



Hatra

Politics, Culture and Religion
between Parthia and Rome

Edited by Lucinda Dirven

Ancient History

Oriens et Occidens 21

Franz Steiner Verlag

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Studien zu antiken Kulturkontakten
und ihrem Nachleben

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Josef Wiesehöfer

in Zusammenarbeit mit Pierre Briant,
Amélie Kuhrt, Fergus Millar und
Robert Rollinger

Band 21



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Cover illustration: Facade of the great iwans
in the central temenos at Hatra. Photo by Erick Bonnier.

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Most of the papers in this volume originate from the colloquium *Hatra. Politics, culture and religion between Parthia and Rome*, that was held at the University of Amsterdam on 18-20 December 2009, under the auspices of the chair of ancient history. It was a memorable event to have so many leading experts assembled in a snow-white, and consequently isolated, Amsterdam. I would like to thank everybody for his or her efforts in making this meeting into a success and for their patience in awaiting this book. Susan Downey, the grand old lady of 'Parthian art', could not attend the conference due to health problems and was sorely missed by all of us. Fortunately, her health restored and I am very pleased that she found the time to write an article for this book; a volume on Hatra would not be complete without her contribution. Leonardo Gregoratti did attend the conference but could not present a paper at the time. The article that he sent me afterwards fits in perfectly with the other contributions and I find it hopeful that young scholars are still interested in Hatra and Parthian history, in the difficult times the Near East is now experiencing.

I should like to express my gratitude to the funding bodies that generously funded the colloquium: the Institute of Culture and History of the University of Amsterdam, The Allard Pierson Stichting and Hatra Capital. I am particularly grateful to Wim Hupperetz, director of the Allard Pierson Museum, who not only provided us with a most suitable location for our meetings, but also enabled me to set up a photo exhibition about Hatra in the museum. Erick Bonnier generously provided us with his splendid photographs of Hatra (some of which are also included in this book, for which I owe him thanks as well).

Indirectly, this conference is the outcome of my Postdoctoral Research Project on the sculptures of Hatra that was conducted at the department of Archaeology of the University of Amsterdam (2001-2005) and that was generously funded by UTOPA and sustained by my former supervisor, Herman Brijder. Needless to say, 2001 was not the most self-evident time to start a project in Iraq and I am most grateful for their continuous support for this exotic subject in classical archaeology. The department of ancient history, above all its chair Emily Hemelrijk, made it possible to keep the study of Hatra alive while I was teaching and supported me in every way to organize this colloquium. The efforts of our PhD students, Veerle Gaspar, Cristina Murer and Anna Sparreboom in the period preceding and during the colloquium, have been indispensable for its success.

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Lucinda Dirven
Amsterdam, January 2013

INTRODUCTION

Lucinda Dirven

The articles assembled in this volume are based on papers presented during a colloquium on Hatra that was held at the University of Amsterdam in December 2009. The aim of the colloquium was the same as of this book: to establish the status quo of research into this important late Parthian settlement, to determine the lacunae in our knowledge and to formulate the main topics of future research. Back in 2009, the time seemed particularly right for such a gathering; after years of archaeological research in which a huge amount of data had been assembled, investigations had come to an abrupt halt with the outbreak of the Second Gulf War in 2003. The colloquium was organised in anticipation of renewed research once the conflict had ended. At the time of the writing of this introduction, almost three years later, archaeological research in Hatra is still impossible and the Hatrene objects that are stored in Iraqi museums are extremely difficult to access for non-Iraqi scholars. It is hoped that this book contributes to keeping Hatra's memory alive and will fire enthusiasm into future generations of researchers, both in Iraq and abroad. So far, Hatra has yielded an immense amount of data that have great potential for a better understanding of the culture, politics and religion of the city itself, of the Jezirah region and of the Parthian Empire as a whole. Undoubtedly, the ruins still hide many more treasures for us. But an assessment of former research is crucial to future investigations.

STATUS QUO

The spectacular archaeological remains of Hatra are located in the Jezirah, in the north of present-day Iraq, about 50 kilometres west of ancient Assur, and 85 kilometres south-west of the modern city of Mosul. The city's excellent state of its preservation is explained by its sudden abandonment in 240 CE, after which it was never inhabited again. References to Hatra's successful resistance to Roman and Sasanian troops in classical and Arabic sources gave the ancient city a legendary status and turned it into a destination for European travellers at an early date. Research first started at the beginning of the last century, with the German expedition led by Walter Andrae, who was working in Assur at the time. Andrae paid the ruins only a few short visits, during which he and his team succeeded to photograph and record all visible remains. The two outstanding publications (1908 and 1912) that resulted from this fieldwork still are an indispensable starting point for all research into the city.

After Iraq's independence in 1951, the city became one of the preferred projects of the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage. Iraqi archaeologists have worked in Hatra with scarcely any interruption from the fifties till the present day.¹ Archaeological research concentrated on the Central Temenos with its monumental buildings, the fourteen small shrines thus far discovered in the domestic area of the city and the northern and eastern city gates and adjoining fortifications. In addition to excavations, the efforts of the Iraqi archaeologists have been concentrated on restoration of the ruins, in particular the buildings in the Great Temenos. When one compares photographs taken before the fifties with the present day situation, the magnitude of these repairs is clear.² Although perhaps stimulating for tourism (that could have flourished under different political conditions), these restorations may well have hampered a correct reconstruction of the city because they are not necessarily correct, are irreversible and obstruct future investigations.

Till about the middle of the seventies of the last century, Fuad Safar and Muhammad Ali Mustafa headed the Iraqi excavations. They published the results of subsequent campaigns in the journal *Sumer*. In 1974, *Hatra. The City of the Sun God* appeared, a monograph that covers their research into the Great Temenos and eleven small shrines. Unfortunately, the book is in Arabic and is difficult to get hold of in the non-Arab world. Although it is the most extensive publication on Hatra to date and lavishly illustrated, the description of architectural remains and sculptures is fairly short and it is frequently impossible to verify the research data. The work of Safar and Mustafa was carried on by Wathiq Ismail al-Salihi, Subhi Abdallah, Jabir Khalil Ibrahim and Hikmat Basheer al-Aswad. They investigated another three small temples in the city and the northern and eastern city gates and the adjoining fortifications. The London PhD thesis of Ibrahim (1986) - who was the director of the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage from 2001 till 2003 - focuses on Hatra and its position in the Jazirah. His archaeological fieldwork in the region surrounding the city is still unique in its kind. An overview of the archaeological work done after Safar and Mustafa is sorely needed. So far, the results were published in separate articles, mainly in the journals *Sumer*, *Iraq*, *Mesopotamia*, *Parthica* and the *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*. The quality of these publications varies; several of the articles in *Sumer* are in Arabic and the quality of the photographs in this journal is often deplorable.

An Italian team led by Professor Roberta Venco Ricciardi worked at Hatra with intervals from 1987 till 2002. Their efforts have concentrated on soundings in the Great Temenos, the tombs and the excavation of several domestic buildings - issues that were largely ignored by the Iraqi archaeologists. In 1990, a Polish mission headed by Professor Michal Gawlikowski worked for one year in Hatra

- 1 Rumour has it that restoration of the great iwans was resumed in the spring of 2010. During this project the floors of the Great Iwans were renewed.
- 2 Gertrude Bell's splendid photographs, made during her visit in April 1911 give a good impression of the site before restoration. They are accessible via the Gertrude Bell Archive: <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/index.php>. For recent pictures of the city and it remains, see Sommer (2003a).

and investigated the remains of the ancient city walls inside the present fortification walls. The reports of both teams have been duly published and are of great importance for the reconstruction of the early history of the city, a history that is still very much unknown.

It is clear from the above that research into Hatra was predominantly an Iraqi affair. Due to the political situation in Iraq and the ongoing tensions between Iraq and the western world, publications of Hatra's finds are frequently insufficient and are sometimes difficult to access by western scholars. It has never been easy for western scholars to visit the ruins or to study the monuments stored in Iraqi museums. Consequently, the potential of this city for a better understanding of the Parthian world and its relationship with the Roman west has never been fully explored.

Although Hatra pops up in most studies related to various aspects of the Parthian world and its relation with the West, its monuments are hardly ever discussed in detail or compared with material from contemporary cities in the Syrian Mesopotamian desert, such as Palmyra, Dura-Europos or Edessa.³ The tendency has been to put Hatra on a par with these cities and to consider them representatives of the same culture before making an in-depth analysis of the Hatrene material.⁴ Hatra was, however, the only one of these cities that was part of the Parthian Empire for the greater part of its existence. Its potential for a better understanding of this culture is therefore unparalleled.

Very little is known about the history of the Parthian Empire and its relationship with the Roman West. Despite the fact that the Parthian Empire lasted almost five centuries and covered an immense area in central Asia and the Near East, hardly anything is known about the Parthians since their enemies wrote most of our literary sources. The remains of Parthian culture are equally sparse and are largely found in the most western regions of their vast empire. Hardly anything is known about the material culture in Ctesiphon, the Parthian capital in Mesopotamia. By far the majority of the sources that throw light upon this empire originate from regions at its borders, such as Hatra. This material entails possibilities for a better understanding of Parthian culture, but also specific methodological problems, for the situation in certain areas in the Parthian Commonwealth does of course not necessarily apply to the Empire as a whole.

