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THE DESERT AND THE SOWN
IMPERIAL SUPREMACY AND LOCAL CULTURE
IN PARTHO-ROMAN MESOPOTAMIA¹

THE superpower's military intervention started in spring. Its army, superior in number and equipment, rushed through the lands between Tigris and Euphrates, reached the Persian Gulf and captured, without meeting much resistance, the enemy's capital. The victory seemed complete, the political organisation of the enemy state was busted, its territory occupied. But while the superpower's leader seemed at the climax of his military success, local resistance increased, turning the occupied territories into a battlefield again. By the third year of the campaign, it became obvious that the country was lost: The new ruler, who had succeeded the invader, restored the political *status quo ante*.

This is no political prophecy, trying to anticipate the events still to come in contemporary Iraq. The campaign started in Spring 114, not 2003, the superpower was the Roman Empire, not the United States, its leader the Emperor Trajan, not George W. Bush, the enemy the Parthian realm, not Saddam Hussein's Iraq. But the parallels are obvious: The Romans, like the Americans today, occupied a country, of which they knew virtually nothing; they faced an enemy, which survived the breakdown of his political organisation, operating in small but highly efficient local cells and benefiting from the vulnerability of a sophisticated military apparatus; and they won the war, but lost the peace.²

A key-stone in the strategic map of Partho-Roman Mesopotamia was the city of Hatra, described by Cassius Dio in the context of Trajan's campaign as being «neither big nor wealthy» (καὶ ἔστι μὲν οὔτε μεγάλη οὔτε εὐδαίμων ἢ πόλις).³ It controlled the Wadi Tharthar, the main traffic axis running southward through the gypsum deserts and salt marshes of the Eastern Jazirah. Who held Hatra, controlled one of the two major accesses from Northern Mesopotamia to Babylonia. Though not very prominent as a settlement in the early second century AD, the city was nevertheless of paramount importance for the Roman domination of Mesopotamia.

Hatra thus entered the light of history exactly during the anti-Roman revolt in Mesopotamia, which in all likelihood broke out in 116. When invading Mesopotamia, Trajan apparently had found the city's gates open. There is no evidence for a Roman siege of Hatra in the first phase of the campaign. But when Trajan, with his heart full of melancholy, watched the ships setting sails for India in the Shatt el-Arab, and the Mesopotamian uprising started, Hatra already was the backbone of the anti-Roman movement. Whilst Trajan assigned the re-conquest of most of the rebellious cities to his Moorish general Lusius Quietus, he directed the siege of Hatra personally. It became Trajan's major military debacle and the turning point of the entire campaign.

Cassius Dio gives a colourful account of the difficulties the Romans had to face when laying siege to the city:

The surrounding country is mostly desert and has neither water (save a small amount and that poor in

1. A more concise version of this paper was given in a seminar-series (*From Cuneiform to Cu'ran*) organised by Fergus Millar in Oxford, in January 2004. I am particularly grateful to Lindsay Allen, Jeremy Black(†), Stephanie Dalley, Ted Kaizer, Fergus Millar, Allison Salveson, Athur Segal, David Taylor and the many others who actively participated in an intriguing discussion, for their constructive criticism. Furthermore I owe much gratitude to the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung (Köln) which bestowed me a research grant enabling me to work exclusively on the Roman Near East in an environment as convenient as Oxford. The following literature, fundamental for the history and culture of Hatra and

the Eastern Jazirah, will be quoted below only exceptionally: BERTOLINO 1995, DRIJVERS 1977, HAUSER 1998, HAUSER 2000, IBRAHIM 1986, ISAAC 1990, VATTIONI 1981, VATTIONI 1994, VENCO RICCIARDI 1996, WIESEHÖFER 1994, WIESEHÖFER 1982. Further reference will neither be made to my own works: SOMMER 2003, SOMMER 2003a, SOMMER 2004.

2. For a comparative study of the two Mesopotamian campaigns cf. SOMMER 2003c. On Trajan's Parthian War BENNETT 1997, 183-204; CIZEK 1983, 402-467; LIGHTFOOT, 1990. On the Third Gulf War in 2003 MÜNKLER 2003.

3. Cass. Dio, 68, 31, 1.

quality) nor timber nor fodder. These very disadvantages, however, afford it protection, making impossible a siege by a large multitude, as does also the Sun-god, to whom it is consecrated [...]. Trajan sent the cavalry forward against the wall, but failed in his attempt, and the attackers were hurled back into the camp. Indeed, the emperor himself barely missed being wounded as he was riding past, in spite of the fact that he had laid aside his imperial attire to avoid being recognised; but the enemy, seeing his majestic grey head and his august countenance, suspected his identity, shot at him and killed a cavalryman in his escort. There were peals of thunder [βρονταί], rainbow tints [ἰριδες] showed, and lightnings [ἀστραπαί], rain-storms [ζάλη], hail [χάλαξα] and thunderbolts [κεραυνοί] descended upon the Romans as often as they made assaults. And whenever they ate, flies settled on their food and drink, causing discomfort [δυσχερείας] everywhere. Trajan therefore departed thence, and a little later began to fall in health.⁴

