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THE LAST KING OF EDESSA: NEW EVIDENCE FROM THE MIDDLE
EUPHRATES

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The preliminary publication of a batch of 21 documents from the Middle Euphrates dating to the middle of the third century of the Christian era increases significantly the number of such documents known from the Levant, and offers potential for a better understanding of the social, economic and political history of that place and time. The documents, whose precise provenance is unknown, are mostly in Greek but include two in Syriac. One of these has been published in full, and the other in part, by Javier Teixidor. In addition to their language these two differ from the others also in being written on parchment (most of the others are on papyrus) and in showing the political influence of the metropolis of Edessa. They antedate slightly the parchment from Edessa which was discovered at Dura-Europos during the American-French excavations there and was, until now, the oldest known piece of writing in Syriac on a perishable material.²

These two Syriac documents, thus, enable the student to check and refine theories about this very disturbed period in the life of the Roman Empire, and specifically, about Edessa itself.³ Analysis of the documents largely vindicates the theories of the first publishers of DP 28 concerning Edessene political history and the brief reestablishment of Edessa's native monarchy under Gordian III, and casts some doubt on details of more recent accounts of Gordian's policy and activities on the eastern frontier. The documents also make possible some observations concerning the Edessene calendar and legal archival practice in the city.

¹ In addition to the standard abbreviations for scholarly reference works, this paper uses the following shortened forms of reference:

Feissel and Gascou = Denis Feissel and Jean Gascou, *Documents d'archives romains inédits du Moyen Euphrate (IIIe siècle après J.-C.)*, CRAI 1989, 535-61;

Derniers rois = Javier Teixidor, *Les derniers rois d'Édesse d'après deux nouveaux documents syriaques*, ZPE 76, 1989, 219-22;

Deux documents = Idem, *Deux documents syriaques du IIIe siècle après J.-C., provenant du Moyen Euphrate*, CRAI 1990, 144-66;

Bellinger and Welles = A.R.Bellinger and C.B.Welles, *A Third-Century Contract of Sale from Edessa in Osroene*, YCS 5, 1935, 95-134;

Goldstein = Jonathan A.Goldstein, *The Syriac Bill of Sale from Dura-Europos*, JNES 25.1, 1966, 1-16.

² Bellinger and Welles; Goldstein; C.B.Welles, R.O.Fink and J.F.Gilliam, *The Parchments and Papyri*, vol. 5, part 1 of *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: Final Report*, ed. Ann Perkins, New Haven, 1959, 142-9. The Dura document is referred to in publications either by its original inventory number, D.Pg. 20, or by the catalogue number DP 28; the latter alternative will be adopted here.

³ A good general account of the problems of this period, many of which remain intractable, can be found in A.T.Olmstead, *The mid-Third Century of the Christian Era*, CP 37, 1942, 241-62, 398-420. D.S.Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle*, Oxford, 1990, is a recent treatment concentrating on events seen from a Middle Eastern perspective.

Description of the documents

The two Syriac documents, labeled A and B by Teixidor, are of the type known as the "double document." The practice of recording legal transactions, sales, marriage contracts and the like in this form is known elsewhere in the Levant and in Egypt. In Egypt, however, the number of double documents known, in comparison to the huge volume of the papyrus corpus, is so small as to make it all but certain that at least under Roman rule, the practice was much more common in the Semitic Near East, where indeed it may have originated.⁴ This impression, which was already supported by the frequency of the practice at Dura-Europos, is reinforced by the 15 or so recently-published double documents from the "Babatha archive" in Judea and by the nine double documents out of a total of 21 from the Middle Euphrates find.⁵ The new texts resemble other double documents in that the main text is presented in full on the lower portion of the parchment sheet, while an abbreviated or summarized version appears at the top.⁶ This upper text was folded up and sealed with string to serve as a safeguard against any tampering with the open text.⁷

Document A, dating to December 240 C.E., is in essence a receipt recording the discharge of a debt by one Worod, son of Nisharyahab, acting on behalf of a certain Bageshū, perhaps a relative by marriage.⁸ The document makes preliminary reference to an earlier transaction out of which the debt arose. This reference has led to some disjunction between the upper and lower texts, for in copying the terms of the receipt for the upper text, the scribe ran out of room before he reached the section recording the essential point of the second transaction.⁹ The first nine lines (out of 27) of the lower text of Document B, dating to September 242 C.E., have been published. This document concerned a lease by the same Worod of property which had been pledged or mortgaged to him by the lessee's father.¹⁰

The two documents, though separated by less than two years, contrast strikingly in the ways in which they characterize the city and its status. They offer powerful testimony to the changes that were occurring in this area of the Empire during a crisis caused by domestic upheavals and outside pressure from the increasingly powerful Sassanid Persian regime. These changes had already been signaled to some extent by DP 28, of 243 C.E., and by numismatic evidence from Edessa.

⁴ E.Koffmahn, *Die Doppelurkunden aus der Wüste Juda*, vol. 5 of *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah*, ed. J. van der Ploeg, Leiden 1968, 21-22; Naphtali Lewis, ed., *The Documents from the Bar Kochba Period in the Cave of Letters: Greek Papyri*, Jerusalem, 1989, 8.

⁵ Welles et. al. (n. 2 above) 14; Lewis (n. 4 above) 6-10; Feissel and Gascou 539, 557-61.

⁶ This is plainly the case with Document A. The seven lines of the upper text of Document B have not yet been published.

⁷ See below, pp. 204-205 for more on the general practice.

⁸ Deux documents 153-4.

⁹ *Ibid.* 147, II. 1-10 of scriptura interior; 152. This truncation of the upper text apparently did not affect the document's legal validity, and may clarify aspects of Edessa's archival practice: below, pp. 204-205.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 154-5, ll. 6-9.

Chronology of Edessa's last kings: The problem

The "freedom" of Edessa. The dating prescript of DP 28 places it in the month Iyyar of the Seleucid year 554, or May 243 C.E. The document is also dated by the regnal year of Gordian III, by the consular year and by the unusual formula "year 31 of the freedom of the illustrious Antoniana Edessa, Colonia Metropolis Aurelia Alexandria."¹¹ In Bellinger's opinion, which has not been disputed, these words "must mean that the city was a colonia at the time the contract was drawn up, and strongly implies that it had been a colonia for 31 years, that is, since 213/14 A.D."¹² The colony's titlature, which seems to derive from the Emperor Caracalla, supports this conclusion, as does Cassius Dio's report that Caracalla deposed Edessa's King Abgar, apparently putting an end to or interrupting the Abgarid dynasty.¹³

The "freedom" that Edessa celebrated with its colonial era would thus be its freedom from the monarch's rule. As Bellinger noted, this is an unusual way to phrase the change in the city's status, particularly since Edessa was not "free" from Roman rule. Such considerations, however, were not enough to stop many cities from adopting, say, a Pompeian era when they came under Roman rule.¹⁴ Before Pompey's arrival, cities which had been granted autonomy by the Seleucids would mark the year of that grant with a new era.¹⁵ It is, however, extremely unusual, if not unknown, for a city to name such an era that of its "freedom," as a search of the indices of IGR and SEG will show.¹⁶ A partial parallel is provided by the coins issued in the previous century by the short-lived Jewish Revolt, which bore Hebrew legends such as "Year One of the Redemption of Israel" and "Year 2 of the Freedom of Israel."¹⁷ The legends combined with the archaic Paleo-Hebrew script in which they were written, and with militantly Jewish types, to allow the coins to serve as vehicles of

¹¹ Editors generally correct the scribe's spelling, e.g. by printing Anton<in>iana, but this does not seem necessary. Cf. J. and L. Robert, *Bull. Epigr.* 1974, no. 577: "Il ne s'agit pas ... de corriger Ἀντωνιανή en Ἀντωνινιανή, comme s'il y avait en erreur du lapicide, mais de constater que la première forme est une contraction fréquente de la seconde, pour ce qui se rapporte aux 'Antonins,' avant tout à Caracalla et à Elagabal ...;" numerous examples supplied.

