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# Kingdoms and Principalities in the Roman Near East

Edited by

Ted Kaizer and Margherita Facella

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# ORIENS ET OCCIDENS

Studien zu antiken Kulturkontakten  
und ihrem Nachleben

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Band 19



## KINGS AND PRINCES AT PALMYRA

*Jean-Baptiste Yon*

The title as it stands may be deceiving, as the only known princes of Palmyra are attested in the third century, in a rather different context, during a period when client kingdoms were in the process of disappearing. As a matter of fact, when speaking of kings in Palmyra, one should perhaps begin with the end of the history of the city, the period of the attempt by Zenobia (and maybe by Odaenathus himself) to reach imperial power<sup>1</sup>. In any case, this attempt seems quite different from what had happened with the client kingdoms at the beginning of Roman domination in the East. But instead of focusing on this later period, which has recently been the subject of much work, we shall try here to highlight the beginning of the history of 'Roman Palmyra', that is the period following the arrival of Rome in the Near East (in the figure of Pompey), until the 70s of the first century AD.<sup>2</sup>

This study will, therefore, deal precisely with the *absence* of kings in Palmyra. The explanation of this absence is obviously hard to find, since the writing of a history of events that did not happen (prospective history?) is a very particular kind of narrative, moreover since documentary evidence is rather sparse, at it is very often when dealing with the history of ancient societies.

One of the striking phenomena in the history of Palmyra is the existence of a strong social stratification in the population, and the influence of notables, at least during the first three centuries of the Christian era. However, if our documentary evidence is to be trusted, there were no princes in Palmyra before Odaenathus. Yet the presence of Rome was relatively late, and the possible Seleucid influence has left few traces, giving time for the developing of particular characteristics.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of Palmyra, the first steps are more or less well known: around 40 BC, the settlement was attacked by Mark Antony's horsemen, who came back, if we follow the narrative of Appian (*BCiv.* 5.9), empty-handed;<sup>4</sup> between AD 14 and 19, and more precisely perhaps, between 17 and 19, at the time of the visit of Germanicus to the Near East, the limits of the Palmyrene (*fines regionis Palmyrenae*) were established by Creticus Silanus, who was governor of Syria from 11 to 17;<sup>5</sup> whether the same Germanicus visited Palmyra in person is hard to affirm, but he did send a Palmyrene, a certain Alexandros, as an envoy to the kingdom of Mesene, a region near the Persian Gulf, and apparently to Sampsigeramos (Shamshigeram

1 For modern views on Zenobia and Odaenathus, see most recently Hartmann (2001).

2 Not incidentally, the epigraphic evidence from Palmyra is attested from this period onwards, permitting to deal with the political situation in some details.

3 See, however, Teixidor (1994), p. 171–3.

4 See, most recently, Hekster and Kaizer (2004).

5 *AÉ* 1939, 179.

in Aramaic), king of Emesa.<sup>6</sup> Apparently from the same period date, first, the incorporation of Palmyra into the Roman empire (or at least a *de facto* domination) and, second, a limited number of documents on the functioning of internal affairs in Palmyra. Eventually, in the 50s–70s of the first century – after nearly twenty-five years of silence on the subject in the documentation – some inscriptions give information about the transformation of Palmyra into a kind of Greek *polis*, with institutions such as a *boulè*, a *dèmos*, and magistrates.<sup>7</sup>

If one cannot help to wonder about the absence of dynasts or kings at Palmyra in a period marked by the widespread influence of this type of organization and by relations with Rome, it is also a good opportunity to ask some questions about the first years of Roman Palmyra or about the years preceding the installation of the *polis*. As in the rest of Syria and Mesopotamia, a lack of documentation and the partial character of the ancient writers blur our knowledge of the period. After the end of the Seleucids and the dispersion of local powers, the arrival of Rome did not mean at first political unification, and the diverse heirs of the Seleucid empire kept their power, sometimes until the end of the first century.<sup>8</sup> Was Palmyra so miserable at this time that nobody thought it of any use to become king over it? However, the remains of the Hellenistic part of the city, only partially excavated, and the epigraphic documentation show clearly that Palmyra was a city, and with a wide-ranging influence from the early first century at least.<sup>9</sup>

