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## Parthian and Iranian titles in the Parchement No. 10 from Dura

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PARTHIAN AND IRANIAN TITLES IN THE PARCHEMENT  
No. 10 FROM DURA.

About twenty years ago a Greek parchment approximately dated from 121 or 122 A.D. was published. It was discovered during the excavation works in Dura-Europos and like every valuable find of this sort it has become one of the very few extant sources of information on the history of Parthia and its internal and foreign affairs<sup>1</sup>.

On the whole the discovered parchment has been preserved in very good condition but for a few parts which are mutilated. Of these one regrets that the introductory part is damaged for it contains invaluable prosopographic data. Here we find a list of names and titles of several personages, which is a mine of information on the still little known history of the Arsacid monarchy, its social structure and institutions.

To make the fullest use of the historical material that we find in the mutilated first part it would be necessary, were it at all possible, to reconstruct the missing text in lines 4 and 5<sup>2</sup> which in its present state reads as follows: τῶν παρὰ Μανήσου τοῦ Φραάτου τῶν βατῆσα καὶ τ[ῶν. ?] . . . . . [.]ρων, παρ[.]του καὶ στρατηγῶ Ἰεσοποταμίας καὶ Παραποταμίας καὶ ἀραβάρχου. One may ask why one man out of all other persons mentioned in this passage was so distinguished to have so many dignities conferred upon him? Two assumptions seem to be correct. On the one hand the political situation of the Arsacid kingdom must have been very grave as it was then that the country was slowly recovering after Trajan's recent invasion of the western provinces (114—117 A.D.).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. I. Rostovtzeff and C. B. Welles, *A Parchment Contract of Loan from Dura-Europos on the Euphrates*, Yale Cl. Stud. II (1931) 3ff.; also by these authors, *Un contrat de prêt de l'an 121 ap. J.—C. trouvé à Doura*. C.R. 1930, 158 ff. and *Parchment No. X. A Contract of Loan of 121 A. D.* in Rostovtzeff's and P. V. C. Bauer's, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Second Season, 1928—9*, New Haven 1931, 201 ff. For full bibliography consult R. Taubenschlag, *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology* III (1949) 57.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. W. Ensslin's detailed analysis, *Phil. Wochenschrift*, 1933 col. 268 ff.

On the other hand Manesus who is the bearer of those many titles must have been a member of a distinguished and powerful Parthian family. Obviously, in the year 121 A.D., that is a few years after the Roman invasion it was necessary to vest with almost absolute powers, both military and administrative, the man — Manesus in our case who for certain belonged to the top level aristocracy in Parthia.

Undoubtedly he must have been a wealthy landowner in the province of Mesopotamia and was probably related to the powerful family of the Surens many of whom since I century B. C. had been holders of responsible offices and were not infrequently appointed governors of this province, thus playing a prominent part in the political life of Parthia<sup>3</sup>.

Along with the Greek titles we have in the MS. the names of Iranian distinctions which again are a characteristic sign that the iranisation of Parthia, and especially of its westernmost province was then steadily progressing.

The Behistun inscription approximately dated from I century B.C. contains, as we know, several Greek titles as they were transferred to the Parthia and assumed by the officials there<sup>4</sup>. In the Dura Parchment the following titles are of genuinely Greek origin: στρατηγός Μεσοποταμίας καὶ Παραποταμίας and ἀραβάρχης. This fact confirms our opinion that in order to secure a better management and a smoother run of governing institutions king Osroes had divided the areas that were freshly recovered from Rome into larger administrative districts or provinces.<sup>5</sup> Such local government was constituted in the district of adjoining Mesopotamia and Parapotamia on the Euphrates; the governor's authority extended as well over the Arabian tribes in the neighbouring territories.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rostovtzeff and Welles, *Yale Cl. Studies* II, 46; Rostovtzeff, *C. A. H.* XI (1938) 114-15, in whose opinion Suren who had vanquished Crassus bore the name of Monaesus.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. E. Herzfeld, *Arch. Mitteil. aus Iran* IV 2 (1932) 80 ff.; N. C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia* Chicago 1938, p. 44. More authoritative seems to be Herzfeld's opinion who dates this inscription back to I cent. B. C. and not to the first half of I cent. A. D. for which date H. Bengtson is in *Die Strategie in der hell. Zeit*, II, München 1944, 286.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the discussion of this complex problem in Rostovtzeff's *op. cit.* 48 Bengtson's, *op. cit.* 284 ff.

