

ODAENATHUS AND THE ROMAN-PERSIAN
WAR OF 252-264 A.D. *

L. de Blois

Amsterdam

One of the most curious episodes in the history of the Roman Empire in the middle of the third century is that of the rise and fall of Palmyra. Its famous ruler from ca. 252-266 A.D., Odaenathus, was one of the most remarkable men of his time.

The purpose of this article is to show that the traditional views of the part that he and his forces played in the Roman-Persian war between 252 and 264 A.D., are not wholly correct.

These traditional views¹ imply, that Odaenathus saved the Roman Empire in the East from utter disaster after the capture of the Roman emperor Valerian by the Persians in 259, by appearing on the stage of war as the "deus ex machina", who inflicted a heavy defeat on the retreating Persian Army, eliminated the usurper Quietus, was called Corrector Totius Orientis and Dux Romanorum by Gallienus, and restored peace in the eastern provinces by his successful attacks on the Persian Empire in the years 262-264. He even reached Ctesiphon, which, however, he could not take.

In 264 peace was concluded. Coins of that year from the Antiochian mint bear the legend *pax fundata*.²

Any activities of Odaenathus before 259 A.D. are lost in obscurity. No one knows in what way Odaenathus became so famous that his position after his attacks on the Persians in 259/260 A.D., was accepted by the emperor Gallienus and by almost everyone in Syria and Mesopotamia. Before an attempt is made to throw some

* For full titles of the works referred to, see: list of sources and works referred to.

¹ See Alföldi, *Studien*, p. 153; p. 183 sqq. and p. 350-353; Ensslin, *Kriege Schapurs I.*, p. 69 sqq.; Magie, *Asia Minor*, I, p. 709, and Neusner, *Jews in Babylonia*, II, p. 39-52.

² See R.I.C. V, I, p. 188, nr. 652.

light upon this darkness, a survey of the history of the Roman-Persian war of the years 252-264 A.D. is given.

Particularly the conclusions of Honigmann-Maricq, Pékary, Callu, and of Ensslin, are followed.³

The great inscription of Shapur I on the "Kaaba of Zoroaster", the so-called Res Gestae divi Saporis (term invented by Rostovtzeff in 1943),⁴ tells us that in the twelfth year of Shapur (252) the Romans violated the Roman-Persian treaty regarding Armenia, whereupon the Persians occupied Armenia and attacked the Romans in Mesopotamia, where they inflicted a heavy defeat on a Roman Army at Barbalissos (on the Euphrates).⁵

The Graeco-Roman tradition, as Ensslin demonstrates, joins at the year 252 A.D. as the first year of a long Roman-Persian war (252-264 A.D.).⁶ Chosroes, king of Armenia, and bitter enemy of the Persians, was murdered in 251.

In the following year his successor, Tiridates, was driven out of his country. So the North-eastern frontier of the Roman Empire lay open to Persian attacks.

But the Persians also attacked other frontier-zones.

The Persians laid siege to Nisibis and, coming up north along the Euphrates, invaded Syria, and defeated a Roman army probably under the command of the governor of Syria. Nisibis, according to Ensslin and Honigmann-Maricq, stood firm until 254 A.D.,⁷ but

³ See Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 18-79; Honigmann-Maricq, *Recherches*, p. 131-142; Downey, *Antioch*, p. 587-595; Pékary, *Chronologie*, p. 123-128, and Callu, *Politique monétaire*, p. 211-214. Rostovtzeff, *RGDS*, p. 36 sqq. (esp. p. 46 sqq.), Honigmann-Maricq, and Pékary demonstrate that Alföldi's chronology is wrong (cf. Alföldi, *Studien*, p. 123-209 and 342 sqq. = *C.A.H.* XII, p. 165 sqq.).

⁴ See Rostovtzeff, *RGDS*. The text of the *RGDS* here used is the one Maricq published in *Syria*, 1958.

⁵ See *RGDS* 10-11. Cf. Honigmann-Maricq, *Recherches*, p. 131, and Pugliese Carratelli, *RGDS*, p. 219.

⁶ Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 18 and p. 29.

⁷ For the siege of Nisibis, cf.: Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 20; Honigmann-Maricq, *Recherches*, p. 137 and S.H.A., *vita Gallieni* 12, 1 and *Trg. tyr.* 15, 3. Odaenathus reconquered it in 262/3. For the Persian invasion of Syria and Cappadocia, c. 252/4, see: *Chron. miscell. ad ann. d. 724*, CSCO III, p. 149 and Honigmann-Maricq, *Recherches*, p. 132 sq. According to Ensslin, o.c., p. 30, Syncellus 715 B. too knows a Persian invasion into Syria and Cappadocia before the capturing of Valerian. But this invasion would have taken place in 258, in my view (cf. n. 15).

Syria and Cappadocia were ravaged by Persian hosts probably until Uranius Antoninus pushed the invaders back. He may have been the same as Samsigeramus, priest of the Sun at Emesa, one of those local heroes, who so often restored a shattered defense in many provinces of the Empire in these chaotic times.

Malalas tells, in a very confused way, the story of his reputed successes against the Persians. The consequence of his success was that he assumed the purple.

