

## Kings – ‘King of Kings’

The royal titles of ‘King of Kings’ and of ‘Great King’ derive from the Iranian Achaemenian, or Parthian, or Sassanian worlds, but their origin can actually be dated back to the Assyrian and Median worlds, as among many others Henri FRANKFORT and Gwyn GRIFFITHS<sup>157</sup> were able to demonstrate in their classical works. Nevertheless it is certain that during Roman imperial times the ideological meaning of these titles was ultimately clearly differentiated on the basis of a long process that had taken place particularly in Hellenistic times, the investigation of whose mechanism is beyond our present scope.<sup>158</sup> While a good number of oriental dynasts were titled Great Kings starting from the sovereigns of Pontus and Armenia and ranging to those of Commagene or Judaea, none of them ever took the title of ‘King of Kings’ in Roman imperial times, as the latter title was considered to be exclusively due first to the Arsacid birthright and then to the Sassanian one. The inexhaustible universal aspirations of Ctesiphon, which were shared by the Arsacid dynasty as much as by the Sassanian royal house,<sup>159</sup> found their more direct and clear expression in this title, which is also unequivocally testified at the beginning of ŠKZ:

I am the Mazdā-worshipping divine<sup>160</sup> Šābuhr, King of Kings of Aryans and

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<sup>157</sup> FRANKFORT 1948; GRIFFITHS 1953. A full discussion of this subject in SCHÄFER 1974. Cf. HARTMANN 2001, 181-183.

<sup>158</sup> MUCCIOLI 2001, 2004.

<sup>159</sup> WOLSKI 1982; KETTENHOFEN 1984; GNOLI 1991; KETTENHOFEN 2002; GNOLI forth. a.

<sup>160</sup> About the term *bay* in the Sassanian and Graeco-Roman titles and political ideology cf. PANAINO 2003, 281: “In short, the Sassanian ideological propaganda was partly simplified and deliberately translated and adapted according to the Roman and Hellenistic political language of royal power, although the process did not proceed without inconsistencies. Indeed it is well known that the use of *bay* (as referred to living kings) did

non-Aryans, of the race of the gods, son of the Mazdā-worshipping divine Ardašīr, King of Kings of the Aryans, of the race of the gods, grandson of the King Papak, I am the Lord of the Aryan nation (transl. LIEU).<sup>161</sup>

This title, clearly considered of Iranian origin and thus perceived also by Rome, in a certain moment in time was usurped by the Palmyrene dynasts, who were obviously not entitled to claim to any link either with the new Sassanian sovereigns or with the recently dethroned Arsacids.

Available evidence in support of such usurpation is extremely scarce, but significant. The texts are well known and raise a number of problems, that are fiercely debated by scholars and which involve important aspects for the interpretation of the Palmyrene vicissitudes.

### *I. Inv. III 3*<sup>162</sup>

Palmyra, honorary inscription from a niche in the Tetrastyle.

[B]ασιλεῦ βασιλέων πρὸς [Ἰ]όντη [... βα]σιλείας τὴν κατὰ | [Π]ε[ρ]-  
σῶν νεῖκην ἀναδησαμένῳ Σεπ[τιμ]ίῳ Ἡρωδιανῶ, Ἰούλιος Αὐρήλιος |  
[Σεπτί]μιος Ο[ὐ]σ[ο]ρ[ώ]δης [καὶ Ἰούλιος Αὐρήλιος (?) .... ἐπίτροπος τῆς  
δ]εσ[π]οίνης κεντηνά[ριος] ἀμφοτέροι στρα[τηγ]οὶ τῆς λαμ[π]ροτάτης |  
[κ]ολων[ν]εῖ[ας].

(This statue is dedicated) to the King of Kings, [having received?] the royalty near the Orontes, crowned for victory over the Persians, Septimius Hero-

not correspond to that of *divus* among the Romans (as referred to deceased kings), but the continuity of the Hellenistic tradition made possible the (different and asymmetric) use of θεός for *divus*, so that θεός became the best ‘political’ translation of *bay*. We can simply state that θεός comes midway between *bay* and *divus*, but does not precisely correspond to either;” PANAINO 2004, in partic. 557-559; About the actual Sassanian royal titles cf. now HUYSE 2006.

<sup>161</sup> DODGEON, LIEU 1991, 34. ŠKZ I. 1 of the Parthian Greek versions, the Middle Persian text, almost completely faded away, has been reconstructed on the other two versions: cf. HUYSE 1999, 22: *Az, mazdēsn bay Šābuhr, šāhān šāh Ērān ud Anērān, kē čīhr až yazdān, puhr mazdēsn bay Ardašīr, šāhān šāh Ērān, kē čīhr až yazdān, puhrēpuhr bay Pābag šāh, Ērānšahr xwadāy ahēm*. ἐγὼ μασδασασνης θεὸς Σαπώρης, βασιλεὺς βασιλέων Ἀριανῶν καὶ Ἀναριανῶν, ἐκ γένους θεῶν, υἱὸς μασδασασνου θεοῦ Ἀρταξάρου βασιλέως βεσιλέων Ἀριανῶν ἐκ γένους θεῶν, ἔργονος θεοῦ Παπάκου βασιλέως τοῦ Ἀριανῶν ἔθνου[ς κύριός εἰμι].

