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## ADIABENE AND HATRA: SOME REMARKS ON HATRA'S NEIGHBOR\*

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The book under review is a volume containing the proceedings from the colloquium held at the University of Amsterdam in 2009. Published in 2013, this book presents the most up-to-date research on the city of Hatra. It sadly coincides with the end of a certain era, not only in the history of scholarship on Hatra, but also in the history of the city itself. In 2015, the city became one of the victims of the ISIL campaign against ancient monuments in the region. First, it is certain that several sculptures from Hatra stored in the Mosul museum were destroyed, as this can clearly be seen in the videos released online by ISIL in 2015. Second, it was also reported that the city itself was demolished by ISIL bulldozers in March 2015. However, the latter report was based on oral sources, and the extent of damage to the site is not entirely clear.

The book under review contains seventeen papers organized into three distinctive parts: “Between Parthia and Rome,” “The City and its Remains,” and “Culture and Religion on the Crossroads.” While the political relationship between Hatra and the great superpowers of that time – Rome on the one hand, and the Parthians and Sasanians on the other – is mainly explored in the first part of the book, the religious and cultural aspects of Hatra’s geopolitical location “on the crossroads” (to put it in the editor’s words) are discussed in the third part of the book. The second part is devoted to several archaeological issues that are relevant to the reconstruction of the history of Hatra (especially those raised by the recent excavations conducted by the Italian and Polish teams under Roberta

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\* This is a review article of Lucinda Dirven (ed.), *Hatra. Politics, Culture and Religion between Parthia and Rome*, *Oriens et Occidens* 21, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2013, pp. 363. ISBN 9783515104128.

Venco Ricciardi and Michał Gawlikowski, respectively). The papers are preceded by a very useful introduction written by the editor, L. Dirven, and the book is concluded with a rich bibliography, a list of contributors and figures, and, finally, 77 plates (of good quality). Unfortunately, there are no indexes, which is a rare phenomenon in high-level modern publishing, greatly hampering the efficient use of this publication.

First, let me briefly recall the most important lines of thought from several papers that particularly caught my attention due to my own research interests. Second, I will focus on three aspects of the political history of the region at large that are relevant for both Hatra and Adiabene.

The first part contains three interesting papers by B. Isaac, M. Sommer, and L. Gregoratti. In his overview of the available literary sources on Hatra ("Against Rome and Persia. From success to destruction"), B. Isaac comes to a rare and striking conclusion: the city and its region were part of the Roman Empire in the second and third centuries CE. By contrast, both M. Sommer and L. Gregoratti claim in their papers ("Hatra between Rome and Iran" and "Hatra: on the West of the East," respectively) that Hatra was a dependent ally of the Parthian kingdom at that time. More precisely, L. Gregoratti attributes Hatra's rise of importance and the intensified relationship between the Parthian kings and the Hatrene rulers after 117 CE to Hatra's success against Emperor Trajan. In Gregoratti's view, Hatrene rulers were awarded with certain privileges for services rendered to the Parthian Empire against Trajan (apparently, as leaders of the anti-Roman resistance in 116–117 CE). Next, after the loss of Osrhoene to the Romans in 167 CE, Hatra's importance to the Parthians increased again, which led to the award of royal status to Hatrene rulers. According to M. Sommer, it is only after the Sasanians defeated and replaced the Parthians as the sole rulers of their state that the Hatrene kings switched sides and allied with the Romans (which can be argued because of the epigraphically attested presence of a detachment of Roman troops in Hatra in 238–240 CE).

The question of the cultural, but also political, affiliation of Hatra lies at the heart of de Jong's paper ("Hatra and the Parthian Commonwealth"). De Jong points to the evidence of the spread of many aspects of Iranian culture throughout the Parthian kingdom and in Hatra (administrative titles, personal names, costume, jewelry, weaponry, religion) and consequently argues that, rather than being labeled as "between Rome and Parthia" in cultural and political terms, Hatra should be perceived, first and foremost, as an integral part of the "Parthian Commonwealth."