¹² Bellinger and Welles 143.

¹³ Dio 78.12.1. The nomen (or praenomen) Antoninus, which evoked fond remembrances of the days of the "five good emperors," was a powerful tool which Septimius Severus and his successors, especially Caracalla, used to garner support among the troops and populace - HA Sev. 19.3-4; Car. 9.2; Macr. 3.9; Ronald Syme, *Emperors and Biography*, Oxford, 1971, 78-88. The presence of "Alexandria" in the colony's titlature may reflect Caracalla's apparent obsession with Alexander - Hdn. 4.8.1-3; Dio 78.7-8; Bellinger and Welles 143, n. 4.

¹⁴ Henri Seyrig, *Antiquités Syriennes*, Syria 31, 1954, 79: examples of Pompeian eras.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 78.

¹⁶ E.J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World*, 2d edition, Ithaca, 1968, 72, gives examples of such eras, but none of them seems to be expressed in the language of liberation, with the possible exception of SEG 33.851, nos. 51-54. This inscription gives a list of Amyzonian magistrates serving ἀφ' οὗ [Κ]ῶρες ἠλευθερώθησαν (from Rhodes), but does not use this as an era in the strictest sense. SEG 2.330, from Tyre, is heavily restored and hence suspect.

¹⁷ Leo Miltenberg, *The Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War*, Typos VI, Aarau, Frankfurt and Salzburg, 1984, 29-31. The parallel is only partial because here the "freedom" is indeed freedom from Roman rule.

"propaganda" in the purest sense. The whole package "boldly proclaimed a political and cultural renaissance of the Jewish state."¹⁸

In the Edessa documents as in the Bar Kochba coinage, and indeed elsewhere in ancient sources, the language of liberation has rhetorical force. In 243 C.E., the reference to the city's "freedom" was no mere formula. It was pointed and timely. Already before the discovery of DP 28, an interesting series of bronze coins from the Edessa mint had been identified, which proved that there had been a King Abgar on the throne at some time during the reign of Gordian III.¹⁹ The coins bear images of both Gordian and Abgar, identified as ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΑΒΓΑΡΟΣ. In some of them the king appears to pledge fealty to the seated emperor or to present him with a small Nike. These coins led Bellinger to the conclusion that, at some time during the reign of Gordian, the native dynasty had been restored to the throne. The evidence of DP 28, however, indicated to Bellinger that this restored monarchy had not survived Gordian; it was already gone by the time he died in 244 C.E.²⁰

Reconstruction based on DP 28. Bellinger proposed the following reconstruction:²¹

In the troubled years after 235 C.E. - perhaps well before 241 - the nearby cities of Nisibis and Carrhae fell to the Sassanids. Testimony to the cities' capture, which put Edessa in jeopardy as well, is provided by the Byzantine historians Syncellus and Zonaras.²² There is no direct evidence for Edessa's fate at this time; it may have been captured or maintained its freedom from Persian rule by conciliation or resistance. However, "in the confusion the colonia [established in 213/14] came to an end, and a native king by right or force assumed the throne." With Roman attention increasingly focused on the Eastern frontier, Abgar "made an arrangement with the emperor by which Edessa was reestablished as a vassal kingdom such as it had been in the days of Septimius Severus."

Under this cooperative arrangement, a heavy output of Abgar-Gordian coins appeared; indeed, according to Bellinger, this coinage alone "supplied the Mesopotamian cities with bronze in the years just before 242." The arrangement, however, apparently lasted only until 241, when the Sassanid threat grew and Gordian set out for the East. "It may be that Abgar played him false; it may be that he did not arrive soon enough to save Edessa." Whatever the reason, by May 243 Abgar was no longer on the throne, and the magistrates of the colonia of Edessa were back in charge.

Scholars since Bellinger who have studied Gordian III's eastern policy and the war against Shapur I have ordered events differently. Xavier Lorient and, following him, Erich Kettenhoffen, concluded that the restoration of the Abgarid dynasty did not precede

¹⁸ Ibid. 69; cf. 72.

¹⁹ Bellinger and Welles 144; G.F.Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia*, British Museum Catalogue series, London, 1922, 113-17, plates XVI, XVII.

²⁰ Others have interpreted DP 28 differently. See below, p. 191.

²¹ Bellinger and Welles 144-6.

²² Sync. P361, p. 681; Zonaras 12.18.

Gordian's Persian campaign. Rather, it was a result of Roman successes in that campaign, which regained Carrhae and Nisibis from the Persians.²³ Kettenhoffen cites the date of DP 28 as proving that the monarchy could not have been restored before 243 C.E., while Lorient justifiably points out that "aucun texte ne mentionne explicitement la restauration des Abgarides et seules les monnaies nous en ont conservé le souvenir."²⁴ A statement in the 12th-century chronicle of Michael the Syrian tallies with the theory of a late restoration of the Abgars. Michael states that the Edessene kingdom was abolished in the fifth year of Philip the Arab, or the Seleucid year 560 (249 C.E.).²⁵ A new documentary history of the Roman-Persian confrontation adopts the interpretation proposed by Lorient, citing Michael's statement.²⁶

Now, however, after the discovery of Syriac Document A from the new archives, the theory of a late restoration of the Abgarid monarchy seems untenable.

Testimony of the new documents

In December 240, the following prescript was placed at the head of our Document A:²⁷

"In the month of December of the year 552, the third year of the Emperor Caesar Marcus Antonius Gordianus, Fortunate and Victorious,²⁸ in the second year of King Aelius Septimius Abgar, son of Ma'nu the pašgriba, son of King Abgar, who was honored with the consulship at Orhai, the baris city which is the grandmother of all the cities of Mesopotamia. This document was written in Haiklā-Karkā of Sidā the New, of King Abgar, on the 28th day."²⁹

Hence, in December of the Seleucid year 552, in other words December 240 C.E., King Abgar had already been on the throne of Edessa - called in this document by its Semitic name Orhai - for more than a year.

