

I DURA-EUROPPOS AND THE ROMAN GARRISON

The aim of this introductory chapter is to provide the reader who approaches Dura's Latin papyri with some essential data on their context, and with updated bibliography. Research on all archaeological and historical topics concerning Dura has been thorough and abundant – the latest product of which being the monumental and seminal book by S. James¹ – and it is not the claim of this chapter to supersede it. Instead, together with the following three chapters, it will attempt to provide a framework large enough for the reader to contextualise the papyri, without getting lost in all the manifold aspects of the life in this unique town; and always bearing in mind, with J. Baird, that splitting the city's history into phases (Semitic, Seleucid, Parthian, Roman) is done primarily for the purpose of clarity, and is a largely artificial representation of the cultural and historical richness of Dura-Europos.²

1.1 The city

Probably in the wake of a major foundation programme promoted by Seleucus I after the battle of Ipsos (301 BC), in the following decade some Graeco-Macedonian settlers led by an otherwise unknown Nikanor (Νικάνωρ) built a φρουρίον 'small fortress' on the right bank of the Euphrates, about 50–60 km south-east from the mouth of the Khabour river.³ The new settlement, called Εὐρωπός like Seleucus' native town, was not built directly on the bank, but on a rocky cliff protected to the north and the south by *wadis*, and on the western side by the desert. Its first inhabitants were veterans from the Seleucid army, originally coming from the town of the same name, Εὐρωπός, in Macedonia.⁴ As the site lay directly in the way of any army which meant to invade the fertile plains of Osrhoene from Mesopotamia, and in a very favourable position as regards commercial routes to and from Palmyra, the settlers' (or their leaders') choice appears a sensible one.⁵ They probably did not get there

¹ James (2019). For a detailed history of Dura, see pp. 49–55.

² Baird (2014: 40) '[...] the phasing of the town into Hellenistic, Parthian, and Roman Dura is in some senses an artificial construct [...] there are no clear archaeological or historical horizons for these periods at the site itself'.

³ Isid. Char. ΒΝΨ 781 F 2, 31–36 Δοῦρα Νικάνωρος πόλις, κτίσμα Μακεδόνων, ὑπὸ δὲ Ἑλλήνων Εὐρωπός καλεῖται ('Dura, town of Nikanor, a foundation of the Macedonians; it is called *Europos* by the Greeks'). The site is close to the modern Syrian village of Al-Salhiyah. See also Kosmin (2011: 98–102); Leriche (2011: 26).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Edwell (2008: 97–101) on the small military importance of the town in the Seleucid era – it was not a border town then, but deep within the kingdom – as opposed to its strategic potential, due to its very position.

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Figure 1.1 Roman East in the second century AD

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1.1 Continued

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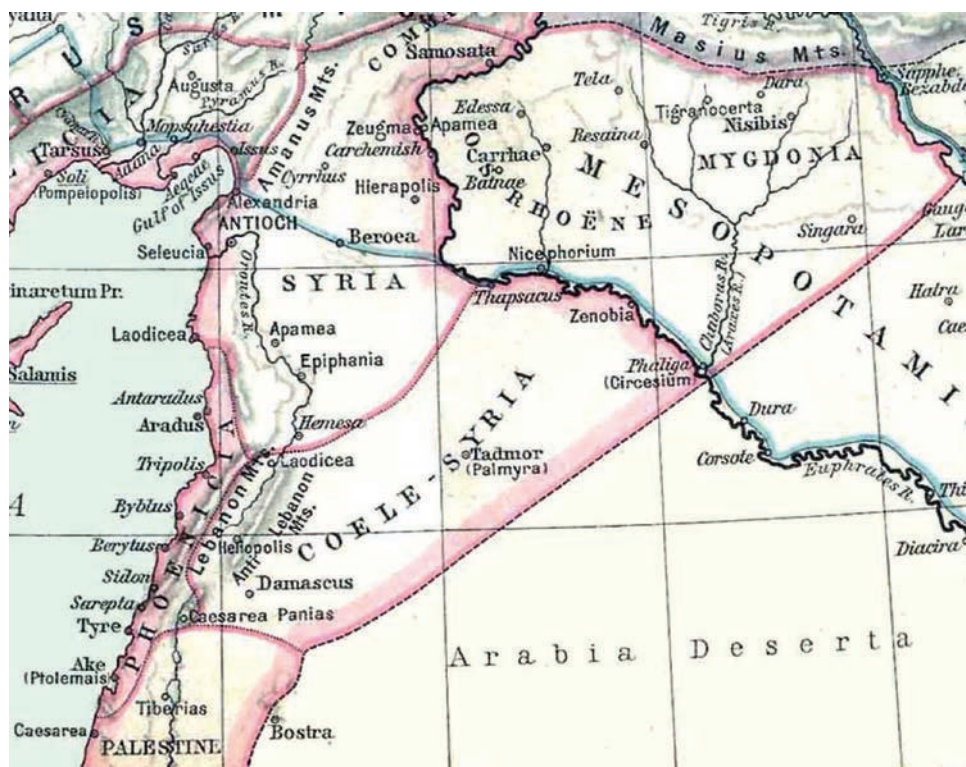


Figure 1.2 Dura-Europos and its neighbourhood

first. A tablet in the cuneiform alphabet and Akkadian language, dated back to the eighteenth–seventeenth century BC, and containing a deed,⁶ informs us that a settlement called *Da-wa-ra* existed in the closest vicinity of the new town, perhaps on the very bank of the river or at any rate not too far from it. The original name did not vanish, and in any circumstance where the Greek name could be dropped, the town was referred to as Δοῦρα/*Dura*, the phonetic evolution of *Da-wa-ra*. The two names, *Dura* and *Europos*, co-existed in antiquity, probably alternatively one to another, rather than in the unified (and conventionally hyphenated, i.e. *Dura-Europos*) way employed in modern times, after excavations revealed the existence of the city.

Our information on the earliest centuries of the city is scanty. Apart from the already quoted Isidorus of Charax, Polybius mentions the city in passing while discussing Molon's revolt.⁷ We know from Polybius himself, and from papyrological

⁶ See Stephens (1937). The tablet was found during the excavations in the site of Dura-Europos, 'imbedded in an unbaked mud brick, which formed part of the wall of the temple of Atargatis' (*ibid.*: 183).

⁷ Polyb. 5 48,16 πολλήν δὲ ποιησάμενος ἐπιμέλειαν ἐνταῦθα τοῦ στρατοπέδου καὶ παρακαλέας τὸ πλῆθος ὤρμηξε πρὸς τὰς ἐξῆς πράξεις, καὶ τὴν μὲν Παραποταμίαν μέχρι πόλεως Εὐρώπου κατέχευε, τὴν δὲ Μεσοποταμίαν ἕως Δούρων ('here having paid the utmost attention to the army, and having

evidence, that it lay in the district of Parapotamia.⁸ The settlement grew slowly but steadily from the original φρουρίον to a populated town, and new buildings rose.⁹ Papyrological and archaeological evidence suggests that the population was a mixture of Semitic and Graeco-Macedonian elements; that there was a Graeco-Macedonian portion of the population, the descendants of the original settlers who called themselves Εὐρωπαῖοι in official contexts – veteran soldiers from the Seleucid army – who received pieces of land (κλήροι) and became the foremost landowners;¹⁰ and that the relationship – cultural as well as political – between the Hellenised and the Semitic portions of Dura-Europos is far from being completely understood. It is probably impossible to establish the precise extent of Greek influence in Durene architecture, and political and cultural life; from the material point of view, the city was far from a typical Hellenised settlement,¹¹ and as to religious communities and

summoned the crowds, he set out on what he had to do next: he seized Parapotamia as far as the town of Europos and Mesopotamia up to Dura'). Being a Greek historian, Polybius uses the Greek name; this Δοῦρα he mentions probably refers to another town.

