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SIMON JAMES

Dura – Europos and the Chronology of Syria in the 250s AD*

«The time between the death of Maximinus, or better from the beginning of the reign of Gordian III to the end of the rule of Gallienus is the darkest in the history of the Roman Empire, darkest in two senses of the word, inasmuch as it was the time of greatest misery for the Roman Empire, and at the same time a period concerning which our information is meager, vague and contradictory . . .».¹

The results of the excavations at Dura-Europos have been of immense interest to historians, not least because the city was destroyed and abandoned in the middle of this obscure period.² The excavators concluded that the recovered evidence proved that Dura was destroyed in AD 256.³ Further, ROSTOVTZEFF proposed that before this, in AD 253, the city had been briefly occupied by the Sassanians but quickly fell back into Roman hands for the last couple of years before Shapur I finally eliminated it.⁴

The sketchy historical sources referred to above have been repeatedly scrutinised with the most painstaking attention to detail.⁵ However, the conclusions drawn from the archaeology of Dura have been accepted virtually without question for forty years. It is time that these, too, were reviewed, as they are often used as bench-marks, fixed points on which to hang chronologies of events in Syria in

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¹ M. ROSTOVTZEFF, *Res Gestae Divi Saporis and Dura, Berytus VIII*, 1943, 17.

² For the main literature on Dura, see the Reports on the Excavations, published 1929–1952; the Final Reports from 1943 onwards; ROSTOVTZEFF *op. cit.* (note 1) and *Dura Europos and its Art*, Oxford 1938. C. HOPKINS, *The Discovery of Dura Europos*, New Haven and London 1981, contains an exhaustive and up-to-date bibliography.

³ ROSTOVTZEFF, *op. cit.* (note 1), 48 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.* 53 ff.

⁵ A. T. OLMSTEAD, *The Mid-Third Century of the Christian Era*, CPh 37, 1942, 241 ff., 398 ff.; ROSTOVTZEFF *op. cit.* (note 1); M. SPRENGLING, *Third Century Iran; Sapor and Kartir*, Chicago 1953; H. R. BALDUS, *Uranus Antoninus, Münzprägung und Geschichte. Antiquitas, Reihe 3, Band 11*, Bonn 1971.

the 250s, especially Shapur's first invasion of the Roman province.⁶ Almost every paper written on the subject makes use of the Dura dates or at least discusses them.

The date of AD 256 for the death of the city is often repeated and is taken for granted by most writers of recent years.⁷ To a lesser extent the same is true of ROSTOVTZEFF's notion that there was a preliminary occupation in AD 253.⁸ In some quarters the latter is so much accepted that it has been used to date other events.⁹ This is somewhat disturbing, as the idea was only put forward as an hypothesis in the first place. ROSTOVTZEFF did not prove that it actually occurred.¹⁰

The following reassessment of the Dura dating evidence makes little difference to the archaeology of the city itself. That the destruction of the city took place in the 250s is abundantly clear, and this is a bracket quite narrow enough for most archaeological purposes. The aim is rather to assess the basis of the precise *historical* dates derived from Dura's archaeological data. Here accuracy to within a year is critical to the reconstruction of the sequence of political and military events. Uncertainty of a year or two is highly significant.

ROSTOVTZEFF first proposed that Dura had been briefly occupied by the Persians in AD 253 in his paper of 1943.¹¹ This was concerned with the events and chronology of Shapur's wars with Rome, as described in the so-called *res gestae* of Shapur, then newly discovered. A trilingual inscription on the Kaba'a of Zoroaster at

⁶ OLMSTEAD, *op. cit.* (note 5), 404; ROSTOVTZEFF, *op. cit.* (note 1), 51–54; SPREGLING, *op. cit.* (note 5), 95.

⁷ G. DOWNEY, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*, Princeton 1961, 593 (but see also 594–595); T. PEKÁRY, *Bemerkungen zur Chronologie des Jahrzehntes 250–260*, *Historia* 11, 1962, 127; F. MILLAR, D. BERCIU, R. N. FRYE, G. KOSSACK and T. TALBOT RICE, *The Roman Empire and its Neighbours*, London 1967, 263; BALDUS, *op. cit.* (note 5), 263–264; A. PERKINS, *The Art of Dura Europos*, Oxford 1973, 7; L. DE BLOIS, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, Leiden 1976, 2; J.-P. REY-COQUAIS, *Syrie Romaine de Pompée à Dioclétien*, *JRS* 68, 1978, 58; C. HOPKINS, *op. cit.* (note 2), 235, 245, 247 ff., 262 f.; E. DABROWA, *La Garnison Romaine à Doura-Europos. Influence du Camp sur la vie de la ville et ses conséquences*, *Cah. Scient. Univ. Jagellonne* 613, 1981, 63; E. KETTENHOFEN, *Die römisch-persischen Kriege des 3. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. nach der Inschrift Šāhpurs I. an der Ka'be-ye Zartošt (ŠKZ)*, *Beih. Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Reihe B, Nr. 55*, Wiesbaden 1982; R. N. FRYE, *The Political History of Iran under the Sassanians*, Cambridge History of Iran 3, 1983, 128.

