

OLD AND NEW DISCOVERIES AT PALMYRA

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Christiane Delplace et Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy, *L'agora de Palmyre*, sur la base des travaux de Henri Seyrig, Raymond Duru et Edmond Frézouls, avec la collaboration de Kh. al-As'ad, J.-C. Balty, Th. Fournet, Th.M. Weber et J.-B. Yon. Bordeaux: Institut Ausonius, Ausonius Éditions - Mémoires 14; Beyrouth: Institut français du Proche-Orient - Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 175; 2005, 393pp. ISBN 2-910023-58-3 (Ausonius); 2-35159-000-7 (IFPO).

Andreas Schmidt-Colinet (Hrsg.), *Palmyra. Kulturbegegnung im Grenzbereich*, 3. erweiterte und veränderte Auflage. Sonderbände der Antiken Welt. Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2005, 99pp. ISBN 3-8053-3557-1.

The evocative drawings by Louis-François Cassas, the French artist who visited Palmyra for about a month in late spring 1785, count amongst the most important sources on the preservation of the site in the early modern period, and in particular of the area around the agora.¹ It is therefore appropriate that a view by his hand of the so-called “salle annexe”, a basilica or market directly adjacent to the agora proper, that - though with mistakes as regards proportion of some of the gates and other errors - is notable for its showing “un état de conservation exceptionnel” (p.16), decorates the cover of the major work on the Palmyrene agora by Christiane Delplace et Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy. *L'agora de Palmyre*, published both as a *Mémoire* of the Institut Ausonius and in the *BAH* series of the Institut français du Proche-Orient, is based on the previously unpublished excavation report by Henri Seyrig and Raymond Duru, and the book starts with brief biographical introductions of the “anciens” (p.9). Seyrig was in charge of Near Eastern archaeology under the French mandate and afterwards became the first director of the Institut français d'archéologie de Beyrouth (which in turn became the Institut français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient (IFAPO) in 1977, and was renamed again as the Institut français du Proche-Orient (IFPO) in 2002). He led the excavations of the agora at Palmyra in 1939-40, of the houses behind the temple of Bel in 1940-1, and earlier of course of that temple itself, following the evacuation of the modern village from the temenos in 1929-30. Duru was the architect working with Seyrig, and the original measurements which are used throughout the book are his. With the end of the French protectorate, directly connected to the Second World War, further excavations and publication plans of the agora were first delayed and then discontinued. The third of the “anciens” is Edmond Frézouls, whom Seyrig had initially trusted with the publication of the agora, and who had commenced the study of the Greek and Latin inscriptions from Palmyra in the 1960s. Interrupted only by a two-month campaign in 1965 by the French count Robert du Mesnil du Buisson, who conjectured about the existence of two archaic sanctuaries in the area around the agora (see below), and by a Syrian mission from 1966 to 1968, the long silence as regards the agora is now finally ended by the decision to publish the original archives, complemented with modern commentaries.² No new

¹ They were published in the first of three volumes recording his Levantine illustrations: L-F. Cassas, *Voyage pittoresque de la Syrie, de la Phénicie, de la Palestine, et de la basse Égypte* I-III (Paris, 1799).

² R. du Mesnil du Buisson, ‘Première campagne de fouilles à Palmyre’ in *CRAI* (1966), p.158-87, esp. p.176-7; A. Bounni and N. Saliby, ‘Fouilles de l’annexe de l’agora à Palmyre. Rapport préliminaire’ in

excavations were undertaken and indeed no new measurements were taken, but the editors have aimed to “réintégrer ce secteur monumental dans l'évolution générale de l'urbanisme de la cite antique” (p.10).

The actual description of the agora itself in chapter 2 is based on what must be (following similarities with an article published in 1940³) Seyrig's own manuscript, which was found, with Duru's notes written in the margins, in the archive of the regional archaeological service at Bordeaux, where it had been deposited by the architect's sons after their father's death. The brief presentation of the original excavations (p.23-32) is followed by Seyrig's own notes and budgets for two proposed excavations, and three letters to him written by Duru, and is illustrated with photographs from the IF(A)PO archives in Damascus, some recent ones taken by Delplace and Dentzer-Feydy, and the original drawings by Duru, which are occasionally complemented by Thibaud Fournet, IF(A)PO's architect in more recent times. Soundings revealing four column bases 1.30m below the actual floor level (cf. p.25) suggested that the agora complex was built in an area which had previously been occupied by other structures, possibly (though not necessarily) an earlier agora or a religious edifice. This may seem, at first sight, to fit well with the above-mentioned suggestion by Du Mesnil du Buisson that two 'archaic' sanctuaries had been located in this area, although it must be emphasised that neither can be properly confirmed by the evidence that has consecutively appeared. The count's suggestion was based in the first place on a Greek inscription which he read as a dedication 'to Bol, Isis and Aphrodite, the ancestral gods'.⁴ Bol, generally believed to have been the main god of the oasis before he was turned under Mesopotamian influence into Bel, was somehow 'preserved' in the divine names of Palmyrene gods such as Yarhibol and Aglibol. The bizarre combination of Bol with the goddesses Isis and Aphrodite (who were otherwise absent at Palmyra) has been described by Józef Milik in terms of “une résurgence cultuelle provoquée par le goût d'antiquaire”.⁵ However, as far as our evidence is concerned, Bol was otherwise not worshipped in his own right in the late Hellenistic and Roman period, and, as Javier Teixidor pointed out many years ago, the Greek characters of the inscription could be divided differently, resulting in the following, much more plausible reading of the line: ... Σαμαβωλω και Ἴσιδι και Ἀφροδείτη πατρῶοις θεοῖς. According to Teixidor, Σαμαβωλος is the Greek transcription of the goddess Astarte's epithet 'Name of Bol/Ba'al' (*šm b'l*), attested both at Ugarit and at Sidon, and a joint mention of this deity with Isis and Aphrodite fits well with a Hellenistic inscription from Delos, in which Astarte appears alongside these two other goddesses.⁶ As regards a second 'archaic' sanctuary in this area, there

Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes 18 (1968), p.93-102. For a taster of the present volume, see C. Delplace, 'L'extension urbanistique de Palmyre: de l'agora urbaine au marché suburbain' in M. al-Hayek, M. Maqdissi and M. Abdulkarim (eds.), *Zenobia & Palmyra. Proceedings of the International Conference (19-21 October 2002, Homs and Palmyra)* (Homs: Al-Baath University, [2005]), p.145-64.

³ H. Seyrig, 'Rapport sommaire sur les fouilles de l'agora de Palmyre' in *CRAI* (1940), p.237-49 = id., *Scripta Varia. Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* (Paris, 1985), p.235-48.

⁴ Same reading by J.T. Milik, *Dédicaces faites par des dieux (Palmyre, Hatra, Tyr) et des thiasés sémitiques à l'époque romaine* (Paris, 1972), p.54-5, and followed by the editors (p.17). Cf. Delplace, o.c. (n.2), p.158 n.20.

