Late Antiquity and Early Islam

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In this paper, an investigation on the relation between state-building and Near Eastern religion is attempted. Analyzing the city-state of Ḥaṭrā (Iraq, close to Kirkuk), it is demonstrated that pre-Islamic state craft in the region was dependent on the initiative of the Parthian monarchy in Iran. The kings of the Arsacid dynasty attempted to bestow the local Arabic tribes in the Jazira with a cultic center that would serve as a stronghold against Rome/Byzantium. The deity most venerated in Ḥaṭrā was the Sungod, Šamaš, the same as in Palmyra (Tadmor), Edessa (Urfa), and Emesa (Homs). It is of crucial importance, that since Constantine the Great venerated the Sungod before becoming a Christian, the combination between Greek and Iranian art on the border of the two empires became the basis of Christian art. Ḥaṭrā, a point of cross-cultural fusion between the East and the West, is now very much endangered as the troops of the "Islamic" State have destroyed the until recently well-preserved ruins.

Keywords: Ḥaṭrā, Sungod, state-building, Near Eastern religion, Parthian monarchy, Arsacid dynasty.

In one of the most important inscriptions from Ḥaṭrā (modern Iraq), one reads the following lines (no. 272, 1ff. Vattioni):

> 1.[bjr]ḥ ʾḥ šnt CCCC XXXX IIII
> šwr' w'bwlʿ dj bnʿ bjt ʾlhʿ
> nṣr[w] mrjʿ l ḫjjhj wʿl ḫjj bnjhj
> wḥjhj
> 2.wʿl ḥjʿ mn dj lmrʿ rḥjm bnʿ bjt
> šmš ʾlhʿ rbʿ ks,,,mʿ bjt šmš

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In English (my translation):

> 1. "In the month of Iyyar, the year 444
> Built the wall and the door of the House of God
> Naṣru, the lord, for his life and for the life of his sons
> And his brothers
> 2. And for the life of who is beloved to the Lord, he built the house
> of Šamaš the God ... the Temple of Šamaš

The inscription, though engraved on a limestone block broken into three pieces, is not difficult to understand. Its language (and script) is the local dialect of the city of Ḥaṭrā (see below), a variant of the "Reichsaramaeisch" once used by the Achaimenid dynasty of Iran for the governance of their empire. After Alexander, this unified language of Syria ("Aram" in the Bible), Iraq and the whole Near East broke apart into various local dialects/scripts: Nabataean in the South, Edessenian, the local Aramaic used in Georgia (beautiful in the bilingual inscription of Serapitis, in Greek and this "Armazi" variant [Braund, 1994, 214]) and the dialect of Palmyra (Tadmur). While the second part of this article will focus on Nabataean, it is important to know that with the destruction of Ḥaṭrā by the Sasanids, the epigraphical evidence for this language comes to an end (see below).[1] The same happened to the dialect of Palmyra when the Romans under Emperor Aurelian destroyed it. The Aramaic dialect of Edessa (Orhāy, today Urfa in southeastern Turkey), however, suffered a completely different fate. In a complex process of dogmatic ramification, Byzantine and Sasanian religious politics, and the negotiation of ethnic identities, this dialect of bilingual Edessa, where even the Jews wrote in Greek besides Hebrew (Segal 1970, 27; 30 n. 5; 42 n. 3 and pl. 16a and 319), became the liturgical language of both the miaphysite Church of Syria, Turkey, and Iraq (Takrit), and of the "Apostolic Church of the East," in Iraq and Iran. In their churches, for example in Tehran, one can still hear this variant of Eastern Aramaic,[2] which is today's Suryānī. These dialects were closely related to each other, mutually understandable and written in

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1. Though very close to Classical Syriac, Hatrean was written in a clearly distinctive script which is attested also in the surrounding places like Hellenistic Assur (Vattioni 1981, 10f.). Typical is the use of /l -/ for the preformative form of the verb, not /n-/ as in Classical Syriac.

2. Closely related to the aforementioned dialects are the idioms of the Babylonian Talmud, the Palestinian Talmud, and the Aramaic ideograms in Pahlavi.

alphabets directly derived from Imperial Aramaic. Biblical Aramaic is also closely related, but represents an older stage of the language. Since Aramaic replaced the older Accadian in this huge territory, one finds many Accadian loan words in classical Syriac. Even here, the word *"bwl"* (portal) goes back to Accadian *"abullu"* and appears also in Palmyra, the Jewish targums and the Babylonian Talmud (see the note by Vattioni 1981, 88).[1] On the same inscription there is the name "*ṭpšr*" which means scribe.

All the aforementioned inscriptional dialects of Aramaic have it in common that they were used side by side with Greek. Actually, the Seleucids, after having gained the throne in Babylon (the ascension of Seleukos Nikator there marks the beginning of the Seleucid Era, also used in the inscription cited above), kept Aramaic in official use, alongside with Greek. This Greek presence was stronger in the West and South (the Nabataeans, see part II) and was less felt in the East. In Ḥaṭrā, there are only few Greek inscriptions. Latin inscriptions are even less common, since the use of Latin was restricted to the Roman army and jurists. Interestingly enough, there are three Latin inscriptions to be found here (Vattioni gives them in the appendix on p.105 and 109). At Ḥaṭrā, all the Greek inscriptions are bilingual and highly instructive from the standpoint of comparative religious studies. The use of Greek alongside with Aramaic, even in the same inscription bears a symbolic importance, as can be best shown by the bilingual market tariff of Palmyra from the time of the Roman emperor Hadrian (no. 629 Dittenberger). Palmyra (like Ḥaṭrā and the Nabataeans) set herself into the tradition stemming from the time of the Achaemenids and Alexander. When giving a trilingual inscription at Naqš-e Rostam, in Greek, Parthian, and Pahlawī, Shapur, the Sasanid king, did exactly the same (as the Parthian kings did when emitting coins with Greek legends).