⁸ HOPKINS, *op. cit.* (note 2) 247–249, 263 f.; SPREGLING, *op. cit.* (note 5), 4 and 88 where it is described as «very probable»; F. ALTHEIM and R. STIEHL, *Inscriptions of the Synagogue of Dura Europos, East and West* 9, 1958, 17; REY-COQUAIS, *op. cit.* (note 7), 58; R. A. G. CARSON, *The date of the capture of Valerian I*, in ed. T. HACKENS and R. WEILLER, *Actes 9^{ème} Congr. Int. Numism.*, Louvain-la-Neuve/Luxembourg 1982, 462; KETTENHOFEN, *op. cit.* (note 7), 77 f.

⁹ SPREGLING used it to «prove» that one of Shapur's incursions into Syria was «definitely 253», *op. cit.* (note 5), 88.

¹⁰ *op. cit.* (note 1), 53, 56.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 53 ff.

Naqsh-i-Rustam was the source of this new evidence.¹² Three wars are described in the text, which is hereafter referred to as KZ. The first was against Gordian III and Philip the Arab, and so dates to around AD 244. The third culminated in Shapur's greatest triumphs, the victory at Edessa and the capture of the emperor Valerian in AD 260.¹³

The second war fell between these two dates, but included no easily datable events. Its main landmarks were the Persian victory at Barballissus (not mentioned in any western source), and the capture and sack of Antioch. Over thirty other cities were plundered, and these are listed in the inscription. One of them was Dura.¹⁴ As ROSTOVITZEFF observed, the written sources for the 250s are very poor. «The literary sources – Latin, Greek and Oriental – consist mostly of late epitomes of historical works of earlier date. The dates of the events are mostly uncertain, and the narrative is fragmentary and often full of legendary details . . .»¹⁵

It is beyond the competence of the writer and the scope of this paper to discuss these sources, which have in any case been exhaustively considered by others.¹⁶ The main point here is that ROSTOVITZEFF felt that he could make a good case for AD 253 as the date of the second war, which he took to be a campaign of one year only.¹⁷ His thesis was far from proven and other writers have preferred AD 256.¹⁸ This slightly later date rested mainly on a passage in the chronicle of Se'ert, which records the capture and abduction of Demetrianus, Patriarch of Antioch, by the invading Persians. The text was interpreted as meaning that this occurred during the first Persian invasion of Syria (i.e. the second war with Rome of KZ). A letter to Pope Stephanus proves that Demetrianus was still at Antioch on 12 May 254, thereby apparently making it impossible that the invasion took place in AD 253. On this evidence it must have taken place in 254 or later, and the evidence from Dura would seem to put it in 256.¹⁹ This major objection to AD 253 has recently been challenged by BALDUS, who pointed out that the chronicle does not say that Demetrianus was abducted at the first taking of Antioch (during Shapur's second war). It actually says that the patriarch was siezed before the second capture of the city, which took place after the battle of Edessa in AD 260. BALDUS suggests that

¹² M. SPRENGLING, *Shahpuhr I, the Great, on the Kaabah of Zoroaster*, *Amer. Journ. Semit. Lang.* 57, 1940, 330 ff., 341 ff.; M. SPRENGLING, *Pahlavi Notes*, *Amer. Journ. Semit. Lang.* 58, 1941, 169 ff.; OLMSTEAD, *op. cit.* (note 5); ROSTOVITZEFF, *op. cit.* (note 1); SPRENGLING, *op. cit.* (note 5).

¹³ CARSON, *op. cit.* (note 7), 465.

¹⁴ SPRENGLING, *op. cit.* (note 5); KZ III, 2.

¹⁵ *op. cit.* (note 1), 17.

¹⁶ See note 5.

¹⁷ *op. cit.* (note 1), 22, fn. 11; also SPRENGLING, *op. cit.* (note 5), 89, 95.

¹⁸ R. N. FRYE, *The Heritage of Persia*, London 1964, 241; MILLAR *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 7), 263; E. HONIGMAN and A. MARICQ, *Recherches sur les Res Gestae Divi Saporis*, *Acad. Roy. Belg., Lettres Sc. Mor. Pol.* 47, fasc. 4, 1952, 136; DOWNEY, *op. cit.* (note 7), 593–594.

¹⁹ The relevant text and interpretation is set out by BALDUS, *op. cit.* (note 5), 255 ff.

Demetrianus was taken prisoner while fleeing from Antioch in 260.²⁰ This removes the objection to the first invasion, which is the second war, being in 253.

