> and later to the church,<sup>88</sup> both of which saw extensive “final reports.” The Mithraeum has not only failed to receive a final report, but Cumont's own text on it was only posthumously published in an English version in the 1970s (in the same volume that demolished his theory of Mithraism), while the French original has only been published for the first time in the volume under review.<sup>89</sup> That is, subsequent scholarship and the drive of historical events moved away from the subtle (and subtly antisemitic) agenda of Christian origins founded on Hellenized Iranian monotheism (which, for Classicists, stood in opposition to the norms of Christianity's Jewish heritage) back to Jewish origins and the synagogue. (Care is needed around terms: I mean “antisemitic” in the sense of downgrading Jewish influence in European ancestral history and Christian origins.<sup>90</sup>)

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<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., Baird 2016 on dress practices; Sommer 2016 and Stuckenbruck 2016 on bilingualism.

<sup>84</sup> On the limitations – frankly travesties – of the Saidian model (which notably fails to take on questions of religion, the historiographical traditions of Germany, the dominant scholarly culture in the 19th c., or Russia), see Wharton 1995, 165–66; Marchand, 2009, xvii–xxvi; Scheerlinck 2013b, 1–18.

<sup>85</sup> For some context, see esp. Marchand 2009; Scheerlinck 2013b, 219–48 (specifically in relation to Cumont); Gagné 2019.

<sup>86</sup> Cumont and Rostovtzeff 1939.

<sup>87</sup> Du Mesnil du Buisson 1939; Sukenik 1948; Kraeling 1956; Goodenough 1964.

<sup>88</sup> Kraeling 1967; now Peppard 2016.

<sup>89</sup> The two versions are in the volume under review at 337–96 (English) and 397–438 (French). The few more recent discussions include Mastrocinque 2004 and Gnoli 2016. Lucinda Dirven and Matthew McCarty are now preparing a “final report”: early thoughts towards it include Dirven and McCarty 2014 and Dirven and McCarty 2020. Note that no other (pagan) religious buildings have received “final reports.”

<sup>90</sup> For implicit “antisemitism” in this sense, see Stroumsa 2009, 91–95, on Cumont; and Marchand 2009, 483, on both Rostovtzeff and Cumont.

The religious frame has been highly problematic. Those of us who have written on Durene art in relation to religion or on Dura's religions and religious life have been caught in its meshes (consciously or not);<sup>91</sup> those who have resisted the religious hegemony of the excavators' reports and approach to explore other things have had to write against the thrust of the reports and the structure of the archive.<sup>92</sup> The Orientalist delusion of Iranian vitalism underpinning Western mysteries and Hellenic spirituality has little factual substance but significant foundations in the history and literatures of a number of European fantasies, from Freemasonry to the antisemitism that contaminated approaches to Christian origins (and much else besides) for most of the later 19th c. and early 20th c. Its driving persuasive energy was certainly (one might hope finally) overturned in the revulsion to the Holocaust after 1945. But the excavators of Dura used the material culture of the site in an attempt to establish Greco-Iranian "realities" that have no evidential foundation, such as the idea of Parthian art,<sup>93</sup> on the basis of interpretative positions extrapolated from what today seems a highly eccentric theoretical position as applied to the material culture they discovered. It means that those trying to look anew at the manifold evidence of one of the greatest excavations of the last century must do so through a grim series of distorting, ideological mirrors.

So where do we go from here? In the foreseeable future there is no chance of further archaeological work, after the disasters of the recent civil wars in Syria and Iraq, and the activities of the so-called Islamic State. We need to be creative with the archive. That means taking studies in new directions – for instance, Jennifer Baird's work on domestic housing<sup>94</sup> – and seeing Dura through new lenses. The city has a long history (much of it opaque) from obscure Seleucid beginnings (it was probably founded around 300 BCE), followed by a longish period of Parthian dominance (it fell to the Arsacids around 113 BCE), and then a brief span of Roman military control (from about 165 CE to its fall and destruction ca. 256).<sup>95</sup> Most of what survives now is from the Later Parthian and Roman eras, when the town was subject to significant Palmyrene influence and included many Palmyrene residents.<sup>96</sup> One of the oddest aspects of all this is the late "golden age" of multi-faith religious and visual activity just as the so-called crisis of the 3rd c. was kicking in across the Roman world, as evidenced by the temples, the houses adapted into cult buildings, the large numbers of frescoes and reliefs depicting subjects of religious cult in particular, and notably non-animal sacrifice by means of sprinkling incense on altars.<sup>97</sup> This material is precisely what so galvanized Cumont and Rostovtzeff.

One move would be to go beyond the specifics of the site and to set it in a broader set of contexts, both local and international.<sup>98</sup> The city stood at the eastern edge of what was

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<sup>91</sup> Perkins 1973; Wharton 1995, 15–63; Dirven 1999; Elsner 2001a; Sommer 2005, 271–94; Kaizer 2009a; Kaizer 2009b; Duchâteau 2013; Buchmann 2016; Dirven 2016; Yon 2016.

<sup>92</sup> Millar 1998; Baird 2014; Baird 2018; James 2019.