The other common trait of these inscriptions follows from their representational character. They do not represent the language of the majority of the people, as both Georgian and Armenian (in the Aramaic inscription of the Artaxids) were at this time spoken, not written, languages. The same holds for Ḥaṭrā, Palmyra, and the Nabataeans,

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1. The Classical Arabic word *haykal* goes back to Accadian *ek/gallum* "palace," again through Aramaic. The normal word for "architect" in Ḥaṭrā is *'rdkl'*, from acc. *arad ekalli* "slave of the palace" (see the index by Vattioni 1981).

where the language of the people and probably of all the nomads there was already Arabic in an archaic form. This is clear from many instances and is also to be seen in the inscription cited. Like in many inscriptions from Palmyra and Jordan/Saudi Arabia in the Palmyrenan and Nabataean dialects, many (often all) personal names are Arabic (a forerunner of classical Arabic). Another typical trait is the presence of the *tanwīn*. While in later Nabataean inscriptions, where this habit leads to a somehow mixed language (see part II), in the inscription cited, there is a clear example of both instances in the name of the dedicant, *nṣr[w]* in l. 3. This is clearly the Arabic (also Islamic) name Naṣr. Like in classical Arabic, it is written with the final - /u/ of the *tanwīn*. Though written here correctly, in many later Nabataean inscriptions, the final vowel becomes fossilized, which points to the disappearance of the *i'rāb* among sedentary Arabs before Islam (also referred to in later grammatical tradition). In today's Arabic, the name 'Amr (عمرو) is always written with this final vowel, which is the result of several traits preserved from Nabataean orthography in Classical Arabic.

The reason for this hidden presence of Arabic in all these cities (Ḥaṭrā, Palmyra, al-Ḥijr/Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, Edessa, Petra, etc.) is that these "Caravan cities" (Rostovtzeff 1932) were founded as centers of independent, or half independent states, run by Arab nomads (transformed into dynasties) on the borders of the dissolving Seleucid Empire and the Parthian monarchy, at the time when the Romans were steadily gaining influence in the Near East. Dura/Europos also belongs to this group, although this town was normally (except in its final phase) directly ruled by the Parthians and was thus, never half-independent (and Greek was the most common language).

Ḥaṭrā has no ancient predecessor, but is situated close to the ancient and Biblical sites of Assur (which is about 50 km to the east) and Ninive, well known by the Biblical book of Jonah (about 80 km towards the north).[1] The Jabal Sinjār, *Singārā* in Late Antiquity, is also close. The territory belongs historically to the Jazira, where there was still enough rainfall for modest agriculture in the north, while the south was the realm of the Arab nomads (Sommer 2005, 356f. and n. 6). In stark contrast to Hellenistic tradition, the plan of the city is circular (pic. no. 1), which comes from the Iranian tradition (Ekbatana [Hamadan], Ctesiphon [the Parthian Capital], as well as Shiz and Gur in Iran). One

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1. For details, see Vattioni (1981, 1, 4).

should remember the later plan of Baghdad. The circumference is impressive, as the inner circle has a diameter of about 2 km (more than Ninive), which was densely settled (Sommer 2005, 358ff.). The grid of streets is irregular; Sommer (2005, 365f.) speaks about the streets and the settlement patterns which [JNP] "vermitteln den Eindruck eines orientalischen Sūqs." The quarters look like cells, which is an indication that Ḥaṭrā was already, from her beginning, inhabited by nomadic tribes. Since there are no datable traces before the first century CE, it is most likely that the foundation of the city was an attempt made by the Parthian kings, who settled Arab nomads in the area, around the time when they conquered Mesopotamia, in order to control the caravan trade between the Romans and their empires. The etymology of the city also points to this conclusion, as Ḥaṭrā means "fenced territory," the Aramaic word for "city" being *karkhā*. The designation was kept in Arabic/Islamic times as al-Ḥaḍr (see below).[1]

This general character of settlement in Ḥaṭrā was nevertheless no impediment that her architects looked towards the West; houses (of the classical age) were built in stone, and the temple (see below) combined Iranian with Greek elements in an exemplary fashion (Sommer 2005, 365, 388ff.).

Until their recent destruction by the troops of the "Islamic" State, the ruins of Ḥaṭrā were well preserved and thus open to archaeological research, at least until the third Gulf War. British travelers were the first to study the city, as the physician J. Ross discovered the ruins in 1939, which were the object of oral tradition in Arabic literature (see below). The German "Assur Expedition" under W. Andrae conducted the first systematic research between 1906 and 1911, and G. Bell stayed in the city's remnants, which were getting famous. E. Herzfeld published an article about the city seven years after his treatise on Pasargadae (1914). After the Second World War Iraqi archaeologists took over the excavation process, and in 1987 they were joined by a team from Torino, Italy under the guidance of R. Venco Ricciardi. The tenth volume of "Topoi," edited by her, and Venco Ricciardi (2001) is dedicated to their work. The Aramaic, Greek and Latin inscriptions have been published by Vattioni (1981).[2]

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1. For an overview of the designations, see Vattioni (1981, 2f.).
2. Sommer (2005, 355) gives a sketch on the history of the city's exploration. See also Sommer (2003, 4-8).