Some coins of him are known.⁸

Ensslin and Honigmann-Maricq demonstrate that Shapur did not surprise Antioch during this campaign.⁹

Valerian, realising how serious the troubles in the East were resolved to go there himself in 254.

He was in Antioch in January 255, as is proved by the inscr. A.E. 1957, 19 (a rescript of Valerian and Gallienus to Philadelphia in Asia).¹⁰

He restored order in Syria and Cappadocia, eliminated Uranius Antoninus (of whom nothing is heard any more after 254 A.D.) and returned to Rome. He was there on 10 oct. 256, as is proved by Cod. Iust. 6, 42, 15.¹¹ The coins emitted by the mint of Rome in 256 and 257, indicate that Valerianus and Gallienus celebrated their Adventus in Rome and their entering upon the consulate of the year 257 A.D.¹²

Meanwhile the Roman-Persian war was entering a new stage. Shapur laid siege to Dura-Europos in 255. Perhaps he intended to cut off the southern invasion-route from Syria, down the Euphrates,

⁸ For Uranius Antoninus, cf.: Alföldi, *Studien*, p. 141 and Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 35 sq. For the story of Samsigeramus, see: Malalas 296 B. For these local heroes, cf.: J. Gagé, *Les classes sociales dans l'empire romain*, Paris, 1964, p. 294 sqq.

⁹ Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 38 sqq.; Honigmann-Maricq, *Recherches*, p. 132-142, and Pékary, *Chronologie*, p. 126 sq.

¹⁰ Cf. Pékary, *o.c.*, p. 124 sqq. For the inscription, see J. & L. Robert, R.E.G. 71, 1958, p. 311.

¹¹ Cf. Pékary, *l.c.*, and Callu, *Politique monétaire*, p. 211.

¹² Cf. R.I.C. V, 1, p. 42, nrs. 44-45 (aurei, Liberalitas Aug. III); p. 46, nrs. 104-105 (antoniniani, Liberalitas Aug. III); p. 53, nr. 197 (as, Liberalitas Aug. III). Such emissions of dated coins in three metals with such legends are an indication of a festivity and of distributions of money among the people in Rome: Cf. Callu, *Politique monétaire*, p. 211.

into Babylonia, and to establish a strong base for his own operations in Syria. The protracted siege of Dura ended in 256, as is proved by the excavations at Dura, with the fall of this fortress. Syria was again ravaged by the Persians, who this time—the chronological order here followed is that of Ensslin, Honigmann-Maricq and Pékary—even succeeded in taking Antioch by surprise, with the help of the Antiochian traitor Mareades (Gr.: Kyriades).¹³

Valerianus returned to the East in 257 A.D., with a big army (if we may give credence to the statement in the R.G.d.S., that his army counted 70,000 men from almost every province of the Empire).

Valerian recovered Antioch and gained perhaps some other successes. The legends Victoria Parthica and Restitutor Orientis appeared on coins.¹⁴ Antioch and its walls were rebuilt.

In the following year, 258 A.D., the Goths overran Western Asia Minor and other barbarians ravaged Cappadocia which was also threatened by a Persian invasion from Armenia.¹⁵ Valerian moved his headquarters from Antioch to Samosata (which probably accounts for the transfer of the mint from Antioch to Samosata in 258).¹⁶ He sent Felix with some troops to Byzantium. He himself marched with the main body of his army into Cappadocia. Valerians army, however, starved in Cappadocia, which was heavily ravaged, and the plague played havoc with his best soldiers.¹⁷

In 259 A.D. Shapur resumed his attacks on Roman Mesopotamia. He beleaguered Edessa, with little success. Encouraged by the successful resistance of Edessa, Valerian marched against the Persians. Shapur, however, defeated his army and captured the Roman Emperor with his own hands, according to the R.G.d.S.

¹³ See n. 9. Ammianus Marcellinus XXIII, 5, 3, and Libanius, *Or.* 24, 38 describe the surpral of Antioch. Cf. Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 60.

¹⁴ RGDS 19 sqq. See Callu, *Politique monétaire*, p. 211, and Pékary, *Chronologie*, p. 126-128. For coins of Valerian of 257/8 with such legends, see R.I.C. V, 1, p. 39, nr. 22; p. 58, 262; p. 60, 29 (Victoria Parthica); p. 60, 286 (Restitutor Orientis). Cf. Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 42.

¹⁵ See Demougeot, *Invasions barbares*, p. 417-425. Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 30 and p. 46, believes that a Persian army invaded Cappadocia on the eve of Valerian's last campaign (he mentions Syncellus 715 B. as an indication).

¹⁶ See Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 55 and Callu, *Politique monétaire*, p. 209 sqq.

¹⁷ See Zosimus I, 36, 1; Ensslin, *o.c.*, p. 30 sqq. and p. 46-49, and Pugliese Carratelli, RGDS, p. 222 sq.

This took place in 259 A.D. (I agree with Lopuszanski, Fitz and Callu in this respect).¹⁸

Thereafter¹⁹ the Persians overran Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia. They captured Antioch a second time, and also took Tarsus in Cilicia and, after breaking the fierce resistance of the Roman general Demosthenes, also Caesarea in Cappadocia. Then discipline broke and the Persian soldiers got out of hand, looting in dispersed bands, so that Macrianus at Samosata, and Ballista (or Callistus), in Cilicia, who tried to reorganise Roman defense, had several successes.