SPRENGLING's reappraisal of KZ also concluded that 253 was the date, but showed that ROSTOVITZEFF was probably mistaken in thinking that the second war lasted for only one campaigning season, as the order of the list of captured cities seems to reflect two distinct campaigns.²¹ The first included Barballissus and the fall of Antioch, while the second, recorded as a short list of cities appended to the main one, included a reference to the taking of Dura.²² More recently, BALDUS has come to the same conclusion, equating the short-lived second campaign with the archaeologically attested destruction of Dura put in 256. The limited penetration of this invasion he links with Valerian's VICTORIA PART coin types of AD 257.²³ Other writers have also suggested two campaigns,²⁴ or have simply proposed a series of invasions during the 250s.²⁵ Currently, then, BALDUS's interpretation is the most satisfactory, although by no means has the last word been said on the subject.

However, in 1943 ROSTOVITZEFF's conviction that Shapur's invasion took place in AD 253 left him with a problem, for it was thought that the archaeological evidence from Dura proved that the city fell in 256.²⁶ He implicitly assumed that Shapur would not have bypassed Dura in 253. If he went on up the Euphrates to Barballissus and Antioch, he would have neutralised the dangerous fortress first rather than risk leaving it unmolested in his rear.²⁷ But there was evidence for only one siege, so ROSTOVITZEFF suggested that a peaceful occupation of the city had taken place.²⁸ It was proposed that the Roman garrison had retired in the face of Shapur's advance, probably to join the army concentrating to confront the invader at Barballissus. This is quite feasible, as there seems to have been no emperor or expeditionary force in Syria at the time so it could be argued that the provincial garrison, standing alone, would need to concentrate all available troops or be dismembered piecemeal.²⁹ ROSTOVITZEFF thought that the occupation would have been shortlived, the Persians withdrawing within a few months and a Roman garrison returning ready for the siege of 256.³⁰

²⁰ *ibid.*, 258 f.

²¹ *op. cit.* (note 5).

²² *ibid.*, 96.

²³ BALDUS, *op. cit.* (note 5), 264 f., followed by REY-COQUAIS, *op. cit.* (note 7), 58.

²⁴ PEKÁRY, *op. cit.* (note 7), 125.

²⁵ M. L. CHAUMONT, *L'Arménie entre Rome et l'Iran I*, ANRW II, 9.1, Berlin/New York 1976, 174.

²⁶ The evidence is summarised in ROSTOVITZEFF, *op. cit.* (note 1), 48 ff.

²⁷ BALDUS disagreed and thought Dura was indeed bypassed in AD 253. *op. cit.* (note 5), 264.

²⁸ *op. cit.* (note 1), 53 f., 57.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 44; SPRENGLING, *op. cit.* (note 5) 4, 88 f.

³⁰ *op. cit.* (note 1), 54. Roman legionaries were in Dura in AD 254; C. B. WELLES, R. O. FINK, and J. F. GILLIAM, *Dura Final Report V*, part 1; *The Parchments and Papyri*, New Haven 1959, 166 ff., P. Dura 32.

ROSTOVITZEFF therefore *looked for evidence from Dura which might support his hypothesis*. The evidence he put forward included a Sassanian-style wall painting from one of the private houses, and a mural from the Temple of Azzanathkona which he believed depicted the Palmyrene ruler Odenathus after the latter had supposedly reoccupied Dura for Rome and forced Shapur to withdraw from Syria.³¹ The main plank in the argument, however, consisted of a group of no less than six coin hoards (out of the twenty-two found at Dura) which seemed to offer support both for the occurrence of the Persian occupation, and its dating to AD 253.³²

There is no doubt that the first of the frescoes, depicting mounted warriors in combat, is Sassanian in style,³³ and it bears inscriptions apparently in Pehlevi. However, the readings of these fragmentary labels are disputed. «Professor Torrey's reading makes Ardashir a combatant; Professor Pagliaro reads in the fresco a combat of Valerian and Shapur; Professor Benveniste interprets the inscription from the uppermost row of black and white figures as Bahram. In view of the variant readings any attempt at precise identification of the battle from this evidence becomes extremely hazardous.»³⁴

Before his 1943 paper on KZ ROSTOVITZEFF assumed that the fresco depicted the battle of Edessa, and was painted by a soldier of a Persian force occupying Dura just after the final siege, which at that time he was dating to 260.³⁵ But in 1943 he changed his mind and suggested instead that the battle depicted was Barballissus (which was now known from KZ, just published), and that the fresco was painted in 253.³⁶ Clearly, ROSTOVITZEFF was guessing. Parsik and Pehlevi *dipinti* on the wall-paintings of the synagogue³⁷ have been taken as evidence for the 253 occupation, especially as they seem to include official titles.³⁸ They are certainly pre-siege as they were buried under the emergency rampart. However, neither these nor the Sassanian mural need imply a Persian occupation. The inclusion of Persian government titles in the *dipinti* is disputed and in any case, many Durenes had Iranian names³⁹ and it is demonstrable that the Pehlevi script was in use in Dura during the

³¹ ROSTOVITZEFF, op. cit. (note 1), 59.

