

Palmyra revisited: 40 years of different ways of research

essential reading for those studying the city in all its aspects, and an invaluable resource for scholars exploring the complexities of Roman colonies in the Greek East.

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Palmyra revisited: 40 years of different ways of research

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SEIGNE, J. 2021. *Observations sur la topographie de Palmyre*. *Studia Palmyrenskie* 14. Warsaw: Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology.

GAWLIKOWSKI, M. 2022. *Tadmor – Palmyra. A Caravan City between East and West*. Cracow: IRSA Publishers.

From 1959, the Polish Archaeological Mission at Palmyra was the flagship of Palmyra research for more than 50 years, involving annual excavation in the field as well as publication activities, especially in the various series of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology (PCMA) of the University of Warsaw.¹ Other missions later also started

* The author notes that he is in scientific exchange and personal contact with both authors of the publications reviewed here, but these do not constitute a conflict of interest for the purposes of this book review.

¹ See the Palmyra project bibliography, Obłuski 2022.

investigations in Palmyra and its hinterland.² The beginning of the war in Syria in 2010 and especially the brutal destruction of monuments by ISIS/Daesh in 2015 brought about a new research situation for Palmyra. Local work on site was suddenly no longer possible except for rescue operations.³ As an immediate consequence, numerous exhibitions and conferences were organized, and an increasing and almost innumerable number of special studies were published. New fields of research and new objectives were established,⁴ including an ongoing emphasis on ancient collections and archives,⁵ and a controversial general discussion about reconstruction or restoration of the destroyed monuments.⁶ Additionally, various summary monographs on Palmyra and the Palmyrene have been published since then.⁷

The two publications reviewed here should be understood in this context. They were published at the same time, have approximately the same volume of text, and reflect personal summaries by authors intensively connected with Palmyra for more than 40 years. Jacques Seigne, Emeritus Research Director at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), visited Palmyra first in 1977, being at that time architect at the French Institute of Archaeology of the Near East. Michał Gawlikowski, Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Archaeology of Warsaw University, was director of the Polish Archaeological Mission in Palmyra continuously from 1973 onwards. Thus, both authors can rely on their long-term investigations on site, their theoretical research, and their own numerous previous publications. In spite of these coincidences, the two publications differ fundamentally from each other.

J. Seigne's (S.) *Observations sur la topographie de Palmyre* is a collection of 18 chapters that stand independently from each other but are substantially connected thematically. The chapters are subdivided into sections with subtitles and organized in two parts. In the first part, the author examines single buildings and architectural structures following a topographical order. In the second part, he discusses different circulation networks and road systems of the town. Finally, the author gives his view on the urban development of Palmyra.

After a bibliography, S. declares in an *avant-propos* and introduction his personal and scientific affinity to Palmyra since more than 40 years ago, when Ernest Will, Adnan Bounni, and Nassib Saliby entrusted him with first investigations at the sanctuary of Nabu. Then he explains the aim of his work here: a publication of his own investigations, documentations, and drawings, most of them unpublished hitherto, and his reflections on

² Summarizing reports of the American, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Swiss, and Syrian Missions up to 2010 in Gawlikowski and Majcherek 2013; Kanjou and Tsuneki 2016; Massih and Nishiyama 2018; Saito and Sugiyama 2018.

³ E.g., the exceptional restoration action immediately after the destruction of the Lion statue in front of the museum in 2015; Markowski 2019.

⁴ Summarizing already Kaizer 2016; see also Schmidt-Colinet 2018.

⁵ E.g., Ducrey et al. 2017; see also Levisen 2022; Poelstra 2022.

⁶ E.g., already Mulder 2017, 230–40; Munawar 2017. Proposals and statements by Palmyra excavators in Saito and Sugiyama 2018; see also Stucky 2018, 68–69; Barański 2020, 299–310. For the temple of Bel, see Schmidt-Colinet 2019b; Schmidt-Colinet 2020; Schmidt-Colinet 2022; also Schmidt-Colinet and Seigne 2022, 71–73.

