

DURA-EUROPOS UNDER ROMAN RULE*

Ted Kaizer (Durham)

Some of the anecdotes about Trajan's Near Eastern campaigns, as they are recorded in the epitome of book 68 of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, are very well known. Abgar, king of Edessa, 'induced partly by the persuasions of his son Arbandes, who was handsome and in the pride of youth and therefore in favour with Trajan', went to meet the emperor during his travels and then 'entertained him at a banquet; and during the dinner he brought in his boy to perform some barbaric dance or other'. In the north-Mesopotamian Jazirah steppe, Trajan failed to capture Hatra, a city that found itself under the protection of the Sun god and which was said to be 'neither large nor prosperous, and the surrounding country is mostly desert and has neither water (save a small amount and that poor in quality) nor timber nor fodder.' And perhaps most famous is the scene of a day-dreaming emperor at the Persian Gulf: 'Then he came to the ocean itself, and when he had learned its nature and had seen a ship sailing to India, he said: "I should certainly have crossed over to the Indi, too, if I were still young."' For he began to think about the Indi and was curious about their affairs, and he counted Alexander a lucky man.¹ The brief interlude of Roman control over Dura-Europos around this time, not covered in any literary source, seems to have been only a minor episode in the campaign. It certainly concerned a 'brief interlude' as far as Dura-Europos was concerned, since this small town on the west bank of the Euphrates river was soon to return to form part of the Parthian world once again, as it had done since the late second century BC. But in the context of Rome's "push down the valley of the Euphrates",² at least 60 km south of its conflation with the Chabur,

* I am very grateful to Elena Muñiz Grijalvo for inviting me to the conference on 'Ruling through Greek eyes', and to both her and Fernando Lozano Gomez for the wonderful hospitality in Sevilla.

Abbreviations used:

<i>PAT</i>	D.R. Hillers and E. Cussini, <i>Palmyrene Aramaic Texts</i> (Baltimore - London, 1996)
<i>P.Dura</i>	C.B. Welles, R. Fink and J. Gilliam, <i>The Parchments and Papyri. The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report V.1</i> (New Haven, 1959)
<i>P.Euphr.</i>	D. Feissel and J. Gascou, 'Documents d'archives romains inédits du Moyen Euphrate (III ^e s. après J.-C.)' in <i>Journal des Savants</i> (1995), pp.65-119; (1997), pp.3-57 (with J. Teixidor); (2000), pp.157-208
<i>Rep. I, II, etc.</i>	M. Rostovtzeff e.a. (eds.), <i>The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters. Preliminary Reports I-IX</i> (New Haven, 1929-1952)

¹ Dio 68.21.2-3; 68.31.1-2; and 68.29.1 respectively (translation LCL).

² F.A. Lepper, *Trajan's Parthian War* (London, 1948), p.103.

archaeological remains and documentary evidence from Dura-Europos replace literary sources as a reflection of Rome's rule over what was - at that time - the most remote section of the Greek half of its empire. Nearly two km northwest of the town, a detachment of the *Legio III Cyrenaica* built an arch in honour of its emperor, an event which must have pre-dated February 116, since Trajan is not yet styled 'Parthicus' on the accompanying inscription.³ This probably means that these troops had spent the winter of 115/116 at the site, or in any case long enough to plan the victory monument and to erect it. Dura-Europos reverted to Parthian control either in the context of Hadrian's evacuation of Trajan's newly acquired territories on his accession in August 117, or at an earlier stage, possibly even with the blessing of Trajan himself.⁴ In any case, an inscription from the year 428 of the Seleucid era (which ran from October 116 to September 117) records how a certain Alexander, son of Epinicus, restored an otherwise undefined temple, following pillaging by Roman soldiers. He specifies how he had added five cubits to the front of the structure, and then states: 'the original doors were taken away by the Romans, and after their departure from the city I made anew other doors for the same *naos* at my own expense, and outer doors also' (τὰ δὲ θυρώματα ἀρχαῖα λημφθέντα ὑπὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων, μετὰ δὲ τὴν αὐτῶν ἔνθεν ἀποχώρησιν ἐγ δευτέρου ἐποιησάμην ἐπ' ἑμαυτοῦ ἄλλα θυρώ[μα]τα τῷ αὐτῷ ναῷ καὶ ἐξωτέρως).⁵ Partly this may of course have been real piety, but it will also have been related to the fact that it was his father, Epinicus, who had been responsible for the sanctuary in the first instance, as is known both from this and from an earlier inscription.⁶ In any case, this inscription which was set up in the aftermath of the Roman departure from the site remains the most explicit value judgement by the locals on the effects of Roman presence at Dura-Europos.

Within fifty years, by AD 165, the Romans were back at Dura-Europos, and this time for good, or at least for as long as the town continued to exist. It was

³ See *Rep.* IV, pp.3-4, and for the inscription *ibid.*, pp.56-65, n°167, and *Rep.* VI, pp.480-482.

