


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


3. CASS. DIO, 68, 31. 1.
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 161–166 cannot be decided, but Septimius Severus laid siege to the sungod’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.”

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. 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.

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 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
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 monarchical office in the strict sense or the term designated rather a collegiate 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: Abdasmiya (to whom 6 inscriptions assign the title of mlk'), Elkād (1 inscription mry'), Ma'nū (3 inscriptions mry'), Nasrū (34 inscriptions mry'), Naṣrīhab (11 inscriptions mry'), Wolgaš (3 inscriptions mry', 3 mlk'), Sanatrūq, son of Abdasmiya (8 inscriptions mlk'), Sanatrūq, son of Nasrū (1 inscription mry', 23 mlk'), and Worōd (5 inscriptions mry').

Departing from personal presuppositions regarding the many open questions, scholars have been overwhelmingly productive in suggesting diverging chronologies of the Hatrene rulers. 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: Naṣrīhab was 'lord' of Hatra by AD 128/129 (440 še, H 346), Nasrū was 'lord' by the same year (H 346) and probably still in AD 137/138 (449 šb, H 272), one Sanatrūq was 'king' of Hatra by AD 176/177 (488 šb, H 82) and - doubtless another - Sanatrūq 'king' by AD 229/230 (541 šb, 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 Sanatrūq was a son of Nasrū, another person with the same name the son of Abdasmiya, who on his side was the son of a Sanatrūq. It is therefore safe to state that Sanatrūq I who ruled in or had ruled by 176/177 was the grandfather of Sanatrūq II who held the throne in 229/230. Between the two of them ruled Abdasmiya, the son of Sanatrūq I and father of Sanatrūq II. Sanatrūq I was Nasrū's son, who was, according to a couple of inscriptions, 'lord' of Hatra in the 150's. There was, however, another son of Nasrū, Wolgaš, who ruled as 'lord' and 'king'. Since it was Sanatrūq I, his presumptive brother or half-brother, with whose children the dynasty continued, it is most likely that Wolgaš died earlier than Sanatrūq, 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: Naṣrīhab was Naṣrū'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. Naṣrīhab was the son of a certain Elkād. An Elkād, who in all likelihood was identical with Naṣrīhab'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 Elkād'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 200. 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 šb, H 288a), respectively AD 156/157 (468 šb, 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 monarchical in character and inherited within a ruling dynasty. In the 120's and 150's, with Nasrū 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 Elkād. 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

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marched through Osroene 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 Anthemius (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 φύλακας) of the neighbouring portion of Arabia’. 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: φύλακας 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’nû, attested as ‘lord’ of Hatra by three inscriptions.

Hence Ma’nû ruled Hatra in 114 when Trajan invaded upper Mesopotamia. Elkûd was probably his immediate successor. He may have been Ma’nû’s son. But given the extraordinary conditions of war and revolt and the considerable age of Elkûd when he was in office, Ma’nû’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 Elkûd. Be this as it be, for Ma’nû we have a filiation again: the ‘lord’ Worôd, named by five inscriptions, had a son called Ma’nû. Worôd was therefore, with all likelihood, Ma’nû’s father and predecessor, thus being the first ‘lord’ of Hatra we know by name.10 The line of the known Hatrine rulers therefore starts with Worôd who governed probably in the beginning of the 2nd century AD, succeeded by Ma’nû during the second decade and Elkûd during the final phase of Trajan’s Parthian War. With him a new dynasty began. His son Našriab held the throne in the early and mid 210s, his grandson Naşû in the fourth decade. Naşû’s two sons, Wolgaš and Sanaštûq I, ruled either jointly or one after another in the mid 3rd century, Sanaštûq was still in office as ‘king’ in the later 170s. His son Abakamiya became the next mîk’, succeeded by his son Sanaštûq II, who still ruled when the city was besieged and captured by the Sasaniains.

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 Sanaštûq I was ever called ‘lord’. The problem is complicated by the curious fact that we have two rulers, Našri’s sons, who are designated as ‘lord’ and ‘king’ in the epigraphic record: Sanaštûq 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 Sanaštûq inherited from him office and title. Even less likely Sanaštûq returned to the old, obviously less prestigious title when taking over government. Wolgaš and Sanaštûq 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 Sanaštûq I came never again into use.
2. Both titles generally imply a monarchic institution.
3. The change from mry to mîk’, from ‘lord’ to ‘king’ meant a significant increase in prestige for the rulers of Hatra.

10. CASS. DIO, 69, 21, τὸ ὀνομα ὁ αὐτὸς ἐν τῇ Μινωίδῃ ἀνεφεύρθη αὐτῷ ὁ Ἑλκὸς ὁ τοῦ Ασσρικοῦ φύλακας
11. On Worôd’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 Unarten des Arsacidenkönigs nicht unbedacht römische ‘Hobeitzeichen’ verwendeten is, under the conditions of a frontier zone of diffuse power relations not necessarily to be taken for granted. The ‘Hobeitzeichen’ SC may, therefore, have been used by Hatrine rulers, even while the city was still under Arsamid suzerainty, and Worôd can be dated well before the abortive occupation of Mesopotamia by Trajan’s legions.
4. The elevation of the Hatran 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 mir' in the epigraphic record occurs 34 times, whereas there is no single reference to mlk'. Since Sanātrūq I, the title mir' 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 Nasrū as 'lord' in 137/138 and some time before Sanātrūq 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 Hatran 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 state:

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 elites 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.13 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 Hatran 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 Lieu (1994, Osterhammel 1995, Osterhammel 2000; and now, above all, Osterhammel 2001).
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.  

