Palmyra and the Roman East

Byron Nakamura

ZENOBIA'S PALMYRENE EMPIRE, which dominated the Roman East between the winter of 270 and the summer of 272,[1] provides a unique example of a local dynast marshaling support from various eastern communities upon Rome's failure to provide adequate leadership or security for its provinces. In assessing the Palmyrene ascendancy, historians have proposed a variety of other factors. More often than not, Palmyra's brief rise is interpreted as indicative of some cultural, ethnic, political, or social ideology allied with or in opposition to Rome's central authority.[2] Two recent works dealing with Palmyra repeat the conventional view.[3] Stoneman, for example, depicts Zenobia's conflict as an indigenous rebellion against Roman oppression, giving too much credence to the *Historia Augusta*'s picture of the Palmyrene queen as a Syrian Dido or

[1] D. W. Rathbone, "The Dates of the Recognition in Egypt of the Emperors from Caracalla to Diocletianus," *ZPE* 62 (1986) 123; J. Schwartz, "Chronologie du III[e] s.p.C.," *ZPE* 24 (1977) 175f; M. J. Price, "The Lost Year: Greek Light on a Problem of Roman Chronology," *NC* 7.13 (1973) 83; M. Peachin, *Roman Imperial Titulature and Chronology, A.D. 235–284* (Amsterdam 1990) 45.

[2] A. Alföldi, *CAH* XII 178, sees Palmyra embodying native, eastern, and completely local elements in opposition to Roman forms, while G. W. Bowersock, "The Hellenism of Zenobia," in J. T. A. Kourmoulides, ed., *Greek Connections* (Bloomington 1987) 21, adheres to the theory that Zenobia was primarily assimilated under the cultural aegis of Hellenism. I. Shahîd, *Rome and the Arabs* (Washington, D.C. 1984) 152, presents the Palmyrene revolt as an attempt to mobilize a pan-Arab movement, foreshadowing the Arab conquests in the seventh century. Similarly, Altheim concludes that the Palmyrene empire set the stage for the coming of Islam 370 years later: see F. Althiem and R. Stiehl, "Odainat und Palmyra," in their *Die Araber in der Alten Welt* (Berlin 1965) 251. Contrary to Shahîd and Altheim, B. Isaac's recent study de-emphasizes any strong sense of Arab nationalism in conjunction with Palmyra's predominance: *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford 1990) 226ff.

[3] R. STONEMAN, *Palmyra and its Empire: Zenobia's Revolt against Rome* (Ann Arbor 1992: hereafter 'Stoneman'); E. EQUINI SCHNEIDER, *Septimia Zenobia Sebaste* (Rome 1993: hereafter 'Equini Schneider').

Victoria.[4] The issues are more complicated, involving the cultural and political identities of Rome's eastern subjects and their attitudes and relations with the ruling central government.[5] Most studies simply fail to reconcile their conclusions with the many expressions of Palmyrene authority that were incongruous with any definite 'national' or ethnic affiliation, Roman, Syrian, or otherwise.[6]

Viewed in the context of political expediency, however, Zenobia's ambiguous political symbolism and inconsistent cultural allegiances become clear. Palmyra's military presence in the East was not sufficient to hold its eastern territories. Facing hostile opposition from the Emperor Aurelian, the Persians, and even local Arab pressures, Palmyra's position was tenuous indeed. In order to counter this weakness, Zenobia relied on the support of pro-Palmyrene factions in her key urban centers through a policy of benevolence and goodwill, which she extended to a broad spectrum of the population. Through a kind of 'strategic essentialism', expressions of Palmyrene sovereignty accommodated simultaneously both the local and

[4] *H.A., Tyr.Trig.* 30.2, 23; Stoneman 120–24. Stoneman's argument of native particularism as a strong factor for Palmyra's empire ignores C. E. Van Sickle's "Particularism in the Roman Empire during the Military Anarchy," *AJP* 51 (1931) 343–57. The direct connection between Zenobia and Victoria draws too heavily on the *H.A.*'s account, which cannot be verified by corroborative sources. Stoneman's conclusions (161f) that Zenobia aimed at independence much in the same manner as the Gallic emperors neglects many differences between the two events. For a well-grounded interpretation of the evidence on the Gallic empire, see J. F. Drinkwater, *The Gallic Empire: Separatism and Continuity in the North-Western Provinces of the Roman Empire* (Stuttgart 1987).

[5] F. Millar's fundamental study, "Paul of Samosata, Zenobia and Aurelian: The Church, Local Culture and Political Allegiance in Third-Century Syria," *JRS* 61 (1971) 8, cautions against hasty interpretations of such figures as Palmyrene rulers or Paul of Samosata as representatives of 'local' nationalism pitted against the Greco-Roman world. Millar's thesis is elaboraed more broadly in "Empire, Community and Culture in the Roman Near East: Greek, Syrians, Jews and Arabs," *JJS* 38 (1987) 143–64, and "The Roman *Coloniae* of the Near East: A Study of Cultural Relations," in H. Solin and M. Kajava, edd., *Roman Eastern Policy and Other Studies in Roman History* (Helsinki 1990) 7–58. For questions involving this topic in Egypt, see R. MacMullen, "Nationalism in Roman Egypt," *Aegyptus* 44 (1964) 179, and "Notes on Romanization," *BASP* 21 (1984) 161–77.

[6] Equini Schneider (140f) makes a good case for the "multi-cultural" aspects of Palmyra's rule, but ignores the immediate political circumstances, which would have a far greater influence upon Zenobia's policies.

regional sensibilities of its major eastern municipalities and allies. Zenobia's ambiguous image as a Syrian ruler, Hellenistic queen and Roman Augusta, juggling eastern and western cultural traditions, allowed her to solicit a wider range of support to her cause. She did not intend to be a symbol of Arab nationalism, Hellenism, Greco-Roman acculturation, or a freedom fighter. The tumultuous circumstances allowed little time for Zenobia to adopt fully such positions. The Palmyrene queen, as I argue here, merely acted with political pragmatism, without any cultural ideology or program.