Trajan's siege was by no means the only attempt the Romans made to capture Hatra. Whether or not the city was affected by Lucius Verus' Parthian campaign in 163-166 cannot be decided, but Septimius Severus laid siege to the sun-god's city and, like Trajan, remained unsuccessful. Though the chronology is blurred by Dio's and Herodian's accounts, it is quite clear that Severus attacked the city twice, in either of the two phases of his Parthian War (193/194 and 197-199). Some thirty years later, perhaps 227 or 228, Hatra was besieged again, this time by an enemy coming from the East, the recently established Persian Empire of the Sasanians. Some years after this abortive assault, we find a Roman garrison in Hatra's walls, which, however, could not prevent its final conquest and destruction by Sasanian forces in the very last year of the first Sasanian ruler, Ardashir (240). When Ammianus Marcellinus campaigned with the emperor Julian in Mesopotamia in 363/364 he found the site where Hatra had been «in media solitudine».⁵

Roman historiography highlights Hatra's role in the military history of the Partho-Roman Near East, but it remains inevitably mute about the inner affairs of the metropolis in the desert. Plenty of information on the chronology of Hatra and its rulers, on its political organisation and social structure, however, is provided by the abundant epigraphic evidence from the city – some 400 Hatrene inscriptions and in addition a couple of Latin ones dating from the years the city hosted a Roman garrison.⁶ Last but not least the city itself and its architecture, above all the gigantic central temple complex of the Bait Alaha, can be read as a source of its own right.⁷

In the present paper, I shall focus on aspects of political and institutional history. For simple chronological reasons, Partho-Roman Hatra has its place somewhere between cuneiform and Qu'ran. A closer look on the city's social organisation and its position in the environment of the Eastern Jezirah may contribute to determine this place with some more certainty. Indispensably, the the political framework of what has been called the 'Parthian Near West' and the political history of Hatra itself have to be re-examined. The paper will therefore discuss, first, the chronology of the rulers and kings of Hatra, second, the political environment of the western periphery of the Parthian realm, and, third, the Hatrene society as far as it can be reconstructed from the sources.

1. CHRONOLOGY

The inscriptions of Hatra provide us with a great deal of information concerning the city's rulers and kings. What they do not provide, however, is an absolute chronology, since only a small minority of inscriptions bears a year and can be dated with certainty. Even when the inscription can be dated, it is far from sure, whether or not the ruler mentioned was still alive when the inscription was put up. But the epigraphic evidence raises still more questions: To determine the

4. *Ibidem*, 68, 31.

5. AMM., 25, 8, 5: «hac etiam suspitione iam liberi properantesque itineribus magnis prope Hatram venimus, vetus oppidum in media solitudine positum, olimque desertum, quod eruendum adorti temporibus variis Traianus et Severus principes bellicosi cum exercitibus paene delati sunt, ut in eorum actibus has quoque digessimus partes».

6. The most reliable edition (with translation) is provided by VATTIONI 1981 and VATTIONI 1994. The inscriptions will be,

in accordance to VATTIONI's edition, abbreviated as 'H' below.

7. The architectonic record cannot be discussed here. Cf., for a comprehensive analysis (which however provides a dating for the buildings far from being uncontroversial), FREYBERGER 1998, 89-102: esp. 90-92, and SOMMER 2003, 47-80. For the prehistory of the temple complex, cf. now VENCO RICCIARDI 1999-2000.

exact meaning of the rulers' titles mentioned in the inscriptions – *mry'* ('lord') and *mlk'* ('king') – is extremely difficult. Whether a *mry'* of Hatra held a monarchic office in the strict sense or the term designated rather a collegial duty, with more than one *mry'* being in office at the same time, we simply do not know. What exact difference the switching from one title (*mry'*) to another (*mlk'*) meant, and whether at all there took place such a change at a precise moment, remains likewise totally obscure.

We know of nine men who held the rank either of 'lord' or 'king' of Hatra: Abdsamiya (to whom 6 inscriptions assign the title of *mlk'*), Elkūd (1 inscription *mry'*), Ma'nū (3 inscriptions *mry'*), Našrū (34 inscriptions *mry'*), Našrihab (11 inscriptions *mry'*), Wolgaš (3 inscriptions *mry'*, 3 *mlk'*), Sanaṭrūq, son of Abdsamiya (8 inscriptions *mlk'*), Sanaṭrūq, son of Našrū (1 inscription *mry'*, 23 *mlk'*), and Worōd (5 inscriptions *mry'*).⁸

Departing from personal presuppositions regarding the many open questions, scholars have been overwhelmingly productive in suggesting diverging chronologies of the Hatrene rulers.⁹ In my opinion the only solid ground for any attempt of reconstruction is provided by the inscriptions themselves, in spite of their deplorable lack of absolute dates. The governments of only four rulers of Hatra can be determined with some certainty: Našrihab was 'lord' of Hatra by AD 128/129 (440 SE, H 346), Našrū was 'lord' by the same year (H 346) and probably still in AD 137/138 (449 SE, H 272), one Sanaṭrūq was 'king' of Hatra by AD 176/177 (488 SE, H 82) and – doubtless another – Sanaṭrūq 'king' by AD 229/230 (541 SE, H 229).