⁵ Milik, o.c. (n.4), p.55.

⁶ J. Teixidor, *Bulletin d'Épigraphie Sémitique (1964-1980)* (Paris, 1986), p.44, n°26 [originally published in *Syria* (1968), p.360], and id., *The Pantheon of Palmyra* (Leiden, 1979), p.59: "The title would mean that Astarte manifests Baal or makes him known to the faithful." Cf. T. Kaizer, *The Religious Life of Palmyra* (Stuttgart, 2002), p.71 with n.27. For the inscription from Delos, see P. Roussel and M. Launey, *Inscriptions de Délos* 4 [6] (Paris, 1937), n°2132.

must indeed have been a shrine nearby of an enigmatic deity called Rabaseirè', who is known only from the famous tax law, which was set up in the court directly adjacent to the agora. The relevant lines of the inscription record how the tax regulations from AD 137 'must be inscribed with the first law on the stele opposite the temple of (or: which is called) Rabaseirè' (... ἐνγραφῆναι μετὰ τοῦ πρώτου νόμου στήλη λιθίνη τῆ οὔση ἀντικρὺς ἰερ[οῦ] λεγομένου Ραβασείρη ... / ... *wktb 'm nmws' qdmy' bgll' dy lqbl hykl' dy rb'syr'* ...).⁷ It is certainly surprising that there are no further references to this sanctuary which occupied, at least in geographical terms, a central place in Roman Palmyra, and it is not impossible that the explorations in the area south of the wadi, the so-called 'Hellenistic Palmyra' - i.e. the old heart of the town before Palmyra extended to the north with the construction of the central colonnade which dominates the present ruins - will one day reveal another shrine near that of Arsu.⁸ Seyrig's report further includes the hypothesis that part of the portico colonnades were topped with merlons similar to those at the temple of Bel (p.27), a setting in motion of a study of the typology of consoles (which the editors have followed up in a later chapter), and a description of the small building behind the northwest corner of the agora - which had originally been taken to be a temple but is now interpreted by the editors as a *curia* - and the relevant part of the 'wall of Diocletian', initially (and wrongly) designated as the wall of Zenobia, which was constructed partly from agora material⁹ and which has come to decide which sectors of ancient Palmyra would be preserved for posterity and which ones would be lost forever.¹⁰

Chapter 3, written by Delplace with Thibaud Fournet, deals with the three important constructions directly adjacent to the agora, which are believed to have formed a part of the complex at large. Firstly, it is argued that the space which opens to the agora in the northern corner - interpreted by Seyrig as a temple on the basis of benches for ritual dining and a small incense altar - did indeed have banqueting functions, but in its capacity as the "équivalent civil et politique des salles de banquets culturels" (p.118), or - following the suggestion by Jean-Charles Balty - a *curia*.¹¹

⁷ D.R. Hillers and E. Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts* (Baltimore - London, 1996), n°0259 [henceforth *PAT*], lines 10-1 for the Greek and lines 9-10 for the Aramaic.

⁸ The foundations of the temple of Arsu, identifiable as such thanks to an inscribed altar and a number of tesserae, were found in the early 1980s southwest of the agora, just outside the city wall. In any case, the connection between the deity named as Rabaseirè in the tax law and a figure on a cultic niche found in front of the agora (cf. p.307-8), which scholars commonly make and which the editors have naturally followed, is groundless in my opinion. Cf. Kaizer, o.c. (n.6), p.152-3, where a different etymology of the divine name is put forward. In one of Seyrig's budgets, which are attached to the first chapter, the hope is explicitly expressed that the sanctuary could be found: "Monsieur l'Abbé Starcky émet l'hypothèse que peut-être ce temple se trouvait à l'intérieur de la cour et sa cella pourrait alors être la construction du nord" (p.35), the latter a reference to the so-called 'temple' now understood to have been a *curia*.

⁹ "L'on voit notamment avec évidence que la démolition de l'agora n'a pas eu d'autre objet que de fournir les matériaux en question" (p.32).

¹⁰ Not quite forever, though, since a project led by Andreas Schmidt-Colinet, carrying out a geophysical prospection of the area south of the wadi and making a number of soundings, has already increased our knowledge of Hellenistic and early Roman Palmyra and is expected to teach us even more in the coming years. Cf. A. Schmidt-Colinet and Kh. al-As'ad, 'Archaeological news from Hellenistic Palmyra' in *Parthica* 4 (2002), p.157-66, and A. Schmidt-Colinet, 'Recent archaeological research on Hellenistic Palmyra' in al-Hayek, Maqdissi and Abdulkarim, o.c. (n.2), p.97-108.

¹¹ J.-Ch. Balty, *CVRIA ORDINIS. Recherches d'architecture et d'urbanisme antiques sur les curies provinciales du monde romain* (Brussels, 1991), p.50-6, esp. p.52. However, as the authors point out too (p.118), inscriptions dedicated to Palmyra's civic magistrates were not found in or near the small building.

However, Jacques Seigne has recently made some careful considerations on why this building should not be identified too hastily as the place where the local council assembled. He points in particular to the fact that what *seem* to be the carbonised remains of the municipal archives, which were found near the agora, do not necessarily come from this building, as they are “facilement transportables”, but from a separate “maison des archives”, if such a building (*b(y)t 'rk'*) is indeed mentioned in two fragmentary Palmyrenean inscriptions.¹² Secondly, the large rectangular court to the southeast of the agora, commonly referred to as the ‘salle annexe’, is now described as a ‘basilica-market’.¹³ Intended to be excavated in full by Seyrig - as is clear from the budget on p.35 - and explored by the earlier mentioned Syrian mission in the 1960s, the building was much more symmetrical with regard to its gates and windows than the agora proper. According to Delplace and Fournet, it was planned as a Roman-style basilica which only later developed into a market. Assuming that the court, like the agora next door (where small grooves in the columns hint at it) and in the same way as the agora at Dura-Europos is commonly imagined, must have been dotted with numerous “échoppes en toile”, they argue that “nous sommes ici dans un mode d’anciens nomades, au contact de nomades, qui ont sans doute conservé certains modes de vie d’avant la sédentarisation” (p.122). However, I do not think that the use of canvas to protect one’s vegetables and other produce from the sun should necessarily be connected with a ‘nomadic lifestyle’: one only needs to think of the market-stalls in our modern world. The authors of this chapter also put forward the hypothesis that the Palmyrene “basilique-marché” functioned in its earliest phase - along the lines of similar structures elsewhere in the Graeco-Roman world - as a centre for the so-called imperial cult, based “dans une *aedes Augusti* située dans un tribunal hypothétique” (p.123), while a number of Latin inscriptions from the agora dedicated to the Severans suggest the actual agora as its centre later on, “et précisément à une époque où l’agora perd son rôle commercial au profit de la grande colonnade” (p.123).¹⁴ In any case, the tribunal was never actually built in the ‘salle annexe’, but I remain unconvinced by the authors’ reasoning that one of the causes of forsaking the assumed project would have been the “difficulté de réalisation d’un projet trop ‘romain’ dans un monde proche de traditions nomades” (p.121): in my

¹² J. Seigne, ‘Le “sénat” et la “curie” de Palmyre’ in al-Hayek, Maqdissi and Abdulkarim, o.c. (n.2), p.109-30, at p.112-8. The inscriptions are *PAT* 2759-60, and for the formula *byt 'rk'*, see *ibid.*, p.347.