⁴ F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC - AD 337* (Cambridge, Mass. - London, 1993), p.102: "The evacuation need have no connection with Hadrian's abandonment of the provinces of Mesopotamia and Armenia." See the references to the debate in M. Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos and its Art* (Oxford, 1938), pp.139-140, n.12, and the reaction by Lepper, *o.c.* (n.2), pp.148-150.

⁵ *Rep.* VII-VIII, pp.129-130, n°868.

⁶ For the building inscription of Alexander's father Epinicus, see *Rep.* VII-VIII, pp.128-129, n°867. One of the inscriptions was found at the mithraeum, the other one nearby.

captured by the neo-Persians around 256⁷ and subsequently abandoned, as is illustrated by two loose remarks in Ammianus Marcellinus (23.5.8 and 24.1.5). The main focus of this paper will therefore be on the final century of the town's history. Indeed, much of the best evidence for Dura-Europos dates from this period between AD 165 and 256, even if none of it is quite as outspoken as the inscription from Alexander son of Epinicus quoted above. Within Dura's Roman period it is especially the years between AD 208 and 217 that are covered by datable inscriptions, which is at least partly because of a major surge in construction activities on the part of the military. In contrast, there are basically no sources to attest actual changes made in the way Dura-Europos was run for the first forty years of Roman control over the town, despite the presence of regular auxiliary units at least since the reign of Commodus. For example, the key position within the town, that of *stratègos kai epistatès tès poleôs*, which is first attested in the Parthian period, continues to exist until the late second century AD - with one of the latest attestations a Latin transcription, *str(ategus) Dur(ae)*.⁸ Founded as the Macedonian colony Europos in the early Hellenistic period, the town had maintained its Greek public appearance throughout the centuries in which it was officially part of the Parthian realm, i.e. from the late second century BC until AD 165. As Fergus Millar has emphasised on more than one occasion, in all those years "Dura remained in a real sense a Greek city."⁹ It is only in a series of parchments, typically written in Greek, and dating between AD 80 and 160, that the dating formula reveals that Dura-Europos was a 'Parthian' town as far as the political context is concerned: 'as the King of Kings reckons' (ὡς ὁ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων ἄγει) is set in contrast to the Seleucid era, which is explicitly called the 'former' era in those documents (ὡς δὲ πρότερον, or in later parchments κατὰ δὲ τὸν πρότερον ἀριθμὸν).¹⁰

With Rome's renewed and final arrival at the Euphrates fortress in AD 165, the general dominance - as known from the Parthian period - of Greek in public

⁷ For discussion, see S. James, 'Dura-Europos and the chronology of Syria in the 250s AD' in *Chiron* 15 (1985), pp.111-124.

⁸ The earliest attestation of the office is possibly 33/2 BC, certainly AD 51/2. See the discussion with list of relevant inscriptions in R.N. Frye, J.F. Gilliam, H. Ingholt and C.B. Welles, 'Inscriptions from Dura-Europos' in *YCS* 14 (1955), pp.123-213, at pp.140-142, with Millar, *o.c.* (n.4), p.447.

⁹ F. Millar, 'Dura-Europos under Parthian rule' in J. Wiesehöfer (ed.), *Das Partherreich und seine Zeugnisse* (Stuttgart, 1998), p.478 = id., *The Greek World, the Jews, & the East. Rome, the Greek World, and the East* 3, eds. H.M. Cotton and G.M. Rogers (Chapel Hill, 2006), p.415. Cf. id., *o.c.* (n.4), pp.445-452.

¹⁰ *P.Dura* 18-20, 22 and 24.

inscriptions remains unchanged. ‘Palmyrenean’, the Aramaic dialect from nearby Palmyra, continues to be the only other widely used public language in the Roman period.¹¹ Latin, now entering the picture, is generally believed to have played a role almost solely within the military sphere, and modern understanding of the limited extent to which Latin was used in the town’s daily life depends largely on the common interpretation of the famous *Feriale Duranum*. Written in Latin and dated to the reign of Alexander Severus, this unique document lists a series of festivals and sacrifices to be observed over the year. The gods and ritual occasions mentioned are all ‘hard-core’ Roman: there is no reflection of the local religious life of Dura-Europos, nor of any other indigenous cults, nor of mystery cults. The *Feriale Duranum* is traditionally interpreted, since its discovery in 1932, as a Roman military calendar.¹² However, a provocative and intriguing interpretation which was recently put forward by Barbara Reeves would throw a different light on the matter.¹³ She argued that all the extant entries in the calendar could have been observed by Roman civilians in general, and that the only entry which was clearly aimed at soldiers as such is virtually completely restored. She therefore postulated that the *Feriale Duranum* concerns not a military but a civic calendar, which had supposedly been awarded by Rome to Dura-Europos, alongside its new colonial status, at some point in the third century, in an attempt to foster loyalty in what was considered a crucial town with the threat of a Sasanian advance in mind. Needless to say, the role of Latin in Durene society as a whole would of course receive a completely new dimension if Reeves’ interpretation is accepted.