³² A. R. BELLINGER, *The Numismatic Evidence from Dura*, Berytus 8, 1943, 64 f.

³³ A. McN. G. LITTLE, *The Sassanian Fresco*, in: *Dura; Report on the Fourth Season*, New Haven 1933, 182 ff.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 195. The most recent consideration of the mural, B. GOLDMAN and A. M. G. LITTLE, *The Beginning of Sassanian painting and Dura – Europos*, *Iranica Antiqua* 15, 1980, 283 ff., adds little to the question of the dating of the mural or the identity of the combatants.

³⁵ ROSTOVITZEFF, op. cit. (note 2), 30.

³⁶ ROSTOVITZEFF, op. cit. (note 1), 57.

³⁷ B. GEIGER, *The Middle Iranian Texts, Dura Final Report VIII*, part 1, *The Synagogue*, New Haven 1956, 283 ff.

³⁸ ALTHEIM and STIEHL, op. cit. (note 8), 17.

³⁹ C. B. WELLES, *The Population of Roman Dura*, in: *Studies in Roman Economic and Social History in Honor of Allan Chester Johnson*, Princeton 1951, 251 ff.

Roman occupation. At least two inscriptions are known from the Temple of Zeus Megistos, one of them dated to AD 211.⁴⁰ This suggests a Partho-Sassanian element in the city, hardly suprising in a town on a major route of trade and communication. In the light of this, a more prosaic explanation for the mural may be offered. The battle depicted is not identified, nor is it identifiable. It is not even certain that it is a battle between Romans and Persians. It may be that the painting was executed by or for a Persian resident of the city, perhaps a trader, who simply liked wall paintings in the style then in vogue in Iran. As for the synagogue *dipinti*, their readings are disputed, their significance obscure.⁴¹ They could represent a Persian occupation, or the visits of diplomats. They are too terse and uninformative for firm conclusions to be drawn.

ROSTOVITZEFF's second piece of evidence, a wall painting from the Temple of Azzanathkona,⁴² depicts a religious ceremony. On the left is a mounted figure, in Palmyrene costume. It is partially obliterated. According to ROSTOVITZEFF's model for events in AD 253 Shapur was forced to withdraw from Syria because Odenathus of Palmyra was threatening his lines of communication. It was suggested that Odenathus's operations included the reoccupation of Dura, and that this painting shows Odenathus attending a thanksgiving sacrifice on a visit to the liberated city.⁴³ But the mural is undated and, as HOPKINS observes, «we have no graffito here to make identification [of the mounted figure] possible».⁴⁴ Odenathus was an ally of Rome, and the garrison of Dura included a cohort of Palmyrenes.⁴⁵ It would not be particularly surprising to find depictions of such an important local ally at Dura, and it is only a guess that the mounted figure is Odenathus at all. Even if it is, there is no proof that it commemorates his success over Shapur and alleged service to the city. This painting, like the Sassanian mural, provides no remotely credible support for ROSTOVITZEFF's thesis.

The most substantial piece of evidence for the earlier occupation, and that on which the date of 253 relies, is the group of coin hoards detailed by BELLINGER.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ J. HARMATTA, *Die Parthischen Ostraka aus Dura Europos*, *A Ant Hung* 5, 1958, 149.

⁴¹ A. PAGLIARO, *Le Iscrizione Pahlaviche della Sinagoga di Dura-Europo*, *Atti R. Acc. It., Sc. mor. stor.*, series 7,2, 1941-2, 578-616; GEIGER, *op. cit.* (note 37); F. ALTHEIM and R. STIEHL, *Das Erste Auftreten der Hunnen. Das Alter der Jesaja-Rolle. Neue Urkunden aus Dura Europos*, Baden-Baden 1953, and *op. cit.* (note 8). Further work on the *dipinti* currently in progress would seem to generally support GEIGER's readings (F. GRENET, *pers. comm.*), but this work is not yet available for study.

⁴² ROSTOVITZEFF, *op. cit.* (note 1), 58; C. HOPKINS, *The Temple of Azzanathkona*, in: *Dura, Report on the Fifth Season*, New Haven 1934, 152 ff.

⁴³ ROSTOVITZEFF, *op. cit.* (note 1), 59.

⁴⁴ HOPKINS, *op. cit.* (note 42), 155.

⁴⁵ *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*, part of whose regimental records were recovered during the excavations; WELLES et al., *op. cit.* (note 30), 24-45, 191-404.