¹³ The basilica interpretation goes back to J.B. Ward-Perkins and M.H. Ballance, ‘The caesareum at Cyrene and the basilica at Cremna’ in *PBSR* 26 (1958), p.137-94, at p.180-2, who were followed by J.-Ch. Balty, o.c. (n.11), p.52. It was Seyrig who first proposed to see the court as a market “où seraient vendus notamment les produits des jardins, des salines, des villages d’alentour: ce serait le *locus publicus, locus ubi congregantur*, où la loi fiscale précise que l’on vendait le sel” (p.121). According to J. Starcky, *Inventaire des inscriptions de Palmyre X* (Damascus 1949), p.4, Seyrig had thought it to be a basilica too. The ‘salle annexe’ was previously also known as the caravanserai or the ‘Tariff court’, after the tax law which was believed to have been set up in here. However, the tax law was located “pratiquement certain” (p.121) in the vestibule that opens to the court from the wadi, probably displayed in such a way that it was “tournée vers l’extérieur et vers ceux qui s’apprêtaient à entrer dans ce grand complexe” (p.122). It goes to show once more that not only was the centre of Palmyra situated in the area south of the wadi (the Hellenistic city) before the construction of the central colonnade, but that it remained there also afterwards, in other words that the central colonnade came to function as an *additional* axis to the civic centre, without replacing the original one completely (contra p.120).

¹⁴ A specific temple that was the *Kaisareion* of Palmyra has never been located with any certainty. For the evidence concerning the ‘imperial cult’ in the city, see Kaizer, o.c. (n.6), p.148-51, and now also C. Delplace, ‘Entre épigraphie et architecture: aspects du culte impérial à Palmyre’ in X. Lafou and G. Sauron (eds.), *Théorie et pratique de l’architecture romaine. Études offertes à Pierre Gros* (Aix-en-Provence, 2005), p.311-9. Cf. *ibid.*, p.315: “c’est dans le complexe de l’agora-basilique-curie qu’était situé le lieu de culte des empereurs.”

view these ‘nomadic traditions’ of the urban centre that was Palmyra are heavily overstated. Thirdly, a small building to the northeast of the ‘salle annexe’ consisted of a peristyle room, a semi-circular banqueting space and a series of so-called ‘boutiques’. The drawings of this building which were found in the Duru archives were unfortunately not accompanied by any sort of excavation report. Traditionally designated as Palmyra’s ‘senate’, the authors of the chapter propose to see it as “un local de réunion des principaux marchands de la ville” (p.125), along the lines of the *scholae* which include semi-circular banqueting rooms elsewhere in the Roman world.¹⁵ In any case, Seigne has recently emphasised that even *if* the semi-circular space was large enough to contain the council of a city the size of Palmyra, any reconstruction of its seats and benches remains completely speculative. With a view towards a group of statues found in this building and interpreted elsewhere in the book as representing the family of Odaenathus (see below), Seigne puts forward the hypothesis that the building was “un bâtiment réservé au ‘culte dynastique’ de la famille d’Odeinat”. With neither the room which opens to the agora nor the building with the semi-circular room being the assembly hall for the βουλή of Palmyra before the middle of the second century AD at the earliest (if at all!), and the large theatre (which borders on the central colonnade northeast of the ‘salle annexe’ and of the building with the semi-circular room) not yet available in the early Roman period either, Seigne rightly poses a question that still needs to find an answer: “où siégeaient les assemblées civiques avant que certains bâtiments, spécifiques ou non, leur soient attribués?”¹⁶ In this context I wonder why one should not postulate a space somewhere in the area now investigated by Andreas Schmidt-Colinet as ‘Hellenistic Palmyra’ (see above, n.10). Finally, the authors remark that - contemporary with the building with the semi-circular room - the city’s urban planners attempted to add a more monumental access to the northeast side of the agora, the side which had of course been of less importance in the earlier period, when the agora’s main opening focussed on ‘pre-central colonnade Palmyra’ south of the wadi. The fact that the gates of the northeast wall were, in contrast to other walls of the agora and of the ‘salle annexe’, divided in an unpoised manner and opening to later added colonnaded streets which were not perpendicular to the agora itself - irregular aspects which are said to show “le caractè ‘bricolé’” (p.125) of the whole complex - reveals the degree in which earlier constructions in this urban sector restricted the adaptation of the agora to the new civic centre that had come to exist north of the wadi with the construction of the central colonnade (p.121).

Chapter four, by Delplace and Jean-Baptiste Yon, deals with the inscriptions from the agora, which were first collected in 1949 by Jean Starcky in the tenth instalment of *Inventaire des inscriptions de Palmyre*, and which will form an integral part of the volume on Palmyra, now in preparation, in the series *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*.¹⁷ The authors have adopted what seems a complicated numbering system, in the first place dividing the inscriptions thematically (as relating

¹⁵ For yet another interpretation, see Balty’s contribution to the volume at p.335.

¹⁶ Seigne, o.c. (n.12), p.118-23. The two quotations are from *ibid.*, p.123. For a discussion of Palmyra’s civic institutions, see M. Sartre, ‘Palmyre, cité grecque’ in *Palmyra and the Silk Road. Annales archéologiques arabes syriennes* 42 (1996), p.385-405. Cf. M. Sommer, *Roms orientalische Steppengrenze: Palmyra - Edessa - Dura-Europos - Hatra. Eine Kulturgeschichte von Pompeius bis Diocletian* (Stuttgart, 2005), p.170-83.

