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DIFFERENCE, DIVERSITY, DIASPORA: LOCATING THE MIDDLE EUPHRATES ON IMPERIAL MAPS[1]

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MORE than four decades ago, and 80 years after the famous fifth volume of Mommsen's *Römische Geschichte*, Fergus Millar taught us to look at the Roman world from its fringes.[2] At one of the Roman Empire's outer fringes lay the middle Euphrates, often described as the boundary river between the Roman and the Parthian, respectively Sasanian, empires, but in fact rather a frontier zone, between political alignments and between civilisation and steppe. Geography and political circumstances made the middle Euphrates a paradigmatic frontier region, not only in the Roman period, but through almost all times, until now. The area's position was invariably peripheral, and the coming and going of empires accounted for much of its history. This makes empire a pivotal category for the understanding of the middle Euphrates' past.

1. EMPIRE: CONCEPTUAL HAZARDS AND EXPLANATORY POWER

Empires represent power structures *sui generis*, and they were, over millennia, the predominant political pattern in the civilised parts of the world.[3] This changed

[1] I am most grateful to all contributors for their criticism, suggestions and discussions, both, on the conference and afterwards. In particular, I owe many thanks to Michał Gawlikowski, Erich Gruen and Fergus Millar for their conscientious reading of a draft version of this text and their objections to countless inaccuracies and errors.

[2] F. Millar, *Das Römische Reich und seine Nachbarn*, Fischer Weltgeschichte, Bd. 8, Frankfurt am Main 1966. An English edition was published one year later (F. Millar, *The Roman empire and its neighbours*, New York 1967).

[3] For an excellent assessment of the various shapes empires took through world history M. Mann, *Geschichte der Macht. Von den Anfängen bis zur Griechischen Antike*, Frankfurt am Main 1990; M. Mann, *Geschichte der Macht. Vom Römischen Reich bis zum Vorabend der Industrialisierung*, Frankfurt am Main 1991. A fertile historical-comparative approach is provided by I. Geiss, *Kontinuitäten des Imperialismus*, in W. Reinhardt (Hg.), *Imperialistische Kontinuität und nationale Ungeduld im 19. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, 12-30, 17-21; I. Geiss, *Great powers and empires. Historical mechanisms of their making and breaking*, in G. Lundestad (Ed.), *The fall of the great powers. Peace, stability and legitimacy*, Oslo 1994, 23-43; I. Geiss, *Historische Mechanismen. Ein Versuch zur Übertragung naturwissenschaftlicher Kategorien auf die Geschichte*, in F.-L. Kroll (Ed.), *Neue Wege der Ideengeschichte. Festschrift für Kurt Kluxen zum 85. Geburtstag*, Paderborn 1996, 3-26; I. Geiss, *Krieg und Macht als historische Universalien*, in B. Meißner – O. Schmitt – M. Sommer (Ed.), *Krieg - Gesellschaft - Institutionen. Beiträge zu einer vergleichenden Kriegsgeschichte*, Berlin 2005, 19-34, 22-25; I. Geiss, *Nation und Nationalismen. Versuche über ein Weltproblem. 1962-2006*, Bremen 2007, 157-161, 345-360. As a comprehensive study H. Münkler, *Imperien. Die Logik der Weltherrschaft – vom Alten Rom bis zu den Vereinigten Staaten*, Berlin 2005, which is far more pertinent to historical research than M. Hardt – A. Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Mass. 2000.

only with the French Revolution, but empires, whether formal or informal, may well return at the foreseeable dusk of the age of nations. Modern perceptions of empire *and* nation have inevitably shaped views on empires of the remote past,[4] and this, in more recent times, has provoked the opposition of scholars who claim that ancient empires were profoundly different from modern ones. They have put much emphasis on the uniqueness of modern 'imperialism', with its vast ideological and economic implications.[5] Quite rightly so, to be sure, since there are doubtlessly important structural differences between modern colonial, seaborne empires, with a strong urge to systematically legitimise imperial rule, like, say, the British Empire, and pre-modern territorial empires from A (Akkad) to Z (Zulu). But there is also a substantial conceptual confusion, induced by implicit presumptions, derived not least from a vulgar-Marxist modelling of empires, as well as, at least in Anglo-Saxon academia, a blurred terminology applying the term 'imperialism' indiscriminatingly to ideological and historical patterns.[6]

In order to determine the specific role the middle Euphrates played as an imperial periphery through the various stages of its history, we first need to work out a heuristic tool that allows for a comparative study of empires. All empires share a number of features which set them apart from the paradigm of the modern state par excellence, the nation-state. The fundamental opposition – empire vs. nation-state – has often been ignored. Exemplary is again the treatment of the Roman Empire as forerunner of the modern state, all too often with the intention to legitimise imperial claims of 19th century European nation-states. Most European states exploited Rome as a convenient reference point of their respective national identities and/or ambitions: the Napoleonic *Empire*, most obviously, and no less overtly Italy, where both, the revolutionary-republican as well as the liberal-catholic *neoguelfi* faction of the *risorgimento* referred to the precedent of imperial Rome in order to justify the moral primacy of Italy within Europe; more indirectly Bismarck's *Reich*.[7] Charles Wentworth Dilke, the reformist politician, regarded it as

[4] For a summary R. Hingley, *Globalizing Roman culture. Unity, diversity and empire*, London 2005, 1-13.

[5] Most prominently obviously for the Roman Empire. For example P. Freeman, *British Imperialism and the Roman Empire*, in J. Webster – N. J. Cooper (Ed.), *Roman imperialism. Post-colonial perspectives*, Leicester archaeology monographs, vol. 3, Leicester 1996, 19-34; Hingley, *Globalizing Roman culture. Unity, diversity and empire*, 49-71; M. Millett, *The Romanization of Britain. An essay in archaeological interpretation*, Cambridge 1990; G. Woolf, *World Systems analysis and the Roman Empire*, JRA 12, 1990, 223-234; G. Woolf, *Imperialism, Empire and the integration of the Roman economy*, «World Archaeology» 23, 1992, 283-293.

[6] J. Webster, *Roman imperialism and the post-imperial age*, in Webster – Cooper (Ed.), *Roman imperialism. Post-colonial perspectives*, 1-17; J. Webster, *Necessary comparisons. A post-colonial approach to religious syncretism in the Roman provinces*, «World Archaeology» 28, 1997, 324-338; S. Scott, *Provincial art and Roman imperialism: an overview*, in S. Scott - J. Webster (Ed.), *Roman imperialism and provincial art*, Cambridge 2003, 1-7. For a critical assessment N. Shumate, *Nation, empire, decline. Studies in rhetorical continuity from the Romans to the modern era*, London 2006, 9-10; M. Sommer, *Rezension Sarah Scott/Jane Webster (eds.), Roman imperialism and provincial art, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2003)*, HistLit 2, 2004, 2, 65-66.