In the following, we shall try to explain, with particular attention to the contemporary political context, the internal functioning of the *gbl tdmry*, that is what could be best translated as ‘the people of Palmyra’, in the years preceding the installation of the *polis*, a Greek-style city-state. Whereas in Hatra (mid-second century AD) or in Edessa (beginning of the first century AD) local conditions and the political situation at large permitted the transformation of a society governed by a *primus inter pares* into a kingdom with a distinctive king, the functioning of the society of Palmyra was clearly dissimilar, with very different consequences, at least until the arrival of Odaenathus.<sup>10</sup>

## PALMYRA BEFORE THE *POLIS*

### The institutions of Palmyra before the *polis*

Several inscriptions shed light on the institutional situation of Palmyra in the first two decades of the first century AD. The first is a bilingual from AD 25:<sup>11</sup>

6 PAT 2754. Cf. below.

7 See Sartre (1996).

8 Sartre (2001), p. 372–469, on the last years of ‘pre-Roman’ Syria.

9 On the Hellenistic city, see Schmidt-Colinet and As’ad (2000). The earliest dated inscription (44 BC) is PAT 1524 (= *Inv.* XI.100).

10 For Hatra and Edessa, see Sommer (2003b), p. 392–4.

11 PAT 1353 (= *Inv.* IX.12).

[b]yrh sywn šnt 336 šlm' dnh dy  
 [ml]kw br nš' br bwlh' hšš dy mn bny kwr'  
 [dy] 'qymw lh 'nwš 'nwšt' wgb l tdmry'  
 [mn dy] špr lhwn wlmhzwzhwn wlb t 'lhyhwn.

In the month Siwan, the year 336 (June, AD 25), this statue of Malikû, son of Neshâ, son of Bôlhâ Hashash, from the Bene Komare, was set up by the treasurers and the assembly of the Palmyrenes, because he did good to them, to their city, and to the house of their gods.

Μαλιχον Νεσα του Βολαα του Ασα-  
 σου φυλης Χομαρηνων οι αρχυρο-  
 τομιαι και Παλμυρηνων ο δημος  
 ευνοιας ενεκα.

To Malichos, son of Nesa, son of Bôlaa, son of Asasos, from the tribe of the Chomarenoi, the treasurers and the people of the Palmyrenes, in gratitude for his benevolence.

Strikingly, one can recognize parallels with institutions of a later period: next to a *gbl tdmry*, the 'people of Palmyra' or 'assembly of the Palmyrenes' (a popular assembly), magistrates are mentioned ('treasurers', or rather 'men of the treasury').<sup>12</sup> If this aspect is not very surprising, it is difficult to tell if we are dealing here with a legacy of the Seleucid period, thus with a possible Greek influence (in AD 25, the Near East had been 'Greek' for more than three centuries). But one has to remember that the cities of the pre-Greek Near East may already have offered examples.<sup>13</sup> It could be easy to find other parallels for the active role of an assembly,<sup>14</sup> as long as the problem of the actual participation of the population is kept apart.

The word used in the texts, *gbl*, is surely cognate to the Arabic *jabl*, 'multitude', 'crowd', and to the South Arabian *gblt*, 'tribe', and it exists in some Western Semitic languages.<sup>15</sup> Whatever the exact meaning of the term and its origin, in context the inscriptions are rather clear. The Greek texts that form the counterpart of the bilingual inscriptions containing the word may be later,<sup>16</sup> but it is certain that the translators had not forgotten the exact meaning of *gbl* when they were writing ὁ δῆμος (*PAT* 1353) or ἡ πόλις (*PAT* 0269), even if the word *gbl* itself had since long fallen out of use by then. The mention of financial administration clearly indicates that Palmyra was an organized community at the time, although it was neither a *polis* yet, nor simply a gathering of tribes.

The commentary of the above-quoted text about *gbl* and treasurers should as well take into account the mention of the word *mhwzhwn* ('their city'). The word is

12 On the institutions of Palmyra during the Roman period, see Sartre (1996).

13 See Millar (1983) on Phoenician cities. Bondi (1974), p. 160 concluded that the existence of representative institutions in the Phoenician cities is a possibility despite the lack of evidence. For the Mesopotamian world, see Van de Mieroop (1997), p. 121–8.