All this plundering and fighting filled the rest of the year 259 and the first months of 260 A.D. The stiffening Roman defense and their own lack of discipline compelled the Persians to retreat from Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia. One of the retreating Persian bands was then, in the region which in the Later Empire was called Euphratesia, routed by the surprise attack from the Palmyrene prince Odaenathus, who not only had at his disposal his own Palmyrenes, mounted archers and heavy cavalry, so-called cataphracts, but also some Roman troops, and many Bedouins, who joined his army in the prospect of loot.²⁰

The rest of the story is well known. The Roman soldiers in the East made the sons of Macrianus emperors; Macrianus and his

¹⁸ RGDS 24. All sources know the story of Valerian's last campaign and his capturing by the Persians: Zos. I, 36, 2-3; Zonaras XII, 23; Syncellus 716 B.; Aur. Victor, *Caess.* 32, 5; Epit. de Caes. 32, 5; Eutrop. IX, 7; Festus 23; Orosius VII, 22, 4. See Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 55-58 and Stolte, *The Roman Emperor Valerian and Sapor I*, p. 157-162. For the date of Valerian's capturing, cf.: Lopuszanski, *Date de la capture de Valérien*; J. Fitz, *Ingenuus et Régalien*, Brussels, 1965, p. 13, p. 22-24, p. 43 sqq. and p. 71, and Callu, *Politique monétaire*, p. 213 sq.

¹⁹ For the history of the Persian invasions following the capturing of Valerian, for the history of the Macriani, and for the actions of Odaenathus after 259/260 A.D., cf.: Alföldi, *Studien*, p. 180 sqq.; Magie, *Asia Minor*, I, p. 708-710; Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 59 sqq.; Altheim, *Krise der alten Welt*, III, p. 104-109; Olmstead, *Mid-third century*, p. 398-420; Février, *Palmyre*, p. 82, and Starcky, *Palmyre*, p. 55. See also the sources mentioned in n. 17, esp. Syncellus 716 B. sq., and Zon. XII 23-24, and also S.H.A., *V.G.* 10 and *Trg. Tyr.* 15.

²⁰ Concerning the composition of Odaenathus' army: Alföldi, *Studien*, p. 352; Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 76; Février, *Palmyre*, p. 82, and Starcky, *Palmyre*, p. 55. For the Roman troops in his army, cf.: Zos. I, 39, 1.

elder son went to Europe with most of their troops. There they perished on the battlefield against Gallienus' general Aureolus. Macrianus' second son, Quietus, stayed with Ballista in Syria. He could not resist Odaenathus, who was acting on behalf of the emperor Gallienus. Quietus was killed at Emesa in 261 A.D.

Gallienus appointed Odaenathus *Corrector Totius Orientis*, *Dux Romanorum* and *Imperator*.²¹

In the years 262-264 A.D. Odaenathus marched against Persia, reconquered all of Roman Mesopotamia and invaded Persian Mesopotamia, even reaching Ctesiphon which he, however, could not take.²² His successes earned him great fame. In 264 an honourable peace was concluded. Odaenathus was then, though nominally Gallienus' vassal, the real ruler of Syro-Palestine, Mesopotamia, and the eastern regions of Asia Minor. A new empire in the East was about to be born.

Some puzzling questions concerning Odaenathus arise. What did he do before 259? Was Palmyra neutral, or an active ally of either Romans or Persians?

My opinion is that Odaenathus was an active belligerent and Roman ally already before the year 259 A.D.

Jewish sources bear out this hypothesis. The sources I have in mind are the Iggereth Rav Sherira Gaon (missionary letter of Rabbi Sherira), and some stories in the Babylonian Talmud. R. Sherira writes in his letter that Papa ben Nasor came to Nehardea, a great Jewish centre of learning and commercial activity in W. Babylonia, and destroyed it in the year 570 (Seleucid era), i.e. in 259 A.D.²³ Many disciples of the great Mar Samuel, who died in 254 at Nehardea,²⁴ fled to Pumbedita and other Jewish centres in Babylonia. Pumbedita was the great centre of Jewish scholarship and learning in Babylonia ever since. Not only in this letter of R. Sherira is the destruction of Nehardea com-

²¹ For the titles of Odaenathus, see: Starcky, *Palmyre*, p. 55, Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 76, and Jones, *Prosopography*, p. 638.

²² Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 77-79, and Stracky, *Palmyre*, p. 55-56.

²³ Iggereth Rav Sherira, p. 82, ll. 9-11: "And in the year 570 Papa ben Nasor came and he destroyed Nehardea and Rabba bar Abbua, went to Sechansiv and to Silhe (and) to Mehôza".