[7] On Napoleonic France and the 'grande idée' of revitalising the Roman Empire A. Jourdan, *Les*

the mission of Britain's colonial empire to complete the achievements of imperial Rome, and the historian John Robert Seeley considered the way the Romans 'romanized' their provinces as a model for the British Empire.[8]

The idealised view of Rome was shared by many classicists and archaeologists, such as Mommsen (who, in the fifth volume of his *Römische Geschichte*, popularised the vision of an integrated, culturally homogenous, Empire that however, unfortunately, failed to absorb the Semitic peoples of the Near East, namely, of course, the Jews),[9] and Haverfield (who created the paradigm of 'romanization' which still dominates modern perceptions of centre-periphery relations within the Roman Empire). Like every generation of historians, Mommsen and Haverfield projected their own experiences, in the one case the experience of political liberalism and in the other of European colonial expansion overseas, into their period of study.[10] Some even went as far as calling the Roman Empire a nation in the

monuments de la Révolution 1770-1804. Une histoire de représentation, Paris 1997; A. Jourdan, *L' empire de Napoléon*, Paris 2000. On Italy A.M. Banti, *Il Risorgimento*, Torino 2007; R. Lill, *Geschichte Italiens in der Neuzeit*, Darmstadt 1988[4], 111-123. On classicism in the American colonies Reinhold 1984; Richard 1994; Sellers 1994. On the Roman Empire as a projection surface for 19th century national and imperial visions in general now Hingley, *Globalizing Roman culture. Unity, diversity and empire*, 24-26. German attitudes towards Rome during the *Kaiserreich* were more complex, for obvious reasons. After 1871, German nationalism underwent dramatic changes, from traditionally liberal nationalism towards 'Reichsnationalismus' (H.-U. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Von der 'Deutschen Doppelrevolution' bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges 1849-1914*, München 1995, 947-961), with an idiosyncratic blend of *Reich* (empire) and nation, claiming at the same time the indirect succession of the Roman Empire *and* the identity of modern Germany and the Germanic tribes (Geiss, *Nation und Nationalismen. Versuche über ein Weltproblem. 1962-2006*, 35-37, 47-68).

[8] In his *The Expansion of England*, published in 1883, J.R. Seeley argued for a British Empire that would melt the kaleidoscopic cultural and ethnic identities of its colonies into one Greater England. L. Loreto, *Guerra e libertà nella Repubblica Romana. John R. Seeley e le radici intellettuali della 'Roman revolution' di Ronald Syme*, Roma 1999 sees in Seeley's work an intellectual predecessor of R. Syme, *The Roman revolution*, Oxford 1939.

[9] T. Mommsen, *Die Provinzen von Caesar bis Diocletian (Römische Geschichte*, Bd. 5), Berlin 1909[6]: «[...] der Jude war ebendarum wie geschaffen für einen Staat, welcher auf den Trümmern von hundert lebendigen Politien erbaut und mit einer gewissermaßen abstrakten und von vornherein verschliffenen Nationalität ausgestattet werden sollte. Auch in der alten Welt war das Judentum ein wirksames Ferment des Kosmopolitismus und der nationalen Dekomposition und insofern ein vorzugsweise berechtigtes Mitglied in dem Caesarischen Staate, dessen Politie doch eigentlich nichts als Weltbürgertum, dessen Volkstümlichkeit im Grund nichts als Humanität war. – Indes die positiven Elemente des neuen Bürgertums blieben ausschließlich die latinische und die hellenische Nationalität».

[10] F. Haverfield, *The romanization of Roman Britain*, Oxford 1923[4], 2: «Its long and peaceable government – the longest and most orderly that has yet been granted to any large portion of the world – gave time for the expansion of Roman speech and manners, for the extension of the political franchise, the establishment of city life, the assimilation of the provincial populations in an orderly and coherent civilization. As the importance of the city of Rome declined, as the world became Romeless, a large part of the world grew to be Roman. It has been said that Greece taught men to be human and Rome made mankind civilized. That was the work of the Empire; the form it took was Romanization». On Haverfield and his concept of romanization P. Freeman, *'Romanisation' and Roman material culture*, JRA 6, 1993, 438-445; P. Freeman, *Mommsen through to Haverfield. The origins of romanization studies in late 19th century Britain*, in D. J. Mattingly – S. Alcock (Ed.), *Dialogues in Roman*

proper sense of the word.[11] The next generation, however, was generally more sceptical, and, with Rostovtzeff, associated the decline of the Roman Empire with its failure to romanize some of its peripheries properly, again chiefly the east.[12] Others, like Franz Cumont, even accused the Near East of having initiated a roll-back which reversed Hellenism and proselytised the West according to Eastern religious models.[13] Structurally, more recent concepts of 'romanization' are not much different from such attempts to either praise the success story of the Romans in extinguishing local cultures, or blaming them for having failed to do so.[14]

So, what makes empires differ from nation-states? First and foremost, like any other empire, and unlike the nation-state, the Roman Empire was culturally, ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse. Levelling heterogeneity – in line with the French Revolution's definition of a nation as «une et indivisible» – was beyond the reach and scope of pre-modern empires. Empires come into being through conquest, and the conquerors form groups which are ethnically distinct from the subjugated populations («Reichsvolk»). This applies to the Ancient Near Eastern empires (from Akkad[15] to the Achaemenids[16]) as well as to Alexander's empire and its successor states in the Near East and Egypt, the Seleucid and the Ptolemaic realms, and, of course, to Rome.

Second, imperial power does not spread evenly over space. It is strong and compact at the centre and looses grip towards the periphery, ideally in concentric circles (but in reality as influenced by geographical and political factors). Imperial power is soundest in the core territories inhabited by the ethnic group which once conquered and now supports the empire. The core is surrounded by provinces ruled directly by 'governors' appointed by the centre. Towards the periphery, im-

imperialism. Power, discourse and discrepant experience in the Roman Empire, JRA SS 23, Portsmouth (Rhode Island) 1997, 27-50.

[11] F. Schulz, *Prinzipien des römischen Rechts*, München 1934, 96-103.