Fundamental for the religious history of Ḥaṭrā is her character as a "dimorphic society" (Sommer 2005, 355). The plan of the city, the religious architecture (see below), the geographical position at the crossroads of a dozen of streets through the desert (Vattioni 1981, 4, according to Sir Aurel Stein), from Lower Mesopotamia (Ctesiphon and Spasinou Charax), through Takrit, Ḥaṭrā, the Jabal Sinjar, towards Edessa—and thus the Roman Empire (Sommer 2005, 388)—made it a classical "gateway city" between two "Idealtypen": the Arab Nomads and the sedentary people.[1]

The power that made this process possible, inside the vacuum of authority prevailing in the desert, was the Parthian monarchy. In the beginning, there was a local center under the authority of a simple *mrjʾ*, a "lord" (it is the same word as Syriac *Mar*, used for God, and Arabic *imruʾ*), but during the early second century CE, a qualitative swerve (Sommer 2005, 370) occurred when the "rulers" or "lords" of the city became "king of the Arabs" (*mlkʾ dy ʿrb* or *ʿrby*).[2] The inscription cited above is in fact the last secure example where the simpler old title is used (Sommer 2005, 370 and n. 61). Thus, this was the first kingdom of the Arabs—in Edessa, the title was *šliṭ dʿrb* "ruler of the Arabs," the title king being reserved for the ruler of the city without the ethnic attribute (Vattioni 1981, 10 and, more explicitly, Sommer 2005, 253f.).[3] The lords, be them *mrj* or *mlkʾ*, had to take into account the Arab tribes still living outside the city (inscr. no. 79 Vattioni) and one expression of this sharing of power can be seen in the existence of fifteen religious shrines (Sommer 2005, 386) found outside the central temple inside the inhabited area. This impressive building complex (see below) was probably also the economic center of the city (Sommer 2005, 370), and the nomadic tribes from outside were represented by inscriptions written by their members and displayed there. This balance of power between "inside and outside" was one of the main reasons for the success of Ḥaṭrā. How this tribal democracy worked is also shown by two inscriptions which mention an assembly of both "Hatreans, young and old, and Arabs" (nos. 336 and 343 Vattioni; Sommer 2005, 376f.).

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1. Sommer (2005, 356, n. 6) cites Hauser (2000) for speculations concerning the general trend of transformation that occurred in the region during the first two centuries CE.
2. See Sommer (2005, 376ff, and esp. 382f.), which stresses the consent by the Iranian king for the step from tribal leadership to monarchy.
3. The case in Tubach (1986, 14) is different.

With the second century, we now have a significant amount of Greek and Roman historiography at our disposal, which makes the elucidation of this part of Parthian history possible and in which Ḥaṭrā is called either Ἄτρα (ntr. pl.), or Ἄτραι (fem. pl.), while in Latin one finds *Hatra* (Ammian, see below), or *Hatris* in the *tabula* Peutingeriana and the inhabitants are referred to as Ἀτρηνοί, corresponding exactly to Aramaic *Ḥṭrj* (Vattioni 1981, 2f.). Emperor Trajanus (98-117), when beleaguering Ḥaṭrā, was on his way back from Spasinou Charax, the capital of the small kingdom of *Charakene* on the Persian Gulf.[1] Apart from the economic reasons (gaining control over the traffic with India, which was at that time in the hands of the Parthian Monarchy), it was mostly strategic reasons that persuaded the best Roman emperor (*optimus princeps*) to secure the path from Ctesiphon to the Singārā-mountain (see above). This event, which took place shortly before Trajan died, was undertaken when the city was still insignificant. Cassius Dio, a Roman senator of Greek origin from the first half of the third century CE, gives excellent material for the time covered by his work (until 229 CE, the year of his consulate), including information on late Parthian/early Sasanian history. Concerning the city of Ḥaṭrā, he writes, "The city was neither big nor rich" (book LXVIII 31, 1 [Cary; my translation]; see also Sommer 2005, 368f.). This was in fact false at his own time, but true for Ḥaṭrā before it became a hub under the last "lords" or first "kings" (see above)—that is, at the beginning of the second century CE. So, it is quite clear that the Greek senator and consul had an older source in front of him when writing (perhaps an eyewitness account from Trajan's time). Anyways, this siege was a failure and Cassius Dio meaningfully writes, "It was the Sun God of Ḥaṭrā that protected her" (LXVIII 31, 2-4).