²⁴ Iggereth Rav Sherira, p. 82, ll. 5 sqq.

memorated, but also in other Jewish sources, e.g. in the *Seder Olam Zuta*.²⁵

Who was this Papa ben Nasor? Graetz thought that he was Odaenathus of Palmyra. The opinion of Funk is that he was not Odaenathus, but a member of the family of Odaenathus, who was, as a matter of fact, involved in the murder of Odaenathus in 266.²⁶ Neusner's opinion is that Papa ben Nasor is either Odaenathus or a member of his family.²⁷

In my opinion Papa ben Nasor should be identified with Odaenathus. An inscription found on a tomb of a rich Palmyrene family tells that the tomb was built by Septimius Odaenathus, v.c., son of Hairan, son of Wahballat, son of Nasor.²⁸

In other inscriptions too,²⁹ Nasor, Wahballat, Hairan and Odaenathus appear as names in the genealogy of Odaenathus. But there is more evidence. In *Ketuboth* 51B (Bab. Talm.) the question is discussed whether Papa ben Nasor is a king or a captain of bandits.

No other man with the genealogy-name of Odaenathus' family could be called "king" but Odaenathus himself, who assumed the title "king of kings" after his victorious attack on the retreating Persians in 260 A.D.³⁰ In the *Caesares* of Aurelius Victor soldiers of Odaenathus are called latrones. In *Oracula Sibyllina XIII* the word ληστής is used in a context probably referring to Odaenathus.³¹

²⁵ *Seder Olam Zuta*, ann. 4018/Seleuc. era 570 (Latin traduction Joh. Meyer, p. 113); Tum adscendit Papa filius Nezardae, ipsamque Nehardeam vastavit... Cf. Kalman Kahan, *Seder Tannaim ve Amoraim*, Frankfurt (Main), 1935, p. 24 sq.

²⁶ See Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, p. 334 and Funk, *Juden in Babylonien*, p. 75 sq.: He refers to a story in Ierus. *Terumoth* VIII (end). A Jewish embassy is negotiating with Zenobia, when someone enters, saying: "With this sword Ben Nasor killed his brother". This Ben Nasor might equally be Odaenathus.

²⁷ Neusner, *Jews in Babylonia*, II, p. 49 sq.

²⁸ Inv. VIII 55. Cf. Starcky, *Palmyre*, p. 53 and Z. Jawitz, *Toledot Israel*, VII, p. 112.

²⁹ I.G.R. III 1034/1035.

³⁰ *Ketuboth* 51b (with Epstein's n. 10). Cf. Février, *Palmyre*, p. 83; Starcky, *Palmyre*, p. 55, and Schlumberger, *Hérodién*, p. 42 (with n. 8).

³¹ Aur. Victor, *Caess.* 33, 3, and *Orac. Sib.* XIII, 90 sqq. (cf. Pugliese Caratelli, *RGDS*, p. 222).

It may have been a locus communis to speak of Odaenathus as a robber-king, as an upstart,³² who became king after having been a captain of desert bandits, who used to plunder urban centres in the neighbourhood.

Our conclusion is, that Papa ben Nasor was Odaenathus, and that, if Sherira's chronological data are correct, this Palmyrene prince destroyed Nehardea in 259 A.D.

But Nehardea was in Babylonia!

So it is demonstrated that Odaenathus marched on southern Mesopotamia, perhaps down the Euphrates, in 258/9 A.D.. History repeated itself. In 231 the Roman attack on Persia had also three wings (a northern, a central and a southern wing). The latter was utterly destroyed at that time.³³ Valerian started his campaign of 258/9 by covering the North flank: the Cappadocian campaign of that year.³⁴

The second stage of the campaign was Valerian's march on Shapur in n.-Mesopotamia, while Odaenathus attacked S. Mesopotamia.

Here he served his own purpose, by destroying a big Jewish centre, which was no doubt a commercial centre too³⁵ and so a competitor of Palmyra. Odaenathus also hoped, one may conjecture, to reopen the traderoutes through Characene, which the Parthians always had left open, but which the Persians had closed c. 230.

This stroke against Palmyra's commerce had goaded the Palmyrenes into active warfare against Persia already in the campaigns of 234 and 242/3.³⁶

Odaenathus had the rank for this command. He was already in 258 v.c. consularis and mrn, δεσπότης of Palmyra, as is proved by the inscription Inv. III 17.³⁷ He probably had at his disposal

³² In Genesis Rabba III, p. 181 sq., Parasha 76, 6, ad Gen. 32:11, Ben Nasar is compared with the Esau of Gen. 32:11 and identified with the Little Horn of Daniel 7:8. Merqin, the editor of Gen. Rabba, identifies Ben Nasar with Papa ben Nasor, who was Odaenathus, prince of Tadmor (Palmyra).

³³ See H. Bengtson, *Römische Geschichte*, München, 1967, p. 377.

³⁴ See Zos. I, 36, 1.

³⁵ Cf. Neusner, *Jews in Babylonia*, II, p. 49.

³⁶ Cf. Gagé, *Montée des Sassanides*, p. 149, and Février, *Palmyre*, p. 71, and p. 73. Cf. Inv. XII, 22.

³⁷ See Inv. III 17 (= I.G.R. III 1031). Cf. Starcky, *Palmyre*, p. 54; Février, *Palmyre*, p. 80, and Alföldi, *Studien*, p. 352.

not only Palmyrene mounted archers and cataphracts, but also some Roman troops and perhaps a Roman siege-train.³⁸

His absence from Mesopotamia in 259 is explained, consequently, by his activity in Babylonia in 258/259.