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.* (note 32), 64 f., and also *Dura Europos Final Report VI; The Coins*, New Haven 1949, 209; most recently KETTENHOFEN, *op. cit.* (note 7), 50, 78.

These all appear to end in 253, and supposedly point to a major disruption in the life of the city in that year. The hoards concerned are numbers II, VI, VII, XII, XVIII, and XX.⁴⁷ Hoards VI, XVIII and XX are composed solely of tetradrachms, and end with coins of Gallus (AD 251–3). Hoard II is almost entirely tetradrachms (96 coins), again ending with Gallus, but includes a handful of earlier radiates (four of Gordian III and one of Philip). That these four groups all end with coins of Gallus is at first sight highly suggestive of a major dislocation around AD 253. But, as BELLINGER himself admitted, «since no tetradrachms were struck after Gallus, it is of course possible that all these groups were buried in the time of Valerian», i.e. the end of 253 *or later*.⁴⁸ It is possible to go further than this. Radiates of the reigns of Gallus and his predecessors were found at Dura in substantial numbers,⁴⁹ and were present in other hoards.⁵⁰ Clearly, the individuals who assembled hoards VI, XVIII, and XX were deliberately excluding radiates, and selecting tetradrachms only. The reason is not relevant here. What is important is that a hoard of tetradrachms assembled in, say, AD 254–6 when those coins were presumably still plentiful in circulation will end with coins of AD 253. These three hoards of tetradrachms, and we may also include hoard II which is closely similar, just demonstrate that some people preferred to hoard tetradrachms rather than radiates in *or after* AD 253. Consequently, it is quite likely that these groups were deposited as a result of the final siege of the city. It is not necessary to invoke another conquest of Dura in 253.

Hoard XII was entirely of bronze coins, and included «one Antiochene piece of Gallus and none of Valerian».⁵¹ The implication is that as the hoard ends in 253, it may provide support for ROSTOVITZEFF's theory. Let us take the total numbers of bronze coins for the reigns of Philip, Trajan Decius, Gallus/Volusian and Valerian/Gallienus found at Dura. This will provide a rough guide to the proportions of coins of the various reigns in the Durene coin-pool at the time of the siege. We may then see how significant the absence of coins of Valerian from hoard XII really is. The figures are as follows;

<i>Bronze coins</i>	<i>Dura total</i>	<i>Hoard XII</i>
Philip	638	58
Trajan Decius	35	2
Gallus/Volusian	10	1
Valerian/Gallienus	3	0

⁴⁷ BELLINGER op. cit. (note 46) for the definitive coin lists and references to earlier publications.

⁴⁸ Op. cit. (note 32), 64.

⁴⁹ Gordian III, 328 coins; Philip, 20; Trajan Decius, 7; Gallus and Volusian, 118. Figures from BELLINGER, op. cit. (note 46).

⁵⁰ Hoards I, V, VII, X, XVII.

⁵¹ BELLINGER, op. cit. (note 32), 64.

It is at once apparent that hoard XII closely reflects the proportions seen in the overall coin assemblage from Dura. The latter predicts that in a random selection of bronze coins taken at the time of the siege, for every sixty coins of Philip we only expect about three of Decius and one of Gallus. The hoard XII figures are very close to this; the ratio is 58:2:1. It is also abundantly clear that we are unlikely to find any bronzes of Valerian in a sample the size of hoard XII. There are only three from the entire site. Hoard XII, then, could easily have been assembled at the time of the siege rather than in 253. The table above shows that the most recent issues of bronze coinage were not available in large numbers in the Durene coin pool. A number of other bronze hoards ending with coins of Gallus or earlier emperors may also belong to the time of the siege because, like hoard XII, they are too small for the rare late issues to be represented in them.⁵²

The last hoard cited by BELLINGER, VII, was probably assembled in the reign of Philip, for it includes large numbers of tetradrachms of that emperor, but none of his successor Trajan Decius, whose own issues are the more plentiful at Dura (524 coins of Philip and 718 of Decius). The single radiate of Gallus in the hoard proves that it was not deposited before 251, but hardly proves that it was deposited in 253 rather than 254–6.

The support for ROSTOVITZEFF's theory supposedly given by the hoard evidence is spurious. The end-date of 253 can be shown to be misleading for all six hoards quoted.

It may be concluded that Dura has produced no real evidence to show that the Persians occupied the city before the final siege, in 253 or any other year.