[12] M. Rostovtzeff, *The social and economic history of the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1971², vol. 1, 272: «Urbanization made no striking progress, nor did the land become hellenized. A few half-Greek cities arose, and some elements of the rural population settled in the cities. But the mass lived on in the old fashion, devoted to their gods and to their temples, to their fields and to their flocks, and ready at the first opportunity to slaughter the men of the cities and to return to the life of peasants and shepherds under the rule of native priest-kings and sheikhs."

[13] F. Cumont, *Die orientalischen Religionen im römischen Heidentum*, Stuttgart 1959⁴: «In dieser Beziehung läuft die Geschichte des Reiches während der drei ersten Jahrhunderte unserer Zeitrechnung auf eine 'friedliche Durchdringung' des Okzidents durch den Orient hinaus».

[14] J. Bleicken, *Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte des Römischen Kaiserreiches*, Paderborn 1981, vol. 2, 34-47. For a more differentiated assessment of 'romanization' P. Desideri, *La romanizzazione dell'Impero*, in G. Clemente – F. Coarelli – E. Gabba (Ed.), *Storia di Roma*, vol. 2. *L'impero mediterraneo. 2: I principi e il mondo*, Torino 1991, 577-626 and most importantly F. Vittinghoff, *Civitas Romana. Stadt und politisch-soziale Integration im Imperium Romanum der Kaiserzeit*, Stuttgart 1994, 276-279.

[15] On the role of ethnicity in the empire of Akkad M. Liverani, *Antico Oriente. Storia, società, economia*, Bari 1988, 244-249. More specifically on Akkad M. Liverani, *Akkad, the first world empire. Structure, ideology, traditions*, Padova 1993.

[16] J. Wiesehöfer, *Das antike Persien. Von 550 v.Chr. bis 650 n.Chr*, Zürich 1993, 59-65.

perial power fades into various forms of indirect rule: vassal states ruled by kings and dynasts with varying degrees of local autonomy. As a result, empires feature frontiers, not boundaries.[17] At the same time, most empires define themselves as ideally universal; their neighbours are no peer states, but conceived at best as inferior, in most cases as vassals, often as rebellious ones.[18] The Roman Empire had Rome, Italy, the provinces and client kingdoms plus local *civitates*, all equipped with significant degrees of autonomy;[19] Ancient Near Eastern rulers exerted suzerainty over local dynasties and territories ruled by family members; the Parthians and Sasanians incorporated satrapies under the direct rule of the great king and vassal territories under local princes and kings;[20] the Ottoman Empire granted autonomy to religious communities (*millets*);[21] the British Empire institutionalised the distinction between indirect and direct rule for the first time in history.[22]

The ability to provide local populations and their rulers with autonomy is hence the third factor setting apart empires from nation-states which categorically require homogeneity. Local rulers are bound by contracts and loyalty oaths, but they are free to run their own fiscal policies, make their own laws, worship their ancestral gods, dress as they like, build according to their traditions etc. Imperial overlordship, however, restricts their freedom in establishing foreign contacts; the relationship with the suzerain is the most powerful tie they may maintain; and they are obliged to go to war along with their imperial masters. This holds true

[17] Though boundaries may exist: in the Roman Empire, provincial boundaries were well marked. But boundaries are not the predominant feature that defines the scope of imperial power. Take, for example, the largely fruitless discussion whether or not Hatra at a given time 'belonged' to the Parthian empire (S.R. Hauser, *Hatra und das Königreich der Araber*, in J. Wiesehöfer (Ed.), *Das Partherreich und seine Zeugnisse. Beiträge des internationalen Colloquiums Eutin 1996*, Stuttgart 1998, 493-528, 515; J. Wiesehöfer, *Die Anfänge sassanidischer Westpolitik*, «Klio» 64, 1982, 437-447, 439-440; E. Winter, *Die sasanidisch-römischen Friedensverträge des 3. Jahrhunderts n.Chr. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der aussenpolitischen Beziehungen zwischen den beiden Grossmächten*, Frankfurt am Main 1988, 34; E. Winter – B. Dignas, *Rom und das Perserreich. Zwei Weltmächte zwischen Konfrontation und Koexistenz*, Berlin 2001, 184) – an updated English translation of the book is forthcoming: *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity. Neighbours and Rivals*, Cambridge 2007.

[18] Instructive in this context is the Assyrian conception of the 'yoke' the Assyrian king imposes on refractory apostates. For a summary M. Liverani, *The ideology of the Assyrian Empire*, in M.T. Larsen (Ed.), *Power and propaganda. A symposium on ancient empires*, København 1979, 297-317; M. Sommer, *Krieg im Altertum als soziales Handeln*, «Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift» 59, 2000, 2, 297-322, 301-306.

[19] On client kingship in Rome D. Braund, *Rome and the friendly king. The character of the client kingship*, London 1984; M.R. Cimma, *Reges socii et amici populi romani*, Milano 1976. On city autonomy Vittinghoff, *Civitas Romana*, 25-56.

[20] M. Sommer, *Hatra – imperiale und regionale Herrschaft an der Steppengrenze*, «Klio» 85, 2003, 384-398, 394-398; M. Sommer, *The desert and the sown. Imperial supremacy and local culture in Partho-Roman Mesopotamia*, «Parthica» 6, 2004, 235-246, 238-240.

[21] Y. Courbage – P. Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, London 1997.

[22] Most revelatory is the work of the British civil servant, High Commissioner of Nigeria and governor of Hong Kong, Lord Frederick Lugard, who first coined the technical term 'indirect rule' (F. D. Lugard, *The rise of our East African empire. Early efforts in Nyasaland and Uganda*, Edinburgh 1893). For a brief summary J. Osterhammel, *Kolonialismus. Geschichte, Formen, Folgen*, München 1997², 19-28.

for all client rulers from the early Bronze Age onwards: disobedience brings about immediate punishment (as in the case of Abgar, the king of Osrhoene who, being a Roman vassal, negotiated with the Parthians and supported Pescennius Niger against Septimius Severus in 193)[23] or the imminent dissolution of the imperial superstructure (as it happened to the Hittite Empire after their Syrian vassal kings had started to pursue their own foreign policies).[24]

Fourthly: empires may lack the drive towards homogeneity, but they exhibit patterns of 'world explanation' (religious concepts, myths, ideologies, values, norms) which emanate from the centre towards the periphery and can be absorbed by local elites.[25] Imperial 'grand' traditions, whole sets of signals, 'universes of meaning',[26] transcend the imaginary borders between centre and periphery. Imperial values and standards, enjoying a superior overt prestige, are accepted by locals, and permeate indigenous cultures which become 'hybrid' or 'creolised': Indian ruling classes send their sons to English schools and universities; indigenous populations in territories conquered by the Arabs or Ottomans adopt Islam, while those in the colonies of the European powers since the early modern period adopt Christianity; Roman provincial populations strive to learn Latin or Greek; they syncretise their ancestral deities with Greek or Roman gods; they emulate canonised elements of Hellenistic architecture, artistic means of expression, costume.[27] On the other hand, 'grand' traditions hardly anywhere overturn, replace or marginalise local 'little' traditions completely. Such traditions survive, often invisible in the material records which archaeology can trace; they are persistent and long-lasting and often re-emerge after imperial structures lose power or prestige.[28]

