Some Remarks on the Anthroponymy of Dura Europos (and on the Name of the City)

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Abstract

Roman Syria is characterized by a multilingual environment, and a composite anthroponymy, both Semitic and Indo-European.

The city of Dura Europos, in the Middle Euphrates, is a good example of cultural, linguistic and onomastic interactions, as is clear from its double name: founded in ca 300 BC by the Seleucids, the city was conquered by the Parthians at the end of the 2nd century BC, and was disputed between the Arsacids and the Romans for centuries. Finally, the city was conquered in 256 AD by the Sassanians, and then abandoned.

Situated on the border between the Roman and the Parthian empires, Dura was cosmopolitan in character, as is evident from the 19 sanctuaries, from the several languages attested in its numerous (more than 1000) inscriptions (Greek, Latin, Palmyrene, Hatran, Early Syriac, Jewish Aramaic, Hebrew, Safaitic, Middle Persian), and from the variety of its anthroponyms. The paper will focus on the anthroponymy of the city, offering an overview of the different onomastics traditions interacting in the city, and trying to evaluate their respective weight and characteristics.

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Introduction

The city of Europos was founded as *phrourion* (military citadel) in ca 300 BC by Nicanor, general of Seleucus I Nicator,[1] on a site already inhabited, on a cliff hanging over the right bank of the Middle Euphrates.[2] The city was conquered by the Parthians at the end of the 2nd century BC, and was disputed between the Arsacids and the Romans for centuries, since it was located on the border between the two empires. The Romans occupied briefly the city in 116 AD, but they were subsequently forced to leave, and they could definitively take the city only in 165 AD. Finally, in the middle of the following century (256 AD), the city was conquered by the Sassanians, after a long siege, and subsequently abandoned.[3]

The sand of the desert covered the city for several centuries, until it was discovered by chance in 1920 by the British army. The Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles-Lettres entrusted the renowned Belgian scholar Franz Cumont to study the city between 1922 and 1923. Systematic excavations were undertaken in 1928, by the Académie and Yale University and they lasted until 1937, for a total of ten campaigns, directed by Michail Rostovtzeff.[4]

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[1] The identification of Nicanor is somewhat problematic; the *status quaestionis* may be found in Cohen (2006: 163).

[2] For Dura and its foundation, see Leriche (1997), Cohen (2006: 156-169).

[3] For the chronology of the city, see Leriche (1997), Leriche and Al Mahmoud (1994) and Leriche *et al*. (2011).

[4] For the discovery of Dura and for a survey of the discoveries of the archaeological campaigns of 1928-1937, see Hopkins (1979); for the most recent excavations, see the overviews in Leriche and Al Mahmoud (1994) and Leriche *et al*. (2011).

The excavations were interrupted by World War II, and the exploration of the city was resumed only in 1986 by a French-Syrian group of scholars, directed by archaeologist Pierre Leriche, who worked in the site until the outbreak of the ongoing Civil War.

The sand of the desert preserved the city, but all that is visible is dated to its last years, and little is known about the Seleucid and Parthian Dura. What is certain, is that the city, situated on the border between two empires, and a crucial halting-place for the caravans which travelled from Palmyra to Lower Mesopotamia, is a good example of the different linguistic and cultural energies simultaneously operating in Syria during the Roman/Parthian period, as is reflected in its sanctuaries,[5] in the several languages attested in its inscriptions (Greek, Latin, Palmyrene, Hatran, Early Syriac, Jewish Aramaic, Hebrew, Safaitic, Middle Persian), in in its anthroponymy, and in its very name.

The Double Name of the City

Dura-Europos is likely the only city of the Roman Near East to be known by a double name, which moreover contains two toponyms of different origin.

The name Europos (Εὐρωπός) is Greek, and it was imposed after the name of a Macedonian city (Cohen 2006: 157), possibly the one in which king Seleucus himself was born (Cumont 1926: xvii).