<sup>162</sup> *IGRR* III 1032; SEYRIG 1937; SCHLUMBERGER 1942, 38; GAWLIKOWSKI 1985, 255 n° 10; HARTMANN 2001, 114 n. 198, 468; YOUNG 2001, 236.

dianus, by Julius Aurelius Septimius Vorodes and [Julius Aurelius .... procurator] of the Queen, *centenarius*, both strategoi of the illustrious colony (transl. LIEU).<sup>163</sup>

It is useful to emphasize from the outset that *Inv.* III 3 is a text of very difficult and (equally uncertain) reading and so much more than customary caution must be exercised. The above cited version of the Greek text is the most complete in existence and is the reading cautiously advanced by Daniel SCHLUMBERGER in 1942.

In accordance with such a reading, the inscription possibly represents evidence of the assumption of the Iranian title of 'King of Kings' by a certain Septimius Herodianus, who can certainly be identified with both Septimius Ḥairān, the eldest son of Odainath, who is known from some Palmyrene inscriptions,<sup>164</sup> and with the Herodes attested in the *Historia Augusta*.<sup>165</sup> According to SCHLUMBERGER this inscription should have been posed after Odainath's death, certainly in 267/268, as the reconstruction of the title of ἐπίτροπος τῆς δεσποίνης κεντηνάριος in lines 3-4 of the inscription and borne by the second and unknown dedicating person demonstrates. It is difficult to maintain that Zenobia possibly had officials acting in her name when Odainath was still alive.<sup>166</sup> This inscription, as it has been reconstructed, contains the memory of a victory over the Persians at the Orontes certainly in 261/262 A. D., following the second ἀγωγή by Šābuhr in Syria. These lay at the origin of the assumption of the royal title and were supported by the *Historia Augusta*.<sup>167</sup> Ultimately, one of the two dedicators of the inscription was probably Iulius Aurelius Septimius Vorōd, a very popular

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<sup>163</sup> DODGEON, LIEU 1991, 77, based on the translation by GAWLIKOWSKI 1985, 255 n° 10.

<sup>164</sup> *PAT* 0290 = *CIS* II 3944 = *Inv.* III 16; SEYRIG 1963, 161-162 fig. 1 = GAWLIKOWSKI 1985, 254 n° 5 = HARTMANN 2001, 103 n. 162, 467; SEYRIG 1963, 161-162 fig. 2 = GAWLIKOWSKI 1985, 254 n° 6 = HARTMANN 2001, 103 n. 163, 468.

<sup>165</sup> *H. A., Gall.* 13, 1; *tyr. tr.*, 15,2-16. The identification Ḥairān/Herodianos/Herodes is finally strongly supported by HARTMANN 2001, in particular 109-116, with a number of fitting argumentations, and shall be considered as certain.

<sup>166</sup> SCHLUMBERGER 1942, 60.

<sup>167</sup> Actually with reference to the narration in *H. A., tyr. tr.*, 15, there was some confusion between the victory over the Persians and the one by Odainath at Emesa on the Orontes in 261 over the usurpers Quietus and Ballista: SCHLUMBERGER 1942, 42. The question remains open: why should he adopt an Iranian title after this event?

person belonging to the highest ranks of the Palmyrene aristocracy, who I shall treat at length in a later chapter dedicated to him.<sup>168</sup>

This reading of the inscription and the underlying interpretation of the Palmyrene vicissitudes cannot be sustained *in toto* and as far as I know no scholar has fully done so. The problem of the dating of the text, which is incompatible with the certain data of Vorōd's career, is particularly serious. Far from being an inscription posed after Odainath's death, the text should be chronologically located in the vicinity of 262/264 A. D., during which Vorōd was a *duumvir*.<sup>169</sup> Since Odainath was alive and well, or indeed at the height of his power at that time, the reading of lines 3-4 is questionable. In particular the reading "the father of the queen"<sup>170</sup> has been proposed, but also this interpretation appears unsatisfactory, as it would imply that Antiochus, father of Zenobia, was (*procurator*) *centenarius*, which does not appear to be the case.

I cannot say whether the mention of the *δέσποινα* in ll. 3-4 will be kept,<sup>171</sup> I certainly think I can affirm that such a reading is not compatible with the preceding mention of Vorōd. Not only, also the integration of the name of this person is anything but certain and it is only tentatively pro-

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<sup>168</sup> Cf. *infra*, Chap. 3.