¹⁷ Starcky, o.c. (n.13). The most obscure fragments in Starcky’s collection are not included in this chapter, which is not meant as “un recueil épigraphique au sens strict” (p.151). Texts in Palmyrenean Aramaic, or bilinguals which at least include an Aramaic part, are now also available in *PAT*.

to officers and soldiers from the imperial army; to other representatives of Rome, from the emperor to the tax collector; to local magistrates; to the caravan trade; and to benefactors in general) and within those categories chronologically, in as far as the texts either have an explicit date or can be dated indirectly. The inscriptions are followed by a useful and extensive commentary, and by an appendix listing the inscriptions referred to in the commentary. Only a few general points can be made here. As regards the military, the list of legionary detachments and auxiliary units which were either stationed at the city for longer periods, or simply passed through it, is not only of great value for Roman army studies and for research into the movements of imperial forces in the Near East in particular,¹⁸ but it effectively draws attention to the role (not always sufficiently acknowledged) that military individuals could play in the social and political framework of Palmyra, and is an invitation for future case-studies following the model of Nigel Pollard's work on Dura-Europos.¹⁹ A "fonction de police" (p.220) in the Palmyrene territory and especially between Palmyra and the Parthian realm has of course long been taken for granted with an eye to protecting the caravans of the long-distance trade, which not only gave the city its fortune, but also provided the imperial treasury with taxes imposed on the various luxury goods. It is then not surprising that strong personal relations between officers and Palmyrenes could develop, as was the case when a Marcus Ulpius Yarhai, of one of the city's leading families, dedicated (IA.05) a statue to a Roman who had occupied three equestrian officer positions and had - as the prefect of the first *ala Ulpia* of Palmyrene camel troopers (ἑπαρχον εἰλης πρώτης [Οὐλπί]ας δρομαδαρίων Παλμυρη[νῶν] / [...] 'l' *drmdry*' [...]) - probably been awarded honorary citizenship of Palmyra ([πολείτη]ν τῆς Παλμυρη[ν]ῶν πό[λ]εως), like the C. Vibius Celer (Γ Οὐείβιον Κέλερα), whom the local council and assembly honoured in his capacity as prefect 'of the *ala* which is based here' (ἑπαρχον τῆς ἐνθαδε εἰλης) and who is described (p.236, Annexe n°3) not only as a citizen, but also as a local magistrate (τὸν πολείτην καὶ σύνοδρον). The inscriptions throw light also on the idiosyncratic Palmyrene attempts to express Roman titulature, such as the epitaph for 'the lately mourned son of Fuscus, the commander of the Phoenicians' (Φοινείκων τάγου Φούσκου νεοπενθέα παῖδα), which refers "sous une forme poétique" (p.203) to the governorship of Syria Phoenice, of which Ti. Manilius Fuscus - appearing on milestones as *praeses Syriae Phoenices* - was the first incumbent after Severus' division of the original *provincia* Syria in AD 194.²⁰

As every student of Palmyra knows, a group of second-century inscriptions refer to the 'four tribes of the city' and to what seem to be their respective sanctuaries. The main problems are, firstly, that there are much more than four groupings in Palmyrene inscriptions which have been identified as tribes; secondly, that whereas the 'four tribes of the city' are attested in three texts dating from the later second century (AD 171, 198 and 199), their apparent sanctuaries are listed only in two earlier inscriptions (AD 132 and 144); and, thirdly, that the two latter texts do not actually list the same four sanctuaries, but share only three, with the one from AD 132

¹⁸ On which see now A. Gebhardt, *Imperiale Politik und provinzielle Entwicklung. Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Kaiser, Heer und Städten im Syrien der vorseverischen Zeit* (Berlin, 2002), with p.275-303 on Palmyra and its territory.

¹⁹ N. Pollard, 'The Roman army as 'total institution' in the Near East? Dura-Europos as a case study' in D.L. Kennedy (ed.), *The Roman Army in the East*, *JRA Suppl.* 18 (Portsmouth, RI, 1996), p.211-27. Cf. id., *Soldiers, Cities, & Civilians in Roman Syria* (Ann Arbor, 2000).

²⁰ Cf. F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC - AD 337* (Cambridge, Mass. - London, 1993), p.122.

including the temple of Baal-Shamin/Zeus and the one from AD 144 that of Allat/Athena.²¹ In her discussion, Delplace argues that - in contrast to the preserved “caractère tribal” of the temples, the more civic organization of the ‘four tribes of the city’ itself was merely “éphémère”, emphasising that the fact that the inscriptions date only from the late second century AD makes it rather “gênant” (p.214) to date the establishment of the ‘four tribes’ in Palmyra’s governmental structures to the same period (the first century AD) in which other organizational features typical of the Greek city (such as the βουλή and the δῆμος) first appear in our evidence. As regards the fact that “tantôt le sanctuaire de Baalshamîn, tantôt celui d’Allat” (p.211) is listed alongside the temple of Arsu/Ares, the temple of Atargatis and the so-called Sacred Garden, it is generally assumed that this is because both sanctuaries were jointly managed by the same tribe. But even if this is indeed the case, nothing would halt us from postulating an actual change in civic administration taking place in the years between AD 132 and 144. A sixth inscription usually brought into this discussion, apparently dating from AD 145/6,²² comes from ca twenty km from Palmyra, from a site called Um al-‘Amad. It is of particular relevance because it records how a certain Soados - the same benefactor who was the recipient of statues in the four sanctuaries, supposedly ‘of the four tribes’, in AD 132 and 144 - received four statues ‘in the *tetradeion* of the city’ (ἐν τῷ τετραδεῖῳ τῆς πόλεως). It is clear that this term cannot refer to the tetrapylon which divides two different sections of the central colonnade, not only because that was built much later, but also, as Delplace points out (p.117), as it is hard to see how one man’s image would be placed in the same structure four times. The term could of course denote the agora, as many have thought since Seyrig, but I also like Delplace’s third option, which she bases on the relation with the slightly earlier text from AD 132, honouring Soados with statues in the four above-mentioned sanctuaries including that of Baal-Shamin: namely that the key to an understanding of the term is to appreciate that “τὸ δεῖος est une forme épique de τὸ δέος = la crainte” and that the enigmatic τετραδεῖον is in fact an abbreviation of the whole lot, “la forme synthétique désignant les quatre sanctuaires des quatre tribus” (p.118). Indeed, this would fit well with what I said above about a real change in civic administration: if it was sufficient to refer to the τετραδεῖον if one meant these four specific sanctuaries, it is implied that the audience knew which four were meant *at the time when the inscription was set up*.

As regards the proper ‘caravan inscriptions’, the men honoured are mostly the caravan leaders themselves (συνοδιάρχαι or ἀρχέμποροι), “véritables experts de la piste et de l’organisation caravanière”. Following the classic theory by Ernest Will,²³

²¹ For the dossier, with a different interpretation than that by Delplace, see also Kaizer, o.c. (n.6), p.43-51 and p.60-6. Cf. J.-B. Yon, *Les notables de Palmyre* (Beirut, 2002), p.66-72, and most recently M. Gawlikowski, ‘Palmyra: from a tribal federation to a city’ in K.S. Freyberger, A. Henning and H. von Hesberg (eds.), *Kulturkonflikte im Vorderen Orient an der Wende vom Hellenismus zur römischen Kaiserzeit. Orient-Archäologie* 11 (Rahden, Westf., 2003), p.7-10. In her as yet unpublished thesis, C.S. Finlayson, *Veil, Turban and Headpiece. Funerary Portraits and Female Status at Palmyra* (PhD Iowa, 1998), convincingly analyses women’s headgear on Palmyrene funerary reliefs in terms of clan association. Perhaps more controversially, she also proposes to apply her analysis to locate some of the tribal temples, see ead., ‘The four tribes and four temples of Palmyra’ in *American Journal of Archaeology* 106.2 (2002), p.288 (abstract only).