While on his way there (but first going to Ctesiphon), the same historian relates that the tribal kings (*phylarchoi,* the usual Greek term for tribal chieftains acting under Roman/Byzantine supervision, often Arabs), visited Trajan in Edessa/Orhay (see above), in order to pay him homage. Among them was the *phylarchos* of *Arabía* (Cassius Dio LXVIII 21f.). From the list, which is important for the history of the Roman Near East, we can deduce that with this term (*phylarchos* of *Arabía*) the territory of Ḥaṭrā was meant. Thus, we learn from this passage what was the Greek equivalent to the (*mlk' dy*)*rb* mentioned

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1. For the following, see Vattioni (1981, 3ff.).

above. It seems, that these "kings" expected from the *optimus princeps* the same loose subordination that they had experienced under the Parthian king. Sommer (2005, 380f.) perceives the structure of the Parthian Empire as a loose structure of satrapies and kingdoms (Pliny counts 18 in VI 112/XXIX of his *naturalis historia*), controlled by the center in three degrees. Ḥaṭrā, having a king, at least beginning with the 2 century CE, divided along the two seas, belonged to the most independent category, similar to Armenia, where, according to the Parthian and later to the Sasanian court hierarchy, a member of the Royal family of the Arsacids acted as the "vice king," while the middle category (like Georgia) was formed by territories ruled by indigenous dynasts, although without that title. They are called *vitaxa* by Ammianus Marcellinus (XXIII 6,14), which is a Parthian expression. Michael Sommer's interpretation of Emperor Septimius Severus' triumphal title, *Parthicus Arabicus* (381, n. 99, following Hauser) is thus convincing: the kingdom was considered to be the "Parthian Arabs." The shift from the former title *mrj'* to *mlk'* (see above) was, therefore, a step towards greater independence. This was beyond any doubt connected to the Roman expansion towards Syria and Northern Iraq in the second part of the second century CE, best symbolized by the Parthian war of Lucius Verus (166-169 CE). During which Ḥarrān (in today's Turkey) was conquered, Edessa became a Roman *colonia* (thus, a Roman city), and the kingdom of Osroene a Roman province (pic. 2).

It was with the first emperor from the Severian dynasty, Septimius Severus (193-211 CE), that the second attempt at taking Ḥaṭrā by siege (197-199 CE) was undertaken. Cassius Dio is once again the most important source (LXXVI 10f.). It is likely that the inhabitants of the city were not unknown to Severus, since the king of the city (Barsemia) had sent bowmen to help his rival, Pescennius Niger, against Severus. It is important, that this Arab king under Parthian suzerainty sends his troops, trained in the Iranian technique of shooting arrows from a horse, as far west as Antiochia. At this time, only Laodikeia remained with Severus, who in the aftermath made this city (today's Lattakia) the provincial capital of the region, divesting Antiochia of all her honours (Vattioni 1981, 5; Tubach 1986, 58). This attempt to take Ḥaṭrā once again failed, and once again, according to Dio, by the protection of Ḥaṭrā' s Sungod.

About one and a half centuries later in 363, when Emperor Julian was killed under mysterious circumstances close to the Euphrates during his war against Shahpur II, the Roman army, while on its way back through the desert passed through Ḥaṭrā, led by the new Emperor Jovian. Ammianus Marcellinus writes (XXV 8, 5 Seyfarth, my translation):

> Free from this suspicion, in long marches, we came close to Hatra, an old city, situated in the middle of solitude, deserted since a long time, which the bellicose emperors Trajanus and Septimius Severus, in order to extirpate it, had almost destroyed with their hosts, as we have described when relating their deeds.[1]

What had happened? Ardašīr-i Pabagān, having overthrown the last Parthian king, Artavanos V (as can be seen in Naqš-i Rustam, on the western older reliefs), turned to Ḥaṭrā, probably in 228 CE. His siege failed again and, again, the indefatigable Cassius Dio is our witness (LXXX 3. 2).[2] The reaction of the Hatreans is now very significant, and for the first time the city receives a Roman garrison (Sommer 2005, 355, 375f.). Already in 231/32, thus, briefly after the Sasanian overthrow of the Parthians, Emperor Alexander Severus, the son of an Arab mother (from Emesa, today's Ḥoms), built a road at Singār on his way towards the city (Maricq 1957, 294). This was the first Roman military expedition towards the East to fight against the new power of the Sasanids. In 238, the *legio I Parthica* is stationed there: since, in two of the Latin inscriptions mentioned above (nos. 2 and 3 in Vattioni 1981, 109) a tribune of the ninth cohort that consisted of Mauri (thus, Berbers) under emperor Gordian is mentioned (*tribunus militum IX cohortis Maurorum*), we can date them exactly to the time after the ascension of Gordian (who was later killed in his expedition against Shahpur I, as depicted in the Sasanian reliefs preserved at Tang-i Chaugan, Fars). Shortly after his ascension to the throne, probably in the spring of 240, after a longer siege, the city fell to the Sasanians, never to recover again (Tubach 1986, 224ff.). So, Ḥaṭrā in Iraq was for ten years a Roman city.[3]

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1. This part of Ammianus' "History" is lost.
2. To this last episode in the history of Ḥaṭrā, A. Maricque has dedicated an article in 1957.
3. Vattioni (1981, 6) writes: "Sotto il timore dei Sassanidi, Hatra si allea con i Romani che sono già arrivati a Singara."