<sup>169</sup> SEYRIG 1937: 261/264; INGOLT 1976, 135: 262; GAWLIKOWSKI 1985, 256 n° 10: 260/262; MILLAR 1990, 45: 265/267; POTTER 1990, 385: 262; WILL 1992, 177: 261; WILL 1996, 112-113: 260/261; EQUINI SCHNEIDER 1993, 32: 262; KOTULA 1997, 102: 262; WATSON 1999, 230 n. 31: 262; HARTMANN 2001, 178: 263/264; YON 2002, 148: 260/262. We are always talking about dates that are more or less explicitly calculated on Septimius Vorōd's career.

<sup>170</sup> INGOLT 1976, 135: Ζηνοβίως πατῆρ τῆς δ]εσ(π)οίνας; KOTULA 1997, 105 on the contrary substitutes the name Zenobios with the one of the true father of Zenobia, Antiochos, whose complete name would thus be Aurelius Septimius Antiochus, but he is named simply Antiochus in *PAT* 0317, cf. *infra*, p. 90.

<sup>171</sup> YON 2002, 143 n. 74 gives it as a fact. On the contrary SCHLUMBERGER restores the term only on the basis of the last two letters, the only ones he was able to read! SCHLUMBERGER 1942, 38: "la termination HC ne peut être alors que celle d'un génitif féminin. Le seul que j'aie su trouver est celui du mot *δέσποινα*, compatible non seulement avec les vestiges visibles au début de la ligne 4, mais aussi avec deux sommets de lettres arrondis, qui n'avaient pas été remarqués, à la fin de la ligne 3, et où nous aurions les restes d'un *epsilon* et d'un *sigma*. Entre le *sigma* supposé et le bord de l'inscription, lequel est formé par la saillie d'une console il rest, à vrai dire, très peu de place pour un *pi*. Mais peut-être admettra-t-on que cette lettre finale a pu être gravée plus petite, ou omise."

posed by SCHLUMBERGER<sup>172</sup> and before him by Charles CLERMONT-GANNEAU.<sup>173</sup> In my opinion Vorōd has been dragged in this text for the certain reading of κεντηνά[ριος in l. 4, a term surely referring to an ἐπίτροπος. Attention should be paid, however, as also in SCHLUMBERGER's reconstruction it is not Vorōd who is ἐπίτροπος, as he is actually known only as δουκηνάριος, but the other anonymous dedicator, whose presence is sure because of ἀμφότεροι at l. 4, the latter also being a certain reading.

But this is not sufficient, the uncertain reading of l. 1, very cautiously advanced by SCHLUMBERGER, πρὸς Ὁρόντη,<sup>174</sup> has become a fixed and incontrovertible point in any reconstruction of the history of Palmyra and of the assumption of the royal title by Odainath and his son. However this reading too appears uncertain and fraught with difficulty.

Michal GAWLIKOWSKI, in his translation "Au roi des rois, [ayant reçu] près de [l'Or]onte la royauté, couronné pour la victoire sur les Perses,"<sup>175</sup> follows SCHLUMBERGER's counsel to insert a participle with the genitive in the lacuna.<sup>176</sup> If this proposed integration has not been accepted by everyone, it is due to the great difficulty of imagining such a disordered and badly constructed sentence could exist: thus the three appositions of the honoured person were: 1) βασιλεῖ βασιλέων; 2) πρὸς Ὁρόντη ἡξιωμένῳ βασιλείας; 3) τὴν κατὰ Περσῶν νείκην ἀναδησαμένῳ.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>172</sup> SCHLUMBERGER 1942, 36: "dans la lacune qui précède l'*oméga*, je distingue la trace d'une lettre ronde, où j'incline à voir le reste de l'*omicron* de Οὐροῶδης plutôt que celui de la pause du *my* de Συμώνης, car entre la dite trace et l'*oméga* il y a place suffisante pour loger une lettre. Après l'*oméga* je crois avoir aperçu, à la faveur d'un éclairage frisant, les vestiges des trois lettres: ΔHC."

<sup>173</sup> CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1900, 194-201. The proposal by CLERMONT-GANNEAU was rejected by Jean CANTINEAU (in *Inv.* III 3) and before him by SEYRIG 1937.

<sup>174</sup> SCHLUMBERGER 1942, 35: "il est tentant de lire πρὸς [Ὁρ]όντη. Les lectures πρὸς et οντη avaient été proposées par M. Seyrig." The reading by SEYRIG is also very difficult: SEYRIG 1937, 1 n. 2: "après βασιλέων, tout semble indiquer que l'on doit lire προσ; puis vient une lacune de deux lettres, puis un *omicron* ou un *oméga*, puis sans doute NTH."