²² According to the authors (p.210 and p.248), it dates from AD 140/61. I have, however, followed D.G.K. Taylor, ‘An annotated index of dated Palmyrene Aramaic texts’ in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 46 (2001), p.212 (PAT 1062).

²³ E. Will, ‘Marchands et chefs de caravane à Palmyre’ in *Syria* 34 (1957), p.262-77 = id., *De l’Euphrate au Rhin. Aspects de l’hellénisation et de la romanisation du Proche-Orient* (Beirut, 1995),

these “chefs de caravanes” are contrasted with the actual “grand financiers” (p.215), or “patrons” in the words of Yon,²⁴ a category which, however, is never defined in the sources. Delplace points to inscriptions in which Marcus Ulpius Yarhai, himself a συνοδιάρχης, is honoured by other caravan leaders, apparently indicating that he was backing caravans of which he was *not* the leader, and thus - it is argued - had gone from συνοδιάρχης to financier of others’ involvement in the long-distance trade. However, in this regard it may be worth to draw attention to the arguments put forward by Gary Young, who has proposed to revise Will’s scheme by viewing the συνοδιάρχης and the “grand financier”/“patron” as one and the same.²⁵ At the end of the chapter, Yon investigates who the members of the Palmyrene elite who are mentioned in the agora inscriptions actually are, and observes that - in addition to those texts which display a truly civic spirit, with benefactors being honoured by the city’s council and assembly - a large number of inscriptions found at what was considered to be Palmyra’s public place *par excellence* are actually of a rather private character, “comme si des familles utilisaient à leur propre compte l’espace public” (p.226).

I will be only brief about the following four chapters, all of which will no doubt come to stimulate further studies. In chapter 5, Delplace and Dentzer-Feydy follow up Seyrig’s suggestion to study the different types of Palmyrene statue consoles, and to relate those to (especially the dated) inscriptions, thus creating a typology which shows stylistic and chronological links between consoles with the same profile. Putting the evidence from the agora in the wider context of that of the city at large, it is argued that building work of the agora complex started sometime in the last quarter of the first century AD and continued into the first quarter of the second, after which “l’échelonnement chronologique des inscriptions” hints at a main phase, lasting for about a century, until the reign of Caracalla, in which the agora performed its various duties and served as the focal point for the city’s social life, until the relatively sudden lack of third-century inscriptions from this place shows “une forme d’abandon des lieux dans leurs fonctions d’origine” (p.266).²⁶ Chapters 6 to 8, all by Dentzer-Feydy, deal respectively with architectural decorations (showing the relative chronology of the constituent parts of the agora complex); metrology (confirming “le caractère proprement romain” (p.295) of the architectural arrangement at a place where regional units of measure and non-Classical architectural traditions were still very much present in the first century AD); and a catalogue of reliefs, some sculpture and architectural fragments from the site.

In chapter 9, Balty identifies a group of statues and a few heads which were found in the building with the semi-circular room as representations of Odaenathus and his family.²⁷ I find his analysis of the sculpture itself completely convincing: the fact that the statues are all made of marble instead of the more common (for Palmyra)

p.541-56. Cf. J.-B. Yon, ‘Remarques sur une famille caravanière à Palmyre’ in *Syria* 75 (1998), p.153-60.

²⁴ Yon, o.c. (n.21), p.101.

²⁵ G. Young, *Rome’s Eastern Trade. International Commerce and Imperial Policy, 31 BC - AD 305* (London - New York, 2001), p.149-56.

²⁶ Simultaneously, the city expanded towards the north, and recent excavations have discovered a building that originally functioned - it is claimed - as an “agora secondaire”. See Delplace, o.c. (n.2), p.155-6, building on the conclusions of the volume under discussion (p.354).

²⁷ For a taster, see J.-Ch. Balty, ‘Statues et portraits d’Odeinath’ in al-Hayek, Maqdissi and Abdulkarim, o.c. (n.2), p.33-44. The male statues were incorrectly, and without foundation, described as priests in M. Abu-l-Faraj Al-Ush, A. Joundi and B. Zouhdi, *A Concise Guide to the National Museum of Damascus* (Damascus, 1969, repr. 1980), p.118, n^{os}2+5.

limestone, and especially their “modèles iconographiques occidentaux” (p.334) - the two male figures both wear a Roman toga, one of them identified by the *clavus* as a senator, while the other carried now lost *imagines* of his ancestors; the female figures are even more divergent from the typically Palmyrene presentation of upper class women - in combination with a local ‘touch’ in the form of a Palmyrene incense altar alongside one of the males, can only be explained as a “splendide exemple d’acculturation et d’auto-représentation triomphante” (p.335) on the part of what was the only leading family of Palmyra in the mid-third century for which evidence suggests a meteoric rise to the senatorial class of the Roman empire, namely that of Odaenathus, “fier de sa citoyenneté romaine et pour affirmer l’ancienneté et la distinction de sa famille en regard des autres familles de l’oasis” (p.337). In addition to these statues, Balty also discusses a marble head, known only from photographs in the IF(A)PO archives from the agora excavations. Heavily damaged, it portrays a bearded man whose rather bizarre turban must be the lower part of a typically Oriental crown of which the upper part - stuck by an iron pin into the still visible hole on top of the head - rested on the sculpture’s flat circular surface. Balty draws a comparison with royal headgear worn by various kings and princes throughout the Near East, and points to a parallel from Palmyra itself: a lead medal, published by Seyrig in 1937, showing Odaenathus’ unbearded son Herodian, identified as king (Ἡρωδιανὸς ὁ βασιλεύς), wearing a similar conical tiara, decorated with some sort of crest [PLATE I].²⁸ It is of course well-known that the Palmyrene dynasty assumed the Persian title King of Kings (*mlk mlk’*, e.g. *PAT* 0292) alongside a number of Roman honorific titles and positions:²⁹ even if unequivocal evidence for Odaenathus himself appears only after his death, it is hard to imagine that Herodian could have been called King of Kings without his father receiving the title at the very least at the same time.³⁰ With regard to the headgear of the Palmyrene King of Kings, it is worth quoting the fragmentary Greek inscription on the monumental arch at Palmyra [PLATE II], recently revisited by Michał Gawlikowski, who ingeniously improved the reading as follows:³¹

[Β]ασιλεῖ βασιλέων πρὸς [Ορ]όντη [μίτρα τῆς βα]σιλείας τὴν κατὰ
 [Π]ε[ρ]σῶν νείκην ἀναδησαμένω Σεπ[τιμίω] Ἡρωδιανῶ Ἰούλιος Αὐρήλιος
 [Σεπτί]μιος Ο[ὕ]ο[ρ]ώδης [ἐπίτροπος δουκηνάριος καὶ Ἰούλιος Αὐρήλι]ος
 Ἐ[ρ]μῆς κεντηνάριος ἀμφότεροι στρα[τηγοὶ τῆς λαμ]προτάτης
 [κ]ολων[ε]ίας τοῦ α/δο[φ’ ἔτους]

²⁸ H. Seyrig, ‘Note sur Hérodién, prince de Palmyre’ in *Syria* 18 (1937), p.1-4, with pl.VI.1 = id., *Antiquités syriennes* II (Paris, 1938), p.42-5.

