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II

La Syrie de l'époque achéménide
à l'avènement de l'Islam

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Social and Economic History of Syria under the Roman Empire

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Preliminary Observations

Until recently Roman Syria had resisted every attempt to uncover its social and economic history. This was not for lack of information. The great surveys conducted at the beginning of the twentieth century were amply supplemented by the results of major excavations at important urban centers, such as Palmyra, Antioch, and Apamea. The Parthian outpost at Dura-Europus on the Euphrates shed light on the distant influence of the Palmyrenes, and a revival of interest in the Roman province of Arabia served to illuminate the adjacent territory in southern Syria. But nevertheless a satisfactory interpretation of social and economic life in this large, varied, and central province of the eastern Roman Empire seemed still not to emerge. The earliest modern studies of Syria, those of HARRER and BOUCHIER, were both written before most ancient historians had seriously taken up any socio-economic issues. The extraordinarily promising work of J. DOBIAŠ was unfortunately never carried forward into the time of the Roman Empire.

The pioneer of ancient social and economic history, M. ROSTOVITZ, posed some major problems in several important works, but he was never able to escape from the romantic magic of the caravans that were the glory of Palmyra. In his book, *Caravan Cities*, and in a subsequent important article entitled *La Syrie romaine*, ROSTOVITZ showed that he understood commerce to be the fundamental ingredient of Syrian life and prosperity. "La Syrie a toujours été un pays de transit", wrote ROSTOVITZ, and it was this preconception that made it difficult for him to assess Syria as home and workplace for a whole population. ROSTOVITZ's belief in a caravan culture served to explain the singular lack of urbanization that he rightly detected in the Roman imperial period, and it provided him with a justification for drawing impressionistic pictures of life in Syria on the basis of another epoch. He observed, "La Syrie byzantine est pour nous un livre ouvert, la Syrie romaine un livre clos." That being the case, ROSTOVITZ freely drew conclusions about the Roman period on the assumption that it must have been just the same as the Byzantine: "La Syrie romaine ressemblait fort à la Syrie byzantine." This was a dangerous assumption, wholly unwarranted and now demonstrably wrong. Byzantine Syria, with its great churches and monasteries, with its bishops and stylites, with its gradual transformation of city life from Greek *polis* into what was to be known as the Islamic *madina*, was a world utterly removed from that of Syria under the Roman Empire.

The alarmingly indiscriminate collection of sources on the economic life of Roman Syria, compiled by F. HEICHELHEIM for T. FRANK's *Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, was, for all its weaknesses in judgment, a valuable corrective to the overly impressionistic view of ROSTOVITZ. It was TCHALENKO in his pioneering study of the limestone massif in northern Syria and, to some extent, RANOVICH in an important study of the

eastern provinces of the Roman Empire who provided a more sophisticated basis for analyzing the society and economy of Syria. TCHALENKO's minute analysis of village life served to place the great Hellenistic cities in a new and more realistic perspective, and the emphasis that RANOVICH placed on the heterogeneity of various parts of Roman Syria helped to break down the prevalent assumption of a commercial monolith. Life in Roman Syria simply cannot be adequately appreciated without full recognition of the extraordinary diversity of its various parts, and even if we are to reject (as we probably should) RANOVICH's view that the Romans fostered and augmented the differences as a matter of policy in order to prevent a natural tribal cohesion of the native population, the fact of diversity remains. In his recent and valuable study of Syrian society under the Principate, SCHIFFMANN has succeeded, for the first time, in drawing a comprehensive picture of Syrian life that takes account of the complex color of local conditions throughout the region. He manages accordingly to place the commercial activity of the Palmyrenes in its proper perspective.

Regrettably the one scholar of this century who could best have illuminated the social and economic history of Roman Syria in an overall sketch is no longer with us. H. SEYRIG's sovereign command of the literary and archaeological evidence for Syria gave him a unique competence in this subject. His abundant publications on Syrian antiquities of all kinds are models of unprejudiced analysis. As new generations struggle to interpret the new material that comes in rich harvests from excavations at Palmyra, Apamea, Sī' and other major sites, one can only hope that the good judgment of SEYRIG will be kept as an example. It is heartening to reflect that he encouraged TCHALENKO in his study of the northern villages, and he was presumably among the first to recognize that the villages and the land that supported them lay at the heart of the Syrian economy in the Roman period. The mesmerizing influence of the caravans seems to be on the wane. The importance of those caravans for Palmyra is not in doubt, but there was more to Syria than Palmyra. And, as we shall see, the Palmyrenes themselves applied to the land the wealth they had won from trade.

Cities and Villages

The diversity of Syrian life and settlement in the Roman period was understandably determined by the geography of the region. The Roman province encompassed an interlocking group of wholly distinct environments. The coastal region of old Phoenicia shared in a common Mediterranean culture with access to the sea and rainfall that combined to make this western part of Syria quite different in character from the rest. In the interior beyond the mountains lay the limestone massif that constituted the hinterland of Antioch and the environs of the great plain of Aleppo. This limestone territory of the north, with its fertile lands, formed a striking contrast with the remains of lava flow to the southeast and, above all, the black basalt country of southern Syria in the area of the Hawrān and the J. al-'Arab. Between the two and stretching to the east as far as the Euphrates lay the great Syrian desert, homeland to innumerable nomads and the wilderness through which the caravans passed on their way northwest from the Arabian Gulf. Contacts between these various parts of Roman Syria were neither close nor unified. The coastal region was accessible to the inhabitants of the interior plain only through the valley of the Orontes and the mountain pass west of Ḥomṣ. Coastal Syria had virtually nothing to do with the basalt country in the southern interior, which had its links with the Nabataean realm to the south (and subsequently the Roman province of Arabia) and with the valley of the Jordan to the west. The desert region was a world unto itself, with no fixed frontiers. It was a world, as it still is, in which the support of life depended directly and simply upon the presence of water.

The major urban centers in central Syria that did not owe their existence to the Hellenizing zeal of the Seleucid kings were Palmyra, Damascus, Ḥama, and Emesa. The first two, as oases, owed their existence to a generous supply of water which, in turn, determined that they should be important halts on the east-west route in the case of Palmyra and on the north-south route in the case of Damascus. The other two cities, Ḥama and Emesa, lay alongside the river Orontes and thus had their own water supply. In addition, the emplacement

of Emesa was determined by the major crossing of the mountains to the sea that lies immediately to the west of that city. Aleppo, ancient Ḥalab, was another indigenous city situated at a modest supply of water in the center of its plain. It had once been the site of a kingdom, but immediately before the Macedonian period it was more of a village than a city. In short, the basic necessities of life in the interior of the Near East determined the existence of Syria's principal indigenous cities.