⁷ E.g., Hammad 2016; Sartre-Fauriat and Sartre 2016; Seland 2016; Aruz 2017; Delplace 2017; Meyer 2017; Sommer 2017; Raja 2017; Barański 2019; Raja 2022.

this material, combining these with stylistic observations and epigraphic arguments. The author is aware that some of his reflections are hypothetical or end with a question mark. In any case, they should be understood as an urgent appeal for further research and new investigations in the field.

The first part of the book contains ten chapters. In the first (17–36, with an epigraphic addendum by F. Imbert), the chronological relationship of the remains of four architectural structures on top of the Gebel Muntar is clarified: the fortification tower, the small temples of Manawat, and that of Bel Hammôn, and the sections of the earliest city walls. In the second chapter (37–64), S. proposes new reconstructions and interpretations for the agora, including the far-reaching results of recent excavations in the wadi immediately to its south (40, fig. 2.3; 61, fig. 2.11; see also below, chapter 11), and for the so-called curia and the basilica. The horseshoe-shaped “Senat” is interpreted as a building used to honor Odainat and his family. In the third chapter (65–75), the two columns flanking the southern entrance of the crossroads from the Great Colonnade to the temple of Baalshamin are reconstructed as two column monuments crowned by statues of Baalshamin surrounded by grain stalks (71, fig. 3.3; 74, fig. 3.5). S. simultaneously discusses the merlons crowning the temples of Arsu, Allat, Bel, and Nabu, and other buildings at Palmyra.⁸ The remains of a monumental altar discovered by the author in 2011 under the Great Colonnade are discussed in Chapter 4 (77–85). The altar is situated immediately north of the so-called Caesareum and oriented to an earlier axis of the Great Colonnade (79, fig. 4.1; 81, fig. 4.2). In Chapter 5 (87–98), the building phases of the theater (never finished, but used) and the wall with pilasters behind the *scaenae frons* are interpreted in connection with neighboring structures such as the Caesareum, the Great Colonnade, and the temple of Nabu. The *tribunalia* over the *parodoi* are reconstructed with statue groups (93, fig. 5.5). In a short chapter 6 (99–106), a reconsideration of the arguments of A. Bounni and N. Saliby leads to the peristyle complex near the theatre being interpreted as a palace-like building.

In a long chapter 7 (107–23, with an epigraphic addendum by M. Gawlikowski), the Monumental Arch, its inscriptions, and the junction between sectors A and B of the Great Colonnade (i.e., the sections southeast and northwest of the Arch) are completely reconsidered. According to S., sections A and B existed *before* the Arch and were connected by an oval piazza, opening in direction to the sanctuary of Bel (120–21, fig. 7.8–9). Later, the Arch was erected as a victory monument for Odainat and Herodian after the victory over the Persians in 260 CE. The author argues that new investigations and a complete understanding of the Arch within its urban context would be necessary before any restoration of this monument could start.⁹ Another most innovative chapter is Chapter 8 (125–37), concerning the sanctuary of Bel. Based on the author’s discovery of a foundation wall running diagonally into the foundations of the western peribolos wall of the sanctuary (131, fig. 8.5), S. surprisingly reconstructs a pentagonal ground plan of the temenos for the time before ca. 170 CE (132–33, fig. 8.6–8.7; also 150, fig. 9.4). He also proposes a new reconstruction of the outside façade of the western peribolos wall, as well as a new

⁸ See recently Schmidt-Colinet and Seigne 2022, 59–73 for a new reconstruction of the merlons crowning the temple of Bel.