The question of the appearance of material culture in Hatra and its sudden rise to importance and wealth in the second century CE is raised by T. Kaizer, who, while not totally rejecting the previous three explanations (strategic posi-

tion between Rome and Iran, role in the long-distance caravan trade, role as a religious center—a “pre-Islamic Mecca”), suggests that Hatra's development lay in a symbiotic affiliation with the settlements in its territory that may have been strengthened by favorable climatic or geographical circumstances in the first millennium CE. Rather than exploring the beginnings of Hatra, S. Hauser's paper summarizes the evidence for the sieges of Hatra and its final capture by the Sasanians. According to Hauser, Hatra was unsuccessfully besieged by Emperor Trajan in 177 CE, Septimius Severus in 197 and 199 CE, and the Sasanians before 229 CE; it was finally conquered by the Sasanians (Ardashir and Shapur) in 240/241 CE.

One can distinguish three particular episodes in the Parthian and Sasanian periods that were significant for both Hatra and Adiabene.

The first and second episodes made Hatra famous for its resistance against three Roman attacks – during the Parthian War of Emperor Trajan and during the eastern campaigns of Emperor Septimius Severus. Adiabene is also mentioned in ancient sources as one of the ardent enemies of the Romans on both of these occasions.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to Trajan's Parthian War, it is frequently stated that before capturing the Parthian capital Ctesiphon, Trajan invaded Adiabene and, having completed his conquests, created three new provinces – Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Adiabene.<sup>2</sup> This is a widely repeated reconstruction; however, as far as Adiabene is concerned, it is not based on solid ground and has never found much acceptance among the very few scholars who have conducted an in-depth analysis of Trajan's campaigns (such as F. Lepper, M.J. Guey, and C.S. Lightfoot).<sup>3</sup> First, it has been noted that Dio's itinerary, which places Adiabene among Trajan's military achievements on his way to Ctesiphon, actually mixes two distinctive itineraries – one along the Tigris, and another along the Euphrates.<sup>4</sup> Second, Dio's account of Adiabene features reminiscences with accounts of Alexander the Great's itinerary through Adiabene; consequently, the possibility cannot be ruled out that this account is merely a literary creation.<sup>5</sup> Third, the creation of the

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see M. Marciak, *Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene: The Three Regna Minora of Northern Mesopotamia between East and West* (forthcoming), especially the following chapters: 9.3: Adiabene and Trajan's Parthian War; 9.5: Septimius Severus; 9.6: Adiabene, Hatra, and Osrhoene.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Mommsen 1885, 400; Fraenkel 1893, 360; Longden 1931, 13–14; Guey 1937, 79–80; Henderson 1949, 125–126; Magie 1950, 608; Dillemann 1962, 287–289; Bertinelli 1976, 17–22; Chaumont 1976, 140; Eilers 1983, 496; Gregory, Kennedy 1985, 118; Hauser 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Guey 1937, 39–120; Lepper 1948, 95–96; Lightfoot 1990. See also Kettenhofen 1995, 290, n. 25 and Hartmann 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Lightfoot 1990, 121–125.

<sup>5</sup> Lightfoot 1990, 121–125.

province of Assyria is not epigraphically attested (in contrast to Armenia and Mesopotamia).<sup>6</sup> Fourth, had the province of Assyria been created, it would not necessarily have included Adiabene, as early Sasanian and late Roman sources usually understand Assyria as part of southern Mesopotamia.<sup>7</sup> Of course, this is not to say that Trajan did not face and defeat Mebarsapes, king of Adiabene. Indeed, Mebarsapes appears in literary sources as an active player in Mesopotamia, in concert with several other minor rulers. Having been defeated on the west bank of the Tigris and losing his holdings there (Singara, Adenystrae, and Libbana on the west bank are associated with Mebarsapes), he most likely withdrew to the heartland of Adiabene, located on the east bank of the Tigris. He might have then capitulated and sought terms with Trajan. It is also postulated that Hatra came into agreement with the Romans before 116–117 CE, as this could explain how the city may have avoided being besieged and conquered by Trajan before his assault on Ktesiphon.<sup>8</sup> At any rate, it should be stressed that none of the anonymous rulers identified in ancient sources as active in Mesopotamia (especially Mannus and Manisarus) can be unambiguously identified as a ruler of Hatra.