Similarly the existence of good ports determined the presence of older urban settlements along the Phoenician edge of the Mediterranean, notably at Tripolis, Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre. In this part of greater Syria the Seleucids evidently had no incentive to found cities of their own. By contrast, great Syrian cities such as Antioch, Seleuceia, Laodicea, Apamea, and Cyrrhus were all Hellenistic foundations designed to secure Greek influence to some degree at nodal points in the northern part of the region, which was the part that principally interested the Seleucids. Most bore names reflecting the Hellenistic dynasty, as did Ḥama which became Epiphania. Cyrrhus and Beroea (Aleppo) received names from the Macedonian homeland. Antioch controlled the plain of the Orontes as well as its mountain villages and had, at the same time, its own port in the form of Seleuceia. Apamea dominated the plain below the limestone massif, and Cyrrhus presided over the land close to the border with Commagene. Aleppo, the new Beroea, similarly dominated its plain and provided a halt on the northern route west from the upper Euphrates. Most of these cities were essentially, however, artificial foundations, conceived and executed by the Macedonians for Hellenized populations. They were therefore fundamentally different in character from the major indigenous cities of Syria.

The closest analogue to places such as Antioch, Apamea, or Cyrrhus came in the group of cities in southern Syria and northern Transjordan known as the Decapolis. These ten Greek foundations provided urban culture for the environs of the Jordan Valley and the basalt area. They represented the most systematic and thoroughgoing attempt at Hellenization in this entire region of the Near East. They served as buffers against the Jews to the west, the Nabataeans to the south and east, and indigenous tribes of southern Syria to the north. They appeared to have enjoyed a somewhat privileged existence as centers of Greek culture and architecture, although they were subject to the administration of the Romans through an equestrian officer under the Roman government in Syria¹. Several of the cities were incorporated into the province of Arabia when it was annexed in A. D. 106. After that date Decapolis sites such as Gerasa and Philadelphia played a relatively minor part in the economic life of Roman Syria itself. When the southernmost section of the Syrian province was reassigned to Arabia under Septimius Severus, still more of the Decapolis was brought together within the economy of the Arabian province, to which the cities more naturally belonged. But in popular usage such cities as Canatha and even Bostra were still regarded as Syrian.

Although Seleucid urbanization can be confirmed by the foundations that are indisputably ascribed to the Macedonian dynasty, it remains a bizarre and often remarked fact that few traces of Hellenistic civilization have actually been uncovered in Syria. In most of the major cities the surviving or excavated monuments belong exclusively to the Roman or Byzantine periods. It looks as if the Hellenistic foundations were not intended to be monumental cities but rather places of Macedonian settlement as well as perhaps market centers for the surrounding regions. We are confronted with the paradox that the Hellenistic rulers were apparently interested in founding cities but not great ones, whereas the Roman and Byzantine emperors seemed to have had no interest in founding new cities but attended conspicuously to adorning those that already existed. In some cases the Roman government or its representatives evidently took the initiative, during the last years of the Republic and the opening of the Principate, in encouraging systematic sedentarization where settlements had already appeared in strategic locations. Certainly the growth of Palmyra as a city began only in the last years of the Republic and was conspicuously aided by Roman authorities such as Creticus Silanus and Germanicus early in the reign of Tiberius.

1. *ZPE* 44, 1981, 67.

Similarly at Canatha, on the J. al-'Arab, the development of the site into a major cult and economic center for the surrounding region seems to have begun during the proconsulate of Gabinius in the late Republic and to have been carried forward, with extensive building, in the early Principate. Nearby at Si' a grand temple was begun in the Triumviral period, possibly at the initiative of Herod the Great (whose statue was displayed there), and building continued, as at Palmyra and Canatha, into the early Principate. The site may have become a pilgrimage center in the region. Other signs of urban organization can be seen in adjacent areas, such as the Laja', in several cases in connection with the construction of temples. The urbanization of southern Syria shows traces of Nabataean presence and stylistic influence (chiefly at Si'), which could imply that this urban development was coordinated with the concurrent growth of Nabataean cities such as Bostra and Umm al-Jimāl in the adjacent nearby territory of the Nabataean kingdom. On the other hand, some of the evidence formerly adduced to show Nabataean influence in southern Syria (such as the temples at Saḥr and Šūr) may now be better understood as reflections of local styles of the Ḥawrān and Laja'.

The most distinctive feature of the principal Syrian cities is the enormous territory over which their control extended. It has now been conclusively established that the territory of Canatha comprehended a large part of the central J. al-'Arab as well as of the Nuqra to the west. It is reasonable to believe that the southern boundary of the territory coincided with the northern frontier of the Nabataean kingdom after the creation of the Syrian province. The role of Gabinius so soon after the annexation of Syria may well point to the establishment of the southern frontier through the enlargement of Canatha's territory. This would be, at any rate, a plausible interpretation of the epithet Gabinia that became attached briefly to Canatha at a later date. Among other responsibilities Canatha evidently ensured the provision of adequate water supplies for the many villages under its control and thus can be seen as a guarantor of the economic life of those villages. Similarly we know that Palmyra had a vast territory and exercised a comparable economic role in ensuring the prosperity of the residents within that territory. The great tax law of Palmyra, from A. D. 137, explicitly deals with the requirements and obligations for the villages in the territory of Palmyra, and an inscription from the early first century A. D. makes reference to the boundaries of the Palmyrene *regio* as constituted by the Roman legate Creticus Silanus. It seems evident that Palmyra's territory extended to the west all the way to the territory of Emesa and to the north to the region under the control of Apamea.

To the north of the territories of Emesa and Apamea lay the vast domain under the control of Antioch, whose land seems to have extended all the way to the borders of Commagene and the boundaries of the territory of Cyrrhus. Another great *territorium* attested in the Syrian province was that of Augustus' veteran colony at Beirut in the south, whose control appears to have extended as far as Heliopolis (Ba'albek) in the Beqā' Valley. Indeed it looks very much as if the whole of Syria was apportioned into vast *territoria* with a city in control of each. The cities existed to support the inhabitants of the land, scattered in numerous small villages. They were not independent social or economic centers on their own. If some, such as Palmyra and Antioch, subsequently grew populous and wealthy, that was not their primary function. Neither of those two great cities, for example, was created by and for commerce, but it is evident that their role in facilitating commercial activity subsequently provided them with resources far beyond what was available to other territorial centers, such as Canatha, Emesa, or even, splendid as it was, Apamea. It may therefore be suggested that the original function of the Seleucid cities as service centers for a multitude of surrounding villages explains the absence of monumental remains from the Hellenistic period. It was only when these cities acquired wealth from activities that they were not originally designed to have that the monumental building we associate with the great Syrian cities came into being.