⁹ For the recent Russian-Syrian restoration project of the Arch, see al-Khateb 2021; Mediansev 2021. This project is based more on political interests than an international scientific discussion, despite a so-called “Palmyra International Scientific Task Force (PISTF).”

chronology for all the peribolos halls and their capitals, taking into account architectural, stylistic, and epigraphic observations, as well as the workload of the craftsmen. S. emphasizes again the need of further fieldwork in the sanctuary before any reconstruction or restoration work can be initiated for the temple of Bel (see above note 6). In chapter 9, the author summarizes his own research on the sanctuary of Nabu (139–61). More than 40 years ago, the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums entrusted him with the architectural dossier of this sanctuary. Since then, the temple of Nabu, its surrounding temenos, and its connection with the Great Colonnade have been the major focus of the author's research at Palmyra. S. gives a summary not only of his investigations, considerations, and partially hypothetical reconstructions (157–60, fig. 9.6A–E), but also of the chronological development of the area between the sanctuaries of Nabu and Bel from 130 to 260 CE (150–51, fig. 9.4A–F). In the last chapter of this part of the book, S. proposes a new reconstruction of the so-called “*salle de banquets*” dite du sanctuaire de Nabû” (163–67). He reconstructs this building with two columns *in antis* at its large eastern side and interprets it independently from the sanctuary of Nabu.

The second part of the book contains eight chapters dedicated to circulation and road networks of the city. Chapter 11 is entitled “*La première Grand-rue, la route du wadi*” (169–76). Recent Polish and Syrian excavations have proved the existence of a paved road in the Great Wadi Al-Suraysir south of the agora and the original access from there to the agora by ascending steps (174, fig. 11.4). S. argues convincingly that the positions of public buildings along this road (temple of Arsu and temple of Rabasire) suggest that high floods of the wadi were rare in early times and that the pavement of this road served not at first for public circulation but instead for the quicker evacuation of water and rubble in case of heavy rain. Only later did recurring heavy floods provide the reason to reorganize the area north of the wadi and raise the level for the later agora. In chapter 12 (177–88), the author discusses the early phases, the particularities, and the probable function of the so-called Transversal Colonnade. In connection with the inscriptions found in the area, he clarifies the construction phases of this road, of the “*oval plaza*” at its southwest end, and of its later portico additions (with an epigraphic addendum by M. Gawlikowski). The following four chapters 13–16 (189–258) are dedicated to a detailed discussion of the Great Colonnade and its adjacent porticos, starting from the origins and development of the different sections A, B, and C of this main road of the city. For the westernmost section C (189–200), the early construction phases (1st c. CE) can be reconstructed only very fragmentarily despite the sondage executed there by Marta Żuchowska. The same applies to the channels running under the levels of the Colonnade and their possible relation to adjacent living quarters. S. discusses the later chronological development of section C (2nd–3rd c. CE) according to the chronological data given by the inscriptions on the columns of the adjacent porticos. Section A of the Great Colonnade is between the Monumental Arch and the sanctuary of Bel (201–27). The author's detailed documentation of single architectural elements (lintels, door jambs, etc.) as well as a building inscription (with an epigraphic addendum by M. Gawlikowski) enables him to reconstruct almost completely the rising façade and some adjacent rooms of the southwest portico (220, fig. 14.16–17), and the ground plans of two adjacent banquet rooms (?), and to clarify the chronology of this section in the 2nd and 3rd c. CE. Finally, the author discusses section B of the Great Colonnade, the section between the Monumental Arch and the *tetrakionion* (229–47). S. reconstructs several stages of the development of this section, especially of its southwest

portico between the Caesareum and the theater, from the beginning of 2nd up to the 3rd c. CE, taking into account the inscriptions on columns and other building components.

Chapter 16 (249–58) brings together the considerations and results from the three preceding chapters. The author draws a general picture of the development of the Great Colonnade from its planning and construction phases up to its relative and absolute chronology. He argues that two parts of the later Colonnade existed, each comprising two sections: sections A and B of the later Colonnade comprised one part, section C and the later Transversal Colonnade the other. Only later, under Trajan or Hadrian (possibly in connection with Hadrian's visit to Palmyra in 129/30 CE [?]), was an attempt made to join these parts of the road into one Great Colonnade. In the concluding Chapter 17 (259–80), the author summarizes his observations and gives his own synthetic, visionary view on the urban development of Palmyra from the 2nd millennium BCE to the beginning of the 4th c. CE, being aware that some of his reflections may remain hypothetical. The last chapter (18) of the book is a kind of annex (281–93). The author explains his observations on the water systems of Palmyra, including the water supply to the city by foggara- and aqueduct-systems, as well as the distribution of the water within the city. He also offers calculations about the quantity of water available in relation to the estimated population. There is an index of proper names and topographic locations at the end of the book (295–98).