I

Zenobia's campaigns, which extended Palmyrene influence over much of the Levantine coast, Egypt, Arabia, and Asia Minor, can only be appreciated by considering their extent and swift execution. Palmyra's expansion in eastern Syria began in 270 with a rapid drive south through Arabia, assaulting the provincial capital at Bostra.[7] Epigraphic evidence indicates that the Palmyrenes demolished the temple of Jupiter Harmon and possibly engaged Bostra's legionary garrison, the III Cyrenaica.[8] A later source, John Malalas, provides the name of the garrison commander, Trassus, the governor of Arabia, who died during the battle.[9] Recent excavations at Petra reveal evidence of damage that can be attributed to this campaign.[10] If Zenobia's attack on Petra can be verified, we may consequently surmise that she made a considerable effort to bring not only the northern provincial capital of Arabia under her control, but the whole province as well. Milestones bearing the name of Zenobia's son, Vaballathus, found along the roads from Bostra to Philadelphia

[7] Equini Schneider 65–68; G. W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1983: hereafter 'Bowersock') 136; D. F. Graf, "Zenobia and the Arabs," in D. H. French and C. S. Lightfoot, edd., *The Eastern Frontier and the Roman Empire* (=*BAR* Int. Ser. 553 [Oxford 1988: 'Graf']) I 144.

[8] H. Seyrig, "Les inscriptions de Bostra," *Syria* 22 (1941) 46; *cf. IGLSyr* XIII.1 (=*BAH* 113) 9107.

[9] Malalas 12.299.4–9. Trassus was possibly also the governor of Arabia, since this post and the commander of the III Cyrenaica were one and the same. See Bowersock 106; M. Speidel, "The Roman Army in Arabia," *ANRW* II.8 (Berlin 1977) 723.

[10] F. Zayadine, "Tempel, Gräber, Töpferöfen," in M. Linder, ed., *Petra: Neue Ausgrabungen und Entdeckungen* (Munich 1986) 244.

and Gadara suggest that the army either proceeded south to Petra or west into Palestine and continued towards Egypt.[11]

Our evidence for Zenobia's campaign in Egypt is slightly more substantial thanks to references in Zosimus and some papyrological evidence.[12] With the aid of an Egyptian named Timagenes,[13] Egypt fell to an army of Palmyrenes, Syrians, and other barbarians 70,000 strong. After a garrison of 5,000 had been stationed in Alexandria, the Prefect of Egypt Tenagino Probatus[14] returned and drove out the Palmyrene occupation force, but later succumbed to a surprise attack at the hands of Timagenes. With Egypt under control, milestones[15] along the Syria-Palestine coast testify that Zenobia's forces controlled the road systems leading to Antioch; this suggests that the overland trade and communication routes of Bostra, Alexandria, and Antioch lay under Palmyrene supremacy. The furthest extent of Palmyra's occupation beyond Arabia, Egypt, and Syria was an intrusion into Asia Minor to the city of Ancyra.[16]

At its height, Palmyra conquered almost the entire Roman East with great celerity and precision, a truly amazing feat. Yet,

[11] T. Bauzou, "Deux milliaires inedits de Vaballath en Jordaine du nord," in P. Freeman and D. L. Kennedy, edd., *The Defense of the Roman and Byzantine East: Proceedings of a Colloquium Held at the University of Sheffield* (=*BAR* Int. Ser. 297 [Oxford 1986]) 6; Graf 146.

[12] Zos. 1.44; *H.A., Claud.* 11; Equini Schneider 61–64, 69–75. Two letters provide a touching account of two brothers writing to their mother to explain that they cannot see her due to fighting between Roman and Palmyrene troops in Alexandria: see C. H. Roberts, "An Army Doctor in Alexandria," in S. Morenz, ed., *Aus Antike und Orient* (Leipzig 1950) 114f; *cf. P.Ross.Georg.* III 1–2.

[13] Graf (144) hypothesizes that Timagenes might have been a Palmyrene Arab serving in Egypt, but Alföldi (*supra* n.2: 180) maintains that he was a leader of the pro-Palmyrene faction. H. Seyrig, "Antiquités Syriennes," *Syria* 31 (1954) 214–17, provides an edited text of a funerary inscription of a soldier who fell in the Egyptian campaign.

[14] An inscription indicates that Tenagino Probatus, not to be confused with the future emperor M. Aurelius Probus, was the Prefect of Egypt in 270: *cf. SEG* IX.1 9 and T. D. Barnes, *The Sources of the* Historia Augusta (Brussels 1978) 70, who confirms the garbled reflection of the historical Tenagino Probatus in the biography of the later emperor's career.

[15] D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* (Princeton 1950) 1574 n.43; *cf. IGR* III 1065; *AE* 1904.60.

[16] Zos. 1.50.1f. The *H.A.* confirms this by stating that Aurelian met with little resistance in Bithynia but later encountered stiffer oppositon at Tyana: see *H.A., Aurel.* 22.5; *cf. IGR* III 38–39 for possible evidence of Palmyrene activity.

in spite of this accomplishment, Zenobia's military machine suffered from numerous weaknesses, which ultimately forced her to rely on the goodwill and cooperation of local pro-Palmyrene factions in key urban centers.