The social organization of the cities and, where it can be traced, of the villages of Syria would suggest that the indigenous tribes were maintained in the structure of urban society. These tribes had their roots as much in religion as in ethnic background, and that is undoubtedly why temples are so important in Syrian urbanization. The names of the various tribes of the Ḥawrān, as recently assembled by M. SARTRE, demonstrate

a strikingly consistent affiliation to religion. Similarly the four tribes in Palmyra are best explained as having their roots in religious commitments and the establishment of particular temples in four quarters within the city. In short, the social structure of the cities reflects the preëxisting religious organization of Syrian tribes, and hence the establishment of temples and shrines in these cities (as, for example, at Si', Canatha, or Palmyra) cannot be viewed as an attempt to reorganize, disrupt, or relocate the indigenous population.

In the early years of the Roman Principate, a certain number of petty kings and small principalities reflected the Roman habit of entrusting government in remote regions to reliable rulers who were familiar with the problems of the area. Particularly in the rough territory of the Laja', notorious for its brigands, we can detect a policy of leaving the responsibilities to client rulers, such as the two princes known as Herod Agrippa. Similarly the religious center of Emesa, which in later years produced the emperor Elagabalus, remained in the hands of the local dynasty of Sampsigerami until the Flavian era. To judge from the evidence TCHALENKO has produced from the limestone massif in the north, it would appear that on a smaller scale many of the more remote sites were entrusted to private management, much as larger areas were given to princes. Modest but well appointed villas indicate property-owners manifestly controlling the adjacent villages and labor force. And some of the greater villages provided common agricultural services (olive presses, for example) in a region. The emergence of central villages is apparently reflected in the term *mêtrokômia*, signifying something like a metropolis at the village level.

A few individual sites were entirely owned and managed by a priestly community attached to a temple. Of these the most celebrated is Baetocaece, located at Ḥoṣn Soleimān in the mountains east of Arados, within whose territory (as SEYRIG has demonstrated) the temple property lay. A great inscription on the outside wall of the sanctuary of Zeus² comprises documents guaranteeing privileges and tax exemptions from the Seleucid era to the mid-third century A. D. An Antiochus, probably one of the later rulers, had ordered that the village together with its property, resources, and revenues be turned over to the god because the king had been impressed by the power of Zeus of Baetocaece. A decree from the Augustan age shows that the *polis* of the territory, now recognized as Arados, was committed to maintaining tax exemptions for Baetocaece during the two fairs it held every month for its pilgrims.

Other properties separate from the organization of rural Syria were the domains that had once belonged to Seleucid kings or local princes and were now the possession of the Roman Emperor. Among the most important of the imperial estates was the mountainous region from the high valley of Nahr Ibrahim to the Beqā', northwest of Beirut, where a mass of inscriptions documents the efforts of Hadrian to define the boundaries of his property and to ensure the preservation and proper exploitation of the forest that covered it³. These *silvae*, which had once been *regiae silvae* under the Seleucids, were a vital source of timber for Syria generally. Hadrian's management of this domain of mountain forests through his designated procurators effectively prevented the indiscriminate settlement of the area and the abuse of its resources.

The urbanization of Roman Syria may be described overall as due fundamentally to the economic requirements of the villages and to the religious needs of their inhabitants. The society of the cities was essentially designed at the outset to provide services for the residents of the large territories. Because of the entrepreneurial success of the inhabitants of certain of the cities located in areas of commerce, substantial wealth accrued and created new economic situations that altered the original status of these cities. But the centrality of the villages can best be seen in the easy death that came to many of the greater cities while the villages themselves persevered and ultimately provided the model for the Islamic style of urbanization which is known as the *madina*. It was from the villages that the *madina* emerged (well before the arrival of the Prophet), whereas the Hellenic magnificence of the colonnades and agoras at Palmyra or Apamea or Gerasa simply died as the

2. *I GLS* VII. 4028.

3. *I GLS* VIII. 3. 5001 - 5187.

wealth disappeared during the Church's gradual arrogation of munificence to itself. Hellenized cities in Syria are a feature, not of the Hellenistic period, but of the Roman and early Byzantine ages. They were not natural to the region, and they collapsed and disappeared into the earth almost as rapidly as they arose.

Agriculture

The villages were naturally dependent on the land for their sustenance. The importance of agriculture in Syria has only recently been given the emphasis it deserves. It explains the vitality of village life, and it – rather than the caravan trade – was the foundation of the Syrian economy. The fertile plains of the north as well as the Ḥawrān in the south were (and are) well suited to cereal production, especially wheat, and the more inhospitable regions of the steppe could be made equally productive with irrigation. Syrian fruit was produced for export as well as internal consumption, and pears, apples, and figs from Syria were highly esteemed.

The documentary evidence shows clearly that there was considerable agriculture throughout the territories of Palmyra and Canatha through the provision of adequate water. Furthermore the mountainous slopes both in the north and in the south were hospitable to the olive tree as well as to grapes for the production of wine. The slopes above Laodicea were covered with vineyards, which produced, according to Strabo (XVI. 752), most of the wine that was drunk in Alexandria. Even the least hospitable areas of the desert could be cultivated from time to time as an inscription from the Qa'ara depression below Palmyra makes clear⁴. This important text records the presence of harvesters (*ḥsdy'*) who had been there as a group, presumably to gather a crop that a winter rainfall had made possible.

Throughout the desert and steppe as well as on the mountain slopes there is no doubt that grazing was also widespread. The abundance of Syrian textiles implies sheep raising, but goats and camels must also have been present (especially in the desert). In areas frequented by the nomads in their seasonal migrations, there were obviously problems of assigning grazing rights. It is scarcely surprising that the Palmyrene tax law should address this issue and make a careful distinction between Palmyrenes who graze their animals in the territory of the city and those who bring in animals for grazing from outside the boundaries of the territory.

Overall the Palmyrene tax law is the richest source that we have for details of productivity in Roman Syria. It concerns principally the produce that was imported into the territory of Palmyra from adjacent regions or actually generated within the territory itself. There is reference to olive oil, animal fat, salt fish, wheat, wine, pinecones – all vital to the agricultural life of Roman Syria. Strabo wrote the inescapable truth when he observed that the principal activity of Syrians who dwelt away from the coast was farming⁵.