In this publication, S. spotlights single selected architectural objects, like pushing pins into the city map of Palmyra. The many detailed observations, suggestions, and hypotheses of the author are to be found not only in the text, but also hidden in the extensive footnotes, like needles in a haystack, including a refreshing critical look at recent publications (e.g., 55 n. 42). Surprising new reconstructions, especially those of the sanctuary of Bel and the Arch, give reasons for urgent new investigations in the field. Generally, S. combines his own observations and investigations with stylistic, typological, and epigraphical reflections. He fundamentally changes our knowledge and imagination at many points, stimulating ideas about the appearance and urban development of ancient Palmyra in general. Many documents are published and reconstructed for the first time and set into their architectural and thus urban context. New plans of the highest quality and new suggestions for the building phases and reconstructions of single monuments and buildings, as well as of several areas of the city – which engage also with the most recent publications – allow a new perspective on the history of those structures and of the urban development of Palmyra. This publication by a French pioneer of Palmyra research within the Polish series is a fine example of international scientific collaboration and publication, and it does full credit to the high quality of the *Studia Palmyreńskie* of the PCMA.

M. Gawlikowski's (G.) *Tadmor – Palmyra. A Caravan City between East and West* is separated into two parts of almost equal size. The first part (11–275) contains 14 chapters of text with 277 figures, mostly in color. The chapters are classified in part according to chronology and in part according to themes, then subdivided into sections with subtitles. The second part (276–424) is a picture-book promenade through Palmyra, containing 178 large-scale photographs, mostly in color and organized in topographic order within 19 chapters.

In a preface (7–8), G. gives insight into his personal feelings, looking back at 50 years of close connections to Palmyra as it faces the recent infamous activities of Daesh. In an "Editorial note" (9), he justifies the transcription of Arabic and Palmyrene texts, and he

clarifies that the correct adjective for Palmyra is Palmyrene, contrary to other forms used by some authors recently. "The early times" (11–19) starts with Palmyra's geo- and hydro-morphological situation in the "dry steppe zone" south of the "Fertile Crescent." The author describes the life of the semi-sedentary people living near the Efqa spring, explains the origin of the different languages used there, and includes a schematic section showing the hypothetical stratigraphy of the temple of Bel from the Hellenistic period up to the present level (18, fig. 8). In "The coming of the Romans" (21–28), G. summarizes the hitherto scarce archaeological, epigraphical, and literary evidence for Palmyra/Tadmor in the Hellenistic period, including a critical analysis of the Latin sources, especially Appian and Pliny. Then, he explains the "multi-tribal society" (25) of early Palmyra, the first contacts between Rome and Palmyra in the early 1st c. CE, and the early administration. "The city of Palmyra" (29–38) addresses tribal, civic, and fiscal aspects of Palmyra's administration and the institutions in Roman times, including the consequences of the military activities of Trajan in the region and Hadrian's visit in 130/31, and a detailed discussion of the so-called Tariff, the bilingual (Greek and Palmyrene) customs law decree of 137 CE concerning especially local traffic and merchandise.

"The caravans" (39–50) describes the organization, procedure, and political implications of long-distance trade between Palmyra and India via Dura Europos, Hit, and Charax, and provides a calendar showing the seasons of the Indian trade (41, fig. 17). The author also describes the loading and unloading of the merchandise in khans/caravanserais located outside the city of Palmyra. The chapter "A Roman colony" (51–54) treats the political and military implications for the citizens of Palmyra of being Roman citizens, and the consequences of the change from the Parthian dynasty to the Sasanians. In "The Rise and fall" (55–87), G. explores the life and political career of Odainat, "a great warrior," and his political entourage. He also discusses several possible representations of Odainat, including the marble statues found in the "Senat" and the mosaic excavated by the Polish Mission showing Odainat as Bellerophon killing Chimaira, and Herodianus hunting Persian tigers, both interpreted as allegorical representations designed to glorify the triumph of Odainat and Herodianus over the Persians (68–70, figs. 35–37). Then, G. describes "the two lives" of Zenobia, "the unhappy queen," her actual lifetime, and the posthumous and legendary one. He explains the historical facts and clarifies the religious or philosophical implications, mostly overestimated. He rectifies the legends, anecdotes, and rumors surrounding Zenobia from antiquity up to modern times.