How this event became famous in later historical records, can be seen through the Medieval Arabic memory written down in Islamic times (see below), in which one can also observe the growing oral history concerning this mysterious event. Its importance even for contemporaries can be seen in the Mani codex from the famous Cologne papyrus, published by Koenen and Heinrichs in 1975. Here, Mani, who was from Babylonia (and therefore, from the region), speaks about his second revelation (probably April 23, 240): "When I became 24 years old, in the year when the king of Persia Ardašīr subjected the city of Ḥaṭrā, the same year when his son Shahpur put on the biggest diadem, the day of the moon [thus, a Monday], in the (Coptic) month of Pharmuti ... the all merciful lord had pity on me and called me to his grace and ordered me ..." (Heinrichs 1970, 120ff.).[1]

One point of great significance for this paper is the religious importance of the city of Ḥaṭrā for the development of Arabic states on the border between the Iranian (Parthian, Sasanian) and Roman/Byzantine empires. On the political side, since our written sources are limited to (mostly) Aramaic inscriptions, references in Greek/Roman historiography,[2] and the later historiography in Arabic, which has more of an anecdotic character, it is only with great difficulty that we can follow the process of state formation in the desert. But, as Sommer (2005, 381) correctly remarks, at some point between 137/138 and 176/177 CE the rulers of the city changed their official title to "king," which was done by instigation from the side of the Parthian kings. This process was somehow interlinked (one would like to know more) with the economic growth of the city (Sommer 2005, 270). Thus, a territory that was already known as *Arabía* before this stage (see above, on the visit of Emperor Trajan in Edessa) obtained a proto-statal existence (Sommer 2005, 378 with n. 91). The title "king of the Arabs" would be picked up by such rulers as the Sasanian vassal Imru' al-Qays in his tomb inscription, now in the Louvre, from an-Namara (to the east of Damascus), dated 325 CE where he claims to be *mlk kll 'rb*; a title with a long career (Retső 2003, Index). And this ethnogenesis happened centuries before the beginning of Islamic revelation.

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1. Vattioni (1981, 6-8) discusses the different traditions and synchronisms about this important element in Manichaean salvation history. See also Tubach (1986, 225, n. 57).
2. The evidence in Syriac Christian writings is scarce (Tubach 1986, 228ff.).

That the authorities (including the Parthian authorities) developed techniques to cope with one of the biggest traditional dangers on the borders between both the Graeco-Roman and Fertile Crescent with the Arabic desert can be demonstrated by a couple of Aramaic inscriptions (79, 80, 336, and 243 Vattioni). This helps to shed light on the genealogy and the functions of a clan of Bedouins, who held a special role in Ḥatrā (Sommer 2005, 376f.). The importance of all of these inscriptions is shown by the fact that they were all on display on the wall enclosing the temples. The common ancestor, named Šamšbareḵ (literally, "The Sungod blessed [him]") led an assembly of the people of "the inhabitants of the City, old and young, and the Arabs" (336, 3ff.), who issued a law, to which we will come back later. It is, however, important that this Šamšbareḵ, being an Arab, led an assembly of both sedentary and nomadic people. He held the title, common in Ḥatrā, of a *rbjt'* (leader of the house) (see the index by Vattioni, s. v.) and certainly acted both with and by the consent of Lord/*mrj'* or the king/*mlk'*. By these and similar integrational processes, a conflict between nomads and sedentary people was avoided. This strategy had a strong religious aspect which is made clear by the inscription's location (see below).

Parthian is also architecture, as can be seen by the older layers, which are kept in brick, while the official one, stemming from the boom period (about 100 to 240 CE) is in stone, combining Hellenistic and Parthian elements in an aesthetically convincing manner (all temples in the center are in limestone). It is improbable that their architects were locals and one is tempted to imagine Ctesiphon in this manner (Sommer 2005, 357ff., esp. 365). The Parthian hand is also detected in the territory of the city. In stark contrast to Classical-Greek cities (but similar to Hellenistic cities), it was the king who marked the territory. In the wonderful volume by Kennedy and Riley from 1990 (fig. 164 and 186), one finds photographic images taken from the air of two Parthian castles to the northeast of the city, Jaddala 1 and 2. Sommer (2005, 380 n. 97) mentions another, Khirbet Qbr ibn Naif, which is to the west of the capital. So, it is quite clear that the dynasty secured the city against both Bedouin attacks and against the Romans from the west. It is easy to imagine the Arab/Parthian bowmen stationed in one of these castles (or another one, still to be found) defending their city. In fact, as Cassius Dio remarks, when Trajan attacked the city during the last year of his reign, Ḥatrā was defended by her castles and by her

troops. Furthermore, it was that lord Naṣrw (cited in the inscription above) who was ruling there.

In stark difference to the Syriac scarcity, Ḥatrā (and especially her last days) is well attested in the later Arabic and Persian traditions, which are only loosely linked to historical facts. A. Christensen wrote a paper in 1936 on the topic of the "princess on a leaf of myrtle/la princesse sur le pois," and Tubach (1986, 236ff.) summarized this tradition, which ended up in a folk tale: the Arabic tradition, in part following the Ḫvadāynāmag, transformed the historical king Sanaṭrūq II into Sāṭirūn. He was given a new Arabic name (Ḍayzan) and his daughter fell in love with Shahpur I. They gave her a name as well (Naḍīra) and her story turned folk tale, became popular as far as Denmark. Apart from the transmission of this story (also in Pahlawī), there are two important elements: the image of Ḥatrā as immensely rich (which was probably true) and the "Arabization" of the last king, which is comparable to Yemen, where the Jewish king Yosef also received an Arabic name (Dhū Nuwās).

