

solitary, but nevertheless highly significant two pieces of the historical record. Historians and literary people need to come back to each other.

ANTHONY SPALINGER
UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

Persia's Imperial Power in Late Antiquity: The Great Wall of Gorgān and Frontier Landscapes of Sasanian Iran. By EBERHARD W. SAUER; HAMID OMRANI REKAVANDI; TONY J. WILKINSON; and JEBRAEL NOKANDEH. British Institute of Persian Studies Archaeological Monographs. Oxford: OXBOW BOOKS, 2013. Pp. xvi + 711, illus. \$150. [Distributed by the David Brown Book Co., Oakville, CT.]

This book reports the results of a multi-year study of the Great Wall of Gorgān, in the northeast corner of modern Iran to the east of the Caspian Sea and just south of Iran's border with Turkmenistan. Although the Gorgān Wall was an enormous edifice, it is little known even among specialists, so this collection of linked studies is welcome for what it reveals about the wall's setting, construction, and fortification. The book is more important, however, for how the authors use their study of the wall to explicate the power, organization, functioning, and collapse of the Sasanian Empire that built it.

The Gorgān Wall was actually a complex assemblage of features and structures. The wall itself, some two meters wide, at least three meters high, and over 195 km long, was built of fired bricks. It was connected to a second, shorter wall—the 11 km long Tammisheh Wall—at its western end. Over thirty forts were integrated into the main wall's structure and a wide trench along the wall's northern face was actually a canal rather than a simple ditch. There were large arched kilns every thirty to a hundred meters along the length of the wall, used to fire the bricks the wall was built of. And a series of large enclosed settlements south of the wall are interpreted as campaign bases serving to support the garrisons along the wall if they came under attack. The enormous effort required to build and maintain this complex demonstrates both the power of the Sasanian Empire and the degree of threat they faced in this corner of their territory.

The first question this book resolves is the dating of the wall's construction and abandonment. It was built during the reign of the Sasanians, who ruled a vast swath of the Middle East from the early third to the mid-seventh centuries AD. More specifically, the wall appears to have been built during the fifth or possibly early sixth century and to have been abandoned somewhere between 612 and the 650s, during the time of the Islamic conquest. The date of construction has been determined through carbon dates from charcoal in the kilns along the wall and optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) dates from bricks, pottery, sediments in the kilns, and soil beneath the wall. The abandonment is dated by carbon dates from excavations inside Fort 4 near the eastern end of the wall, and supported by both historical records and the absence of typologically later material in surface collections from forts along the wall.

The bulk of this bulky book is devoted to a diverse set of field studies by a collection of researchers. The first study examines the landscape of the Gorgān Plain, emphasizing that the wall marks a natural frontier between arable lands to the south and the dry grasslands of the Turkmenistan steppe to the north. Beyond that observation, this section is most interesting for its discussions of the paleochannels of the Gorgān River and the massive fluctuations in the level (and shoreline) of the Caspian Sea, which ranged from 6 m higher than today in 500 BC, 2 to 4 m lower than today when the wall was built, and 4 m higher than today around 1200 AD.

The core of the book—the section on field research—begins with the archaeological survey, which was based on an analysis of Landsat (digital) and CORONA (photographic) imagery supplemented by visits to sites or features recognized on the satellite data. Sixty-two sites were visited and mapped, and “represented diagnostic wares were collected” by the surveyors. Notably, the research did not include walking surveys of the wall or systematic walking surveys to establish what the satellite coverage might have missed. In addition, a significant proportion of the settlements identified from satellite

imagery were not visited, fewer than a third of the forts along the wall were visited, and no systematic surface collections were made at any site.

Among the intriguing results of the survey, the authors identified two canals in the western portion of the survey area that were older than the Gorgān Wall. They observed that settlements in the eastern steppe portion of the survey area, where rainfall agriculture was apparently practiced, have hollow ways radiating from them. By contrast, in the west, which was apparently an area of irrigation agriculture, hollow ways are rare or absent even around sites of the same general size and age as sites in the eastern steppe. They found no signs of a road parallel to the wall, and argue, based on soil profiles and the presence of possible feeder canals, that the ditch on the north side of the wall was actually a canal, built prior to the wall's construction, that supplied water for making bricks as well as providing water to the garrisons of the wall's forts.

The details of the wall's construction, as revealed by a series of excavations and magnetometer surveys, are staggering. It was made of fired bricks and mud mortar, with each brick roughly $40 \times 40 \times 10$ cm in size and weighing about 20 kg. Five section cuts across the wall indicate that it was five bricks (2 m) wide and, although the entire wall has been robbed for its fired bricks, it was probably at least 3 m (25 courses) high. Surprisingly, the investigators found no signs that the wall had any foundation. A bit of arithmetic shows that there were at least 100 million bricks in the wall, or some 20,000 (350 tons) every fifty meters. The bricks were made and fired on site, in thousands of kilns spaced 37 to 86 m apart along the entire length of the wall. Building the kilns, hauling in fuel, casting wet mud into bricks, lugging and stacking and lugging and mortaring . . . the expense, logistics, and manpower required to build the Gorgān and Tammisheh Walls provide an unmistakable demonstration of the power of the Sasanian Empire.

Separate chapters on forts and fortlets, mountain strongholds, campaign bases, and surveys and excavations at the sites of Dasht Qal'eh and Qelich Qōineq reveal the infrastructure of settlements associated with the walls. These studies provide a broad overview of the regional settlement system during the Sasanian era. However, when compared to the extent of the features they are investigating, the limitations of the research are striking. For example, there are over thirty forts along the Gorgān Wall, but only seven have been studied through magnetometer surveys and only one, Fort 4, has been partially excavated. Most of the others were not even visited. I do not intend this as a criticism; it is rather a comment about how much about the Gorgān Wall and its cultural landscape remains unexamined.