[23] F. Millar, *The Roman Near East. 31 BC - AD 337*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1993, 125; S.K. Ross, *Roman Edessa. Politics and culture on the eastern fringes of the Roman Empire. 114-242 CE*, London 2001, 47; M. Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome*, Cambridge, Mass. 2005, 148-149; M. Sommer, *Roms orientalische Steppengrenze*, Oriens et Occidens, Bd. 9, Stuttgart 2005, 70-71.

[24] T.R. Bryce, *The kingdom of the Hittites*, Oxford 1998, 362-363; Liverani, *Antico Oriente*, 515, 564-567; M. Sommer, *Der Untergang des hethitischen Reiches. Anatolien und der östliche Mittelmeerraum um 1200 v. Chr.*, «Saeculum» 52, 2001, 157-176, 172.

[25] For a case-study in the Roman Empire see C. Ando, *Imperial ideology and provincial loyalty in the Roman empire*, Berkeley 2000.

[26] As studied by P. L. Berger – T. Luckmann, *The social construction of reality*, New York 1966.

[27] The concept of self-romanization, widely accepted for many years (R. MacMullen, *Romanization in the time of Augustus*, New Haven 2000), has recently been the subject of massive criticism (Freeman, *'Romanisation' and Roman material culture*; Hingley, *Globalizing Roman culture. Unity, diversity and empire*, 43-45). It has been noted that Roman material culture does not represent a monolithic framework that could be copied, emulated and adopted. This is doubtlessly correct, but the 'grand' tradition of the Roman Empire (in itself an eclectic mishmash of traditions) was successful precisely because it could be broken down to modular elements which could be taken over and creatively be appropriated by locals. Such a quarry was the complex semantic system of 'Roman art' (itself a problematic term) featuring a visual language that could be understood in many different ways and easily combined to form new contexts, precisely because it was stereotypical and even banal in many respects (T. Hölscher, *The language of images in Roman art*, Cambridge 2004, 10-22, 125-127).

[28] The persistence of local traditions can be observed in imperial peripheries where religious systems spreading from the centre are often syncretised to heterodox variants of the faith: Shi'a Islam,

Concepts such as 'empire' and 'imperial periphery' work as ideal types. They do not pretend to map history idiographically, in Ranke's sense «wie es eigentlich gewesen», but content themselves with being heuristic tools, explicit abstractions taken from clustered samples of individual historical realities – providing paradigms precisely for the study of such realities. Notwithstanding countless differences in detail, all imperial peripheries feature local autonomy, cultural difference and the quantum of political and cultural ambiguity which makes a frontier. The imperial frontier is not – or not just – the borderline between peer states, but rather the broad strip of land separating, in the centre's perception, 'civilisation' from 'wilderness', 'law' from 'lawlessness', 'good' from 'evil'.[29] It may, of course, divide objectively equal states, as well, but from the point of view of imperial universalism, there are only barbarians, outlaws, defecting vassals, apostates and usurpers who lurk behind the frontier. Such enemies have to be crushed: hence the movability of frontiers, hence also the dual nature of frontiers, as limits of settlement and conquest on the one hand, and as inter-state divides on the other.

2. The seeds of empire: diasporas and the rise of cultural identity

Difference, diversity and hybridity are features intrinsic to imperial frontier regions where cultural paradigms of various origins meet and merge. But not only ideas and concepts travel and spread through space and time; people do also, in groups or as individuals. They are attracted by economic opportunities, involved in commercial enterprise, driven out by hunger, thirst and political pressure, deported by political masters, garrisoned as soldiers or taken slaves. People and ideas in motion bring about the rise of diasporic communities, scattered over vast territories, but held together by a collective belief, faith or cult, a common language and ethnic background or shared economic interests. Diasporas are, like modern nations, imagined communities, collectives that exist through their own beliefs in a common background, tradition or even physical origin.[30]

Alewites in Syria and Turkey, Creole religions in Latin America etc. (J. Gordon, *Beyond syncretism. Indigenous expressions of world religions*, Sydney 2001; S.M. Greenfield, *Reinventing religions. Syncretism and transformation in Africa and the Americas*, Lanham (Md.) 2001; E. Maroney, *Religious syncretism*, London 2006; Webster, *Necessary comparisons. A post-colonial approach to religious syncretism in the Roman provinces*). The Celtic revival on the British Isles after England lost its cultural hegemony and Greek toponyms being replaced by Semitic ones in the Near East after the Byzantine withdrawal exemplify the re-emergence of local patterns in post-imperial periods. Judaism became virtually invisible in Palestine after the Bar Kochba revolt (AD 132-135), though it continued to exist (S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish society. 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E*, Princeton, N.J. 2001). On 'grand' and 'little' traditions S.N. Eisenstadt, *Allgemeine Einleitung*, in S.N. Eisenstadt (Ed.), *Griechenland, Israel, Mesopotamien (Kulturen der Achsenzeit. Ihre Ursprünge und ihre Vielfalt*, vol. 1), Frankfurt am Main 1987, 10-40.

[29] This is reflected in the denouncing of steppes and the land of the nomads as 'land of thirst', a 'deadly silent place' inhabited by evil demons and ghosts in cuneiform literature (H. Klengel, *Zwischen Zelt und Palast. Die Begegnung von Nomaden und Sesshaften im alten Vorderasien*, Wien 1972, 32-33).

[30] In the sense of B. Anderson, *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London 1996[7].