Crafts

The evidence for crafts, or what is sometimes anachronistically called industry, in Roman Syria is spotty and perhaps not altogether representative of the actual distribution of the various skills. But there can be no doubt that the various craftsmen of Syria contributed substantially to the internal economy as well as to the export market. At least six important products were generally associated with Syrian craftsmen in the Roman period. These were: blown glass, fabrics dyed in purple, textiles, pottery, bronze and stone sculpture, and art work in precious metals. Many of these items were particularly associated with individual cities, where there was evidently a preponderance of appropriately trained craftsmen. Furthermore, it is clear from limited but explicit documentation that in many of these cities the craftsmen were organized in guilds.

4. *Syria* 40, 1963, p. 33.

5. *Strabo* XVI. 749.

Two Phoenician cities on the coast, Sidon and Tyre, enjoyed great renown for their craftsmen. The discovery of suitable sand in the vicinity of Ake (Ptolemais), had led, in Tyre but above all in Sidon, to the development of a highly skilled cadre of glass-blowers, whose work was widely appreciated and exported as far as Italy and south Russia. At Tyre widespread work with the purple dye extracted from the *murex* produced, according to Strabo⁶, a distinctive atmosphere that made Tyre an unpleasant place to live in, but a rich one. A new inscription from Rouad appears to record that the city of Tyre dedicated a statue of the personified harbor of the fishermen who caught the *murex*: "*limeni tôn en poli porphureôn*"⁷. Fabrics dyed in purple were sought after just as avidly as the glass from Sidon. The abundance and diffusion of these products would suggest that the operations were well organized in both cities.

Weavers must have been found throughout the Syrian region. Textiles of Syrian manufacture have been discovered at Dura-Europus on the Euphrates and in Palmyra. At Gerasa an inscription attests the existence of a guild of weavers under the grandiloquent name of *Hê tou aiônos hiera technê linuphôn*⁸. The price edict of Diocletian mentions the celebrated Arab textile of Damascus that was known (as it is now) under the name of *damask*. The *terra sigillata* of Syria represents the standard ware produced by local potters. An inscription at Gerasa shows that they were organized as a guild within that city⁹, as they were presumably elsewhere. It would appear, however, that production was inadequate for local needs, since there was considerable importation of pottery from outside the Syrian region. The work of Syrian sculptors can be seen in abundance in the funerary monuments of Palmyra. Work in bronze is explicitly attested in the Palmyrene tariff as an object subject to tax. As for precious metals, the dominance of Antioch has long been apparent, and the influence of Antiochene work in gold and silver on Byzantine and Sassanian work in precious metals bears witness to the leadership of the Syrian city in promoting this kind of art work. Goldsmiths and silversmiths were not, however, confined to Antioch. A bilingual inscription at Palmyra explicitly mentions a guild (*synteleia*) of goldsmiths and silversmiths¹⁰. Interestingly the Palmyrene equivalent of the Greek term is *igm'*, itself also Greek (*tagma*) and thus demonstrating the non-Semitic character of this institution.

To the commingling of craftsmen in the society of a thriving Syrian city few documents testify so eloquently as the inscriptions from the necropolis of Tyre¹¹. The textile workers and dyers form part of a larger picture that includes carpenters, metal workers, glass blowers, financiers, vegetable sellers, and cheese makers. From these humble dead the whole bustling scene can be recreated. To be sure, the role of crafts in the Syrian economy was in no way comparable to that of agriculture, but neither was it negligible. In the larger cities craftsmen were strong enough to promote their interests by professional guilds on Hellenic models and good enough to provide work of high quality that met more than the needs of their own cities.

Palmyra and the Caravans

Arab tribes from both the northern and southern desert of Syria appear to have made use of the attractive springs at the oasis of Palmyra, and in the Roman period it is clear that some kind of settlement had already been established there by the first century B. C. A few epigraphical scraps point to the beginnings of sedentarization in the first half of that century. After the battle of Philippi the soldiers of Antony considered

6. *Strabo* XVI. 757.

7. *IGR* VII. 4016 *bis*.

8. *SEG* VII. 827.

9. *SEG* VII. 879.

10. *Inv.* III. 17.

11. *BMBeyr* 29, 1977, pp. 154 – 61.

the site worth sacking as well as relatively easy of access because it lacked walls. But the soldiers left empty-handed. The inhabitants were still sufficiently mobile to pick up their property and themselves and to flee into the desert before the Roman invaders.

It is reasonable to infer that the Palmyrenes of this early phase of the city's history were already involved, in some way, in the caravan traffic from the Arabian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea. But evidence for their involvement appeared only subsequently as the city itself grew in importance. This growth was manifestly encouraged by the Roman government. At the end of the reign of Augustus an imperial legate, Creticus Silanus, was employed in fixing the boundaries of the vast territory of Palmyra: *fines regionis Palmyrenae*¹². A few years later, not long before his death in A. D. 19, Germanicus was honored by a statue at Palmyra, together with statues of Tiberius and Drusus, and the dedication was made by a legate of the Roman legion X *Fretensis*, based at Cyrrhus in the north¹³. This dedication, together with epigraphical evidence that Germanicus gave instructions for embassies from Palmyra¹⁴, would appear to indicate that he was responsible for organizing the city as an integral part of the Roman province of Syria. When the elder Pliny, several decades later, wrote his famous description of Palmyra as enjoying a privileged position (*privata sorte*) between the two great empires of the Romans and the Parthians¹⁵, he was undoubtedly describing a situation (as he often does in his work) that obtained at the beginning of the Principate. At the same time, there can be no denying the special role that Palmyra played in guaranteeing the success of commercial transactions that depended on the good will of the Parthians no less than of the Romans.

The Roman intervention at Palmyra essentially reinforced the economic and social patterns that were already observable in the province. This was entirely consistent with Roman provincial policy elsewhere in the eastern part of the Empire. The definition of Palmyra's broad territory showed a clear recognition of the dependence of the city on its territory, while recognizing the roots of Palmyrene prosperity as a city in profits from the caravan trade. Under Vespasian a few decades after Germanicus, the Roman government reinforced Palmyra's links to the Euphrates by the construction of an important road through Tayyibe and Reşāfah to Sūra at the river's edge¹⁶. This road also had obvious strategic implications for any potential Roman conflict with the Parthians, but it served to complement the links that the Palmyrenes themselves had already forged with cities lower down on the river – indeed as far as the Arabian Gulf itself. A bilingual inscription from A. D. 19 records the erection at Palmyra of a statue honoring a Palmyrene to whom the Greek and Palmyrene traders at Seleucia on the Tigris felt an obligation¹⁷. In 24 another Palmyrene is similarly honored by the traders at Babylon¹⁸. Somewhat later in the century the traders at the great port of Spasinou Charax in Mesene at the head of the Arabian Gulf also honor a benefactor at Palmyra¹⁹.

