The Parthian Kingdom, the dominant polity between the Euphrates and Zagros mountains for nearly four centuries, has often been described as a rival ‘superpower’ to the Roman Empire. However, perhaps surprisingly, there has been little scholarship in English regarding this large and, in many ways, successful empire. Daryn Graham’s intentions with this self-published work, *Rome & Parthia: Power, Politics and Profit*, are, in his own words, to provide, ‘a thoughtful book… at the very least for the purpose of inspiring further research’ (1). The focus is on the changing political relationship between Rome and the Parthians, from the time of the first diplomatic contact in 95 BCE to the collapse of Arsacid authority in the mid-third century CE. The book contains eleven chapters, in addition to a short introduction and conclusion. These proceed chronologically, examining in turn: Sulla’s treaty, the Mithradatic Wars, Carrhae, the Civil Wars, the Augustan period, the Julio-Claudians, Flavians, Trajan, Hadrian, the Antonines and the Severan period.

It is difficult to judge whether the author has more developed ambitions, since the monograph lacks a clear statement of intent and scope, and it is unclear whether this book should be assessed as an academic argument attempting to write a new paradigm for Romano-Parthian relations, or as a synthesis of current scholarship. Moreover, the intended audience is unidentified: whether this is aimed at crafting academic debate, or informing undergraduate students or the non-expert public. Graham is correct in asserting that there is a dearth of relevant scholarship, especially in English (iv), but a number of weaknesses ensure that this contribution does not adequately address the problem.
There are numerous editing issues, which may arise due to the independent nature of the publication. Spelling and grammar problems are present throughout the text. There are inconsistencies in the presentation of inscriptions (i.e., 132, 137) and the use of names: Octavian and Augustus are used interchangeably as opposed to reflecting a difference in period. More fundamentally, a failure to adequately punctuate, at times, renders the prose difficult to follow. The images, which could add significantly to the understanding of the argument, seem an afterthought, since there is no reference to them in the text.

One structural weakness is the absence of comprehensive background. The introductory chapter delivers only a cursory overview of the Roman and Parthian administrative and political systems, which does not contain sufficient detail to supply context for the wider study (2–4). Similarly, the discussion of imperialism, which concludes Chapter II, is unfocused and deficient in providing a framework within which its applicability might be considered. Graham does not provide any definition or explanation of the term, instead taking it as given that some Romans ‘used every opportunity to extend their imperialist aspirations’ (27). Another major criticism of this work is its lack of nuance. The discussions of L. Licinius Lucullus’ recall (17–21) and C. Iulius Caesar’s planned Parthian campaign (50–55) are particularly simplistic. By dismissively stating that ‘the Senate promptly decided to replace [Lucullus] with Gnaeus Pompeius [sic]’ Graham ignores the well-documented senatorial opposition to the lex Manilia which actually brought about this transition. Similarly, the assertion that Caesar sought to invade Parthia in order to provide the foundations for a literal monarchy ignores the complex and unresolved political situation in 44 BCE. Likewise, there are some radical leaps in reasoning, specific examples include the idea that Sinatruces’ reign, for which there is very little evidence, was regarded as ‘peaceful’ (16) or that M. Licinius Crassus’ invasion of the Parthian Empire was inspired by Pompeius’ observation of the Silk Road (21). There is also a startling absence of important scholarship. One would expect Ziegler’s, as yet unsurpassed, Die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich to be discussed at least in passing.¹ Similarly, Graham appears to have neglected the useful, and relatively recent volume edited by Dabrowa.² As such, this work shows little awareness of its

² Dabrowa, E. (ed.). Ancient Iran and the Mediterranean World: Studies in Ancient History: Proceed-
own place within contemporary scholarship.

The quality and the depth of quality increases in the second half of the work, perhaps due to the author’s greater familiarity with the later periods. Graham presents some pertinent arguments regarding the Flavian period and Hadrian's principate, which provide a necessary corrective to some earlier views, and these chapters are among the most developed. The contention that Hadrian introduced a policy of consolidation, famously put forward by Luttwak, is convincingly rejected through a balanced examination of the wider political context. Another positive aspect is the occasional digression to discuss the merits and problems of the available source material (cf. 29–32, 121–122, 162–167), and this could have been done more regularly. Graham’s work seems intended to construct a broad narrative, investigating the evolution of the political relationship between Rome and the Parthian Empire. To an extent, it succeeds in portraying the shifting nature of this relationship over the whole period of diplomatic contact between the two powers. However, the argument is severely hampered by a lack of detailed enquiry and the absence of a clear structure.

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