As such, they figure prominently in the development of cultural identities. The example par excellence for the creation and reinforcement of a collective identity through diaspora is, quite unsurprisingly, provided by Judaism: deprived of their kings, their states and institutions, the Jews of the Babylonian Exile were referred back to their God. In turn for losing its original homestead, the Holy Land, the Babylonian Jewry reprised its devotion to God and hence its identity: «But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the Lord your God and obey him».[31] This is of course the retrospective point of view of those parts of the book Deuteronomy which were added in the Exilic and post-Exilic periods, but it clearly points to the importance of Exile and Diaspora as key factors for a new Jewish identity: territoriality was replaced by genealogy.[32]

'The fashioning and refashioning of Jewish identity'[33] became an issue again when Jews were confronted with the spread of Hellenistic culture, when, in their homeland of Judaea as well as in the new, ever-growing residential cities of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms, they had to face the challenges of assimilation, adjustment and – physical and cultural – annihilation.[34] There was no specific Jewish answer to such challenges, but everywhere and at all levels, the new situation brought about decisive changes to the mentality of Diaspora which the Jews had developed over centuries. Jewish reactions ranged from accommodation through to stubborn resistance, but there was a general tendency towards curiosity, creativity and utilitarianism. Many Jewish intellectuals eagerly captured the forms and means of expression supplied by Hellenistic culture, adapting and applying them to their own purposes, be it in literature or in the pictorial arts.[35]

The Jewish Diaspora was, as countless documents give evidence,[36] by no means an esoteric community secluded from the rest of society. Jews participated in the

[31] Dtn 4:29.

[32] G. Langer, *'Exil und Diaspora als Movens jüdischer Identität'. Der Befund des Pentateuch* in A. Eidherr – G. Langer – K. Müller (Ed.), *Zwischenwelt. Diaspora - Exil als Krisenerfahrung. Jüdische Bilanzen und Perspektiven*, Klagenfurt 2006, 15-35, 29: «Das Exil ist eben nicht nur Strafe, sonder Ort der Umkehr, der Erkenntnis und Besinnung auf das Wesentliche». On the importance of the principles of territoriality and genealogy for present-day Judaism D. Boyarin – J. Boyarin, *Diaspora. Generation and the ground of Jewish identity*, in J.E. Braziel - A. Mannur (Ed.), *Theorizing diaspora*, Oxford 2003, 85-118, 103.

[33] E.S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism. The reinvention of Jewish tradition*, Berkeley 1998, 292.

[34] On Jewish history in the Hellenistic period K. Bringmann, *Geschichte der Juden im Altertum. Vom babylonischen Exil bis zur arabischen Eroberung*, Stuttgart 2005, 63-160; E.S. Gruen, *Diaspora. Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, Cambridge (Mass.) 2002; J. Maier, *Geschichte des Judentums im Altertum*, Darmstadt 1989², 50-58.

[35] Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 297: «The world of Greek culture was not an alien one to Hellenistic Jews. They thrived within it and they made its conventions their own. They engaged in Hellenistic discourse but addressed their message to fellow Jews».

[36] For an overview on Jewish involvement in Greco-Roman social, cultural and political life, M.H. Williams, *The Jews among the Greeks and Romans. A diasporan sourcebook*, London 1998, 107-159.

culture of euergetism that was so typical of urban life in the Hellenistic East, attended games and spectacles, got involved in local government and, in the Roman period, even rose to the higher echelons of Roman administration. On the other hand, they were, even though Jewry and Judaism became intrinsic elements of Hellenistic culture, concerned about the preservation of what made them distinct. The presence of Hellenism, offering new opportunities and threatening them with absorption at the same time, made Jewish identity a problem and thus reshaped it once more, as the globalised culture of our present does.

In more general terms, the attitude of diaspora communities towards their environment is ambivalent. On the one hand, they adapt to, and adopt many items from, surrounding societies. On the other hand, the challenge of difference and alterity which is ubiquitous wherever people live in diaspora, makes diasporic identities more explicit, and brings the notion of belonging together to the minds of those people dispersed over vast spaces. With difference and alterity being the prime catalysts for the construction of cultural identities, questions such as 'who are we?' and 'what makes us different?' are at the top of the agenda of diaspora groups. The absence of territoriality and its replacement by other constituents of identity (genealogy and shared religious belief in the case of the Jews, but also, for instance, common language, vocation and economic interest) sets diasporic communities apart from other identity groups (such as the modern nation state, but also ancient urban and tribal societies). In the ancient world, Greek colonisation, the Phoenician commercial network, the Roman military (including veterans) and early Christianity all constitute diasporic communities, in as much as they were scattered over the Mediterranean and nevertheless maintained a strong notion of belonging together. Some of these communities (Jews, Greeks, Phoenicians) had a shared homeland they could refer to, for others this homeland existed as a kind of virtual reality (for Christians: baptism; for the Roman military: the *esprit de corps* of the army, shared military training and the use of Latin).

Obviously, empires (as opposed to nation states), with their comparatively relaxed approach towards their subjects' cultural affiliations, are the ideal breeding grounds for diaspora. Empires also facilitate mobility and enable dispersed communities to keep in touch. Imperial peripheries have a particularly strong tendency to housing diasporas. The middle Euphrates was no exception, although the presence of diasporic communities can be observed in the evidence only from the Hellenistic period onwards. As early as in the middle Bronze Age, in the period of Mari, the area was thoroughly embedded in the network of 'international' relationships of the period. The city was visited by people from Crete and some may even have lived there for some time.[37] In the 1st millennium BC, the area may have been subject to the settlement of deported populations from other parts of the

[37] As stated hypothetically by B. Muller, *De Mari à l'Egée. La peinture proche-orientale au 2e millénaire av. J.-C.*, in A. Villing (Ed.), *The Greeks in the East*, London 2005, 37-45, 43-44, in her study of the royal palace's wall paintings.

Neo-Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian mass-deportations were rather a-typical for ancient empires, deliberate instruments of cultural homogenisation: indigenous populations were deprived of their traditions by sending them to exile. No trace of the survival of local traditions in such a forced diaspora has come upon us, though the image of a thoroughly homogenised empire may be deceptive.[38]

3. Imperial frontiers and social dimorphism: mapping difference and diversity

The middle Euphrates in Antiquity (in the broadest sense) was *always* a frontier area between civilisation and steppe and *sometimes* also a buffer zone between two empires. As early as the 4th millennium, the area became the scene of a process of secondary urbanisation, in all likelihood radiating from lower Mesopotamia.[39] In the 3rd millennium, after a contemporary collapse of inter-regional trade connections, Mesopotamian influence became more tangible. The region lay at the periphery of the empire of Akkad, which claimed overlordship over the local rulers, but effectively never asserted more than a nominal suzerainty. At this stage, Mari developed into a regional centre, extending its control gradually over most of present-day Syria.