However, the site was already inhabited in the 2nd millennium BC, and its name was likely Damara, as attested on a Cuneiform tablet coming from the city (and possibly on another Neo-Babylonian document).[6] Damara is the Neo-Babylonian form of Akkadian *da-wa-ra*, *dūru(m)*, 'fortress', an element which was quite common in Akkadian toponymy, mostly followed by the name of the founder of the settlement; curiously enough, the city is known as 'Dura Nicanoris' in the *Ravenna Cosmography* (ca 700 AD),[7] with a construction which is quite similar to the Akkadian ones, and which mixes up the Akkadian and the Greek names of the city. Dura (Aramaic *dwr'*) is the Aramaic name of the city, from Akkadian *dūru(m)*.

It has been recently suggested by Pierre Leriche and his collaborators that the name of the city should be Europos Dura and not Dura Europos, because the name Europos would have been used before that of Dura, the latter being attested only in the 3rd century, to be replaced again in the middle of the same century, when the city received the status of autonomous colony (Leriche *et al*. 2011: 38). The name of the city is Europos in the 2nd century AD, becoming Dura in the 3rd. It is registered as *dwr'* in two undated Palmyrene inscriptions (Bertolino 2004, inscriptions A.H1.01a; BA.J7,01). If it is plausible, as suggested by Leriche *et al.* (2011: 38) that the toponym was changed in the 3rd century by the Romans in order to create a gap with the Macedonian past, it is hard to understand why the acquisition of the status of a colony should have changed the situation, which is far from being clear cut.

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[5] For the list of the 19 sanctuaries excavated in Dura, see Leriche *et al*. (2011: 19). The most famous religious building is the synagogue, because of its well preserved frescoes, but there is also one of the most ancient Christian buildings. Some temples are related to the Roman army; others are dedicated to deities of local origin, who often have a Greek 'equivalent'.

[6] For the Cuneiform tablet found in Dura, see Stephens (1937) and Leriche (1997: 196-197). Wiseman (1967: 496, n. 8) suggests that the name Da-ma-[ra] , 'i.e. Dūr Europos', may be read in a Late Babylonian document.

[7] For the attestations of the name of Dura Europos in Greek sources, see Cohen (2006: 156-169).

The ethnonym is Εὐρωπαῖος until 180 AD, Δουρηνή/ός in 200 AD; according to Leriche (2011: 38), it would be again Εὐρωπαῖος in 254 (as attested in Papyrus 32,[8] and in the inscription published in Leriche 1999), but this is not exactly the case: in the inscription found in 1999, and dedicated to Σεπτίμιος Αὐρήλιος Λυσίας, an exponent of one of the most powerful families in the city, is mentioned the 'boulé of the Europaioi' (τῶν Εὐρωπαῖων ἡ βουλή), and in the papyrus dated to 254 AD (number 32), the city is actually called 'the colony of the Europaioi'; however, in the latter the ethnonyms are Δουρηνή and Δουρηνός. It is possible that the man and the woman bearing this ethnonym were not entitled to be called 'Europaioi'. In any case, this document clearly demonstrates that the two names of the city coexisted. We should also keep in mind that the attestations of the toponyms come from official documents, and that the two names of the city were possibly chosen in everyday life according to the context or to personal preferences. Since the site was already inhabited when Seleucid troops founded the *phourouion* of Europos, it is likely that the place had a name, and that this name was Dura, a name of Akkadian etymology which may hardly have its origin as late as the 1st millennium AD.

Anthroponymy

The city seems to have remained faithful to the language of its Hellenistic founders, but the use of languages other than Greek was apparently commonplace. However, their use seems to be circumscribed to specific groups and contexts: Iranian languages were employed by Parthian administrators, Latin was circumscribed to the army and to the dedications to the Roman Emperors, and Jewish Aramaic was in use by the Jewish community. Palmyrene, Hatran and Safaitic are witnesses to the presence of merchants and travelers, whose permanence in the city was not necessarily short. We have in Dura 155 parchments/papyri, and more than 1,200 inscriptions, ranging in date from the 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD.[9] Greek is definitely the dominant language: the approximate percentage of the Greek texts—not considering that several texts are bilingual—is 78%, while Latin covers 11% of the documentation, Semitic languages 8%, and Iranian languages 3%.