In 259 he came back north, probably realising his strategical position after he had heard of Valerians defeat. He assembled many recruits from Syria (Festus, Orosius, and others speak of Odaenathus' army as an "agrestis manus"), gathered dispersed Roman troops and some Bedouins, who were willing to join his army in the prospect of plunder, and fell upon the retreating Persians.³⁹

So already before Valerians débâcle Odaenathus was an active Roman ally of high rank, and possibly with Roman troops at his disposal.

A corner-stone in our hypotheses are the chronological data in Sherira's letter. Are they reliable? Neusner tries to explain them away, asserting that Odaenathus' raid on Babylonia could never have taken place before 262/3, when he acted as Corrector Orientis. But he does not offer any evidence for his views. He calls Sherira "a late and unreliable Gaonic source".⁴⁰ That is not correct. Sherira had a very precise knowledge of Babylonian Jewish tradition and of the history of the Jews in Babylonia. He was a great gaon of the school of Pumbedita from 968 till 1006. The fame of his learning restored the primacy of this old Babylonian centre of Jewish scholarship despite the great expansion of rabbinic learning in Kairouan in N.-Africa, in Spain and in Germany. In the *Encyclopedia Iudaica* Sherira is described as "among the most prolific writers of responsa", and his *Iggeret* as "a classic of Jewish historiography".⁴¹

Jewish writers like Sherira had a very reliable tradition behind them. A twelfth century writer like Abraham Ibn Daud, living in

³⁸ For the composition of Odaenathus' army, see n. 19.

³⁹ Festus 23 and Orosius, *H.a.p.*, VII, 22, 12. Ennslin, *Kriege*, p. 69 demonstrates that Odaenathus' attack followed in all sources immediately on the Persian retreat.

⁴⁰ Neusner, *Jews in Babylonia*, II, p. 50.

⁴¹ *Encyclopedia Iudaica* = New ed., Jerus. 1971, s.v. *Sherira*, col. 1381. An evaluation of Sherira's letter is given in G. D. Cohen, *Sefer ha Qabbalah, The book of Tradition by Abraham Ibn Daud*, Philadelphia, 1967.

Spain, still had an exact knowledge of the furthest limits of the Persian expansion in the Roman Persian wars of the third century⁴² and the Syrian-Jewish source of the 8th century chronicler Se'ert, Daniel ben Mariam, appears to have much better knowledge of names, data, and events than many Greek and Latin epitomators.⁴³

So I don't believe, that there is any reason to regard Sherira's letter as an unreliable source.

Not only the data in this letter, however, indicate an active part of Odaenathus in the Roman-Persian war of 252-264, before the capturing of Valerian.

One of the very few extant contemporary sources, *Oracula Sibyllina XIII*, mentions the civil wars of 253, the victory and death of Aemilius Aemilianus, the other events of 252/3, announces the accession of Valerian and Gallienus, and passes on to the events of the next few years, presenting the *dramatis personae* of the story as animals, in symbolic language.⁴⁴ Rostovtzeff and Honigmann-Maricq are embarrassed, seeing that this source tells in its mysterious wording the story of the exploits of Odaenathus, without mentioning the fall of Valerian and the Persian invasion of Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia. Rostovtzeff remarks: "One might therefore be tempted to regard the chronological frame of the author as a kind of Fiction, as an ornament without real historical value and think that in fact the section dealing with the events before the accession of Valerian is a kind of general summary of all the calamities which overcame Syria between the death of Decius and the activity of Syria's liberator Odaenathus. This may be so. But it remains odd that the author arranged this summary in an imaginary chronological order and that the few facts to illustrate the calamities of Syria in his narrative coincide with those which Shapur describes as events of his first and not his second invasion of Syria. Taking all this into consideration we have no right to deny all value to the chronology of *Orac. Sib. XIII*,"⁴⁵ The solution is, that the exploits of Odaena-

⁴² Cohen, *Sefer ha Qabbalah*, p. 40 sq.

⁴³ Cf. Honigmann-Maricq, *Recherches*, p. 139 sq.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Orac. Sib. XIII*, 100 sqq. and Honigmann-Maricq, *Recherches*, p. 135 sqq.

⁴⁵ Rostovtzeff, *RGDS*, p. 36, and Honigmann-Maricq, *Recherches*, p. 135 sq.

thus described in this source belong to the history of Odaenathus' campaign of 258/9 A.D., his march on Babylonia, and, perhaps, his expelling the Persians from Dura and its environment, the southern half of Syria and Northern parts of Arabia.

So the chronological order of Or. Sib. XIII, 137 sqq. and the question why the story of Odaenathus is told before the history of Valerians defeat and the disastrous consequences of that event, is explained. There are some minor arguments supporting my hypothesis about Odaenathus' campaign of the years 258/9.