In order to take full advantage of Hatra for understanding politics, culture and religion on the border of the Parthian Empire, it is essential that different finds like architecture, sculptures, coins and inscriptions are adequately published. So far, this was done several times for the now almost 500 Aramaic inscriptions that were found at the site - albeit most publications detach them from their archaeological context.⁵ The present author is preparing a catalogue of the sculptures that include the inscriptions, but the inaccessibility of the material greatly hampers this

3 There are, of course, several exceptions, such as Hauser (1998), Sommer (2003a) and (2005a). The 2000 issue of *Topoi* contains more than a few useful studies on various aspects of Hatra, as does *Dossiers d'archéologie* 334 (juillet-août 2009).

4 E.g. Drijvers (1977).

5 Major publications are Vattioni (1981) and (1994), Aggoula (1991) and Beyer (1998).

project. Secondly, it is essential that the cooperation between Iraqi and western scholars intensifies and that the results of Iraqi research are made fully accessible in the non-Arab world. The presence of Hikmat Basheer al-Aswad at the conference and his contribution to this volume give hope for the future.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The seventeen contributions in this volume are spread out over three themes that touch upon issues related to Hatra and its position in the Parthian Empire. The first section, "Between Parthia and Rome" discusses the relationship between Parthia and Rome on the one hand and Parthia and its vassal states on the other. Till recently, a few references with classical writers were all that stood to our disposal. Hatra's history also provides invaluable information in this respect. Information on Hatra's history is largely provided by archaeological sources that are discussed in the second section, "The City and its Remains". The third and final section, "Culture and Religion on the Crossroads", contains articles related to Hatra's position between the two great empires. Although most scholars agree that politically the city and its region belonged to the east, this by no means holds true for all aspects of its culture and religion.

The fact that articles are assigned to the same category does not mean that they do not touch on other issues as well. Frequently, the different categories overlap. Nor does their categorization imply that the authors in each section agree on all accounts. On the contrary; the following outline of the different contributions shows there are important differences amongst them. No attempt has been made to cover these up. On the contrary; they are brought to the fore because they show us the way forward concerning future research.

BETWEEN PARTHIA AND ROME

The three contributions in the first section, "Between Parthia and Rome", deal with Hatra's significance for our understanding of the political relationship between the super powers of the day; the Roman Empire on the one hand and the Parthian and Sasanian Empires on the other. Literary sources are our most important source of information to this respect. Unfortunately, these sources are fairly biased since they all have Roman authors. Be that as it may, it is clear that both western and eastern super powers showed a great interest in Hatra - a clear illustration of the geostrategic importance of the city. But to whom - if any - did the kingdom of Hatra belong? And what are the consequences of such a political alliance for its social organisation, culture and religion? Benjamin Isaac provides us with an overview of the available literary sources, all of which mention the city only in passing and in connection with the military conflicts between Rome and its major eastern neighbour. In Isaac's view, Hatra and its region were very much

part of the Roman Empire in the second and third centuries CE; a daring position not shared by most specialists in the field.

The other two contributions in this section by Michael Sommer and Leonardo Gregoratti do study Hatra in the context of the Parthian Empire, as do most articles in this volume. Sommer and Gregoratti by and large follow Stefan Hauser, who made a strong case for Hatra as a dependent ally of Parthia after 165 CE, when the Parthian king of kings granted the rulers of Hatra the title king after Oshroene was lost to the Roman Empire.⁶ In his article in the third section of this volume, Albert de Jong rightly notes that although Hauser's suggestion is eminently reasonable, it is wholly unsupported by the sources. Interestingly, Leonardo Gregoratti dates the intensified relationship between the Parthian king and the rulers of Hatra fifty years earlier, in 117 CE, shortly after the Hatrenes defeated the Romans. Gregoratti argues that the Parthian king favoured the rulers of Hatra with certain privileges as a reward for services rendered for the Empire. The frantic building activity in Hatra during the years 117-150 CE, before Hatra's rulers acquired the title king of the Great King of Parthia, accords well with Gregoratti's hypothesis. De Jong also notes that loyalty toward the Parthian Empire was frequently rewarded with a change in privilege: titles, territory and the attendant ritual prerogatives. The mechanism behind this process is discussed by Sommer, who quotes Flavius Josephus' account of the two brothers Asinaios and Anilaos, who ruled Parthian Babylonia in name of the Parthian king of kings at the beginning of the Common Era, to illustrate how the Parthian king of kings granted privileges and authority to local rulers in order to obtain political capital and consolidate his power.

Most historians assume Hatra was allied with Rome after the Sasanians defeated the Parthians in 224 CE, because there was a detachment of Roman troops in Hatra by 238-240 CE. In his article in this volume, Michael Sommer even labels Hatra a client kingdom during these years. In contrast, Stefan Hauser in his contribution denies a strong Roman influence even during Hatra's final years. These divergent opinions show how little we have to go on in establishing Hatra's political alliances over the course of time. In addition to the scant literary sources, there are several structures in the region around Hatra that historians either ascribe to Roman or Parthian military; an issue that definitely needs further research in the field.⁷

THE CITY AND ITS REMAINS

The articles in the second section "The City and its Remains" all deal with the reconstruction of Hatra's history on the basis of its archaeological remains. Apart

6 Hauser (1998), p.502-503 and p.516.

7 According to Hauser (1998), p.516-519, these structures constitute a Parthian *limes*, a suggestion followed by Gregoratti in this volume. Isaac on the other hand, argues one cannot speak of *limes* in a desert area, a doubt also expressed by Kaizer in his article in this volume.

from a few literary references in classical sources, the urban history of Hatra rests exclusively on the interpretation of material remains. Virtually all monuments that still stand today were constructed after the first century CE, with an outburst of building activity between 117 and 150 CE. As a consequence, little is known about the city's early history, its urban development in the second half of the second century and the situation during the last years of its existence. The articles in this section partly deal with these issues. Hatra's pre-history is particularly fascinating to archaeologists and historians; no less than three contributions discuss the early period. This is because Hatra's early years are crucial to a proper understanding of the city's *raison d'être*, an issue that is dealt with extensively by Ted Kaizer in his contribution.

The little we know about Hatra's history before the Roman siege in 117 CE we owe to the Italian and the Polish excavations. Italian research concentrated on the early building layers behind the great iwans in the Central Temenos, whereas the Polish team focussed on the remains of the early city walls in the domestic area. It is probable that the early layers within the Temenos and the old city walls are related, but it is not clear how we have to envisage this correlation.

The article by Roberta Venco Ricciardi and Alessandra Peruzzetto provides an indispensable overview of the findings of the Italian excavations between 1996-2000. On the basis of their soundings, they reject the reconstruction of Iraqi archaeologists, who argued that Hatra developed from an Assyrian village into a larger Hellenistic centre. The Italian mission did not find any traces of habitation of the Assyrian period, nor did they find the remains of Hellenistic looking stone buildings that preceded the great iwans. Instead, they found several occupational layers of a settled or seasonal population that came to a halt for unknown reasons, probably in the Hellenistic period. Apparently, Hatra revived around the end of the first century BCE or the beginning of the first century CE. From this period dates a mudbrick wall that the Italian team found behind the great iwans. After a short period of time, probably around the end of the first century CE, a more monumental wall replaced this mudbrick wall. It was torn down after a short period of time, shortly after 117 CE, when the great iwans were constructed.

In his search for the wall that stopped Trajan in 117 CE, Michal Gawlikowski and the Polish team found the remains of a mudbrick wall 320 metres south of the present Temenos wall. Gawlikowski argues in his contribution that this wall is very similar to the earlier mudbrick wall that the Italian team found in the Temenos and he concludes that they were part of the same defence system. In Gawlikowski's reconstruction, the walled city was very small indeed and an area that fenced off the major religious buildings did not yet exist [figure 8].

Venco Ricciardi and Peruzzetto do not agree with Gawlikowski's reconstruction. They argue that the mudbrick wall behind the iwans was part of a temenos wall and that the defence wall was located about 300 metres further west. Hence in their view the walled city was slightly bigger and comprised a comparatively large temenos in its centre [figure 2]. They argue that this reconstruction is more likely because it is not probable that the great iwans were constructed at such a

short distance of the original defence wall.⁸ To this we may add that it is perhaps not feasible that a number of small shrines (nos. III, IV, XI, XII and XIV) were constructed at extra mural locations. However, the dilemma can only be solved if more remains of the outer and/ or temenos wall are recovered and for this new excavations are necessary.

Whether we follow the reconstruction of Gawlikowski or of Venco Ricciardi and Peruzzetto, it is clear that settlement started at the end of the first century BCE or the beginning of the first century CE, and that the city was much smaller before the thirties of the second century. Major construction works only started after Trajan besieged the city in 117 CE, with an increase during the reign of Lord Nasru, around 140 CE. In his contribution, Ted Kaizer looks into the reasons for the appearance of material culture and stresses that the reasons for initial settlement on the site and for Hatra's sudden rise and riches from the second century CE onwards are not necessarily the same. In his article, he concentrates on the reasons that are commonly adduced for Hatra's growth. As Kaizer rightly stresses, most historians agree there are a number of reasons, such as Hatra's strategic position for the super powers Parthia and Rome, its role in the caravan trade and its role as a religious centre for people from the eastern Jazirah. Kaizer subscribes to all these factors, but notes that too much stress on either one of these is bound to distort the historical truth. In addition, he postulates the hypothesis that Hatra probably developed through a symbiotic affiliation with the settlements in its territory. This suggestion is utterly sound but needs confirmation on the ground. Stefan Hauser called for such an investigation in 1998 but every initiative was called to a halt by the political situation.