²⁹ See now, above all, the study by T. Gnoli, *The Interplay of Roman and Iranian Titles in the Roman East (1st-3rd Century A.D.)* (Vienna, 2007), esp. p.81-94.

³⁰ But see Millar, o.c. (n.20), p.170.

³¹ M. Gawlikowski, ‘Odainat et Hérodién, rois des rois’ in J.-B. Yon and P.-L. Gatier (eds.), *Mélanges en l’honneur de Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais. Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* 60 (2007), p.289-311, at p.295. The inscription was first published by J.-B. Chabot, ‘Notes d’épigraphie et d’archéologie orientale III. Nouvelles inscriptions inédites de Palmyre’ in *Journal asiatique* 12 (1898), p.96-97, n°28. Cf. *IGR* III.1032; J. Cantineau, *Inventaire des inscriptions de Palmyre* III (Beirut, 1937), n°3; Seyrig, o.c. (n.28); D. Schlumberger, ‘L’inscription d’Hérodién. Remarques sur l’histoire des princes de Palmyre’ in *Bulletin d’Études Orientales* 9 (1942-3), p.35-50; Gnoli, o.c. (n.29), p.82-8. The photograph is from Kh. As’ad and J.-B. Yon, *Inscriptions de Palmyre. Promenades épigraphiques dans la ville antique de Palmyre* (Beirut - Damascus - Amman, 2001), p.49, n°11.

Although the general meaning of the text is captured by most historians referring to it, namely that the crowning as King of Kings took place ‘near the Orontes’ - usually taken as a reference to the surroundings of Antioch - following a victory over the neo-Persian Sasanids, both the dating of the event and the precise formulation of it are more difficult to grasp.³² In his commentary to line 1 of the inscription, Gawlikowski writes: “Je supplée pour ma part μίτρα à titre d’exemple seulement, mais on peut proposer aussi στεφάνω, puisque Seyrig voyait de la place dans la lacune pour dix lettres avant βα]σιλείας, alors que la restitution avec μίτρα n’en comporte que sept.”³³ Gawlikowski must certainly be right to look for a specific object with which the King of Kings was actually crowned. However, the photograph of the inscription does not convince me that there is no space available for a slightly longer restitution, and I therefore propose to read διαδήματι, from the word used in Greek for the band worn by the Persian kings around their tiara - an aspect which is important with a view towards Gawlikowski’s convincing argument that Odaenathus’ assumption of the royal title did not reflect the founding of a ‘new’ kingdom of Palmyra, of the Orontes valley or of the whole of Syria, but “ne traduit rien de moins que l’aspiration au trône de Sapor!”³⁴ Taking into account that the inscription uses the verb ἀναδέω, it seems more suitable to fill the lacuna with something that can actually be *tied*, such as a στέφανος or a διάδημα. If the object is instead a ‘crown’, one would have expected the verb (ἀνα)λαμβάνω, ‘to take over’, *vel sim*. However, the verb ἀναδέω is used in combination with the Ionic form of μίτρα - though not in a royal context - by Herodotus in his characterization of the Babylonians (I.195): κομῶντες δὲ τὰς κεφαλὰς μίτροησι ἀναδέονται. In any case, it is the *diadema* that is, at least from Alexander, the symbol of royalty,³⁵ although the only linguistic parallels, of someone being *tied* with a *diadema* (ἀναδέω διαδήματι) as a sign of coronation, that I am aware of relate to the abortive efforts by Antony to have Caesar crowned as king (Plut., *Caes.* 61.8; Dio 44.9.2 and 44.11.2), and not to the Persian ceremony.³⁶ Another possible reading would be the dative of κίταρις (or κίδαρις), κίταρει, but this may be too far-fetched, since the *kitaris* (which like the *tiara* consisted of both a

³² E.g. M. Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome* (Cambridge, Mass. - London, 2005), p.353, who translates ‘to the King of Kings, having attained the royal title near the Orontes, crowned by victory over the Persians, Septimius Herodianus, etc. ...’, and hesitates between AD 252 and 259/60; Cf. U. Hartmann, *Das palmyrenische Teilreich* (Stuttgart, 2001), p.162-85, esp. p.176 (AD 263); D.S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180-395* (London - New York, 2004), p.259 (AD 262). Gawlikowski, o.c. (n.31), settles for the winter of AD 259/60 - following the arguments put forward by L. de Blois, ‘Odaenathus and the Roman-Persian war of 252-264 A.D.’ in *Talanta* 6 (1975), p.7-23 - and dates the inscription to either 259/60 or (depending on a different reading of the numerals) 262/3.

³³ Gawlikowski, o.c. (n.31), p.295.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.307. On the role of the *diadema* in Persian royal ideology see e.g. Plutarch, *Moralia* 173C. For what follows, I am heavily indebted to Margherita Facella and Wouter Henkelman for discussions and references.

³⁵ H.-W. Ritter, *Diadem und Königsherrschaft. Untersuchungen zu Zeremonien und Rechtsgrundlagen des Herrschaftsantritts bei den Persern, bei Alexander dem Großen und im Hellenismus* (Munich, 1965), esp. p.12-3; R.R.R. Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (Oxford, 1988), p.34-8. Cf. P. Calmeyer, ‘Zur Genese altiranischer Motive IV - »Persönliche Krone« und Diadem’ in *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* n.s. 9 (1976), p.45-63.

³⁶ Note how a passage in the *Historia Augusta*, referring to Zenobia’s accepting of the diadem, relates to the Roman position of supreme power, not the Persian one, SHA, *trig.tyr.* 30.2: ... *post Odaenathum maritum imperiali sagulo perfuso per umeros, habitu Didonis ornata, diademate etiam accepto, nomine filiorum Herenniani et Timolai diutius quam femineus sexus patiebatur imperavit.*

crown and a *diadèma*) is according to inscriptions from Commagene specifically applied to the Armenian tiara, which the Commagenian king Antiochus I imitated from Tigranes.³⁷

