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The capture Ḥaṭrā in light of military and political activities of Ardašīr I¹

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“Hastening on by forced marched we approached Hatra, an ancient city lying in the middle of the desert and long ago abandoned. The warlike emperors Trajan and Severus tried at various times to destroy it, but almost perished with their armies” [Amm. Marc. XXV 8.5-6]

Introduction

The Sasanian conquest Ḥaṭrā,² is described in the medieval Arabic and Persian traditions. The authors, by combining truth with fiction, had presented distant past of the city and its final perish. Below considerations aim in analysis of the actions Ardašīr I (224-242) towards Ḥaṭrā in context of political and military situation of the founder of the Sasanian dynasty.

Ḥaṭrā – military importance of the city

Ḥaṭrā was a city in Upper Mesopotamia, which gained strategic importance in Irano-Roman border zone in 2nd century AD.³ In the beginning of the century the city was described in written sources as small centre of local importance even though it was captured during Trajan’s (98-117) Parthian campaign in 116-117.⁴ “This city is neither large nor prosperous, and the surrounding country is mostly desert and has neither water (save a small amount and that poor in quality) nor timber nor fodder” [Cass. Dio 68.31.1]. It seems that the key moment for development of Ḥaṭrā was capturing of Nisibis by the Roman armies Lucius Verus (161-169) in campaign of 161-163,⁵ because since then Ḥaṭrā became an important point in Parthian defense system as a border district.⁶ The most measurable effect of increasing role of the local rulers was their acceptance of the title *mlk’* (*malkā* - king) in place of earlier *mrj’* (*māryā* - lord).⁷ This fact finds its evidence in Aramaic inscriptions: *Naṣrū māryī Walayaš* [H. 33]; *Sanaṭrūq malkā* [H. 82].⁸ It seems possible that the hatrean dynasty could use the weakened position of the Arsacids in order to gain independence from Iran,⁹ which is not obvious. The associations of the local aristocracy with the Parthian royal family¹⁰ allow rather accepting the idea of lifting the rank of the local dynasts by Walagaš (Balāš) IV (147/8-190/191).¹¹

During two attempts of capturing the city by Septimius Severus (193-211) in 193 and 197,¹² provoked by the help of the Hatrene king Barsēmīas¹³ granted to Septimius’s rival Pescennius Niger,¹⁴ Herodian

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² Hatra was blown up and bulldozed by IS in early March 2015; DITTMANN, ALMOHAMAD (2015) 37.

³ ISAAC (1990) 154.

⁴ Cass. Dio 68.29.4-32.1; SOMMER (2003) 389-390; SOMMER (2005) 371, 373-374; HARTMANN (2015) 333-334.

⁵ Lucian, *Quomodo historia conscribenda sit*, 15.

⁶ WIESEHÖFER (1982) 439; SOMMER (2013) 43.

⁷ DRIJVERS (1977) 820; SOMMER (2003) 386-390; contra identification of Ma’nū by Sommer, HARTMANN (2015) 334-348.

⁸ Dating of the inscription 176/177: BEYER (1998) 49.

⁹ WIESEHÖFER (1982) 440.

¹⁰ The names Vorōd and Valagaš suggest marital connections with the family and the house of Arsacids; POTTER (1987) 154.

¹¹ SOMMER (2013) 43.

¹² Cass. Dio 76.9.5-10.1, 11.1.-12.5; Herodian 3.1.2-3, 5.1, 9.1-9; CAMPBELL (1986) 51-58.

¹³ Probably the king ‘*bdsmy*’ ‘*Abdsēmyā*’ of the inscriptions: DRIJVERS (1977) 823.

described Ḥaṭrā already as a powerfully fortified stronghold. “This city, located on top of a lofty mountain, was surrounded by a high, strong wall manned by many bowmen” [Herodian 3.9.4].

„Arabic policy” of Ardašīr I

From point of view of Ardašīr the Arab world was divide into three groups. The first group included the Arabs who already in the times of the Arsacid Dynasty were the allies of Iranian state, the second group consisted of the allies of *Imperium Romanum*, while the third group constituted the Arabs inhabiting Arab Peninsula.¹⁵

The first target of Ardašīr’s attack was al-Baḥrayn,¹⁶ most likely to gain control over control the western shores of the Gulf.¹⁷ In the course of the victorious campaign Ardašīr killed the local ruler Sanatruq.¹⁸ “Then he turned round and began to march, and he went to ‘Umān and Baḥrayn and Yamāma, and Sanatruq the king of Baḥrayn went against him. He made war on him and Ardašīr killed him, and he commanded that his city be destroyed” [Dīnawarī, p. 45].