The very features that make Dura-Europos into what is potentially the best source for daily life in a provincial small town of the Roman periphery simultaneously enrich and complicate the study of Roman rule as viewed through the eyes of the ruled. The ‘Greekness’ of the town according to its public documents notwithstanding, the combined discoveries of inscriptions and graffiti have revealed at least eight other ancient languages - besides the Classical languages, these are the Aramaic dialects Palmyrenean, Hatrean and Syriac, Hebrew, Parthian and Middle-

¹¹ For an overview of these issues, see now T. Kaizer, ‘Language and religion in Dura-Europos’ in H.M. Cotton, R.G. Hoyland, J.J. Price and D.J. Wasserstein (eds.), *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge, in press), pp.234-251.

¹² *P.Dura* 54. Cf. R.O. Fink, A.S. Hoey and W.F. Snyder, ‘The *Feriale Duranum*’ in *YCS* 7 (1940), pp.1-221.

¹³ M.B. Reeves, *The ‘Feriale Duranum’, Roman Military Religion, and Dura-Europos: a Reassessment* (Ph.D. Buffalo NY, 2004).

Persian, and the North-Arabian language known as Safaitic. Durene sculptures and frescoes uniquely combine elements of Classical and Oriental art. Commonly labelled with the modern misnomer 'Parthian art' - on the basis of resemblances in style with sculptures from other places that once formed part of the Parthian sphere of influence, such as Palmyra, Hatra and Edessa - they were characterised by a frontality which cannot be securely linked with cultural developments in the heartland of Parthia, but whose appearance in the material evidence seems to coincide instead with Rome's arrival in the Near Eastern lands.¹⁴ Dura-Europos has also revealed the most important papyrological dossier of a military unit in the Roman world, recording the activities of auxiliary troops that consisted to a large degree of soldiers from nearby Palmyra, and arguably hinting at substantive interaction between these soldiers and the local population.¹⁵ Various documents relate to aspects of the local economy, but possibly also to involvement in more exotic long-distance trade.¹⁶ Last but not least, the more than a dozen pagan sanctuaries, which alongside the famous synagogue and the earliest Christian house church occupy positions in the rigorously grid-iron city plan, are mostly accommodating non-Classical deities. The linguistic pattern of the public life of Dura-Europos, heralding its Greekness, is certainly an important factor, but not the only one. Many scholars have therefore chosen to emphasise the town's cosmopolitan character instead, and Maurice Sartre has recently described it as "a kaleidoscope of languages, cults, and costumes."¹⁷

It will thus be inevitable that a discussion of Dura-Europos will not be limited to 'ruling through Greek eyes' in any narrow sense of the word. To do justice to the

¹⁴ H.J.W. Drijvers, 'The Syrian cult relief' in *Visible Religion* 7 (1990), pp.69-82. On the specific role of reliefs in Dura's shrines, see S.B. Downey, 'Cult reliefs at Dura-Europos: problems of interpretation and placement' in *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 10 (1998), pp.201-210, and now also ead., 'The role of sculpture in worship at the temples of Dura-Europos' in Y.Z. Eliav, E.A. Friedland and S. Herbert (eds.), *The Sculptural Environment of the Roman Near East. Reflections on Culture, Ideology, and Power* (Leuven - Dudley, Mass., 2008), pp.413-435.

¹⁵ For different views on the degree of interaction between the military and the civilian part of the population of Dura and elsewhere in the Roman Near East, see 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 (Ann Arbor, 1996), pp.211-226; id., *Soldiers, Cities and Civilians in Roman Syria* (Ann Arbor, 2000); and O. Stoll, *Zwischen Integration und Abgrenzung: die Religion des Römischen Heeres im Nahen Osten* (St. Katharinen, 2001).

¹⁶ L. Dirven, 'The nature of the trade between Palmyra and Dura-Europos' in *ARAM* 8 (1996), pp.39-54; ead., *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos. A Study of Religious Interaction in Roman Syria* (Leiden - Boston - Cologne, 1999), pp.6-8, pp.15-17 and pp.29-40; K. Ruffing, 'Die Geschäfte des Aurelios Nebuchelos' in *Laverna* 11 (2000), pp.71-105; id., 'Preise und Wertangaben aus Dura Europos und Umgebung' in *Laverna* 13 (2002), pp.24-44; and id., 'Dura Europos: a city on the Euphrates and her economic importance in the Roman era' in *Topoi Suppl.* 8 (2007), pp.399-411.