⁸ See the passage quoted above, and Kosmin (2011: 103) 'as early as the reign of Antiochus III, Europos was located in the administrative district called Parapotamia (along the river)', quoting a Durene parchment from the Parthian period, *P.Dura* 18 *recto*, *scriptura interior*, ll. 1–2 ἐν Εὐρωπῶι τῆ[ι] | ἐν τῆι Παραποταμίαι, *scriptura exterior*, l. 14 ἐν [Εὐρωπῶι τ]ῆι ἐν Π[α]ρ[ο]ποταμίαι (AD 87, TM 17216). 'Polybius, Posidonius, and Strabo treat Parapotamia as an official geographical unit of the Seleucid kingdom, distinct from Mesopotamia to its east. It seems to have occupied the same approximate area as the Bronze Age kingdom Khana. At the time of Molon's revolt (222–220 BC, see below), it was under the command of its own strategos, Diodes' (*ibidem*). Parapotamia appears also in *P.Dura* 55 (see commentary ad loc.). Probably because of alterations in the organisation of the provinces, in *P.Dura* 22, l. 2 ἐν Εὐρωπῶ τῆι πρὸς Ἀραβίαι (AD 133, TM 17219) and 25, *scriptura exterior*, l. 17 ἐν Εὐρωπῶ τῆι πρὸς Ἀραβίαι (AD 180, TM 17222) Dura is defined as close to a district called Ἀραβία: πρὸς, at any rate, reveals proximity rather than inclusion.

⁹ 'Au lieu d'une création urbaine *ex nihilo* par le génie d'un oikiste à la fin du IV^e s. av.n.è., nous avons maintenant un processus progressif selon lequel un poste fortifié destiné à consolider la domination séleucide dans la région devient progressivement le noyau d'une agglomération locale, puis, après un siècle et demi d'existence, cette colonie est l'objet d'une refondation urbaine' ('Instead of the creation of a city out of thin air by the genius of a founder at the end of the fourth century BC, we now have a steady process according to which a fortified outpost destined to consolidate the Seleucid power in the region progressively becomes the core for a local gathering; then, after one century and a half of existence, this colony is rebuilt as a city') (Leriche 2011: 37). Leriche had already written about the Hellenistic features of the town in Leriche (2003).

¹⁰ See Dirven (1999: 3–4); Edwell (2008: 113); Kosmin (2011: 98–101); Leriche (2011: 37).

¹¹ 'The early settlement of Europos emerges as an entity ambiguously situated between a simple fortress and a full πόλις ... In terms of sociopolitical phenomena, it lacked a developed epigraphic habit, representative civic government, sophisticated bureaucracy, and its own mint (bar one short episode)' (Kosmin 2011: 102). S. James notes how 'this nascent Europos expanded onto the adjacent plateau where a Hippodamian street-grid defined a much-larger city ... although it would always remain very modest by comparison with Palmyra or Hatra, let alone Seleucia on the Tigris or Ctesiphon' (2019: 50). Further on, he notes that 'most Durene material culture, portable as well as architectural, developed along indigenous Syrian and Mesopotamian lines' (*ibid.*: 51). See also Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959), particularly pp. 23–8; Millar (1993: 437–45, on Greek towns in the Near East and how far they were

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spoken languages, it was a melting pot.¹² Greek was undoubtedly the main language used for writing official and personal documents,¹³ as it was in other Hellenistic kingdoms such as Egypt; but, like in Egypt, original languages never died out and continued to be written and spoken, only perhaps on a less official footing. The very existence of a clear-cut division between Graeco-Macedonians and the Semitic

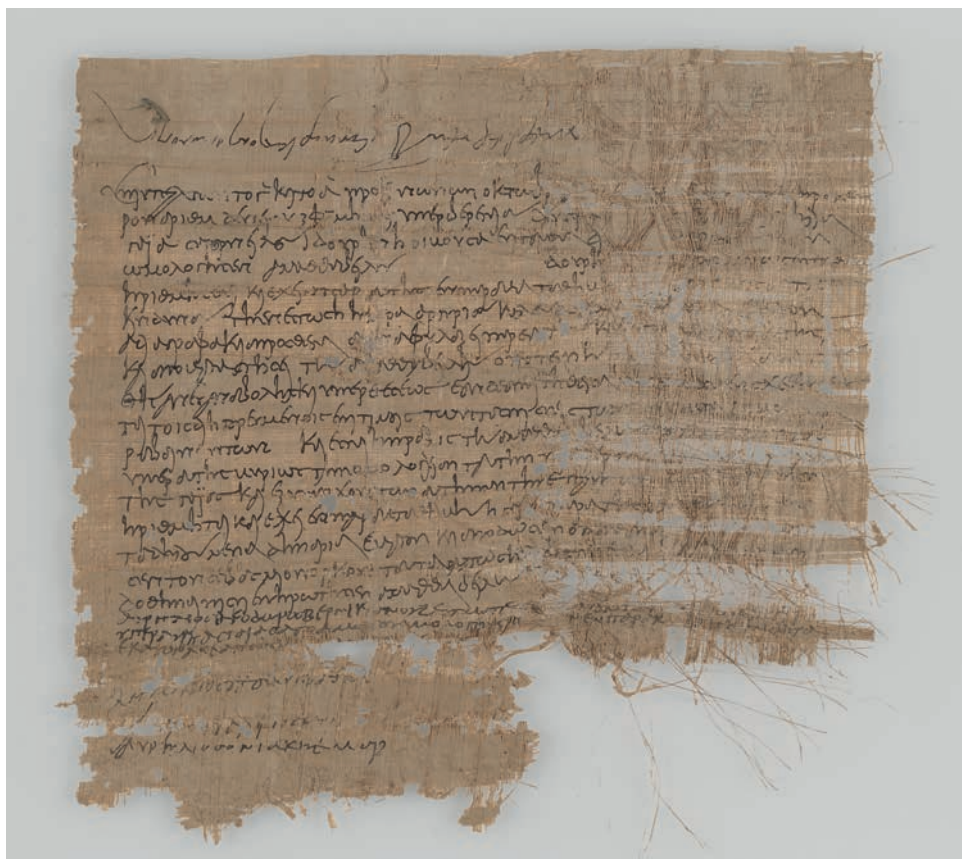


Figure 1.3 *P.Dura* 29 [= P.CtYBR inv. DP 73], a contract of deposit in Greek language between two women (AD 251, TM 17226)

Hellenised; 445–52 on how much Dura was Hellenised); Pollard (2007: 91 – Durene material culture is ‘formed largely by influences from eastern Syria and Mesopotamia, with rather limited Greek input’); Kaizer (2015: 94–9). For further archaeological and architectural description of the city, see Sommer (2005: 271–94), and, of course, James (2019).