14 Members of tribes may have composed this assembly, but that is an hypothesis which cannot be proven.

15 On the etymology, see Cantineau (1935), p. 150, with a possible Arabic origin. However, in Old Aramaic and in Phoenician the word means 'border' or 'territory', see *DNSWI*, s.v. *gbl*. The derivation is possibly the same as for the word *dēmos* in Greek, from the meaning of 'administrative subdivision' to 'people'.

16 See Cantineau in *Inv.* IX, p. 17 and p. 20; id. (1933), p. 202.

attested once more in Palmyrene epigraphy during the first years of the *polis* (PAT 1375, from AD 76). The difference between *mhwz* and *mdynh*, 'city', has been subject to debate.<sup>17</sup> It may be better here to dismiss the meaning of *portus*, a point where transit taxes were exacted, and to prefer the simplest translation, giving a political meaning to the word: 'city', possibly with an emphasis on a particular aspect ('fortress', as in Syriac?<sup>18</sup>), before its replacement by the widespread use of a more general word as *mdynh*. One should note as well that in another text of the same date (relating to the same person), we find the phrase *bmdynt bbl*, 'in the city of Babylon' (PAT 1352). In any case, the conception of a supra-tribal body in Palmyra appears clearly, and it may be useful to remind ourselves that the case of Palmyra was not one of a tribal community being transformed into a Greek city. It thus seems that the role of Rome was part of an on-going process, as was paralleled elsewhere. We will come back to this below.

Another point to underline is the function of the magistrates: their financial role may induce us to wonder what kind of treasury it was. One may be tempted to answer: 'of the sanctuary'. However, as we will see below, nothing in the history of Palmyra points to a confusion between civic institutions and sacerdotal power. Besides, the treasurers known in AD 114 (PAT 0340) seem to be civic magistrates, even though they dedicated an altar. Obviously, it is possible that despite the continuing use of their title, their status had changed. In any case, it seems difficult to decide what exactly were the functions of the treasurers in the early period. They could have been the chief magistrates of Palmyra, as is often thought. One should note at least that, in our text, Malikû is honoured by the *gbl* and the treasurers because he was good to them, to their city, and to the *bt 'lhyhwn* ('house of their gods', which may mean the sanctuary of Bel, since the text was found there), thus introducing a reference to the central position of sanctuaries (and of one in particular) in relations to the institutions of the city.

Keeping for a later discussion a text of AD 51 (PAT 0269), which gives the equivalence *polis/gbl*, the word *gbl* is found as well in another text, of AD 11, preceding even Germanicus' visit to Syria, which gives at least a *terminus* for the installation of the *gbl*:<sup>19</sup>

*kil' dnh dy bwly' dy*  
*gmly' dy l'l mnh dy blw*  
*gbl tdmry' klhwn 'l*  
*'tnin kprwt br br''*  
*w'l ymlkw brh dy mn bny*  
*myt' byqrhwn bšnt*  
 322.

17 See Teixidor (1983), p. 309–11. Contra Bowersock (1987), p. 180–1, but see Briquel-Chatonnet (1995a), p. 124–6.

18 See Payne-Smith (1903), s.v. For the use of a word with similar meaning (*krk'*), see PAT 2015 (cited below). See also Briquel-Chatonnet (1995a), p. 128–9, on the possibility that *krk'* is actually Spasinou Charax.

19 PAT 2636. For a full commentary of this difficult text, see also Gawlikowski and As'ad (1993), p. 163–72.

From this wall, the revenue (of the taxation) on the camels, the upper part of which is (out of) the revenue of the whole people of the Palmyrenes, to Atenatan Khaffatû, son of Bar'â and to Iamlikû his son, from the tribe of the Bene Mita, in their honour, the year 322 (AD 10/11).

One may conclude that at this time the people of Palmyra kept control of their finances, at least for internal purposes, without reference to an external power.

For the sake of completeness, one should add two other mentions of treasurers (unfortunately both without a date), which may, judging from the script, be earlier than the middle of the first century, first, an altar with an inscription reading [ʿl]t' dh mn ksp 'nwš[ʿt]', 'this altar, paid by the treasury',<sup>20</sup> and a tessera with the legend 'nwš[ʿt']/krk', 'the treasury/the city'.<sup>21</sup> It seems that the word *gbl* is always used in connection with financial affairs or with the sanctuary of Bel, which goes to show what was really important in Palmyra at the time.