¹⁷ M. Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome* (Cambridge, Mass. - London, 2005), p.194.

multifarious cultural influences present in the small-town, it ought to be acknowledged that its uniquely rich evidence has long since played a major role in the debate on Roman rule in the eastern frontier zone. Academic disagreement about the actual degree of ‘Greekness’ of Dura-Europos is certainly nothing new, and the early stages of this ongoing discussion can now be followed in brilliant detail thanks to the publication of the one hundred and sixty-four letters that remain of the evocative correspondence between the two great friends and common explorers of Dura’s culture and history, the Belgian *Privatgelehrter* Franz Cumont and the Russian Yale Professor Michael Rostovtzeff.¹⁸ For example, in a letter dated to 5 March 1932, Cumont told Rostovtzeff: “j’inclinerais à accorder à l’hellénisme une part un peu plus large que celle dont vous le laissez maître. Vous le réduisez trop, le pauvre, à la portion congrue.” A year later, in print, Rostovtzeff gave expression to his doubts: “Doura de l’époque parthe et romaine n’est pas une ville grecque. Mais en même temps elle n’est pas non plus purement orientale.”¹⁹ Subtle distinctions can also be noticed in their respective interpretations of the patterns of worship in the town: whereas Cumont understood the divine world of Dura-Europos as a collection of polis cults, Rostovtzeff viewed the religious evidence as belonging to that of a ‘caravan city’, stating that “Greek religion had been for a time predominant at Dura. But [---] in the Parthian and Roman periods it was a mere survival, no longer a living religion with worshippers devoted to it.”²⁰

Perhaps it is simply a matter of size. Dura-Europos was nothing compared to the major cities of the region. It was just a small town, “une petite ville.”²¹ The ideal type of the Greek city in the Roman period, or rather the stereotypical ‘Graeco-Roman’ city, can be characterised by its civic institutions (the traditional organs and offices of a *polis*, but also in a number of cases colonial magistracies), by its architectural presentation, by the production of civic coinage (the so-called ‘Roman provincial coinage’), by a universally recognised programme of public entertainment, and last but not least by conformation to a customary framework of religious culture, including the connection between public cults and the territorial division of the *polis*

¹⁸ G. Bongard-Levine, C. Bonnet, Y. Litvinenko and A. Marcone, *Mongolus Syrio salutem optimam dat: la correspondance entre Mikhaïl Rostovtzeff et Franz Cumont. Mémoires de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (Paris, 2007).

¹⁹ M. Rostovtzeff, ‘L’hellénisme en Mésopotamie’ in *Scientia* 53 (1933), pp.1-15, at p.15.

²⁰ Id., *Dura-Europos and its Art* (Oxford, 1938), p.61.

²¹ E. Will, ‘La population de Doura-Europos: une évaluation’ in *Syria* 65 (1988), p.321 = id. in P. Leriche e.a., *Doura-Europos Études* (II) 1988 (Paris, 1988), p.63.

and the symbolic language of euergetism used in public inscriptions honouring benefactors.²² It is clear that, on most accounts, Dura-Europos did not fit the bill. A *bouleuterion* was indeed located within the sanctuary of Artemis,²³ but the remaining elements of a Greek civic constitution seem to be overshadowed - at least from the early third century onwards - by the dominant position in society of senior military officials. Whether that means that local magistrates were actually deposed by the Roman authorities is of course another matter,²⁴ but it has been argued convincingly that *legati*, *praepositi* and *tribuni* will have undertaken certain “executive functions”.²⁵ More problematic is the widespread assumption, following the classic study by Rostovtzeff’s pupil Frank Gilliam, that the enigmatic *dux ripae*, the ‘commander of the river bank’, carried out judicial duties as the supposedly overall military commander of the Middle Euphrates region in what counted as the region’s central stronghold.²⁶ According to Gilliam, the position of the *dux ripae* at Dura-Europos was different from that of other *duces* in the Roman world, since it was the only commander post which was regularly held, with jurisdiction over an established area and command over a fixed number of military units. However, Peter Edwell has recently revisited the evidence about the perceived role of the *dux ripae* in Durene society, and has convincingly shown “how the initial speculation regarding the *Dux Ripae* was used as proof for the uniqueness of his office.”²⁷ The previous argument rested on one dipinto from a building that has - on typically dubious grounds - come

²² F. Millar, ‘The Greek city in the Roman period’ in M.H. Hansen (ed.), *The Ancient Greek City-State* (Copenhagen, 1993), pp.232-260 = id., *The Greek World, the Jews, & the East. Rome, the Greek World, and the East 3*, eds. H.M. Cotton and G.M. Rogers (Chapel Hill, 2006), pp.106-135.

²³ See P. Leriche and E. el Ajj, ‘Une nouvelle inscription dans la salle à gradins du temple d’Artémis à Doura-Europos’ in *CRAI* (1999), pp.1309-1346.