This Parthian component of Ḥatrā's culture was not only restricted to political dominance and perhaps administrative protection (summarized by Sommer 2005, 379ff.) but also important for the military aspect (see above, on the bowmen). However, it can also be shown that it reached other sectors of the society: onomastics and dynastic titles. Again, we desperately need the help of the inscriptions, since the other sources are so incomplete.

Sommer (2005, 371ff.) gives a commented list of the rulers of Ḥatrā, in which he attempts to epigraphically establish a chronology of reigns, a dynastic genealogy, and a chronological framework (which he successfully accomplishes).

The first ruler, WRWD, to be dated at the beginning of the second century CE, clearly bears an Iranian name; it is the same name as is attested among Parthian kings, *Orodes* in Greek. Significantly enough, his son and successor has an Arabic name (MʿNW, common also in Edessa), and it was he who gave homage to Trajan in that city (see above), according to Cassius Dio.

The son and successor of Naṣrw also has an Iranian name (always according to Sommer), and again it is a Parthian royal name: WLGŠ, appearing as *Vologaeses* in Western sources. So, apart from Arabic and

Aramaic names (maybe aramaized Arabic names?), at least two members of the ruling dynasty had Iranian names of a royal sound. That is no small claim to Iranian dignity from a former Bedouin tribe.

More important still is the use of a classical middle Iranian term for the heir apparent, also known in other Arabic kingdoms of the borderline: *pšgrb'* "the prince" (attested with its variants four times in the corpus of Vattioni [1981], index, where attestation no. 36, 4 is missing). As it is to be expected, the title normally appears in a royal context. Since, in the city of Ḥatrā, the official religious cult was in the hands of the dynasty, the archaeological context is also religious (no. 195 is from the temple of the Sungod). The same holds for Edessa, where the title is engraved on one of the Old Syriac inscriptions, found on one of the two columns of the former royal palace, which is now the sanctuary of Abraham (Drijvers and Healy 1999, no. As 1, 45ff. [with comm. and the Parthian origin of the juridical team]). That it dates exactly from the time when the "Blessed City" was under Roman rule (for the first time) is hardly a coincidence. It is significant that both Arab dynasties used Iranian titles for expressing dynastic continuity.

The religion in Ḥatrā is far from being understood today and religious historians have to base their speculations on the inscriptions, the complex interaction of architecture and their texts (most inscriptions were found in the central sanctuary), and the scattered allusions from Greek and Latin writers. All assignation of a certain temple to one deity remains hypothetical and we have no religious literature from Ḥatrā (Tubach 1986, 46, 50). Crucial for the religious life of the city was the precinct situated in its center. After the comprehensive description and analysis by Parapetti and Venco Ricciardi from 2000 and the historical analysis by Sommer (2005, 359-66),[1] we have sufficient knowledge of it. It was probably built in subsequent phases during the second century CE (thus, when Ḥatrā became a commercial hub) and consisted of two parts enclosed by a wall and divided inside by another wall (see the plan in pictures no. 1 and 3, taken from Sommer 2005, 359). Almost all temples were in the smaller, eastern part of the sanctuary, the *bjt 'ḥʾ.* This designation, constantly used by Sommer, occurs but once in the inscriptions and that in the one cited above. The impressive ruins, now destroyed by the "Islamic" State are concentrated here, in the center of

1. See also Vattioni (1981, 12).

the city. Different from other Greek and Oriental sanctuaries, the area is not dedicated to one God alone, but to several deities (Sommer 2005, 360).

By far the most prominent one is the Sungod, Šam(a)š,[1] and, as Tubach (1986, 261-63) has shown convincingly, he is "Our Lord," *mrn* (Vattioni, index), a designation that evokes strong Christian associations (*Maran ata* "Come, our lord," is still prayed in Aramaic by Christians). Ḥatrā is regularly referred to on her coins as "The city of the Sungod," *Ḥṭr d šmš*. Graeco-Roman historiography also points to the strong presence of this Near Eastern God, who became part of the Roman imperial state cult under Emperor Aurelian, who vanquished Palmyra, in 274. Given the high importance of Parthian art for the genesis of Christian art (see Rostovtzeff 1935), it is thus not astonishing if the spectator nourishes suspicions that the bust of the Sungod from Ḥatrā is an early depiction of Christ (who is present in a mosaic from a mausoleum ("M") from under the old Church of St. Peter in Rome riding Helios' chariot); this can be seen in picture no. 4. It is only the horns that are different.

Generally, while the decoration of the temples is Hellenistic, the basic conception of the sacred district, most prominently the Ivan (G in Sommer's plan) in the center, that consists of several parts (erected one after the other, the Southern being the oldest) is Parthian. Interestingly, this building is not the temple of the Sungod, although it (H) is closely (in the west) adjacent to the Ivan (which might have been the place of a dynastic cult; Andrae took it as a palace). It was built later than the Ivan, with a slight, although important change concerning the (avoided) architectural axiality (Sommer 2005, 364, n. 32, citing Freyberger). It is probable that the "tomb of Helios" (*hlyw* in Syriac, so the Greek name of Šamaš), which is mentioned in Theodor bar Koni's *liber scholiorum*, a presentation of religions and sects (from Islamic times, similar to Šahrastānī, from a point of view of the Apostolic Church of the East), was this building. The same information is preserved also in the Greek Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions (Tubach 1986, 232f.; Vandenhoff 1915, 256f.).[2]

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1. I cannot see why Sommer (2005, 384) assumes a difference between the nomadic, female Šams and a male, sedentary Šam(a)š.
2. In the same sense, the Moongod Sin is claimed for Ḥarrān.