### Grandeas and the tribes: notables and struggle between tribes

A number of details in the history of Palmyra might be taken as indicators of a potential evolution into a principality or a tetrarchy. Among these factors, the predominance of leading families in the political life of the city is one of the most prominent phenomena.<sup>22</sup> Yet, if some personalities dominated the political scene, such as Hāran bar Bōnnê in the first century AD or Odaenathus in the third, the apparently perpetual changes in the leading role among the Palmyrene elite, with the rapid appearance and disappearance of families, could have prevented these same families from keeping a position of power which was rooted more deeply. Several factors may explain this 'instability': the integration into the Roman empire was, obviously, favourable to the normal working of institutions proper to a Greek city, and it may have prevented any disruption of social order, or exercise of power without control.

Nevertheless, one must not forget that tribes and family lineages were at the basis of the organization of Palmyrene society, at least in the inscriptions of the first century.<sup>23</sup> The apparent 'instability' could, therefore, also be interpreted as the consequence of struggles between tribes or clans (however these terms are understood). In that case, the situation should be interpreted as a dynamic process, with rival groups. It has been argued recently that in Hatra some sort of political consensus led to the establishment of a monarchy;<sup>24</sup> this was obviously not the case at Palmyra. A well-known text from the sanctuary of Bel may give an insight in the relations between tribes in the first century:<sup>25</sup>

20 PAT 1620. See Starcky (1949–50), p. 56.

21 PAT 2015. See Ingholt, Seyrig and Starcky (1955), n° 8, and see Briquel-Chatonnet (1995a), p. 128–9, for a different interpretation. Cf. above.

22 See Yon (2002).

23 In a later period, even if references to tribes are rarer, the evidence proves the importance of family lineage (long genealogies, family tombs ...).

24 Sommer (2003b), p. 393–4.

25 PAT 0261. See also CJS 3915 = *Inv.* IX.13.



šlm ḥšš br nš' br bwlh' ḥšš dy  
 'bdw lh bny knr' wbnj mibwl mn [d]y qm  
 bršhwn w'bd šlm' bynyhwn wprns  
 brmnhwn bkl [š]bw klh rb' wz' r'  
 byqrh byrh knwn šnt 333.

Statue of Hashash, son of Neshâ, son of Bôlhâ Hashash, made for him by the Bene Komare and the Bene Matthabol, because he stood at their head and made peace between them and assisted them in every possible way, large and small. In his honour, in the month Kanun, year 333 (November, AD 21).

Hashash is honoured by two tribes (the Bene Komare and the Bene Matthabol) because 'he stood at their head' (*qm bršhwn*) and made peace between them ('*bd šlm' bynyhwn*). Hashash is the brother of the Malikû who was honoured by the treasurers and the *gbl* in the above-cited inscription (*PAT* 1353).

One should perhaps not go too far in the interpretation of the text, and if indeed the components of the collectivity of Palmyrenes did not always go together smoothly, that does not mean that that collectivity was therefore a new, or even artificial, construction. The main interest of the text is to show a small part of the political life of Palmyra before the *polis*, and the exact meaning of the phrases 'Bene Komare' and 'Bene Matthabol' may remain unclear, apart from the fact that they were probably part of the city's society.

A parallel may be found in a much later text with the same words ('he made peace', '*bd šlm'*'), set up for the *strategos* Aelius Bôrrâ in AD 198.<sup>26</sup> It shows that the functioning of the society of Palmyra could meet with some difficulties even by the time it had the institutions of a Greek city. The main difference to underline is that Aelius Bôrrâ is called a *strategos*, whereas Hashash is a chief, or rather acted as the chief of the two tribes mentioned.<sup>27</sup> The meaning of the phrase *qm bršhwn* and its political implication is difficult, but 'he stood at their head' (literal meaning) is not exactly the same as 'he was their leader'.<sup>28</sup> From the first translation, one has the feeling that the text is dealing with a precise occasion, perhaps a struggle against a common enemy, or at least an occasion which caused the intervention of Hashash. In any case, the word thus loses part of its political meaning to become only a description of the situation.