<sup>175</sup> GAWLIKOWSKI 1985, 255 n° 10.

<sup>176</sup> SCHLUMBERGER 1942, 35: "Il est donc vraisemblable que le passage perdu ... et que termine le mot [βα]σιλείας est aussi une apposition dans laquelle ne pouvait guère manquer de se trouver un participe au datif gouvernant βασιλείας, comme ἀναδησαμένῳ gouverne τὴν νείκην .... Je me borne à observer que des termes tels que τεπειμημένῳ ou ἡξιωμένῳ s'accorderaient à la lacune."

<sup>177</sup> Particularly unsuitable is the 'dancing' position of the two participles and the unexpect-

Under these conditions some have preferred to interpret the geographical determination as referring to the title βασιλεὺς βασιλέων (“to the King of Kings who is on [or at] the Orontes”).<sup>178</sup> This very strange combination between a declared universalistic title with an extremely narrow geographical limitation has usually been explained on the basis of the fact that it was at the Orontes that Herodianus won his victory over the Persians, which originated the assumption of this royal title.<sup>179</sup> But is it possible that such a concept could be summed up by means of such an unfair and frankly quite undecipherable expression? Σεπτίμιος Ἡρωδιανὸς βασιλεὺς βασιλέων πρὸς Ὀρόντη is much similar to some *L. Septimius Severus imperator Augustus apud Carnuntum!*

One further difficulty: if the idea that Herodianus/Ḥairān took the title of ‘King of Kings’ after a victory he had won over the Persians is correct, then the fact that in Palmyra two ‘Kings of Kings’ existed contemporaneously would have to be admitted, i.e. Odainath and his son Ḥairān.<sup>180</sup> SCHLUMBERGER was quite aware of this difficulty:

Logiquement, dans un même royaume, ce titre n’aurait dû être porté que par un seul roi à la fois. Mais à défaut de monuments qui permettent de s’assurer de l’usage de toutes ces monarchies, les monnaies des dynasties parthes et saces de l’Inde montrent que ce nom, dès le premier siècle avant notre ère, s’était avili, et pouvait ne rien désigner de plus que le simple titre royal. C’est ainsi qu’Azès I et son futur successeur Azilisès s’intitulent l’un et l’autre roi des rois, sur la même monnaie; et il en est de même pour Azilisès

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ted meaning that ἀναδέω + acc. = ‘I crown myself for something’ would acquire. Even worse would be obviously the solution to render πρὸς Ὀρόντη as being directly depending on the participle ἀναδησαμένω, without any insertion of any further participle into the lacuna (“who assumed at the Orontes ..... the kingship after his victory over the Persians”), as the construction would be practically incomprehensible.

<sup>178</sup> POTTER 1990, 393; WILL 1992, 177; WATSON 1999, 32: in their opinion Ḥairān had received the title next (or at) Antiochia.

<sup>179</sup> So, e. g., SCHLUMBERGER 1942, 42, referring the event to the only known episode of the war, the battle of Emesa. Emesa lays far from the Orontes, anyway. Obviously πρὸς Ὀρόντη cannot be referred to the geographical range on which the βασιλεία of Herodianus was extended, as Palmyra is very far from the river flowing through Antiochia.

<sup>180</sup> It is not possible to admit that Herodianus/Ḥairān took the title after his father’s death because of a twofold reason: 1) the *H. A.* affirms that Odainath was killed together with his son Herodes; 2) a title like the one Herodianus assumed could not hint at anything else but a designated succession of Herodianus/Ḥairān to his father Odainath. Only the contemporary death of the former can explain his failed succession to his father.

et son futur successeur Azès II. Dans la monarchie sassanide, d'autre part, à l'époque même dont nous occupons, le gouverneur du Khorassan, fils et héritier présomptif du roi des rois, porte le titre de «grand roi des roi, des Kouchans». Il ne serait donc pas prudent d'affirmer qu'à Palmyre un père et un fils n'aient pu être appelés simultanément roi des rois.<sup>181</sup>

It is easy to envisage the difference existing between a title like 'King of Kings of the Kushans' (which was actually attested in periods later than those to which this inscription is attributed) and 'King of Kings at the Orontes.' Moreover a source that is external to the Palmyrene vicissitudes and certainly to be preferred in respect to this uncertain inscription explains beyond all doubt the character of the title 'King of Kings' attributed to Odainath:<sup>182</sup> the assumption of the Iranian royal title had the purely anti-Persian aim of claiming a right of succession to the throne of the by then almost extinguished Arsacid dynasty. It is evident that, given the ideological background of this usurpation of the royal Sassanian title by Odainath, it is impossible to hypothesize an eccentric, diminished or peripheral use of the title of the heir to the throne of the Palmyrene dynast.