Palmyrene support of commerce at the head of the Arabian Gulf provides the context for the missions of the man (Alexander) dispatched by Germanicus from Palmyra to the territory of Mesene as well as, on another occasion, to the kingdom of Emesa in the west. A remarkable trilingual inscription at Palmyra, in Latin, Greek, and Palmyrene, from the middle of the first century A. D. seems to reflect the increasing involvement of the city in commercial traffic as well as the importance of the Roman presence as reflected in the use of Greek and Latin²⁰. A certain Lucius Spedius Chrysanthus commemorates the erection of a tomb

12. *AE* 1939. 179.

13. *AE* 1933. 204.

14. *Syria* 12, 1931, p. 139.

15. *NH* V. 88.

16. *AE* 1933. 205.

17. *Inv.* IX. 6.

18. *Inv.* IX. 11.

19. *Inv.* X. 40.

20. *CIS* II. 4235.

for himself and his family during his own lifetime. In the Palmyrene text he describes himself as *mks'*, a *publicanus*. The suspicion therefore arises that he was actually a Roman official. Although it seems odd that Chrysanthus' post is not mentioned in the Greek or Latin texts, TEIXIDOR's view that the word *publicanus* in Latin or *telônês* in Greek would not have been understood by the Palmyrenes seems peculiar if they could be expected to have understood the meaning of *mks'*. On the contrary, it is possible that the Palmyrene term here does not designate a Roman *publicanus* but rather a local Palmyrene tax collector. But in any event the text is notable in its documentation of the traffic through Palmyra and the trilingualism of the official.

The social organization of the city during this period of expansion cannot be precisely illustrated. The earliest inscriptions of the first century refer to the *dêmos* of the Palmyrenes as the *gbl tdmry'*, "the assembled Palmyrenes"²¹. The city does not appear as a *polis* until the time of Claudius²². A functioning *boulê* and *dêmos* are seen from the Flavian period onwards. The various tribes that had settled in the city were inevitably at odds with one another from time to time. One text of A. D. 21 honors a man because he was able to make peace between two tribes²³. The later structure of Palmyrene society in four major tribes may perhaps have taken shape in the first century, as the *polis* organization did, but there are those who believe that it was not until the time of Hadrian that the four tribes were finally in place. The Flavian era has emerged increasingly as a major turning-point in the organization of Syria, and it would perhaps be reasonable to assume that the *polis*, which Claudius had established (and the Palmyrene tribe *Claudia* may commemorate), came into being, in the form in which we see it subsequently, under Vespasian.

It may be doubted, however, that the Palmyrenes thought of themselves in the first century as already a major commercial *entrepôt* or as possessing, in the language of the Palmyrene tariff of A. D. 137, a *limên*. The word *limên*, traditionally meaning port or harbor, had taken on another sense, as ROSTOVITZEFF demonstrated in a much neglected discussion²⁴, already in the Hellenistic period, – the sense of "tax district". The Greek word was taken over into Palmyrene as *lmn'*. Previously the Palmyrenes had described their city as a *mhwx*, recently claimed as the native Palmyrene term for port or *entrepôt* on the basis of a Ugaritic parallel. But *mhwx* is a perfectly good Aramaic word for a fortified place or enclosed space (cf. classical Arabic *ḥawx*), and it seems much more likely that the term *mhwx* reflects the new fortifications of the city which have now been traced to a relatively early date in the time of the Principate. The researches of GAWLIKOWSKI seem definitive now on this point as fixing the Palmyrene fortifications to a date soon after Claudius' accession.

In the second century Palmyrene support of the caravan trade was widespread and impressive. An abundance of inscriptions documents the vigorous efforts of leading Palmyrene citizens in the protection of merchants and their caravans. The caravan leader (*synodiarchês*) sometimes travelled with his caravan but by no means always did. But whether present with the *synodia* or not, the leader was regularly the recipient of honors from the merchants (*emporoi*). Among the many benefactors known to us from this period, Marcus Ulpius Iarḥai, who presumably rose to the Roman citizenship in the time of Trajan and may even have received his name from the emperor during his eastern campaign, takes pride of place. He is thanked in a multitude of texts which reveal his far-flung operations. In the mid-second century he was thanked no less than five times by traders from Spasinou Charax for his support of their caravans moving north from the Arabian Gulf²⁵, and in another text he is recognized by the merchants of Choumana²⁶, a city within the Parthian territory in Babylonia south of Volagesias.

21. *Inv.* IX. 12.

22. *Inv.* IX. 8.

23. *Inv.* IX. 13.

24. *Yale Class. Studies* 3, 1932, p. 79–81.

25. for example, *CIS* II. 3928.

26. *CIS* II. 3960.



Fig. 10. A Palmyrene with his ship. Funerary relief (Palmyra Museum)

Palmyrene mercantile activity inside the domain of the Parthians attests to the value of their services and a kind of privileged position which lends some validity, even in later times, to the characterization of the city of Palmyra in the elder Pliny. At Vologesias itself a temple of the Roman emperors was built and dedicated by a Palmyrene, whose services to the merchants of that city were repeatedly recognized²⁷. Another Palmyrene built a shrine to the god Bel in the same city²⁸. In the Gulf itself, some of these great Palmyrene entrepreneurs owned and operated their own boats and were therefore involved in the water route to India as well as the overland caravan routes. One of the texts mentioning Marcus Ulpius Iarhai alludes to a journey "in the boat of Ḥonaino, son of Ḥaddudan"²⁹, who were presumably Palmyrenes with their own sea-going vessel. The implications of this text are supported by an important funerary relief at Palmyra itself with a depiction of a Palmyrene standing beside his ship (fig. 10). Tombs in the Palmyrene style that have been discovered at the head of the Arabian Gulf need not necessarily reflect the presence of Palmyrenes, but they do document eloquently the Palmyrene influence in the area. The Iarhai who is named on a Hadrianic inscription as a "satrap" of Thilouos (Tylos in classical Greek), modern Bahrain (not Thilouana, which is a misreading of the

27. *SEG* VII. 135.

28. *CIS* II. 3917.

29. *Inv.* X. 96.

genitive *Thilouanôn*, an ethnic meaning "the inhabitants of Thilouos"), may well be a Palmyrene serving the commercial enterprises of the king of Spasinou Charax, who was then in control of Thilouos³⁰.