A source of additional information, however, is provided by the accuracy with which the inscriptions specify the filiations of the respective rulers, in some cases over as many as three generations. We thus know that one Sanaṭrūq was a son of Našrū, another person with the same name the son of Abdsamiya, who on his side was the son of a Sanaṭrūq. It is therefore safe to state that Sanaṭrūq I who ruled in or had ruled by 176/177 was the grandfather of Sanaṭrūq II who held the throne in 229/230. Between the two of them ruled Abdsamiya, the son of Sanaṭrūq I and father of Sanaṭrūq II. Sanaṭrūq I was Našrū's son, who was, according to a couple of inscriptions, 'lord' of Hatra in the 130's. There was, however, another son of Našrū, Wolgaš, who ruled as 'lord' and 'king'. Since it was Sanaṭrūq I, his presumptive brother or half-brother, with whose children the dynasty continued, it is most likely that Wolgaš died earlier than Sanaṭrūq, being either his predecessor or his joint ruler in the first phase of his government.

The dynasty can be traced back over two more generations: Našrihab was Našrū's father and presumably his predecessor, which would suggest that in 128/129 when the first inscription mentioning the two rulers was put up, he was already dead. His government goes therefore back to the early and mid 120's. Našrihab was the son of a certain Elkūd. An Elkūd, who in all likelihood was identical with Našrihab's father, is mentioned as 'lord' of Hatra in merely one inscription, dated probably in the year 155/156. The inscription was the epitaph of Elkūd's son. When the son died in 155/156, the father may well have been in office slightly more than 30 years ago, hence in the years before and after 120. With this date, we are coming intriguingly close to Trajan's abortive annexation of Mesopotamia, from 114 to 117. I shall return to this later.

Two other 'lords' of Hatra are mentioned in the epigraphic record: Ma'nū and Worōd. Ma'nū's name appears on an inscription carved into a stone block, perhaps an altar, which bears inscriptions on three sides. Two of these – not the one mentioning Ma'nū – are dated, to the years AD 148/149 (460 SE, H 288a), respectively AD 156/157 (468 SE, H 288b). The tempting conclusion that Ma'nū must have ruled in the middle of the 2nd century AD is far from being cogent. So far, we have no evidence for a body of more than one 'lord' ruling at the same time; the inscriptions rather suggest that the office of *mry'* was monarchic in character and inherited within a ruling dynasty. In the 140's and 150's, with Našrū and later his two sons on the throne, there was simply no space left for another *mry'* Ma'nū.

It is therefore more convincing to place Ma'nū chronologically before the dynasty which began with Elkūd. This option is, surprisingly enough, backed by Cassius Dio's detailed account of the initial phase of Trajan's Parthian War in spring 114. After having invaded Armenia, Trajan's army

8. For the exact references cf. SOMMER 2003, 23-29.

1995, 12. Cf. also AGGOULA 1977; HAUSER 1998, 503; IBRAHIM

9. A synopsis of earlier attempts is provided by BERTOLINO

1986, 99-106; SAFAR 1973.

marched through Osrhoene in upper Mesopotamia, whose king, Abgar, welcomed the emperor in his capital, Edessa. While Trajan spent the winter in Edessa, the rulers of the neighbouring territories sent envoys to him to seek alliance. Dio names Sporakes of Anthemusias (a territory stretching along the Euphrates south of Carrhae), Manisaros of Gordiene (on the left bank of the upper Tigris) and a certain «Mannos, the ruler (ὁ φύλαρχος) of the neighbouring portion of Arabia».¹⁰ Viewed from Edessa in the Western Jezirah, «the neighbouring portion of Arabia» cannot be anything else than the eastern part of the 'island' (Jezirah) between Euphrates and Tigris, the Hatrene. Indeed, Dio gives an almost literal translation of the title the 'lords' of Hatra bore: φύλαρχος evidently equates *mry'*, the very unspecific and ambiguous Greek term Ἀραβία is simply a transliteration of 'Arab', the name used in the Hatrene inscriptions to designate the territory surrounding Hatra and the people inhabiting it. This suggests that Dio's 'Mannos' is no-one else than Ma'nū, attested as 'lord' of Hatra by three inscriptions.

Hence Ma'nū ruled Hatra in 114 when Trajan invaded upper Mesopotamia. Elkūd was probably his immediate successor. He may have been Ma'nū's son. But given the extraordinary conditions of war and revolt and the considerable age of Elkūd when he was in office, Ma'nū's regime is more likely to have been swept away by a local uprising like that of Abgar in Edessa, his dynasty being replaced by a new one, founded by Elkūd. Be this as it be, for Ma'nū we have a filiation again: The 'lord' Worōd, named by five inscriptions, had a son called Ma'nū. Worōd was therefore, with all likelihood, Ma'nū's father and predecessor, thus being the first 'lord' of Hatra we know by name.¹¹ The line of the known Hatrene rulers therefore starts with Worōd who governed probably in the beginning of the 2nd century AD, succeeded by Ma'nū during the second decade and Elkūd during the final phase of Trajan's Parthian War. With him a new dynasty began. His son Našrihab held the throne in the early and mid 120s, his grandson Našrū in the fourth decade. Našrū's two sons, Wolgaš and Sanaṭrūq I, ruled either jointly or one after the other in the mid 2nd century, Sanaṭrūq was still in office as 'king' in the later 170s. His son Abdsamiya became the next *mlk'*, succeeded by his son Sanaṭrūq II, who still ruled when the city was besieged and captured by the Sasanians.