The number of languages used in the epigraphs is reflected in anthroponymy. In this brief survey of Dura anthroponymy, only the Greek texts are considered, because the great majority of the texts are in Greek, and Greek is the favored language of the inhabitants of the city. The Latin parchments and papyri are not included, because they are mainly related to the army, and the army at Dura has been defined as a 'total institution', *i.e.* as a self-standing horizon, with few or no contacts with the civilians (Pollard 1996). The Semitic and Iranian texts have not been taken into consideration, because their anthroponymy is rather predictable: the anthroponymy of the Iranian texts is uniquely Iranian, with one exception;[10] similarly, the onomastics of Semitic texts is mostly Semitic, with extremely few exceptions.[11]

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[8] The number of the parchments and papyri follows Welles *et al.* (1959).
[9] For more details about the languages in use in Dura, see Gascou (2011) and Grassi (2015).
[10] See Grenet (1988: 144, 155).
[11] We may notice the Greek name Λεύκιος (lwqy) in Palmyrene, hardly Latin Lucius at such an early date (31 AD): see Grassi (2012a: 70), and the Greek name Θεόδωρος (ṭdrws) in Jewish Aramaic (Bertolino 2004, inscription H.L7.01a).

The Weight of Greek, Latin, Iranian and Semitic Anthroponyms

If Greek is definitely dominant as a language, the situation of anthroponymy is much more complex, since Semitic anthroponymy is well represented: Greek and Semitic anthroponyms are the two largest groups in the city.[12]

In the Greek texts from Dura ca 1,000 different anthroponyms are attested (each variant is considered one anthroponym) for which it is possible to establish an etymology. Of these 1,000 names, ca 55% are Semitic, ca 31% Greek, ca 12% Latin and ca 2% Iranian. Even if these numbers must be taken cautiously, given the high percentage of doubtful readings and the ambiguity of some names, the proportion and the weight of the different onomastic groups are clear.

However, Semitic names are not as overwhelming as the percentage may suggest, because each Semitic anthroponym is attested few times, often just once, and in the inscriptions with a predominantly Semitic onomastics we hardly have complete genealogies. Conversely, each Greek name may occur frequently: the ruling class remains Macedonian at least until the Roman conquest and Macedonian ruling families used to write abundantly (the same bearer of a name may be attested several times) and to provide far-reaching genealogies, where papponymy was frequent. Moreover, if the families of Macedonian origin tend to avoid Semitic anthroponyms, there are families with a predominantly Semitic onomastics and presumably local origin in which the use of Greek names is rather common: Greek anthroponymy was evidently considered prestigious, while Semitic was not.[13]

In fact, if we consider the names (with variants) attested 10 or more times, Greek anthroponyms are by far predominant. The names are:

Ἀδαῖος; Αδδαιος; Ἀθηνόδωρος; Ἀλέξανδρος; Ἀμμώνιος; Ἀντίοχος; Ἀντωνῖνος; Ἀπολλοφάνης; Ἀπολλώνιος; Ἀρτεμίδωρος; Αὐρήλιος; Βαραθης / Βαρατης / Βαργατης; Βαρλαας; Βαρναιος / Βαρνειος / Βαρνεος; Βαρχαλβ / Βαρχαλβας / Βαρχαλβος; Γερμανός; Δαμόνικος; Δάνυμος; Δημήτριος; Διογένης; Διόδοτος; Διόδωρος; Διοκλῆς; Ἡλιόδωρος; Θεόδωρος; Ἰούλιος; Κόνων; Λυσανίας; Λυσίας; Μαλχος; Μαρῖνος; Νικάνωρ; Ξενοκράτης; Ὄλυμπος; Πατροκλῆς / Πάτροκλος; Σέλευκος; Τιμώνασσα / Τιμωνάσση.

Remarkably, we have here 37 names, of which 26 are Greek, 5 Latin, and 6 Semitic, while there is no Iranian name with 10 occurrences or more.

The Greek proper names are numerous and varied. It is worth mentioning that some Greek names are not attested in Syria outside Dura (e.g. Δαμόνικος or Δάνυμος), while others are among the most frequently attested in Syria (e.g. Θεόδωρος; Ἀντίοχος; Ἀλέξανδρος). Some names are Pan-Hellenic, while others are names particularly frequent in Macedonia

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[12] For the anthroponymy of Dura, see Bradford Welles *et al.* (1959: 58-65) (parchments and papyri); Grassi (2007, 2012a, 2012b, 2015), Greek and Latin epigraphs and Greek papyri and parchments.