Mari was a classical example of a new power centre emerging in the power vacuum of an imperial periphery.[40] Heavily influenced by the Mesopotamian alluvium, it still maintained many of its original patterns: economically (relying on an agriculture depending not on irrigation, but on precipitation), socio-politically (featuring a relatively weak kingship) as well as linguistically and culturally (with documents revealing that the language spoken in Mari throughout the 3rd millennium was a western Semitic idiom).[41] Imperial peace alternated with periods of political multi-polarism, and peripheral areas were turned once again into power vacuums.[42] In the late Bronze Age, the middle Euphrates region became a frontier area again: first controlled by Mitanni (which had its centre nearby, in the headwaters area of the Khabur), and its torso state of Khanigalbat respectively. Later (from the 14th century BC onwards), it lay on the western fringes of the Middle Assyrian Empire, with Dur-Katlimmu (Tell Sheikh Hamad) as a regional centre of administration, and Hittite and Babylonian outposts in the immediate vicinity. Reverting to a power vacuum as a consequence of the turmoil affecting the entire Near East in the early 12th century BC, the zone saw the intrusion and

[38] Liverani, *Antico Oriente*, 826-828; B. Oded, *Mass deportations and deportees in the Neo-Assyrian empire*, Wiesbaden 1979.

[39] See, also for further reference, Mario Liverani's paper in this volume.

[40] Geiss, *Nation und Nationalismen. Versuche über ein Weltproblem. 1962-2006*, 157-158.

[41] Liverani, *Antico Oriente*, 205-206.

[42] On the political history H. Klengel, *Syria: 3000 to 300 B.C. A handbook of political history*, Berlin 1992 and Liverani in this volume. On the imperial cycle as a model for the de-alignment and re-alignment of political power M. Sommer, *Die Phönizier. Handelsherren zwischen Orient und Okzident*, Stuttgart 2005, 145-148.

gradual settlement of Aramaic tribes, followed by a «progressive *reconquista*» (Liverani) by the Neo-Assyrian Empire. For almost one millennium, the region was now at the heart rather than the periphery of subsequent Near Eastern empires: Assyrians, Babylonians, Achaemenids, Seleucids. The borderline between Syria and Mesopotamia continued, however, to be a structural gap, culturally as well as socially and economically.[43]

This gap began to yawn again when the Seleucids were succeeded by the Romans in the west and by the Parthians in the east, from the 2nd century BC onwards. The 'Aramaic' Near East was now split in almost equal parts between the two rival empires – along the lines that had separated the Assyrian dominated Mesopotamian east from the Syro-Hittite west in the Bronze Age. Once again, political loyalties were contested in the ethnic, cultural and religious twilight of the 'steppe frontier'. Rome's rule in the Levant, which lasted, from the establishment of the province of Syria to the battle of the Yarmuk (AD 636), exactly 1,000 years, had a deep impact on the entire region which can be traced in its material culture – even though the character and extent of this impact is very controversial.[44] The Parthian east slowly moved away from Hellenistic models, a process that accelerated with the establishment of Sasanian rule in the 3rd century AD. In the twilight of Antiquity, in the late 6th century, the rift was wider than ever. The gap is still there, corresponding roughly to the present divide between Sunni and Shi'ia Islam which runs through the Middle East.

The wider middle Euphrates zone was the epicentre of Partho-Roman and Romano-Sasanian dualism and, at least in the early Empire, clearly marked a symbolic frontier:[45] conflict was preluded by Crassus' unhappy attack on the Parthians in 55 BC. The kingdom of Osrhoene, a Parthian territory, sided with Trajan, and became a Roman client kingdom as a result of L. Verus' Parthian War in AD 166.[46] The same conflict brought about a complex political situation in the area around Dura-Europos, a city founded in the time of Seleukos Nikator and

[43] Liverani in the next issue of this journal.

[44] Millar, *Roman Near East*, 517, argues in favour of a cultural amnesia which was inflicted on the Near East by the hellenization which followed Alexander's conquests («If we think of a 'culture' in the full sense, as a tradition, an educational system, a set of customs and above all a collective understanding of the past, then we can find in the Roman Near East only two established cultures: Greek and Jewish»). Such a bold statement provokes opposition almost inevitably. To W. Ball, *Rome in the East. The transformation of an empire*, London 2000, 246, the apparent 'Roman-ness' of the material culture which is, to the present day, the most notable legacy of Roman rule in the region, is no more than an 'imperial veneer'. The persistence of indigenous traditions has also been stressed by Sartre, *Middle East, passim*. For a more balanced, theory-induced assessment of Millar's thesis K. Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, London 2003; Sommer, *Roms orientalische Steppengrenze*; M. Sommer, *Der römische Orient. Zwischen Mittelmeer und Tigris*, Darmstadt 2006.

[45] On rivers as «moral barriers» and «information barriers» F. Millar, *Emperors, frontiers and foreign relations, 31 B.C. to A.D. 378*, «Britannia» 13, 1982, 1-23, now again in F. Millar, *Rome, the Greek world, and the East, 2. Government, society, and culture in the Roman Empire*, Chapel Hill 2004, 160-194, esp. 188.

[46] Millar, *Roman Near East*, 472-481; Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 29-45; Sommer, *Roms orientalische Steppengrenze*, 235-239.

conquered by the Parthians shortly after 116 BC:[47] Palmyrene archers were garrisoned along the middle Euphrates without a Roman official being in command.[48] Possibly, the Roman city of Palmyra exerted a kind of 'protectorate' outside the borders of the Roman province of Syria.[49] Only later, in the Severan period, were Dura-Europos and its hinterland gradually integrated into the Roman structure of command and administration.[50] A couple of decades after this, most likely in AD 257, Dura-Europos was conquered by the Sasanians. Later, the city was abandoned and destroyed, never to be settled again. The Persian conquest did not terminate settlement, nor even urban life, in the area: in Late Antiquity, the middle Euphrates featured a surprisingly dense network of Christian communities.[51]

Difference and diversity were characteristic of the middle Euphrates region in more than one respect: a distinct feature of many societies in Western Asia is the interdependence of towns with the surrounding pastoralist tribes. Symbiotic economic relationships between urban dwellers and nomads can be observed throughout the Near East's history – and they still occur in some tribal areas of present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.[52] Social dimorphism – the technical term for symbiotic interaction between settled and mobile populations – is most likely in such areas where agriculture only provides a precarious base for subsistence, *i.e.* in the area between the 200 and the 400 mm isohyets. In the Near East, the 'dimorphic zone' forms a band stretching roughly from the northern Bekaa Valley through the Syrian steppe, the Jezirah, the Diyala region to Fars (Persis) in south-western Iran. Within this zone lie the sites of Palmyra, Dura-Europos, Mari and Hatra.[53]

[47] The terminus post quem is provided by a papyrus (P. Dura 34) dating, after the Seleucid era, to the year 116 BC. The addition «according to the former era» which was obligatory under Parthian rule, was still lacking (F. Millar, *Dura-Europos under Parthian rule*, in Wiesehöfer (Ed.), *Das Partherreich und seine Zeugnisse*, 473-492, 475).