As we have seen, Cassius Dio lists some of the rulers of upper Mesopotamia attributing to them the title ὁδόρηγος. In contrast, he does not associate any title with Abgar, the 'king' of Oshoene, but simply calls him Ἀβγαρ ὁ Ὀσχοιναῖος, 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 basilisk, which is certainly misleading. If the region of Dura would have been a proper Parthian region 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 «vitazae». Ammianus equates the Parthian term vitazae 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 «vitazae» 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 mīlk' and probably to Iranian shah, as the Arsacid king called himself in Greek βασιλέας, king of kings. In prestige and autonomy inferior to the 'kings' were Ammianus' «vitazae», to whom Cassius Dio in Greek referred to as phylenchos, the papyrus from Dura as strategoi. The analogous Iranian term was padheša, the word employed by the Aramaics in Oshoene and Hatra mry. Both offices were clearly hereditary, the holders usually members of the local elites. Like vitazae, Ammianus' term for the third class of local governors, «satrapae», is borrowed directly from Iranian. In contrast to the 'kings' and «vitazae», 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 mīlk' was therefore a political improvement 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. The battlefields of L. Verus' campaign were the ground on which the 'Kingdom of the Arabs' was erected. With the Romans controlling Oshoene 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

Hatras 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
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. 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 Jezirah closely resembles structural patterns well known from other ancient, sub-recent and even recent societies.

A couple of years before Hatra was definitively destroyed by the Sassanians, two brothers, Elkûd and Yahbarmaren, the sons of Šamsabarek, put up a statue of king Sanāтраq 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:

Statue of the king Sanāтраq, the victorious, whose fortune is with the gods, the son of Absamaniya, which erected on the day of his fortune's birth Yahbarmaren and Elkûd, the sons of Šamsabarek, the son of Elkûd, the son of Šamsabarek, the son of Elkûd, because he is their delight. And they — Yahbarmaren and Elkûd 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 õmet of Maškane and by the fortune of the king Sanāтраq and by his offspring and sons, that no-one belonging to their clan will ever seize Ma’ana with force, the son of king Sanāтраq. 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 Sanāтраq's son had been kidnapped by family members previously; the statue thus may have been erected as a symbolic 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

a Babylonian *Breitmauertempel*. Elkād’s and Yahbarmānē’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, Elkād’s and Yahbarmānē’s clan clearly comprehends two groups to whose distinction the inscription pays much attention: Elkād and Yahbarmānē are the heads of a kind-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 Osrhoene. Smaller areas of social dimorphism include the Bīqa 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 elites 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.

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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.\textsuperscript{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 habita problem to dimorphic societies in the Shah’s Iran and integrated Pashun 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 control, tribal groups frequently went out of control. This apparently happened from the 3rd century onwards, when Rome and the Sassanians struggled for direct control of the steppe frontier.

Time seemed to work in favour of the Arsacid overlords in the 2nd century Jejzrah. 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.\textsuperscript{25} In the Wadi Thinhar, which disperses 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 3rd century AD.\textsuperscript{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 Jejzrah’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 nomad 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

\textsuperscript{25} Summarising Hauser 2000.
\textsuperscript{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 Qur’an – 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 Hatraene 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, Nadīrā 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 spoilt by her father and nevertheless betrayed him. Nadīrā 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 to 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Filiation</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Dated evidence</th>
<th>Ruled ca. from</th>
<th>to</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worod</td>
<td>son of Worod</td>
<td>mīr'</td>
<td>Cass. Dio, 68, 21, 1</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>(110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma'nūš</td>
<td>son of Worod</td>
<td>mīr'</td>
<td>H 416</td>
<td>(116/117)</td>
<td>116/117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elkūd</td>
<td>son of Elkad</td>
<td>mīr'</td>
<td>H 272, 338, 346</td>
<td>(120)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naṣrūh</td>
<td>son of Naṣrūh</td>
<td>mīr'</td>
<td>H 82, 272, 338, 346</td>
<td>128/129</td>
<td>(125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolgaš</td>
<td>son of Naṣrū</td>
<td>mīr' , mīl'</td>
<td>H 82</td>
<td>(140)</td>
<td>(140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanāṭruq I</td>
<td>son of Naṣrū</td>
<td>mīr'</td>
<td>H 82</td>
<td>(140)</td>
<td>(170)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abdasmiya</td>
<td>son of Sanāṭruq I</td>
<td>mīl'</td>
<td>Herodian. 3, 1, 3</td>
<td>(180)</td>
<td>176/177</td>
</tr>
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<td>Sanāṭruq II</td>
<td>son of Abdasmiya</td>
<td>mīl'</td>
<td>H 329</td>
<td>(200)</td>
<td>(240)</td>
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Estimated ruling dates in brackets.
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