2. HATRA AND THE PARTHIAN NEAR WEST

More thrilling a problem than the chronology of the rulers of Hatra is the apparent change of their title. No ruler before Wolgaš ever bore the title 'king', and no-one after Sanaṭrūq I was ever called 'lord'. The problem is complicated by the curious fact that we have two rulers, Našrū's sons, who are designated as 'lord' and 'king' in the epigraphic record: Sanaṭrūq only by one inscription as 'lord', but by 23 as 'king'. The simplest but less convincing solution is to rule out the one inscription as erroneous, presuming that Wolgaš was the first ruler to call himself 'king' and Sanaṭrūq inherited from him office and title. Even less likely Sanaṭrūq returned to the old, obviously less prestigious title when taking over government. Wolgaš and Sanaṭrūq may, however, have jointly ruled and jointly adopted the new title. Or Wolgaš made his brother 'lord' when he himself assumed the higher rank of 'king'.

No less enigmatic than the circumstances of the change are its reasons and chronological setting. I will depart from five hypotheses:

1. The new title 'king' replaced the traditional title 'lord', which after Sanaṭrūq I came never again into use.
2. Both titles generally imply a monarchic institution.
3. The change from *mry'* to *mlk'*, from 'lord' to 'king' meant a significant increase in prestige for the rulers of Hatra.

10. CASS. DIO, 68, 21, 1: ὡςπερ οὐδὲ ὁ Μάννος ὁ τῆς πλησιοχώρου οὐδὲ ὁ Σποράκης ὁ τῆς ἀνημουσίας φύλαρχος.

11. On Worōd's coinage now HARTMANN, LUTHER 2002. Quite oddly, the coins display the Latin letters SC ('Senatus consultum'). HARTMANN's and LUTHER's conclusion «daß lokale Dynasten Nordostmesopotamiens als Untertanen des Arsacidenkönigs nicht unbedacht römische 'Hoheitszeichen'

verwendeten» is, under the conditions of a frontier zone of diffuse power relations not necessarily to be taken for granted. The 'Hoheitszeichen' SC may, therefore, have been used by Hatrene rulers, even while the city was still under Arsacid suzerainty, and Worōd can be dated well before the abortive occupation of Mesopotamia by Trajan's legions.

4. The elevation of the Hatrene rulers from 'lords' to 'kings' could hardly take place without consent of the Parthian kings.

5. It was connected with and related to substantial changes within the strategic layout of the Parthian Near West and within the society of the Eastern Jezirah.

No one can seriously doubt the replacement of an older title by a new one: Before Wolgaš, the title *mry'* in the epigraphic record occurs 34 times, whereas there is no single reference to *mlk'*. Since Sanaṭrūq I, the title *mry'* is mentioned only once, compared to 38 references to *mlk'*. Furthermore, a parallel change taking place about 200 years earlier has quite recently and very convincingly been suggested by Andreas Luther for Edessa.¹²

The epigraphic evidence does not provide any precise date for the change. It took place some time after the last reference to Naṣrū as 'lord' in 137/138 and some time before Sanaṭrūq was mentioned as 'king' in 176/177. The perfect chronological setting within this frame is provided by the Parthian War undertaken by L. Verus from 163 to 166. An elevation of the Hatrene rulers to the rank of 'kings' matches, as will be seen, strikingly with the political and strategic condition of the Parthian realm and its western periphery in precisely these years.

What was this western periphery like? How did the Parthians exercise their power? How did Hatra, the 'kingdom of the Arabs', fit in this structure? And what changes took place with the gradual advance of Roman influence in the Near East? Like the Roman Empire, the Parthian kingdom represents just one individual expression of imperial hegemonic power. All empires, whether pre-modern or modern, share six universal patterns, which distinguish them from the post-French-Revolution model of nation state¹³

1. They have a clearly distinct core and a likewise distinct periphery; power diminishes from the core towards the periphery, ideally in concentric circles.

2. The interaction between the core and each periphery is closer than the interaction between several peripheries.

3. Ruling *élites* are ethnically and culturally distinct.

4. Empires have two levels of established culture: cultural patterns, ideologies and religions emanating from the core towards the peripheries use to penetrate and transform 'little traditions' which nevertheless survive.

5. Empires have no borders, but open frontiers.

6. Empires are products of military conquest and depend on the military hegemony of their cores.

No pre-modern empire was ever in a condition that it could exercise immediate power in its entire territory. The model of 'indirect rule', first explicitly proposed by Frederick Lugard with regard to the British administration of India, is in fact as old as hegemonic power itself.¹⁴ Thus empires used to be surrounded by vassal and client states with different degrees of inner autonomy. The Parthian realm was no exception. It has often been described as 'feudal', and in fact, in some instances, it clearly resembles structural patterns of medieval universal monarchies. 'Feudal', however, is not synonymous to 'weak', and the Arsacids' indirect style of exercising power was apparently the most suitable way to cope with a region which, in almost every respect, differed from the Mediterranean coastlands ruled by Rome. Nomadic populations in particular were chronically difficult to control for hegemonic power centres. The core, which was controlled directly by the Parthian kings, was relatively small (in comparison much smaller than the proportion made up by the Roman provinces) and surrounded by a huge *cordon sanitaire* of territories ruled by relatively autonomous 'kings', 'lords' and 'satraps'.

