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## The Last Kings of Edessa

The kings of Edessa ruled over their city for more than three centuries and a half. They began apparently as Arab tribal chieftains, when they took advantage of the Seleucid retreat from beyond the Euphrates and established themselves in the Macedonian foundation that was Edessa from 132 BC on, as it results from the 8th century chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius, on which our host Witold Witakowski has so much to say. While the first ruler, one Orhai b. Ḥewya, clearly bears an eponymous name, it does not necessarily follow that he was an entirely legendary figure. The tribe of Orroei or Roali, as the nomad inhabitants of the land East of the middle Euphrates were known to Plinius (NH V. 20. 85; VI. 19. 25), must have been calling themselves *\*bene Orhay* or the like. If so, they would have given their name to their new stronghold, just as the Hemisenoi seem to have given theirs to the city of Emesa, spelled in Semitic as *ḥmṣ* in the 1st century AD and ever since until today. There is at any rate no compelling reason to follow the general opinion that the name of Orhai is the original name of the place the Greeks called Edessa.

Ever since their installation, the dynasty characterised by the recurrent Arab names of Abgar and Ma'nu controlled a city where not many traces of the Macedonian foundation seem to have been left. It was not necessarily an important city during the first centuries, though situated on the road leading from the main passage of the Euphrates at Zeugma to Nisibis and further East to Adiabene and Media. Unlike some more obscure places, such as Ichnae on the Baliḥ (Isid. 1; Plut., *Crassus* 25), it was apparently no more considered a Hellenic city about the turn of the Christian era. It was not even mentioned in the itinerary of Isidorus, if we follow Dillemann — as I think we should — in dissociating Edessa from the place the manuscripts of the *Mansiones Parthicae* call Manouorrha Auureth;<sup>1</sup> the first member of this name is not to be under-

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<sup>1</sup> L. Dillemann, *Haute Mésopotamie orientale et pays adjacents*, Paris 1962, 168-169.

stood as "Orhai of Ma'nu",<sup>2</sup> because Edessa does not fit the geographical context of the itinerary.<sup>3</sup>

The well-known series of inscriptions from Sumatar Harabesi shows that the people of Orhai did not consider themselves as Arab either, whatever the origin of their ancestors and their kings.<sup>4</sup> The officials called *šaliṭē d-'Arab*, "rulers of the nomads", have left their trace in this high-place, where they were apparently meeting the desert elders dependent on the king. As elsewhere in the Near East in Antiquity, 'Arab is in the first place the name of all tent-dwellers, the *Scenitae*, and not a reference to the speakers of a given language or people of a certain ethnic origin.<sup>5</sup> The office of *šaliṭā* should not be very different from that of a *strategos nomadōn* in a Ḥawrān village,<sup>6</sup> or of an *arabarches* in Dura-Europos.<sup>7</sup>

The Abgar dynasty managed to maintain themselves in their kingdom for quite a while manoeuvring, sometimes on a tight rope, between the Romans and the Parthians. The emperor Trajan met in Edessa in 115 AD (Dio LXVIII. 21) not only with Abgar VII, but also with a certain "Ma'nu of Arabia", a chieftain of some nomad tribes of the Mesopotamian steppe (not of Hatra, which was then most probably ruled by Lord Worod),<sup>8</sup> and with Sporakes, a *phylarches* of Anthemousia, that is a tribal chief of the district of Batnae, now Suruç, 42 km from Edessa by the modern road. Though both could have been clients of Abgar, the direct rule of the latter did not apparently extend very far.

He was removed the next year for disloyalty and soon replaced with the Arsacid protégé of the Romans, Parthamaspatēs, but already in AD 123 the pro-Roman king in place, Ma'nu b. Izat, was a brother of the hapless Abgar. His son and namesake was in turn removed by the

<sup>2</sup> As, most recently, M.-L. Chaumont, "La route royale des Parthes de Zeugma à Séleucie du Tigre d'après l'itinéraire d'Isidore de Charax," *Syria* 61 (1984) 63-107, here 77-79.

<sup>3</sup> See M. Gawlikowski, "La route de l'Euphrate d'Isidore à Julien," in P.-L. Gatier, B. Helly, J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds), *Géographie historique au Proche-Orient*, Paris 1988, 76-98, here 81-82.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. H. J. W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, Leiden 1980, 122-145.

<sup>5</sup> P. Briant, *Etat et pasteurs au Moyen-Orient ancien*, Paris - Cambridge 1982, 113-125.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. M. Sartre, *Trois études sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine*, Bruxelles 1982, 123.

<sup>7</sup> P. Dura 20, cf. F. Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 BC - AD 337*, Cambridge, Mass. 1993, 447-448.