The corresponding prescript for Document B reads:³⁰

"In the fifth year of the Emperor Caesar Marcus Antonius Gordianus Pius Augustus, in the consulship of Vetius Atticus and of Lepidus Praetextatus, in the month of September of the year 553 of the former reckoning, and in the year 30 of the freedom of the renowned

²³ X.Lorient, *Les premières années de la grande crise du IIIe siècle: De l'avènement de Maximin le Thrace (235) à la mort de Gordien III (244)*, ANRW II.2, 1975, 768-9; E.Kettenhoffen, *The Persian Campaign of Gordian III and the Inscriptions of Šāhpuhr I at the Ka'be-ye Zartost*, in: *Armies and Frontiers in Roman and Byzantine Anatolia*, BAR International Series 156, 153-4.

²⁴ Kettenhoffen (n. 23 above) 154; Lorient (n. 23 above) 768, n. 822. H.J.W.Drijvers, *Hatra, Palmyra and Edessa*, ANRW II.8, 1977, 882, comes down in favor of Lorient's interpretation, though with reservations.

²⁵ Michael the Syrian, *Chron.* 5.5, pp. 77-8 (Syriac).

²⁶ Michael H.Dodgeon and Samuel N.C.Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars: A.D. 226-363*, London and New York, 1991, 35, no. 2.1.4; 355, n.6.

²⁷ *Deux documents* 147, 150, ll. 1-7.

²⁸ The imperial epithets are rendered in Syriac: GDY'WZKY'.

²⁹ On the terms pašgriba and baris see below, pp. 192 and 199.

³⁰ *After Deux documents* 154-5, ll. 1-6.

Edessa Antoniana Colonia Metropolis Aurelia Alexandria. This document was written in Marcopolis Thera, during the priesthood of Marcus Aurelius Antahyrus, son of Aggai, and during the archonship of Marcus Aurelius Alexandrus, son of Subas, and of Baratha son of Shalamsin, on the first day of the month."

The arrangement and language of this prescript and of that of DP 28 are remarkably similar. There are also, obviously, significant differences between the language used here and that of Document A. These will come under discussion presently, but to begin with, we are concerned strictly with the chronological conclusions made possible by the two new documents. Many of these have already been pointed out in Teixidor's two articles; what follows may be considered a refinement of his views.

Since Document A dates from the second year of Abgar's reign, we can now say with near certainty that he took the throne sometime between December 238 and December 239. The colony was reestablished by September 242, the date of Document B. The dating prescript of DP 28 puts it in the second term as strategos of Marcus Aurelius Abgar, son of Hafesai, and it has been suggested that this indicates the renewed colonia had been in existence for at least one year, therefore since May 242 or earlier.³¹ As was also recognized, however, Abgar's first *strategia* could have come in the colony's prior existence, before the monarchy's restoration. Hence we can set a maximum term of three years, nine months - December 238 to September 242 - for the rule of Abgar. Although his reign was certainly more than one year long, we cannot be any more specific as to its minimum duration, since none of our documents provides a date for the reestablishment of the colonia.

Abgar: The end of a dynasty

Ma'nu the paṣgriba. The filiation supplied for Abgar in Document A enables us to go beyond dating his reign, and to establish his place in the Abgarid dynasty. He is identified as the son of "Ma'nu the paṣgriba" and the grandson of another king named Abgar. The last Abgar known by independent witness is the king who was deposed by Caracalla. The dates seem to fit roughly if we assume that this was the grandfather of our Abgar.

It seems most likely that the deposed grandfather was the eighth Abgar, known as "the Great".³² This may help us understand the term used to identify Ma'nu, which Teixidor rendered as "prince héritier."³³ Paṣgriba (Iranian paṣagriw) is a term known from Syriac, Aramaic, Middle Persian and Sogdian texts and inscriptions, usually in contexts which require it to be translated as "successor to the throne" or "vice regent."³⁴ In a series of second-century C.E. Aramaic inscriptions from Hatra, women of the royal family are

³¹ Bellinger and Welles 145.

³² For an alternative possibility see below, pp. 193-194.

³³ Deux documents 150, 161.

³⁴ André Maricq, *Hatra de Sanatrouq, Syria* 32, 1955, 276-80; Paul-Hubert Poirier, *L'hymne de la perle des Actes de Thomas, Homo Religiosus* 8, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1981, 212-23.

honored, among other things, for being "mother of the paṣgriba (or pazgriba)."³⁵ In another inscription from the same site, Hatra's King Sanatruq is called "father of the paṣgria".³⁶ At Edessa itself, a similar inscription has long been known.³⁷ It honors a Queen Shalmath, wife of a king whose name is unreadable, and daughter of the paṣgriba Ma'nu. It is tempting to identify her father with our Ma'nu, but the name was common in the royal family and in Edessa generally. Segal speculates that she was Abgar the Great's wife, a possibility also envisioned by Maricq.³⁸ For Teixidor, she was both sister and wife of the Abgar who ruled in 240 C.E.³⁹ There can be no certainty.

What seems clear is that the father of our Abgar was, not king of Edessa, but the designated successor to, or vice regent for, his father Abgar. This reinforces the likelihood that the elder Abgar was the one removed by Caracalla. For once Rome had "subdued" Edessa, there was no longer a throne for the heir to mount. It looks as if he died before 239, a successor who never succeeded.⁴⁰ Presumably if he had been alive at that date it would have been he and not his son who took power in Edessa.

Another possible reference to Ma'nu the paṣgriba is found on a coin bearing on the obverse a bearded portrait of a King Abgar and on the reverse that of a bearded man wearing a tiara, with the legend MANNOC ΠΑΙC.⁴¹ Hill was puzzled by the apparent identification of this mature individual as a παῖς, but since his work it has been generally accepted that ΠΑΙC is an abbreviation of paṣgriba.⁴² These coins, which could not have been issued after Caracalla's seizure of the Edessene king, make it look as if Abgar took his son as a "second" or colleague in power before losing his throne.

"*Abgarus Severus*"? Another series of Edessene coins, and the anonymous eighth-century chronicle attributed to "Dionysius of Tell Mahré," introduce a complication.⁴³ Although the absolute dates given in "Dionysius" (the "era of Abraham") are seriously flawed, it has been considered possible to make something of the figures he gives for the lengths of the Edessene kings' reigns.⁴⁴ After recording the 35-year reign of Abgar the Great, "Dionysius" reports:

³⁵ Maricq (n. 34 above) 1, 9-10.

³⁶ Poirier (n. 34 above) 216, no. 195.

³⁷ Derniers rois 221; J.B.Segal, *Edessa: 'The Blessed City'*, Oxford, 1970, 19; H.J.W.Drijvers, *Old-Syriac (Edessean) Inscriptions, Semitic Study Series, new series no. 3*, Leiden, 1972, 19-21; F.C.Burkitt, 'The Throne of Nimrod,' *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 28, 1906, 149-55.

³⁸ Segal (n. 37 above) 26; Maricq (n. 34 above) 7.

³⁹ Derniers rois 221.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Hill (n. 19 above) ci.

⁴² First suggested by Burkitt (n. 37 above) 153.