The structure of the Parthian periphery suggests that rather than to ask whether or not Hatra was part of the Parthian realm, we have to find out to what *extent* this was the case. In other words: How dependent were the Hatrene rulers on the Arsacid kings and how far did their autonomy reach? To model the territorial organisation of the Parthians is rendered more difficult by an amazingly imprecise terminology, a terminology blurred by the diversity of languages, blurred

12. LUTHER 1999, 448-452.

13. A good overview on the categories of imperial power is provided by the contributions in LUNDESTAD 1994, OSTER-

HAMMEL 1995, OSTERHAMMEL 2000; and now, above all, OSTERHAMMEL 2001.

14. LUGARD 1906.

by ancient authors, but blurred also by modern scholars, some of whom seem to be unaware of the substantial differences between the basic patterns of empire and nation-state.¹⁵

As we have seen, Cassius Dio lists some of the rulers of upper Mesopotamia attributing to them the title *φύλαρχος*. In contrast, he does not associate any title with Abgar, the 'king' of Osrhoene, but simply calls him *Αὔγαρος ὁ Ὀρροηνός*, which could indeed designate Abgar's royal dignity. In Dura-Europos on the middle Euphrates a papyrus mentions the *strategos* Manesos, a contemporary of Trajan, who held the title *batesa*, which clearly is of Iranian origin and resembles the later Sasanian title of *padheša* which can quite adequately be translated as 'margrave'. Hesychius of Alexandria's Greek encyclopedia lists the term *bistax* and translates it with *basileus*, which is certainly misleading. If the region of Dura would have been a proper Parthian *regnum* and Manesos its 'king', the Dura papyrus would not have referred to him as *strategos*. More helpful is a little known passage in Ammianus Marcellinus, which distinguishes three holders of gubernatorial offices in the Parthian realm: «reges», «satrapae» and «vitaxae».¹⁶ Ammianus equates the Parthian term *vitaxa* with a Roman *magister equitum*. His analogy is most probably due to the fact that Ammianus had a keen interest in the military function of the office. But by putting them in one context with «reges» and «satrapae», Ammianus makes perfectly clear that also «vitaxae» were regional administrators. In terms of prestige and autonomy, they obviously have to be located right in the middle between «reges» and «satrapae».

With Ammianus' help it ought to be possible to reconstruct a coherent framework of the Parthian administration putting together disparate pieces of evidence from four different languages. The highest rank of local rulers, called «reges» by Ammianus Marcellinus, corresponds to the Aramaic title *mlk'* and probably to Iranian *shah*, as the Arsacid king called himself in Greek *βασιλεὺς βασιλείων*, king of kings. In prestige and autonomy inferior to the 'kings' were Ammianus' «vitaxae», to whom Cassius Dio in Greek referred to as *phylarchoi*, the papyrus from Dura as *strategoi*. The analogous Iranian term was *padheša*, the word employed by the Aramaics in Osrhoene and Hatra *mry'*. Both offices were clearly hereditary, the holders usually members of the local *élites*. Like *vitaxae*, Ammianus' term for the third class of local governors, «satrapae», is borrowed directly from Iranian. In contrast to the 'kings' and «vitaxae», the satraps were installed and dismissed by the Arsacid king. They probably governed the provinces in the core of the realm, where Ctesiphon exercised direct rule.

The elevation of a Hatrene ruler from the office of *mry'* to the higher and more prestigious rank of *mlk'* was therefore a political event of far more than local scale. It directly affected the political shape of the Parthian western periphery and it can be taken for granted that the Arsacid king had fairly good reasons for either tolerating or instigating the Hatrene rulers' grasping for the purple.¹⁷ The battlefields of L. Verus' campaign were the ground on which the 'Kingdom of the Arabs' was erected. With the Romans controlling Osrhoene and the region of Nisibis down to the Jebel Sinjar, Hatra was, from the 160's onwards, the Parthians' farthest outpost in Northern Mesopotamia. The vulnerable rulers of an almost agonised empire had no choice than to grant more autonomy to their vassals, whose strategic importance with the frontier coming closer and closer had dramatically increased. By doing so, however, the Parthian rulers proved once again the flexibility of their system of indirect rule in the realm's western periphery: the whole structure reacted adequately to the threats and challenges from outside.

3. HATRA AND ITS SOCIETY

Hatra's rise in importance and the prestige its rulers achieved by the third quarter of the 2nd century AD is embedded in the global history of the period and in particular in the mutual relationships

15. For a detailed discussion of the pertinent literature SOMMER 2003a, 394-395.

16. AMM., 13, 6, 14: «sunt autem in omni Perside, hae regiones maximae, quas vitaxae (id est magistri equitum) curant, et reges et satrapae – nam minores plurimas recensere difficile est et superfluum – Assyria, Susiana, Media, Persis, Parthia, Carmania maior, Hyrcania, Margiana, Bactriani, Sogdiani, Sacae,

Scythia infra Imaum et ultra eundem montem, Serica, Aria, Peropanisadae, Drangiana, Arachosia et Gedrosia».

17. The fact that royal insignia were granted by the Arsacid central power is underlined by an account by Jos., *ant. Iud.*, 20, 67, who claims that Izates of Adiabene was permitted to wear the tiara and to sleep on a golden bed by Artabanus II. Cf. TELIXIDOR 1967-1968, 3.

between the respective hegemonic states of the West and of the East, the Roman Empire and the Parthian realm. It is, however, likewise connected to processes within the society of Hatra and the surrounding parts of upper Mesopotamia, which again are linked to what happened on the stage of inter-imperial politics.