¹² Languages attested in Dura (on inscriptions, *ostraka*, parchments and papyri) are Greek, Aramaic dialects (Palmyrenean, Hatrean, Syriac), Parthian and Pehlevi, Hebrew, Safaitic, and Latin (see Kilpatrick 1964; Kaizer 2009; Kaizer 2015: 94). For religious communities, see Downey (2007), particularly p. 114.

¹³ See again Millar (1993: 445–9) on Greek language and public offices in Parthian Dura.

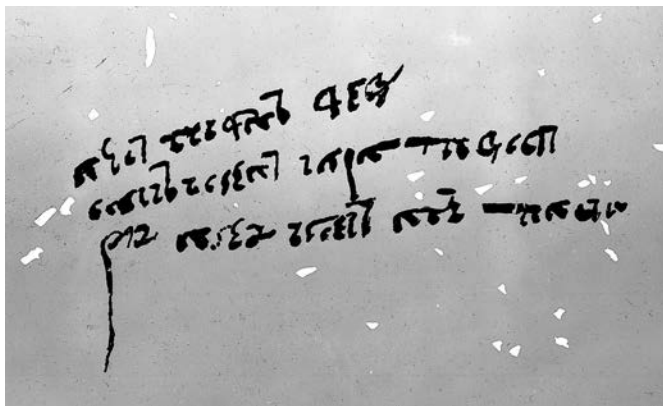


Figure 1.4 Tracing of a Pehlevi inscription in the synagogue of Dura, by Prof. Geiger

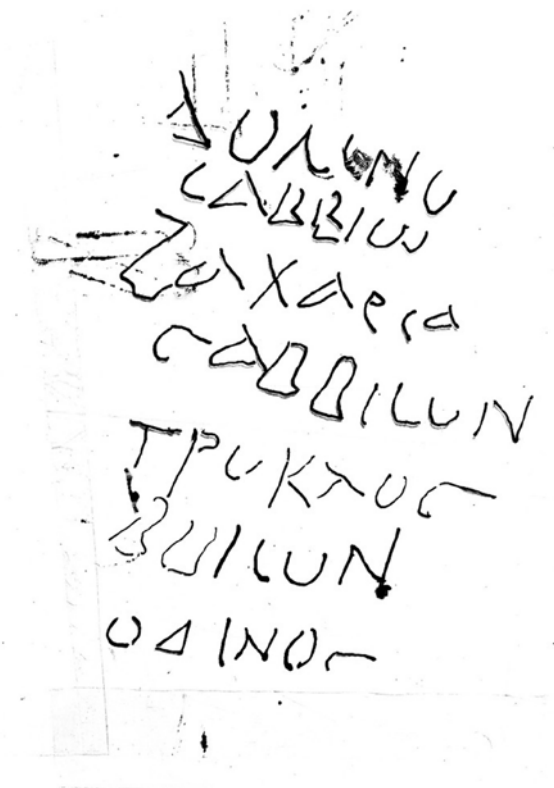


Figure 1.5 Tracing of a Greek graffito (no. 957) in the 'Roman Palace', by F. E. Brown

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element, first hypothesised by Welles,¹⁴ has been recently called into question by Pollard, who argued in favour of more complex identities, shifting between an emphasis on the Macedonian or on the Durene part whenever the need was felt to do so.¹⁵ We may suspect, however, that only a small number of inhabitants called the town Εὐρωπός. Isidorus of Charax (first century BC–first century AD), who in writing an itinerary would have needed exactness, identifies the town as Δοῦρα, stating that the Greek name is used ὑπὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων. In fact, the Greek name is called forth very seldom and in official contexts:¹⁶ elsewhere, and in Latin military papyri – whose scribes could not be bothered with using rare or ambiguous names – the town retains his Semitic-sounding name ‘Dura’.

As time went by, the Seleucid kingdom grew less and less able to retain its possessions. Despite a new programme of fortifications towards the end of the second century BC, around that time the city fell into the hands of the Parthian kingdom.¹⁷ By this time, it was a prosperous settlement, where farming, grazing with livestock and commerce were successfully practised; there is no evidence that the new rulers altered these circumstances, and the city retained Seleucid-originated magistrates (the στρατηγός καὶ ἐπιτεστής ‘commander and governor’, to quote only the foremost ‘amongst the Europaioi’¹⁸) and laws.¹⁹ A community of Palmyrenes probably settled in Dura during the Parthian period; it has been suggested that it might have

¹⁴ Welles (1951).

¹⁵ Pollard (2007: 89–100); particularly pp. 98–9 (‘some individuals whom we see as Greco-Macedonians in some contexts are merely presenting a facet of their identity appropriate to that context, and they might appear very “non-Greek” in other contexts. Perhaps this more complex attitude to identity makes better sense in the complex cultural environment in which they lived’) and 100, on the conclusions suggested by the custom of ‘double names’ (the same individual using a Greek name in certain contexts and a Semitic one in others) in Dura (‘some individuals who in certain contexts would appear as Greek were at the very least culturally ambivalent, and even perhaps employing Greco-Macedonian names not as markers of cultural identity but as context specific indicators of other aspects of identity, perhaps social or political. There is also the unprovable possibility that these instances of double naming represent just the “tip of the iceberg” and that some individuals whom Welles regarded as members of the “Greco-Macedonian aristocracy” might appear as “Semites” or “Syrians” if we saw them in other contexts’). Andrade (2013: 211–41) has tried to establish the different predicament of the ‘Greek’ community within Seleucid, Parthian and Roman Dura, mostly obtaining a mixed picture where we cannot draw a strict line between ethnicities, but witnesses constantly changing balances. See also Kaizer (2015).

¹⁶ See e.g. the parchments quoted above, p. 5, footnote 8 (*PDura* 18, *PDura* 22) and, very late in the city’s lifespan, *PDura* 32 *recto*, *scriptura exterior*, l. 4 ἐν κολωνεῖα Εὐρωπ[αίων] (AD 254, TM 17229); in this case, both the Hellenised element and the Roman concession of colonial status are emphasised (see p. 16).

¹⁷ Sommer (2005: 294–305); Kosmin (2011: 104–5). The once conventionally accepted date, on account of countermarks on coins, was 113 BC: remarks have been made recently in this respect by J. Gaslain (2012: 262–6). A more complex situation is described in James (2019: 50).

¹⁸ Leriche (2011: 26); James (2019: 50).