⁴³ I.B.Chabot, ed., *Chronicum Anonymum Pseudo-Dionysianum Vulgo Dictum, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptorum Syri, ser. 3, vol. 1-2.*

⁴⁴ Bellinger and Welles 148.

"At Orhai, Abgar Severus ruled together with his son (՝MLK ՝BGR SWRS ՝M BRH), one year and seven months. And after him ruled Ma՛nu his son (՝MLK M՛NW BRH), for twenty-six years."⁴⁵

Thirty years later (in the "year of Abraham" 2233), "Dionysius" records both the death of Caracalla and the end of the Edessene monarchy, saying, "They were subjected to the power of the Romans from this time forward."⁴⁶

The "Abgar Severus" who ruled for one year and seven months "with his son" may be the same individual who appears on coins dating from the reign of Caracalla, with the legend CEOYH ABΓAΠOC.⁴⁷ This king, whose coin portraits show that he was a young man, would in that case be the one deposed by Caracalla after ruling briefly in succession to Abgar VIII; hence he would be Abgar IX. This theory has won some adherents, but some of the props underpinning it are weak:

1. Hill, in publishing the coins of Edessa, used the reports of Cassius Dio to support the view that Abgar's removal (on the pretext of cruelty to his subjects) came shortly after his accession.⁴⁸ In this case Dio's text surely cannot bear the weight of the argument. The close juxtaposition between the statement about Abgar's "cruelty" and the report of his removal by Caracalla results from the way modern editors have interwoven the text of Xiphilinus with the Excerpta Valesiana.⁴⁹

2. If the "young" Severus Abgar of the coins did succeed to the throne upon Abgar the Great's death, only to be removed less than two years later, it may be doubted whether he could have had a son old enough to take as a colleague. Certainly this young king cannot be the bearded Abgar on the obverse of the MANNOC ΠAIC coins.

3. Although the similarity between the name of "Abgarus Severus" in "Dionysius" and the Severus Abgar of the coins is suggestive, it was Abgar VIII who was most closely associated with Septimius, having been received by the emperor at Rome with an escort that became legendary for its magnificence.⁵⁰ Therefore it is plausible that in writing "Abgarus Severus," "Dionysius" was referring specifically to Abgar VIII.

It seems impossible to arrive at a theory that accounts for all the evidence without contradiction, even after discounting the absolute dates given by "Dionysius." For instance, since the span of time from Septimius Severus's investiture to Caracalla's death was only 24 years, it is not possible that an Abgar Severus was succeeded by a Ma՛nu who ruled for 26 years, until the monarchy was abolished in the year of Caracalla's death. The figure of 26 years, however, coincides well with the span between Abgar's removal and the

⁴⁵ "Dionysus" (n. 43 above) vol 1, p. 128.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 131.

⁴⁷ Hill (n. 19 above) ciii, pl. XIV.10.

⁴⁸ Hill (n. 19 above) ci-cii.

⁴⁹ Dio 78.12.1^a, 1²: Exc. Val. 369 (p. 746) and Xiph. 332. 7-16 R.St., respectively, with Boissevain's note ad.loc.

⁵⁰ Dio 80.16.2.

reestablishment of the Abgarid monarchy as established by Document A. Therefore that document provides support for the traditional view that Ma'nu actually had a shadow rule of that length, from 214 to 240.⁵¹

The case of "Abgarus Severus" is more intractable. Teixidor posits that the year and seven months attributed to this individual actually belong to the Septimius Abgar of Document A, by an easily explained confusion of names.⁵² This solution, however, requires us to dismiss, not only the absolute chronology in "Dionysius," but also the ordering of the kings as given in the chronicle. It seems preferable to preserve the order by concluding that the joint rule described by "Dionysius" is that of Abgar VIII and his son Ma'nu. It may be that Abgar nominated Ma'nu as regent upon his removal from the throne, being unaware of the fate of his kingdom.⁵³ More probably, however, Abgar took Ma'nu as a colleague before being dethroned. "Dionysius's" year and seven months may represent the time of joint rule before the dethronement, after which Ma'nu remained the heir presumptive.

This reconstruction makes sense of the text of "Dionysius," as far as it goes. Two points, however, still call for explanation: first, the coins of the young Severus Abgar and second, "Dionysius's" omission of the Abgar of 240 C.E. from his king-list. For the reasons given above (p. 194, especially point no. 2), it is difficult to accept the rule of a young Abgar before 214. Therefore some explanation such as Teixidoes - that the Romans promoted a rival to Ma'nu who had "un règne éphémère" before the establishment of the new colonia - must contain the answer.⁵⁴

"Dionysius's" omission of the last Abgar - whom we may call Abgar IX - is also difficult to explain. However, as we have seen "Dionysius" believed that the Abgarid dynasty came to an end in the year of Caracalla's death, 217 C.E. He placed all 26 years of Ma'nu's "reign" before this, and described Edessa as being subjected to the rule of Rome after it. If the reign of Abgar IX was little over a year in length (above, pp. 191-192), it may not have left enough of a record to be included in "Dionysius's" annals. Again, the chronographer may have confused the original establishment of the colonia with its reestablishment ca. 242 CE, helping to explain the omission of our Abgar. None of these explanations is completely satisfactory, but the truth must lie somewhere among them.

The chronology of Gordian III's Persian war

The range of possible dates for the reign of Abgar IX makes it inconceivable that the brief restoration of the Edessene monarchy resulted from Roman military successes in 243 C.E. (above, p. 191). As we have seen, the suggestion that it did so result was offered as an alternative to Bellinger's thesis, that Abgar had somehow seized power in the confusion that

⁵¹ Deux documents 161.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Deux documents 160-61.

prevailed after 235, and then turned to Rome for support (above, p. 190). By examining the events of this period, and comparing the new chronology for Abgar, we may be able to decide whether or not Bellinger's theory should be reinstated, and in particular, to settle the vexed question of whether Edessa ever fell to the Persians as other cities in its region did.⁵⁵

Edessa's resistance to Persian conquest. The *casus belli* for the Persian campaign of Gordian III is thought to have been the loss of Hatra, whose date can be fixed, fairly confidently, at the spring of 241 C.E.⁵⁶ In the following year, according to the *Historia Augusta*, Gordian III opened the gates of the Temple of Janus, signifying the formal beginning of hostilities.⁵⁷ In fact, the eastern frontier had been in an unsettled state since well before Gordian became emperor in 238. As is proven by three Latin military inscriptions from Hatra, that city had been garrisoned by Roman troops as early as 235 C.E.⁵⁸ The troops were still there in the first year of Gordian's reign, when the Sassanids invaded northern Mesopotamia and took both Carrhae and Nisibis.⁵⁹ The poignant gaffito from Dura-Europos, κατέβη ἐφ' ἡμῶν Πέρσης - dated to 239 C.E. - testifies to the widespread disruption of those years.⁶⁰

It is precisely in this context, between December 238 and December 239, that Document A now forces us to place the beginning of Abgar's reign. Since this king's coinage shows that he was friendly to Rome, it seems doubtful that Edessa fell to the same Persian offensive that took Carrhae and Nisibis.