For the Hatra besieged by Trajan in AD 117, Cassius Dio states that it was «neither big nor wealthy». What he remarks on the city, which, roughly 80 years later, Septimius Severus tried to conquer, reads entirely different: 'The city then, according to Dio, virtually boasted of wealth and splendour.'¹⁸ The Bithynian senator, with regard to Hatra, seems indeed to be a fairly well informed chronicler. His account of the city's geographical setting is *grosso modo* correct, the details provided by him concerning historical events taking place in and around Hatra proved reliable. We therefore have to take his information seriously, that the capital of the 'Kingdom of the Arabs' underwent dramatic changes within not even a century, developing from a strategically important, but otherwise insignificant fortress to a boomtown of the steppe in the proper sense of the word. This view is impressively backed by the archaeological evidence: As most scholars agree, the giant temple complex of the Bait Alaha in the exact centre of Hatra was erected precisely in the period in question.

In order to imagine how extraordinary the urban breakthrough in the Eastern Jezirah was, one should consider once again the extreme ecological conditions its inhabitants had to cope with in all periods. In most parts of the region an annual precipitation of less than 300 mm is measured. Below the 400 mm isohyet, agriculture in the Near East tends to be precarious, for precipitation is not distributed equally over the year, but concentrates in winter and spring, and furthermore varies from one year to another. An urban settlement in considerable distance from the fertile river valleys had never before – and has never again – existed in the Eastern Jezirah, which, unlike other sub-regions of the Near East, within the last 2000 years did not undergo substantial climatic changes.

What made such a process possible, in such an environment? And why at all could an urban centre come into existence in an ecological setting where it was least likely? What assured the livelihood of the people dwelling within Hatra's walls, being unproductive in the primary sector? The answer is not blowing in the wind, but it is certainly too optimistic to expect it in the epigraphic record. What may be looked for in the inscriptions is, however, some information on the social organisation of Hatra and the Hatrene. As we will see, the society of the 2nd and 3rd century Eastern Jazirah closely resembles structural patterns well known from other ancient, sub-recent and even recent societies.

A couple of years before Hatra was definitely destroyed by the Sasanians, two brothers, Elkūd and Yahbarmarēn, the sons of Šamašbarek, put up a statue of king Sanaṣrūq II in one of the small shrines scattered over the city's dwelling area. They added an inscription (H 79) noteworthy enough to be quoted here in full length:¹⁹

Statue of the king Sanaṣrūq, the victorious, whose fortune is with the gods, the son of Abdsamiya, which erected on the day of his fortune's birth Yahbarmarēn and Elkūd, the sons of Šamašbarek, the son of Elkūd, the son of Šamašbarek, the son of Elkūd, because he is their delight. And they – Yahbarmarēn and Elkūd and their sons and their offspring, inside and outside – pledge solemnly by our lord, the eagle, and by his reign and by the fortune of Arab and by the *sēmeia* of Maškane and by the fortune of the king Sanaṣrūq and by his offspring and sons, that no-one belonging to their clan will ever seize Ma'ana' with force, the son of king Sanaṣrūq. May they be remembered in Hatra forever.

The inscription provides a number remarkable details. First, the oath sworn by the two brothers on behalf of their family members seems quite odd. They pledge what should be the most natural: loyalty to their king and that no harm will be done to his son. The oath suggests that Sanaṣrūq's son had been kidnapped by family members previously; the statue thus may have been erected as a symbolical re-compensation addressed to the king. Noteworthy is, second, the location of the statue and inscription: they were put up in one of 15 small sanctuaries surrounded by urban dwellings, each consisting of a tiny cella with a larger antecella, hence resembling the shape of

18. Cass. Dio, 76, 12, 2 δόξα τε γὰρ τοῦ χωρίου ὡς καὶ πάμπολλα τὰ τε ἄλλα χρήματα καὶ τὰ τοῦ Ἡλίου ἀναθήματα ἔχοντος μεγάλη ἦν.

19. On the inscription in detail DIJKSTRA 1990.

a Babylonian *Breitraumtempel*. Elkūd's and Yahbarmarēn's family seem to have had a special relationship to the shrine, as it used it for the erection of more than one inscription. Hatra's urban layout in general and the position of the shrines in clearly distinguished neighbourhoods marked by irregular courses of roads, dead ends and agglutinating architectonic structures in particular suggest that the social patterns of clientele and kinship played a decisive role. Their prominence is underlined by the importance which is given to kinship ties in the epigraphic record of Hatra.

Third and finally, Elkūd's and Yahbarmarēn's clan clearly comprehends two groups to whose distinction the inscription pays much attention: Elkūd and Yahbarmarēn are the heads of a kin-group («sons and offspring») whose members were living «inside and outside». From the city's point of view this can only mean inside respectively outside the city walls, hence in Hatra itself and in its surroundings. One single tribal group obviously overlapped the boundary between city and steppe: some of its members were urban dwellers, some were either pastoralists or agriculturalists, hence living «outside». Modelling the 2nd and 3rd centuries Eastern Jezirah as a society structured in tribes comprising urban, rural and nomadic populations is supported by two more, almost identical, inscriptions which give evidence on a law approved by the people's assembly. It designates the crowd of voting individuals by employing the odd expression «the Hatrenes, old and small, and all the 'Arabs' and whoever dwells in Hatra». The group of participants is therefore structured by two clearly distinguished dimensions. First, 'Arabs' are opposed to those living inside the walls suggesting that most of the people «outside» were nomads, and, second, the whole of the population is constituted by «old» and «small», most likely not according to age but to social rank. Though they are distinct groups, 'Arabs' and city-dwellers, notables and common people all being citizens of Hatra shared one collective identity.