If I dwell upon what may seem details, it is because the word *rš'*, 'chief' or 'leader', appears elsewhere in the epigraphy of Palmyra, namely to describe the political position of Odaenathus, who in the middle of the third century was called (as was his son Haïran) 'chief of Palmyra'.<sup>29</sup> Besides, if the society of Roman Palmyra was dominated by *grands notables* who did not hold official titles, it is interesting to note that one of the first of them, before the Roman period, was 'at the head of two tribes', possibly with no official title either. One last remark on this subject may be made: 'chief of tribe' has a very obvious translation in Greek,

26 *PAT* 1063. See Ingholt (1932), p. 27.

27 On the function of *strategoi* in Palmyra, see Sartre (1996), p. 394–5, and Yon (2002), p. 114–6.

28 Both translations are found in *PAT*, the first one s.v. *qm*, the latter s.v. *rš'*.

29 See Millar (1995).

namely *phylarchos*, but the word is never used in connection to Palmyra, especially in the first years of Roman domination of Syria.<sup>30</sup>

### Grandeas and the tribes: tribal mixings

Other texts of the first century may throw some light on the relationships between tribes in the formative years of the *polis*, giving evidence of marriages between members of different tribes.<sup>31</sup> The first is an Aramaic inscription from AD 52, set up in the temple of Baal-Shamin:<sup>32</sup>

*byrh tbt šnt 363*  
*'mwd' dnh qrbt 'mlt b[r]t*  
*br'' br 'intn dy mn bny myt'*  
*'t tym' br blhzy br zdbbl dy*  
*mn phd bny m'zyn lb 'lšmn 'lh'*  
*t'b' škr' 'l hyyh whyy bnyh*  
*w'hyh.*

In the month Tebet, year 363 (January, AD 52), this column was offered by Amtallat, daughter of Bar'ā, son of Atenatan, from the Bene Mita, wife of Taīmā, son of Belhazaī, son of Zabdibel, from the tribe of the Bene Maziyān, to Baalshamin, good and rewarding god, for his life and the life of his sons and of his brother.

The second text is a trilingual from the same year:<sup>33</sup>

*Haeranes Bonne Rabbeli*  
*F(ilius) Palmirenus phyles Mithenon*  
*sibi et suis fecit.*

Haeranes Bōnnē, son of Rabbelus, Palmyrene, from the tribe of the Mithenians, made (this tomb) for himself and for his family.

Ἔτους γξτ' μηνός Ξανδικού  
 Αἰρανης Βωνναίου τοῦ Ραββηλοῦ  
 Παλμυρηνός φυλῆς Μειθηνων ἑαυτῷ  
 καὶ Βωννη πατρὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ Βααλθηγα μητρὶ  
 αὐτοῦ εὐνοίας ἔνεκεν καὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις αὐτοῦ.

Year 363, in the month Xandikos (April, AD 52), Hairanes, son of Bōnnaios, son of Rabbelos, Palmyrene, from the tribe of the Mithenians, for himself and for Bōnnaios his father, and for Balthega, his mother, in gratitude for his benevolence, and for his family.

*byrh nysn šnt 363 qbr' dnh dy*  
*ħyrn br bwn' br rb' l br bwn' br 'intn br*  
*tymy tdmry' dy mn phd bny myt' dy bn' 'l*  
*bwn' 'bwhy w' l b' l'g brt blšwry dy mn*  
*phd bny gdybwl 'mh wlh wlbwhy lyqrhwn.*

30 See, however, Strabo 16.1.28 on the phylarchs who controlled the region west of the Euphrates.

31 On intertribal marriages, see Yon (2002), p. 179–80.

32 PAT 0168; Dunant (1971), n° 11.

33 PAT 2801; Rodinson (1950), p. 137.

In the month Nisan, year 363, this tomb of Haïran, son of Bônnê, son of Rabbel, son of Bônnê, son of Atenatan, son of Taïmaï, Tadmorean, from the tribe of the Bene Mîta, which he built for Bônnê, his father, and for Baaltega, daughter of Belshûri, from the tribe of the Bene Gaddibô, his mother and for himself and for his sons, in their honour.