It appears that the principal service of the Palmyrenes to the caravan traffic through the desert was the financing and policing of these operations. The dossier of texts in honor of Soados, son of Boliades, illustrates clearly the roles of the great Palmyrene benefactors. He is said to have shown "nobility and munificence" on many occasions to the merchants and caravans and citizens at Vologesias³¹. His contributions were evidently considered so important by the Roman government that both Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, as well as various governors of Syria, wrote testimonial letters on his behalf. He also is recorded to have protected caravans from dangers in the desert, as we read in a text from the temple of Baalshamîn at Palmyra: "He saved the recently arrived caravan from Vologesias from the great danger that surrounded it"³². For his services four statues were erected in shrines and temples at Palmyra. These only complemented the four statues that were subsequently set up in his honor in the agora of the city. The policing of the desert, to which reference is made in the honors to Soados, receives additional documentation in an important decree in honor of Ogeilos, "for the continuous expeditions he has raised against the nomads, always providing safety for the merchants and caravans on every occasion on which he was their leader"³³. The same citizen is also praised for his "financial outlay, his generous expenditure to these ends from his own resources."

The dangers from nomadic assault seem to have led the Palmyrenes to institute some kind of military command in the desert. We know of a *'str̥gwt* (*stratēgia*) in the wilderness that was entrusted to a certain Iarhai³⁴, who may well have been the same as the great Marcus Ulpius Iarhai. A *'str̥tg* (*stratēgos*), who may also have been involved with protection against the nomads³⁵, has been identified on the Palmyrene road to Hit. The *stratēgiai* of Palmyrenes in the desert would appear to complement the military presence of Palmyrenes at Dura even when the city was still under the control of the Parthians. Once again it is clear that there was a recognition on the sides of both Rome and Parthia of the extraordinary role that Palmyra had to play in the success of commerce in the desert.

For caravans moving in the desert regions within the Roman Empire, the Roman army itself provided protection. The members of a caravan proceeding northward from Mesene dedicated a statue to a legionary centurion who was stationed at Palmyra for his assistance. Even the great man, Marcus Ulpius Iarhai, had to rely on the Roman military, as can be seen from a statue which he dedicated³⁶ to a prefect of the *Ala I Ulpia*, which consisted of Palmyrene camel-riders within the legionary force for deployment in the desert when needed.

The prosperity of Palmyra through its mercantile activities is amply and unforgettably mirrored in the magnificence of its public buildings. The civic pride and munificence of the richest citizens of the city placed Palmyra in this period alongside other great cities of Greek character in their reliance upon private benefaction. The population as a whole, which at its height has been calculated as high as 200,000 souls, obviously stood to gain from so much private spending on public causes. Apamea, another magnificent city of the high Empire, already had 117,000 people who were Roman citizens (and obviously many more who were not) in the Augustan period³⁷. It was a typically well endowed city of Roman Syria, whereas, as J. MATTHEWS has

30. *Inv.* X. 38.

31. *SEG* VII. 135.

32. *Sanctuaire de Baalshamin* III, no. 45.

33. *Inv.* X. 44.

34. *Syria* 40, 1963, p. 47.

35. *Syria* 14, 1933, p. 179.

36. *Syria* 22, 1941, p. 234.

37. *CIL* III. 6687.

correctly observed, what made the *évergétisme* of Palmyra untypical was the source of the wealth of its affluent citizens, "in the pursuit of support of mercantile enterprise rather than, as in most cities, agriculture."

The Tax Law of Palmyra

The single most important document concerning the economic history of Roman Syria is, without question, the tax law of Palmyra, preserved in four great panels that were discovered as a single inscribed block in Palmyra in March of 1882. By authorization of the Sublime Porte, the stone was cut into its four constituent panels and sent to Leningrad, where it now rests in the Hermitage Museum. The first panel is a bilingual text in Greek and Palmyrene, the second entirely in Palmyrene, and the third and fourth entirely in Greek. Most but not all of the Greek text is paralleled by the Palmyrene, and the transliterated Greek words in the Palmyrene would imply that the original text had been drafted in Greek. TEIXIDOR has argued recently that the original text was a Latin version that was rendered into Greek and Palmyrene independently, but this was based upon the untenable view that Greek *limên* could only mean, unlike Latin *portus*, a maritime harbor and hence that the words *limên* and *lmn'* in the law represent the Latin term. As observed earlier, *limên* is Hellenistic Greek for tax district. Both the Greek and Palmyrene texts of this great inscription have recently been thoroughly edited in Leningrad by I. SCHIFFMANN and equipped with a full commentary and concordance.

The text is dated to the year A. D. 137. The dating formula is spread in Greek across the stone at the top of the central panels. At the head of the second panel (in Palmyrene) is a line reading, "Tax law of the fiscal area (*lmn'*) of Hadriana Tadmor and of the water sources of Aelius Caesar." This law comprises, in both the Greek and Palmyrene versions, the tax regulations as determined by the current magistrates known as *archons* and *dekaprotoi* with reference to the provisions of the old tax law, which was based upon rulings given in the previous century by several different Roman magistrates. The old law is incorporated into the body of the new document and includes citation of rulings made by a certain Marinus, who would appear to be a legionary legate acting in the place of a consular governor, by Gaius Licinius Mucianus as governor, and by the general Corbulo during his administration of Syria under Nero. The direct involvement of the Roman government in the establishment of Palmyrene taxes in the first century is notable, as is the action of Palmyrene magistrates in promulgating the new law – indicating clearly that this is an internal document for the city with reference to goods subject to tax within the *regio Palmyrena*.

The Palmyrene tax law is conspicuously not concerned with the goods of the caravan trade but rather with the economic needs of Palmyra and its territory. Apart from aromatic oils or perfumes, there is nothing in the Palmyrene document which would evoke the great trade in silks, spices, and incense that is normally associated with the caravans. By contrast there is provision for tax on a variety of goods contained in goatskins and transported either by camel or donkey. Only in the case of the aromatic oils are containers so luxurious as the alabaster jars mentioned in the inscription, and these were presumably for the families of those prosperous citizens whom the traders in the desert and on the Arabian Gulf so frequently honored.

Among the commodities for which provision is carefully made are olive oil, animal fat, salt fish, grain, wine, fodder, pinecones, camels, and camel skins. Evidently all of these were relevant to the smooth functioning of life in the region of Palmyra, and taxes were adjusted to take account of whether or not the goods were being imported or exported or both. There is extensive provision for the sale and taxation of local salt as well as the use of the water supply in the city. Indeed the tax on water is fixed at such a very high sum (800 *denarii* annually) that it would be difficult to comprehend the figure without assuming that the tax only applied to commercial users of the sources of water. There was additional provision for importing animals for slaughter and sheep for shearing, again clearly within the context of the Palmyrene economy.