We may push Kaizer's argument still a bit further and argue that the reasons for Hatra's beginning around the start of the Common Era and for its subsequent growth in the first half of the second century are not necessarily the same. The function of the city may well have changed over time as internal as well as external political and economic factors changed. In their contributions, Gawlikowski and Venco Ricciardi and Peruzzetto both stress the prominent role of religion during the city's early phase. According to Gawlikowski, Hatra's very name - enclosure - refers to this religious function. Parallels from the Arab world suggest that such sacred enclosures concomitantly fulfilled an important social role because they provided the desert peoples with a neutral ground.⁹ So perhaps Hatra started as a sacred enclosure and from here developed other functions when circumstances changed.

Why the city suddenly boomed during the reign of Lord Nasru is still not entirely clear. Gawlikowski suggests that after Hatra's victory over the Romans the Parthian king favoured the desert city as a useful fortification against the Roman enemy. Leonardo Gregoratti independently arrives at the same conclusion. Many historians date the strategic interest of the Parthian rulers in Hatra after 165 CE, when Hatra had become the westernmost possession of the Parthian Empire. We

8 Compare also the comments made by Stefan Hauser in note 27 of his article in this volume.

9 Dirven (2006-2007).

see this reflected in the changed title of Hatra's rulers, but not - and this is noteworthy - in its urban development. It may well be that we have to date the intensified relations with the Parthian Empire earlier, after the defeat of Trajan which the Parthian king may have considered a service rendered to the empire.

Concomitantly with the development of the Great Temenos a number of small shrines were built in the domestic area around the sacred enclosure. In total fourteen shrines have been found; Krzysztof Jakubiak lists the evidence from the first thirteen shrines, whereas Hikmat Basheer al-Aswad publishes the material from the temple that was most recently unearthed by Iraqi archaeologists. Although some of the finds from Temple XIV were published previously, al-Aswad's contribution in the present volume is the most extensive description of the temple and its finds in English. The eldest inscriptions from the small shrines are a dedicatory inscription from Temple VIII that is dated in 98 CE and an inscription from Temple XIV dated in 100/1 CE. Hence these two buildings are more or less contemporary with the second monumental wall that the Italian team found behind the great iwans. Most shrines are located inside the area that the Italian mission takes to be the walled city before the construction of the last city wall. Only four shrines are located in the area that was added later to the city (nos. V, VI, X and XIII), as are the tombs. This suggests that nearly all the small shrines existed in the days of the old city and that only few temples were added during its final stage. It seems that small shrines were enlarged and rebuilt on a regular basis, but unfortunately such a building history does not yet exist.

The small shrines were named after the sequence in which they were found. Jakubiak shows that this is for the better, since it is frequently not clear to whom these temples were dedicated.¹⁰ In most temples a number of deities are represented in reliefs and statues or are mentioned in inscriptions and graffiti. Only when we possess the dedicatory inscription (as with Temple XIV that was dedicated to Nanaya) or when the cult image was found in situ in the cult niche of the cella (as with the Heracles-figure in Temple XI), can we be certain to whom the temple was dedicated. The fact that several gods were worshipped under the same roof agrees with ancient Babylonian customs. This also holds true for a number of deities that received a cult in the small temples, such as Nabu, Nanaya and Nergal.

A god that was extremely popular in the small shrines is a Heracles figure. He was worshipped in Hatra under several names and in several guises, one of which is discussed by Susan Downey in her article on clothed Heracles-figures. Jakubiak relates his popularity in the small shrines to Heracles' identification with the Babylonian deity Nergal, the god of the netherworld. His popularity in the small shrines is probably related to the ancestral cult that was celebrated in these shrines. Whereas Nergal's association with the Greek god testifies to Hellenistic influence,

10 Already pointed out by Kaizer (2000).

his connection with dogs is probably due to Iranian influence; contrary to Greek and Semitic customs, dogs figure prominently in Iranian funerary practices.¹¹

An article by Stefan Hauser in which the end of the city is discussed concludes the section on archaeological remains that throw light on the urban history. Thanks to the Cologne Mani codex the year in which Hatra fell can be established as 240 CE. The immense significance of this siege was, however, not entirely clear. In his article Hauser discusses and analyses the siege works of Hatra that have been known since long but that have only recently been identified in greater detail thanks to analysis of high-resolution satellite images and areal photographs of the area taken in the 1950s. These Sasanian siege works are the most extensive ancient siege works known to date and throw new light on the military tactics and political position of the new Sasanian rulers in Mesopotamia. Hauser shows that both literary sources and archaeological remains make abundantly clear that the fall of Hatra confirmed the power of the new Sasanian rulers in Mesopotamia and as such was of immense importance. What remains to be solved though, is why the Sasanians chose to abandon a city with such an important geostrategic setting.

CULTURE AND RELIGION ON THE CROSSROADS

The last section in this volume, “Culture and Religion on the Crossroads”, includes articles that touch upon issues of cultural and religious interaction between Rome and the Parthian and Sasanian Empires. Hatra was located between the two super powers Rome and Parthia and dealt with both. Politically, the city belonged to the Parthian Empire and was involved in several military conflicts with the west. Periods of confrontation will, however, undoubtedly have been alternated with periods of coexistence. There also must have been a considerable amount of peaceful interaction, transcultural exchange, and acculturation. This interaction was greatly helped by the fact that there was no fixed border between the western and eastern empires but a permeable border zone that comprised large areas of the Syrian Mesopotamian steppe. This ambiguous situation - politically part of the Parthian empire and culturally situated in a region that transcended the political borders - makes it extremely difficult to pin down culture and religion in Hatra.

Crucial to the whole discussion is how we define Parthian culture and religion. If we follow Albert de Jong in his contribution and define Parthian as referring to the people from the region Parthia, the kings drawn from that people and the language they spoke, regions like Hatra belong to the Parthian Commonwealth: a region within the orbit of the Parthian Empire but not inhabited mainly or chiefly by Parthians or other Iranians. The problem is, of course, that Parthian culture is almost exclusively known through the regions in this Commonwealth where we also have to reckon with other cultural influences.

11 On the ancestral cult in the small shrines, see Dirven (2005a) and on Iranian influences in the cult of Nergal, Dirven (2009), cited with approval by De Jong in his article on Parthian cultural influences in Hatra in the present volume.

In case Hatra was part of the Parthian Empire during the greater part of the second and third centuries CE, what are the consequences of this alliance for the cultural and religious situation in the desert city? This is the main theme of De Jong's contribution, in which he argues that Hatra belonged first and foremost to the Parthian Commonwealth and that the impact of Parthian culture in the city must have been substantial. He insists that it is misleading to think of Hatra as a city between Rome and Parthia on all accounts except that of figurative arts. He argues that "between" is frequently taken to mean "indigenous", and refers to the Aramaic speaking urban civilisation that can be found in the dry steppe of Syria and Mesopotamia. De Jong points out that the notion of indigeneity is frequently coupled with the Parthians' presumed lack of a distinctive culture. Consequently all cultural elements are either termed Roman or indigenous and Parthian cultural elements are frequently neglected. In this article, De Jong shows that a Parthian cultural presence can be detected in the western domains of the Parthian Empire in a number of fields, such as Iranian loanwords, personal names, titles, clothing, jewellery and weapons and a strong preference for Parthian stories. This, he argues, is the result of a process of elite acculturation, with leading families appropriating cultural elements characteristic of the Parthian courts.

In his article on Hatra and Palmyra, Jean-Baptiste Yon discusses the contemporaneous monumentalization of public space in the two cities and therewith touches upon the shared urban civilization in the cities in the *bādiya*, the dry steppe of Syria and Mesopotamia of which Hatra and Palmyra are both part. In order to explain these similarities, Yon discusses the evidence for transhumant relations across the steppe between the Roman and the Parthian Empires. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that tribes had members on both sides of the frontier. This does not imply that it is not true; the modern evidence for tribes who are on both sides of the border is abundant. Although one cannot reconstruct the direct lines of contact, it is clear that similarities between Hatra and cities in Roman Syria are not confined to sculpture, but pertain to other cultural expressions as well, such as monumental architecture and public inscriptions. In Yon's view, the cultural similarities between Palmyra and Hatra largely predate the period of strong Romanization of Palmyra; despite the fact that they belonged to two different political formations they were part of the same world, that deviated from classical culture as we know it. Yon does not use the word "indigenous" to characterize this culture, nor does he deny that Parthian culture left its mark in Hatra as well. The two options are simply not mutually exclusive.

An example of western influence is the well-known mask sculpted next to the entrance of one of the iwans of the central temple complex. Klaas Dijkstra proposes a new interpretation of the accompanying inscription in which he argues that inscription and sculpted head should be considered as a unity. If the reading *grgn*, "gorgo" is correct, this is the first instance in which the Greek name of a divine being is transcribed in Hatrean Aramaic. This reading is, however, partly inspired by the head that shows affinity with Graeco-Roman Medusa-heads. Be that as it may, it is clear that the head derives from a western model that is interpreted by the Hatrene sculptor in a new and unique way. It is noteworthy that such

‘Roman’ motives are particularly popular in the architectural decoration of the great iwans, carvings that belong to the earliest sculptures from Hatra. Why these motives were particularly popular just after the Hatrenes defeated Tranjan’s army in 117 CE is in need of further research.

