number of about one hundred individuals ranging from Rabbi Akiva (first century CE) to Ignatii Krachkovskii (d. 1951) and it includes writers, religious authorities and Russian Imperial officials, who were instrumental in purchasing, cataloguing and safe-keeping the treasures.

A detailed index vastly adds to the scholarly value of the book. There are also chronological tables and other information, which makes the treasures easily accessible for a scholar and a teacher or any interested member of learned public. No doubt the book will also be met with a great interest outside Russia, which urgently necessitates its translation in to English and Hebrew or perhaps even other languages of Europe and the Middle East.

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THE PERSONALITIES OF MITHRA IN ARCHAEOLOGY AND LITERATURE. By A. D. H. BIVAR. pp. xii, 140. New York, Bibliotheca Persica, 1998.
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In today's political climate, there does not seem to be much interest for studies that document Iranian contributions to western civilisation. Victor Davis Hanson, an historian of Greece at California State University, Fresno, writing, astonishingly in my view, of the film *300*, claims that the digitalised action-adventure preserves the spirit of Thermopylae, although it makes "allowance for popular tastes".[1] Unfortunately, this allowance includes a profound demonisation of all Persians, well beyond any perspective of Herodotus. After all, Thermopylae is but one section in Herodotus' long history; there certainly are other sections in which Persians are portrayed more positively.

Professor David Bivar's broad study of Mithraism is a small corrective to the dissection of Iran and the West so prevalent in popular culture today. It challenges the conventional wisdom in Mithraic studies that there is little of Iranian culture in the Mithraism of Rome and Greece. I use the word "small" only with regard to the size of audience; many more will, of course, see *300* and more read the works of Hanson, who has had various personal interactions with members of the Bush administration.[2] Nonetheless, Bivar's choice of topic is a fitting one for the Yarshater Lecture Series at UCLA, whose objective is to "foster greater mutual cultural enrichment between UCLA and the Iranian community". (p. v)

In the first chapter Bivar sets out the difficulties of a comprehensive study of the god Mithra(s) and his cult. First, there is scope: the book is interested in all mentions of the god as well as remnants of and influences from his worship. For Bivar, the chronology and geography of Mithraism range from the *Vedas* to C. S. Lewis. He rightly notes that with such a perspective Mithraic cult cannot be viewed as a unity, but the comprehensive nature of the survey does pose some problems for thoroughness. For example, in comparing the character Aslan of Lewis's Narnia chronicles to a Mithraic and leonine solar deity, Bivar is unable to provide a source for Lewis's inspirations, but more importantly he does not evaluate the reasons for the similarity (p. 64). Why would the Christian apologist liken his noble lion, his allegory of Christ, to an Iranian deity? And if the similarity is unintentional, that conclusion in itself carries some significance. The second difficulty in the study of Mithra(s) is the scarcity of sources. Since the Roman cult was by its nature practiced in secret, there are few written sources.

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[1] Victor Davis Hanson, "History and the Movie *300*", *Private Papers*. (http://www.victorhanson.com/articles/hanson101106.html). The film is not based on Herodotus but a graphic novel by Frank Miller.

[2] See again his website http://www.victorhanson.com, in particular his interview with Peter Robinson at the *National Review*.

As an archaeologist, Professor Bivar is well-equipped to handle the widespread but scattered remains and does so masterfully. The scarcity of sources in Iran is the result of the Zoroastrian reforms that expunged Mithra from the greater part of the religious tradition. Bivar's basic argument with regard to Iranian Mithraism is that it survived the Zoroastrian attacks under Darius I mainly among Medians in the provinces. Since the Achaemenids generally supported local religious cults, devotees of Mithra could disguise him as a local god in order to insure his clandestine survival (pp. 12–14, 22).

The second chapter focuses on a perennial question in Iranian studies, namely the relationship of Mithra to certain spiritual manifestations. In Zoroastrian terms these would be the Amesha Spentas, or in Manichaean terms, the sons of the Living Spirit. A very valuable element of this chapter is Bivar's argument that Serapis, the bull-like god of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, is Iranian in origin. The Greeks and Romans viewed Serapis as an Egyptian god often associated with Isis, but Egypt itself provides little to no proof of the god's existence prior to Greek colonisation. Bivar, by connecting Serapis to the Middle Persian term *šahrbed* and by compiling both literary and epigraphic evidence of Serapis from outside Egypt dating either prior to, or soon after, the conquest of Alexander, argues that the god is a manifestation of Mithra. This argument, as Bivar notes (p. 22), might help explain the associations between Mithras and Serapis in the classical period. I myself have wondered about the priest of Isis named Mithras in the book eleven of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (11.22). Some of the etymologies in this chapter need more careful development, however. In general, more extensive citation of comparable examples from similar phonetic environments would help to convince skeptics. The proposal that links Greek Σάραπις/Σέραπις to *šahrbed*, for example, never gives the actual Greek forms and thus never treat the vowel quantities or qualities (p. 17). Are these long or short alphas, epsilons or etas? And if the vowels are not constant in the Greek examples, does the borrowing from an Iranian language explain that variation?