¹⁹ See again (Millar 1993: 445–9); Dirven (1999: 4–11), particularly pp. 6–7; and a quick mention in Sommer (2017: 58).

been the original core of the squadron of Palmyrene archers which contributed to public order in late Parthian Dura, but this is uncertain.²⁰

1.2 The Roman period and the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum*

The political tension between the two main superpowers in the Near East before the Arabs took over, i.e. the Roman and the Parthian – later Sasanian – empires, created the utmost pressure on the northern and middle Euphrates, which for many years constituted a border between the two rival states. From Trajan onwards, i.e. from the early second century AD, Romans were apparently able to shift this pressure southward, on the middle Euphrates, stretching their influence on Osroene. In fact, Edwell has argued that it is impossible to exclude Roman influence on Dura itself before its actual conquest by Roman troops; it must have been alternately under the influence of Rome and the Parthians for at least two centuries after the Parthian takeover (first century BC–first century AD)²¹. Be it as it may, we know for certain that during Trajan's campaign in Mesopotamia (AD 114–16), Dura was taken and then abandoned by Roman troops; they stayed long enough to build a triumphal arch.²² The subsequent period has been described by Sommer as a 'Machtvakuum' ('power vacuum'²³) – more likely, the return of (nominal) Arsacid rule;²⁴ then came an earthquake in AD 160, and the final Roman conquest, probably during the Parthian campaign of Lucius Verus and Avidius Cassius, in AD 165.²⁵ Reasons for keeping the city were twofold: its economic importance (particularly inasmuch as there was a flourishing trade with Palmyra²⁶) had never waned, and now there was a strategic relevance which the town suddenly acquired for becoming one of the remotest eastern outposts of the Roman Empire. In fact, while Roman sovereignty – both after Verus' campaign, when the border of Syria remained on the Euphrates, and after the annexation of Osroene under the Severan emperors, when the Khabour river constituted a new border – was probably limited to the towns of the river, rather than stretching into the interior of Mesopotamia, those very towns, located on fertile ground in the middle of steppe and deserts, were strategically pivotal in the event of an invasion from either side.

²⁰ See Dirven (1999) for a complete assessment; Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959: 24); Sommer (2004: 850–2); Edwell (2008: 101–12); Sommer (2017: 126–30).

²¹ Edwell (2013: 194–6; 201–4).

²² See Baird (2012: 310) with attached bibliography; Andrade (2013: 211); Kaizer (2015: 91–2); James (2019: 51).

²³ Sommer (2005: 311).

²⁴ James (2019: 52).

²⁵ Edwell (2008: 116). This dating has been discussed and improved recently: see Luther (2004: 330–4 – Rome would have taken official possession of the town with the Severan emperors, Dura being in the preceding decades still under Palmyrene rule); Kaizer (2017).

²⁶ A full assessment in Ruffing (2007) and (2010).

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The Roman period of Dura was to last till AD 256/7. It is normally divided into three phases. A first stage is defined by Sommer as one of ‘indirekte Herrschaft’ (‘indirect sovereignty’, AD 165 onwards): Rome controls the town through Palmyra, of which Dura is a protectorate.²⁷ A detachment of Palmyrene archers, already attested in the city, is now the fully operating legal force. This stage ends between AD 193 and 199 when Severan campaigns against the Parthians and the increasing *Machtpolitik* between the two superpowers forced Rome into the direct annexation of the riverside towns southwards from the Khabour, including Dura. And so begins the second stage. After the first wave of Parthian wars, around AD 208, the garrison in Dura and the Roman camp within the town are increased and more clearly defined, thus commencing the third and last stage, till the final siege in AD 256/7, when the Sasanian army led by Shapur I, during his long and devastating campaign in the Roman East, takes and destroys Dura.²⁸ Recent studies by S. James have altered the above-mentioned picture, suggesting that Roman units, and therefore direct Roman military presence and government, as well as the garrisoning of more than one-third of the town, had already commenced a few years after the occupation in AD 165, and only increased at the beginning of the third century AD: there is no evidence for a Palmyrene protectorate.²⁹

The overall effect of Roman direct sovereignty – and of the Roman army – on Dura is the object of a long and ongoing debate.³⁰ For the purpose of the present book, we can concentrate on the introduction of military units, either stationed in Dura in their entirety or through *uexillationes* (‘detachments’), and in the important construction (begun immediately after the Roman conquest in the 160s³¹) of a new military base within the town, which was to provide lodgings not only to soldiers, but to their enlarged families – wives, concubines, sons and daughters, servants, trainees, attendants,³² and several other activities – from a brothel to an amphitheatre to the typical Roman baths. A detailed outline of this garrison, which occupied more than a third of the town in its north section, is available in chapters 5–8 of James (2019): here I content myself with relating bits from this immense source of knowledge. Romans confiscated the northern section of the town, built a camp out of it, and erected a wall in order to divide the camp from the rest of the city.³³ The garrison underwent significant qualitative improvements (*principia* ‘headquarters’ were built³⁴, as well as other buildings) between c. 208–17, also in the wake of aggressive imperial

²⁷ See also the aforementioned Luther (2004: 334).

²⁸ Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959: 24); Sommer (2005: 311–12).

²⁹ James (2019: 52–4).

³⁰ See the detailed commentary in *ibid.*: 286–313.

³¹ *Ibid.*: 239.

³² *Ibid.*: 250–55 has diffusely argued for this ‘extended military community’.

³³ Dąbrowa (1981: 65–8); Pollard (1996: 212–14); Edwell (2008: 119).

³⁴ Details in James (2019: 78–90); particularly p. 85 (‘A Roman headquarters comprised a number of functions, accommodating the standards and imperial *imagines*, administrative offices and archives,



Figure 1.6 Roman shield ('Lion Scutum') from the Dura-Europos collection of the Yale University Art Gallery

projects against the Parthians.³⁵ The temples which happened to be inside the confiscated section (e.g. the Temple of Bel³⁶ and of Artemis Azzanathkona³⁷) continued to be used, at least by the soldiers. The great palace overlooking the river Euphrates, built in the Roman period and, since several graffiti were found there, hence called the 'Palace of the *Dux Ripae*', has been more correctly labelled by Baird 'Roman Palace', and is perhaps the most considerable architectural development in Roman Dura.³⁸ Further important buildings erected in Roman times were the Mithraeum,

spaces for the giving of daily orders and passwords, and places for formal events like courts-martial and other ceremonies, not least cult offered to the standards and the emperors').

³⁵ James (2019: 249–50; and especially 268–9).

³⁶ Where the picture of Iulius Terentius performing a religious ceremony was painted; see Cumont (1923); Kaizer (2006) and attached bibliography; Downey (2007: 111–14); James (2019: 63–6); see also *P.Dura* 89 and the commentary ad loc.

³⁷ See Downey (1988); Arnaud (1992–3); a mention in Millar (1993⁴: 449–50); a full survey in James (2019: 70–8).

³⁸ Baird (2014: 149–50); James (2019: 66–70).