Herodianus/Ḥairān/Herodes actually took the royal title together with his father Odainath, as the *Historia Augusta* affirms. This is unequivocally testified by a lead token from Antiochia<sup>183</sup> as well as by the inscriptions cited above at n. 164. In all these documents Herodianus/Ḥairān is always called βασιλεύς, but never βασιλεὺς βασιλέων.<sup>184</sup>

We are actually uncertain even about the name of the dedicator of the inscription. The integration Σεπ[τιμίω Ἡρωδι]ανῶ is exclusively based on the first reading by BERTONE, a cultivated traveller who supplied the materials from which the works by Charles CLERMONT-GANNEAU, Jean-Baptiste CHABOT and René CAGNAT originated, and which states Σεπτιμίω Ἡρω-δ[ι]ανῶ. Nevertheless, when in 1942 SCHLUMBERGER read the inscription again, he had to admit that "la pierre a souffert depuis lors."<sup>185</sup> The accuracy of BERTONE's reading on this point has never been questioned, although

<sup>181</sup> SCHLUMBERGER 1942, 39.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. *infra*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>183</sup> SEYRIG 1937, 3 pl. VI; cf. HARTMANN 2001, 114 n. 199.

<sup>184</sup> HARTMANN 2001, 177 n. 54: "Einen einfachen Königstitel führt Herodianus auf einer undatierten Bleibulle aus Antiochia" is misleading.

<sup>185</sup> SCHLUMBERGER 1942, 35 n. 4.

SCHLUMBERGER was able to see an *alpha* of Herodianos which was concealed from BERTONE.<sup>186</sup>

To conclude, we cannot affirm that in *Inv.* III 3 Ἡραῖραν, Vorōd, or the δέσποινα Zenobia are mentioned, either together or separately. We are certain about the mention of a King of Kings, which should lead us to think of either Odainath or his son Vaballath.

## 2. Inscription from the ‘Camp of Diocletian’<sup>187</sup>

Reused stone in the ‘Camp of Diocletian’ originally the drum of a column.

...[...τ]ῆς πόλεω[ς ... τοῦ] | [... ...]θου βασιλέω[ς βασιλέων] | [... ...]ὸν  
 πάρινον Ἡλίου πατρώου | [θεοῦ ...να]ὸν τῶν Σεβαστῶν καὶ καθιερώ-  
 [σαντα ... ...]ιανου καὶ αὐτοκράτορος | [... ...]τειμ[ῆς καὶ μεγαλοφρο-  
 σύνης ἔνεκεν.

[... ...] of the city [... ... of NP]<sup>188</sup> the king of kings [... ...] of marble of Helios the ancestral [god ... ... the tem]ple of the *Augusti*<sup>189</sup> and he dedi[cated ... ... of ...]ianos and of the emperor [... ... ]<sup>190</sup> in his hon]our and because of his greatness of mind [transl. KAIZER].

<sup>186</sup> Note that the reading by BERTONE of l. 3 has been completely changed by SCHLUMBERGER. BERTONE was just able to read: [...]λιος C[...][ - - - .

<sup>187</sup> MICHALOWSKI 1960, 208 n° 2; GAWLIKOWSKI 1973, 100; HARTMANN 2001, 176 n. 53; KAIZER 2002, 149.

<sup>188</sup> The termination of the name fits equally well both Odainath and Vaballath, nevertheless the *theta* is not so clear and it has been omitted by KAIZER 2002, 149. The proposal by MILIK 1972, 316 to read Herodianus, is certainly to be rejected, also without the support of *theta*, cf. *supra*. HARTMANN 2001, 176 n. 53 is much more inclined towards Odainath.

<sup>189</sup> The integration ναὸν τῶν Σεβαστῶν, already proposed by the discoverer MICHALOWSKI, has been accepted by MILIK, BOWERSOCK 1976, 353, KAIZER, doubtfully by HARTMANN, but rejected by GAWLIKOWSKI. About the imperial cult in Palmyra cf. KAIZER 2002, partic. 148-151.

<sup>190</sup> The proposal of integration by MILIK: καὶ καθιερώ[σαντα τὰς ἀνδριάντας Kaisάρου Αὐρηλιανου καὶ αὐτοκράτορος [Οὐαβαλλάθου Ἀθηνοδώρου] is not to be supported, as the qualifications of ‘Aurelianus *Caesar*’ and ‘Vaballathus *imperator*’ are not attested anywhere. The singular αὐτοκράτωρ compells to search for some other title for [-]ιανου. Furthermore this reading is uncertain, since GAWLIKOWSKI only reports [-]νου. An integration such as καὶ καθιερώ[σαντα τὰς ἀνδριάντας Σεβαστου Αὐρηλιανου καὶ αὐτοκράτορος [Οὐαβαλλάθου Ἀθηνοδώρου] is equally not satisfying and not attested elsewhere. However the reading [-]ιανου, if it is confirmed, prevents us from any integration transforming that word in a genitive matching with the following καὶ αὐτοκράτορος.