The reflection of Ardašīr’s struggle with the Arabs can be heard in the story of “auspicious worm” (*kerm-e farroḡ*) forwarded in (among the others) *The Book of the Deeds of Ardašīr*: “At that time, a son (of the Kirm-Xwaday) who was at Erhestan, with a large number of forces from the Arabs and Omanis¹⁹ who were on the coast of the sea came and fought with Ardaxšīr.” [Kār-nāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān 6.15] and in the less legendary version at Ṭabarī. “Ruling in the coastlands along the Persian Gulf was a king called 'b.t.n.b.w.d (Haftānbūkhṭ ?), who was accorded divine attributes and worship. Ardashīr marched against him, killed him by cutting him in half with his sword...”[Ṭabarī 817].

In order to analyze the policies of the first Sasanian *Šāhanšāh* towards the Arabs, his building activity, demonstrated by settling of the new cities, seems more important than the records of the military actions. The majority of Oriental sources mention intensive actions taken by Ardašīr on the banks of the Persian Gulf.²⁰ One of the ports on the northern side of the Persian Gulf was al- Khaṭṭ.²¹ “he built eight cities:... in al Baḥrayn, Fasā (?) Ardashīr” [Ṭabarī 820]; “the city of Fūrān Ardašīr, and these were in Baḥrayn” [Dīnawarī, p. 47]. *The Book of the Deeds of Ardašīr* also describes setting of the port by him: “he saw the ocean before his eyes, he offered thanksgiving to God, called that place the city of Bokht Ardashir” [Kār-nāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān 4.8]. The location of the city Rēv Ardašīr is still disputed however there is possibility that it was a city on the coast of Fārs.²²

It seems that in long-perspective Ardašīr planned capturing of entire Arabia,²³ and subsequently of entire maritime in Persian Gulf.²⁴ Because intense trade in Persian Gulf was a starting point for a long-range maritime trade, it is possible to believe that king’s intention was to return the monopoly in Far East trade to Iran,²⁵ the monopoly which was broken after capturing the Nabatean kingdom by Rome.²⁶ Information

¹⁴ “Barsemius, king of the Hatrenians, sent a contingent of native archers to aid Niger” [Herodian 3.1.3].

¹⁵ WINTER (1988) 73, n. 1.

¹⁶ The eastern shores of the Arabian Peninsula; MIRI (2009) 9.

¹⁷ Before 210 - ALTHEIM, STIEHL (1965) 166; Before defeating of Ardavān (224) acc. *Kār-nāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān* and Dīnawarī; PIACENTINI (1985) 57-78.

¹⁸ Tabari 820; The appearance of the Parthian name Sanatruq/Sinatrices, so common among the Arsacids, may mean that this local ruler was an Arsacid vassal; BOSWORTH (1983) 603-604; WIESEHÖFER (1986) 373.

¹⁹ According to. DARYAEE (2016) 42: Mazunshahr “Oman,” refers to the Persian Gulf, not Mazandaran according to Darab Dastur Peshotan Sanjana: “At this juncture, one of the sons, who was in Arvasthan, came by the passage of a sea, with a, large army composed of soldiers from Arabia and Mazenderan, and stood against Ardashir in battle.” The Makranians (*myč(w)nyg 'n*) SHAPUR SHAHBAZI (2012) 534-536.

²⁰ KERVRAN (1994) 325-350; The port of Guzeran or Kujaran-Ardeshir, located near Bandar-ī Lengeh which may date to the third century C.E.; DE CARDI (1972) 306.

²¹ BOSWORTH (1983) 593-594; Pērōz Ardašīr - POTTS (1990) 233.

²² Ṭabarī 820; WHITEHOSE, WILLIAMSON (1973) 40-41.

²³ WINTER (1988) 75.

²⁴ DARYAEE (2016) 41.

²⁵ WILLIAMS (1972) 97-109.

²⁶ TAYLOR (2001).

about the fight with the coalition of Haftwād suggests that Ardašīr intended to subdue the water route not only for economic but also for military reasons.²⁷