The Sungod however, was venerated in Ḥatrā as a member of a "Holy Trinity," which consisted of Father (*mr*) and Mother (*mrtn*) and was venerated in a separate temple (A in Sommer).[1] It should also be mentioned that "Our Lady" would not sound unfamiliar to a Christian, nor would the "Son of two Lords," *brmryn*. Tubach (1986, 255-335) has dedicated a long chapter to this "Triad" (as he calls it), in which he analyzed works of art, evidence from the inscriptions (from both inside and outside the city) and Graeco-Roman writings. The Triad is also present on the city's coins (Sommer 2005, 381 n. 100). Evidently, both older Babylonian concepts, as well as those from pre-hellenistic Syria survived in Hatrā. So, one also finds Atargatis, the "Dea Syria," mentioned on many inscriptions in the district (Vattioni 1981, index; more attestations in Tubach 1986, 255f. n. 3, citing Drijvers). Lukian dedicated an essay to her. But also *Allāt*, the old Arab goddess from the Age of Ignorance had a temple in the sacred district, which was outside the most important sacred center, close to the wall dividing the unequal halves (B in Sommer) and furthermore, she is also represented in inscriptions (Vattioni 1981, index). There was also a special "leader of the house of Allat," *rbjt 'l't* (384, 5 Vattioni; the archaic construction and orthography points perhaps to an Arabic loanword). Astonishingly, the common dress of most deities is the Roman/Greek tunic. All over the city, fifteen smaller temples/shrines have been found and at the entrance to one of them, no. XI, during the city's last moments, the nomadic tribesmen (mentioned above) erected a statue of a king.

Clearly, when Naṣrw set his inscription, an observer, like the one cited by Cassius Dio (see above), would have been able to witness a classical process of "Ethnogenese" in the style of the Vienna school; the classic of which is H. Wolfram's book on the Goths (2001). Like the *gentes* of the Early Western Middle Ages, the Parthian, Arabic, and Hellenistic heritage in the city of Ḥatrā formed a kernel of tradition ("Traditionskern"). Its development, however, was stopped by the Sasanian destruction of the site.

The first who left traces at the *Beyt Alāhā* was an ancestor of Naṣrw, WRDW, who bears, as we have seen, a Parthian name, thus showing his alignment with the dynasty in Ctesiphon; the Southern Ivan in the sanctuary is his (Sommer 2005, 359, 374). The wall around the

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1. In Sommer (2005, 384), there is a certain contradiction, since he assigns here the Ivan-building to the Trias.

complex, however, was erected by his (indirect) successor, as is reported in the inscription dated to the year 137/138 CE cited above. This is a classic dedicational inscription, common also in the Hellenistic world. Nasrw, whose son, WLGŠ, was bestowed with a Parthian name, dated this inscription, which was meant for public display according to the traditional era in the Near East after Alexander (The date of the ascension of Seleucos I to the throne of Babylon). Thus, he chose the Hellenistic reckoning (1 of Nisan 311 BCE), like Greek cities in Mesopotamia and Iran and not the Arsacid one (247 BCE) (Vattioni 1981, 8 and nos. 64f.). For him, as the lower lines of the inscription show, the *Beyt Alāhā* was identical to the *House of Šamaš* (l.2 [bis] Vattioni).

In Ḥatrā, religious law could also be issued by assemblies led by nomads (on their role, see Sommer 2005, 386f.), and this is shown in the inscription mentioned above (336, 3 Vattioni). Šamašbareḵ, an Arab nomad, decided on the acceptance of a law that forbade any kind of theft, even if the purloined object was worth only one obolus (*māʿā* in Syriac), under the penalty of stoning. This law is preserved by Eusebios of Caesareia (d. ca. about 340 CE) in his "Evangelic preparation" (VI, 10, 24: In Ḥatrā, the one who steals something, worth an obolos, is stoned [my translation]). This *pastiche* of older texts, stitched together by the author in the service of Christianity, was no longer valid in Eusebios' lifetime. Bardesanes (in Syriac Bardayṣān) from Edessa (d. 222 CE in Armenia) declares explicitly that this law was no longer valid: "They do not do it anymore" (Tubach 1986, 228).[1]

So, there is no inscriptional attestation for any religion present in Ḥatrā, except the one of historical Syria/Northern Iraq, centered on the Syro-Mesopotamian Sungod (but no traces of Mithraism, Judaism, or Mazdaism). That there were Christians in Hatra is an assumption by Tubach (1986, 229), for which we have no direct evidence (in contrast to Dura/Europos and Edessa at the same time). The solar religion in the city, with the exception of some nuances, was common to Edessa, Dura/Europos, Palmyra, Baalbek, and Emesa.

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1. The citation is according to Cureton (33/20). See also Vattioni (1981, 3) and Sommer (2005, 376f.). It is evident, also according to Tubach that the citation in Eusebios is from the lost Greek original version of Bardesanes; the Syriac text we have are the notes taken from the master by one of his pupils.