Given the condition of the inscription, it is not possible to tell if the 'King of Kings' mentioned there is either Odainath or Vaballath, nor it is possible to tell if this inscription was posed before or after the mysterious death of Odainath. My preference for Odainath is due to the fact that in the inscription something belonging to the 'God Helios' (it might be either a statue, or a column, or a temple) is mentioned. The Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle, as is well known, runs thus:<sup>191</sup>

another will come, a well-horned hungry stag in the mountains desiring to feed his stomach with the venom-spitting beasts; then will come the sun-sent, dreadful, fearful lion, breathing much fire. With great and reckless courage he will destroy the well-horned swift stag and the great, venom-spitting, fearsome beast discharging many shafts and the bow-footed goat; fame will attend him; perfect, unblemished, and awesome, he will rule the Romans and the Persians will be feeble [transl. POTTER].<sup>192</sup>

The juxtaposition of the ἡλιόπεμπτος δεινός τε φοβερός τε λέων πνεύων φλόγα πολλήν Odainath and the offering to the god Sun/Šamāš in this inscription seems very stimulating to me.<sup>193</sup>

### 3. PAT 0292, 0317

PAT 0292:<sup>194</sup> Palmyra, consolle in the Great Colonnade:

šlm sptmyws 'dy[nt] mlk mlk' | wtmqnn' dy mdnh' klh sptmy' | zbd' rb hyl' rb' wzby rb hyl' | dy tdmwr qrtst' 'qym lmrhwn | byrh' 'b dy šnt 5.100 + 80 + 2.

Statue of Septimius Odainat, King of Kings and *restitutor totius Orientis*, and Septimius Zabdā, chief commander and Zabbai, commander of Tadmor, *virii egregii*, have erected for their lord in the month Ab in the year 582 [Sel. = August 271 A. D.].

<sup>191</sup> POTTER 1990, particularly 341-346.

<sup>192</sup> *Or. Sib.* XIII 164-171 (210, GEFFCKEN): τότ' ἐλεύσεται ἡλιόπεμπτος | δεινός τε φοβερός τε λέων πνεύων φλόγα πολλήν. | δὴ τόθ' ὁ γ' αὐτ' ὀλέσει πολλῆ καὶ ἀναιδέι τόλμῃ | εὐκεράωτ' ἔλαφόν τε θοὸν καὶ θῆρα μέγιστον | ἰοβόλον φοβερόν συρίγματα πόλλ' ἀφιέντα | λοξοβάτην τε τράγον, ἐπὶ δ' αὐτῶ κῦδος ὀπηδεῖ. | αὐτὸς δὴ ὀλόκληρος ἀλώβητος καὶ ἀπλητος | ἄρξει Ῥωμαίων, Πέρσαι δ' ἔσονται ἀλαπαδνοί.

<sup>193</sup> On the solar cult in Palmyra cf. KAIZER 2002, 154-157.

<sup>194</sup> CIS II 3946 = *Inv.* III 19; cf. GAWLIKOWSKI 1985, 256 n° 11; HARTMANN 2001, 146 n. 78; YOUNG 2001, 236, defective translation.

*PAT* 0317:<sup>195</sup> milepost from the suburbs of Palmyra:

... ..] | [... κ]α[ὶ ὑπὲρ σω]ττηρίας Σεπτιμίας Ζηνοβίας τῆς  
λαμπροτάτης || βασιλίσσης μητρὸς τοῦ | βασιλέως, [...]υ[...]  
ʿl ḥ[ywh] wz[kwth dy] sptymyws | whlbt ʿndr[ws nhy]rʿ mlk mlkʿ | wʿpnrṯṯʿ  
dy mdnhʿ klh br | spt[ymy]ws [ʿdynt mlk] mlkʿ wʿl || ḥyh dy sptymyʿ btzby  
nhyrʿ | mlkʿ ʿmh dy mlk mlkʿ | bt ʿntykwks m<yl>10 + 4

... and for the safety of Septimia Zenobia, *clarissima* queen mother of the King ....

For the safety and victory of Septimius Vaballathus Athenodorus, *clarissimus* King of Kings and *corrector totius Orientis*, son of Septimius [Odainath, King] of Kings, and for the life of Septimia Bat-Zabbai, *clarissima* Queen, mother of the King of Kings, daughter of Antiochos, miles 14.