<sup>93</sup> The subject of Rostovtzeff 1935, a 150-page monograph of an article, comprehensively dismantled by Dirven 2016.

<sup>94</sup> Baird 2018.

<sup>95</sup> An up-to-date summary of the history is in Baird 2018, 17–37.

<sup>96</sup> See, e.g., Kaizer 2017, 67–73.

<sup>97</sup> See Elsner 2012, 147–55.

<sup>98</sup> Something like what Pollard 2000 tried to do with Dura as a fortress; for a different approach, focused on political/cultural localism, see Sommer 2005; Andrade 2013 (esp. 211–41). But all of these are rather Romanocentric.

called in Late Antiquity the “Barbarian Plain,” the Syrian steppe between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean Sea, which sat politically at the border between the great imperial worlds of Rome/Byzantium and Parthia/Sassania (that is, Europe and Iran).<sup>99</sup> That borderland was also a no-man’s land of essential political importance: a polyglot, multifaith world out of which Palmyra briefly made its own empire in the 270s; a contested territory in which sections were repeatedly taken and retaken by each of the great empires over more than half a millennium from Trajan’s Parthian conquests in the 1st c. CE to Heraclius’s war with Persia in the 7th c. It ceased to have a political meaning when it was definitively and finally conquered by the new and vibrant religion of Islam in the 630s, in a sweeping move that ended the political patterns of Antiquity across the Near East and north Africa forever. In Mesopotamia, across the Euphrates from Dura and close to the Tigris, the so similar and yet so different city of Hatra in the “Parthian near west,” which was never taken by the Romans despite various attempts and which has also been destroyed by the so-called Islamic State in recent years, intimates a very different kind of peripheral territory.<sup>100</sup>

Before Islam, the world of the Barbarian Plain operated with a mix of an intrinsic and distinctive identity of its own on the one hand and, on the other, a hybridity calculated to appeal beyond itself both eastward to Iran and west to the Greeks, especially in matters of religion. Whether one looks at the cult of the Syrian goddess in Hierapolis on the northern Euphrates in the pre-Christian era, which Lucian describes vividly in the 2nd c. CE,<sup>101</sup> or that of St. Sergius of Rusafa (approximately midway between Hierapolis and Dura but away from the river) from the 5th c.,<sup>102</sup> the religious, pilgrimage culture of the Barbarian Plain looks out beyond itself toward both East and West.<sup>103</sup> These local cults themselves emulate the larger-scale, new religions born in the broader borderland between Persia and the Roman world, which spread through conversion, persecution, hegemony, and war beyond both the Mediterranean and Iran: I mean Christianity and Manichaeism, and finally Islam.

It is within the localist and international dynamics of a distinctive world defined by a specific historical geography and by being a problematic borderland space within ancient international relations, within a world that could rise to expansive imperial pretensions in Zenobia’s Palmyra of the 270s and later, in the Umayyad period, attempt to rule the Islamic Empire from Damascus, that the vibrant mix of religion, militarism, and domesticity evidenced by the Dura dig needs to be placed and understood. These issues are not so far from what the principals of the excavation wanted to explore, but they need to be de-ideologized, decolonialized, and reinvigorated through a modern understanding not only of globalism across Afro-Eurasia but also of regionalism and civic identity within the intercultural world of Dura.

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<sup>99</sup> Excellent summary discussion in Fowden 1999, 1–5 with 65–66.

<sup>100</sup> On Hatra, see, e.g., Sommer 2003; Sommer 2005, 355–90; Dirven 2013.

<sup>101</sup> See Elsner 2001b; Lightfoot 2003; Lightfoot 2005.

<sup>102</sup> See Fowden 1999.

<sup>103</sup> For instance, Lucian, *Syr. D.* 10, 13, 32, 49, 56, mentions the peoples of Syria, Arabia, and beyond the Euphrates, as well as Phoenicians, Babylonians, Cappadocians, Cilicians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Medes, and Armenians, while also comparing the goddess and her consort to a variety of Greek deities at 15 and 31–32. The Sergius cult spread west to Constantinople and east to Mesopotamia and Iran: Fowden 1999, 91–129.

I should thank Ted Kaizer and the Bibliotheca Cumontiana for making the multiplicity of Cumont's Dura publications available in one place: we need to know these things both for the information they convey and for understanding how to keep our distance from their assumptions and starting points. I realize that, in focusing on Cumont *and* Rostovtzeff, I have somewhat moved beyond my duty in reviewing K.'s volume, but I have done so because to take account of 100 years of Dura requires confronting the full frame of its early publication. What has been uncovered is complicated and awkward, and much of it unfamiliar. The need to know more about the critical axioms and presuppositions of our ancient historical and archaeological fathers (I fear they were almost always men) is essential – well beyond the archaeology of Dura Europos – because to think outside the box that previous generations have created requires a critical understanding of why that box was made and why it may have seemed compelling in earlier and different historical contexts. If there is a takeaway from this piece, beyond thinking about Dura itself, it is that archaeologists need to do more of this kind of historiographical work.

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