From the description of Zenobia's army in Egypt, we can see that she did not possess a standing professional army, but a coalition force composed of native Palmyrene troops and various allied mercenaries. Our sources depict an army composed primarily of a core of heavy cavalry (*cataphractarii* or *clibanarii*) supported by mounted horse archers, light infantry, and mercenaries, very similar to the Sassanid Persian model.[17] Like the Persian army, it is probable that the bulk of the Palmyrene soldiers consisted of aristocratic levies financed mainly by booty won in combat.[18] Later sources attest that,

[17] Zos. 1.50.2–54; *cf.* Festus *Brev.* 24. Zosimus' description of Palmyrene heavy cavalry does not call them *clibanarii* or *cataphractarii* specifically, but rather refers to them with the generic term ἡ ἱππεία and reports that the cavalry was ὁπλίσει βαρείᾳ καὶ ἀσφαλεῖ. Festus, however, maintains that they were *clibanarii*: see J. W. Eadie, "The Development of Roman Mailed Cavalry," *JRS* 57 (1967) 170f. Graf (155) raises the point that the graffiti from Dura-Europos depicting *clibanarii* in action may be Sassanid or, in fact, Palmyrene units of the cohors XX Palmyrenorum garrisoned in the city. H. Seyrig, "Armes et costumes iraniens de Palmyre," *Syria* 18 (1937) 4–53, and M. A. R. Colledge, "Parthian Cultural Elements at Roman Palmyra," *Mesopotamia* 22 (1987) 19–28, show the heavy Parthian and Iranian influences on Palmyrene culture, clothing, and armor. Graf's interpretation, however, must be viewed with caution, for the XX Palmyrenorum was a milliary cohort of both infantry and cavalry (*cohors equitata milliaria*). The texts from Dura-Europos do not indicate conclusively that the cavalry units were indeed *clibanarii* and connected with the graffiti. For the Dura texts and commentary, see C. B. Welles, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report: The Parchments and Papyri* (New Haven 1959) nos. 82–89, 97; *cf.* R. Fink, *Roman Military Records on Papyrus* (Cleveland 1971) 179–82, 340–44.

[18] Hdn. 4.5.3; *cf.* G. Widengren, "Iran, der Grosse Gegner Roms: Königsgewalt, Feudalismus, Militärwesen," *ANRW* II.9.1 (1976) 280f. Under early Sassanid rulers, all nobles, regardless of their wealth, were required to equip themselves and their followers for service in the army without pay. Later in the sixth century, Khusrau I changed this practice and gave less wealthy nobles equipment and salary for their service in the army. See R. N. Frye, "Political History under the Sasanians," *Cambridge History of Iran* III.1: *The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods* (Cambridge 1983) 154; A. D. H. Bivar, "Cavalry Equipment and Tactics on the Euphrates Frontier," *DOP* 26 (1972) 279. The rarity of coins struck in the early Sassanid period shows the lack of state expenditures for their military machine. Later with Shapur II, however, production increases enormously, indicating the genesis of the policy of paying the army with coins culminating with Khusrau I's reforms: see R. Göbl, "Sasanian Coins," *Cambridge Hstory of Iran* III.1 333.

earlier, Odenathus levied his army from the countryside in the Persian manner.[19] Zenobia's allied mercenary contingent, comprising at least half of her total army,[20] represented Nabataean, Jewish, and Syrian elements,[21] as well as other far distant peoples such as Indians and Axumites, who were perhaps members of Palmyra's trading networks.[22] A Safaitic horseman's prayer for loot may indicate that Zenobia's allies relied on plunder to supplement fixed pay.[23] Other graffiti from the 'Adwidh tribe states that they returned to their homeland with booty the year that the Medes battled the Romans at Bostra, and they rebelled against Rome that very same year.[24] The testimony of these inscriptions seems to allude to Rome's war with Palmyra in Arabia, since we have no record of any

[19] Festus *Brev.* 23.8–13; Oros. 7.22.12f; Jord. *Hist. Rom.* 290; Hieron. *Chron.* 261.12. All four authors mention in some form *Odenathus collecta agrestium Syrorum manu.* Orosius goes on to say *et usque ad Ctesiphontem rusticani Syriae cum Odenato suo vincendo venerunt.* Stoneman (106f) disagrees with Gibbon's view that Odenathus led a peasant army and interprets the passages to mean that the sheik gathered an impromptu force from the villages of Syria and the tents of the desert. It would be far more sensible to take the broad meaning of *agrestis* and *rusticanus* to be simply from areas outside the city. With this interpretation one can see Odenathus conducting a levy of Palmyrene cavalrymen from the outlying areas, where horses could be maintained.

[20] D. P. Couch, "A Note on the Population and Areas of Palmyra," *MélBeyrouth* (1972) 245, reasons that Zenobia's army consisted of 30,000 Palmyrenes and (on the basis of an ekistics equation) that the remaining 40,000 were inhabitants of the Syrian hinterlands. J. B. Calhoon, "Space and the Strategies of Life," *Ekistics* 29 (1979) 427; but this equation may be suspect since Graf has pointed out that Zenobia's allies may have originated far beyond the "hinterlands."

[21] There is strong reason to believe in close connections between Palmyra and the Arab tribes of the Hauran: see D. F. Graf, "The Syrian Hauran," *JRA* 5 (1992) 464f.

[22] The long list of Palmyra's supporters catalogued at *H.A., Aurel.* 33.4, including among others Blemmyes, Bactrians, Iberians, and Saracens, appears to be an exaggeration from a dubious source. Recently-discovered epigraphical evidence, however, points to Babylonians and Indians accompanying a Palmyrene delegation to the court of a South Arabian king during the first century and indicates that the *H.A.*'s description has some basis in fact. See Graf 147.

[23] V. Clark, *A Study of New Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan* (diss.University of Melbourne 1980) no. 48; *cf.* Graf 157. It is not unlikely that the rather large emission of radiate antoniniani from Antioch, bearing the image of Vaballathus and Aurelian, formed the base salary of Zenobia's army.

[24] Graf (*supra* n.21) 467; *cf. CIS* V 4448; *SIJ* 78.