Rise and fall of a king. In the critical strategic situation of 238-9, the Persian threat was undoubtedly keenly felt at Edessa. The occasion was ripe for the reassertion of power by a local warlord. It is easy to imagine Abgar, scion of one of the city's leading families, coming to the fore in the defensive effort, and demanding in return the recognition of his ancestral prerogatives.⁶¹

Document B proves that Edessa was reestablished as a *colonia* by September 242 (above, p. 192). At this time the armies of Gordian III and the Praetorian Prefect Timesitheus were on their way East to meet the Persian threat. It is unlikely that the Roman forces reached Syria by September, particularly in view of the report that they engaged in battles with

⁵⁵ Cited as one remaining puzzle of the war's history: Kettenhoffen (n. 23 above) 153; cf. Lorient (n. 23 above) 769 n. 820.

⁵⁶ Lorient (n. 23 above) 761-2; Kettenhoffen (n. 23 above) 152. The date is narrowed to winter-spring 240/1 by a Manichaean parchment codex: A.Henrichs and L.Koenen, *Ein griechischer Mani-Codex*, ZPE 5, 1970, 125-32.

⁵⁷ HA Gord. 23.3, 5-6.

⁵⁸ D.Oates, *A Note on Three Latin Inscriptions from Hatra*, *Sumer* 11, 1955, 39-43; A.Maricq, *Les dernières années de Hatra: l'alliance romaine*, *Syria* 34, 1957, 288-96.

⁵⁹ Sync. P361, p. 681; Zonaras 12.18; Lorient (n. 23 above) 759-60.

⁶⁰ SEG 7. 743b; P.V.C.Bauer, ed., *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: Preliminary Report of the Fourth Season of Work, Oct. 1930-March 1931*, New Haven, 1933, 112-14.

⁶¹ Alternatively, Abgar IX may have been a usurper who adopted the traditional Edessene royal lineage. In either case, the troubles of 238-9 provide a fitting context.

hostile forces in Moesia during their progress.⁶² A recent study concludes that the army probably did not reach Antioch until the last months of 242.⁶³ It was in the spring of 243 that the Roman army crossed the Euphrates and recaptured Carrhae, then Nisibis, in the meantime defeating the Persians in a major battle at Rhesaina (Ras el 'Ain) near Edessa.⁶⁴ One of the coins of Abgar IX and Gordian portrays the king presenting the emperor with a small Nike figure.⁶⁵ It is natural to assume that this commemorates a Roman victory, and before the discovery of our documents the most likely candidate was the victory of Rhesaina. We now see, however, that Abgar was no longer on the throne by the date of that battle. The Nike may instead commemorate the successful activity of the Roman army on its way East, or it may be anticipatory.

There is yet a third possibility, which on due reflection seems perfectly likely. It may be that the coin refers not to victories of the Roman army, but to those of Abgar himself - victories that saved Edessa for the empire and were thus fitting offerings to the emperor.

The greatest difficulty, however, is in the portrayal of an encounter between the king and the emperor. Abgar may have been on the throne as late as summer 242, but it is difficult to get the Roman armies to Syria that early. The problem is solved if we assume that Gordian himself traveled separately and arrived in Syria before the troops, which we know were under Timesitheus's command.⁶⁶ Otherwise, the two new Syriac documents force a complete reevaluation of the chronology of Gordian's eastern campaign.

Even more mysterious than the reasons for Abgar IX's coronation is the question of the end of his reign. To judge from his coins and his recognition of Roman sovereignty in Document A, this king was no rebel. If the reasons suggested above for his enthronement are anywhere near correct, he was in fact a defender of the Roman order against Persian attack. It is unlikely that Gordian deposed him upon the arrival of Roman forces in Syria, since it seems to have been Gordian's regime that recognized Abgar; and we now see that the colonia's reestablishment came too early to be in any way connected with the rise of the future Emperor Marcus Julius Philippus ("the Arab"). The regime of Abgar seems to have had an Orientalizing bent, which will be the next subject of investigation. This may provide some basis for believing that the Roman authorities perceived Abgar as disloyal and hence removed him from his influential position. Yet today we have no more solid material than had Bellinger on which to base a hypothesis (cf. above, p. 190) - except for the knowledge that, at the time of Abgar's removal, the strategic situation that apparently brought him to the throne had not changed. Until Spring 243, the Persians still occupied Carrhae and Nisibis,

⁶² HA Gord. 26.4.

⁶³ Lorient (n. 23 above) 767. Despite the contrary (and unique) testimony of HA Gord. 26.5-6, it is unlikely that the Persians ever took Antioch before or during this campaign.

⁶⁴ HA Gord. 26.6; Sync. 681; Zonaras 12.18; Amm.Marc. 23.5.17; Lorient (n. 23 above) 768-9.

⁶⁵ Hill (n. 19 above) 113, nos. 136-9.

⁶⁶ HA Gord. 27.2.

and Edessa was still threatened. This was not a propitious time to remove a loyal local leader.

A modest proposal. In this quandary, it is perhaps permissible to abandon the mindset that tends to view everything in terms of Roman imperial patronage and policy. There are conceivable and plausible reasons for the replacement of one regime by another, that do not require invoking the hand of Rome. If indeed Abgar was a leader in the defense of the city and the region, he may have fallen in a confrontation with the Persians before he had the time to arrange for a successor. On the other hand, as Document B and DP 28 show, Edessa had a local aristocracy ready and able to step in and assume leadership in the renewed colonia after Abgar's removal.⁶⁷ Possibly that removal was the work of members of this group, who loudly proclaimed their loyalty to Rome after taking the reins of power. These suggestions do not lay to rest the mystery, but they broaden the list of suspects.

Edessa and Rome

The casts of characters of Document B and DP 28 bear the clear stamp of Roman influence. Four out of 12 individuals mentioned in Document B, and seven out of 19 in DP 28, proclaim their Roman citizenship by appending to their names "Aurelius" or "Marcus Aurelius".⁶⁸ The names are clear indications that these people's citizenship derived from the blanket grant contained in Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana*. Two of the city's magistrates in DP 28 are also identified as HPWS RHMWS - members of Rome's equestrian order. These indications harmonize with the consular dating, the era of "freedom" and the city's titulature ("Colonia Metropolis Aurelia Alexandria," etc.) to evoke an almost ostentatious air of pro-Roman sentiment in Edessa after Abgar IX.⁶⁹

Document A offers a number of points of contrast. The king, Aelius Septimius Abgar, is the only person who bears a Roman name. There are 19 other individuals mentioned, all of whom go by purely Semitic or Iranian names, even though some of them, at least, were surely free under the *Constitutio Antoniniana* to use Roman nomina if they so desired. Apparently under the regime of Abgar it was not fashionable to declare one's affection for Rome so openly.

The language and arrangement of Document A's prescript reinforce this impression. From the outset, the formula is different; rather than starting with the regnal year of the emperor and the consular date, Document A begins with the Seleucid Year 552. It does not bother to

⁶⁷ It is perhaps worth noting that one of these, a strategos, in 243 CE, was also an Abgar, son of Ma'nu (DP 28,1. 6). His grandfather's name, however (Aggai), shows that he was not the same as King Abgar, son of Ma'nu.