<sup>8</sup> While a Lord Ma'nu is attested there by an inscription of a later date, in spite of B. Aggoula, *Inventaire des inscriptions hatréennes*, Paris 1991, n° 288.

Parthians and restored two years later by Lucius Verus while on campaign in Mesopotamia. The reign of his successor Abgar VIII known as the Great is usually dated from 177 to 212, as can be recalculated from the data of Pseudo-Dionysius. However, if we admit that the error of 26 years is systematic in this source, the accession and the end of Abgar should be fixed one year later.<sup>9</sup> Abgar is reputed to have gone into trouble again for having sided with the wrong pretender, but Septimius Severus left nevertheless the city of Edessa to him, while annexing the country around it as the province of Osrhoene.

The extent of the *regnum Abgari* is partly known thanks to two border stones found in Kizilburç 40 km West from Edessa and dated in AD 195 and 205.<sup>10</sup> It is usually said that the kingdom was greatly reduced by Severus.<sup>11</sup> However, the border marked by the Roman governor Pacatianus was very close to Batnae-Suruç, 42 km from Edessa in the same direction. Because Anthemousia had its own ruler in AD 115, it is quite possible, then, that Abgar lost nothing, and the annexation of Osrhoene was conducted at the expense of some other dynasts and cities, such as Carrhae 50 km South from Edessa. The name of the province Osrhoene, though a distortion of Orrhoene, was clearly dissociated in this case from the name of the royal city of Orhai.

Abgar was allowed to take the name of Septimius after the emperor and to mint coins with the portraits of Severus and of himself. He assisted Severus with troops in 197 (Herod. III. 9. 2) and was received later with great honours in Rome. This is not the treatment one would expect Severus to prepare for a former partisan of his enemy. After all, maybe the Orrhoenoi who had besieged the loyal city of Nisibis with the Adiabeniens and the Arabs from Hatra (Dio LXXV. 1. 1) were those annexed subsequently into the new province, while King Abgar himself would manage to keep himself in a more balanced position. At any rate, Severus took after this campaign the titles of Adiabenicus Maximus and Arabicus Maximus, but not one referring to the kingdom of Abgar.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. F. Millar, *The Roman Near East* (see note 7 above), 561.

<sup>10</sup> J. Wagner, "Provincia Osrhoene: New Mesopotamian Finds Illustrating the Military Organisation under the Severan Dynasty," in S. Mitchell (ed.), *Armies and Frontiers in Roman and Byzantine Anatolia*, BAR Int. Series 156, (1983) 103; AE 1984, n° 919-920.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. H. J. W. Drijvers, "Hatra, Palmyra und Edessa. Die Städte der syrisch-mesopotamischen Wüste in politischer, kulturgeschichtlicher und religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung," ANRW II, 8 (1977) 799-906, here 878.

However this may be, there is no proof of the reduction of Abgar's kingdom to the mere "Stadtgebiet". It was possibly just as small as it always had been, before being incorporated into the province by Caracalla. The general Roman policy in Osrhoene did not differ there from that followed in the 1st century toward the petty rulers of Syria. There is no reason to suppose that Abgar has been eventually given back his lost estates,<sup>12</sup> just because a source calls him the king of the Osrhoeni (Dio LXXVIII.12). He never lost them, as long as he was king.

Promoted to the honorific status of *colonia*, Edessa became an integral part of the Roman province until a king Abgar appears there again in the reign of the emperor Gordian (238-244): number of coins portray the emperor and the king together.<sup>13</sup> In the meantime, Edessa was again promoted by Alexander Severus to become a *colonia metropolis*, and the province Osrhoene has melted with the neighbouring province Mesopotamia: a prefect was in charge of both already about 220.<sup>14</sup>

The last of Abgars is also mentioned as Abgar Severus under the emperor Philip, according to the fragment of the chronicle of Jacob of Edessa as quoted by Michael the Syrian. Drijvers supposed here a confusion with Abgar IX Severus, a successor of Abgar the Great, who according to Pseudo-Dionysius was removed from power in his second year by Caracalla, in the Seleucid year 497, that is one year before the end of Abgar the Great as resulting implicitly from the (recalculated) data of the Chronicle. This is clearly a mistake. In the same time, the last king of Edessa in Pseudo-Dionysius is called Ma'nu and said to have reigned after his father Abgar Severus for 26 years. On the other hand, a king Abgar contemporary of Gordian existed in the 240s quite independently of the mention in the somewhat equivocal text of Jacob, as his coins readily show, while there are no coins known of the last Ma'nu.

All this has been cleared up recently, as everybody in this audience knows, thanks to the new Syriac parchments published by Teixidor.<sup>15</sup> The document A (P. Mesop. 19) is dated in December of the Seleucid year 552, being year 3 of Gordian (AD 240) and in the same time year 2

<sup>12</sup> As J. Teixidor, CRAI, janvier-mars 1990, 160.