Concerning Septimius Severus, it should be noted that his Oriental campaigns had two different phases: one in 195 CE (immediately after the defeat of Niger at Issos in 194 CE), and another in 197–199 CE (after the defeat of Clodius Albinus in Gaul).<sup>9</sup> Importantly, Adiabene explicitly comes to the fore in ancient sources only in the context of the 195 CE campaign, while Hatra appears in the 197–199 CE campaign. Although it is widely and rightly claimed that Septimius defeated Adiabene as one of the Parthian client kingdoms supporting his political rival, Niger, one should be aware of the limitations of the extant evidence and, consequently, should not overestimate Septimius' achievements in the East. First of all, neither of the two texts of Dio (75.2.3 [Xiphil. 303.21–304]<sup>10</sup> and 75.3.2 [Xiphil. 304.8–22]<sup>11</sup>), frequently understood as evidence of the con-

<sup>6</sup> Lightfoot 1990, 121–125.

<sup>7</sup> Maricq 1958, 304–305, nn. 4–5; Maricq 1959, 257–260; Lightfoot 1990, 121–123; Millar 1993, 101 and n. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac 2013, 23–24; Sommer 2013, 35, 37.

<sup>9</sup> For the historical context, see Magie 1950, 671–673, 1538–1542; Ziegler 1964, 129–132; Platnauer 1965, 74–98; Birley 1988, 108–120; Sommer 2005, 239–240, n. 58.

<sup>10</sup> Dio Cass. 75.2.3 (Xiphil. 303.21–304): "... afterwards [after crossing the Euphrates] Severus reached Nisibis, and tarrying there himself, sent Lateranus, Candidus, and Laetus in various directions among the barbarians named; and these generals upon reaching their goals proceeded to lay waste barbarians' land." The translation is from the Loeb Classical Library (Cary 1925).

<sup>11</sup> Dio Cass. 75.2.3 (Xiphil. 304.8–22). "Severus again made three divisions of his army, and giving one to Laetus, one to Anullinus, and one to Probus, sent them against Arche; and they invaded it in three divisions and subdued it, yet not without difficulty. Severus bestowed some dignity upon Nisibis and entrusted the city to a knight. He used to declare that he had added a vast

quest of Adiabene, explicitly mention Adiabene. Of course, we do possess tangible epigraphic and numismatic evidence: Septimius adopted the two victory titles (*cognomina ex virtute*) PARTHICUS ADIABENICUS and PARTHICUS ARABICUS (attested on milestones, coins, and the famous arch in the Forum Romanum),<sup>12</sup> and numismatic evidence (with images of “seated captives”; see Figs. 1–4) allows us to connect the victory titles with three imperial salutations (IMP V, IMP VI, and IMP VII) adopted by Septimius in 195 CE.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it stands beyond doubt that Adiabene was among Septimius’ enemies and was defeated, but the course of the fighting and the extent of Adiabene’s losses remain unclear. In this context, it has been indicated that the adoption of as many as three distinctive imperial salutations may be seen as a sign that “the victories were probably hard won,”<sup>14</sup> or that “the situation may have been more critical than would have been imagined.”<sup>15</sup> After all, the situation may have been similar to that of Trajan’s time – Mesopotamia was “a patchwork of different ethnicities... [and a] political jungle,”<sup>16</sup> where one could find enough enemies or cities to fight with and consequently to deserve, in the Romans’ eyes, as many as three imperial titles (e.g., Batnae, Cardueni, Mardoï, Marcomedi, Singara, Thebeta, and Libbani).<sup>17</sup> In other words, the ruler of Adiabene may have been defeated only in Mesopotamia and lost his possessions on the west bank of the Tigris (where the new Roman province of Mesopotamia was created), but this did not necessarily indicate any serious consequences for his rule on the east bank of the Tigris.