⁶⁸ The count includes both the eponymous magistrates and the names of fathers and grandfathers mentioned in both documents.

⁶⁹ "Colonia Edessa" also displayed its westernization with its system of dating by magistrates: archons or strategoi (Document B and DP 28, respectively) and an eponymous priest (the word read as 'MRWT', "residency" by Welles and Teixidor is actually KMRWT", "priesthood": Goldstein 2,4).

characterize this era as "the former reckoning," as does Document B. It does give the emperor's regnal year next, but Gordian receives, not his standard Greek epithets transliterated into Syriac ('WSBWS SBSTWS = εὐεβῆς σεβαστός as in Document B, but purely Syriac epithets (GDY' WZKY' = Fortunate and Victorious). This is followed by the regnal year and filiation of Abgar, and eventually by the phrase "at Orhai, the baris city which is the grandmother of all the cities of Mesopotamia." This phrase is the equivalent of "Edessa Antoniana Colonia Metropolis Aurelia Alexandria" in Document B. In it the most obvious contrast is the use of the original native name Orhai rather than the transplanted name Edessa. The rest of the terminology is apparently an attempt to convey the idea of metropolis without resorting to transliteration. The term baris, however, contains an additional overtone. A word which made its way into Hellenistic Greek apparently from the conquered Near Eastern lands, baris means "stronghold" but was used originally to signify a fortified (royal) residence, something like a "chateau."⁷⁰ Its use here is apparently a re-borrowing from the Greek, since the word does not appear in this form in any Semitic text.

Thus, the language of Document A's prescript and the lack of Roman nomina for the individuals mentioned in the document are archaizing, in the sense that they deliberately hark back to Edessa's heyday as the capital of the Roman-allied kingdom of Osroene, all while duly recognizing the emperor's sovereignty.

Apropos of DP 28, Welles wrote, "The expulsion of the dynasty and the formation of a Roman colonia in A.D. 214 ... meant a reversal of [Orhai's] Oriental inclination, but its effect was delayed for thirty years.... At the date of the contract, A.D. 243, Edessa was just beginning to face West again."⁷¹ Since we still have no documents from the period of the colonia's life before Abgar IX, we have no basis on which to evaluate the truth of this statement. The Romanizing fashion among Edessa's townspeople may have been delayed until after Abgar IX's removal, or it may have been interrupted by his reign only to be enthusiastically resumed after it. The only thing that is clear is the contrast between an apparent Eastern atmosphere under Abgar and the West-facing attitude after him.

Abgar's "consulship." In first publishing part of Document A, Teixidor translated the phrase MYQR BHPTY' B'RHY as "honoré comme consularis à Edesse," and concluded that Abgar was a provincial governor.⁷² In the full publication of the text, however, he translated the phrase as "honoré du consulat à Orhai," and took it as indicating that Abgar had received the honorific ornamenta consularia.⁷³ The phrase is puzzling and interesting, both because of what it may tell us about Abgar's own relationship with Rome and because it

⁷⁰ Ernest Will, *Qu'est-ce qu'une baris?*, Syria 64, 1987, 253-9.

⁷¹ Bellinger and Welles 125.

⁷² *Derniers rois* 220-222.

⁷³ Deux documents 161-2. It will be seen in what follows that I prefer the second translation to the first, but I lean toward the earlier interpretation.

has already been used to support the suggestion that Septimius Odaenathus of Palmyra also received the ornamenta.⁷⁴

A group of inscriptions from Palmyra, some of which are dated 257/8 C.E., call Odaenathus λαμπρότατος ὑπατικός (NHYR' HPT̄YQ').⁷⁵ This phrase has been variously interpreted. The most natural reading would be that Odaenathus was indeed governor of Syria Phoenice, or part of it, in or around 257/8. This has been disputed, however, and while some have seen a reference to the consular ornamenta others have suggested that Odaenathus at one time held a suffect consulship.⁷⁶ The Palmyrene dynast may have been adlectus inter consulares. This seems unlikely, however, for in another inscription he is λαμπρότατος συνκλητικός but not ὑπατικός.⁷⁷

It is understandable, given this uncertainty, that the case of Abgar was seized as an opportunity better to understand that of another eastern monarch of the mid-third century. However, as Teixidor realized in modifying his translation, the Syrian HPTY' used of Abgar derives from the Greek ὑπατεία, not from ὑπατικός as does the Palmyrene HPT̄YQ'. The two cases are therefore not exactly parallel, and whatever we conclude about Abgar does not necessarily apply to Odaenathus. Furthermore, the few texts which refer, or may refer, to grants of consular ornamenta to native dynasts under the Empire never say that the Kings received the consulship itself; in Greek texts the beneficiaries are said to receive τιμὰς ὑπατικάς.⁷⁸ The language of Document A differs significantly.

The word ὑπατεία can mean a governor's jurisdiction even when exercised by a non-senator, as it does in the first Greek document published from the Mesopotamian corpus.⁷⁹ This petition of 245 C.E., addressed to Julius Priscus while he was exercising judicial powers at Antioch, describes Priscus as διέπων τὴν ὑπατείαν.⁸⁰ It may be that the word is used similarly in the case of Abgar. Abgar, however, is said to have been honored by the grant of ὑπατεία specifically in Orhai. This does not conflict with the picture of his career that has been drawn above. Having come to the rescue by defending Edessa successfully against Persian attack, it would seem that Abgar obtained recognition of his civil and military authority so that he was, within the city of Edessa, both king in his own right and governor by Roman authority. This is only a tentative suggestion, but it seems to make the best sense possible of the fragments of evidence available.

⁷⁴ Potter (n. 3 above) 389-90.

⁷⁵ M.Gawlikowski, *Les princes de Palmyre*, Syria 62, 1985, 254-5.

⁷⁶ PLRE 1.638, s.v. Septimius Odaenathus; cf. F.Millar, *Paul of Samosata, Zenobia and Aurelian*, JRS 61, 1971, 8; Magie RRAM 2.1569, n. 32.

⁷⁷ Gawilowski (n. 75 above) 253.

⁷⁸ Dio 60.8.2; cf. Dio 78.13.1, Sync. 717.20.

⁷⁹ Feissel and Gascou 545-57.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 547 l. 3.