In these two texts, both written after the death of Odainath, the latter and his son are both qualified with the Sassanian royal title of *mlk mlkʿ*: ‘King of Kings.’ Besides this title in *PAT* 0292 Odainath is called *mqnnʿ dy mdnhʿ klh*, while in *PAT* 0317 Vaballath is called *ʿpnrṯṯʿ dy mdnhʿ klh*. I have already expressed elsewhere my opinion about the different titles assumed by father and son on the two documents (mind you, both posed under the reign of the son and almost contemporaneously).<sup>196</sup> In my opinion it is methodologically necessary to acknowledge a difference in meaning between the substantive in the derived emphatic state as derived from the addition of the ending *ān* to the participle *pael* of the verb *tqn*, which exists both in Aramaic and in Hebrew, with the substantial meaning of “to put in order, to straighten out” and the term *ʿpnrṯṯʿ*, a simple transliteration of the Greek ἐπανορθωτής. The difference between the two terms is the same as that which exists in Latin between *restitutor* and *corrector*, between the action of an emperor and the function of one of his subordinates.<sup>197</sup> In the refined political ideo-

<sup>195</sup> *CIS* II 3971 = *WADD.* 2628 = *IGRR* III 1028 = *OGIS* 649; YOUNG 2001, 178, only Palmyrene.

<sup>196</sup> GNOLI 2000, 153.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. CANTINEAU 1931, SWAIN 1993; *contra* CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1920; POTTER 1996; HARTMANN 2001, 149: “Die Titel der beiden Dynasten stehen in den palmyrenischen Inschriften an der gleichen Stelle nach dem Königstitel .... Die Begriffe *mqnnʿ* und *ʿpnrṯṯʿ* werden hier offensichtlich synonym verwendet, beide Herrscher beanspruchten also dieselbe Titulatur.” However, as I have already affirmed, GNOLI 2000, 153 n. 88, the very perfect identity of titles in both official and contemporary documents makes the difference between the two terms employed there particularly significant, which is sign of the graduality of power in the sense I have explained *ad loc.*

logy of Zenobia/Vaballath, the continuity of action by the son towards his father was meant to ensure the benevolence of the new emperor, Aurelianus.

Both the father and the son are called 'King of Kings.' Odainath assumed the royal title at the same time as his victory over the Persians. This fact, of great importance for all the Palmyrene vicissitudes, is actually not attested in a direct and unequivocal way in any source contemporary with the life of Odainath, and so it is always possible to maintain that the royal title had not been taken by the Palmyrene dynast but rather by his son, the usurper Vaballath, who 'dated it back' to his father. The oft-cited inscription found on a crater discovered in the sanctuary of Abgal in Ḥirbat Samrīn, in the 'Palmyrène du nord-ouest,' which actually qualifies Odainath by means of the title *mlk*, cannot solve the highly controversial point of the dating, as it is incomplete.<sup>198</sup>

Only the *Historia Augusta* unequivocally affirms that Odainath assumed the royal title even though it is contradictory between the title either of King of Palmyra or of Roman emperor, and furthermore it is doubtful whether the assumption of the kingship took place before, during or after the expedition by Odainath against Šābuhr in 261/62.<sup>199</sup> I am among those who maintain that Odainath took the royal title and did so in agreement with the Roman authorities. Pursuing a lengthy policy of growing autonomy during which he had slowly usurped the senatorial titles over the period of at least one decade and following a clever interpretation of the ὑπάτειρα, by the assumption of the royal title, which from the outside was configured as the assumption of titles due to the Arsacid and Sassanian kings, he completed the process.<sup>200</sup> I

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<sup>198</sup> PAT 1684 = SCHLUMBERGER 1951, 60 n° 36, 151 n° 21. The possible datings matching with the lacuna are 573 (= 261/62), 578 (= 266/67) and 583 (= 271/72). Cf. HARTMANN 2001, 177 n. 55, who tends to support 266/67, but without any decisive arguments.

<sup>199</sup> *H. A. tyr. tr.*, 15, 2: *adsumpto nomine primum regali cum uxore Zenobia et filio maiore, cui erat nomen Herodes, minoribus Herenniano et [a] Timolao collecto exercitu contra Persas profectus est*; 15, 5: *Herode, qui et ipse post reditum de Perside cum patre imperator est appellatus*; *H. A., Gall.*, 3, 3: *totius prope Orientis factus est Odenatus imperator*; 10, 1: *Gallieno et Saturninus conss. Odaenatus rex Palmyrenorum optinuit totius orientis imperium*; 12, 1: *Odenatum participato imperio Augustum vocavit*; 13, 1: *Herode, quem et ipsum imperatorem appellaverat*, etc. The tradition attested in the epitomators (EKG ?) ignores the assumption of the royal title by Odainath. Full discussion in HARTMANN 2001, *passim*.