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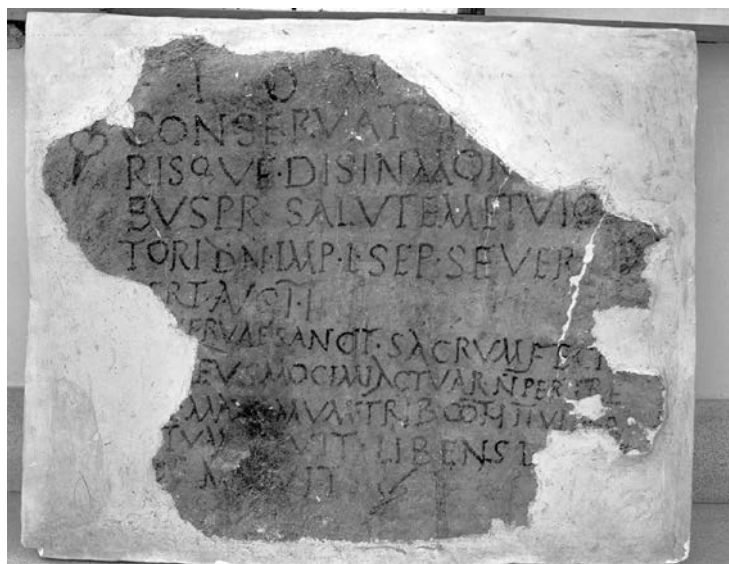


Figure 1.7 Painted Latin inscription from the Temple of Artemis
Azzanathkona (1946)

the synagogue, and a Christian building.³⁹ For more information on how the base worked, see James (2019: 275–85) and Figure 1.8.

Being a relevant outpost, Dura was also frequently visited by detachments (*uexillationes*) from other Roman units. A full list, gathered from all the available sources (papyri, inscriptions and the like) is in James (2019: 242–3). We can here mention legions (the *XVI Flavia Firma*, the *III Scythica* and the like⁴⁰) but also cohorts (*III Augusta Thracum*⁴¹). Some soldiers, both from the cohort and from the detachments, might have been lodged outside the camp in the billeted civilian houses,⁴² but this most probably happened at the end of Roman Dura, when a great quantity of Durene civilians had probably already abandoned the town (see p. 17).

Among the units attested in Dura, one is of particular interest to us: an auxiliary cohort, the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum*. Despite the fact that the earliest testimony is *PDura* 56 letter *B*, dated back to AD 207, the cohort might have been created much earlier: perhaps around AD *c.* 176 as a *cohors quingenaria*, and then upgraded to *milliaria*

³⁹ Cf. Kilpatrick (1964: 216; 222–3); Millar (1993: 470–1); Sommer (2004: 846–50; 2005: 329–54); Edwell (2008: 125–8); Berger (2011); Rajak (2011); McClendon (2011); Deleeuw (2011).

⁴⁰ See another list in Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959: 23–6); Kennedy (1987: 62–5); Edwell (2008: 139–43).

⁴¹ See *PDura* 26, 1. 6 [ζ]πείρ(ης) γ' Σεβ(αστῆς) Θραικῶν (AD 227, TM 17223). The document is a deed of sale.

⁴² Dąbrowa (1981: 65–8); see Baird (2014: 115–48) for a full survey on housing soldiers in Dura.

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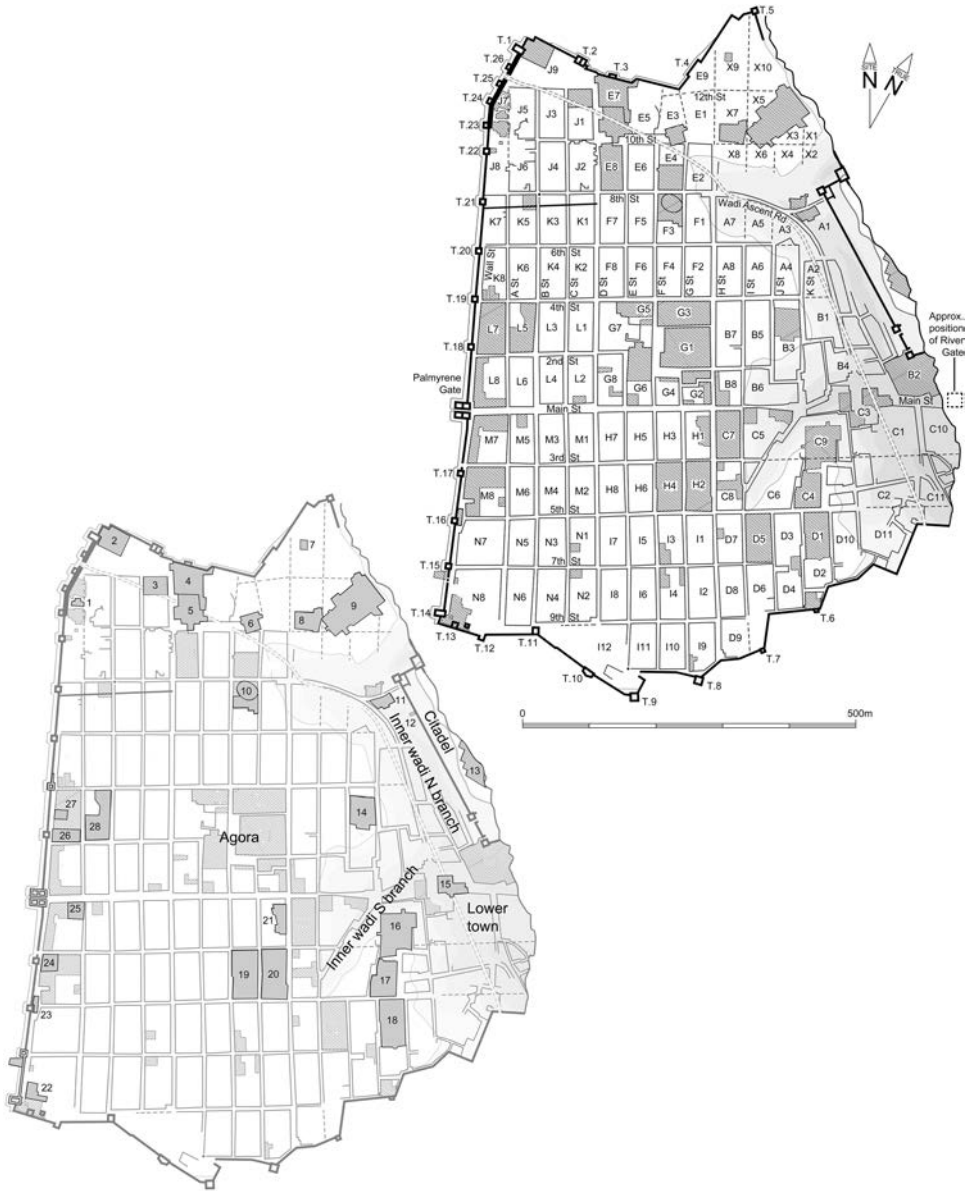


Figure 1.8 Outline of Roman Dura

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between 189 and 191.⁴³ It kept, however, several formal characteristics of a *quingenaria*: despite its high manpower (its strength fluctuating between 924 in *P.Dura* 82 and 781 in *P.Dura* 89⁴⁴), it had only **six⁴⁵ centurions and five decurions**, instead of the expected ten centurions and eight decurions; and attached to the infantry troops, it had dromedary troops, apparently unconnected to the cavalrymen. ‘Whether or not it ever included cataphracts, *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* was then apparently very unusual in its combination of large size, anomalous organization, and complex composition.’⁴⁶ The oldest attested date of enlistment for soldiers is (according to the great roster *P.Dura* 100) AD 192.⁴⁷ The ethnic specification *Palmyrenorum* heavily suggests that the basis for this new unit consisted of the Palmyrene archers, who were already stationed in town. This creation is yet another instance of an attested custom of the Roman army, that of recruiting auxiliary units on a local ethnic basis, having come into possession of a new territory, in order more rapidly to foster loyalty in new provinces; cohorts of Batavians, Mauretanians, Tungrians and the like are only the most renowned instances.⁴⁸ At least before AD 212 this specific branch of service in

⁴³ James (2019: 250).