In "The growth of a city" (89–112), the author explains first the geological and hydrological conditions for the settlement of "Tadmor before the Romans" up to the earliest sanctuaries in the 1st c. CE. Then he describes the early access to the agora from the south (98, fig. 56) and interprets the later agora with its adjacent buildings, the remaking of the Temples of Arsu and Baalshamin, and the remaking of the western section C of the Great Colonnade according to a "Western model" and "as an imperial initiative" (99). In a parenthesis, the reader gets a short, basic lesson on the importance of the "Corinthian Order" in Roman architecture. It is explained that Section C, the oldest section of The Great Colonnade, was not a road for transit circulation, as it was blocked in early times by the western Gate (102, fig. 62) and to the east by the altar in front of the Caesareum (see above). A great house adjacent to the later Great Colonnade was inhabited continuously from the 2nd to the late 8th/early 9th c.; that is, through Christian up to Muslim times of Palmyra, "maybe even by the same family" (104). Section A of the Great Colonnade is explained as a replacement for the older market along the wadi. Section B,

from the Arch to the *tetrakionion*, with the theater in between, is interpreted as a triumphal zone for the glory of Odainat and his entourage. The author distinguishes two different kinds of boulevards in ancient Palmyra: sections A and D of the Great Colonnade served as the main boulevards and markets; sections C and B as a kind of “exterior boulevards,” later transformed into a “Royal Mall,” celebrating Odainat and Zenobia (112).

The chapter “The temples” (113–49) treats the four great sanctuaries of Palmyra: first, the temple of Bel and its architectural sculpture, history, “anomalies,” and the problematic reconstruction of its roofing. For the chronology of the porticos around the courtyard surrounding the temple, G. follows the stylistic argumentation of D. Schlumberger (cf. J. Seigne above). Second is the temple of Baalshamin with its Syrian adyton, and the courtyards with buildings around them. Third, he treats the temple of Allat, later incorporated into Diocletian’s Camp, giving a summary of his final publication of this sanctuary.¹⁰ The temple existed from the 1st c. BCE until Late Antiquity. The most astonishing evidence is of its reconstruction around the middle of the 2nd c. CE (140, figs. 112–13), at the same time as the temple of Baalshamin and by members of the same tribe. Last is the temple of Nabu. The author describes its chronological development and discusses the different suggestions for the reconstruction of the northern portico of the sanctuary.

With the chapter “The City of the Dead” (152–74), the author comes back to the topic of his doctoral thesis.¹¹ He describes the burial system with loculi, and the unique exception of an Hellenistic individual burial in a wooden coffin, the several burial zones (necropoleis) around Palmyra, and the typology and chronology of the different types of monumental tomb buildings such as tower tombs, underground tombs (hypogea) and temple- or palace tombs.¹² He explores the different finds made in the tombs, such as the various types of funerary sculpture (reliefs, sarcophagi), textiles,¹³ and other small finds. In the chapter “The gods” (175–87), G. emphasizes that religious life in Palmyra was determined by three facts: first, a pluralism of divine beings and their mixing with foreign names and imaginations; second, cult and worship with certain rites; and third, the fact that everyone and every tribe had its individual deity. Several deities and rites are known, but many questions remain about the religious imaginations of this semi-settled society. The chapter “Byzantine Palmyra and Islamic Tadmor” (189–204) illuminates the history of Palmyra from the time after Zenobia to the sad situation of Islamic Tadmor today. The author discusses, for example, the installation of Diocletian’s Camp, the first known bishop of Palmyra in 325 CE, several churches of the 6th c. excavated by the Polish Mission, the Byzantine wall paintings in the cella of the temple of Bel, the installation of an Arab *suq* in the Great Colonnade in the early 8th c., and the Arab village in the sanctuary Bel removed only at the beginning of last century.