The free-standing statue of a bearded deity flanked by eagles from Temple V, also testifies to contacts between Hatra and Roman Syria. In his study of this famous Hatrene statue, Andreas Kropp convincingly shows that this is the Hatrene interpretation of the celebrated cult statue of Apollo of Hierapolis, known from the description of the fifth-century author Macrobius and several representations. In spite of the statue’s archaic flavour, cuirass and Tyche-figure make clear that this creation dates to the Hellenistic period or later. The archaic character of the statue may have been a conscious creation, inspired by the venerable age of the Babylonian god Nabu with whom Hierapolitan Apollo was associated. In Hatra too this statue was linked with the god Nabu; a small copy of this statue was found in the small temple dedicated to this god. Interestingly, the statue is not just a faithful copy of the Hierapolitan original but was adapted to the local situation. Kropp points out that the solar bust on the chest is a novelty that undoubtedly serves to associate the god with Shamash. This incites the question whether other elements of the statue were also interpreted according to Hatrene beliefs and customs; a valid question that is extremely difficult to answer at the present state of affairs. Equally enigmatic is the fact that a Hierapolitan cult statue turns up in another city, 400 kilometres to the east. It shows that cities in the *bādiya* were connected but unfortunately we don’t know anything about the nature of these contacts.

In his contribution on the triad of Hatra, Jürgen Tubach investigates the identity of the three deities that were the most important, but least studied gods of Hatra: Maren, Marten and Barmaren. Tubach confines his research to the male deities, since little is known about the character of Marten. In fact, contrary to her male partners, it seems that none of the iwans in the great temple was dedicated to her worship. Why she is such a bleak figure in the religious life of Hatra is in need of further research. Tubach argues that both Maren and Barmaren were gods of Babylonian origin, as are a number of other elements in Hatrene religion. In his view, these traditions are explained by Hatra’s continuous history from the Achaemenid or Hellenistic period into the Parthian period. This assumption is contradicted by the latest archaeological findings of the Italian mission in Hatra. They show that the site probably does not go back to the Assyrian period and that the material remains do not substantiate any cultural continuity. This raises the question for the origin of these Mesopotamian traditions. Were they perhaps much more alive in Parthian Mesopotamia than is generally assumed? The continuity of Babylonian traditions in the Parthian period received fairly little attention so far and is in need of further research.¹² This holds true in particular for the reinterpretation of these traditions in the course of time, an issue that is also touched upon

12 An exception is Dalley (1998).

by Tubach in his article. If Babylonian traditions were still alive in the Parthian period, this implies that they were subject to change.

The last two contributions, by Simon James and Sylvia Winkelmann, both discuss weaponry as evidence for intercultural contacts. Times of peaceful co-existence are often considered fruitful for cross-frontier exchanges. James shows that periods of war may be equally stimulating since hostile forces tend to be eager to copy admired enemy traits. James' starting point is a cheekpiece from a Roman-looking helmet found in Hatra. It is the stepping-stone to a discussion of martial interactions between Romans, Parthians and Sasanians in the Middle East. According to James, the Hatra cheekpiece is part of an animal-faced Ostrovo-helmet type, a regional helmet variant created by and for Rome's eastern soldiers. He argues that its presence in Hatra may be explained in various ways, which is indicative of the complexities of cultural interaction in Hatra.

Sylvia Winkelmann's article starts from representations of weapons in Hatrene figurative art and presents a valuable catalogue of the different types of swords and daggers that are attested here. In her search for the origin of these weapons, she shows that the Parthian people adopted weapons like the scabbard slide and long sword from the nomadic peoples of the Euro-Asian steppes. In all likelihood, this happened around the beginning of the Common Era or slightly earlier. It is noteworthy that weapons from Hatra and other territories to the west of Parthia are very similar to those from eastern territories. Winkelmann notes that the same pertains to jewellery and clothing. This suggests a communal source and it lies close at hand to assume that this was the Parthian court. It is clear that weapons in representations from Hatra primarily function as status markers. Weapons provided the Hatrene elites with symbolic capital because it linked them to the central political power. As such, they provide us with an excellent example of the process of elite acculturation that is key to Parthian culture in the Parthian Commonwealth.

BETWEEN PARTHIA AND ROME

HATRA AGAINST ROME AND PERSIA FROM SUCCESS TO DESTRUCTION

Benjamin Isaac

This paper offers an attempt to understand the significance of Hatra against the background of the relationship of the Roman Empire with its major eastern neighbour. This relationship itself has been a matter of debate in the modern literature and the present paper reflects my views of Roman imperialism and military policy as published in the past. As I argue, there is little basis for claims, often encountered, that Rome feared Parthia in the East and that Sasanian demands were consistently more militant than those of the Parthians. It will be argued that the location of Hatra was a position felt to be essential for those who wanted to gain control of Northern Mesopotamia – if they were based in Babylonia (Parthia, Persia), or for those who wanted to act militarily in the South, if they controlled the North (Rome). A significant factor was also the prominence of the Hatrenes as archers and cavalry. A third element to be noticed in the sources is the fact that the divine interference was believed to have played a genuine and significant role in the war. Fourth: crucially important, at least in the case of Septimius Severus, but probably also for other rulers, was the matter of glory and disgrace. Considerations of honour, image, status, it is argued, should never be underestimated when assessing Roman imperial policy. Finally, the source of Hatra's wealth is uncertain and has therefore been variously interpreted. I will emphasize the economic significance of its location: like other towns that were prosperous for some time, Hatra was a trade centre on a main road in the desert.

HATRA IN THE LITERARY SOURCES

In the literary sources available to us Hatra is prominent during four episodes. According to Cassius Dio (68. 31) Hatra revolted against Trajan. From this we may deduce that it had been part of the region under Roman control immediately after Trajan's campaign of conquest, but without having been besieged previously. This immediately shows our ignorance of the history of Hatra before Trajan besieged it and, more in general, of the course of Trajan's Parthian War.¹ We do not know what was the degree or form of dependence on Parthia until 114 and we do not know what was the state of affairs preceding the revolt. We may assume there was no previous siege. It is possible that Hatra came to an agreement with Trajan and accepted some form of integration into the Roman Empire. It is also

1 As acknowledged by Lepper (1948), chapter 1.

possible that Hatra's "revolt" (ἄφειστήκεσαν) merely represents a phrase indicating that foreigners refused to accept Roman sovereignty without resisting.² In any case, it clearly was part of the region Trajan wanted to annex into the provincial system of the Empire. Another element to be noticed in Dio's passage on Trajan's siege is the fact that the sun god is believed to have taken an active part in the war. He was the origin of thunder, lightning etc. that played a role during the siege to the advantage of the besieged.³

During the second reported siege – or pair of sieges – of the city, in CE 197/8,⁴ Septimius Severus spent considerable time and effort to take the city during his march back. This shows and illustrates the importance of Hatra's location. In Dio's description it is worth noting that Severus marched south along the Euphrates, but withdrew northwards along the Tigris because the Roman army had exhausted supplies of every kind while advancing into Mesopotamia. We should keep this in mind when considering the effect of the army's progress, withdrawing northwards along the Tigris. The army would have passed through the territory of Hatra, although it might not have entered the city. The presence of an army, even a friendly one, with its demands for provisions was a devastating event, which could reduce a region to poverty. This could have been sufficient reason why Hatra would have resisted Rome at the time. The main reason for Severus' persistence, however, was according to Dio the matter of disgrace. This element may even be more important if the report by Herodian is right, that Barsemius, ruler of Hatra, sent Severus' enemy Niger a troop of archers (Herodian 3.1.3). Septimius Severus is on record as having punished other cities that supported Niger in the civil war. Antioch on the Orontes was deprived of many of its privileges and Neapolis (Shekhem / Nablus) in Palestine – the traditional centre of the Samaritans – lost its city status,⁵ while neighbouring Samaria-Sebaste was awarded colonial rank in the same years.⁵

Herodian's statement is yet another testimony of the prominence of the Hatrenes as archers. Also: if Herodian is right this shows that in Dio's information

2 Frontinus, describing Domitian's campaigns in Germany, says that by crushing the ferocity of these savage tribes "he acted for the benefit of the provinces" (*Stratagems* 1.1.8). Plautius Silvanus Aelianus is on record as having "brought over to the river bank under his protection kings hitherto unknown or hostile to the Roman people to pay homage to the Roman standards" (ignotos ante aut infensos p.R. reges signa Romana adoraturos in ripam, quam tuebatur, perduxit): *ILS* 986.