Unfortunately, SPRENGLING unquestioningly accepted the 'evidence' for the 253 occupation and used it to 'prove' that Shapur's main invasion of Syria during his second war with Rome was in that year; «... we ... know from its coin hoards and other data that [Dura] was very probably evacuated by the Romans and temporarily taken over by the Persians in 253; ... This gives us an exact date for Sapor's passage, not 251/2 ... nor 252/3, as Rostovtzeff says ... but definitely 253.»⁵³

His conviction was reinforced by a discovery he made in the list of cities taken in the first invasion of Syria recorded in KZ. Besides the unequivocal reference to Dura in the 'appendix' to the list which is thought to represent a separate, later campaign, the Pehlevi text (but not the Greek) records the capture of the «fortress of *Arūpan*» (or possibly *Akūpan*). SPRENGLING took this to be an Iranised form of *Europos*, i.e. Dura. This would then be an historical reference to the alleged occupation of Dura during the main invasion of 253.⁵⁴ This suggestion that Dura appears twice in KZ and that therefore it was taken twice has been seriously chal-

⁵² Hoards XIV, XV, XVI, XX and perhaps VIII/IX.

⁵³ SPRENGLING, op. cit. (note 5), referring to ROSTOVITZEFF, op. cit. (note 1), and BELLINGER op. cit. (note 32).

⁵⁴ SPRENGLING, op. cit. (note 5), 88 f.

lenged by BALDUS. Not the least objection to the idea is that in KZ Dura is called a city but *Arūpan* is a fortress. BALDUS thinks they are two separate places.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding this objection, the reference to *Arūpan* is the closest we can currently get to any reasonably credible evidence for Dura falling in 253 as well as later. The argument based on archaeological evidence collapses as soon as it is scrutinised.

The second half of this paper is concerned with the evidence for the date of the final siege itself. It breaks down into numismatic, epigraphic and papyrological material.

The epigraphy provides ostensibly the latest date for Dura. An inscribed jar from Tower 19 bears a date in the Seleucid era which ROSTOVITZEFF wanted to read as a year equating to AD 256.⁵⁶ But ROSTOVITZEFF himself admitted that the reading is doubtful.⁵⁷ In fact, to read it as 256 it had to be assumed that the characters were written in the wrong order.⁵⁸

The *dipinti* on the synagogue paintings referred to above⁵⁹ include dates in what is thought to be a Sassanian era, years 14 and 15. It was suggested that these were regnal years of Shapur.⁶⁰ ROSTOVITZEFF used this interpretation to fix them firmly in AD 255.⁶¹ As the synagogue was only preserved because it was buried in the embankment thrown up behind the city walls before or during the siege, we seem to have a good terminus post quem for these emergency defensive measures and the Persian assault. But the relationship of Shapur's regnal years and our own era is uncertain. The date of Shapur's accession is disputed.⁶² FRYE has suggested late 239 or 241 for Shapur's first year, inclining towards the latter date.⁶³ More recent research has thrown up other dates. The regnal years may have been counted either from the start of Shapur's coregency with Ardashir (now put in April 240), or from the beginning of his sole rule, probably 243.⁶⁴ BICKERMANN admits that «we are unable to say whether the coronation happened in 240, 242, or 243».⁶⁵ Until Shapur's dating is fixed, and until the readings of the *dipinti* are sorted out, the evidence of these Parsik texts cannot be relied upon for a terminus post quem.

The papyrological evidence is more straightforward. The latest document with

⁵⁵ Op. cit. (note 5), 264.

⁵⁶ Op. cit. (note 1), 50; M. CROSBY, *Painted Inscriptions on Sherds, Dura, Report on the Sixth Season, New Haven 1936*, 250 ff.

⁵⁷ ROSTOVITZEFF, op. cit. (note 1), 50, fn. 64.

⁵⁸ CROSBY, op. cit. (note 56), 252.

⁵⁹ GEIGER, op. cit. (note 37). See above.

⁶⁰ PAGLIARO, op. cit. (note 41); accepted by GEIGER, op. cit. (note 37), 286.

⁶¹ Op. cit. (note 1) 49–50.

⁶² C. B. WELLES, *The Chronology of Dura Europos*, in *Symbolae R. Taubenschlag III*, *Eos* 48, 1957, 474 and fn. 26.

⁶³ FRYE, op. cit. (note 18), 236.

⁶⁴ FRYE, op. cit. (note 7), 119.

⁶⁵ E. BICKERMANN, *Time Reckoning*, *Cambridge History of Iran*, 3, Cambridge 1983, 778 f.

an undisputed date is a divorce document of a legionary, and was issued in the second consulship of Valerian, the first of Gallienus. This gives an unequivocal terminus post quem of AD 254.⁶⁶