It is simply unbelievable, that a Roman emperor should trust his whole eastern border to an unknown "deus ex machina" from the desert. Well, he did not. Gallienus trusted his eastern border to a staunch ally of the campaign of 258/9, and earlier campaigns, who was already v.c. consularis in 258 A.D., and whose family had longstanding connections with the Roman army in the East (if the inscription I.G.R. III 1035 in which a member of Odaenathus' family is honoured by soldiers of the Legio III Cyrenaica, may be interpreted in this way).⁴⁶ For this and for his successes of the previous years, he was accepted by so many Roman soldiers, that Quietus at Emesa in 261 never had a chance to survive. It is equally unbelievable that the S.H.A. should praise a successful Arab raider from the desert, a previously unknown sheikh, in the way he is praised unanimously.⁴⁷

Well, they praise the successful ally of Valerian, who was a member of a distinguished family which had been loyal und useful to Rome from the times of Septimius Severus.

Odaenathus may have been an active ally of Rome, even before the year 258 A.D. He was already v.c. consularis about that time. So he should have earned the title consularis previously.

Was he already operating as one of the commanders, or as the commander of the Palmyrenes against the Persians in the years 252-254 possibly in concert with Uranius Antoninus? Malalas' story could be interpreted in this way. According to Rostovtzeff traces of these events can be seen in paintings in the office of the

⁴⁶ See I.G.R. III 1035. Cf. Zos. I, 39, 1: ἀνδρα Παλμυρηὸν καὶ ἐκ προγόνων τῆς παρὰ τῶν βασιλέων ἀξιωθέντα τιμῆς. Zon. XII, 23 calls Odaenathus: συμμαχὸς Ῥωμαῖων.

⁴⁷ Cf. S.H.A., V.G. 10 and *Trig. Tyr.* 15.

actuarius of the Cohors XX Palmyrenorum at Dura (in one of the rooms around the templecourt of Azzanathkona).⁴⁸

The Palmyrenes were no doubt involved in the fighting around Dura-Europos in 255/6. A Palmyrene auxiliary cohort was garrisoned at Dura⁴⁹ and the Palmyrenes could never have let the Persians cut off the traderoute down the Euphrates without taking some action. A minor problem is to be solved.

Petrus Patricius tells that Odaenathus once thought that the Persians were stronger than the Romans, and that he therefore sent an embassy to Shapur. His legates were to offer Shapur presents and to ask him for a treaty. Shapur, however, had the presents thrown into the Tigris and demanded unconditional submission to his authority.⁵⁰

When did Odaenathus try to change sides? Until now the opinion prevailed that he did so before Valerians disastrous campaign of 259, or just after it.⁵¹

My opinion is, that Odaenathus did so before Valerians return to the East, after the successful Persian campaign of 255/6. Afterwards he remained a loyal ally of Valerian. In 258 he got the title v.c. consularis.⁵²

A major problem also remains to be solved. Why did not the Greek and Roman epitomes and breviaria mention this campaign of Odaenathus of 258/9 (The S.H.A. could have mentioned it in the lost part of the *Vita Valeriani*)?

My opinion is that the Graeco-Roman tradition was constantly overrating the exploits of *Roman* emperors and generals⁵³ and had a tendency to overlook or minimize the merits of *foreign* vassals. Their activity was regarded as an integral part of the activity of their Roman commanders. From 260 onwards Odaenathus was an exception, because he became a "Roman commander" himself.⁵⁴ A more important reason is that the Greek and Roman

⁴⁸ Malalas 296 B. Cf. Pugliese Carratelli, *RGDS*, p. 221 sqq., and Rostovtzeff, *RGDS*, p. 56-59.

⁴⁹ Cf. Février, *Palmyre*, p. 74.

⁵⁰ Petrus Patricius, FHG (Müller) IV, p. 187, fr. 10.

⁵¹ Cf. Février, *Palmyre*, p. 81 and Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 75.

⁵² See n. 37.

⁵³ Honigmann-Maricq, *Recherches*, p. 131.

⁵⁴ Cf. Neusner, *Jews in Babylonia*, II, p. 49.

epitomes and breviaria seem to summarize the events of the Roman-Persian war of 252-264. They offer schematic summaries in which many events are not separately dated.

Pugliese Carratelli says: "Tutte le fonti citate—meno gli Oracula—danno l'impressione di aver considerato le varie invasioni da loro narrate, non come avvenute in tempi diversi, ma come episodi di una sola, continua guerra di Shapur contro i Romani".⁵⁵

The campaign of Odaenathus of 258/9 was not mentioned separately in their summaries, possibly because the sources of the epitomators were describing it as merely a raid from the desert on Babylonia.

The letter of Sherira is giving yet another date, i.e. 254 A.D.: the date of the first campaign of the Persians in Cappadocia.⁵⁶

There is more evidence. Funk refers to a story in the Moed Qatan about R. Samuel who died in 254/5 A.D., according to Sherira's letter and other Jewish sources. He had so much sympathy for Shapur, that he did not tear his clothes, when he heard of the slaughtering of 12.000 Jews by the Persians in Caesarea Mazaca, in Cappadocia.⁵⁷

After telling the history of the Persian campaign of 252 in Armenia and the Persian victory at Barbalissos, the RGDS gives a catalogue of captured towns, not only of Syria, but also of Cappadocia.⁵⁸ The Syriac chronicle ad ann. 724 mentions that the Persians devastated Syria and Cappadocia in the very beginning of the war 252-264.⁵⁹ In Orac. Sib. XIII 89-102 an invasion of Cappadocia is mentioned, during which a Syrian traitor was joining the invaders, who took Tyana and Mazaca, i.e. Caesarea Mazaca, in Cappadocia.