Paleographers have been at variance about the origin of the three titles considered until now to be Iranian. Unfortunately, this is where the hiatus occurs in the MS., two titles are mutilated and one is preserved in its complete form. In one of the mutilated titles the last part only has remained. Least difficult to reconstruct will be the other mutilated title in which the middle part is destroyed.

So far three conjectures have been put forth of how to implement the missing middle part. Of these the one postulated by R o s t o v t z e f f seems to be no longer tenable. To formulate his proposition R o s t o v t z e f f has drawn an analogy to the Egyptian system of administration. Acting upon this tenet the author has proposed to fill up the hiatus in the text by adding the letters [αλη], because, so he has contended, the preserved ending needs read πτης<sup>6</sup>.

Another solution has been proposed by M l a k e r who has wholly based his conjecture upon the actually preserved text παρ[ ]της. He maintains that the full word is παρ[απά]της, and in his opinion it corresponds to the Iranian rank of *pāhragbēdh* (= chief guardsman)<sup>7</sup>.

Let us add that no other evidence, however, is available that might support his hypothesis as well as this also must be remembered that no research has as yet been started in order to define the function and rank distinction of this official in the hierarchy of Parthian administration. Neither any attempt has so far been made to establish the equivalent of the term in Greek.

From what we know about this function it certainly was no minor office, for were it so, it would not have been held by such a prominent personage as Manesus evidently was. Significantly his name and title are placed before the name and title of the strategos of Mesopotamia and Parapotamia. And what is more, his title is written in the Iranian language. This fact tends to prove that his function must have been created by the Arsacids; also that by no means had it been of foreign origin and translated, for instance, from the Seleucid administration.

As we know the chief officers of the guards are mentioned in various documents dating from the same Arsacid period. They

<sup>6</sup> *op. cit.* 51.

<sup>7</sup> quoted by E n s s l i n, *Phil. Wochenschrift* 1933, 269, and also supported by R o s t o v t z e f f himself, *C. A. H.* XI 114, note 5.

are usually known by the names of φρούραρχος and φυλακάρχης<sup>8</sup>. Yet with reference to the Dura Parchment it is quite clear that Manesus certainly was not one of them. Besides the fact we have already stated of his being the strategos, this point is also interesting that another official is mentioned in the MS, called Menarnaios who most probably had been either a phrurarchus or a phylakarchus. The mention of his name in the document indicates that his rank and the rank of Manesus were two different things and so the titles of those two men were not identical.

If the above assertion is correct then the Greek equivalent to the title παραπάτης will be ὁ σατράπης ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν μεγάλων πυλῶν, as attested by Philostratus, v. Apollon, I 27. Its bearer was a high Parthian functionary with his permanent place of residence in Babylon<sup>9</sup>. Philostratus tells us that this officer was in charge of the king's safety what meant also that he was responsible for the safety of the royal palace, and therefore he was, too, in command of the royal household guards.

Yet a brief explanation is needed of the title σατράπης. We find it in Philostratus for it was assumed by both governors and vice-governors of the provinces.<sup>10</sup> Presumably the full name of that dignity was ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν μεγάλων πυλῶν, parallel to other titles, frequently appearing in the documents, of ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν προσόδων and ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν πραγμάτων. Philostratus erroneously confused it with the better known title of satrap, the mistake he had made before in his work<sup>11</sup>.

On these grounds it will be correct to say that the Iranian term as it is used here for the dignity of *pāhragbēdh* — παραπάτης — and the Greek form ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν μεγάλων πυλῶν are identical. They both denote the holders of the same office. For there is no doubt that the term „the Great Gates” used in this context denotes the palace of the ruler which was commonly known by that name in the East. Also the story related by Philostratus wholly confirms the same meaning and usage.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ensslin, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> In spite of the errors stated in his work there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the title quoted by Philostratus.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Bengtson, *Gnomon* 13 (1937) 115 ff.