⁴⁴ See the commentary ad loc. for this unusually reduced figure; and Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959: 32).

⁴⁵ In *P.Dura* 82 one sees the rather unexpected number of nine centurions; Fink concludes that three of those nine were supernumeraries (1971: 184).

⁴⁶ James (2019: 247). Fink believes that this piece of information (ten centurions and eight decurions – or rather, eight *turmae* of cavalrymen, therefore eight decurions – for *cohortes equitatae milliariae*), given in Hyg. *Mun. castr.* 26–8, must not be taken as unavoidable and always observed by any unit in the Roman army; peripheral units could (and did) undergo variations from official prescriptions. See Fink in Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959: 28–30); Haynes (2013: 82 ‘while this might be explained by the contingent’s irregular origins, it is probably best to take it as just another indication of the degree to which “exceptional” patterns of organization were more usual than contemporary scholars tend to accept’). Davies has later argued that the ‘missing’ centuries and *turmae* were probably in a sort of permanent detachment from Dura (1967d: 111). Kennedy, on the other hand, prefers to construe the cohort as a real *equitata quingenaria*, originally endowed with six centuries and four *turmae*, then artificially enlarged in about AD 170, when Avidius Cassius’ rebellion forced Marcus Aurelius to enhance recruitment in the region (1994: 96–8). That the cohort underwent a rise in enrolment in AD 214–16 is also true, according to Gilliam, in the context of Caracalla’s campaign against the Parthians, then in preparation; Gilliam has also pointed out that in the Palmyrene cohort, the *equus* was in fact none other than a promoted and better paid *pedes*, usually after ten years of service; there was, he maintains, no such thing as separate career branches in the Roman army, but cavalrymen and infantry were different stages of the same career. This would explain why after AD 205 so few cavalrymen are actually enrolled, and why they end up being the oldest members of the cohort (1965: 75–6).

⁴⁷ See Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959: 26–7); Chaumont (1987: 430); Sommer (2005: 311–12). Scholars generally believed the cohort to be the effect of direct annexation, i.e. to have been organised after the AD 190s. Kennedy apparently prefers an earlier dating, i.e. the very year in which the Romans took possession of the city (1994: 96–8); so thinks Haynes (2013: 81 ‘it seems most probable that it was created in the AD 160s out of an irregular formation of Palmyrene archers, providing an example of a staggered incorporation into the Roman military system’).

⁴⁸ See Haynes (2013: 103–35) for a full survey.

the Roman army led in most cases to Roman citizenship.⁴⁹ Reasons for the figure (*XX, uicesima*) are still unclear; Kennedy has provided a careful hypothesis.⁵⁰ The longest service period attested in the cohort is (not too surprisingly, as we would expect twenty-five) twenty-seven years: in *P.Dura* 100 col. XXI, l. 8, Abdas son of Themarsas was recruited under the seventh consulship of Commodus (therefore, he served AD 192–219). Ranks and hierarchy in the cohort have been listed and discussed in Fink (1947: 166–7; 1953: 210–15); Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959: 31–3). A full overview of the cohort is provided in James (2019: 245–7).

While Dura kept civilian government and magistrates who still recalled Seleucid ranks (e.g. the στρατηγός, now *strategus Durae*⁵¹), the presence of a Roman auxiliary cohort inevitably altered the balance of power in the microcosm of local administration. The nature of the dealings between the cohort and the Durene civilians is encompassed by the larger problem of the relationship between soldiers and civilians in the Roman Empire as a whole; Pollard has repeatedly argued in favour of the Roman army as a ‘total institution’ whose members lived separately from, and somehow to the detriment of, civilian communities, while others prefer a more nuanced perspective.⁵² Whereas Welles had argued for a final economical demise of the town, and for the annihilation of the Graeco-Macedonian *élite* during the Roman period, in favour of the Semitic element,⁵³ also this view has been challenged.⁵⁴ A full re-assessment is provided by the already quoted James (2019: 286–313).

⁴⁹ If not to the children of the auxiliaries, certainly to the auxiliaries themselves, after their *honesta missio* (Haynes 2013, particularly pp. 83–4 on the problem of granting citizenship to the children of the auxiliaries). In fact, from the second century AD onwards, while in legions citizenship was a strict requirement, auxiliaries might and might not be citizens, the distinction between citizens and *peregrini* finally falling down after the *Constitutio Antoniniana* (ibid.: 100–1).

⁵⁰ ‘I am inclined to favour this final possibility that the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* was so numbered because, at the time of its formation, there were already 19 cohorts in Syria’ (Kennedy 1983: 216): not *cohortes Palmyrenorum*, but just *cohortes*.

⁵¹ Kaizer (2015: 92–3).

⁵² Pollard (1996, particularly 212–15; 219–20); also Pollard (2007), where his theses are more clearly discussed and stated; then Baird (2014: 152–4) and the whole of chapter IV (pp. 155–208). For a different perspective, see Stoll (2001).

⁵³ This is the main and only point of Welles (1951). Further arguments in Dąbrowa (1981: 68–74); the scholar accepts only partially Welles’ view, maintaining that the Graeco-Macedonian aristocracy did not just die out, but successfully emigrated.

⁵⁴ In Pollard (2007: 82–100) Welles’ theory is recapitulated and criticised, and new evidence is discussed. His conclusions are less radical (‘one cannot deny that change did take place, given the increased magnitude and importance of the Roman military presence at that time. The acquisition of Roman colonial status is undeniable, and changes in civic institutions quite possible. Likewise Roman authorities may have actively removed individuals from power ... However, it is likely that the changes of title and name that did occur relate to shifts in presentation of self and community, with a diminished emphasis on lineage and Greco-Macedonian origins on the part of some, rather than the wholesale removal of people envisaged by Welles and Dąbrowa’, p. 100).