<sup>13</sup> BMC Mesopotamia, Edessa 136-165, pl. XVI, 7 - XVII, 4.

<sup>14</sup> R. Duncan-Jones, "Praefectus Mesopotamiae et Osrhoenae," CIPh 64 (1969) 229-233.

<sup>15</sup> J. Teixidor, "Les derniers rois d'Edesse d'après deux nouveaux documents syriaques," ZPE 76 (1989) 219-222; "Deux documents syriaques du III<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.-C., provenant du Moyen Euphrate," CRAI, janvier-mars 1990, 144-166; cf. S. Brock, "Some New Syriac Documents from the Third Century AD," *Aram* 3 (1991) 259-267.

of "Aelius Septimius Abgar the king, son of Ma'nu *pšgryb'* son of Abgar the king". The text administers the proof that the Macedonian calendar, with the New Year in the beginning of October, was still in use 540 years after the foundation of Edessa as a Macedonian colony. More importantly, it fixes the accession of Abgar in AD 239 or even earlier in 240, depending on whether the Roman consular year or the Seleucid year will be considered. This corresponds rather neatly to 26 years from the destitution of the dynasty by Caracalla, as much as Pseudo-Dionysius attributed to his king Ma'nu (IX).

It is now clear that Ma'nu was merely the heir apparent, never to rule, but upon his death his son was restored as king. In the year 240 he was honoured with the *ornamenta consularia*, no doubt as *consul suffectus*. This honorific title was bestowed in Rome, and the following phrase "in Orhai, the fortress (*b'rs*, Brock reads *b'ds*, "in Edessa"), great city, metropolis of all the cities of Mesopotamia" describes the seat of his regained kingship and certainly not of the futile consulate. The document giving these details was written "in the palace of New Karkā d-Šīdā of king Abgar", that is at Batnae in Anthemousia, soon to be renamed Markoupolis, the present-day Suruç. This was the place which had apparently its own dynast in the early 2nd century. Abgar was restored to the kingdom that might have been larger than it used to be under his ancestors.

He enjoyed this not for long, though, since he does not appear in the document B of Teixidor (P. Mesop. 20), dated in September 242, which was the "30th year of the liberation of the illustrious colony of Antoniniana Edessa Metropolis Aurelia Alexandria", thus counting from January 1 of AD 213 (or September 212), and not from 214 as held before.

This date ignores entirely the short restoration of the last of the Abgars (this would be his third year). More importantly, it raises doubts about Abgar Severus, the direct successor of Abgar the Great, who would have reigned for a year and seven months. The short reign of Abgar Severus coincides surprisingly well with what we know now of king Aelius Septimius Abgar in AD 240. Could it be, then, that Abgar Severus never existed, and that Caracalla summoned the old king to Rome before annexing Edessa?<sup>16</sup> There are, it is true, coins of Caracalla and of one

<sup>16</sup> As suggested by J. Teixidor, CRAI, janvier-mars 1990, 160; cf. also S. K. Ross, "The Last King of Edessa. New Evidence from the Middle Euphrates," ZPE 97 (1993) 187-206.

Seve[rus], looking rather young,<sup>17</sup> but the heir apparent at the Edessene court was Ma'nu, as reported by Julius Africanus;<sup>18</sup> the title of this prince is *pašgriva* in the local inscriptions. While Jacob of Edessa puts his last Abgar under the emperor Philip, that is several years too late, Pseudo-Dionysius would make him on the contrary 30 years too young. Giving him the surname of Severus instead of Septimius would be a minor inaccuracy indeed.

However, if it were the elusive Abgar Severus whom Caracalla destituted in AD 212, Abgar the Great would have died in 211 after the reign of 35 years starting in 176. This is perfectly possible, and would impose the advancing for one year all reigns from Ma'nu VII, as in my table. The Parthian interlude of Wa'el b. Wa'el would then fall between 162 and 164, suiting much better the facts of Roman history: it would be indeed surprising if Lucius Verus went in 164 to Ctesiphon by the way of Dura while leaving behind a Parthian client in Edessa.

The picture is now therefore as follows. After the long reign of Aelius Septimius Abgar and perhaps of a short-lived successor, the kingdom was incorporated into the province in 212, starting probably the new reckoning on January 1st, 213. The prince Ma'nu waited for his chance in vain for 26 years, until he disappeared in 239. It was eventually his son Aelius Septimius Abgar who was reinstated, as it happened only for a short while. Already in autumn 242 Edessa was again under direct Roman rule as part of the province of Mesopotamia.