The exact agreement of dates (AD 52) is to be underlined. The coincidence of year is surely accidental, but not the fact that both texts belong to the same short period. One may see here the result of a process already begun in AD 21, since the two marriages were already old in 52, as the son born of the second of them had the right age to build a family-tomb. In the first case, the fact that a woman of the Bene Mita offered something in the temple of Baal-Shamin may explain why she felt the need to underline her marriage to a member of the Bene Maziyan, who were associated with this sanctuary.<sup>34</sup> It would be very surprising indeed if similar cases never occurred in the following years, but no other example is known, and stressing this kind of union must have been felt as a necessity in this period. In the case of the other family, the son who built the tomb is a well-known personality of those years, Haïran, and this very fact also needs to be underlined. As a crucial figure in the first years of the *polis*, it may be revealing that he too felt the need to indicate the two tribes to which his parents belonged. The same man stood also in relation with what seems to have been the most important institution of Palmyra, the sanctuary of Bel.<sup>35</sup>

## PALMYRA, MESOPOTAMIA AND ROME

### The sanctuary of Bel

The importance of the temple of Bel in those few years does not need to be emphasized: as we have seen, mention of *gbl* and treasurers very often go along with mention of Bel. Thus, the earliest dated Palmyrene inscription (44 BC) mentions the priests of Bel.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, in AD 24–5, Malikû, brother of Hashash, received two honorific statues: both accompanying inscriptions (*PAT* 1352–3) mention his generosity towards the sanctuary of Bel or to the house of their gods, which may well have been two ways of saying the same thing. This central role of a sanctuary is striking, and one cannot fail to think of the princes of Chalcis, called high-priests on their coins, of Hierapolis, or even of Emesa, where a sanctuary seems to have been at the basis of the existence of a community.<sup>37</sup> But what particularizes Palmyra

34 One may note that this Amtallat, daughter of Bar'â, son of Atenatan, from the Bene Mita, may be related (perhaps as grand-daughter) to Atenatan Khaffatût, son of Bar'â of the above-cited inscription *PAT* 2636.

35 See *PAT* 1356 (= *Inv.* IX.20), a dedication by the priests of Bel, and Canineau (1933), p. 175, 2B (not in *PAT*), for his possible description as κ[ρίστ]ης, in relation with constructions for the gods. On the man himself, see Yon (2002), p. 44–7.

36 *PAT* 1524.

37 On the Ituraean high-priests of Chalcis, see Aliquot (2003), p. 212–24. On Emesa, see the contribution by A. Kropp in this volume.

is the fact that, in the following centuries, at least until the second part of the third century, sacerdotal and political functions were kept separate, and (as far as the evidence is concerned) no magistrate was at the same time also symposiarch and chief of the priests of Bel.<sup>38</sup>

### Trade and Mesopotamia

It is striking that the Palmyrene cult of Bel appears to have spread with Palmyrene trade: in the text which I just referred to (*PAT* 1352), in AD 24 all the traders who were in Babylon thanked Malikû because he helped the construction of the temple of Bel. Another interest of the inscription is that it shows once again the role of a leading family in Palmyra, although these traders, as is shown by the following text, were not necessarily all Palmyrenes: a few years earlier, between AD 17 and 19 (thus at the time of Germanicus' stay in Syria) a certain Iedîbel, son of Azîzû, received a statue given by the traders, Greek and Palmyrene, who were in Seleucia (on the Tigris?), 'because he contributed to the building of the temple of Bel':<sup>39</sup>

[--- --- --- οἱ ἐν Σελευ-]  
 [κεία ἔμπι](ο)[ρ](οι Παι)[λμυρηνοὶ]  
 [καὶ Ἑλλην](ε)ς ἀνέ(σ)[τι](σ)[αν]  
 [τὸν ἀνδριάν]τα Ιεδειβ[ηλφ]  
 [Αζίζου Παλ](μ)υρηνοῦ (φ)[υλῆς]  
 [Μανθαβω](λ)ειων ἐπει  
 [κατεσκο]ύδασεν ε(ἰς τῆ)ν  
 [κτίσιν] τοῦ ν(αο)ῦ (Β)ῆλ(ου).

[...] The Palmyrene and Greek traders of Seleukeia set up this statue to Iedeibelos, son of Azizos, Palmyrene, from the tribe of the Manthabolians, because he contributed to the building of the temple of Bel.