The «traditional» date of AD 256 for the siege has been derived mainly from the numismatic evidence. The latest deposits of coins at Dura were the group found with the bodies of Roman soldiers in the mine under Tower 19,⁶⁷ which evidently were deposited during the siege itself, and the so-called «hoard» XVII. The latter comes from what seems to have been a grave cut into the back of the rampart and is thought to be the contents of the purse of a soldier killed during the siege.⁶⁸ Two other hoards are of interest, nos. I and X, both of which had been concealed in houses subsequently covered by the emergency embankment behind the walls.⁶⁹ These four groups contain the latest coins from Dura, radiates of Valerian and Gallienus. In all the publications, the Syrian radiates of these emperors were classified according to ALFÖLDI's scheme,⁷⁰ which is set out most conveniently by BELLINGER.⁷¹ All four groups include coins of ALFÖLDI's Antioch issue 1. As to the date of the issue, «supposing that the emission began late in 253 [i. e. on the accession of Valerian], there would seem to be a sufficient number of types to provide for the years 254 and 255 . . . we may conclude that the coins in Hoards I and X were struck through a large part of 255».⁷² However, only «hoard» XVII (the burial in the rampart) has coins of ALFÖLDI's Antioch issue 2, which «. . . must begin in 256, and ALFÖLDI would like to put it early in that year. To this I have no objection, but I do not think it can be pushed back to 255».⁷³ Hence the dating of the siege to 256. «Hoard» XVII and the mine group are of course stratigraphically later than Hoards I and X under the rampart. They are also distinguished from the latter pair because they contain radiates of Valerian from the mint of Rome, and from the second Syrian mint. The whereabouts of the latter is not known. ALFÖLDI placed it at Samosata,⁷⁴ BELLINGER at Emesa,⁷⁵ and most recently CARSON has proposed Cyzicus,⁷⁶ but this, too, is now thought to be incorrect.⁷⁷

CARSON's review of Valerian's Syrian radiate issues has resulted in a new classifi-

⁶⁶ WELLES et al., op. cit. (note 30), 166 ff., P. Dura 32.

⁶⁷ Cf. especially the two papers by BELLINGER (notes 32 and 46).

⁶⁸ BELLINGER, op. cit. (note 32), 71; and also op. cit. (note 46), 181.

⁶⁹ BELLINGER, op. cit. (note 32), 70, and op. cit. (note 46), 165 f., 175 ff.

⁷⁰ A. ALFÖLDI, *Die Hauptereignisse der Jahre 253–61 n. Chr. im Orient im Spiegel der Münzprägung*, Berytus 5, 1937, 41 ff.

⁷¹ Op. cit. (note 32), 69.

⁷² Ibid., 70.

⁷³ Ibid., 71.

⁷⁴ Op. cit. (note 70), 64.

⁷⁵ BELLINGER, op. cit. (note 32), 67.

⁷⁶ R. A. G. CARSON, *The Hamâ Hoard and the Eastern Mints of Valerian and Gallienus*, Berytus 17, 1967, 133 f.

⁷⁷ R. BLAND of the British Museum, pers. comm.

cation. He divides ALFÖLDI's Antioch issue 1 into three, mainly on the basis of abbreviations in the imperial titles and the appearance of issues for other members of the imperial family. If the coins from the four Dura groups are retabulated according to CARSON's revised scheme (table 1), it is immediately obvious that «hoard» XVII and the mine group are distinguished from hoards I and X because the former, stratigraphically later groups contain coins of CARSON's Antioch issue 3, and two of issue 4 (= ALFÖLDI's issue 2). This result at least partially vindicates CARSON's reclassification from independent evidence, i.e. the relative stratigraphy of the Dura groups. It demonstrates the distinction between his Antioch issues 1/2 and issue 3, and also proves sequence; issues 3 and 4 really were later than issues 1 and 2, because they were not in circulation when hoards I and X were buried before the embankment was raised, but had arrived before the city was finally cut off. Here is useful corroboration of the current understanding of the Antiochene issues.

A reclassification of the coinage requires a new chronology. Only CARSON's issue 2 is directly datable, as one of the reverse types may be fixed by the imperial titles to AD 254.⁷⁸ Two unstratified examples of this dated type were found at Dura. All four of the groups under discussion have examples of other types from the same issue. They show that issues 3 and 4 arrived later than issue 2, and that the time lag was long enough to allow the raising of the earth bank. But as issues 3 and 4 include no types datable by imperial titles, we do not know how long this gap was. We can only say that, from the sequence, issues 3 and 4 are of AD 254 or later. Coins of issue 5 are dated by titles to AD 257,⁷⁹ but are absent from Dura. CARSON himself would put issue 3 in AD 255 and issue 4 in 256/7, but these are really only estimates and it is possible that issues 3 and 4 came out within months of issue 2 in AD 254, and were followed by a lull in production until 257.⁸⁰ On the other hand, Mr. R. BLAND of the British Museum points out that many of the reverse types are common to both issues 4 and 5, and are very similar in style. He therefore believes that issue 4 dates to 256 or early 257.⁸¹ However, he has found no die links, and similarity of style is not sufficient reason for putting issue 4 in 256 rather than, say, 255.