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We can be certain of a few facts. The tribune of the cohort could intervene in civilian legal matters,⁵⁵ and probably had authority over other Roman functionaries in the vicinity, such as procurators of any sort, or the mysterious *praepositus praetenturae*.⁵⁶ Given the number of places to which the cohort sent detachments, it is possible that it was the centre of a small riparian district.⁵⁷ Almost certainly auxiliaries closely monitored the gates and any business conducted inside them.⁵⁸ A single inscription attests to the existence, in the late decades of Roman Dura, of a δοῦξ ῥείπης, probably the Greek rendition of *dux ripae*, but the origin, scope, and consequence of such a shady figure are still poorly understood.⁵⁹ Other typical features of the Roman army which we can be sure about are the great influx of money – the salaries of the soldiers, at least partially invested in local activities and businesses – and the presence of veterans, either from the Palmyrene cohort or from detachments, who often became landowners and businessmen in the countryside of Dura. Greek papyri from civilian settings among those found in Dura attest to land-owning veterans, and veterans marrying and divorcing Durene women, and subscribing to deeds and business documents.⁶⁰ We do not know exactly when, but at an unspecified moment Dura obtained the status of *colonia*.⁶¹

1.3 The fall of Dura, the excavations and the papyri

While residing in Dura, at least between AD 193 and 224, the Palmyrene cohort carried out its main duty of a garrison against the Parthians, and probably witnessed (and took part in) two campaigns against them (AD 197–8 and 216–17). But the third decade of the century saw the beginning of a new dynasty of rulers in Iran. Whereas after Carrhae (53 BC) the Parthian Empire, though not to be underestimated, was never able to strike a decisive blow to the Romans or prevent them from sacking its cities, the Sasanians managed to do so twice: first under Shapur I

⁵⁵ Or any high authority in the Roman army. See *PDura* 125 and 128, with commentary ad loc.; also Merola (2012).

⁵⁶ See *PDura* 64 and the commentary ad loc.

⁵⁷ See Edwell (2007: 64–98) for the whole system of Roman fortifications on the middle Euphrates.

⁵⁸ See a summary in Edwell (2008: 148 ‘the Roman military presence at Dura, and at many smaller sites in its vicinity, was partly designed to provide a level of security and defence at a local level. It was undoubtedly also designed to provide intelligence on enemy movements and to play a role in major conflicts when they took place; however, these functions were probably secondary in importance. During the long intervals between conflicts what were Dura’s soldiers doing? For the most part, the soldiers of the Dura garrison monitored traffic on the Euphrates, assisted in the enforcement of tax collection, intervened in times of public disorder, enforced legal decisions and contributed strongly to the establishment of Roman authority on a significant section of agricultural land on either side of the Euphrates and Khabur rivers. The fact that many of the soldiers were Palmyrenes would have served to demonstrate on the landscape the new order of Roman power in the region’).

⁵⁹ Edwell (2008: 128–35).

⁶⁰ Sommer (2004: 852–5; 2005: 315–29; 2007, particularly pp. 89–91); Baird (2007: 423; 2012: 172); Dąbrowa (2012); Haynes (2013: 180 – in fact, quoting Baird 2007).

⁶¹ Millar (1993: 468–9).

(AD 251–60) and a second time under Khosrow II (AD 602–28). The first event is what most concerns us, as during this war the final demise of Dura took place. The details, and the correct succession of events, of the great campaign of Shapur I against the Romans, which started after Decius' death and ended with Odaenathus' victory over Shapur's army, are not yet completely clear and therefore open to interpretation; sources, both historical and archaeological, have been nevertheless employed in producing a consistent picture of those years.

Shapur's own account of his war against Rome – the so-called *Res gestae diui Saporis*, *SKZ* – numbers Dura among cities taken ἐν ἀγωγιῇ μιᾷ after his victory in Barbalissus and the successful pillaging of Coele Syria and Osroene, and before Emperor Valerian's coming to Antioch, i.e. before about AD 254. This account is, of course, a product of Sasanian propaganda and it may be assumed that it somehow simplifies and alters the actual sequence of events.⁶² On the other hand, from an archaeological point of view, the last decade of Dura (250–60) provides interesting evidence. Baird's inquiries on the site reveal that in the last years of Dura, most inhabitants had probably abandoned the settlement, and their houses had been employed to lodge soldiers and their families. The growing threat of the Sasanians might have encouraged the flight of the civilians.⁶³ There is evidence for a short-lived Persian occupation of the town, according to some graffiti, paintings and papyri (*PDura* 153–5) in Pehlevi, around AD 253;⁶⁴ at any rate, Dura was again in Roman hands from AD 254⁶⁵ till the final siege, which probably took place in AD 256/7. Evidence for this dating comes from several coins, produced by the Antiochene mint – which was fully operational till AD 257 – and found together with nineteen Roman corpses in an underground gallery below one of the defensive towers along the wall of Dura. Incidentally, the events related to the death of those

⁶² This source is described and commented upon in Rostovtzeff (1943).

⁶³ Baird (2012), particularly p. 310: 'there is no longer any reason to think of Dura as a quickly abandoned city; indeed, there is a good chance much of the population had already left, voluntarily or otherwise, by the time of the final siege. ... Perhaps a portion of the population did not wait in the city to see who would win'; (2014: 144–5): 'Indeed, beyond billeting, it may be the case that the military presence in the houses of Dura is actually evidence of a military phase to the city's occupation; it is possible that by the 250s AD, after an initial Sasanian incursion (or in anticipation of one), that a portion of the civil population able to flee had done so, and the remaining inhabitants were the members of the military, their families and servants, and military dependents ... By the time Dura fell to the Sasanians, and possibly for a considerable number of years before that, the military was present throughout the site; not just in the camp, in the principia and other military buildings, the bathhouses, or in the streets, on the city walls and stationed at its gates, but living in the houses which had once been, but perhaps were no longer, private houses of Dura's inhabitants.'

⁶⁴ More specifically, around AD 253; see Baird 2012, 312–14 with bibliography attached.

⁶⁵ Or so it seems from *PDura* 32 (TM 17229), a deed of divorce dated back to that year (*scriptura exterior*, *recto*, ll. 3–4 ἐπιῖ ὑπὲρ [ἀ]τῶν τ[ῶ]ν κυρ[ί]ων ἡμῶν Αὐτο[κρά]τ[ῶ]ρ[ω]ν Ο[ὐ]αλερια[ν]οῦ ὕβ' καὶ Γαλιηνοῦ Σεβα[σ]τῶ[ν], πρὸς | δὺο Καλανδῶν [Μ]αείων).

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Roman soldiers have been carefully investigated by James, and proposed to be the earliest archaeological instance of chemical warfare.⁶⁶

When considering all the evidence mentioned above, Rostovtzeff faced an inconsistency between Shapur's account (Dura taken once, after Barbalissus but before Valerian's defeat at Edessa) and Durene evidence (Dura taken in AD 256/7, and proofs of an earlier short-lived Sasanian presence). He solved the problem by construing the events thus:⁶⁷

- AD 251–3: Shapur, after some years of diplomatic troubles concerning Armenia, seizes the moment and launches a full attack against Rome in the critical year of Decius' death and the invasion of the Goths in the Balkans. He very quickly marches with his army through upper Mesopotamia.
- While doing so, he sends parts of his army to occupy some outposts on the Euphrates, in order to protect his back from the Palmyrenes; among these outposts is Dura, which is briefly occupied in a non-violent way in AD 253. Most of the inhabitants have already carefully cleared their houses and fled, probably to Palmyra; they will never have the opportunity to return.⁶⁸
- Shapur crushes the Roman army at Barbalissus in AD 253. Somehow the occupation of Dura ends and the Romans get back in control.
- Probably as a consequence of the ongoing turmoil, civilians keep departing from the town.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, in *c.* 254–5, Romans begin an extensive programme of reinforcing the fortifications,⁷⁰ and Shapur wreaks havoc in Coele Syria and Cilicia. In AD 254, Valerian arrives in Antiochia.
- While Valerian reorganises (AD 254–6), Shapur retreats to consolidate his former conquests, and launches a second siege of Dura, an episode of which – the asphyxiation of Roman soldiers and the subsequent fire set by the Sasanians in the tunnel under Tower 19 – reveals its overall intensity.⁷¹ The invading army manages to take Dura and the city, perhaps very briefly occupied by Sasanians,⁷²

⁶⁶ More on the final chronology of Dura in James (1985); MacDonald (1986); James (2011).