The Eastern Jezirah in the Partho-Roman period is but one specific example for what might be called an integrated tribal society, with bonds of – authentic or fictitious – kinship overlapping the borders between settled and migratory elements of population. M. B. Rowton, who first dedicated a series of comparative studies to what he calls «dimorphic» societies,²⁰ lists a number of features such societies characteristically share, from the dawn of history to the establishment of nation states in Western and Central Asia. Integrated tribal societies arise, where agriculture for ecological reasons is still possible, but precarious (which is the case above the 200 mm and below the 400 mm isohyets), and farmers and pastoralists are mutually dependent. The 'dimorphic zone' is therefore congruent with most of the less advantaged parts of the Fertile Crescent, stretching from South-Western Iran to Southern Osroene. Smaller areas of social dimorphism include the Bi'qa valley in Lebanon²¹ and some parts of Iran²² and Afghanistan.²³ Integrated tribalism requires a specific type of pastoral migration which differs in almost any respect from the Bedouin nomadism of the Arabian desert. Pastoralists in the dimorphic zone typically migrate on a much smaller scale, returning periodically, usually in accordance to the seasons, to the same places and being engaged in some rudimentary form of agriculture, as well. This 'enclosed nomadism' is a secondary development to sedentarisation, for enclosed nomads depend totally on commercial exchange with peasant and urban populations. If, however, agriculture is precarious and dependence between agriculturalists and nomads mutual, symbiotic links between urban, rural and nomadic populations may develop, leading to a form of social organisation which comprehends different ways of life in one social and political body. The symbiosis is symbolically expressed by the perceived bonds of kinship between the two groups.

The archetype of an integrated tribal society is – geographically fairly close to Hatra – the Mid Bronze Age city of Mari on the middle Euphrates. The clay tablets from the palace archive throw much light on the basic mechanisms which kept integrated tribalism work. In a way, the tribal *élites* were part-time nomads. They exercised power as tribal leaders in the steppe, but, at the same time, served as officials in the bureaucracy of the urban centre. They were the indispensable link between the king, his palatial organisation and the sedentary parts of tribes on the one hand and the migratory pastoralists on the other. They maintained communication between city and steppe

20. Most important ROWTON 1973, ROWTON 1974, ROWTON 1976.

21. Cf. SOMMER 2001, SOMMER 2003c, SOMMER 2004a.

22. On Iran BARTH 1959-1960; BARTH 1961, 73-74.

23. On Afghanistan ANDERSON 1975; DESSART 2001, 180-234.

and settled conflicts, which often occurred. Practically, the king of Mari was merely one more tribal leader, who only hold the limited power of a *primus inter pares*.²⁴

The basic prerequisites of integrated tribalism thus include an urban centre, a substantial population of pastoralists practising enclosed nomadism, mutual dependence, the perception of kinship links between settled and migratory populations and a king as the paramount institution embodying the 'state'. With variations, the paradigm obtained importance again and again in the social history of Western and Central Asia, from the Late Bronze Age Levant with its endemic *habiru*-problem to dimorphic societies in the Shah's Iran and integrated Pashtun tribes in contemporary Afghanistan and Western Pakistan. As a general pattern, it can be observed that integrated tribalism flourished, wherever empires controlled vast territories extensively, granting at the same time a high degree of autonomy to their peripheries. This was certainly the case in the Partho-Roman frontier zone in Syria and Mesopotamia from the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD. When empires and nation-states, however, started to interfere with the inner affairs of their peripheries and to subjugate them to direct rule, tribal groups frequently went out of control. This apparently happened from the 3rd century onwards, when Rome and the Sasanians struggled for direct control of the steppe frontier.

Time seemed to work in favour of the Arsacid overlords in the 2nd century Jezirah. Both, intensive archaeological fieldwork in Hatra and extensive surveys in the surroundings suggest, that from the late 1st century onwards, an increasing proportion of the local population was sedentary.²⁵ In the Wadi Tharthar, which disposes of the only substantial water reservoirs of the area, the number of rural settlements steadily increased. At about the same time, the dwelling area of Hatra itself began to occupy so far unsettled spaces, hence requiring the construction of new fortifications, which were erected in the 150's AD.²⁶ An important factor was certainly what could be called the pendulum of pastoralism: exposed to the temptations of a sedentary way of life, individuals practising enclosed nomadism tend to abandon their migratory way of life and begin to settle. In the long run, nomadic populations get absorbed by the sedentary – until major disturbances such as political crisis, war or the breakdown of hegemonic centres start up the imperial cycle of Western Asia again. Perhaps still more important was the impact of Rome's expansion in Mesopotamia. With Hatra having become a heavily fortified frontier outpost, the scope left to the nomads clearly had diminished. The archaeological record suggests a fierce military building activity on the Parthian side of the border following L. Verus' campaign, whether carried out by the central government or by local forces. In all likelihood, in addition to the restrictions the border imposed, nomadic groups became subject to conscription and were integrated in Parthian or Hatrene military units.