In my opinion this Persian invasion into Cappadocia should be identified with the march of the Persian crown-Prince Hormizd in 254 A.D., with the help of Mareades,⁶⁰ who in 256 betrayed

⁵⁵ Pugliese Carratelli, RGDS, p. 222. Cf. Ensslin, *Kriege*, p. 21 sqq.

⁵⁶ Iggereth R. Sherira, p. 81. Cf. Neusner, *Jews in Babylonia*, II, p. 47.

⁵⁷ Moed Qatan 26a, ap. Goldschmidt, *Babylonische Talmud*, p. 218. Cf. Funk, *Juden in Babylonien*, p. 73 sq.

⁵⁸ RGDS 14 sqq.

⁵⁹ Chron. miscell. ad ann. d. 724 pert., CSCO III, p. 149: Eo anno 563 (Seleuc. era) (i.e. 252) vastavit Sabur rex Persorum Syriam et Cappadociam. Cf. Honigmann-Maricq, *Recherches*, p. 132 and p. 135 sq.

⁶⁰ Cf. S.H.A., *Trg. Tyr.* 2, 2 and Pugliese Carratelli, RGDS, p. 228.

Antioch to Shapur. One would presume, that Hormizd attacked from his recently conquered base, Armenia.

In conclusion, a summary of my findings concerning the part Odaenathus played in the Roman-Persian war of his time until 260 A.D. would seem appropriate.⁶¹

Already in the opening years of this war Odaenathus was probably an active ally of Rome, who possibly cooperated temporarily with Uranius Antoninus in pushing back the Persians out of Syria after the Roman defeat at Barbalissos and the following Persian plundering of Syria. He was probably involved in the fighting around Dura. He remained loyal to Valerian, until the Persian successes of the years 255/6 convinced him that Persia was the stronger power. Shapur, however, rejected his approaches, so that he had to stick to the Roman side. In 258 he was v.c. consularis and, one assumes, already a famous man.

In 258/9 A.D. Odaenathus was involved in Valerian's great attack on the Persians, who were beleaguering Edessa. Probably he commanded a mixed Roman-Palmyrene army, and marched down the Euphrates (or through the desert) on Babylonia. He destroyed Nehardea, a Jewish centre of learning and commerce, thus also serving Palmyrene commercial interests.

One might compare his daring expedition with the march on Babylonia of the right wing of Severus Alexander's army. After the capturing of Valerian Odaenathus returned to Syria, where he came just in time to fall upon a column of retreating Persians, who had taken part in the ravaging of Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia.

The history of the rest of his career is well known. He eliminated the pretender Quietus at Emesa, acting on behalf of Valerian's son Gallienus, who thereupon nominated him Corrector Totius Orientis and Imperator. He was then the de facto ruler of Syro-Palestine, Arabia, Mesopotamia and eastern Asia Minor.

He waged war against Persia from 262 until 264, and gained great victories, even reaching Ctesiphon, which he could not take. In 264 A.D. peace was restored on the eastern border of the Roman

⁶¹ For the translation of Hebrew and Aramaic texts I am very indebted to prof. dr. M. J. Mulder, Semitologist at the Free University Amsterdam. I owe thanks to dr. M. A. van Beek, who kindly corrected the English text of this article.

Empire. In 266 Odaenathus pushed back barbarians who invaded Pontus from the northern shores of the Black Sea. Shortly afterwards he was murdered after a quarrel within his own family.

List of sources referred to

A. Latin and Greek literary sources

- Eutropius, *Breviarium ab urbe condita*, ed. Rühl, 1887.
 Aurelius Victor, *Caesares*, ed. Pichlmayer-Gründel, 1966.
Epitome de Caesaribus, ed. Pichlmayer-Gründel, 1966.
Scriptores Historiae Augustae, ed. Magie, London, 1954 (second ed.): *Vita Gallieni* and *Vitae triginta tyrannorum*.
 Festus, *Breviarium*, ed. Eadie, London, 1967.
 Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos*, ed. Zangemeister, Leipzig, 1889.
 Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, ed. F. Paschoud, Paris, 1971.
 Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, ed. Dindorf, Leipzig, 1870.
 Georgius Syncellus, *Chronographia*, ed. Dindorf, Bonn, 1829.
 Ioannes Malalas, *Chronica*, ed. Niebuhr, Bonn, 1831.
 Petrus Patricius, *FHG IV* (Müller), Paris, 1885, p. 181 sqq.
 Ammianus Marcellinus, ed. Rolfe, Cambridge (Mass.)/London, 1956.
 Libanius, *Orationes*, ed. Foerster, Leipzig, 1903-1927.
Oracula Sibyllina XIII, text of A. T. Olmstead, Cl. Ph. 37 (1942), p. 398 sqq.