¹⁰ Gawlikowski 2017; review by Schmidt-Colinet (2019a) in this journal.

¹¹ Gawlikowski 1970.

¹² The tomb in 171, fig. 148 should be no. 173 instead of no. 175; see Schmidt-Colinet et al. 1992, 44, fig 16g–h; 53–54, fig. 23a–b; The reconstruction drawing of tomb no. 36 (174, fig.151) is outdated. The correct reconstruction (with the position of the merlons on top of not the outer façades but the inner peristyle) already in Schmidt-Colinet et al. 1992, Attachment [“Beilage”] 23.96, Plan 13b, 18a–b, 19.

¹³ Contrary to the author’s statement that most of the textiles were of plain linen (162), by far the most fabrics were of wool; see Schmidt-Colinet et al. 2000, 9–10.

The chapter “Sculpture and other arts” (205–54) is the longest in the book. Here is the domain of the archaeologist. The chapter is a kind of history of the art of ancient Palmyra from the 1st to the 3rd c. CE, exemplified especially by sculpture, but including also mosaics, wall painting, stucco, and textiles. First, the author discusses the historical and artistic development of votive and cult reliefs in limestone, including the relief beams of the Bel temple, and the honorific and funerary statues in limestone and marble. Then, he explains the chronology, iconography, style, and interpretation of the funerary reliefs, especially the *loculus* reliefs, with hints of recent discussions and projects. Alongside this, he analyzes and interprets the wall paintings of the Tomb of the Three Brothers and of the Tomb of Hairan, together with the mosaics from the house east of the Bel sanctuary. Finally, he discusses the iconographic particularities of the two monumental sarcophagi exhibited in the Museum of Palmyra, followed by a short discussion of the correlations between decorative motifs on sculpture, in architecture, and on textiles. The last chapter, entitled “Travellers and archaeologists” (255–75), is a journey through the history of the discovery of Palmyra in the broadest sense. It starts with the first travelers in the 17th c. and the monumental oeuvres of Robert Wood¹⁴ and especially Louis-François Cassas in the 18th c., then continues with the drawings of Léon de Laborde and the first photographs of Palmyra by Félix Bonfis in the 19th c. Archaeological investigations at the site started at the beginning of the 20th c. with the discovery and documentation of the Tariff and of the Three Brothers Tomb, followed by German and French archaeological and epigraphic missions, namely the French activities in the Sanctuary of Bel between 1928 and 1931. After World War II, several international missions were active in Palmyra, first the Polish Mission from 1959 until the beginning of the war in Syria in 2011. The author emphasizes that all of these missions enjoyed the friendly and warm support of local collaborators and friends.

The second part of the book, titled “A promenade in Palmyra. Yesterday and today” (276–424), offers a guided tour by the author, and at the same time a retrospective on his 50 years in Palmyra. The author leads the reader through 19 topographic chapters with almost 200 figures, showing monuments and views of Palmyra, as well as scenes from the work and daily life of the excavation team. Most of the large-scale pictures are private color photographs taken by Krystyna Gawlikowska, supplemented by historical black-and-white pictures. Every chapter is preceded by a city map indicating the locations to be visited and a large-scale frontispiece showing an engraving of Louis-François Cassas. The promenade starts in the oasis, continues to the museum, then returns to the sanctuary of Bel, including the old guest house. From there it continues to the Monumental Arch, the sanctuary of Nabu, and the baths, then proceeds along the Great Colonnade East to the theater, the agora, and the Tariff site up to the tetrapylon and surroundings, and the Great Colonnade West. Leaving the Great Colonnade to the north, the author continues his tour to the sanctuary of Baalshamin, the residential quarter and churches, then – crossing to the south again – to the Transversal Colonnade, and to Diocletian’s camp, including the castle and the sanctuary of Allat. From there, crossing the ramparts, with a detour to the Gebel Muntar, the promenade ends logically at the Valley of the Tombs and other tombs. The book ends with a bibliography (425–35), illustration credits (437–47), and an index (449–54).