⁶⁷ For the whole reconstruction, see Rostovtzeff (1943); Millar (1993⁴: 159–73). Further perspectives in Bellucci (2014–15).

⁶⁸ James (2019: 37).

⁶⁹ See again Baird (2012: 315, 323).

⁷⁰ 'After the inferred first Persian withdrawal and return of the city to Roman hands, Dura underwent a massive programme to strengthen its fortifications, with the intention of holding out against anticipated renewed Sasanian attack. These changes were concentrated along the vulnerable so-called desert wall, which looked out across a flat, dry plain (steppe rather than desert, often lush in springtime) ... In *ca.* 254–255, the Roman defenders massively reinforced the vulnerable western wall against rams, artillery, and undermining when they built a steep mudbrick glacis to its front and a huge rampart to its rear, preparations that shaped the subsequent mine warfare. The rampart was constructed in phases, reflecting successive changes of plan' (James 2011: 72; 2019: 36–7).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² See Baird (2012: 320–2); James (2019: 36–7), the state-of-the-art account on the final demise of Dura.

is then abandoned for good. Ruins were still visible when Julian invaded against the Sasanian Empire, a century later.⁷³

This hypothesis, focused on the Sasanians taking Dura **twice** (shortly in AD 253; for good in AD 256/7), has been discussed by James⁷⁴ and criticised by MacDonald;⁷⁵ whereas there was no doubt that the final siege occurred in AD 256/7, the first, short-lived occupation remained uncertain. Baird and James, however, have reassessed the extant evidence and concluded that such a short-lived occupation, in fact, took place in AD 253.⁷⁶

The story of how this destroyed city came back to life from 1920 onwards, after the accidental discovery of archaeological material in the site where Dura had risen, is given in great detail in Hopkins (1979). The main institutions responsible for the excavations have been Yale University, the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, and from 1986, under the leadership of P. Leriche (CNRS, Paris), the Mission Franco-Syrienne d'Europos-Doura (MFSSED). Further details on the history of the excavations, and commentaries on the most recent campaigns and the further destruction of the site in 2012 during the Syrian civil war, are given in James (2019: 26–31; 317–18). The series about the *Excavations at Dura-Europos* has brought to a worldwide audience all sorts of priceless findings from the ancient town; more are still to be restored and presented to the public, while being preserved in the endless vaults of the Yale University Art Gallery and the Beinecke Library. The finding we want especially to remember here is the one which provides the foundation to this book: **the parchments and papyri** – the Latin ones, in particular, but there was an abundance of Greek, Jewish and Pehlevi too – found mostly within the Roman base area (except for a small number of them found in Wall Street: see the commentary on the individual items).

In the northern section of the garrison, close to the northern wall, lay the aforementioned temple of Artemis Azzanathkona. In 1931/2, during the fifth archaeological campaign,⁷⁷ a great quantity of fragmentary papyri and parchments was found in room W13, a portion of the temple which bordered the northern wall. While

⁷³ See Amm. Marc. XXIII 5,8 *ubi cum pro ingenita pietate consecrato principi parentasset pergeretque ad Duram desertum oppidum, procul militarem cuneum conspicatus stetit immobilis, eique dubitanti quid ferrent offerretur ab eis immanissimi corporis leo* ('after he had made a propitiatory offering to the deified prince out of his natural piety, and was on his way to the abandoned city of Dura, he noticed at a distance a troop of soldiers and remained motionless; and by those soldiers was offered to him, who wondered what they were bringing, a lion of gigantic bodily size'); XXIV 1,5 *emenso itaque itinere bidui prope civitatem uenimus Duram desertam, marginibus amnis inpositam* ('then after a two-days travel we arrived to the abandoned town of Dura, located on the banks of the river').

⁷⁴ James (1985); he does not rule out Rostovtzeff's theory, but suggests caution.

⁷⁵ MacDonald (1986); he entirely rejects Rostovtzeff's theory.

⁷⁶ See Grenet (1988), particularly pp. 140–1 (where he confirms Rostovtzeff's theory) and 143–6; and the aforementioned Baird (2012: 312–14).

⁷⁷ Hopkins (1979: 75–105).

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Figure 1.9 Excavations at Dura-Europos: the northern wall of the citadel (1928–9)



Figure 1.10 Excavations at Dura-Europos: break in the city wall, north-west of the Citadel (1928–9)

reinforcing the wall with ramparts in order to face the incoming Sasanian army, the Romans vacated the room, and threw in the fill every available object, including cut documents, which they did not feel the need to keep; other papyri and parchments were found nearby, 'along the fortification between the Main Gate and Tower 3 at



Figure 1.11 Detail from a newly found papyrus (1933-4)

Block E7'.⁷⁸ Most of them were protected from the worst effects of time and wear by the very fact that they had been covered with mud and raw materials in order to build the rampart itself. Hopkins describes in detail the process of the discovery, and comments upon the surprisingly good conservation state of some of them, including *PDura* 54, the so-called *Feriale Duranum*, and *PDura* 60, both of which he was able to read immediately after them being removed from the dig.⁷⁹ Most of the papyri and parchments found in room W13 (which constitute the greatest majority of papyri and parchments found in Dura-Europos) were in the Latin language, and referred to the aforementioned *cohors XX Palmyrenorum*, proofs of whose existence are to be found only in the manuscripts themselves, and in the inscriptions excavated in the city. These **Latin papyri and parchments** are the main object of this monograph, which is to represent the third⁸⁰ – and as far as letters are concerned, the fourth⁸¹ – comprehensive (re-)edition of the Latin Durene military manuscript evidence.

⁷⁸ Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959: 3).

⁷⁹ Hopkins (1979: 99–102).

⁸⁰ The first great edition of the *PDura* is contained in Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959); several documents had been published after the papyri came to Yale in the forties and fifties – *PDura* 54 in Hoey, Fink and Snyder (1940); *PDura* 56, 82, 97 *et alii* in Gilliam (1950), etc. – but that of Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959) was for most of them the *editio princeps*. Fink re-published all documents in his *Roman Military Records on Papyrus* in 1971; a few years later (1975–7) Marichal did the same with all the Latin documents for volumes VI, VII, VIII and IX of the *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores*.

⁸¹ The letters (*PDura* 55 to 81) have been published once again by Cugusi in his *Corpus Epistularum Latinarum* (CEL: 1992–2001).