<sup>11</sup> V. Apollon. I 21. Rostovtzeff, *Yale Cl. Studies*, II 56.

<sup>12</sup> The Turkish „Sublime Porte” will be the most classical example.

We can safely presume that that officers acted in the capacity of court seneschal and had under his command the royal guards.<sup>13</sup> To protect the person of the king was, of course, his main duty what is confirmed by his Iranian title. Now it is quite clear why his rank is given precedence before the rank of province governor. It also accounts for his other function of commanding the palace guards. Both those offices were held by Manesus. A further examination of his title will reveal several interesting points about the cultural relations between Parthia and the Roman Empire. On the whole the sources of the new imperial offices introduced in the times of Constantine the Great<sup>14</sup> can be traced back to the institutions of the Sassanids. This view, however, seems to require some revision. It is highly probable that in several instances the Sassanid offices were founded in imitation of the Arsacid models<sup>15</sup>. For instance, the dignity of ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν μεγάλων πυλῶν could have served as a pattern for the later office created by Constantine the Great and known by its Latin name of *magister officiorum*. The responsibilities of its holder were many. He was made minister of foreign affairs, he administered justice to the royal household; he at last was entrusted with the protection of the monarch and the command of the royal bodyguard called *scholae palatinae*.<sup>16</sup> All those functions were accumulated in the hands of a very high official in Parthia mentioned above.

The fact that his title is given in the singular number as contrasted with the plurality of Manesus' offices seems to emphasize even more strongly his superior rank in the hierarchy of the Parthian civil service. Also the appearance of the Greek title well demonstrates that the hellenization and absorption of Iranian legal terms had not been easily accomplished. All these considerations lead us to reject the theory<sup>17</sup> of Christensen<sup>18</sup> who postulates

<sup>13</sup> It is quite possible as it has been above stated, that there could have been several such officials in Parthia. For want of good data the question must be left open.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. E. Kornemann, *Röm. Geschichte in Gercke's and Norden's Einleit. in die Altertumsw.* III 2<sup>3</sup>, Leipzig und Berlin.

<sup>15</sup> It is quite possible that the title of *vitaxa* — βίταξ (commander-in-chief of the Parthian cavalry) served as a model for the Roman *magister equitum* carried over to Rome through the Sassanid dynasty. Cf. my *Remarques critiques sur les institutions des Arsacides*, being now published in EOS.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. E. Stein, *Vom röm. zum byzant. Staate*, I, Wien 1928, 172 f.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ensslin, *op. cit.* 270.

<sup>18</sup> *L'empire des Sassanides*, Copenhagen, 1907, 40.

that the term παρ[αστα]του denotes exactly the same office as the title of *wazirbēdh* which means „men who are admitted to the presence of the king”. If compared to Manesius' numerous dignities this title would look so modest that it could hardly be given priority to the rank of the strategos of the province. Moreover, if Christensen's suggestion were correct then a larger space would be required than the damaged text provides for this word<sup>19</sup>.

A fuller explanation will be needed of the title βατησα which was used in Iran under the Sassanid dynasty and corresponded to the rank of *padhešah* or *padheša*.<sup>20</sup> It is significantly placed at the head of Manesius' other titles to show that his position was very high in the Parthian administration. The Greco-Roman tradition records several instances which will help us to establish the nature of his office and his prerogatives. This dignity is attested by Ammianus Marcellinus (XXXVI, 6, 14), its holder is called here a *vitaxa* and is defined as a *magister equitum* and one *qui maximas regiones curat*.

Apparently he held two offices, i. e. he was made commander in chief of the Parthian troops (almost exclusively organized of cavalry regiments) and governor of large provinces. Besides he was the sovereign's privy councillor; the latter dignity having continued after the old Persian tradition of the office of ὀφθαλμὸς τοῦ βασιλέως<sup>21</sup>. How powerful the holder of this office must have been, or what rôle was played by βατησα is even more clearly demonstrated by the gloss of Hesychius: βίσταξ ὁ βασιλεὺς· παρὰ Πέρσαις. We wish to refer the readers who are interested in this subject to a special study that has been devoted to a detailed analysis of Hesychius' account<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> One does not, of course, exclude the possibility that there was another Iranian equivalent to παραπάτης; than *pāhragbēdh* proposed by Mlaker, e. g. *barabadi* i. e. *majordomus*. From the linguistic point of view his suggestion is not acceptable for the initial *b* is seldom changed in Greek into *p*. Yet we have *bitaxš* in Paikuli Inscriptions which in Greek is transcribed πιτιάξης cf. Rostovtzeff, *Yale Cl. St.* II 52; — this office not attested in ancient tradition would be exactly an equivalent to the Greek title ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν μεγάλων πυλῶν.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Rostovtzeff, *Yale Cl. St.* II 51 f.

