



# *Dallas-Fort Worth Society*

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*Understanding Parthian Success and Reconstructing Parthian History in  
the Hellenistic World:*

*An Introduction to the Challenges of Parthian Scholarship and Sources*

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For over three centuries the Parthian Empire stood as Rome's main rival in the east. Unfortunately, sparse and biased evidence impedes our understanding of early Parthian history and the history of the larger Hellenistic Middle East in this period. Our sources for Parthian history are few, scattered, and almost all from a Greek and Roman perspective.

In this talk, Dr Nikolaus Overtoom will introduce the available source material, the challenges facing Parthian Studies, and the scholarly debate over reasons for Parthian success. Scholars have portrayed the Parthians as "Scythian" nomads, as Persian "revivalists," and as Hellenistic successors. Yet Parthian society was an amalgamation of nomadic, Persian, and Greek elements. Under the leadership of the early Arsacid kings, the flexible cultural identity of the Parthians facilitated their incorporation of influential Irano-Hellenistic customs into their new and expanded society, while in many ways maintaining the roots of their nomadic past (for instance their horse-based culture and military).

In 2020 Oxford University Press published Dr Overtoom's recent book *Reign of Arrows: The Rise of the Parthian Empire in the Hellenistic Middle East*, as part of the prestigious Oxford Studies in Early Empires Series. It offers a new interpretation of the political and military history of the Hellenistic Middle East, and a new assessment of the rise of the Parthian state to help encourage general interest in and scholarly debate on this important ancient world power.

Nikolaus Overtoom is an alumnus of the University of North Texas (BA, 2008), and earned graduate degrees at the University of Maryland and LSU. He is Clinical Assistant Professor of History at Washington State University.

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