The remaining part of Balty's chapter, ingenious as it is, works less well as far as I am concerned. In short, he comes to blows with a classic paper by Gawlikowski from 1985, followed ever since, in which the family tree of the Palmyrene dynasty was 'cleaned up'.³⁸ Balty now proposes to return to the old view that the Septimius Odaenathus who founded a family tomb (*PAT* 0558) - and who must in his view have been the one who first received Roman citizenship under Severus - was different from Zenobia's husband. Though it is clear that the *gentilicium* Septimius goes back ca two generations before the famous Odaenathus, I do not agree with Balty's further arguments - although he rightly draws attention to the fact that the discovery of one new inscription can alter the whole picture. Firstly, he puts too much weight on the characterization of Odaenathus by the late-5th/early-6th Greek historian Zosimus as an ἄνδρα Παλμυρηνὸν καὶ ἐκ προγόνων τῆς παρὰ τῶν βασιλέων ἀξιοθέντα τιμῆς (I.39). Zosimus can hardly be taken as faithfully recording the social and political particulars of third-century Syria, and in addition Balty's rendering of the phrase as "[ce] Palmyrénien honoré par les empereurs comme l'avaient été ses ancêtres" (p.336) - which he puts forward against the Budé's translation (by F. Paschoud in 1971) as 'un Palmyrénien que les empereurs avaient jugé digne d'honneurs à cause de ses ancêtres' - is merely one possibility amongst others, and as far as I am concerned not the most convincing one.³⁹ Secondly, if Balty's hypothesis - that the *gentilicium* was first awarded by Severus in recognition of support received in the civil war against Pescennius Niger - is correct, that does not make the recipient of that honour identical with the Odaenathus who founded his family tomb. According to Balty it is hard to see how the famous Odaenathus would have stuck to the stereotypical formula encountered at nearly all Palmyrene funerary monuments. However, the foundation of the tomb (whose inscription is undated) seems to have occurred at a time when Odaenathus had not yet reached the pinnacle of his career, and any other way of setting up a family tomb in one of the necropoleis of the oasis, which were governed by extremely strong local traditions, would have been conceived as utterly preposterous. Indeed, the fact that the foundation inscription is undated can be used as an argument in favour of the famous Odaenathus: there is a certain arrogance in leaving your inscription undated while referring to yourself as ὁ

³⁷ See the inscription from Sofraz Köy (SO), on the side of a *dexiosis* relief showing Antiochus (wearing the tiara) and Apollo, 1.5-6: πρῶτος ἀναλαβὼν τὴν κίταριν. The text is now republished by C. Crowther and M. Facella, 'New evidence for the ruler cult of Antiochus of Commagene from Zeugma' in G. Heedemann and E. Winter (eds.), *Neue Forschungen zur Religionsgeschichte Kleinasien. Asia Minor Studien* 49 (Bonn, 2003), p.71-4, with Taf.9. Cf. M. Facella, *La dinastia degli Orontidi nella Commagene ellenistico-romana. Studi Ellenistici* 17 (Pisa, 2006), p.228.

³⁸ M. Gawlikowski, 'Les princes de Palmyre' in *Syria* 62 (1985), p.251-61. E.g. Sartre, o.c. (n.32), p.352: "This simple solution has the advantage of accounting unproblematically for all the documentation currently available."

³⁹ For other, sometimes loose translations, seemingly supporting Balty's case, see that by R.T. Ridley (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1982): 'Odaenathus, the Palmyrene, a man highly esteemed because of the honour the emperors had shown to his ancestors'; and by S. Lieu, in M.H. Dodgeon and S.N.C. Lieu (eds.), *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, AD 226-363. A Documentary History* (London - New York, 1991), p.75: 'Odaenathus of Palmyra, a person whose ancestors had always been highly respected by the emperors'. However, as my colleague Luke Pitcher kindly confirms, καὶ might equally be a simple copulative conjunction here, as well as "un adverbe qui modifie ἐκ προγόνων" (p.336 n.76).

λαμπρότατος συνκλητ[ικός]/s(n)qltyq': it implies that the audience knew anyway when the event had happened. Thirdly, the point that the Septimius Hairan who is named as ἔξα[ρχον Παλμυ]ρηνῶν/rš tdmwr in AD 251 (and who - following Gawlikowski and most others - was identical with Herodian) cannot have been the son of the famous Odaenathus "car l'on imagine mal que cette charge ait été dédoublée et, encore moins, que le fils l'ait exercée avant son père" (p.337), can be refuted by comparison with the honour Odaenathus and Herodian apparently shared when they both were crowned as King of Kings (indeed much more of a contradiction in terms than the presence of multiple 'heads of the Palmyrenes').⁴⁰ Balty's chapter is followed by a brief description of a piece of sculpture in an appendix by Thomas Weber, and the book is closed by the authors' conclusions, a bibliography and an Arabic summary.

The continuing discussions emanating from discoveries old and new find reflection also in the second book: the volume on Palmyra edited by Andreas Schmidt-Colinet as a Sonderband of *Antike Welt*, which was first published in 1995, then in a slightly revised version in 1997, and which has now received a third edition. Some new images have been added, the bibliography is updated, and the Japanese mission in the southeast necropolis is introduced.⁴¹ But the main addition to the latest impression is the presentation by Michał Gawlikowski of a new mosaic, which was discovered in a banqueting room just behind the central colonnade in May 2003 ('Der Neufund eines Mosaiks in Palmyra', p.29-31).⁴² In the middle of a symmetrically divided floor, showing animals and fruits, are the two main images, themselves surrounded by a luxuriant frame. Both style and archaeological context suggest a dating from the second half of the third century AD, which would make it contemporaneous with the only two previously known mosaics from the city. The latter (found in the houses behind the temple of Bel, which Seyrig excavated during the same mission as the agora) depict scenes known from Greek mythology in a similar style as other Classical mosaics from the Near East, such as those from Antioch, Zeugma and Shahba-Philippopolis, with the main characters identified by Greek inscriptions. But whereas one of them depicts the discovery by Odysseus and Diomedes of Achilles on Scyros, among the daughters of king Lycomedes (a theme which is present in Palmyra once more, on a fresco in a hypogeum⁴³), the other has an interesting twist on the well-known story (Apollod. *Bibl.* II.4.3) of Cassiopeia: as on slightly later mosaics discovered at Apamea and at New Paphos on Cyprus, at

⁴⁰ Note that at Hatra, before the installation of kingship, multiple 'lords' were active in the city. Cf. Sommer, o.c. (n.16), p.368-76. The fact that Hairan is the first to be attested as ἔξαρχος in AD 251 (PAT 0290) can simply be attributed to "le hasard des découvertes", thus Gawlikowski, o.c. (n.31), p.292. Odaenathus himself is designated as such in an inscription from AD 252 (PAT 2815).

⁴¹ Cf. T. Higuchi and T. Izumi (eds.), *Tombs A and C: Southeast Necropolis Palmyra, Syria, Surveyed in 1990-92* (Nara, 1994) and T. Higuchi and K. Saito (eds.), *Tomb F - Tomb of BWLH and BWRP - Southeast Necropolis, Palmyra, Syria* (Nara, 2001)

⁴² The mosaic had been presented briefly by Gawlikowski in two volumes of *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 14 (2003), p.288ff, and 15 (2004), p.313ff, and images were made available in *Current World Archaeology* 12 (2005), p.26-32. In the meantime, a shelter has been designed to preserve the mosaic, see *PAM* 16 (2005), p.462-3. A proper study of the find, by Gawlikowski in the proceedings of a colloquium on *Hama and the Orontes*, held in 2003, is announced in the new edition of the Sonderband of *Antike Welt* (p.94 n.30). See now, however, M. Gawlikowski, 'L'apothéose d'Odeinat sur une mosaïque récemment découverte à Palmyre' in *CRAI* 2005, p.1293-1303, a reference I owe to Tommaso Gnoli.