[48] The evidence is rather confusing and inconsistent. Inscriptions suggest that the Palmyrene 'militia' was active in the Wadi Hawran, to the south of Dura-Europos, as early as AD 98: F. Safar, *Inscriptions from Wadi Hauran*, «Sumer» 20, 1964, 9-27, No. 1 (dated AD 98); J. Starcky, *Une inscription palmyrénienne trouvée près de l'Euphrate*, «Syria» 40, 1963, 47-55, here 47 (undated). This indicates that the Palmyrenes were trying to control the traffic routes through from the oasis to the Euphrates. On the other hand, the Palmyrene caravan inscriptions provide evidence for the Roman army operating towards the east of Palmyra (Inv. X 81 G-1-4, AD 135; Inv. IX 23, ca. AD 150). For the Palmyrene role in the 2nd century in more detail see the paper by M. Gawlikowski in the next issue of this journal.

[49] This would be in line with the unique degree of autonomy the oasis city exhibited.

[50] Sommer, *Roms orientalische Steppengrenze*, 305-312.

[51] See Fergus Millar's paper delivered at the Conference, now in SCI 27, 2008, 67 ff.

[52] On the Pashtuns J.W. Anderson, *Tribe and community among the Ghilzay Pashtun. Preliminary notes on ethnographic distribution and variation in eastern Afghanistan*, «Anthropos» 70, 1975, 575-600; L. Dessart, *Les Pachtounes. Économie et culture d'une aristocratie guerrière (Afghanistan-Pakistan)*, Paris 2001.

[53] Social dimorphism in Hatra has been presented in detail by K. Dijkstra, *State and steppe. The socio-political implications of Hatra Inscription 79*, «Journal of Semitic Studies» 35, 1990, 81-98. His argument has been pursued by Hauser, *Hatra und das Königreich der Araber*; S.R. Hauser, *Ecological limits and political frontiers. The 'Kingdom of the Arabs' in the eastern Jazira in the Arsacid period. 2: Geography and cultural landscapes*, in L. Milano – S. De Martino – F. M. Fales – G. B. Lanfranchi (Ed.), *Land-*

Dimorphic interaction probably originates as a means of resource management in periods of draught, when the supply of meat provided by pastoralists compensates for the farmers' crop shortfalls. Whereas the relationship between nomads and sedentary populations has never and nowhere been exclusively or even predominantly hostile, farming and 'enclosed' pastoralist nomadism in the dimorphic zone depend closely on each other. They share a common interest in the exchange of goods and the management of local and long-distance trade, in which nomads are regularly involved. From this, even closer relationships may develop: bonds of mutual solidarity, of shared tribal identities and notions of (real or fictional) kinship.[54]

Dimorphic structures shaped, over the millennia, the societies of the middle Euphrates region. Mari was the classical example of a city maintaining close contacts with the tribes of the surrounding steppe. The documents mention tribal notables serving as 'state' officials, and tribal groups performing military duties for the city. The kings of Mari were integrated in the kinship structure of the tribes, and local elites were at home in both worlds: town and steppe. Bonds of kinship and mutual solidarity overlapped, occasional conflicts notwithstanding, the boundaries between urban and nomadic territory. Nomads formed part of urban life and 'state' institutions: tribal leaders convened at councils of elders and their kinsman attended the people's assembly in Mari.[55]

Similar patterns were repeated in Parthian Hatra, where nomadic families voted in the assembly and negotiated the terms of co-existence with the urban authorities, and in Palmyra, where the nomads played a major role in the city's long-distance trade and formed the base of recruitment for the so-called militia which gave Palmyra substantial weight as an autonomous military player on a regional scale in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.[56] To what extent the middle Euphrates after

scapes, territories, frontiers and horizons in the Ancient Near East, Padova 2000, 187-201; U. Scharrer, *Nomaden und Seßhafte in Tadmor im 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, in M. Schuol – U. Hartmann – A. Luther (Ed.), *Grenzüberschreitungen. Formen des Kontakts zwischen Orient und Okzident*, Oriens et Occidens, vol. 3, Stuttgart 2002, 279-330; M. Sommer, *Hatra. Geschichte und Kultur einer Karawanenstadt im römisch-parthischen Mesopotamien*, Mainz am Rhein 2003, 11-13; M. Sommer, *Palmyra and Hatra. 'Civic' and 'tribal' institutions at the Near Eastern steppe frontier*, in E.S. Gruen (Ed.), *Cultural borrowings and ethnic appropriations in antiquity*, Oriens et Occidens, vol. 8, Stuttgart 2005, 285-296.

[54] Fundamental is the work of Michael B. Rowton: M.B. Rowton, *Autonomy and nomadism in Western Asia*, «Orientalia» 42, 1973, 247-258; M.B. Rowton, *Urban autonomy in a nomadic environment*, JNES 32, 1973, 201-215; M.B. Rowton, *Enclosed nomadism*, JESHO 17, 1974, 1-30; M. B. Rowton, *Dimorphic structure and the problem of the apiru-ibrim*, JNES 35, 1976, 13-20; M. B. Rowton, *Dimorphic structure and the tribal elite*, in F.J. Thiel (Ed.), *Al-Bahit. Festschrift Joseph Henninger zum 70. Geburtstag*, St. Augustin 1976, 219-257; M.B. Rowton, *Dimorphic structure and topology*, OA 15, 1976, 17-31; M.B. Rowton, *Dimorphic structure and the parasocial element*, JNES 36, 1977, 181-198. For ethno-archaeological case-studies C. Chang, *Pastoral transhumance in the southern Balkans as a social ideology. Ethnoarcheological research in northern Greece*, «American Anthropologist» 95, 1993, 687-703; A.S. Gilbert, *On the origins of specialized nomadic pastoralism in western Iran*, «World Archaeology» 15, 1983, 1, 105-119.

[55] Klengel, *Zwischen Zelt und Palast*, 131-138.