²⁴ As was put forward by P. Arnaud, ‘Doura-Europos, microcosme grec ou rouage de l’administration arsacide?’ in *Syria* 63 (1986) = id. in P. Leriche e.a., *Doura-Europos Études* (I) 1986 (Paris, 1986), pp.135-155, at p.146, n.51: “... comme si la romanisation des institutions de la cité avait simultanément causé la disparition du titre et des fonctions de stratège et épistate de la ville, et la création de la *Boulè* de la cité.” Cf. K. Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (London, 2003), p.402: “There is no clear sign at Dura or other cities of military interference in civic government, but there is not much indication either way.”

²⁵ Pollard, *o.c.* (n.15), p.87. *P.Dura* 125-127 have Laronius Secundianus as a tribune of the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* conducting civil legal affairs. *P.Euphr.* 3-4 show the *praepositus praetenturae* Julius Proculus in a similar judiciary role.

²⁶ J.F. Gilliam, ‘The *Dux Ripae* at Dura’ in *TAPA* 72 (1941), p.157-175.

²⁷ P.M. Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia: the Middle Euphrates, Mesopotamia and Palmyra under Roman Control* (London - New York, 2008), pp.128-135, with the quotation at p.131. But compare also T. Gnoli, ‘From *praepositus praetenturae* to *dux ripae*. The Roman ‘grand strategy’ on the Middle Euphrates (2nd - 3rd cent. AD)’ in A. Lewin and P. Pellegrini (eds.), *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest. BAR International Series 1717* (Oxford, 2007), pp.49-55. In general, see also Millar, *o.c.* (n.4), pp.131-133.

to be known amongst scholars as the ‘palace of the *dux ripae*’.²⁸ The dipinto itself, which is in Greek, is actually a *memento* inscription for a *tragôidos* who is identified as the *threptos* of a man called Domitius Pompeianus, ‘pious and just’ δούξ τῆς ῥείπης, transliterating the non-attested Latin form *dux ripae*.²⁹ Other *duces*, but without further specification, are attested in Latin documents from the above-mentioned archive of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*: Licinius Pacatianus was *tunc dux* in August 245, whereas Ulpius Tertius is described in identical fashion in 248.³⁰

As regards other characteristics of the stereotypical ‘Greek city’, Dura-Europos did not issue its own coins,³¹ and there is no evidence for a Classical-styled theatre where plays could be performed for the citizens, or for athletic contests to have been held along the Euphrates. But perhaps most visibly diverting from the ideal model is the town’s religious architecture, as the various shrines follow indigenous plans with distinctively local characteristics.³² Typically a sanctuary consisted of a courtyard with a relatively small central place of worship surrounded by a number of minor rooms, which are often interpreted by scholars as ‘subsidiary shrines’ or, especially when they are aligned with benches, as ‘banqueting rooms’.³³ The only exception to this local scheme is a small structure known (after a damaged inscription) as the ‘temple of the Roman archers’, which was constructed as a single room fronted by a *distyle in antis* porch, and which scholars naturally (but without any supportive evidence) believe was dedicated to a typically Roman god.³⁴ With the exception of this military sanctuary (and also of the temples that are depicted on the frescoes from the synagogue), Dura-Europos had no Classical or otherwise monumental buildings, and as such stood in sharp contrast to the major Near Eastern cult centres such as Palmyra.

²⁸ *Rep.* IX.3, pp.1-26. Cf. Pollard, *o.c.* (n.15), p.49, n.68, who also states that what has become a widely accepted designation “is not necessarily justified by the evidence for [the *dux ripae*’s] activities there.”

²⁹ *Rep.* IX.3, pp.30-31, n°945: Μνησθῆ Ἐλπιδηφόρος ὁ Βυζάντιος τραγωδός ὁ Δομιτίου [Πο]μπεϊανοῦ τοῦ ἀγνοῦ καὶ δικαίου δουκὸς τῆς ῥείπης θρεπτὸς μετὰ Πρόβου τοῦ ὑποκριτοῦ αὐτοῦ. Μνησθῆ ὁ ὦδε μένων καὶ ὁ ἀναγεινῶσκων.

³⁰ *P.Dura* 97, lines 22ff.

³¹ Sartre, *o.c.* (n.17), p.263: “that city never minted coins (except for a few issues under Seleucos I and possibly one during the time of the Parthian occupation).”

³² The major study is by S.B. Downey, *Mesopotamian Religious Architecture. Alexander through the Parthians* (Princeton, 1988), pp.76-129.

³³ See now J. Buchmann, ‘Räumlichkeiten für Bankette und Versammlungen in ausgewählten Heiligtümern in Dura Europos’ in I. Nielsen (ed.), *Zwischen Kult und Gesellschaft: kosmopolitische Zentren des antiken Mittelmeerraumes als Aktionsraum von Kultvereinen und Religionsgemeinschaften. Hephaistos* 24 (Augsburg, 2006), pp.93-99. Cf. Millar, *o.c.* (n.4), p.446.