Human activity was also taxed. Prostitutes were obliged to pay tax on their earnings – if small, the entire sum, if large, a part of it – and a distinction was made between clothiers who were itinerant within the city

and those who operated in fixed establishments. The law provides for the purchase and sale of slaves: "from those importing slaves into Palmyra or the borders of Palmyra [the tax collector] will exact for each person 22 *denarii*; from one selling slaves in the city or exporting them, for each person 12 *denarii*; from one selling veteran-slaves, 10 *denarii*, and if the purchaser exports the slaves, he will exact for each person 12 *denarii*." In 1935, in his survey of Roman Syria, ROSTOVITZEFF had commented on the total absence of allusion to slavery or serfdom in the literary texts of the period: "Mais de serfs et d'esclaves, pas un mot". And yet the Palmyrene tax law leaves us in no doubt that slavery was an important part of the Syrian economy. The parchments which ROSTOVITZEFF himself participated in uncovering on the Euphrates at Dura-Europus point to the same situation. The Greek text of the Palmyrene law uses the word *sôma* (*pais* occurs only in modern supplements to the text), while the Palmyrene term is *'lm*, which is obviously cognate with the classic Arabic *ghulâm*.

A substantial section of the Greek text on sureties is absent from the Palmyrene at the equivalent point, and it is in this section regulating sureties for undischarged debts that we discover a reference to an appointed official at Palmyra, *ho en Palmyrois tetagmenos*, who was probably a Roman rather than a Palmyrene official. Possibly because of his role in enforcing the institution of sureties, with which the Palmyrenes may have been unfamiliar, these lines are absent in the translation. A further section of the Greek text, in fragmentary form, seems also, for some reason, to lack a Palmyrene version, but the precise content is difficult to ascertain. The Greek text concludes, evidently with a parallel version in Palmyrene of which little has survived, by stating regulations on grazing rights. No taxes were to be exacted except in the case of animals introduced from outside the Palmyrene territory for the purpose of grazing. In the latter case the tax collector was authorized to have the animals branded, if he wished. This provision manifestly reflects the transhumance of desert peoples.

Syrian Traders

The Syrians were particularly well known abroad in the Roman Empire as traders. In the fourth century Jerome summed up what must have been a widely held opinion when he wrote, "An innate enthusiasm for trading survives down to the present day among the Syrians, who run about through the whole world in their eagerness for profit"³⁸. The Syrians have left their traces on inscriptions, especially funerary texts, in the great trading centers of the Roman Mediterranean. They can be documented at Rhodes and Delos in the east and at several major ports in Italy, notably Brundisium³⁹ and Puteoli⁴⁰. Numerous texts from Rome provide evidence of the Syrians and their families residing in that city, and the presumption must be that in most cases they were there for trade. Similarly in the commercial centers of Spain, such as New Carthage, Malaga, Cordoba, and Seville, Syrians can be identified. In Malaga, for example, they were organized into some kind of association, inasmuch as we can identify a man who is named as *prostatês tôn [en Malakê] Surôn*⁴¹. Other Syrians can be found at the commercial center of Lugdunum (Lyon) at the confluence of the Rhine and the Rhone Rivers, and Syrians also turn up on tombstones along the Rhine at Augusta Trevirorum⁴² as well as at Augusta Vindelicum near the Danube⁴³, where the deceased had purveyed Tyrian purple.

Those overseas traders came from a variety of cities in their homeland. Several, such as those at Rhodes, Delos, and Brundisium came from Laodicea, the great port city which was famous for its export of wine.

38. Migne, *PL* XXV. 255.

39. *IG* XIV. 681.

40. *CIL* X. 797.

41. *IGR* I. 26.

42. *IG* XIV. 2558 – 60.

43. *CIL* III. 5824.

One of the traders at Lyon also came from Laodicea, which he proudly called, in his funerary epigram, "the admired ornament of Syria". Tyrians are found at Rome⁴⁴ and at Puteoli⁴⁵, where they appear to have been organized in their own *statio* in each city. Natives of Syrian Apamea are attested at Rome⁴⁶, while one man who died in Trier came from the village of Kafr Zebed in the territory of Apamea as his inscription makes plain: "Here lies Aziz Agrippa the Syrian from the village of Caprozabada in the territory of Apamea"⁴⁷.

Palmyrenes can also be found at Rome, where they left inscriptions in both Greek and Palmyrene⁴⁸. These texts are dedications to the gods of Palmyra. In one⁴⁹ we meet a man with the familiar Palmyrene name of Iarḥai, which is presented in Greek not by the simple equivalent of Iaraios but rather as Titus Aurelius Heliodorus Antiochou Hadrianus Palmyrenus. Evidently in Rome this person chose to present himself to western viewers of his dedication as a thoroughly Hellenized citizen of the Roman Empire. The name Heliodorus is apparently a calque, formed from the Semitic name Iarḥai, itself a hypocoristic from the divine name Iarḥibal with its allusion to a solar deity. This self-conscious dedicator accordingly turned his name into Heliodorus. Similarly his father's name, Ḥalifi in Palmyrene, has been transformed into Antiochus in Greek on the basis of the root *ḥlf* in the name, meaning "to change" or "to substitute". These transformations of nomenclature provide a startling glimpse into the means by which Syrians abroad endeavored to establish themselves within an alien society. The Hadrianus Palmyrenus in Iarḥai's name in its Greek form is a proud declaration of the name of his native city, Hadriana Palmyra.

Two traders known to us from the Syrian community in and around Lyon are better known than most Syrians overseas because of the more ample information provided in their funerary inscriptions. A bilingual text from Trevoux in Latin and Greek is most instructive in its Greek part.⁵⁰ Thaim, also known as Julianus, who was the son of Sa'ad, is described as a native of Athila (modern 'Aṭīl), but he was a *bouleutēs* and citizen of Canatha in Syria (*epi Surias*). The reference to the two cities is easily explained by the fact that Athila, lying to the west of Canatha, was included within the large *territorium* that has now been established for that city. Canatha itself had been included within the Roman province of Syria but was transferred in the time of Septimius Severus to Arabia. Inasmuch as the Latin text of the inscription gives the city the epithet Septimia, it is likely that this text comes from a date after the inclusion of the city in the Arabian province and therefore that the use of the word Syria in Greek reflects a popular general usage rather than Roman administrative language. In southern France, where he died, Thaim ran what C. P. JONES has described as "a large general store" (*es prasin . . . enporion*).