[13] It cannot be excluded that sometimes a Greek name attested within families with a predominantly Semitic anthroponymy hides a Semitic name, which would have been used in a Semitic inscription. If overtly double names are rare in Dura (see Grassi 2007), as well as in the whole Near East (see Sartre 1998), the case of a bilingual (Greek – Palmyrene) epigraph (Bertolino 2004: 42-43, inscription BA.N7.01), in which the same man is called Σέλευκος in the Greek text, and brʿth (an Aramaic name) in the Palmyrene text is surely a *caveat*.

(Ἀδαῖος; Ἀλέξανδρος; Νικάνωρ), or related to the Seleucid dynastic family (Ἀντίοχος; Δημήτριος; Σέλευκος, which is the most common name in Dura).

Latin anthroponyms, if not borne by soldiers, may be split into two groups, which are valid also outside this list. Latin names are usually either Imperial names (as Antoninus, Aurelius – which is also related to the acquisition of Roman citizenship after the *Constitutio Antoniniana*) – or Iulius), or names which are similar to Semitic anthroponyms, and thus relatively popular in the Near East: Germanus is frequent in Southern Syria (and the Semitic root *grm,* 'to cut; to decide' is common in North and South Arabian onomastics), while Marinus is popular in Northern Syria, where anthroponymy is mainly Aramaic, and *mr',* 'Lord', is a well attested element in Aramaic anthroponymy.[14]

The majority of the Semitic names attested in the list is Aramaic, and formed by the noun *br,* 'son', followed by a theonym: Βαραθης; Βαρλαας; Βαρναιος; Βαρχαλβος. Also Αδδαιος is an Aramaic name, which contains the theonym Hadad, the storm god, in a short form. Μαλχος, 'King' is one of the few names attested in the whole Near East. Not recorded among the anthroponyms with ten or more occurrences are Hebrew names, which are attested in the city, and borne by members of the Jewish community.

Chronological Aspects

As mentioned above, the ruling class remained Macedonian at least until the Roman conquest, and even after it there are inscriptions originating from this milieu. That means that several names tend to remain the same along the history of the city, because the families of Macedonian origin used a conservative onomastics. If in the dated epigraphs there are names attested only in a reduced chronological spam, names such as Θεόμνηστος, Δάνυμος, Λυσίας or Σέλευκος are continuously attested from the most ancient inscriptions of Dura up to the end of the Parthian period. With the arrival of the Romans, these names are less attested, even if some of them do not disappear. According to Bradford Welles (1951: 267), after the conquest of Dura by the Romans (165 AD), the anthroponymy of the city changed deeply, 'Graeco-Macedonian names disappeared almost completely' and 'Semitic names are in the great majority', while both Semitic and Greek names are not the same names as previously.

If it is actually quite clear that in the Roman era the ruling class was recruited also among the populations bearing Semitic names, the idea that the anthroponymy of the city was so deeply affected is somewhat problematic. It is actually hard to find a dated epigraph bearing the names of the Macedonian families after the Roman conquest, but their names are sometimes attested, even if without the predominance they used to have. For example, the anthroponyms attested in a deed of sale dated 180 AD (Papyrus 25) are indisputably the names of families of Macedonian origin. Even more significant is the already mentioned inscription found in 1999 (Leriche and El ʿAjji 1999), which, albeit undated, is datable to the 3rd century AD because of its anthroponymy (the imperial name Septimius is related to the Severan dynasty): the inscription, originally the basement of a bronze statue, is dedicated by the βουλή of the city to Σεπτίμιος Αὐρήλιος Λυσίας, an exponent of a family of the

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[14] For the phenomenon of Greek and Latin anthroponyms chosen because of their similarity with Semitic anthroponyms, see also Sartre (1998, 2007), Grassi (2015). The vast majority of Latin anthroponyms are attested in their Greek form.

Macedonian ruling class of Dura, and still evidently prominent in the Roman period.[15] This seems to suggest that the influence of the Macedonian ruling class was curtailed rather than put to an end.