Persian activity in this area. Palmyra's army looked Persian, which may help to explain why the Saifatic text described the Palmyrenes as Medes.

An army composed of a large mercenary contingent with a nucleus of Palmyrenes, whose services were temporary, could not have effectively consolidated conquered territories on a long-term basis. Since payment depended on the acquisition of booty, ravaged territories and plundered cities would prove detrimental to a policy of annexation. We see evidence of manpower shortages when the Palmyrene general Zabdas left only 5,000 men in Alexandria. Normally, the Romans stationed two legions (over 10,000 men) and extended the arm of the imperial navy in Egypt to guard the grain supply of Rome.[25]

One must also remember that three hostile fronts encircled Palmyra. Zenobia not only faced Aurelian's forces in the West, but also enjoyed the enmity of the Persian king Shapur I[26] and local Arab tribes. Not more than eight years earlier, Zenobia's husband, Odenathus, had soundly defeated Shapur's army and driven it back to Ctesiphon, recovering Carrhae, Nisibis, and Roman Mesopotamia.[27] The curious figure Aurelius Vorodes, a general under Odenathus, whom Schlumberger identified as one of Shapur I's supporters mentioned in the great trilingual inscription at Naq-i Rustam,[28] may have represented a pro-

[25] A. K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs* (Berkeley 1989) 74. E. G. Huzar, "Augustus, Heir of the Ptolemies," *ANRW* II.10.1 (1988) 360, maintains that three legions and auxiliaries stationed in Egypt amounted to 28,000 men. N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt under the Romans* (Oxford 1983) 19f, poses the more conservative number of 17,000–18,000. For a list of Roman troops in Egypt see J. Lesquier, *L'Armée romaine d'Egypt d'Auguste à Dioclétien* (Cairo 1918).

[26] In a fabricated letter to Aurelian (*H.A., Aurel.* 27.4f), Zenobia mentions that she is expecting reinforcements from Persia. Aurelian in response to this letter is reported to have cut off these reinforcements (28.2), yet no other source corroborates this event. No Persian activity is recorded during or after the siege of Palmyra. Zosimus (1.55.1f) mentions that while Palmyra was besieged, Zenobia fled from the city to request Persian aid, but never made it across the Euphrates.

[27] Zos. 1.39.1f; Festus *Brev.* 23.13–18; *Or. Sib.* 113.155–71.

[28] D. Schlumberger, "Vorôd l'agoranome," *Syria* 48 (1972) 340. Οὐρωδ ἀγορανόμου occurs at line 67 of the Greek text of Shapur I's inscription, the so-called *Res Gestae Divi Saporis,* or *SKZ.* See A. Maricq, "Classica et Orientalia 5: Res Gestae Divi Saporis," *Syria* 35 (1958) 295–360, for texts and commentary.

Persian faction at Odenathus' court.[29] If Vorodes indeed was a court representative, his prominence diminished soon after Odenathus' death in 267, for we hear nothing of him afterwards. Stoneman (117) suspects Vorodes had no place at Zenobia's side and was promptly replaced. Sour relations with Persia certainly intensified with Vorodes' removal from his influential position at the Palmyrene court.

Although Zenobia had the support of various Bedouin tribes, Palmyra's dominance over the Roman East caused some worry and animosity among the Tanukh tribal confederation in northern Arabia. According to Arab tradition contained in the *Chronicle* of Tabari, Zenobia (Zebba) plotted the destruction of Jadhima, the ruling sheik of the Tanukh, eventually slitting his wrists. Jadhima's successor, 'Amir ibn 'Adi, avenged his uncle by leading the Tanukh against Palmyra, eventually destroying the city.[30] From this account emerges evidence of tension, if not hostility between Palmyra and some Arab tribes. By no means did Zenobia have the unanimous support of all Bedouin groups within her sphere of influence. At first glance, Palmyra held a position of military superiority, yet upon closer examination, Zenobia's authority over her eastern territories was precarious at best. Lacking sufficient manpower and surrounded by many foes, the key to her control of the Roman East lay in holding the cities of Antioch and Alexandria without benefit of full military garrisons.

II

Antioch and Alexandria were great metropolitan centers, serving as seats for both cultural and administrative life in their respective provinces. Antioch had been a military headquarters and imperial residence in the Roman East since the first century, while Alexandria remained the queen of the Mediterranean and the departure point for the grain fleet to Rome.[31] Both cities were essential for control of the eastern territories, yet increasing political and social destabilization during the third century led to violent uprisings, which took a toll on their

[29] Graf 155; *cf.* Stoneman 105.

[30] Tabari IV 745–60 Perlman; *cf.* Bowersock 132–37; Stoneman 156ff; Equini Schneider 45–52.

[31] Isaac (*supra* n.2) 270–76; Bowman (*supra* n.25) 38.

respective populations. Desperate for stability, these cities sought from prospective usurpers protection and alleviation from the grave economic and political difficulties plaguing the Roman Empire.

As the administrative capital of Syria, Antioch's population saw at first hand that emperors could be made elsewhere than in Rome. Vespasian's successful bid for the purple in 69, and the example of Avidius Cassius' failure to wrest power from Marcus Aurelius over a century later provided excellent precedents. During Septimius Severus' war with Pescennius Niger, Antioch, in favor of Niger's mild rule, provided him with his headquarters and the bulk of his troops.[32] According to Herodian, when Severus Alexander levied his army for his eastern campaign against Persia in 231, the soldiers garrisoned in Antioch mutinied.[33] It does not appear that the ethnicity of the emperor had played any significient rôle in the context of eastern rebellion since the obscure Jotapianus declared himself Augustus in response to oppressive taxation of Philip the Arab's brother Priscus, as the *rector Orientis.*[34] The culmination of Antioch's dissatisfaction with Roman authority may have expressed itself when one of its leading citizens, Mariades, opened the city's gates to the Persian king Shapur I *ca* 252, leading to a brief period of Sassanid occupation.[35] Poor economic conditions and the possibility of a plague in Syria may have demoralized the citizenry to the extent that even Persian rule would be more tolerable than Roman control.[36] Antioch had no natural predilections towards rebellion, though our sources would lend one to believe so.[37] It is also unlikely that ethnic or eastern sentiment ever played a serious part in these

[32] For Niger's acclamation in Antioch see Dio 74.13.5ff; headquarters: Hdn. 2.7.9–8.8; Antioch's contribution to Niger's army: Hdn. 3.1.4, 3.3.