¹⁴ Strictly speaking, Wood was not an Englishman (257), but an Irishman, born 1716 or 1717 in Riverstown Castle near Dublin.

G.'s publication seems to be based on two essential aspects: first, an all-inclusive scientific knowledge and deep understanding of archaeological monuments and written sources; and second, an awareness that all kinds of monuments and written sources are connected with people, meaning that they are made or ordered by single persons or groups. Whenever possible, the author connects history and monuments with the names of people and their lives. The many excellent photographs also show monuments as well as excavations and individuals. Consequently, the frontispiece of this scientific "handbook" of the Polish doyen of Palmyra research shows the two sons of the author playing in the Sanctuary of Bel in 1983. A careful balancing of terms and handling of words is also obvious: for example, when G. reluctantly uses the term "Hellenism" or the adjective "Hellenistic" but defines simply the "Hellenistic period, as the modern scholars have agreed to call the time between the conquest of Alexander and the Roman annexation of the successor kingdoms" (21). In total, the author offers detailed insights into archaeological evidence, historical and epigraphic sources, and his own excavation experience. Based on detailed information and arguments, he creates a comprehensive overall picture of the cultural history of Palmyra from antiquity up to modern times. This rich harvest of a researcher's whole life is caringly and clearly formulated in a lively way, with numerous digressions and side notes.

The two publications reviewed here exemplify two different ways of accessing knowledge and two different methods of presenting the resulting scientific research. In this way, they complement each other. For S., single architectural features are the starting point for urban considerations. G., on the other hand, takes into account all kinds of archaeological and historical sources to give a full and comprehensive general view of the cultural history of ancient Palmyra. As such, the publications are directed at different readerships: S. above all toward specialized colleagues and G. toward everyone interested in the cultural history of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East. Furthermore, the two publications demonstrate once more that Palmyra is one of the best – if not *the* best – researched city of the Hellenistic to Roman Near East, followed probably only by Jerash/Gerasa,¹⁵ and by Petra and the Nabateans.¹⁶ For this reason, Palmyra represents a fixed point within the research landscape of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East, and it can serve as a kind of guideline for research in other places. Both publications encourage further studies not to treat Palmyra as an isolated phenomenon, but to understand it in a broader context and in correlation to the geographical and historical context of other areas and sites. In addition to their many stimulating scientific results, both authors take a clear position also in the discussion concerning the restoration of the monuments destroyed by ISIS. They warn against overly hurried reconstructions especially of the Monumental Arch and the temple of Bel, before these monuments have been studied in detail and understood within their topographic context.

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¹⁵ E.g., Zayadine 1986; Zayadine 1989; also Lichtenberger and Raja 2018, with further references.

¹⁶ E.g., McKenzie 1990; Politis 2007; also Nehmé 2015, with further references.

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REDDÉ, M. 2022. *Gallia Comata: la Gaule du Nord: de l’indépendance à l’Empire romain*. Collection «Histoire» (Rennes, France). Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes. Pp.400, 182 figs., 11 tables. ISBN 978-2-7535-8238-5, ISSN 1255-2364.

Michel Reddé (R.) tackles half a millennium or so of change, from roughly 300 BCE to roughly 200 CE, in his remarkable, dense, but readable personal view of the evidence and arguments for the period. Though the two-word main title encompasses the whole of Gaul beyond what became Narbonensis, the next four words show that the focus is really on what was to become Belgica and northern Lugdunensis, essentially today’s France north of the Loire along with Belgium. The areas to the south are mentioned when helpful, so also is the Rhineland (technically part of Gaul down to the 80s CE) making use of the German-language literature, with which R. is very familiar (he is also well up on the English-language literature). To mention France in the same sentence as Gaul, as above,