B. Jewish literary sources

- Iggereth Rav Sherira Gaon*, ed. B. Lewin, Haifa, 1921.
Seder Olam Zuta, ed. M. J. Weinstock, 1957. Latin translation: Joh. Meyer, Amsterdam, 1699.
Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, ed. I. Epstein, new ed., London, 1971 (Ketuboth).
Der Babylonische Talmud, ed. L. Goldschmidt, Berlin, 1930 (Erubim), 1931 (Moed Qatan).
Le Talmud de Jérusalem, ed. M. Schwab, II, Paris, 1960 (Terumoth).
Genesis Rabba, ed. M. A. Merqin, III, Tel-Aviv, 1958.

C. Syriac literary sources

- Sebert, Chronica*, ed. Scher, P.O.IV, p. 220-223. French translation: J. Gagé, *La montée des Sassanides*, Paris, 1965, p. 315 sq.
Chronicon miscellaneum ad annum domini 724 pertinens, CSCO III, p. 149 sqq. (IV, 115 sqq.).

D. Inscriptions

- J. Cantineau, *Inventaire des inscriptions de Palmyre*, I à IX, Damascus, 1930-1936; X, 1949.
Res Gestae Divi Saporis, text of A. Maricq, Syria 35 (1958), p. 295 sqq.

- Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes*, ed. Cagnat a.o., I-IV, Paris, 1906-1927/Rome (second ed.), 1964.
Année Epigraphique, Paris, 1888-1970.
Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum, I-XXV, ed. Hondius a.o., Leyde, 1923-1971.

E. Coins

- H. Mattingly & E. A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, V, 1, ed. P. H. Webb, London (second ed.), 1968.

List of works referred to

- Alfoldi, A., *Studien zur Geschichte der Weltkrise des dritten Jhs. n. Chr.*, Darmstadt, 1967.
Die Hauptereignisse der Jahre 253-261 n. Chr. im Orient im Spiegel der Münzprägung, p. 123-154 (= Berytus IV, 1, 1937, p. 41-68).
Die römische Münzprägung und die historischen Ereignisse im Osten zwischen 260 und 270 n. Chr., p. 155-209 (= Berytus V, 1, 1938, p. 47-92).
Die Krise der römischen Welt 249-270 n. Chr., p. 342-374 (= C.A.H. XII, p. 165-231: Crisis of the Empire).
Altheim, F., *Die Krise der alten Welt*, III, Berlin, 1953.
Callu, J.-P., *La politique monétaire des empereurs romains de 238 à 311*, Paris, 1969.
Demougeot, E., *La formation de l'Europe. Les invasions barbares des origines à l'avènement de Dioclétien*, Paris, 1969.
Downey, G., *A History of Antioch*, Princeton, 1961.
Ensslin, W., *Zu den Kriegen des Sassaniden Schapurs I.*, S.B.A.W., philol.-hist. Kl., München 1947, 5 (1949), p. 1-115.
Février, J. G., *Essai sur l'histoire politique et économique de Palmyre*, Paris, 1931.
Funk, S., *Die Juden in Babylonien*, 200-500, Berlin, 1902.
Gagé, J., *La montée des Sassanides et l'heure de Palmyre*, Paris, 1965.
Graetz, H., *Geschichte der Juden*, IV, von Untergang des jüdischen Staates bis zum Abschluss des Talmud, Berlin, 1853.
Henning, W. B., *The great inscription of Shapur I*, B.S.O.S. 9 (1937-1939), p. 823-849.
Honigmann, E., & Maricq, A., *Recherches sur les Res Gestae Divi Saporis*, Mem. de l'Acad. Roy. de Belgique 47, 4, 1953, p. 7 sqq.
Jones, A. H. M. a.o., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, Cambridge, 1971.
Jawitz, Z., *Toledot Israel*, new ed., Tel Aviv, 1954/5-1962/3.
Lopuszanski, G., *La date de la capture de Valérien et la chronologie des empereurs gaulois*. Cahiers de l'institut d'études polonaises en Belgique 9, Brussels, 1951.
Magie, D., *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, Princeton, 1950.
Maricq, A., *Compléments aux recherches sur les Res Gestae Divi Saporis*, Syria 35 (1958), p. 295-360.

- Neusner, J., *A History of the Jews in Babylonia, II: The early Sasanian Period*, Leyde, 1966.
- Olmstead, A. T., *The Mid-third Century*, Cl.Ph. XXXVII (1942), p. 398-420.
- Pékary, Th., *Bemerkungen zur Chronologie des Jahrzehnts 250-260 n. Chr.*, Hist. 11 (1962) p. 123 sqq.
- Pugliese Carratelli, G., *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*, P.P. 2 (1947), p. 209-239.
- Rostovtzeff, M. I., *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*, Berytus VIII, 1, (1943).
- Schlumberger, J., *L'inscription d'Hérodien, Remarques sur l'histoire des princes de Palmyre*, Bulletin des Etudes Orientales 9 (1942/3), p. 35-50.
- Starcky, J., *Palmyre*, Paris, 1952.
- Stolte B. H., *The Roman Emperor Valerian and Sapor I, King of Persia*, Riv. storica dell' antichità I (1971), p. 157-162.