[33] Hdn. 6.4.7; *cf. H.A., Alex. Sev.* 53f.

[34] Zos. 1.20; *CIL* III 14149 5. For an account of the Arabian Julii family's rise to power, see F. Kolb, "Das Ende des Timesitheus und die Machtergreifung der Arabersheikhs," in his *Untersuchungen zur Historia Augusta* (Bonn 1987) 99–132.

[35] *H.A., Tyr. Trig.* 2; Amm. Marc. 23.5.3; Petrus Patricius, *FHG* IV 192; on the date of Antioch's first fall see J.-C. Balty, "Apamea in Syria in the Second and Third Centuries A.D.," *JRS* 78 (1988) 104; D. S. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1990) 293–97.

[36] G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria* (Princeton 1961) 254.

[37] G. Hadad, *Aspects of Social Life in Antioch in the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (New York 1949) 122.

civil disturbances. When the ruling consensus broke down, Antioch supported whoever would provide greater security, peace, and prosperity.

Nor was Alexandria a stranger to civic upheaval.[38] Our sources relate numerous instances of riots and violent conflicts during in the third century, indicating the severe political instability of the city's population. The letters of Alexandria's bishop, Dionysius, provide an account of violent riots erupting against the Christians in Alexandria due to their distaste for Philip I's fiscal policies.[39] Sometime later, when news of Decius' rise to the purple reached Alexandria, civil strife broke out again, this time between factions of both Decius and Philip, soon subsiding after Decius' victory in 249.[40] Dionysius goes on to describe another civil war in Alexandria between the forces of the Emperor Gallienus and his prefect Aemilianus. The Alexandrian waterways were so choked with the bodies of dead citizens that Dionysius compared it to the condition of the Red Sea when Moses caused the waters to reconverge on the forces of Ramses.[41] Even after Aemilianus' defeat, his supporters took the Bruchium and held it until forced to capitulate in 268 (Euseb. *H.E.* 7.32.6–12). We must be careful to differentiate between social and religious tensions in the city: it does not appear that the revolt under Gallienus had any basis in ethno-religious *stasis*.[42] Clearly, in the cases presented above, we encounter violence that regularly became endemic under unstable political circumstances. Rome's inability to govern or to maintain an acceptable level of prosperity for the population caused dissatisfaction and revolt. When the emperor as both *patronus* and protector of his eastern cities could not provide

[38] The reputation of the natural unruliness of the Alexandrians in the first and second centuries has been questioned: see W. D. Barry, "Popular Violence and the Stability of Roman Alexandria, 30 B.C.–A.D. 215," *BSAA* 4 (1992) 1–15.

[39] S. I. Oost, "The Alexandrian Seditions under Philip and Gallienus," *CP* 56 (1961) 4f; Euseb. *H.E.* 6.41.1–8. Oost reasons that Dionysius' failure to mention any activity to disperse this riot showed either the Roman governor's inability to maintain order or his defiance of Philip, who maintained a tolerant if not pro-Christian policy.

[40] *Or. Sib.* 13.74–80; Euseb. *H.E.* 6.41.9; *cf.* Oost (*supra* n.39) 6.

[41] Euseb. *H.E.* 7.21; for Aemilianus' rôle as a so-called usurper see J. G. Milne, "Aemilianus the Tyrant," *JEA* 10 (1924) 82.

[42] C. Anderson, "Siegreiche Kirche: Dionysios von Alexandrien," *ANRW* II.23.1 (1979) 454f; *cf.* Oost (*supra* n.39) 15.

these services, his subjects (the most active element being the army garrisoned nearby)[43] resorted to a substitute who would.

There is little doubt that both Antioch and Alexandria suffered greatly from the loss of life accompanying civil unrest. Antioch withstood Persian invasion and the repercussions of Rome's eastern campaigns, while Alexandria's economic prosperity declined.[44] This context provided fertile ground for rebellion against the central Roman authority. The relatively easy acquisition of both cities' support for Zenobia's cause is an indication of this. Yet if Zenobia could not offer stable government and satisfactory rule during the Palmyrene occupation, the same elements she depended on for support could suddenly vanish. She could not afford to maintain a constant military presence in these urban areas because her army was relatively small in relation to the amount of territory she possessed. Instead of controlling her key cities through these garrisons, which would deplete her forces, Zenobia went to great lengths to legitimize her government and to promote her regime as being as stable as possible.

III

Expressions of Palmyrene sovereignty under Zenobia took various forms. Political symbolism, acts of patronage, and coinage as propaganda, all appealed to both local and regional sensibilities. The forms of her propaganda did not rely on anything inherently or exclusively Roman or eastern, in an effort to make her rule implicitly Roman or eastern in nature. The eclecticism of her propaganda derived more from desperate political circumstances and pragmatism than from any fundamental ethnic or national leanings.

We should not suppose, however, that Zenobia totally divorced herself from the traditional vehicles of propaganda employed by previous usurpers. Titulature obtained from milestones, coins, and papyri provide excellent proof that Zenobia and her son Vaballathus perpetuated, at least nominally, the continuity of Roman administrative structures.