*byrh 'b šnu 330 [šlm' dnh dy]*  
*ydy'bl br 'zy(zw) br y(dy') [bl dy mn]*  
*(bn)y mtbw[l dy] 'qym[w lh tdmry']*  
*(w)y(wn)y' dy b(s)hwky' [bdyl dy]*  
*(q)m w(šmš bmgd' r)[b' lbt bl].*

In the month Ab, year 330 (August, AD 19), this statue of Iedîbel, son of Azîzû, son of Iedîbel, from the Bene Maththabol, which was erected by the Palmyrenes and the Greeks of Seleukeia, because he was their leader and was very generous with the house of Bel.

This far-reaching influence of the cult fits well with the hypothesis of the importance of the Palmyrene Bel, even though the god was actually of Mesopotamian origin, but it is best explained by the necessities of trade, and may be viewed as evidence of the growing role of Palmyra as a trading place for the cities of Mesopotamia, or at least for part of their inhabitants. The commercial links between

38 See Yon (2002), p. 40–3.

39 *PAT* 0270. See *CIS* 3924 (= *Inv.* IX, 6). For the cult of the 'Palmyrene Bel', see Hauser (2007). He concludes that the temple was built in Seleucia, not in Palmyra (p. 234 and p. 249–50), but the possibility that the temple in question was the great temple of Palmyra can not be excluded.

Palmyra and Lower Mesopotamia must have been firmly established by this time, which explains Germanicus' choice of a Palmyrene as an envoy to the king of Mesene, even if the man was not necessarily a trader himself.<sup>40</sup>

[---d]y mtqrh 'lksndrws  
 [---td]mry' dy hw 'bd  
 [---]h lqdmyn wšdrh grmngs  
 [---m]lk' myšyn[ 'w]lwt 'rbz  
 [---]h' mn st[r--]lswdy  
 [---šm] šgrm mlk [--- ml]k' ršy'  
 [---] wlwt [---].

... who is called Alexandros [ - - ] Palmyrene, because he made [ - - ] before (?) and Germanicus sent him [ - - ] king of Mesene and to Orabazes (?) [ - - ] except for (?) [ - - ] Shamshigeram, king[ - - ] supreme king [ - - ] and to [ - - ].

### Germanicus and Palmyra

The coincidence of date is once again striking, and the contemporaneous presence of a Palmyrene as a Roman envoy in Mesene, the manifestation of loyalty of Mesopotamian traders to leading Palmyrenes and to the supreme god of the oasis, and the erection of imperial statues in Palmyra<sup>41</sup> are worth stressing. This evolution did not happen without problems in the society of Palmyra, as the above-quoted text set up for Hashash shows clearly. As for the text mentioning Germanicus and Mesene, the role of the Palmyrene called Alexandros is not very clear, especially his relations with a king Shamshigeram, who may be the Emesene king of the same name (Sampsigeramos in Greek).<sup>42</sup> It is rather striking that Germanicus had to go to Palmyra to find an envoy to the king of the Emesenes, but the text is very damaged, and all interpretations must be put forward very carefully. One may note as well that this inscription is almost the only epigraphic attestation of links between Emesa and Palmyra.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the situation of this region of Roman Syria in the first century is somewhat obscure.<sup>44</sup>

Admittedly, it was important for the Romans, as for the Parthians, to keep control over the steppe and its roads, but in the first part of the first century, between

40 PAT 2754. For a commentary, see Cantineau (1931), p. 139.

41 Statues of Tiberius, Drusus and Germanicus set up by Minucius T f. Hor. Rufus, *legatus* of the *Legio X Fretensis*: *Inv.* IX.2 = *AE* 1933, 204.

42 This interpretation was put forward by the first editor (Cantineau), and followed by most of the commentators.

43 Another inscription is a boundary stone found at Qasr el-Heir el-Gharbi (*AE* 1939, 180 = *IGLS* V 2552): *Fin[es] inter Hadriano[s] Palmyrenos et [He]mesenos*, 'Limits between the Hadrian Palmyrenes and the Emesenes'. A second boundary stone between the civic territories of Palmyra and of another city (*AE* 1939, 178 = *IGLS* V 2549) can be restored as either *ciuitat* [- - *Emes]enorum*, 'of the city of the Emesenes', or *ciuitat*[- - *Apam]enorum*, 'of the city of the Apamenes'.