<sup>21</sup> This problem has been discussed in detail in my work (cf. footnote 15).

<sup>22</sup> This opinion holds Pagliaro, *Riv. di studi orientali* 12, 160 ff. quoted after Bengtson, *Die Strategie* II 273, note 3. In this case it must be stressed that in the kingdom of the Achemenids we have only one such official Cf. Meyer, *Gesch. d. Altertums* III 2, Stuttgart 1937, 43. Obviously the Arsacids had increased the number of the holders of this office.

We now may see what a prominent man Manesus was and how distinguished were both his military and administrative offices. Against Rostovtzeff's assertion<sup>23</sup>, we may say that βατῆσα was not a mere courtesy title but that it stood for the highest office in Parthia.

The author of the present study hopes that the evidence he has collected will help to complement the lacuna in the text.

Examining anew line 4 τῶν βατῆσα καὶ τ[ων..?] [.....] ρων. and basing his conclusion upon almost obliterated letters which naturally allow for a number of different and hence conjectural readings of the text Rostovtzeff proposes to reconstruct line 4 in the following manner: τ[ῶν][ἐλευθέ]ρων<sup>24</sup>. To support his statement he takes the word *azâtân* (= free men) which in the epoch of the Sassanids denoted nobility<sup>25</sup>. But barring the uncertainty of this lection from the paleographic point of view, I think that Ensslin has correctly pointed out that it was unlikely for a high dignitary to state together with his rank the fact that he belonged to the nobility<sup>26</sup>. Much substantial evidence can easily be gathered to prove that this opinion is correct. According to Joseph Flavius Ant. Jud. XIV 13,5 — Bell. Jud. I 13,3 one of the cavalry regiments of the Parthian army was named οἱ ἐλεύθεροι. In this context any doubt about the proper interpretation of the title has to be dismissed.

In his reading τ[ῶν] [δεκάνδ]ρων of the Dura text Harmon asserts that the words denote the king's privy Council composed of the highest officials in Parthia and is probably a part of the Great Council συνέδριον<sup>27</sup>. No particulars can be so far ascertained about the functions of the Great Council, consequently it is even less likely to find a proof of the organization of its smaller bodies in form of the royal Privy Council or a special Commission.

Ensslin has correctly questioned this reading. His suggestion of filling up this lacuna was based again upon an analogy to the title of another Parthian high official Menarnaios who is called in Dura MS. τῶν πρώτων καὶ προτιμωμένων φίλων. Ensslin's

<sup>23</sup> Yale Cl. St. II 51.

<sup>24</sup> op. cit. II and 51.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, Copenhagen 1936, 44.

<sup>26</sup> Ensslin, *Phil. Wochenschrift*, 1933, 270.

<sup>27</sup> Rostovtzeff, op. cit. 53.

own reading is τ[ῶν] [συγγενῶν ἀνδ]ρῶν<sup>28</sup>. The term — οἱ συγγενεῖς according to him embraced all the highest Parthian officials Manesus including<sup>29</sup>. Barring paleographic reasons this reading covers 16 letters while all the three former conjectures have attempted at the reconstruction of a 12-letter word. Moreover, this term nowhere appears as οἱ συγγενεῖς ἄνδρες but is always written οἱ συγγενεῖς. For this reason only Ensslin's conjecture is entirely groundless and cannot be accepted.<sup>30</sup>

To make the best use of the data concerning the administrative system in Parthia and because they are so invaluable the author of the present study deems it of utmost importance to have the text soon and correctly emended. Also he wishes to signalize a fact which has somehow escaped the notice of the scholars and which in his opinion is most essential for preparing the only correct reading of line 4. This concerns the last letter in line 4 which is probably not τ as Rostovtzeff has suggested.<sup>31</sup> If we were to examine the whole text containing the list of Menusus'titles we should take notice of the article τῶν which once only is used in this passage. Consequently a totally new conjecture can be proposed of how to supplement the missing part of the text.