[43] Isaac (*supra* n.2) 139.

[44] M. Rostovtzeff, *Roman Empire*[2] 479–90, provides the basic account. For high grain prices during the third century see R. P. Duncan-Jones, "The Price of Wheat in Roman Egypt under the Principate," *Chiron* 6 (1976) 246.

This is hardly surprising, for equestrian officers had come from Palmyra since the second century, with senators following in the third.[45] Epigraphical evidence has provided us with the title, *corrector totius Orientis,* first held by Odenathus in 260, and later assumed by Vaballathus in 267/268,[46] clearly a reference to a Roman administrative position of some authority over Roman officials in the east.[47] In this early stage, Vaballathus was still a subject of the emperor. As Palmyra's break with Rome became more pronounced with the occupation of Egypt and Syria in 270, Zenobia's and Vaballathus' titulature leaned towards more independent positions of authority. The Palmyrenes, after their takeover of the imperial mints at Antioch[48] and Alexandria, issued a series of antoniniani and tetradrachms featuring the Roman emperor, Aurelian, on the obverse and Vaballathus on the reverse.[49] These issues proclaiming Vaballathus as a *vir clarissimus rex imperator dux Romanorum* acknowledged Aurelian as an *Augustus,* indicating a period of joint-rule.[50] Likewise, papyrological documents

[45] Isaac (*supra* n.2) 146f; *cf.* Bowersock 129f.

[46] Odenathus and Vaballathus' titles stem from two inscriptions, *CIS* II 3971 and 3946 respectively. Although the title does not occur in any Greek or Latin inscriptions, Vaballathus' Palmyrene title, *'pnrtt',* is a direct transcription of ἐπανορθώπης or possibly an equivalent of διορθωτής. Odenathus' title, *mtqnn',* however, could stand for *restitutor* just as well as *corrector.* For discussions of the titulature of Odenathus and the Palmyrene princes, see Potter (*supra* n.35) 381–94; Millar (*supra* n.5) 9f; M. Clermont-Ganeau, "Odeinat et Vaballat, rois de Palmyre, et leur titre romain de Corrector," *RBibl* 29 (1920) 382; J. Cantineau, "Un Restitutor Orientis dans les inscriptions de Palmyre," *JAS* 222 (1933) 217.

[47] A. Stein, "'Επανορθώτης," *Aegyptus* 18 (1938) 234–43. It might be noted, however, that precise definitions of these Roman offices and their Palmyrene equivalents cannot be ascertained and remain quite arbitrary during the third century.

[48] M. Peachin, "Johannes Malalas and the Moneyers' Revolt," in C. Deroux, ed., *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* III (Brussels 1983) 329f.

[49] For the Antiochene antoniniani see *RIC* V.1 308 no. 381; for the Alexandrian tetradrachms see *BMC, Alexandria* 309 nos. 2384–96 and J. G. Milne, *A Catalogue of Alexandrian Coins* (Oxford 1971) 103f nos. 4303–48. *Cf.* Stoneman 159f; Equini Schneider 87–99, provides an excellent iconographic study of the coinage of Zenobia and Vaballathus.

[50] Aurelian may have had a junior status, since the mint marks of both cities were on his side of the coin. See R. A. G. Carson, "The Antoniniani of Zenobia," *NumAntCl* 7 (1978) 222; *cf.* H. Mattingly, "The Palmyrene Princes and the Mints of Antioch and Alexandria," *NC* 16 (1936) 113. Particularly from the mints at Antioch, however, there are examples of Roman coins on which the principal figure of the coin was on the side with the mint marks: *RIC* V.1 260.

attest to the same arrangement.[51] We do not see a complete break with Aurelian until the spring of 272, when coins appear from Antioch bearing Vaballathus and Zenobia individually and proclaiming them as sole *Augusti.*[52] Milestones found near Bostra dated to this later period attest to Vaballathus' adoption of full imperial titulature.[53]

Clearly, Vaballathus and Zenobia derived their authority from Roman titulature, yet we also encounter a number of eastern titles reflecting their unique position as rulers operating from an eastern provincial power base. On the same inscriptions bearing the Roman title of *corrector,* we have, written in Palmyrene, Vaballathus as Βασιλεύς Βασιλεών (*mlk mlk'*) and Zenobia as a θυγάτηρ 'Αντίοχος (*bt 'ntywkws*). Like the title *corrector,* Vaballathus inherited "King of Kings" from his father who styled himself as such, perhaps after his victory over the Persians. In any case, we have an adoption of an eastern title very similar to the ones Sassanian monarchs used.[54] The apparent incongruity of assuming a Roman administrative position coupled with Persian royal nomenclature merely represents Palmyra's inherited traditions interwoven with elements from Hellenistic, Roman, and Persian institutions. Zenobia's claim to be the daughter of Antiochus presents some problems. It is immaterial whether or not the claim is accurate;[55]

[51] For the papyrological documents see P. Bureth, *Les titulatures impériales dans les papyrus, les ostraca et les inscriptions d'Égypte* (Brussels 1964) 122 nos. 1–5; Peachin (*supra* n.1) 404 nos. 154–58; P. J. Sijpesteijn, "Remarks on Some Imperial Titles in the Papyri," *ZPE* 40 (1980) 137f and "Further Remarks on Some Imperial Titles in the Papyri," *ZPE* 45 (1982) 193f.