[56] In his contribution, Michał Gawlikowski denies that Palmyra still had such an extraordinary

Alexander mirrored similar structures cannot be decided with certainty. There are, however, some indications which point significantly in the direction of social dimorphism as a factor playing a decisive role in Dura-Europos and its vicinity, as well. In Parthian times, the middle Euphrates formed a territory under a local dynasty whose members styled themselves with Macedonian personal names. The rulers did not bear a royal title (*basileus*), but were called *strategoi* (or *strategoi kai epistateis*) in Greek and probably *padheshah* in Iranian.[57] In contrast to satraps, they held a hereditary office, but were inferior to Parthian vassal kings (such as the king of Osrhoene and later the king of the 'Kingdom of the Arabs' – Hatra). In one document, the rulers were also called *genearcheis*, a title echoing the *arabarches* and *phylarches* known from other dimorphic areas of the Romano-Parthian steppe frontier.[58] It is thus likely that the title just adds another perspective: the local ruler was a *strategos* or *strategos kai epistates* for the still predominantly Greco-Macedonian population of the city; he was, as an imperial official, a *padheshah* for his Arsacid overlords; and he was a *genearches* (or 'Sheikh') for the tribal populations inhabiting the hinterland of Dura-Europos.

Integrated, dimorphic tribalism ensured, wherever it occurred, periods of relative peace and stability combined with a high level of local autonomy in a region that otherwise oscillated between imperial peace (with little or no local autonomy) and post-imperial power vacuum (with waves of migration, re-nomadisation and re-sedentarisation). The collapse of most of the steppe frontier's urban centres in the 3rd century AD brought about profound changes in the area's demography and social organisation. The Sasanians and the Romans – the two empires that must be held responsible for the partial destruction of a functioning regional system in the first place –[59] suffered severe damage from the dimorphic societies' disappearance. Frontier management and the military control of vast areas turned out to be increasingly difficult in a region whose nomads were deprived of their urban centres.

Doubtlessly, the influx of settlers from Greece and Macedon in the early Hellenistic period had opened a new chapter in the history of the Levant: it had cre-

autonomy in the imperial period. For him, Palmyra was «firmly and loyally ensconced within the framework of the Empire» (in the next issue of this journal).

[57] This can be concluded from Amm. XIII 6, 14, who mentions three classes of Persian local rulers: *satrapae*, *reges* and *vitaxae*. He equates the latter, somewhat misleadingly, to the Late Roman *magistri militum*. The terminology is more likely to apply to the Parthian than to the Sasanian Empire. Whereas *satrapae* were Parthian officials appointed by the king, *vitaxae* (the Latin transliteration for Persian *padheshah*) were indigenous, hereditary rulers of autonomous territories. Apart from the rulers of Dura-Europos, the 'lords' of Hatra seem to have belonged to this category, before they were elevated to royal rank (Sommer, *Roms orientalische Steppengrenze*, 292 and 382).

[58] F. Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura-Europos*, Paris 1926, No. 52 (a papyrus dating from 33/32 BC).

[59] Whereas important places such as Dura-Europos and Hatra were destroyed, others, such as Palmyra and in a sense probably Edessa as well, entered a period of decline, at least politically. Many of the regions' urban centres, however, as Fergus Millar points out in his paper, published in SCI 27, 2008, 67-93, continued to flourish through and beyond Late Antiquity.

ated a colonial diaspora *sui generis*, marked by harsh social and political contrasts. Even though much of the early history of the Hellenistic Near East remains untold, Greeks and Macedonians at least arrived with the intention of monopolising political participation and ownership of landed property.[60] Such a privileged minority may have been the Greco-Macedonian military colonists in the middle Euphrates area. Whether they settled in an existing town (Dura) to which they gave a Macedonian name (Europos) or on virgin soil, is still an open question.[61] In the centuries to follow, the city became home to a group of Palmyrenes who were involved in trade, while later still came Palmyrene archers, Roman soldiers and worshippers of Mithras, Jupiter Dolichenus, Yahweh and the god of the Christians.

The peripheral position of Dura attracted many of these people: for the Palmyrenes, the middle Euphrates was of commercial interest, whether for the long-distance trade or rather for local exchange of commodities;[62] the Palmyrene archers and the legions were deployed in the vicinity of Rome's eastern imperial rivals; and the various deities were carried to the region by warriors and traders (Judaism and Christianity possibly by both groups, Mithraism and the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus certainly by soldiers and veterans who came from all parts of the vast empire). With so many groups exhibiting so many distinct group features, a short walk through Roman Dura could indeed expose the stroller to a whole universe of different 'cultures'. Soldiers, Jews, Palmyrenes, 'indigenous' inhabitants of Dura: they all had created their own worlds around themselves, which interacted and partly overlapped. The colourfulness of the town made the problem of identity explicit to every single one of its inhabitants. Therefore, it also provided an alternative model to the Greco-Roman city which was – as representing the collectivity of its citizens – the prime horizon of identity. Dura and its region pointed the way towards more fragmented, less inclusive, concepts of identity – away from the classical 'civic' paradigm of social organisation, towards

[60] On the terms of Hellenistic colonisation in the East P. Briant, *Rois, tributs et paysans. Études sur les formations tributaires du Moyen-Orient ancien*, Paris 1982, 227-262. To be sure, Briant's model is not based on the evidence. But Greek political thinkers such as Isocrates (*Panaegyr.* 166) and Xenophon (*Anabas.* VI 4, 6) had developed ideas for the conquest and economic exploitation of the Persian Empire long before Alexander launched his Persian War. They had planned the foundation of Greek cities in indigenous environments, including the helotization of large populations. After the defeat of the Persian Empire, Hellenistic monarchs drew legitimacy from regarding the territories conquered as spear-won land (*doriktetos chora*).

[61] It has to be noted, however, that nothing but the name survives of the pre-Hellenistic Dura (if there was one). There is no archaeological proof of an indigenous settlement preceding the early Seleucid military post. See P. Leriche, *Europos-Doura hellénistique*, in M. Sartre (Ed.), *La Syrie hellénistique*, Lyon 2003, 171-191.

[62] For a discussion of Dura's mercantile importance L. Dirven, *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos. A study of religious interaction in Roman Syria*, Leiden 1999, 34-30. The precise course of the trade routes is subject to some controversy (M. Gawlikowski, *Palmyre et l'Euphrate*, «Syria» 60, 1983, 53-68; N. Kramer, *Das Itinerar Staqmoi; Parqikoiv des Isidor von Charax – Beschreibung eines Handelsweges?* «Klio» 85, 2003, 120-130; G.K. Young, *Rome's eastern trade. International commerce and imperial policy. 31 BC - AD 305*, London 2001, *passim*).

more diasporic and less territorial forms of cohesion. On the banks of the middle Euphrates, this process was brought to a sudden halt, when Sasanian troops conquered and destroyed Dura-Europos. But elsewhere in the Roman Empire the process continued and transformed imperial society, a major step away from classical civilization.

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