3 See the contribution by J. Tubach in this volume.

4 Campbell (1986).

5 For Antiochia and Neapolis, see SHA *Septimius Severus* 9.4–5: Ant[h]ioc<h>ensibus iratior fuit, quod et administrantem se in oriente <in>riserant et Nigrum etiam victum iuverant. denique multa his ademit. Neapolitanis etiam Pal<a>estinensibus ius civitatis tulit, quod pro Nigro diu in armis fuerunt. For the colonial status awarded Sebaste: Paulus, *Digest* L 15, 8, 7: *Divus quoque Severus in Sebastenam civitatem coloniam deduxit*. Colonial coinage: Hill, *British Museum Catalogue, Palestine*, xxxix, 80, nos. 12 f. The latest pre-colonial coinage dates to 201/2: Kindler & Stein (1987), p.226–229. How long Neapolis' punishment was maintained is not clear. The city later received colonial status as well, as appears from coins of 251–253: Ben Dor (1952); Harl (1984), no. 151 and 154 with comments on p.68; Kindler (1980). From both Neapolis and Samaria there is evidence of a military presence at some stage in the first and second centuries: Isaac (1992), p.430–431.

some matters of importance are missing, to say the least.⁶ Finally, the fact that Hatra provided troops to a Roman commander is in itself interesting, if it is true. It raises the possibility that Hatra regularly provided Rome with troops like other dependent or client states during the period of Roman ascendancy in Northern Mesopotamia – following the campaign of Lucius Verus in the sixties of the second century. As clients they would have been in a similar relationship with Rome as, for instance, the Batavi in the first century.⁷

It is, however, usually assumed that Hatra was a dependent ally of Parthia in this period. The argument in support of this assumption is that Septimius Severus, after his first Mesopotamian campaign in 195, assumed the titles ‘Parthicus Arabicus, Parthicus Adiabenicus.’ The ‘Parthian Arabs’ referred to would have been those of Hatra.⁸ This would imply that Severus made fraudulent victory claims, for if he failed to capture Hatra during his second Parthian campaign in 198 it is unlikely that he controlled it in 195. Fraudulent claims, however, are made. It would also mean either that Herodian’s statement concerning Hatrene troops supporting Niger is incorrect, or that the Parthians lent support to Niger through a client – which would be surprising. In any event, it is significant that this also appears to be the period in which Hatra became a kingdom, whatever the relationship of those kings with respectively Parthia and Rome.

In connection with the subject of honour, image and status, we may note the remarkable statement that Severus watched the storming of the city while seated on a lofty tribunal, an image which evokes the more famous one of Xerxes witnessing the defeat of his fleet at Salamis in 480 BCE, as described by Herodotus (8.90) and Aeschylus (*Persae* 465–70). This shows a clear difference in the execution of the role of the two commanders. Trajan was almost wounded himself at Hatra over 80 years before, and therefore clearly involved in the battle himself. Severus, at least on this occasion, was very distant.⁹

Noteworthy is further the importance of the cavalry and archers, said to be Arabians. In Semitic languages in antiquity, this is a term for nomads rather than an ethnic or linguistic designation.¹⁰ However, Dio here does refer to Arabs in an

6 Cf. Whittaker, *Herodian* vol. 2. p.317, n.4: “Herodian’s chronology differs seriously from the order of events in Xiphilinus’ epitome of Dio, which records two attacks on Hatra, both after the capture of Ctesiphon (CE 197/8); see Dio 75.9ff. But the words of Dio give no real chronology.” In any case, we cannot be certain whether Severus tried and failed once or twice to capture the city.

7 Cimme (1976); Braund (1984).

8 This was first argued by Hauser (1998), p.516–517. It is unfortunate that Hauser then goes on to confuse the issue with speculations concerning the function of a number of structures in the region that earlier scholars interpreted as a Roman “limes” while Hauser, p.517–518, on the contrary, sees them as a Parthian “limes”. A “limes” is a mirage, in the desert as elsewhere, Roman or Parthian. For Hatra’s position in this period see also: Sommer (2005a), p.379–383.

9 For the place of the commander on the battlefield in this period: Goldsworthy (1996), p.152–163.

10 For the meaning of the term “Arab” indicating “nomadic” or “nomadic origin” in the sense of a way of life, see Zadok (1977), 192; Eph’al (1976); (1982). Aggoula (1991) translates ‘rby’ as “bédouins”, e.g. H336; H343. This seems anachronistic. For the relationship between

ethnic sense. This is clear, for instance, from the statement that he expected ‘the Arabians to come to terms.’ This refers to the Hatrene ruler and his people. The name of the province of Arabia, *Arabia Provincia*, established in Trajan’s reign, also indicates that the Romans understood this to be an ethnic designation, for they were well aware that the Nabataeans in Petra and Bostra were no nomads.¹¹ It is likely that the name ‘Arabia’ had broader associations than ‘Nabataea.’ The Province of Arabia had a grandiose name, like the two provinces of Germania which somehow conveyed the message that Rome controlled all of Germania. To return to Hatra: its rulers are described as sovereigns of Hatra *and* Arabs in local inscriptions.¹² Arabs were therefore understood to be the non-urban Hatrenes.¹³

Here, as in the passage about Trajan’s siege, there is an emphasis on divine interference (by the sun god), reflecting a widely held belief in antiquity in the active role played by gods on the battlefield. Dio was obviously aware of the importance of the cult to the city and its inhabitants.

One further point to make here is the usual stereotype encountered also in Tacitus, that Syrian troops are inferior to those recruited from Europe.¹⁴ In this connection: it ought to be superfluous to point this out again, but appears not to be so, that the troops meant are indeed units from Europe, the continent, not from Dura-Europos on the Orontes.¹⁵ This is obvious: Cassius Dio was a Roman senator, writing in Greek for an empire-wide public, not for our contemporary specialists on the Roman Near East or the army there. For Dio and his readers Europeans were inhabitants of a continent, not of a small town in the Syrian Desert, on the Euphrates. When Dio refers elsewhere to ‘Europeans’ he does so also in clear contrast to Asiatic people or Africans.¹⁶ If he had meant to refer to sol-

Hatra and the nomads in the region, see Dijkstra (1990) with references to earlier discussion on p.90–93, nn. 26–31.

- 11 There is no obvious reason why they refrained from calling the new province “Nabataea”.
- 12 The king, Sanatruq, and his son are called *mlk’ d’rb*, king of Arabia e.g. in inscriptions nos. H79; H195-199; H373; H378. Earlier rulers were called *mry’* (lord). For discussion, see Hauser (1998), p.510–512.
- 13 For various interpretations of ‘Arabs’ in the modern literature: Hauser (1998), p.512. Cf. Sommer (2003a).
- 14 Kennedy (1986). Kennedy has shown that Severus’ failure at Hatra may have been less damaging, at least diplomatically, than Dio represents it. For the stereotype, see Wheeler (1996); Isaac (2004), chapter 5. Whittaker, comments on Herodian (p.320, n.1): Herodian does not mention the mutiny of the European legions reported by Dio. He argues that this probably stemmed from the executions of a praetorian tribune, Julius Crispus and Severus’s commander, Laetus. It is also possible that the entire episode is tendentious. In any case, as noted, it represents a stereotypical difference between eastern and European troops.
- 15 Kennedy (1986) should have sufficed, but it appears that there are still proponents of the theory that Dio referred to troops from Dura.
- 16 Zonaras Gallorum in Italiam incursionem enarrans 7, 23 sua hausit e Plutarcho et Dione. Dionea haec sunt: 1) οἱ δ’ Εὐρωπαῖοι Γαλάται, ὧν οἱ Ἀσιᾶται νομίζονται ἄποικοι 13.54.10: τὰς τε Ἀλπεῖς πρῶτος ἀνθρώπων τῶν οὐκ Εὐρωπαίων, ὅσα γε ἡμεῖς ἴσμεν, σὺν στρατῷ διέβη. 290.18-21: Ὁ δέ γε Μάλλιος τότε Πισιδίαν Λυκαονίαν τε καὶ Παμφυλίαν τῆς τε Γαλατίας τῆς Ἀσιανῆς πολλὰ προσηγάγετο. ἔστι γάρ τι κἀνταῦθα γένος αὐτῶν, ἐκ τοῦ Εὐρωπαίου ἀποδόσμιον. Βρέννον γάρ ποτε βασιλέα σφῶν προστησάμενοι τὴν τε Ἑλλάδα καὶ τὴν Θράκην ἐπέδραμον, ... 251.20-252: Δίῳ δὲ ὁ Κοκκιανὸς ταύτας πλησίον φησὶ

diers from Dura-Europos he would have explained what was meant, just as, in our times, someone would add a word of explanation when mentioning the village of Amsterdam, Ohio, but would not feel it necessary if this were the city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

The third episode, the first of the two sieges of the city by Ardashir, the newly victorious Sasanian ruler, clearly implies that Hatra had gone over to the Roman side without a siege by 229. There was a detachment of Roman troops there by 238–240, as indicated by three famous Latin inscriptions.¹⁷ However, Ardashir attacked the city already in 229, shortly after he had defeated the Parthians (in 226) and gained power. Hatra now resisted the Sasanian Ardashir when he marched against Rome, so it appears that the policy of Hatra was to resist any foreign power that attempted to interfere directly or impose direct control. The Sasanians wanted to re-occupy all of Mesopotamia (at least), occupied Carrhae and Nisibis in 238 and Nisibis again in 260. As part of these operations they wanted to occupy Hatra, just like the Roman emperors who had campaigned in Mesopotamia. Dio says Ardashir wanted to use it as a base for attacking the Romans.¹⁸ Whatever he had in mind, once Ardashir captured the city in 240,¹⁹ it was deserted and never refounded. Ammianus saw the site in 363 and describes it as an ‘old settlement, long abandoned in absolute solitude.’²⁰

HATRA BETWEEN ROME AND PERSIA IN TIMES OF WAR

If we want to understand the significance of Hatra against the background of the relationship of the Roman Empire with its eastern imperial neighbour we are immediately faced with the reality that this relationship itself has been a matter of debate on the part of modern scholars.²¹ This is not the occasion to review all of this in its complexity – and even if I decided to make such an attempt, this still would not resolve matters to the satisfaction of everybody. It will have to suffice here briefly to give my own views on the role Hatra played in the conflict between Rome and Persia. There is no need to insist on the limitations of the literary documentation found in the Roman literature, while the Persian sources are al-

¹⁷ Ἰβηρος εἶναι ποταμοῦ, πλησίον τῶν Εὐρωπαϊῶν Ἡρακλείων στηλῶν, ὃς νήσους Ἑλλήνες μὲν καὶ Ῥωμαῖοι κοινῶς Γυμνησίας φασίν, Ἰβηρες δὲ Βαλερίας ἦτοι ὕγεινάζ. Tzetzes ad Lycophron 633.