[52] H. Seyrig, "Vabalathus Augustus," *Mélanges Michalowski* (Warsaw 1966) 661; *cf.* Carson (*supra* n.50) 223; Milne (*supra* n.49) no. 4349ff. An ostracon (*O.Mich.* III 1006) shows Aurelian and Vaballathus as co-Augusti: Οἱ κύριοι ἡμῶν Αὐρηλιανὸς καὶ βασιλεὺς 'Αθηνόδωρος Σεβαστοί. It is likely that the date of this ostracon falls between the time when Vaballathus acknowledges himself a junior member and when he calls himself a sole *Augustus.*

[53] *AE* 1904.60: IM(PERATORI) CAESARI L/IULIO/AURELIO SEPTIM-IO/VABALLATHO/ ATHENODORO PER/SICO MAXIMO ARA/ BICO MAXIMO ADIA/BENICO MAXIMO PIO/ FELICO INVICTO AU(GUSTO).

[54] A. Christiansen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen 1944) 92; *cf.* Widengren (*supra* n.18) 230f.

[55] Stoneman 112, hypothesizes that the Antiochus mentioned at *CIS* II 3971 is Antiochus IV Epiphanes and that the descent was true in accordance with H. Ingholt, "Varia Tadmorea," in *Palmyre-Bilan et Perspective* (Strasbourg 1975) 136f. The text, however, only states that Zenobia was a daughter of an Antiochus. No direct evidence supports this assumption. *Cf.* Equini Schneider

the importance lies in Zenobia's desire to form a dynastic link to the Seleucid family, a tradition surviving from pre-Roman days. Most of the major eastern cities under her control had Hellenistic roots, and their leading citizentry would be actively conscious of the Hellenistic traditions evoked by Zenobia's attempt to legitimize herself by this association.[56] Zosimus (1.51) tells us that Zenobia had pro-Palmyrene supporters in Antioch during her occupation of the city, who would be prime candidates for her propaganda.

In Zosimus' account of Zenobia's Egyptian campaign, Palmyra received some support from the local population in Alexandria.[57] This time, calling herself Cleopatra and claiming to be a descendent of the Ptolemaic royal line,[58] Zenobia actively engaged in propaganda in the Nile valley by promoting her rule as stable and beneficial. Part of this goodwill program evidently included a restoration of Egyptian cities. Inscriptions found at Thebes indicate a refurbishment of the famous colossal statue of Memnon.[59] Such building expenditures showed Palmyrene willingness to grant benefactions during a time when harsh taxation was the rule rather than the exception. Further evidence from a letter of Vaballathus to the Alexandrians shows the population regarded the Palmyrene regime quite favorably.[60] The text continues to describe a promised visit to Alexandria by Vaballathus with the accompanying dispensations for the city's loyalty.[61] During the third century, economic

---

27. Moreover, any association with Antiochus IV specifically would be incongruous with Zenobia's pro-Jewish sentiment and would undermine Jewish support, for the Seleucid ruler persecuted the Jews; *cf.* Downey (*supra* n.36) 107–11; C. H. Kraeling, "The Jewish Community at Antioch," *JBL* 51 (1931) 134; O. Mørkholm, *Antiochus IV of Syria* (Copenhagen 1966) 135–69. It is more likely that she wanted to associate herself with the Seleucid house in general rather than with a specific member.

[56] K. Harl, *Civic Coins and Civic Politics* (Berkeley 1987) 2f; *cf.* Equini Schneider 26f.

[57] Zos. 1.44.2; *cf.* J. Schwartz, "Les palmyréniens et l'Egypt," *BSAA* 40 (1953) 76.

[58] *H.A., Aurel.* 27.3, *Prob.* 9.5, *Tyr. Trig.* 27.1, 30.2; discussion of this anecdote's authenticy in Barnes (*supra* n.14) 69.

[59] G. W. Bowersock, "The Miracle of Memnon," *BASP* 21 (1984) 32.

[60] P. J. Parsons, "A Proclamation of Vaballathus?" *ChrEg* 84 (1967) 401; *cf.* Stoneman 159.

[61] For the restored text see J. W. B. Barns, *JEA* 52 (1966) 144: τὰ μάλιστα ἀρξάμενος τῆς τοῦ εὖ ποιεῖν [ἐξου]σίας, ὅσον δίκαιον ἔστ[α]ι παρέχειν [τῇ μη]τρῴᾳ πόλει.

conditions demanded increased liturgies from civic magistrates, to the point where it was not uncommon for the local aristocracy to evade such obligations.[62] The Palmyrenes would have received support to the degree that they were able to alleviate these burdens.

Zenobia's attempt to win over the citizens of Alexandria did not end with the general population; she also catered to the large Jewish contingent in her cities. Inscriptions reveal a thriving Jewish community in Palmyra during the third century (*CIJ* 820–23). A number of funerary epitaphs from Beth She'arim, the major necropolis of Diaspora Jewry, mention Palmyra as their home, and some burials actually bear the name "Zenobia" indicating close relations between Palmyra and the Syrian Jews (Graf 148). It is not surprising, therefore, to find an alabaster *tabula* from the upper Delta with a bilingual inscription granting the reinstatement of the privilege of asylum to a synagogue under the patronage of Zenobia and Vaballathus.[63] Later patristic tradition presented Zenobia as a Jewess, stemming from her association with them and her patronage of Paul of Samosata, but this can be dismissed.[64] So far, we have encountered numerous examples of Palmyrene propaganda based on goodwill, targeting various groups who supported Zenobia's govenment. Let us examine one other act of patronage that attempted to legitimize Palmyrene rule.

In addition to the claim of descent from the Ptolemaic and Seleucid houses, Zenobia bolstered her image as a Hellenistic queen. From the waning Second Sophistic movement, she gathered a literary salon of philosophers, rhetoricians, and sophists in much the same vein as another Syrian empress, Julia

[62] A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford 1966) 90.