⁴³ C.H. Kraeling, 'Color photographs of the paintings in the tomb of the three brothers at Palmyra' in *AAS* 11-12 (1961/62), pl.II-III (top) and XIII. Cf. T. Kaizer, 'Funerary cults at Palmyra' in O. Hekster and S. Mols (eds.), *Cultural Messages. BABesch Anniversary Supplement* (Leiden, forthcoming).

Palmyra Cassiopeia is the victress in her beauty contest with the Nereids.⁴⁴ According to a recent paper by Janine Balty, building upon the neo-Platonic interpretation of the mosaic which she first put forward some years ago, the victory of this Cassiopeia (etymologically linked to the toponymic deity of Mt. Kasios) stands for the victory of the cosmic order over the chaos of the aquatic powers. The god standing in the mosaic's middle circle is not the Poseidon known from Classical mythology, who sent a sea-monster in revenge of Cassiopeia's slight of the Nereids (with due consequences for Cassiopeia's daughter Andromeda), but a Near Eastern Poseidon, who is much more of a supreme deity.⁴⁵ It makes the mosaic a unique mixture between Oriental cosmological conceptions and the neo-Platonic theory of the transmigration of the souls, which according to Balty could only have come into existence in the local circumstances of Palmyra, where - under the aegis of the intellectual openness of Zenobia - the philosopher Longinus spent the last years of his life.⁴⁶

The newly unearthed mosaic equally brings together elements from west and east, but in a different manner. It uses Classical imagery, combined with local iconographic detail, in an allegorical manner to comment on contemporary events in the third century. On the first of the two main images (PLATE III), Bellerophon is slaying the chimaera, the mythical monster which, following its famous description in the *Iliad* (6.179-82), was composed of lion in front, snake behind, and she-goat in the middle - though the animal on the mosaic has heads of all three animals sticking out of its body - and, following post-Homeric mythology, the hero is helped by the winged horse Pegasus. Two eagles fly above him carrying a wreath. Although the general outline of the mosaic is very classical, Bellerophon is portrayed wearing eastern clothes with trousers. The second central image (PLATE IV) seems at first sight to depict an innocent hunting scene, with the horseman, again dressed in so-called Parthian trousers, engaged in a fight with Persian tigers. He aims his bow and arrow at the one which is raised on his back feet. Again, an eagle is flying above him carrying a wreath. The accompanying inscription, which is, uniquely, in the local Aramaic dialect known as Palmyrenean, and evocative of the well-known Syriac mosaic inscriptions from Edessa,⁴⁷ refers to the artist who has laid the mosaic.⁴⁸ But

⁴⁴ Although discovered already in 1939-1940, thus simultaneous with the agora excavations, those two remained unpublished until the late seventies. Cf. H. Stern, *Les mosaïques des maisons d'Achille et de Cassiopée à Palmyre* (Paris, 1977). On the Near Eastern mosaics depicting a different story of Cassiopeia, see J.-Ch. Balty, 'Une version orientale méconnue du mythe de Cassiopée' in L. Kahil and C. Augé (eds.), *Mythologie gréco-romaine, mythologies périphériques. Études d'iconographie* (Paris, 1981), p.95-106; G.W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 1990), p.50-1, with pl.3-4.

⁴⁵ A bilingual inscription from AD 39 from Palmyra explicitly identifies Poseidon with Elqonera, 'El the creator' ('*lqwnr*'), see *PAT* 2779. On the Levantine Poseidon in general, see J. Teixidor, *The Pagan God. Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Near East* (Princeton, NJ, 1977), p.42-6. Not surprisingly, then, at New Paphos Poseidon's place on the mosaic has been taken over by Aion, the divine personification standing for the permanence of the cosmos.

⁴⁶ J. Balty, 'Composantes classiques et orientales dans les mosaïques de Palmyre' in *Palmyra and the Silk Road. Annales archéologiques arabes syriennes* 42 (1996), p.407-16, and now ead., 'Zénobie et le néoplatonisme' in al-Hayek, Maqdissi and Abdulkarim, o.c. (n.2), p.45-57. She also proposes a specific date for the development of the idea: the death of Plotinus in ca AD 270. From Palmyra - it is argued - the idea was then later copied at New Paphos and at Apamea.

⁴⁷ For some recent finds, see G.W. Bowersock, *Mosaics as History. The Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam* (Cambridge, Mass. - London, 2006), p.36-8 with fig.2.4 (a depiction of the creation of mankind by Prometheus, with the attending gods identified in Syriac), and the linguistic analysis of an inscription accompanying a depiction of Orpheus, by J.F. Healey, 'A new Syriac mosaic inscription' in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 51 (2006), p.313-27.

⁴⁸ Following Gawlikowski, o.c. (n.42), p.1300: *dydʿts 'bd psp̄s d'hw wbnwhy*, 'Diodotos has made this floor, he and his sons', introducing a new Palmyrenean word in *psps*, a transcription from the Greek

apparently there is more here than meets the eye, and the inscription is believed to be a later correction to an earlier text, which included the word for ‘lord’ (*mr[n]*), a title used in third-century Palmyra for Odaenathus and his son Hairan-Herodian (Herodes according to SHA *Tyr. Trig.* 16.1).⁴⁹ The seemingly innocent hunting scene is then, following Gawlikowski’s argument, an allegory for the victory which the Palmyrene leader won over the Persians, and which earned him and his son, as we have seen above, the Persian title ‘King of Kings’. At least two out of the three known mosaics from Palmyra therefore show a uniquely local mix between influences from west and east, so that even this most Classical of art forms, like the inscriptions, sculpture and architecture, draws attention to the city’s individualism in a world dominated by the Roman and Parthian superpowers.

PLATE I

Lead medal of Herodian as king, wearing conical tiara. After H. Seyrig, ‘Note sur Hérodien, prince de Palmyre’ in *Syria* 18 (1937), pl.VI.1.

PLATE II

Greek inscription on the arch at Palmyra. After Kh. As’ad and J.-B. Yon, *Inscriptions de Palmyre. Promenades épigraphiques dans la ville antique de Palmyre* (Beirut - Damascus - Amman, 2001), p.49, n°11.

PLATE III

New mosaic from Palmyra; image of Bellerophon on Pegasus fighting the chimaera.

PLATE IV

New mosaic from Palmyra; image of hunting scene with Persian tigers.

ψηφίς. Cf. J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions II* (Leiden, 1995), p.923, s.v. *ψφ*.

⁴⁹ Thus E. Villeneuve, ‘Dernière découverte à Palmyre’ in *Le Monde de la Bible* 159 (2004), p.52, based on Gawlikowski’s analysis, and now Gawlikowski, o.c. (n.42), p.1300-1.