³⁴ *Rep.* II, pp.16-17 and pp.57-61. Cf. Pollard, *o.c.* (n.15), p.147.

However, as I have argued in a separate article,³⁵ the fact that the sanctuaries at Dura-Europos were not built in a Classical style does not in itself exclude the functioning of at least some of these buildings as providing a home for the town's so-called civic (or even *polis*-) cults. The well-known reference to four peculiar priesthoods in a deed of sale from AD 180 (thus fifteen years after Dura became Roman) is very telling in this context.³⁶ The parchment is dated in a complicated manner, first - as was common - after the consuls and the emperor, then after 'the former reckoning' (κατὰ δὲ τὸν πρότερον ἀριθμὸν), year 491 of the Seleucid era, 'on the fourth day of the month Peritios (i.e. February)', and then, finally, by reference to four eponymous priests: 'when Lusanios son of Zenodotos son of Heliodoros was priest of Zeus, when Theodoros son of Athenodotos son of Artemidoros was priest of Apollo, when Heliodoros son of Diokleios son of Heliodoros was priest of the ancestors, and when Danumos son of Seleukos son of Danumos was priest of king Seleucus Nicator'.³⁷ Each of the respective cults can of course be linked with the religious attitudes of the house of Seleucus: Zeus was the main god for the dynasty, under the name Zeus Olympios; Apollo was one of its patron deities; the πρόγονοι were either the mythical ancestors of a Seleucid king or - as Tony Spawforth has recently argued - of the town's Graeco-Macedonian elite; and the priesthood of Seleucus Nicator speaks for itself. It does not come as a surprise that scholars have commonly interpreted these four eponymous priesthoods as being those of the 'municipal gods' of the Macedonian colony when founded in the early Hellenistic period. But since the peculiar dating formula is not attested in other documents from Dura-Europos, neither in those from the Parthian period nor in those from after 165, the question of whether it provides evidence for actual cultic continuity cannot be answered with certainty. According to Rostovtzeff, such

³⁵ T. Kaizer, 'Patterns of worship in Dura-Europos: a case study of religious life in the Classical Levant outside the main cult centres' in C. Bonnet, V. Pirenne-Delforge and D. Praet (eds.), *Les religions orientales dans le monde grec et romain: cent ans après Cumont (1906-2006). Bilan historique et historiographique* (Brussels - Rome, in press), pp.153-172.

³⁶ The parchment has been much discussed since the classic paper by M. Rostovtzeff, 'ΠΡΟΓΟΝΟΙ' in *JHS* 55 (1935), pp.56-66, most recently by T. Spawforth, 'Macedonian times': Hellenistic memories in the provinces of the Roman Near East' in D. Konstan and S. Saïd (eds.), *Greeks on Greekness. Viewing the Greek Past under the Roman Empire. PCPS Suppl. 29* (2006), pp.1-26, at pp.10-11.

³⁷ *P.Dura*, n°25, lines 18-20 of the lower text: ἐπὶ ἱερέων Διὸς μὲν Λυσανίου τοῦ Ζηνοδότου τοῦ Ἡλιοδώρου, Ἀπόλλωνος δὲ Θεοδώρου τοῦ Ἀθηνοδότου τοῦ Ἀρτεμιδώρου, τῶν δὲ προγόνων Ἡλιοδώρου τοῦ Διοκλέους τοῦ Ἡλιοδώρου, βασιλέως δὲ Σελεύκου Νικ[ά]τορος Δανύμου τοῦ Σελεύκου τοῦ Δανύμου.

municipal dating was “not a creation of Roman times”, but “a fossilised survival of a much earlier period” instead.³⁸ He argued that the four cults were not to be interpreted as a proper mirror of religious life at Dura in later, Roman, times, and that the official cults of the Macedonian colony “as such existed no longer as a reality” by AD 180.³⁹ However, these priesthoods seemed sufficiently important by that date to be filled by men with a purely Macedonian genealogy, which led Rostovtzeff to interpret the “ancient Seleucid religious traditions” in Dura-Europos under Roman rule as “a kind of romantic reaction on the part of the Macedonian colonists of Europos against the pretensions of the Parthian kings to be the legitimate successors of the Seleucids”, a revival which was presumably “shortlived”.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, a divorce act from AD 254 shows that Dura-Europos - only a few years before its capture by the Sasanians, by which time it had of course long since become a Roman *colonia* - could officially be referred to as the *κολωνεία Εὐρωπαϊῶν Σελεύκου Νεικάτορος*, ‘the *colonia* of the Europaioi of Seleucus Nicator’, a phenomenon which suggests that the revival of these tendencies was perhaps not so ‘shortlived’ after all.⁴¹