<sup>200</sup> A most extensive description of this process of growing autonomy of Odainath in GNOLI 2000.

think that the logic underlying the events should lead us to situate the assumption of the Sassanian royal title after the victory over the Persians, thus far away from the Orontes, and indeed well inside the enemy's territory.<sup>201</sup>

The assumption of the title of 'King of Kings' by Odainath should be considered as an extreme action organized by Gallienus in an attempt to stop the breakup of the oriental provinces after the devastating Persian attacks. The project by the emperor aimed at establishing command over the whole East and at the same time claiming the Arsacid throne in the face of the Sasanian usurpation.

The dynastic claim hidden beneath the title of 'King of Kings' assumed by Odainath is supported with certainty in a passage of the Babylonian Talmud (*Seder Nashim, Ketuboth* 51b):

Rabbi Judah affirmed: kidnapped women are allowed to their husbands. "But" the Rabbi told the Rabbi Judah, "They bring them some bread, do they not?" – They do it for fear. "They take them arrows, do they not?" – They do it for fear. However it is certain that they are forbidden (to their husbands) if the kidnapers free them and they go to them of their own free wills.

Our Rabbi thought: The prisoners of the king have got the *status* of ordinary prisoners, but those who are kidnapped by highwaymen are not considered as ordinary prisoners. Did we not think of the contrary? – There is no contradiction between the rules regarding the prisoners of the King as the first rules make reference to reigns such as that of Ahasuer, while the second ones make reference to the reign of one man like Ben Nezer. Neither there is any contradiction between the two regulations regarding the prisoners of the bandits, because the first ones make reference to a bandit like Ben Nezer, while the other ones make reference to an ordinary bandit.

As far as Ben Nezer is concerned, might he be called 'king' here and 'bandit' there? – Yes he might; as compared with Ahasuerus he was a bandit, but as compared with an ordinary thief, he was a king.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> HARTMANN 2001, 176 agrees with me when he maintains that Odainath and his son "nahmen nach Abschluß des Zuges im Jahr 263 den persischen Titel 'König der Könige' an." But unlike him I actually think it is neither possible nor important to determine if the assumption took place "jedoch in Syrien" or once more in Persian territory during that campaign. What is sure is that the titles Odainath bore were well known and discussed in Mesopotamia, *pace* HARTMANN. Cf. *infra*.

<sup>202</sup> ESPTEIN 1936 II, 299.

The identification of Ben Nezer with Odainath son of Ḥairan Vaballath son of Naṣōr on the one hand and of Ahasuerus with Šābuhr on the other is usually accepted as valid by Talmud scholars.<sup>203</sup> This passage is meaningful also as evidence of the social cohesion existing in the Sassanian empire some decades after the elimination of the Arsacids, thus as highly significant in as much as it regards a religious minority that in Sassanian times was increasingly emarginated and thus most probably more permeable to centrifugal pressures.

Moreover this passage contradicts the hypothesis by Udo HARTMANN that the assumption of the Iranian title of 'King of Kings' by Odainath and Vaballath took place only in Palmyra, as these dynasts simply preferred to bear the royal title elsewhere.<sup>204</sup> Logically the title of 'King of Kings' actually had a strongly subversive value precisely outside Palmyra and particularly in Mesopotamian territory. If we just accept the general outline of the setting by HARTMANN, which I have already done in my monograph preceding his work, i. e. if we mean that Odainath did not betray Rome by usurping the imperial power, but that he had taken the Persian royal title in full agreement or better still at Gallienus' instigation, and that he was a martyr to the 'Realpolitik' of the Roman emperor who was trying to re-establish non-conflictual relationships with his Persian neighbour, in this precise case it is evident how the assumption of the Sassanian royal title of 'King of Kings,' which had as its cultural and propagandistic point of reference the Sassanian empire and not the Roman one, must have been used also outside Palmyra. The above cited dialogue between the two rabbies refers to this specific point: which of the two kings, Šābuhr or Odainath, was the true king. Both

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<sup>203</sup> Cfr., e.g., AVI-YONAH 1962, 126: "Die enttäuschten Juden begannen 'Ben Nezer' (oder 'den Sohn des Spröbblings', d. h. Odenat) mit dem kleinen Horn in Daniel 7, 8 zu vergleichen;" NEUSNER 1966, 49-50. The rare objections against this identification of Odainath are mainly linked to the difficulties to fix the dating of the destruction of the Mesopotamian town of Nehardea by Ben Nezer (570 Sel. = 258/259 A. D.). Out of it derives the unnecessary explanation identifying Ben Nezer with an undefined 'relative' of Odainath. Decisive is the objection by DE BLOIS 1975, 13: "no other man with the genealogy-name of Odaenathus' family could be called 'king' but Odaenathus himself."

<sup>204</sup> HARTMANN 2001, 183. The fact that outside Palmyra both Odainath and Herodianus are always called just 'King' is very dangerous as any *argumentum e silentio*. Moreover, as already exposed above, the documents testifying the assumption of the royal title are really very rare.

could present themselves in the same way to their subjects: both were 'Kings of Kings.'