17 Vattioni (1981), 109–110, Nr. 3 = *Année Epigraphique* 1983. 935; Oates (1955); Maricq (1957); *AE* 1958. 238–240.

18 Potter (1990), p.372–375, suggests that the wars between the first Sassanid kings and Rome were caused by the desire of Ardashir to establish control over the frontier client kingdoms like Hatra and Armenia which Rome considered part of her empire. It may not be wise to limit Sasanian ambition to such an extent. For the siege: Campbell (1986).

19 Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis 18, 1–16 eds. Koenen & Römer, p.10–12 = Dodgeon & Lieu (1994), p.33: “When I was twenty[-four] years old, in the year in which Dariadaxir (i.e. Ardashir), the king of Persian, subjugated the city of Hatra,…”

20 Ammianus 25.8.5.

21 Kettenhofen (1982). For my views on these matters, see Isaac (1992), chapter 1.

most non-existent. Obviously we must be very cautious in accepting any statement made in Roman sources about Persian aims, motivation and ambitions, except as an expression of what the Romans thought about Persia or wanted others to think. This is not to say that opinions among the Romans were uniform or remained the same over time. Strabo describes the Parthians as powerful but virtually part of the empire.²² In 35 CE, a few decades after Strabo wrote, Tacitus states that Artabanus III made extreme demands, requiring restoration of the old border between Persia and Macedonia as it was before Alexander's campaign.²³ In the third century, Dio reports similar far-reaching claims on the part of Artashir.²⁴ A modified and slightly more moderate demand is ascribed to Shapur II in the fourth century.²⁵ These then are Roman reports concerning enemy demands over the centuries that are a subject of debate. I will not return to this discussion on this occasion.

It will suffice to say that my view still is that there is little basis for the argument that Sasanian demands were consistently more militant than those of the Parthians. Diplomacy has to be seen and checked against the background of reality, of deeds and military action. Let us briefly note some salient points. In the first century BC, the first extended period of warfare between Rome and Parthia saw Crassus' invasion and defeat in Parthia (54 BCE) and, during the civil wars, an extended Parthian invasion of Roman territory (41–38 BCE). In the first century of the Common Era, a Roman eastern campaign turned a diplomatic conflict regarding Armenia into a military one (CE 57–8; 61–2). The second century saw Trajan's failed attempt to annex all of Mesopotamia, down to the Persian Gulf (114–7). It ended in failure, but Armenia remained under Roman control, a situation unacceptable to Parthia. The result was a Parthian invasion in 155, followed by a Roman counter-attack, involving raids deep into Mesopotamia, including the plundering of Seleucia and Ctesiphon. The Roman army withdrew from Babylonia, but the long-term effect was a continued Roman presence in parts of Northern Mesopotamia from the 160's onwards. In the nineties of the second century, Septimius Severus attacked again, plundered Seleucia and Ctesiphon once more, and annexed Northern Mesopotamia as a province. Further attacks, attempting to expand Roman control under Caracalla, failed and were followed by a negotiated peace. When the Sasanian Artashir took over from the Parthian Artabanus he inherited a seriously reduced Empire as a result of these sixty years of Roman attacks. There is no need to assume a radical change in imperial ideology following the succession of ruling dynasties to explain the Persian counter-attacks in the third century. Persia lost an important and affluent region and the Sasanian military offensive against Rome was as predictable a response to this encroachment as were the Parthian raids in the years 41–38 BC to Crassus' major invasion in 54.

22 Strabo 6.4.2 (288).

23 Tacitus, *Annals* 6.31.

24 Dio 80.3; cf. Herodian 6.2.2.

25 Ammianus 17.5.4f.; also 17.14.1

The two powers continued their struggle for another four centuries, but the sequel no longer concerns us on this occasion, since Hatra ceased to exist.

The location of Hatra clearly was a position felt to be essential for those who wanted to gain control of Northern Mesopotamia – if they were based in Babylonia, or for those who wanted to act militarily in the South, if they controlled the North. Hence the efforts made by Trajan, Septimius Severus and Ardashir. Yet it was not a place that needed to function as a city, at least in the eyes of Ardashir, for he destroyed it. This may or may not have been an error of judgement on his part. Its location remained essential, as is clear from the fact that Julian's army passed the site during their withdrawal in 363.²⁶

It was hostile to Rome in critical times, resisting Trajan and Severus, but had a modest garrison under Gordian, presumably because it was opposed to the Sasanian efforts to assert themselves, using their city as a base. Like Palmyra, Hatra profited from a key position in times of peace, but even more than Palmyra it paid for its profitable location when this invited intervention in times of war. It succeeded at least three times in defending itself against besiegers and when, on a fourth (or fifth) occasion, it failed, that was the end, joining a long list of minor players who succeeded for a while in maintaining themselves in the Near East, between the major powers in the West and East, but that were crushed eventually.

HATRA BETWEEN ROME AND PERSIA IN TIMES OF PEACE

The evidence concerning Hatra in peace time is far less extensive and vivid than that from Palmyra. It is not mentioned in Talmudic sources, unlike Palmyra.²⁷ The rich epigraphical material from Palmyra splendidly shows its role policing the caravan trade, even if essential information can be gained only by systematic interpretation.²⁸ Such material is missing at Hatra, which, none the less, had quite an epigraphic habit, but a different one from that maintained by the Palmyrenes.²⁹ One interesting exception is an inscription found twenty kilometres from Hatra: it commemorates the construction of a caravan station at a watering hole along the road, set up by the commander of the guards.³⁰ Yet it may be assumed that it

26 Above, n.21.

27 Oppenheimer (1983), p.477–478: Hatra and Hatar in Talmudic sources are not to be identified with Hatra. Unlike Palmyra (Tadmor) therefore Hatra is not mentioned in any Talmudic source.

28 Dirven (1996) has shown that a direct link between Palmyra and Dura on the Euphrates complements the long familiar route to Sura; cf. Sommer (2003a), p.44–46, for Hatra as a trade centre.

29 On the different epigraphic habits in Hatra and Palmyra, see the article by L. Gregorati in this volume, and Aggoula (1991).

30 Aggoula (1991), Appendice, no.5 from Sa'rdiyya. Note also H.65, l.5: *lgr tgr'y*, 'en l'honneur des commerçants', but the reading is not quite certain. If correct, this is the only inscription from Hatra to date that mentions merchants.

played a somewhat similar role.³¹ It was situated on a main road along the Tigris, parallel to the route along the Euphrates – which explains its importance in war as well. Whatever the sources of its obvious wealth, it dominated an important route,³² namely the one linking Nisibis and Singara (only roughly 100 kilometres away) with the Tigris and Seleucia-Ctesiphon. This was the route Zeugma, Edessa, Rhesaina, Nisibis, Singara, Hatra, Tigris. We should note that it appears as such on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. The *Peutinger Map*, which here apparently reflects material from the second and third centuries, locates it on a main route: it lists the locations Singara – Hatra – Naharra – Seleucia / Ctesiphon. Singara is shown to be connected with Rhesaina and Nisibis.³³

The source of Hatra's wealth is not documented in any direct manner.³⁴ Yet there is good evidence, besides the information from Palmyra, of the economic significance that being a trade centre on a main road in the desert could have. Note, for instance, Ammianus remarks about the city of Batne / Batnai (Suruc), in the Syrian Desert on the road from Antioch – Beroia (Aleppo) – Hierapolis / Bambyke (Mambij) – Euphrates:

'The town of Batne, founded in Anthemusia in early times by a band of Macedonians, is separated by a short space from the river Euphrates; it is filled with wealthy traders, when, at the yearly festival, near the beginning of the month of September, a great crowd of every condition gathers for the fair, to traffic in the wares sent from India and China, and in other articles that are regularly brought there in great abundance by land and sea. This district the above-mentioned leader [sc. Nohodares, a Persian commander who had received instructions to invade Mesopotamia in 354] made ready to invade, on the days set for this celebration, through the wilderness and the grass-covered banks of the Abora; but he was betrayed by information given by some of his own soldiers....'³⁵

Here we have an explicit and unambiguous statement concerning the essential commercial importance of a town along a desert route that served as an annual market for the long-distance trade. Ammianus emphasizes that the Persian commander, if he had been successful, would 'have devastated the whole region like a

- 31 The question whether it was a "caravan city" and whether this is an appropriate description of other cities has been discussed by several participants at the conference. The sources of its wealth are not the topic of the present paper.
- 32 Widengren (1971), p.757; Drijvers (1978), p.803–807 and bibliography on p.877–879. For other tentative explanations regarding the source of Hatrene wealth, there are the papers in this volume by M. Sommer and L. Gregoratti.
- 33 See Hauser (1995); Altaweel & Hauser (2004).
- 34 See Hauser (2000), p.193–194; Sommer (2005a), p.386–388. Young (2001), p.192–193, believes Hatra derived its wealth from its position as a religious centre.
- 35 Ammianus 14.3.3–4 (trans. J.C. Rolfe, LCL): *Batnae municipium in Anthemusia conditum Macedonum manu priscorum ab Euphrate flumine breui spatio disparatur refertum mercatoribus opulenti, ubi annua sollemnitate prope Septembris initium mensis ad nundinas magna promiscuae fortunae conuenit multitudo ad commercanda, quae Indi mittunt et Seres, alia plurima uehi terra mari que consueta. Hanc regionem praestitutis celebritati diebus, invadere parans dux ante dictus, per solitudines Aborae amnis herbidas ripas, suorum indicio proditus...*

thunderbolt.³⁶ The passage shows a) how important Batnae was as a commercial centre, b) that it played this role only during an annual market, not continuously and c) the crucial military importance a place like this could play.