If we realize what position Manesus held and what was the then situation of Parthia we may accept the following reading as it expresses both his functions: τῶν βατῆσα καὶ [αὐτοκρατό]ρων.

The title of αὐτοκράτωρ denoting an official endowed with greater powers than other men was transferred in the Greek form into the Seleucid Empire. It was used, for instance, by Seleucus IV and Trypho. It was assumed by superior military chiefs enjoying special privileges and prerogatives, as for instance, by Xenaitos who lived during the reign of Antiochus III (Polib. V 45, 6).

Since the beginning of II century A. D. the same title was also assumed by numerous Parthian and Iranian rulers and continued till the times of Gundapharos who reigned c. 20—65 A. D. and was

<sup>28</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> Poseidonius quoted by Strabo XI 9, 3; Philostratus, v. Apollon. I 34.

<sup>30</sup> Tacitus makes use once of the title of *vir nobilis* when writing of another Mo(a)nesus, as apposition. In other documents συγγενής is quoted, similarly to ὁ πρῶτος καὶ προτιμωμένος φίλος. Consult Rostovtzeff's table of various documents, *op. cit.* 54 ff.

<sup>31</sup> *op. cit.* 51; it is quite likely that after καὶ the letter τ should follow.

the last king to bear the title of *αὐτοκράτωρ*<sup>32</sup>. We may see from the text the same title was assumed by Manesus as the commander-in-chief of the Parthian army which besides could be the translation of the Roman title of *imperator*<sup>33</sup>.

From the above we may conclude that about the second half of I century A. D. the power of the king was considerably weakened. Since then the Parthian monarchs had rarely accompanied their troops in military campaigns but sent instead the generals as commanders-in-chief who were usually appointed from among the members of the royal family or aristocracy<sup>34</sup>. How popular was the title of *αὐτοκράτωρ* in the East in III century is best attested by the fact that it was assumed also by Odenatus of Palmyra<sup>35</sup>.

The use of the plural form *αὐτοκρατόρων* in the Dura Parchment is least surprising. It is quite probable that king Osroes had commissioned a number of his officials to organize the administration of the whole country lying between the two rivers. If Manesus was the strategos of Mesopotamia and Parapotamia on the Euphrates, similarly other provinces were governed by the strategos too, of Messenia, Babylonia, Assyria and Parapotamia on the Tigris. The necessity of giving vast powers to the *βατῆσα* by the king was determined by the actual political and military situation of the Arsacid monarchy. The title was quite often used along with the Iranian title of *αὐτοκράτορες*. It is, therefore, a characteristic feature of the Parthian kingdom that both terms for the same dignity co-existed as well as this is also interesting that alien names of dignities were very easily transferred from neighbouring countries and widely employed. All these reasons lead us to conclude, also for the sake of historical veracity that the reading [*αὐτοκρατό*]ρων seems only to be correct.

It will be interesting to confront this conjecture with the full text inscribed on the parchment. Yet every scholar who will intend

<sup>32</sup> On this question consult Herzfeld, *Arch. Mitteil.* IV 2, 45, note 2.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Roma on the coins of Kanishka — P. Gardner, *B. M. C. Greek and Scythic Kings* 149 — LXII — which can serve as example of the Roman influence on the Iranian soil.

<sup>34</sup> Distinctly stated by Plutarch, *Ant.* 44 when he writes about Fraates IV.

<sup>35</sup> Th. Mommsen, *Röm. Geschichte* V 433, note 2.

to do it will be handicapped by the fact that those few letters in the manner they have been set by the editor of the document allow for wide discrepancies in the interpretation so that any new proposition of complementing lines 4 and 5 must remain conjectural only.

The author of this study is of the opinion that the final decision on the correct and best choice from the discussed conjectures should be left with the editors of the full text.

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