Thaim would appear to have been a resident in France, unlike another trader from Syria attested in the same region, a certain Julianus Euteknios, whose funerary epigram was discovered a little over a decade ago at Saint Juste in Lyon. Euteknios proclaims himself a native of Syrian Laodicea and takes so much pride in the persuasive power of his eloquence among the Celts that some scholars have even been tempted to assume that he was a rhetorician or teacher rather than a trader. But the inscription goes on to state that Euteknios "constantly gave himself over to waves and sea, bearing to the Celts and the lands of the Occident all the gifts that god has bidden the all-bearing land of the Orient to bear"⁵¹. As C. P. JONES has observed, this description of Euteknios' profession can only connote "a trader of a kind common in antiquity, who sailed

44. *IGR* I. 132.

45. *IGR* I. 420 and 421.

46. *IGR* I. 311 and 317.

47. *IG* XIV. 2558.

48. *CIS* II. 3902 - 5.

49. *CIS* II. 3902.

50. *IG* XIV. 2532.

51. *AJP* 99, 1978. 336.

with his wares in his own or a hired ship". In his transits over the sea, Euteknios presumably returned to his native city of Laodicea in order to gather those goods which he sold at Lyon. The personal charm of this busy merchant in foreign parts can be easily inferred from Euteknios' own description of himself as a man beloved by all, "from whose tongue persuasion flowed".

Syrians in the Roman Aristocracy

Nothing shows better the success of the upper levels of Syrian society in penetrating the Roman aristocracy than the arrival of three Syrian Arabs on the throne of the Caesars in the third century A. D. These were Elagabalus, who came from Emesa; his kinsman Severus Alexander; and Philip, who came from the edge of the Laja' on the borders of Syria and Arabia. The way for the elevation of these three Arab emperors had been prepared by the bride of Septimius Severus, who belonged to the priestly family of Emesa that subsequently produced both Elagabalus and Severus Alexander. The emergence of Syrians at the head of the Roman government was yet another stage in a process that had been going on for a long time, namely the provincialization of the Roman aristocracy. But the suddenness and intensity of the Syrian presence seem at first surprising. It cannot have been entirely due to the whim of Severus in selecting a Syrian wife. The fact is that Syrian élites had been gradually rising in the Roman aristocracy through membership in the Senate for well over a century.

In the present state of our evidence it is a striking fact that all senators from the Near East whose origins can be determined came from Syria. There is no clear evidence at this time that any Arab from outside this area ever penetrated the senate, nor did any representative of the resident Jewish families in Palestine. One can only draw the conclusion that there was a long-standing policy on the part of the Roman government, across the reigns of many emperors of widely varying character, that the Near East would be represented at Rome by Arabs from Syria and not from anywhere else. The origins of this policy of social advancement in favor of the Syrians appear to lie in the reign of Vespasian, whose interest in strengthening and organizing the Syrian province has already been documented. The first identifiable senators from the whole near eastern region seem to have entered the Senate all at about the same time. They were: Lucius Julius Marinus, proconsul in Bithynia and Pontus in 89/90; Lucius Julius Procleianus, a governor of Cappadocia and Galatia in the reign of Titus; and a certain Sohaemus, who apparently entered the Senate in the period when his family was deprived of the dynastic power at Emesa. Vespasian's interest in Syria and his decision to bring upper-class Syrians into the Roman government was presumably based upon the years of experience he had in the area during his conduct of the Jewish war in the late sixties. Apart from the Emesene Sohaemus, the new senators seem to have represented the coastal area rather than the interior. Procleianus came from Tripolis, and Marinus is, to judge from his Roman tribe, likely to have been a native of Berytus (modern Beirut).

In the second and third centuries, as the number of Syrians rising to senatorial rank grew markedly, the prejudice in favor of the coastal cities diminished, and several of the greater cities of the interior produced men who entered the Senate, such as Avidius Cassius from Cyrrhus, Velius Fidus from Heliopolis, and the family of Septimius Odaenathus in Palmyra that was ultimately to produce the husband of Zenobia. The family of Odaenathus evidently entered the Senate under Septimius Severus.

The influence of Julia Domna in promoting her relatives led to an extension of senatorial status to those persons from outside Emesa who married into her family. Such were: Sextus Varius Marcellus from Apamea, who was the father of Elagabalus, and Gessius Marcianus from Arca Caesarea, who was the father of Severus Alexander. But ultimately the arrival of such senators is more an extension of the Emesene influence than any significant indication of a role for other Syrian cities. It may well be that after the abortive attempt of Avidius Cassius, the senator from Cyrrhus, to take over the Roman Empire by usurpation in A. D. 175, there was little inclination to elevate other Syrians to the Senate (and potentially to the throne) outside the ranks of those

who had already been accepted. At any event, it is only the Palmyrene family of Odaenathus that makes a conspicuous entry into the Senate after the uprising of Cassius. The rise of the family of Claudius Pompeianus at Antioch had already commenced in the Antonine age and was very nearly undone by involvement in the conspiracy against Commodus at the beginning of his reign. In terms of ascent into the Roman aristocracy, therefore, it was, above all, the cities of Emesa and Palmyra that were preeminent over all other near eastern regions in sending representatives to the Senate.

Even within Syria some cities are distinguished by an absence of representation in the Senate. A particularly surprising omission is the great family of the Julii Agrippae at Apamea, which we now know to have provided Syria's first high priest of the provincial cult of the Emperor.⁵² Normally within the provinces of the Roman world, the high priesthood of the imperial cult was a natural step in the rise of a family to senatorial rank within two generations (one at the equestrian level). And yet the only Apamean who ever reached the Senate was the man who married the daughter of Julia Maesa, the sister of Julia Domna. The southern area of Syria is utterly without representation. There is no senator from Damascus or from any of the cities of the northern J. al-'Arab. But nevertheless it was from this very part of Syria that the one Arab emperor who had no connection with the house of Julia Domna ultimately emerged. That was Philip, a Syrian already of equestrian dignity from a small village at the modern site of Shahbā, which he, as Emperor, then raised to the status of a city under the self-aggrandizing name of Philippopolis. The elevation of Philip the Arab was the result of military disasters in the last years of Gordian III after the death of his prefect Timesitheus, and it reflected the sentiments of the troops then present in the east more than anything else.

At least one Syrian usurper had made an effort to continue the domination of Emesa in the Roman court, but Uranius (as he was called in Greek) failed in his bid for power. That failure put a clear end to the Emesene influence and opened the way for the increasing power of the one great Syrian senatorial family that was not part of the coastal or Emesene group so notably favored by Rome. This was the house of Odaenathus at Palmyra. The economic success of that city in the second century led directly to its social rise in the early third century, and this in turn led to the broad political domination that the Syrians of Palmyra exercised over the Middle East in the years after the humiliation of Valerian in the mid-third century. Zenobia almost succeeded where Avidius Cassius had failed.

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