The importance the Romans attached to this kind of centre is shown also by the legislation limiting markets for the exchange of goods between Rome and Persia to specific locations agreed upon by treaty between Rome and Persia.³⁷ The locations are Nisibis, Callinicum and Artaxata. The reason is stated: “in order to prevent the secrets of either kingdom from being disclosed...” Nisibis was Persian in this period, while Artaxata was the capital of Armenia. The agreement referred to presumably goes back to Jovian, in 363.

A comparable regulation is found in the treaty of 562.³⁸ This treaty contains a clause stipulating that merchants must import their wares through the traditionally appointed toll-stations. Another relevant clause, in this connection, stipulates that “Saracen and other barbarian merchants are not allowed to use unknown and little used routes, but must pass through Nisibis and Dara and with formal permission only.” Whatever was done to enforce such a clause must remain an open question. It is precisely the existence of prosperous and influential centres such as Hatra that makes it possible to give substance to such rules. All this shows how important the role of a market centre was considered to be for centuries. What was true for Palmyra, Batnae, Nisibis, and other towns, may have been true for Hatra in its days of prosperity.

The extent of our ignorance concerning essential matters is shown by the fact that we have not the slightest idea whether any other centre replaced Hatra in the role it must have played during the period of its prosperity, or how else its destruction affected trade along the Tigris route. The oldest firmly dated monument in Hatra appears to be a shrine built in 98 CE. The building of the great iwans started in the beginning of the second century.³⁹ We may therefore assume that the city played its successful role during roughly a century-and-a-half.⁴⁰

36 quod si impetrasset, fulminis modo cuncta vastarat.

37 *Codex Iustinianus* (ed. Krueger) 4.63.4, dated 408–409 CE. Cf. Oppenheimer (1983), p.327.

38 Menander Protector, fr. 11, Müller, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* 4. p. 208ff.; cf. Winter (1987).

39 Gawlikowski (1994c), p.52.

40 For Hatra's position as a frontier town in the Steppe, see the judicious remarks by Sommer (2005a), p.388–390.

IN THE TWILIGHT HATRA BETWEEN ROME AND IRAN

Michael Sommer

‘Next he came into Arabia and began operations against the people of Hatra, since they, too, had revolted. This city is neither large nor prosperous, and the surrounding country is mostly desert and has neither water (save a small amount and that poor in quality) nor timber nor fodder.’¹ What Cassius Dio describes here, is - according to him - the beginning of the end of Trajan’s ambitious project of conquering what Richard Fowler has once called ‘the Parthian Near West’.² However, what matters for the present is not so much Trajan’s ultimate failure to capture Hatra, but Dio’s description of the place as ‘neither large nor prosperous’.

Some eighty years after Trajan’s attempt to assault the walls of Hatra, Septimius Severus undertook the same - twice and with an identical outcome. Our main source of information is again Cassius Dio:³ ‘Severus now crossed

1 Cass. Dio 68. 31, 1: μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐς τὴν Ἀραβίαν ἦλθε, καὶ τοῖς Ἀρηνόϊς, ἐπειδὴ καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀφειστήκεσαν, ἐπεχείρησε. καὶ ἔστι μὲν οὔτε μεγάλη οὔτε εὐδαίμων ἡ πόλις· ἢ τε πέριξ χώρα ἔρημος ἐπὶ πλείστον ἔστι, καὶ οὐθ’ ὕδωρ, ὃ τι μὴ βραχὺ καὶ τοῦτο δυσχερές, οὔτε ξύλον οὔτε χυλὸν ἴσχει. καὶ πρὸς τε αὐτῶν τούτων, ἀδύνατον τὴν προσεδρεῖαν πλήθει ποιούντων, πρὸς τε τοῦ Ἥλιου, ᾧ πέρ πού καὶ ἀνάκειται, ῥύεται· οὔτε γὰρ ὑπὸ Τραϊανοῦ τότε οὔτε ὑπὸ Σεουήρου ὕστερον ἦλω, καίτοι καὶ καταβαλόντων μέρη τινὰ τοῦ τείχους αὐτῆς - - Τραϊανὸς δὲ τοὺς τε ἰπτεὰς πρὸς τὸ τεῖχος προπέμψας ἐσφάλῃ, ὥστε καὶ ἐς τὸ στρατόπεδον αὐτοὺς ἐσαρραχθῆναι, καὶ αὐτὸς παριππεύσας βραχυτάτου ἐδέησε τρωθῆναι, καίπερ τὴν βασιλικὴν στολὴν ἀποθέμενος ἵνα μὴ γνωρισθῇ. τῆς δὲ πολιᾶς αὐτοῦ τὸ γαῦρον καὶ τὸ σεμνοπρεπὲς τοῦ προσώπου ἰδόντες ὑπετόπησάν τε εἶναι ὅς ἦν, καὶ ἐπετόξευσαν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἰπτεὰ τινὰ τῶν συνόντων οἱ ἀπέκτειναν. ἐγίνοντο δὲ βρονταί, καὶ ἱριδες ὑπεφαίνοντο, ἀστραπαὶ τε καὶ ζάλη χάλαζά τε καὶ κεραυνοὶ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις ἐνέπιπτον, ὅποτε προσβάλοιεν. καὶ ὅποτε οὖν δειπνοῖεν, μυῖαι τοῖς βρώμασι καὶ τοῖς πόμασι προσκίζανουσαι δυσχερεῖας ἅπαντα ἐνεπίμπλων.

2 Fowler (2005), p.128.

3 67. 10: καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο ὁ Σεουήρος τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν διαβάς ἐπειράθη μὲν καὶ τῶν Ἀτρων οὐ πόρρω ὄντων, ἐπέρανε δ’ οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ μηχανήματα κατεκαύθη καὶ στρατιῶται συγχοὶ μὲν ἀπώλοντο ἀμύπολλοι δὲ καὶ ἐτρώθησαν. ἀπανεστή οὖν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν καὶ ἀνέξευξεν ὁ Σεουήρος. ἐν ᾧ δὲ ἐπολέμει, δύο ἄνδρας τῶν ἐπιφανῶν ἀπέκτεινεν, Ἰούλιον Κρίσπον χιλαρχοῦντα τῶν δορυφόρων, ὅτι ἀχθεσθεὶς τῇ τοῦ πολέμου κακώσει ἔπος τι τοῦ Μάρωνος τοῦ ποιητοῦ παρεφθέγγατο, ἐν ᾧ ἐνήν στρατιώτης τις τῶν μετὰ Τοῦρνου τῷ Αἰνεῖα ἀντιπολεμούντων ὀδυρόμενος καὶ λέγων ὅτι "ἵνα δὴ τὴν Λαουινίαν ὁ Τοῦρνος ἀγάγηται, ἡμεῖς ἐν οὐδενὶ λόγῳ παραπολύμεθα". καὶ τὸν κατηγορήσαντα αὐτοῦ στρατιώτην Οὐαλέριον χιλιάρχον ἀντ’ αὐτοῦ ὁ Σεουήρος ἀπέδειξεν. ἀπέκτεινε δὲ καὶ τὸν Λαῖτον, ὅτι τε φρόνημα εἶχε καὶ ὅτι ὑπὸ τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἡγαπᾶτο καὶ οὐκ ἄλλως στρατεύσειν ἔλεγον, εἰ μὴ Λαῖτος αὐτῶν ἡγοῖτο. καὶ τούτου τὸν φόνον, διότι οὐκ εἶχε φανεράν αἰτίαν εἰ μὴ τὸν φθόνον, τοῖς στρατιώταις προσῆπεν ὥς παρὰ γνώμην αὐτοῦ τοῦτο τετολμηκόσιν. αὐτὸς δὲ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὰ Ἄτρα ἐστράτευσε, πολλὰ μὲν σιτία παρασκευάσας πολλὰ δὲ καὶ μηχανήματα