In any case, it seems very unlikely that the four men, who according to their nomenclature belonged to the upper stratum of society, would have allowed themselves to be put off with second-rate priestly offices, and from that perspective it is more likely that the respective cults *did* have an important place in Dura-Europos shortly after it became Roman. The fact that the eponymous priesthoods were applied to the dating formula of an official document can then be viewed not so much as a sign of archaization, but rather - in the context of the civic spirit dominating the Roman empire around this time - as a way to highlight the town’s Greek past. Instead of a so-called re-introduction in Dura of long-forgotten Seleucid cults from the colony of Europos, I would argue that these traditional aspects of worship had been present in the town all along: having simmered underneath the civic surface throughout the Parthian period, under Roman rule they could then have been elevated once again to a more visible position. Despite the relative tolerance and the apparent lack of an active ‘religious policy’ which is generally attributed to Parthian rule, in the time that the Arsacid King of Kings nominally assumed control over Dura it would perhaps have

³⁸ Rostovtzeff, *o.c.* (n.36), p.57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.58.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.58-59.

⁴¹ *P.Dura*, n°32.

been one step too far to date an official document after the priesthood of Seleucus Nicator in the way that the parchment from AD 180 does. But a continuity of some of the religious patterns which were first introduced by the original Macedonian colonists, from the earliest Hellenistic period through the Parthians, surely would have been no problem in less official contexts.

Indeed, six years before the transition from Parthian to Roman Dura, in AD 159, Seleucus Nicator appears on a relief from the so-called temple 'of the Gadde'. The founder of the Seleucid empire, identified as such by a Palmyrenean-Aramaic inscription (*slwqws nyqtwr*), is depicted in the act of crowning the divine figure seated in the middle of the relief, who is labelled the Gad (personified good fortune, the Aramaic equivalent of Tyche) of Dura (*gd' dy dwr*).⁴² According to Lucinda Dirven's convincing iconographic analysis, this deity is to be identified as Zeus Olympios, an interpretation that fits well with the fact that it is Seleucus himself who is holding a wreath over the seated figure's head.⁴³ It would go to show not only that there was an awareness in the late-Parthian period of the Hellenistic origins of some of the town's cults, but also that, already before the arrival of Roman troops, such Seleucid roots could be openly emphasised in religious contexts, in any case by inhabitants of Dura who were themselves relative outsiders from Palmyra. As is well-known, the personified Good Fortune of Dura is also depicted on the famous fresco of Julius Terentius, from the late 230s, in the so-called temple 'of the Palmyrene gods'.⁴⁴ In this case, however, the image is that of a traditional city goddess with mural crown, who is identified by the accompanying inscription as Τύχη Δούρας. Again, the interpretation of the town's tutelary deity is made by Palmyrenes, but this time they are presented as fighting under Roman flag, as the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*. It could of course be interpreted as illustrating a shift in understanding, on the part of the Palmyrene community in the town, of the religious identity of Dura-Europos as such, but it is probably more fruitful to approach the divergence between the two visual

⁴² Relief: *Rep.* VII-VIII, pp.258-260 with pl.XXXIII; inscriptions: *PAT* 1094-1096. Cf. M. Rostovtzeff, 'Le Gad de Doura et Seleucus Nicator' in *Mélanges Syriens, offerts à monsieur René Dussaud* I (Paris, 1939), pp.281-295.

⁴³ Dirven, *o.c.* (n.16), pp.111-127, esp. pp.117-119.

⁴⁴ For the fresco, see now T. Kaizer, 'A note on the fresco of Iulius Terentius from Dura-Europos' in R. Rollinger and B. Truschnegg (eds.), *Altertum und Mittelmeerraum: die antike Welt diesseits und jenseits der Levante. Festschrift für Peter W. Haider zum 60. Geburtstag. Oriens et Occidens* 12 (Stuttgart, 2006), pp.151-9, with further references.

representations as an example of opposing images that should not be seen as contradictory and mutually exclusive.

As we have seen above, the respective genealogies of the incumbents of the four priesthoods listed in the dating formula of the parchment from AD 180 may imply Macedonian descent. But in a recent paper on Roman Near Eastern onomastics Maurice Sartre has issued a warning against drawing conclusions about cultural identity from looking at isolated cases: it is a study of the overall picture that is needed.⁴⁵ In this same spirit, Nigel Pollard has suggested, independently, that the high office holders with Graeco-Macedonian names in late-Parthian and Roman Dura were *not* descendents of the original settlers of the colony Europos (in contrast to what Bradford Welles had argued), but that they formed instead “a real and distinctive ethnic group that employed a myth of common descent and formulaic, recurring names as marks of cultural identity”.⁴⁶ On the other hand, since there is plenty of evidence from the town showing that double naming (with both a Graeco-Macedonian name and a Semitic one) was very common, it is of course also a real possibility that those who appear in our sources only under a Classical name - as for example the four priests listed in the parchment - had in fact also a Semitic name which just happens not to be preserved by the evidence. The double naming of individuals is mirrored in the name of the town itself. If ‘Dura-Europos’ is a modern hybrid created by scholars, both halves were clearly used alongside each other in the same period: Dura (meaning ‘fortress’) as the site had been called since time immemorial - a cuneiform tablet reused in a wall of the temple of Atargatis refers to the ‘district of Dawara’⁴⁷ - and Europos after the Macedonian colony founded here. In any case, in his *Parthian Stations* (1), the first-century author Isidorus of Charax lists the town as ‘Dura, city of Nikanor, a foundation of the Macedonians, called Europos by the Hellenes’ (Δοῦρα, Νικάνορος πόλις, κτίσμα Μακεδόνων ὑπο δὲ Ἑλλήνων Εὐρωπος καλεῖται). And when the indigenous name ‘Dura’ alongside the ethnicon *Durenus*