The Seleucid year at Edessa

The date of Document A - December of the Seleucid year 552, or 240 C.E. - and the nature of the transaction described therein, permit some observations about the calendar in use at Edessa during this period. The pertinent information is contained in lines 7-25 of the document:⁸¹

"I, Bageshū, son of Abgar, son of Shamishū, of the village of Mihrū, an employee of Sha'idū the of Shalmān, freely declare to Worod, the son of Nishryahab, of Beth Pourin, resident at New Karkā, the contents of the document which Bageshū son of Shamash'aqab, son of Taimū, of New Karkā of Sidā, wrote, and in which Batnanāi, Bageshū's wife, went surety before Sha'idū, the fodder contractor. And he (Bageshū) made known to him in this document that what was owed to Sha'idū the contractor, he would give him at the end of November or the beginning of December of the year in which the document was written, and that, if when this time had passed he had not given it (to him), the same Bageshū, son of Shamash'aqab, would give Sha'idū the contractor a datio for what which was owed (to him): 150 denarii.⁸² And it was written there that if he did not give these 150 denarii they would increase by three denarii for each month elapsed. And this document was written in the month of September in the year 551, on the 18th day. Now I declare to Worod that since Sha'idū the contractor has demanded (his debt) from Bageshū and the said Bageshū was not present, I have received from Worod the 150 denarii which the document stipulated and cited, and I have drawn up this present document ... so that he may exact them from Bageshū or his heirs according to the right which exists on account of the alliance."⁸³

The document describes this sequence of events:

1. September 551: Bageshū contracts obligation to Sha'idū
2. [date unspecified]: Sha'idū demands payment.
3. [date unspecified]: Worod makes payment on Bageshū's behalf.
4. December 552 (240 C.E.): Bageshū son of Abgar draws up Document A.

The nature of Bageshū's original obligation to Sha'idū is not mentioned, but it was clearly not a monetary debt. Given the nature of Sha'idū's business, we may guess that it was a certain quantity of grain, for the cultivation of which Sha'idū had let a subcontract.⁸⁴ The present argument concerns the date of that subcontract.

⁸¹ After Deux documents 150-51.

⁸² Datio in solutum: "The payment of a thing other than that which was originally due to the creditor who accepts it as a discharge of the former obligation." - Adolf Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society vol. 43, part 2, 1953, 424; cf. Deux documents 153.

⁸³ The mention of Bageshū's wife as fellow-surety for the original obligation makes it likely that the "alliance" mentioned here is a matrimonial one between Worod and the family of Bageshū.

⁸⁴ Sha'idū's role evokes that of a civilian or perhaps a member of the armed forces charged with supplying the Roman army with grain, Deux documents 152-3.

Observing that the original agreement took place in the Seleucid year before that of Document A, Teixidor quite naturally places it in the previous Julian year, that is, 239 C.E.⁸⁵ This conclusion is surely incorrect, for a number of reasons.

Although the months named in the document are those of the Roman Julian year, the primary dating era is not that of Rome, but the Seleucid era. This applies both to the prescript and to the dates mentioned in the body of the text. The Seleucid era was in use throughout the former domains of the Seleucid dynasty, but it was measured differently in the eastern and western parts of the kingdom. The eastern realms used the so-called Babylonian reckoning, under which the year began in April, while in the West (primarily Syria) the "Macedonian" system, with an October New Year, was used. Antioch used the Macedonian system, and the documents in the archives of Dura show that it, too, had an October New Year in the third century C.E.⁸⁶

Although it has been suggested that Edessa in the third century was an exception to this rule, it seems more reasonable to assume that it followed general Syrian practice. If the Seleucid year was indeed reckoned in Edessa as starting in October, it is obvious that the original transaction must have taken place, not in September 239, but in September 240 - only a few months before the date of Document A - because the New Year came between the dates of the two documents.

It will be seen that the entire transaction makes much more sense under this assumption. In the first stage, in September 551, Bageshū undertook to provide Sha'idū with a certain amount of grain as soon as it was harvested two months or so later - in the same growing season; hence the phrase "the year in which the document was written." When the obligation came due, Sha'idū was unable to collect it (perhaps Bageshū had found a better price for his crop in the meantime). Thereupon Sha'idū's employee, another Bageshū, collected the datio or penalty of 150 denarii from Worod. This payment must have taken place immediately upon demand or soon thereafter, since the interest or penalty for late payment was not assessed. Document A, which is a receipt for that 150 denarii, must have been drawn up at this time. It strains credulity to posit, as Teixidor does, that Document A was actually written a year after Worod paid off the debt.⁸⁷

Arguments for an April New Year. Document A, therefore, supports the inference that Edessa, like other Syrian towns, had an October New Year. Previous students of the question have concluded otherwise, based on "chronological considerations of a general character."⁸⁸ The conclusion was based on the dating prescript of DP 28, on numismatic evidence which suggests the colony may have been founded in January, and on Cassius

⁸⁵ Deux documents 152-3.

⁸⁶ Bickerman (n. 16 above) 71; Welles et. al. (n. 2 above) 10.

⁸⁷ Deux documents 154.

⁸⁸ Bellinger and Welles 143, n. 3 and 154, n. 64. Teixidor does not refer to Bellinger's findings on this point, although they would tend to support his own interpretation of Document A.

Dio's report concerning the removal of Abgar. Dio relates that Caracalla imprisoned Abgar and "laid hands on" Osrhoene after tricking the king into coming to him as if to a friend:⁸⁹

"Ἡπατηκῶς γὰρ τὸν βασιλέα τῶν Ὀσροηνῶν Αὔγαρον ὡς δὴ παρὰ φίλον αὐτὸν ἤκειν, ἔπειτα κυλλαβὼν ἔδησε, καὶ τὴν Ὀσροηνὴν οὕτως ἀβασίλευτον οὐσαν λοιπὸν ἐχειρώσατο."

By Bellinger's reckoning, this could not have happened any earlier than early 214, since, as late as autumn of 213, Caracalla was campaigning in Germany.⁹⁰ Citing colonial coins which bear a device resembling the zodiac sign Aquarius, Bellinger proposes January 214 as the date of Abgar's fall and the colonia's establishment. On this hypothesis, May 243 could fall in the colony's 31st year only if the New Year were reckoned from a point in the year before May: hence the conclusion that Edessa had a Babylonian-style April New Year.

It may be felt that this argument places too much weight on Dio's words. The deception by which Caracalla captured Abgar may not have involved an actual summons to the emperor's presence, although the Greek ἤκειν makes it look as if it did. On the other hand, if the evidence of the coins may be left aside as ambiguous, we might hypothesize that Abgar was captured, and the colony established, at some date before January 214. On this assumption the colony may have used a calendar reckoning the New Year at January 1, which also would put May 243 in the 31st year of the colony.

The entire issue, however, may be a red herring. Bellinger's argument rests on the assumption that the years of the colonial era were the same as those of the Seleucid era. Now, it is plain from the prescripts of both DP 28 and Document B that Edessa did not use the same years in all its various eras. For the consular year can hardly have been anything other than the regular Julian year beginning on January 1, whereas all students are in agreement that the New Year of the Seleucid calendar was either in April or in October. Once this is admitted, one must admit also that we do not have any idea when the years of the colonial era began. It seems perfectly likely that these years were reckoned from January 1, according to the standard Roman calendar. This assumption is consistent with the dates in both DP 28 and Document B, if we may place the colony's creation earlier than January 214 - perhaps as late as December 213.

Bellinger's "general" considerations, then, do not help us answer the question of which system Edessa used in counting the years of the Seleucid era. Document A, on the other hand, when seen in the proper light, is positive evidence that it used the Macedonian system, as is to be expected given the practice in nearby cities.