Mesopotamia and made an attempt on Hatra, which was not far off, but accomplished nothing; on the contrary, his siege engines were burned, many soldiers perished, and vast numbers were wounded.’ But so easily no Roman emperor caves in. Septimius Severus duly launched a second attack on the desert city, besieging it for 20 days.⁴ This time, Dio’s account is much more detailed. Again, he points to the loss of men and material the siege involved; at length, he describes the fierce resistance of the *Atrenoi*, their efficient use of nomadic cavalry and their tactic of preventing the Roman forces from foraging.⁵ This time, Hatra is por-

έτοιμασάμενος· καὶ γὰρ δεινὸν ἐποιεῖτο, τῶν ἄλλων κεχειρωμένων, μόνην ταύτην ἐν μέσῳ κειμένην ἀντέχειν. καὶ ἀπώλεσε καὶ χρήματα πλείστα καὶ τὰ μηχανήματα πάντα, πλὴν τῶν Πρισκείων, ὡς ἀνωτέρω ἔφην, καὶ σὺν τούτοις καὶ στρατιώτας πολλούς. συχνοὶ μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἐν ταῖς προνομαῖς ἐφθεύοντο, τῆς βαρβαρικῆς ἵππου (φημὶ δὴ τῆς τῶν Ἀραβίων) πανταχοῦ ὀξέως τε καὶ σφοδρῶς ἐπιπυτούσης αὐτοῖς· καὶ οἱ Ἀτρηνοὶ ἐξικονοῦντο μὲν καὶ ταῖς τοξείαις ἐπὶ μακρότατον (καὶ γὰρ ἐκ μηχανῶν βέλη τινὰ ἐξέκρουον, ὥστε πολλούς καὶ τῶν τοῦ Σεουήρου ὑπασπιστῶν βαλεῖν, σύνδου τε αὐτῶν βέλη ὑπὸ τὴν αὐτὴν ῥύμην ἰέντων, πολλαῖς τε ἅμα χερσὶ καὶ πολλοῖς τοξεύμασι βαλλόντων), πλείστον δὲ ὁμως ἐκάκωσαν αὐτοὺς ἐπειδὴ τῷ τείχει προσέμιζαν, καὶ πολὺ πλείον ἐπεὶ καὶ διέρρηξαν ἐν αὐτοῦ· τὰ τε γὰρ ἄλλα καὶ τὸ νάφθα τὸ ἀσφαλτῶδες ἐκεῖνο, περὶ οὗ ἄνω μοι γέγραπται, ἀφιέντες σφίσι τὰ τε μηχανήματα καὶ τοὺς στρατιώτας πάντας, οἷς ἐπεβλήθη, κατέπρησαν. καὶ αὐτὰ ὁ Σεουήρος ἀπὸ βήματος ὑψηλοῦ ἐθεώρει. πεσόντος δὲ πῃ τοῦ ἐξωθεν περιβόλου, καὶ τῶν στρατιωτῶν πάντων προθυμουμένων ἐς τὸν λοιπὸν ἐσβιάσασθαι, ἐκώλυσε αὐτοὺς ὁ Σεουήρος τοῦτο πρᾶξαι, τορῶς πανταχόθεν τὸ ἀνακλητικὸν σημανθῆναι κελεύσας· δόξα τε γὰρ τοῦ χωρίου ὡς καὶ πάμπολλα τὰ τε ἄλλα χρήματα καὶ τὰ τοῦ Ἥλιου ἀναθήματα ἔχοντος μεγάλη ἦν, καὶ προσεδόκησεν ἐθελοντὶ τοὺς Ἀραβίους, ἵνα μὴ βιά ἁλόντες ἀνδραποδισθῶσιν, ὁμολογήσειν. μίαν γοῦν διαλιπὼν ἡμέραν, ὡς οὐδεὶς αὐτῷ ἐπεκηρυκεύσατο, προσέταξεν αὐτῷ τοῖς στρατιώταις τῷ τείχει, καίπερ ἀνοικοδομηθέντι νυκτός, προσβαλεῖν· καὶ αὐτῷ τῶν μὲν Εὐρωπαϊῶν τῶν δυναμένων τι κατεργάσασθαι οὐδεὶς ἔπ’ ὀργῇ ὑπήκουσεν, ἕτεροι δὲ δὴ Σύριοι ἀναγκασθέντες ἀντ’ αὐτῶν προσβαλεῖν κακῶς ἐφθάρησαν. καὶ οὕτω θεὸς ὁ ῥυσάμενος τὴν πόλιν τοὺς μὲν στρατιώτας δυνηθέντας ἂν ἐς αὐτὴν ἐσελθεῖν διὰ τοῦ Σεουήρου ἀνεκάλεσε, καὶ τὸν Σεουήρον αὐβουληθέντα αὐτὴν μετὰ τοῦτο λαβεῖν διὰ τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἐκώλυσε. οὕτως γοῦν ὁ Σεουήρος ἐπὶ τούτοις διηπορήθη ὥστε τινὸς τῶν ἀμφοῖν αὐτὸν ὑποσχομένου αὐτῷ ἐάν γε αὐτῷ δώσῃ πεντακοσίους καὶ πεντήκοντα μόνους τῶν Εὐρωπαϊῶν στρατιωτῶν, ἄνευ τοῦ τῶν ἄλλων κινδύνου τὴν πόλιν ἐξαίρῃσιν, ἔφη πάντων ἀκουόντων ‘καὶ πόθεν τοσούτους στρατιώτας ἔχω;’ πρὸς τὴν ἀπίθειαν τῶν στρατιωτῶν τοῦτο εἰπὼν. For this, there is a parallel source (Herodian. III. 9, 4-6). Herodian’s account, fabulous and ill-informed as it may be, contains some additional information: it constructs a connection between Hatra’s support for Septimius Severus’ rival Pescennius Niger in 193 (ibid. III. 1, 3) and Severus’ attack. According to Herodian, the siege was aborted due to the *Atrenoi*’s ‘vigorous defending’ (γενναίως ἀπεμάχοντο). Little solid information is conveyed about the city itself (III. 9, 4): though it probably had ‘enormous strong walls’ (τείχει μεγίστῳ καὶ γενναίῳ) and was ‘teeming with archers’ (ἀνδρῶν τοξοτῶν ἀκμάζουσας), Hatra was certainly not ‘at the very top of a precipitous ridge’ (ἐπ’ ἄκρας ὕψηλοτάτης). On Herodian’s account on Hatra Sommer (2003a), p.20.

4 The chronology here is completely confused. Both attacks on Hatra may have happened during Severus’ second campaign against the Parthians, which was launched after the defeat of Clodius Albinus (this is what Millar (1993), p.121, concludes; Millar (1964), p.143, dates both sieges ‘probably’ to 198; Sartre (2005), p.149, mentions only one siege and dates it to 198, too).

5 Cass. Dio 67. 11.

trayed as a place that ‘enjoyed great fame, containing as it did a vast number of offerings to the sun god as well as vast sums of money.’⁶

Dio’s narratives raise a number of questions. First, how can Hatra’s stunning development from a place of little wealth and significance into the important city it was by the end of the second century CE be explained? Second, why was Hatra so important to the Romans that they attempted repeatedly – in vain, but mobilising enormous resources – to gain control of the place? And, thirdly, why did – and how could – the Hatrenes offer resistance so efficiently, that they withstood three Roman attempts to capture their city? In order to go about such questions, we will approach Hatra from three different angles: first, we will try to establish what importance the city had for the Roman Empire; second, we will take a Parthian point of view and explore, how Hatra fitted in the political structure of the Arsacid kingdom; third, we will attempt to adopt a local perspective in order to investigate what options the political climate left to the Hatrenes.

CONQUEST AND TRIUMPH – THE ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

At least three Roman attempts to capture Hatra by force were abortive. The narrative sources establish plausible motives both for Trajan and Septimius Severus to besiege Hatra. In the case of Trajan, we learn through Cassius Dio that the revolt of Hatra in CE 116–17 formed part of a general insurgency in the back of the Roman army that had just completed the conquest of Mesopotamia.⁷ As countless other conflicts in and over Mesopotamia prove, the danger of being trapped in a hostile environment was real for a Roman army. This being the case, it was strategically imperative for Trajan to recapture fortified places, which otherwise could have been used by the enemy to cut off the Romans from their supplies. The fact that Trajan himself oversaw the siege of Hatra, while he entrusted other places to his lieutenants, most notably his Moorish general Lusius Quietus, suggests in itself that the city in the eastern Jezirah was pivotal for his strategic planning.⁸

According to Herodian, Hatra’s king Barsemios had, on Pescennius Niger’s request, dispatched archers to support the Roman pretender against Septimius Severus in CE 193.⁹ Herodian does explicitly refer to revenge as a motive for Severus’ attack on Hatra,¹⁰ and there may indeed be a connection. If, as Cassius Dio’s chronology suggests, Severus attacked Hatra twice, such a connection becomes even more verisimilar. The most plausible explanation for Severus’ stub-

6 Ibid. 67. 12, 2.

7 Ibid. 68. 29-30 (on the revolt); *ibid.* 31. 1 (on Hatra).

8 Isaac (²1992), p.58, points to the fact that revolts in recently established provinces were a well-known phenomenon and rather the rule than the exception. In this case, however, the revolt coincided with the Jewish revolt of 115, which made it potentially more dangerous (Pucci [1981]). On Lusius Quietus: Gebhardt (2002), p.94–95.

9 Herodian. III. 1, 2-3.

10 Ibid. III. 9, 1.