The Eastern Jezira's integrated tribal society had, in the course of the 2nd century AD, utterly changed its face. Urban elements became more and more predominant over the nomadic inheritance. Patterns of integration characteristic for the 'state' displaced the bonds of kinship pivotal for the nomads. And new sources of wealth had to be exploited: the growing sanctuary, unique in its dimensions, had clearly more than local importance and certainly attracted pilgrims from all over Mesopotamia, perhaps even Syria. But no sanctuary, not even Mecca, is sufficient to sustain an urban population of considerable size under extreme ecological conditions. I therefore suggest, that long-distance trade and regional economic exchange played, like in Palmyra, a major role in Hatra, as well. Here the nomadic component of the integrated tribal society comes into play once again: jointly performed long-distance trade is, besides the exchange of food, the common ground, on which dimorphic societies are built.

To sum up, Hatra's increase in importance in the course of the 2nd century AD had external and internal reasons. The stage, on which Hatra's rulers could grasp for the purple was the Partho-Roman steppe frontier. Trajan's Parthian War attested the paramount strategic importance of the stronghold, L. Verus' campaign, which pushed the frontline beyond the Jebel Sinjar, increased it, and Septimius Severus' twofold siege of Hatra made it even more obvious. But parallel to the

24. On Mari KLENGEL 1972; KUPPER 1957; KUPPER 1967; HEINZ 2002, 127-132, 151-153

25. Summarising HAUSER 2000.

26. On the fortifications GAWLIKOWSKI 1994.

changes taking place on the inter-imperial stage and closely connected to them, local factors played their decisive role, as well. The promotion of Hatra's rulers to the rank of kings and the transformation of its territory into a proper 'Kingdom of the Arabs' gave expression to, and took notice of, the profound changes the local society had undergone in the meantime.

The seminar's topic – *From Cuneiform to Qu'ran* – implicitly requires some concluding remarks on Hatra's place between 'East' and 'West'. The Eastern Jezirah's society obviously displayed a number of features which are characteristic, perhaps even exclusively, for societies settled in a geographic context which could be called 'oriental'. It is therefore tempting to take Hatra as a proof for an unbroken cultural continuity, stretching indeed from the Achaemenid period to early Islam – and in both directions even beyond. It is tempting, but in my view highly hazardous, to draw such conclusions from the evidence. First, it would be circular, since I have deliberately used anachronistic comparative case-studies taken precisely from the periods preceding and succeeding the Partho-Roman era to shape my model. Second, the Hatrene society's resembling earlier and later structural patterns is no proof at all for cultural continuity, as the resemblance is purely typological, by no means genetic. In other words: Hatra developed similar patterns as Middle Bronze Age Mari or 20th century Fars, precisely because of the similarities in political and ecological conditions, not because of obscure cultural traditions stretching back over 5000 years of history.

Hatra and its fall, however, left their traces in the *mémoire collective* of the Islamic and Christian Arab world. According to Syriac and Arabic texts, the city was protected by a talisman and with its help withstood siege. When Hatra was besieged by the Persians, the beautiful daughter of the city's ruler Daizan, Nađirā fell in love with the Persian king. She unveiled the spell to him, and the Persians overcame the city's fortifications. The treacherous princess met her fate when she complained about her bed and a myrtle's leaf was found under the mattress. The Persian king was not amused about the princess's behaviour who was so spoiled by her father and nevertheless betrayed him. Nađirā was executed the same day.

After Hatra had perished, the imperial cycle started to move again. Within a couple of decades the Syro-Mesopotamian steppe frontier utterly changed its face. The kingdom of Osroene, after a short revival in the reign of Gordian III, was definitely transformed into a Roman province in the 240's. Dura-Europos and the entire line of Roman strongholds along the middle Euphrates were conquered by the Sasanians and erased from the map. Palmyra after its supernova-like explosion in the power-vacuum following Valerian's defeat at Carrhae in 260, was finally captured by Aurelian and never recovered as a politically relevant factor. Other autonomous kingdoms in the formerly Parthian Near West were submitted to Sasanian direct rule. The small kingdoms which shaped the political structure of integrated tribalism had vanished, the tribes were no more integrated, but became free radicals which could be controlled by the rivalling empires only by means of extraordinary effort. A long-lasting war of attrition began, with the nomads all too often as a Fifth Column of the respective adverse empire. In the very long run, it prepared the ground for the final success of the Muslim Arabs, but this is certainly another chapter.

APPENDIX

Name	Filiation	Title	Dated evidence	ruled ca. from	to
Worōd		<i>mry'</i>			(110)
Ma'nū	son of Worōd	<i>mry'</i>	CASS. DIO, 68, 21, 1	115	116/117
Elkūd		<i>mry'</i>	H 416	(116/117)	(120)
Našrihab	son of Elkūd	<i>mry'</i>	H 272, 338, 346	(120)	(125)
Našrū	son of Našrihab	<i>mry'</i>	H 82, 272, 338, 346	128/129	137/138
Wolgaš	son of Našrū	<i>mry'</i> , <i>mlk'</i>		(140)	(170)
Sanaṭrūq I	son of Našrū	<i>mry'</i> , <i>mlk'</i>	H 82	(140)	176/177
Abdsamiya	son of Sanaṭrūq I	<i>mlk'</i>	HERODIAN., 3, 1, 3	(180)	197-199
Sanaṭrūq II	son of Abdsamiya	<i>mlk'</i>	H 229	(200)	(240)

Estimated ruling dates in brackets.

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