[63] *CIL* III 6583; *cf.* T. Mommsen, *EE* IV 26; Peachin (*supra* n.1) 409 no.7. Some doubt that this inscription can be directly attributed to the Palmyrene rulers: J. Bingen, "L'asylie pour une synagogue CIL III Suppl. 6583=CII 1449," in J. Quaegebeur, ed., *Studia Paulo Naster Oblata* (Leiden 1982) II 11–16, argues that the titles belonged to Cleopatra VII and Caesarion, but the only parallels Bingen can find for bilingual inscriptions in Ptolemaic Egypt are graffiti written by Roman tourists at Philae.

[64] Millar *JRS* (*supra* n.5) 13. For the patristic tradition see Athanasius, *Hist. Arian.* 71.1, in Migne, *PG* XXIV 1293; J. Chrys., in *PG* LIXX 66; Theodoret, in *PG* LXXXIII 393.

Domna.[65] Catering to the Hellenized urban elites, Zenobia as a patron of culture and *une femme des lettres* held court with Cassius Longinus, one of the most eminent literary scholars of the period.[66] After the death of Odenathus, whose funeral oration he is said to have composed,[67] Longinus continued enjoying Zenobia's patronage of intellectuals. Others besides Longinus flocking to the Palmyrene court included a sophist from Petra named Callinicus, who wrote a history of Alexandria dedicated to the new self-styled Cleopatra.[68] A fellow Petran, Genathlius and the historian Nicostratus of Trapezus wrote histories of the Roman East and added to the intellectual climate of the Palmyrene court,[69] continuing a long tradition. Great sophists like Polemo and Aelius Aristides had waxed eloquent before the imperial court of Antoninus Pius and had petitioned for titles and honors on behalf of their cities. The mechanism by which civic patriotism could be expressed, benefices gained, and protection secured was through the emperor. A century later, when the imperial presence had faded, Zenobia assumed the same trappings, though on a less grand scale.

IV

At the inception of Palmyra's dominance over the eastern scene, Rome and the emperor could hardly be seen as active factors. The military failures of Gordian III and Valerian left Rome's eastern territories virtually defenseless.[70] The em-

[65] Bowersock 135; *cf.* Shahîd (*supra* n.2) 41; Stoneman 130f.

[66] Zos. 1.56.2f; *H.A., Aurel.* 30.3.

[67] Libanius *Ep.* 1078 Förster: Οδαίναθον τὸν λόγον, Λογγίνου δὲ ὁ λόγος, ἔγω μὲν ἀπαιτῶ, σὲ δὲ δεῖ δοῦναι καὶ γενέσθαι δίκαιον περὶ τὴν ὑπόσχεσιν.

[68] *Suda s.v.* Καλλίνικος. See A. Stein, "Kallinikos von Petrai," *Hermes* 58 (1923) 448; A. D. E. Cameron, "The Date of Porphyry's KATA ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ," *CQ* NS. 17 (1967) 383.

[69] Potter (*supra* n.35) 71f.

[70] For an excellent geographical description and analysis of Shapur's campaigns against Rome, see E. Kettenhofen, *Die römisch-persischen Kriege des 3. Jhts. n. Chr.* (=*TAVO* Beiheft B55 [Wiesbaden 1982]). W. Felix, *Antike literarische Quellen zur Aussenpolitik des Sasanidenstaates* (Vienna 1985), provides an excellent commentary to the ancient sources of this period; in English, M. H. Dodgeon and S. N. C. Lieu, edd., *The Roman Eastern Front-*

peror's inability to provide security and stability created a power vacuum, which Palmyra filled. There is no reason to suppose that Palmyra's rise was a wholly eastern separatist movement against Roman rule, a war of independence, or even that of a typical usurper of the period, operating under the institutions of the Empire. We see that Palmyra's expressions of sovereignty reflected the immediate political circumstances and the local nature of its power base. In this light, there is perhaps some truth to the fictional anecdote about Zenobia found in the *Historia Augusta*: she is said to have dined and held court in the manner of a Persian and to have appeared in public in the manner of a Roman emperor.[71] The eclecticism of Palmyra's culture exhibited in its religion, language, and history gives us warning not to attribute Palmyra's brief rise too readily to an essential cultural association, be it Roman, Hellenistic, or Aramaic. We must recognize that it had its own unique manifestation.

Zenobia's program of propaganda, however well-conceived, ultimately failed. Titles, building programs, and intellectual circles could neither mask nor replace the most crucial element for maintaining stability—military victory. Aurelian's successes in Asia Minor and the rapid collapse of Palmyra's forces at Tyana left Syria open for the taking (Zos. 1.50.2–54). Palmyrene support in Antioch quickly evaporated, causing Zenobia and her general, Zabdas, to flee towards Emesa and later to Palmyra, where she was eventually captured. Whatever support she had cultivated soon dissipated in the face of Aurelian, the man touted to be the restorer of the Roman world. After its defeat, Palmyra never regained its former military or economic prominence. Unfortunately, Aurelian's reign, too, would prove to be ephemeral, paving the way for another emperor, Diocletian, whose dominate took another course, combining

---

tier and the Persian Wars (A.D. 226–363): A Documentary History (London 1991) is the next best thing. J. F. Drinkwater's "The Catastrophe of 260: Towards a More Favourable Assessment of the Emperor Valerian I," *RivStorAnt* 19 (1989) 123–35, offers an interesting reassessment of Valerian's famous debacle.

[71] *H.A., Tyr. Trig.* 30.13f: *More magis Persico adorata est, regum more Persarum convivata est. Imperatorum more Romanorum ad contiones galeata processit.*

the power, authority, and legitimization that provided the foundation of the Later Roman Empire.[72]

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, SEATTLE
November, 1993

[72] I am pleased to thank W. Barry, H. A. Drake, J. W. Eadie, A. Ferrill, D. F. Graf, C. Haas, W. E. Metcalf, C. G. Thomas, and the anonymous reader, who read earlier drafts of this paper. Their insightful criticisms and comments have saved me from numerous errors. Remaining inaccuracies and errors of judgment are my own.