Only for Ḥatrā are these two religious institutions attested and worth of attention: The term "House of God," later common for the Ka'ba (though it not attested in the Qur'ān),[1] and the canon concerning theft (which resembles the regulations of the Sharia, cf. Quran 5:33f., and those of the Roman law for *furtum*). The impressive ruins and unique inscriptions, now endangered, belong both to Greek/Roman and Iranian (Near Eastern) history. Millar's question marks "East? West?" at the end of his book from 1993 (see also Sommer 2005, 355) symbolizes a major achievement: there is no sharp border between European and Oriental history and the protection of this common heritage is, therefore, a global duty (and an urgent one). It should be kept in mind that Constantine the Great, before adopting Christianity (officially only on his deathbed), worshipped the Sungod.
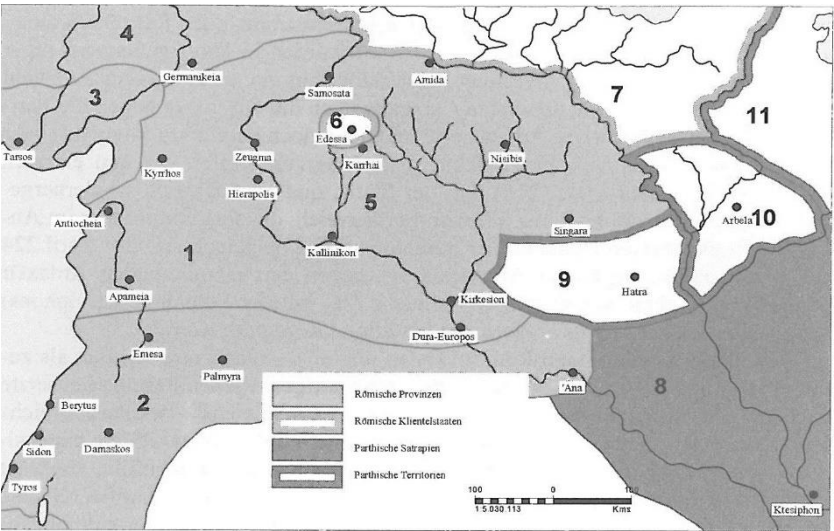

1. Aerial view of Ḥatrā (al-Ḥiḍr), taken from the book of Kennedy and Riley (1990, 105). It is an old photograph taken by the Royal Air Force. Important are the well visible circular plan (Parthian city), and the rectangular plan of the sanctuary in the center.

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1. Attested though is the term *bayt*, followed by various qualifications, e.g. (*al-Ka'ba*) *bayt al-ḥarām* (Quran 5:97); see also Quran 2:125-27 and 3:96. See EQ (2:458ff.) by J. E. Campo, EQ (3:75ff.) by G. R. Hawting, and Witztum (2009).
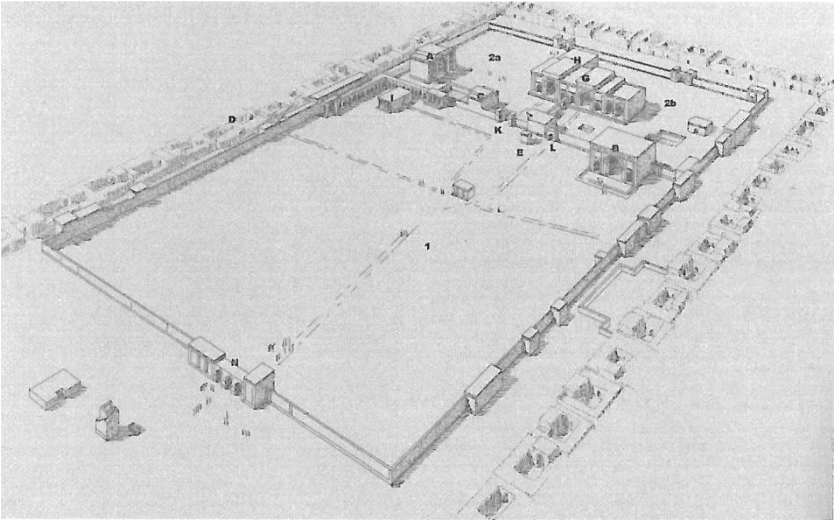
2. Isometric reconstruction of the central sanctuary of Ḥaṭrā (Sommer, 2005, 359), the *beyt Alaha.*

3. The map (Sommer 2005, 71) shows the expansion of the Roman Empire at the end of the second century in the Near East under Emperor Septimius Severus (d. 211 CE). Grey is Roman, with a grey margin a

Roman vassal state. Dark Grey is Parthian, a dark margin a Parthian vassal state. 1. The province Syria Coele, 2. Syria Phoenice, 5. The new province of Mesopotamia, 6. The (rest of the) kingdom of Edessa/Urfa, 7. Armenia, 9. Ḥaṭrā, 10. Adiabene (whose kings were Jewish), 11. Media Atropatene, the nucleus of Modern Azerbaijan.

4. Relief cut in limestone from a temple in Ḥaṭrā (Tubach, 1986, 408ff. and Abbildung 10). The image shows either the Sungod Šamaš or his son, Barmaren (see above). Note the Roman tunic as dress. The piece, originally in Mosul, is hopefully preserved there.

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