⁸⁹ Dio 78.12.1².

⁹⁰ Bellinger and Welles 154, n. 64.

Additional notes: Double documents

The upper text of double documents. In its earliest form the double document contained two complete copies of the same text, one open and one sealed. Both of the new Syriac documents present a degenerate form of the practice. The upper text of Document B is written in an extremely cursive hand, and no reading has yet been published.⁹¹ It is most probably an abbreviated summary of the lower text, as the similarly difficult upper text of DP 28 was finally shown to be after a period of defiance.⁹²

By contrast, the upper text of Document A is clear enough, but is useless as a summary of the main points of the lower text. It gives a fairly full summary of only the first part, breaking off after the description of the first stage.⁹³ Its first two lines, however, do include the date of the main transaction of Document A and the name of the principal party, Bageshū the son of Abgar (Sha'idū's employee). These elements were apparently sufficient to guarantee the document's legal validity.

Among the double documents of the recently published Babatha archive from the "Cave of Letters" in Judea, there are instances both of extreme abbreviation and of lengthy inner texts which even go beyond the outer texts in places.⁹⁴ As the editor of the archive observes, in some cases the inner text was so truncated that it could not serve to verify the textual integrity of the outer text (the original purpose of a sealed inner text); "nor, in fact, was such verification needed, for in these three instances of extreme abbreviation of the inner text the document is a copy taken from an official record, from which verification could be obtained should the need arise."⁹⁵ This parallel may help explain the case of Document A. None of our documents is a "copy taken from an official record." Lines 18-20 of DP 28, however, prove that Edessa had archives in which copies of transactions were kept:

"Two documents of this sale have been written; one copy of it, retained as a record, is to be entered in the archives of Antoniana Edessa, the glorious, and the other copy of it is to be for Tiro, the buyer."⁹⁶

Even though the truncated upper text of Document A could not have served to verify the authenticity of the main body of the lower text, it could have directed the searcher to the official copy of the document in Edessa's archives, which may have been catalogued by first lines.⁹⁷ The form of this upper text, thus, suggests the changes in archival practice that may have accompanied the evolution of the double document. Since an official registry of copies

⁹¹ Deux documents 154.

⁹² Goldstein 2, 6; ll. i and ii.

⁹³ See the summary of the four stages: above, p. 201.

⁹⁴ Lewis (n. 4 above) 9.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Goldstein 6. It is unlikely that the municipal archives existed only during the life of the colonia; they were probably maintained under Abgar.

⁹⁷ The use of a text's ἀρχή as an identifier, at least in catalogues of literary works, dates back as far as the Πίνακες of Callimachus, Athen. 6.244a, 13.585b. The practice may be much older.

existed, a full inner text would be otiose. What was needed was a way to find the archival copy in case of doubt about the text. Under the rule of Abgar IX, and perhaps during the earlier existence of the colonia, it appears that a first-line cataloguing system was used. The abbreviated upper texts of DP 28 and Document B, however, suggest that after the colony's reestablishment, the central log may have contained only a brief description of each document in terms of its date and a short summary of its main points.

Witnessing of double documents. In the standard double document, witnesses signed, not at the bottom as in a normal legal document, but on the verso, one witness signing next to each of the knots (normally five) in the string that sealed the inner text.⁹⁸ This practice was a further guarantee against tampering; it made it impossible to cut off the upper text so that it might appear the lower text was the only one.⁹⁹ A curious feature of the witnesses' signatures on the verso of DP 28 is that Mat-Tar'atha, the seller, signed twice, against the first and the last knots.¹⁰⁰ Goldstein explain this in terms of the purpose of the signatures on the verso: Although a double document needed to have a signature against each of its knots, the signatures need not be those of legal witnesses to the transaction (which, of course, the seller was not).¹⁰¹ Mat-Tar'ath's second signature merely fills a blank space, according to Goldstein.¹⁰²

It may be more than coincidence that Document A displays a similar feature. On the verso we again find five signatures, one of which is that of Hashā the son of Maththāi - described on the recto as signing in place of the illiterate Bageshū son of Abgar.¹⁰³ The first and fifth places, however, are occupied by the signature of another Bageshū, the son of Taimū, who is not mentioned elsewhere in the document. Since his father's name is the same as the name of the grandfather of Bageshū son of Shamash'aqab, the debtor, he may have been that Bageshū's uncle. It is therefore possible that he was closely involved in the transaction, perhaps having been himself the one who arranged for Worod to pay off his in-law's debt. Like so much else in dealing with these documents, this can only be speculation. The position of Bageshū's two signatures, however, and the curious parallel of the signature on DP 28, make it seem as if there is more going on here than the mere filling of spaces.¹⁰⁴ Whatever the purpose of this double-signature practice, it appears to have been limited to Edessa. Neither the double documents of Dura nor those of the Babatha archive provide any parallel.

⁹⁸ Deux documents 149 (photo of sealed Document A and witnesses' signatures on verso).

⁹⁹ Koffmahn (n. 4 above) 11.

¹⁰⁰ DP 28 verso, ll. 1 and 5.

¹⁰¹ Goldstein 15.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Deux documents 151, ll. 26-7.

¹⁰⁴ It must be admitted that one of the signatures on the verso does indeed look like a "space-filler." It is that of the fourth witness, who calls himself simply "Abdūn" - clearly a slave name. Cf. Goldstein 15: "According to some authorities, even the signature of a slave would do."

Although the process of extracting firm conclusions from the new Syriac documents has been a lengthy one, those conclusions can be succinctly stated. First, Document A proves without a doubt that the Abgarid monarchy was indeed restored early in the reign of Gordian III, as Bellinger had proposed on the basis of the coins of the last Abgar. Document B reinforces the evidence of DP 28, to the effect that this king's reign was a short one. The two documents together prove that more recent reconstructions, which placed the restoration of the monarchy as late as 243 C.E., are incorrect. They show that Abgar IX came to power just as the strategic situation in northern Mesopotamia was at its most critical turn, and that he fell from power (or died) before that crisis had yet abated. These new conclusions leave us a legacy of questions that are as mysterious as those that have been solved. The new evidence for the chronology of Abgar, however, makes it appear unlikely that Edessa fell to the Persians along with Carrhae and Nisibis in 239 C.E.

The new Edessene documents have also made possible some miscellaneous observations on administration and archival practice in the city, most notably the conclusion that it used the Macedonian year-reckoning system and not the Babylonian, as earlier believed.

It is ironic that of the three early Edessene Syriac documents now known, none was found in or near Edessa itself. This fact, besides exhibiting the effects of climate and chance transmission, bears testimony to the city's importance as a regional commercial center well before its emergence as a cultural force during the Christian period.¹⁰⁵

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¹⁰⁵ The original version of this paper was written for a Sather Seminar on Roman Syria led by Prof. Glen W. Bowersock in Fall 1991 at the University of California at Berkeley. Heartly thanks are due to Prof. Bowersock, and to Professors Werner Eck and Fergus Millar for their valuable comments on earlier drafts.

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