As regards the change in the typology of the anthroponyms, this is a phenomenon that is difficult to evaluate. On the one hand, dated epigraphs—i.e. epigraphs bearing a date—are relatively rare, they seem to be circumscribed to specific occasions,[16] and they are in general less common during the Roman rule than in the previous centuries, because they are mainly the expression of the Macedonian ruling class. On the other hand, Semitic names (and several Greek names) are often attested only once, or a few times, and it is thus very difficult to evaluate their popularity from a chronological point of view. However, we can observe that some names or some typologies of names seem to have been always popular: for example, Βαργατης is attested as a patronymic in 61/2 AD (Cumont 1926, inscription 114), in 153 AD (PVIII, 871) and in 178 AD (PVIII, 874); Ζαβιδαδος, with its variants Ζαβιδαδαδος and Ζεβιδαδαδος, is recorded in 7/6 BC (Cumont 1926, inscription 57), in 54 AD (PV, 418) and in 175 AD (PVIII, 873). Other names are attested at the very beginning and at the very end of the chronological span (e.g. Αβινναιος, documented in 37 AD and then in 249/50, respectively in Frye *et al.* (1955, inscription 2) and PIX, 962), but this is likely due to the scarcity of dated inscriptions. As regards the typology and the elements contained in the anthroponyms, we may observe, for example, that names formed with the above-mentioned element *br* are attested from the beginning to the end of the chronological range, or that the theonym Nabu was never out of fashion.[17]

There is a category of names which is particularly attested in the 1st century AD, or at the very beginning of the 2nd, at least in dated inscriptions: that of female anthroponyms. Even more: the dates which occur in the inscriptions are frequently the same. They are in correspondence with the 'fièvre édilitaire' which shaped the *salles aux gradins* of the sanctuaries of Dura in 35-40, 61-67, and 102-107 AD (Arnaud 1997, 117). These *salles aux gradins* have been found in several sanctuaries of the city devoted to female deities (Artemis; Atargatis; Azzanathkona). The inscriptions on the steps are a mine of genealogical information, because they bear the names of the owners of the seats. The analysis of one *salle aux gradins* conducted by Arnaud clearly demonstrates that the families are almost always the same as those attested in the other sanctuaries, and that the families with a Semitic onomastics are in a peripheral position (Arnaud 1997: 140). Moreover, these *salles aux gradins* are particularly important for us, because they provide the majority of the female anthroponyms attested in the city, which are otherwise rare. The most interesting aspect is that the female anthroponyms, differently from the male anthroponyms, were in use also

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[15] See Leriche and El ʿAjji (1999); Grassi (2012b: 133, n28). The dedication of a statue was a rare honor in Dura. The same man appears on a Latin inscription (PI: 149, s.n.).

[16] A typical example is the use of dated inscriptions in the so-called *salles aux gradins* which were used in sanctuaries (see below).

[17] Among the names attested only once in dated inscriptions, Βηλοοβασσαρος and Μηκατναναια are particularly interesting, because their etymology is Akkadian (surely for the first name, possibly for the second name: see Zadok 1987: 258, Grassi 2012a: 173, 228); the fact that the inscription in which they are recorded (Cumont 1926, inscription 57) is dated to 7-6 BC may suggest that the Akkadian component of Dura anthroponymy, still alive in the 1st century BC but no more recorded in later inscriptions, was perhaps more significant in the previous centuries. Akkadian names are extremely rare in Roman Syria.

among the Macedonian families of the ruling class, where they likely entered through mixed marriages (Grassi 2012b).

Conclusions

Apparently, the Parthian and Roman dominations did not affect the city culturally as deeply as the Greek one, in spite of the fact that Dura Europos remained under Arsacid control for the great majority of its history. Latin and Iranian names are relatively rare, the first ones often related to the army, and the second ones borne predominantly by Iranians. On the contrary, Greek names are frequent, and used both by the descendants of the Macedonian colonisers—who remained the ruling class at least until the Roman domination—and by families of local origin. Among the families of indisputably Macedonian origin, male anthroponymy tends to remain Greek, while female names may have a Semitic etymology. Semitic anthroponymy—mostly Aramaic, but also Arabic—is various and well attested during the entire life of the city, where Greek influence and the persistence of local onomastic traditions did coexist until the end of the city.

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