44 See the contribution by A. Kropp in this volume.

Germanicus and the Roman citizens known as tax collectors,<sup>45</sup> the evidence for the Roman presence is rather slight. The years that followed Germanicus' stay in the Near East seem to have been years of progressive romanisation. Between AD 11 and 17, Creticus Silanus, governor of Syria, established boundaries for the Palmyrene (*fines regionis Palmyrenae, constitutos a Cretico Silano leg. Aug. pr. pr. 'limits of the Palmyrene territory, established by Creticus Silanus, legate of Augustus, propraetor'*).<sup>46</sup> In the Tariff, a letter of Germanicus to a certain Statilius (either an unknown procurator or the man in charge of Palmyra) is mentioned,<sup>47</sup> in a passage which deals with the use of Roman coinage for tax-payment. It is not known if this regulation is made especially for Palmyra, or more generally for the whole of Roman Syria. Germanicus is therefore one of the best attested Roman officials in the epigraphy of Palmyra. For the end of the 30s of the first century, a new discovery documents the presence of Roman soldiers at Palmyra,<sup>48</sup> but no more evidence is known until the late 50s.

One may perhaps speak of a client state without kings, but the actual status of Palmyra at the time is unknown. In the end, a new generation, with Haïran son of Bônnê as a leading figure, marks a new evolution. Within a few years, not only do we notice the appearance of new institutions and of Roman citizens (tax collectors), but also the Latin language is now used in public and official inscriptions.<sup>49</sup> As happened sometimes with client kingdoms, one has the feeling that Palmyra had been put on a sort of 'waiting list', while a process of romanisation or hellenisation was taking place, before the city came to be fully integrated as a *polis* into the Roman empire. For one reason or another, it did not seem useful at first to the Roman authorities to change anything to the institutions of Palmyra, most probably because the city was already well governed. During the following two centuries, Palmyra was institutionally a Greek *polis*, even if arguably on a superficial level only.

At the end of the period, at the time of Odaenathus, it is possible to interpret his power as a last example of a notable dominating his city. As we have seen, even his title of 'chief' could belong to a local tradition.<sup>50</sup> But the new political and social conditions were the cause of a complete disruption of the social order.<sup>51</sup> Even then, Palmyra was not a monarchy, and the power of Odaenathus can as well evoke the notion of a tyranny, with the apparently normal functioning of civic institutions, at

45 Three Roman citizens, freedmen, are known in the years 57–58 and may well have been tax collectors (either for the *fiscus* or, less probably, for the city of Palmyra). See Matthews (1984) and the recent overview by Gawlikowski (1998a).

46 *AE* 1939, 179.

47 L.182–3 in the Greek text and l.103–4 in the Aramaic version. For the Tariff, see *PAT* 0259 (= *CIS* 3913); for an English translation, see Matthews (1984), p. 174–80.

48 Publication (in press) by M. Gawlikowski: see Yon (2008), p. 129, n. 3. It is impossible to know if the soldiers belonged to a Roman garrison at Palmyra or were only on the way to another destination.

49 For the trilingual inscriptions of Palmyra, see now Seigne and Yon (2005).

50 See parallel denominations of local 'chiefs' in a late Nabataean inscription: *resh Hegra* and *resh Teima*, Stiehl (1970) p. 87. See Yon (2002), p. 148–9.

51 On the events in Palmyra during the third century, see Hartmann (2001).

least until the last years of his domination. Then, the balance of the scales changes and Odaenathus is King of kings. However, at this stage one cannot speak of a client-king anymore, and this use of the title of King of kings seems more a declaration of his status aimed against the Sasanian king than anything else. To come back to the Roman perspective, and to conclude on a paradoxical note, before Vabalathus, the son of Odaenathus and Zenobia, was called *autokrator* in inscriptions or on coins, we find the words *dux Romanorum*,<sup>52</sup> employing the term 'chief' once again, though now with a very different meaning.

52 See some examples in Bauzou (1998), p. 202–3, n<sup>os</sup> 95–7.