The radiates of the Roman and second eastern mint, also found only in the two later groups, are of no additional help in precise dating. The first issue of the latter mint includes no types with title dates.⁸² Similarly, the date of 255–6 assigned to two of the Roman radiates is only an educated guess.⁸³

To summarise the numismatic evidence, the latest securely dated coins from Du-

⁷⁸ CARSON, *op. cit.* (note 76), 132.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸⁰ A possibility suggested by Dr. R. REECE, *pers. comm.*

⁸¹ *Pers. comm.*

⁸² CARSON estimates AD 255, *op. cit.* (note 76), 133.

⁸³ Roman Imperial Coinage V, i, p. 81, no. 148.

ra are Antiochene radiates of AD 254, but two later, though floating issues are represented. None of the securely dated fifth Antioch issue, of AD 257, were found at Dura. This evidence suggests that the cessation of the coin supply to Dura, which was presumably caused by the investment of the city by the Persians, just might have been as early as 254, but is unlikely to have been as late as 257. The most probable years are 255 or 256. The only certain conclusion to be drawn is that while the archaeological evidence gives an exceptionally narrow bracket for the date of the siege, that bracket, or perhaps rather probability curve extends over more than one year.

The excavated evidence for the date of the siege of Dura does not permit the degree of precision and confidence assumed in the current literature. A date of 255 is as acceptable as the conventional date of 256, while early 257 or even late 254 cannot be absolutely ruled out. Consequently, Dura cannot be used by historians as the exact chronological bench-mark it has appeared to be in the past.

A large question mark hangs over what happened to Dura in AD 253, which now looks fairly secure as the date of Shapur's first invasion of Syria. Was it simply bypassed by the Persian *Blitzkrieg* as BALDUS believes? Or was SPRENGLING correct in equating *Arūpan* with Dura, which therefore was occupied by the victorious Persians for a few months? The archaeological evidence adduced by ROSTOVITZ for such an occupation does not survive scrutiny, yet such a transitory presence need leave no archaeological trace. Only fresh evidence will shed further light.

Ironically, the discoveries from Dura have, over the last forty years, probably hindered the historian's task of elucidating the chronology of the Roman East in the 250s. This was because historians accepted archaeological dates from Dura with a lack of criticism which was never allowed for the other sources of evidence. It is hoped that the present paper, by trying to treat the archaeological evidence with the same rigour that has been applied to the historical material, has highlighted the limitations of the former so that it will not be misunderstood in the future.

Table 1

	Hoard I		Hoard X		«Hoard» XVII		Mine	
	Val.	Gall.	Val.	Gall.	Val.	Gall.	Val.	Gall.
<i>Antioch</i>								
Issue I	IMP C P LIC VALERIANVS PF AVG							
AEQVITAS AVGG	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
AETERNITATI AVGG	4	—	2	—	—	—	1	—
LAETITIA AVGG	6	—	4	—	—	—	1	—
ROMAE AETERNAE	9	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
SALVS AVGG	7	—	17	—	—	—	—	—
VENVS VICTRIX	3	—	6	—	—	—	—	—
VIRTVS AVGG	19	—	2	—	1	—	1	—
Issue II	IMP C P LIC VALERIANVS AVG							
	IMP C P LIC GALLIENVS AVG							
AEQVITAS AVGG	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
AETERNITATI AVGG	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
LAETITIA AVGG	9	16	24	4	—	3	1	—
ROMAE AETERNAE	2	3	17	4	—	—	2	—
VENVS VICTRIX	—	5	—	7	—	—	2	—
VICTORIA AVGG (stg. r.)	4	5	1	7	—	—	4	—
VICTORIA AVGG (adv. l.)	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
VIRTVS AVGG	3	1	2	—	—	—	—	—
Issue III	IMP C P LIC VALERIANVS AVG							
	IMP C P LIC GALLIENVS AVG							
DIANA LUCIFERA	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
FELICITAS SAECULI	—	—	—	—	2	—	1	—
FORTVNA REDVX	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
PACATORI ORBIS	—	—	—	—	—	1	4	—
PIETATI AVGG	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
VICTORIAE AVGG	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—

	Hoard I		Hoard X		«Hoard XVII»		Mine	
	Val.	Gall.	Val.	Gall.	Val.	Gall.	Val.	Gall.
Issue IV	IMP VALERIANVS PF AVG							
APOLINI CONSERVA	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
VICTORIA AVGG (sig l., shield)	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
<i>Second eastern mint</i>								
Issue I	IMP C P LIC VALERIANVS AVG							
PIETAS AVGG	-	-	-	-	8	-	2	-
RESTITVT ORIENTIS	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
VIRTVS AVGG	-	-	-	-	11	-	1	-
VOTA ORBIS	-	-	-	-	4	-	8	-
<i>Rome</i>								
	IMP C P LIC VALERIANVS AVG							
APOLINI PROPVG	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
PROVIDENTIA AVGG	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
	IMP C P LIC GALLIENVS AVG							
LIBERALITAS AVGG	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-