Finally, a collection of chapters on various classes of material (ceramics, glass, bones, charcoal, and bitumen) and methods of data collection (underwater and archaeomagnetic surveys and OSL dating) add essential detail to the analyses presented throughout the report.

There are, of course, problems that users of this volume should be aware of. Most significantly, some of the maps and figures lack useful or critical information. For example, Figure 3:7, the map showing paleochannels of the Gorgān River, needs some sort of key showing the sequence of the relict channels described in the text. The CORONA images on pp. 104–12 are too small and of too poor resolution to be of much use. Some images have labels to identify features discussed in the text but others, particularly Figure 3:32, do not. Some images do not have scales. Figure 6:2, a topographical map of Fort 4, has two overlapping grids, no scale or key, and no compass arrow to orient the map. Readers should not be left to puzzle out such issues on their own.

There are also a few places where the authors' discussion and interpretation are either confusing or unconvincing. In particular, Figure 6:3 (the magnetometer survey of Fort 4) shows the interior of the fort divided into four quadrants rather than two halves, but the "Narrow Lane" running upper right to lower left is only marked on Plates 6:3 and 6:4 at the back of the book. And the features of Fort 4 that the authors call "canals" were almost certainly drains to let water out rather than ditches to bring water in, because the contours given on Plate 6:4 show that the interior of the fort is higher than the level of the canal running outside of the adjacent section of the Gorgān Wall. Finally, a summary table listing data on the wall forts—location, size, distance to adjacent forts, preservation, whether visited, etc.—would have been very useful.

In summation, this volume presents a large, complex story built brick by carefully acquired brick into an impressive edifice. There is, as the authors regularly remind us, a great deal more to be done.

And at a few points, the book's data, arguments, and interpretations could have been presented more clearly. But as a whole, this is a monumental contribution to the archaeological study of Sasanian Iran. The authors can be proud of their work.

JOHN R. ALDEN
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Die Rifāʿiyya aus Damaskus: Eine Privatbibliothek im osmanischen Syrien und ihr kulturelles Umfeld.

By BORIS LIEBRENZ. Islamic Manuscripts and Books, vol. 10. Leiden: BRILL, 2016. Pp. xvi + 421, illus. \$181, €140.

Middle Eastern history is currently experiencing a major shift toward a greater interest in identifying documentary material, in addition to the standard canon of normative and narrative texts. The field of reading and library history is particularly blessed by this documentary turn as it had reached virtual stagnation, doling out similar or even the same anecdotes. In recent years this has dramatically changed, in particular for the early modern and Ottoman period: a collaborative research group headed by Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar, and Cornell Fleischer is working on the catalogue of Sultan Bayezid II's royal library catalogue from 909 (1502f.); François Déroche has been awarded an ERC grant for his project "Saadian Intellectual and Cultural Life" (1554–1660) focused on the sultans' library preserved as a "time capsule" in the El Escorial monastery; Henning Sievert has used various documents to retrace the literary life of an eighteenth-century bureaucrat; and Tobias Heinzelmann has shrewdly employed manuscript evidence to bring to light the usage of popular religious literature—to name but a few.

Boris Liebrezn's book under review lies fully in this trend and it brings to light a particularly elusive form of book collection, that of "private" collections. Whereas we have some good case studies of collections in institutional contexts, such as the *madrasa*, and court contexts, private book collections have remained among the field's known unknowns. The case study presented here is the so-called Rifāʿiyya collection from Damascus currently held in Leipzig. The elusiveness of private collections is no better illustrated than by the fact that this collection only gained its current name in Leipzig and that we are not even sure who its owner (al-Rifāʿī ?) actually was—Liebrezn is justifiably very cautious in his hypothesis as to this owner's identity. The collection was acquired in the mid-nineteenth century by the Saxonian authorities via the Damascus-based jack-of-all-trades Gottfried Wetzstein, Prussian consul, Arabist, and entrepreneur. The Leipzig University Library preserved the collection's distinctive identity, not merging it with other manuscripts—a stroke of luck that so many other historical collections, merged without further ado into the large European or Middle Eastern collections that developed from the late nineteenth century onward, did not escape. As the Rifāʿiyya collection is not mentioned in any contemporaneous source and not a single manuscript note has ever cited it, this decision was crucial. Had the manuscripts in this collection been merged into the larger Leipzig collection, its existence would have been irretrievably lost.

Liebrezn was thus presented with the daunting task of writing a book on a non-documented library. And he has done a brilliant job in the face of this challenge by giving us a book that is not only a pleasure to read, but, more importantly, is the first full-scale study to rely on manuscript notes (*Sekundäreinträge* in this book's terminology). While manuscript notes have been acknowledged for quite a while, no monograph has as yet fully engaged with this important documentary source. There are hardly any easily accessible research tools for this line of work: manuscript catalogues mention them too infrequently to yield a critical mass and an editorial compendium of a corpus has only been undertaken for a selection of *samāʿāt* from medieval Damascus. Research based on these notes thus requires scouting large numbers of manuscripts and deciphering often hideously written scribbles to get more often than not frustratingly fragmentary information. Liebrezn has advanced this line of research by not only documenting all of the notes on the Rifāʿiyya manuscripts, but also those on other Damascene