It should also be noted that the images of “seated captives” with the inscriptions PARTHICUS ADIABENICUS and PARTHICUS ARABICUS on Septimius’ coins are not individualized presentations of any specific rulers.<sup>18</sup> First, the garments of the “seated captives” are standard garments of Oriental lesser royalties and nobles of that time – they included long-sleeved tunics with belts around the waist, as well as trousers and mantles buttoned up below the neck.<sup>19</sup> As for headgear, the depictions are very random. For instance, in Figs. 2–3 (variant I), the figure to the right of the *tropaion* has no headdress and wears only a diadem,

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territory to the empire and had made it a bulwark of Syria.” The translation is from the Loeb Classical Library (Cary 1925).

<sup>12</sup> Murphy 1945, 80–87; Mattingly, Sydenham 1936, 60, 66, 94–99; Mattingly 1950, lxxx; Brilliant 1967, 92–95, 172–182; Bonanno 1976, 143–146.

<sup>13</sup> Mattingly, Sydenham 1936, 60–61; Platnauer 1965, 96, n. 1; Murphy 1945, 2; see also Mattingly 1950, lxxx–lxxxi.

<sup>14</sup> Birley 1988, 116.

<sup>15</sup> Mattingly, Sydenham 1936, 60.

<sup>16</sup> Sommer 2013, 41.

<sup>17</sup> Guey 1937, 66–67 and Lepper 1948, 8–10.

<sup>18</sup> Marciak, Wójcikowski 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Marciak, Wójcikowski 2017.

while the figure to the left has a high tiara.<sup>20</sup> This could suggest some individualization. However, in Figs. 4–5 (variant II), both figures wear diademed tiaras with neck coverings, clearly contradicting the idea that the images of the two “seated captives” are individualized.<sup>21</sup> As for the cognomina on Septimius’ coins, it has been suggested that ARAB refers to Hatra.<sup>22</sup> However, there is no compelling evidence for this identification. On the contrary, Hatra was not conquered by Septimius. There are many other candidates for this identification, including Osrhoene.<sup>23</sup> It is also possible that the term refers to an anonymous ruler of Mesopotamia.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, the ruins of the temple of Baal Shamin in Hatra reveal many statues of royalties and nobles who are presented as worshippers of the deity. One of the statues bears an inscription (inscription no. 21) which calls the worshipper *’tlw mlk’ntwn’šry’* (see Fig. 1).<sup>25</sup> Parallel terms (*ntwn’šry’*, but not *ntwn’šry’* as in no. 21) are also preserved in inscriptions nos. 113 and 114, which refer to two nobles: *’Alkūd* (or *’Alkūr*) and his father *’Ustānaq*.<sup>26</sup> The term *’tlw* is widely interpreted as the proper name of the worshipper, who is also called the king (*mlk’*) and *ntwn’šry’*.<sup>27</sup> The term *ntwn’šry’* has aroused a great deal of discussion in scholarship, but it appears that a consensus has recently been reached. This term consists of the participle *naturun*, meaning “given”; *’šr*, the proper name of the goddess Ishtar; and *y’*, a *yud-gentilic*.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the term in question appears to be parallel to the Iranian renderings of the Greek name of Adiabene, *ntwšrkn* and *nwthštrkn*, attested in the trilingual inscription of Shapur I (on the walls of Ka’ba-ye Zardosht). According to E. Lipiński, in the Parthian form *ntwšrkn*, the *n* was confused with the *w*, and the correct spelling should be *ntnšrkn* (the *w* would only be a *mater lectionis*), and the Middle Persian version *nwthštrkn* implies the same confusion of *wāw* with *nūn* and a metathesis of the letters *tn*, read as *wt*.<sup>29</sup>