The third chapter is a tour de force of iconography. Bivar reviews numerous examples of what he terms the "Mithraic hold". In this arrangement, a human, animal, or divinity grasps the shoulder of another human or animal in an inferior position and steps on a back leg of the individual. The intent is to slay the inferior figure. Bivar finds examples of this depiction dating in time from the pre-Achaemenid Near East to the Hellenistic, Roman, and Sasanid periods. Certain third-century CE coins from Tarsus minted under Gordian III are key to the relationship of the hold to Mithraism. Mithra and a lion are placed in a similar position in these coins (pp. 9, 32–33), and the comparable graphic representation is in keeping with the importance of the lion in Mithraic iconography generally. The chapter is perhaps as important to art history as the history of religions. Here again, because Bivar is dealing with such a wide range of images from various places and times, it is unclear who would understand the various analogies. Has there been anyone except a modern scholar who could read the iconographic equations? When a third-century Greek saw a griffin on the back of a stag in a mosaic from a palace at Pella in Macedonia (Fig. 19), could he understand the griffin as analogous to Mithra? That is not to say the chapter does not make a significant contribution. To cite a comparative context, when an art historian notes similarities between early Christian representations of Jesus and the Greek god Apollo, even if no Christian ever equated Apollo and Jesus, and it is likely that a few did, the iconographic correspondence tells us much about the role of classical art in the development of Christianity. The volume does include thirty-eight beautiful photographs of rarely-seen items relevant to the study of Mithraism ranging in provenance from India to the British Isles.

The fourth chapter contains information that will be the least familiar to scholars of ancient Mithraism and thus perhaps the most intriguing. Here Bivar investigates the survival of Mithraic ideas from the Sasanian period to the rise of Islam and beyond into the twentieth century. He reviews the role of Mithra in Iranian dualism, perhaps the most significant theological contribution of Iran to the West; he interprets the iconography of two eleventh-century Kufic amulets decorated with a lion and scorpion, and he traces the survival of elements of Mithraic cult among the Kurdish Yazidis and the Ahl-e Ḥaqq in Iran. The chapter ends with a lengthy discussion of two tales compiled by Ali Mirdrakvandi, a mysterious character who became an associate of the Allied forces in Tehran during World War II and thus the famous Iranist R. C. Zaehner. Bivar suggests (pp. 56–63) that the leonine god in one of these tales may have been inspired by pre-Zoroastrian traditions preserved within Mirdrakvandi's clan; he derives the author's name from the Avestan term for a follower of the Lie *drugwant*. Appendix C contains a previously unpublished excerpt from Mirdrakvandi's *Nurfagan*.

The appendices are the most thorough in their treatment of the theses proposed. Perhaps in these cases the author was less constrained by the oral medium from which the chapters seem to have emerged. In Appendix A, Bivar returns to an idea he introduced in the first chapter regarding Plato (pp. 11–12), namely that some mythic elements found in the *Republic* show the influence of the Iranian tradition if not specifically esoteric Mithraism. He compiles a vast array of evidence to support the possibility of Plato's interactions with Iran, and it should be noted that the author focuses less on the late and dubious biographies of the philosopher and more on sources on Plato's maternal family from the fourth century BCE. The latter allow Bivar to argue that the maternal family had a long association with Persia, acting as *proxenoi* at Athens. In making these claims, he demonstrates a careful knowledge of the complicated political history of Greece of the fourth century. The case, of course, for Iranian influence in Plato must be from internal evidence, as possibilities remain only possibilities. In essence, Bivar does provide the internal evidence for the proposal concerning Plato in Appendix B. There he sets the Myth of Er within an Iranian tradition of metaphysical journeys to the underworld.

The strength of Professor Bivar's investigation comes from the numerous ingenious connections between various types of evidence from diverse cultures in a wide chronology. He is one of the few individuals in the world who controls so many types of data on Mithra(s), and this knowledge has allowed him to note these connections. His proposals now deserve a close review by disciplinary and cultural specialists.

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Languages of Iran: Past and Present Iranian Studies in memoriam David Neil MacKenzie. Edited by Dieter Weber. pp.xxvii, 307. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005.

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David Neil MacKenzie, the dedicatee of this volume, died in 2001 after a lifetime in Iranian studies, first as Lecturer, later as Reader at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, and finally as Professor at Göttingen, where he spent the last 20 years of a distinguished academic career. A strong personality who seemed to reck little of friends or enemies – and he had many of both, including the present writer – he tended to rouse strong feelings amongst his acquaintances; his students learned what to expect from him, and colleagues were also under no illusions. It is fitting that a large group of them has been gathered together by Dieter Weber for the 25 essays in this volume, forming a very imposing and interesting tribute to an important scholar whose many contributions to Iranian studies spanned a half-century. (These are usefully itemised in a 13-page bibliography).

The volume comprises a quite exceptional collection of essays, all of them interesting and significant, and many of them outstanding. I should have liked to discuss each of them individually, but that would

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