⁴⁵ M. Sartre, ‘The ambiguous name: the limitations of cultural identity in Graeco-Roman Syrian onomastics’ in E. Matthews (ed.), *Old and New Worlds in Greek Onomastics. Proceedings of the British Academy* 148 (Oxford, 2007), pp.199-232.

⁴⁶ N. Pollard, ‘Colonial and cultural identities in Parthian and Roman Dura-Europos’ in R. Alston and S.N.C. Lieu (eds.), *Aspects of the Roman East. Papers in Honour of Professor Fergus Millar FBA*, vol.I (Turnhout, 2007), pp.81-102, at p.99, arguing against C.B. Welles, ‘The population of Roman Dura’ in P.R. Coleman-Norton (ed.), *Studies in Roman Economic and Social History in Honour of Allan Chester Johnson* (Princeton, 1951), pp.251-274.

⁴⁷ F.J. Stephens, ‘A cuneiform tablet from Dura-Europas’ in *Revue d’Assyriologie* 34 (1937), pp.183-190.

came back into fashion in the early third century AD, this did not happen at the cost of the Greek name, as some of the clearest attestations of Europos and the ethnicon *Europaïos* date from this same late phase in the town's existence. In any case, the choice of name does not seem to have followed any specific logic: when Julius Terentius and his soldiers were depicted on their fresco in the 230s alongside the town's Tyche - nearly eighty years since the latter's Semitic equivalent, the *Gad* of Dura, had appeared in the shape of Zeus Olympios on a relief - the goddess is explicitly identified as Τύχη Δούρας and *not*, despite the fact that the inscription is in Greek and the image follows Graeco-Roman parameters, as the Tyche of Europos. As regards *personal* names, the Roman period clearly saw an increase in the use of Semitic nomenclature in the inscriptions from Dura-Europos.⁴⁸ Whereas traditionally this undeniable trend in our evidence has been interpreted, following Bradford Welles, as the result of an actual replacement of one large section of the population by another,⁴⁹ it has now been argued, by Nigel Pollard, that the developments rather “relate to shifts in presentation of self and community, with a diminished emphasis on lineage and Greco-Macedonian origins on the part of some”.⁵⁰

It is clear that the multi-varied evidence from Dura-Europos, of which only a small percentage was used in this paper, cannot be forced into a single, all-explanatory framework of interpretation. If the inhabitants of this small town on the Euphrates were becoming Roman while staying Greek, to borrow the title of a well-known article by Greg Woolf,⁵¹ they were also nurturing aspects of a local identity which from a Roman perspective may simplistically be viewed as ‘Oriental’, but which rather ought to be understood as a conglomerate of cultural elements (some truly indigenous, others introduced more recently) which continued to evolve

⁴⁸ For some very useful tables and general discussion, see M. Sommer, ‘A map of meaning. Approaching cultural identities at the Middle Euphrates (1st to 3rd centuries AD)’ in *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 27 (2004), pp.153-83; id., ‘Dura-Europos ed il medio Eufrate. Osservazioni su diaspora e costruzioni di identità culturali nella Mesopotamia parto-romana’ in *Mediterraneo Antico* 7 (2004), pp.837-57; id., *Roms orientalische Steppengrenze: Palmyra – Edessa – Dura-Europos – Hatra. Eine Kulturgeschichte von Pompeius bis Diocletian. Oriens et Occidens* 9 (Stuttgart, 2005), esp. pp.320-329.

⁴⁹ Welles, *o.c.* (n.46), esp. p.262, pp.267-8 and p.273.

⁵⁰ Pollard, *o.c.* (n.46), p.100. He concludes this attractive hypothesis, in the final lines of his article, by pointing out how these shifts could then be understood as “Durene reflections of Roman experiences of, and attitudes towards, the more diverse, post-Severan, Hellenism of the eastern Roman empire.”

⁵¹ G. Woolf, ‘Becoming Roman, staying Greek: culture, identity and the civilizing process in the Roman East’ in *PCPS* 40 (1994), pp.116-143.

throughout the Roman period, and whose authenticity very much depended on the eye of the beholder.