Although the inscription on the statue does not contain any dates, we can approximately date it to the first half of the third century CE because of its very

<sup>20</sup> Marciak, Wójcikowski 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Marciak, Wójcikowski 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Hauser 1998, 516, followed by Sommer 2005, 240 (tentatively) and Luther 2015, 286; also taken into account by Isaac 2013, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Bayer 1734, 165; Günther 1922, 121; Chaumont 1987, 437–439.

<sup>24</sup> Ross 2001, 48.

<sup>25</sup> Beyer 1998, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Beyer 1998, 54.

<sup>27</sup> Caquot 1952, 101; Altheim, Stiehl 1967, 264; Milik 1962, 52; H.J.W. Drijvers 1977, 824; Lipiński 1982, 117–120; Beyer 1998, 33.

<sup>28</sup> H.J.W. Drijvers 1977, 824; Lipiński 1982, 117–120; Beyer 1998, 33; Lipiński 2015, 204–205.

<sup>29</sup> Lipiński 2015, 204–205.

close stylistic similarities with the statues of Sanatruq II (which can be dated epigraphically to between 231 CE and 237/238 CE).<sup>30</sup> The fact that a foreign ruler (and other foreign nobles) could place his sculpture in Hatra reinforces the idea that Hatra was a superregional sanctuary.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the fact that foreign donators came from the neighboring kingdom of Adiabene suggests that the political relationship between both countries was good (at the very least), and that cultural ties were close. Perhaps it could be speculated that the political ties were created by a common enemy – Rome in the second century CE, and the Sasanians at the beginning of the third century CE. The fact that the first ruler of Adiabene attested for the Sasanian period bore the Sasanian royal name Ardashir (*Res Gestae Divi Saporis*) was interpreted long ago as an indication of the Sasanians' installation of a new royal line in Adiabene.<sup>32</sup> If the last Parthian ruler of Adiabene had such good relations with Hatra, which openly opposed the early Sasanians, we may speculate that he shared the same fate as the last king of Hatra in 240/241 CE.

It is frequently stressed the Hatra's importance and wealth was connected with its role as a caravan stop for routes from Nisibis to Babylonia. In this context, it should be stressed that Adiabene also profited from international trade. First, an important communication line leading to Babylonia via Arbela is well-known; second, Adiabene may also have been connected to the Nisibis–Hatra communication line by controlling routes that came from other directions: in particular, a route from the Tigris crossing (Faysh Khabur, Nineveh, or Nimrud) to Hatra, and another from Assur to Hatra (see Fig. 6).<sup>33</sup>

In summary, the book under review offers an excellent overview of the latest research on Hatra, and as such will be useful for both graduate students and researchers. Perhaps a more regional perspective could also be included in a few cases (such as those presented in the article with regard to Adiabene). But even without this, the book certainly earns an important place in the scholarship on Hatra.

<sup>30</sup> Beyer 1998, 38–39, 73; Sommer 2005, 372; Sartre 2005, 346.

<sup>31</sup> H.J.W. Drijvers 1977, 824–825; Marciak 2014, 221.

<sup>32</sup> Frye 1983, 279.

<sup>33</sup> The connection between Assur and Hatra is also suggested in Gregoratti 2013, 48.