The military situation in Mesopotamia at the reinstatement of the last Abgar was extremely precarious. Hatra was under Sassanian siege, to fall in 240, before March 241 at the latest.<sup>19</sup> The neighbouring Carrhae and not very distant Nisibis fell already to the Persians about 238.<sup>20</sup> Edessa remained as the major city East of the Euphrates still in Roman hands, and its fall would mean the loss of the entire province. It is perhaps not surprising that the heir of the local dynasty has been sought after under these circumstances, and made king to hold his city for Rome (and not try to go to the other side). At any rate, Abgar has already disappeared in September 242, perhaps as a result of the arrival of Gordian's Persian

<sup>17</sup> BMC Mesopotamia, p. 96.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. F. Millar, *The Roman Near East* (see note 7 above), 474 s.

<sup>19</sup> A. Heinrichs – L. Koenen, "Ein griechischer Mani-Codex," ZPE 5 (1970) 97-216, here 125-132.

<sup>20</sup> S. K. Ross, "The Last King of Edessa. New Evidence from the Middle Euphrates," ZPE 97 (1993) 187-206, here 196.

expedition earlier that year. He is certainly the same ruler who appears in Jacob of Edessa as Abgar Severus allegedly removed from kingship in 248/249, to be replaced by the governor Aurelianus Ḥafṣai. In fact, the *strategoī* of the colony Edessa in 243 were named Aurelius Abgar b. Ma'nu and Abgar b. Ḥafṣai.

All this sheds new light on a funerary mosaic from Edessa published by Drijvers.<sup>21</sup> This once well-preserved pavement represented a family grouped around a noble figure who is honoured by the undated foundation inscription. The founder Barsimya, seen in the upper left corner behind the shoulder of this distinguished character identified as Abgar b. Ma'nu, has also made his father Ašdu, his mother and his brother to be portrayed in the other three corners of the mosaic, but their tomb is dedicated "for the life of Abgar, my lord and benefactor".

Drijvers has alleged this personage to be no other than king Abgar the Great. To argue his point, he invoked mainly parallels from Hatra, where the local rulers were called "Lords" before they became "Kings of 'Arab". The absence of the royal title has not however been explained. While the proposition met with strong scepticism,<sup>22</sup> it was also wholeheartedly accepted by a more recent author.<sup>23</sup>

It seems to me much more likely to see this figure as the last of the Abgars, son of the prince Ma'nu and grandson of Abgar the Great. It should be noted here that the queen Šalmat, whose statue was set on a column still standing at the citadel of Urfa, was daughter of Ma'nu *pašgriva*, and therefore would be a sister of the Abgar of the mosaic. He has apparently reached already a respectable age, as his greying beard shows, but the kingship was still eluding him. Nevertheless, his social position in Edessa, as no doubt his father's, must have been prominent and he could very well keep a private court and be treated with reverence by his entourage.

Segal has for a moment considered this identity, thinking of Abgar (whom he calls Frahates, after the enigmatic Roman epitaph, CIL VI 1797) already after his deposition, but this appeared to him as "only marginally less unlikely than the identification ... as Abgar the Great".<sup>24</sup> This might be so, but the same son of the crown prince shortly before his

<sup>21</sup> H. J. W. Drijvers, "A Tomb for the Life of a King. A Recently Discovered Edessene Mosaic with a Portrait of King Abgar the Great," *LM* 95 (1982) 167-189.

<sup>22</sup> J. B. Segal, "A Note on a Mosaic from Edessa," *Syria* 60 (1983) 107-110.

<sup>23</sup> F. Millar, *The Roman Near East* (see note 7 above), 473.

<sup>24</sup> Segal, "A Note on a Mosaic from Edessa," *Syria* 60 (1983) 110.

reinstatement makes in my eyes a good candidate for the model of the mosaic. The lord and benefactor of Barsimya still waited for his moment to come and still had his retainers in Edessa.

Abgar VII b. Izat	109-116	// Trajan Sporaces of Anthemousia, Mannos of Arabia
Ialud & Parthaspates, 3 years 10 months	118-122	
Ma'nu VII b. Izat, 16 years	122-138	
Ma'nu VIII b. Ma'nu (Philoromaios), 38 years	138-162 164-176	Wael b. Sahru 162-164
L. Ael. Sept. Abgar VIII b. Ma'nu, 35 years	176-211	// Sept. Severus
Abgar IX Severus b. Abgar, 1 year 7 months	211-212 (?)	annexation by Caracalla Jan. 213
Ma'nu paşgriva, 26 years	213-239	
Ael. Sept. Abgar b. Ma'nu paşgriva b. Abgar malka	239-241 (242 ?)	// Gordian III
Abgar X Severus	allegedly 243-249	same as precedent

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