Fig. 1. Sculpture of 'tlw from Hatra (courtesy of D.C. Siebrandt, Deakin University)





Fig. 2. Septimius Severus' coins (variant I); (courtesy of Forum Ancient Coins)



Fig. 3. Septimius Severus' coins (variant I); (courtesy of Forum Ancient Coins)



Fig. 4. Septimius Severus' coins (variant II);  
(courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group, Inc., [www.cngcoins.com](http://www.cngcoins.com))



Fig. 5. Septimius Severus' coins (variant II);  
(courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group, Inc., [www.cngcoins.com](http://www.cngcoins.com))

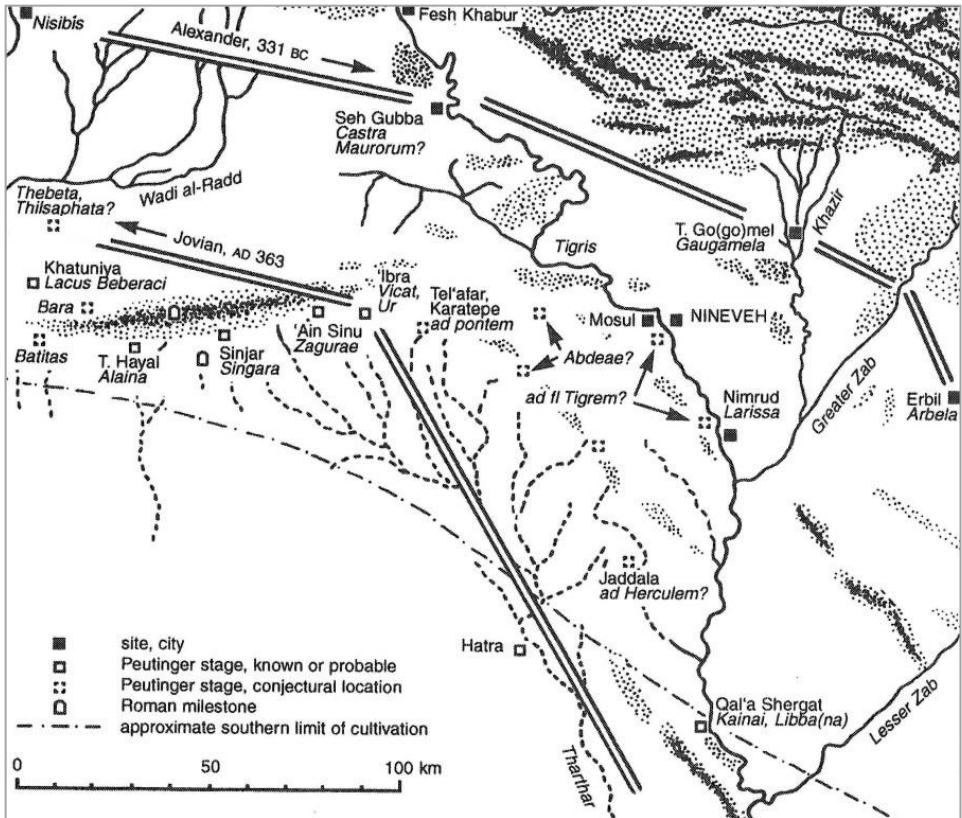


Fig. 6. Ancient routes via Adiabene (Reade 1999, 287, Fig. 5)

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## Abstract

The article reviews the book “*Hatra. Politics, Culture and Religion between Parthia and Rome*,” edited by L. Dirven and published in 2013 by Franz Steiner Verlag as volume 21 of the well-known series *Oriens et Occidens*. It is acknowledged that the book offers the latest research on Hatra. The aim of this article is to contribute to the research on Hatra by taking a look at the regional perspective. Specifically, it is argued that the available sources do not allow us to make far-reaching conclusions about the Roman influence in the neighboring kingdom of Adiabene in the times of Trajan and Septimius Severus. Thus, there was never a “Roman Adiabene” as a province or client kingdom of the Roman Empire. In this sense, both Hatra and Adiabene were integral parts of the Parthian Commonwealth. Furthermore, it is stressed that Hatra and Adiabene had good political and close cultural ties throughout most of the second and early third centuries CE, as they apparently shared the same international challenges and perhaps even the same enemies. In addition, it is likely that both kingdoms mutually profited from transregional trade in the region.