The Arab policies of Ardašīr was not only limited to Southern Arabia. The King turned his attention to Hira.²⁸ This city was the important center with regard to the protection of the Iranian Western frontier.²⁹ According to Ṭabarī the important tribal confederation Tanukh, inhabiting the vicinities of Hira³⁰ intended to resist Ardašīr. “When Ardashīr conquered Iraq and seized power there, a large part of the Tanukh (group of tribes) disliked the prospect of remaining in his kingdom and becoming his subjects.” [Ṭabarī 821]. Sasanian ruler turned directly to the clan of the Našrids,³¹ which already during the rule of the Parthian dynasty had played the meaningful role in the city.³² During Ardašīr’s reign the leading man was ‘Amr b. ‘Adi.³³ “Amr b. ‘Adī’s tenure of power was ... twenty-three years within the time of the Persian kings, comprising fourteen years and ten months of Ardashīr son of Babak’s reign and eight years and two months in his son Sābūr’s reign.” [Ṭabarī 822]. Ṭabarī’s testimony is not very clear but it is possible to assume that ‘Amr b. ‘Adi subdued the part of Arab tribes with assistance of the first Sasanids. “Amr b. ‘Adī b. Našr b. Rabī’ah, the governor for Sābūr..., over the frontier region of [the land of] the Arabs of Rabī’ah, Mudar, and the rest of the tribes in the deserts of Iraq, Hijāz, and Jazīrah.” [Ṭabarī 833]. This fact is confirmed also by the position of his successor, Emro’-al-Qays.³⁴ It can be assumed that Ardašīr initiated quite successfully unification of the Arab tribes and what is more important generated tight relations between the Sasanians and Našrids. The main intention of the policy of Ardašīr in this region was gaining control over border zone of Arabic Desert.

First attempt of capturing of Ḥaṭrā

Cassius Dio states that after defeating Ardavān IV (216-224),³⁵ Ardašīr attempted to capture Ḥaṭrā. “After killing Artabanus, Artaxerxes) made a campaign against Hatra which he endeavoured to take as a base for attacking the Romans. He did make a breach in the wall but he lost a number of soldiers through an ambush; he transferred his position to Media” [Cass. Dio 80.3.2]. When looking only into chronology of Dio’s testimony than the expedition would have to be dated to 226/7 a year before invasion of Armenia 227/8.³⁶ According to Ṭabarī directly after the battle in the plain of Hormzdaḡān Ardašīr aimed in attacking Ādurbādaḡān and Armenia. “Then he went from there to Hamadhān and conquered it by force of arms, as also the mountain region (al-Jabal), Azerbaijan, Armenia, and [the region of] al-Mawšil.” [Ṭabarī 819]. Confirmation of both texts allows to believe that after failed attempt of capturing the city, the ruler withdrew to Ādurbādaḡān which remained in his hands already before the attack on Ḥaṭrā.³⁷ In that case the first attempt to capture the city should be dated for about 229.³⁸

Because of the strong bonds of the Arab aristocracy with the Arsacid royal house, taking over the power in Iran by Ardašīr changed the situation for the city.³⁹ It must be pointed out here that not only from Ḥaṭrā’s perspective, Parthian rule had not entirely been broken.⁴⁰ The activity of Walagaš (VI),⁴¹ the resistance of the Arab tribes and first of all remaining the power of the Arsacids in Armenia⁴² were very real dangers for

²⁷ WINTER (1988) 77.

²⁸ BOSWORTH (2003) 322-323; SHAHĪD (1986) 462-463.

²⁹ NYBERG (1959) 319-326; BOSWORTH (1983) 597-604.

³⁰ “The first element was that of the Tanukh, who dwelled in shelters and tents of hair and skins on the western banks of the Euphrates, between al-Hirah and al-Anbar and beyond” [Ṭabarī 822].

³¹ FISHER (2011) 245-267; FISHER, WOOD (2016) 247-290.

³² “The complete extent of ‘Amr b. ‘Adi’s tenure of power was 118 years, of which ninety-five fell within the time of Ardawan and the “Party Kings”” [Ṭabarī 822]; ROTHSTEIN (1899).

³³ WOOD (2016) 789-790.

³⁴ Ṭabarī 833; WINTER (1988) 78.

³⁵ On 30 Mehr/28 April 224 C.E.

³⁶ CHAUMONT (1960) 32; WIESEHÖFER (1986) 372.

³⁷ WIDENGREN (1971) 757.

³⁸ DODGEON, LIEU (2002) 13.

³⁹ WIESEHÖFER (1982) 441.

⁴⁰ DIGNAS, WINTER (2007) 154.

⁴¹ The coins in Seleucia were struck until 227/8; MCDOWELL (1975) 200; SELWOOD (1971) 290.

⁴² Agathangelos 2.12; Moses Khorenats’i 2.71.

the new Persian dynasty. It seems that in case of Ḥaṭrā, possible strive of Ardašīr to limit the power of the vassal kings⁴³ was not a decisive factor. *Šāhānšāh*'s decision could also be inspired by the trade competition between Ḥaṭrā and Ḥira.⁴⁴

Capturing of Ḥaṭrā

During the reign of Sanaṭrūq II (AD 200-240/241), the last king of Ḥaṭrā, massive towers and walls were built.⁴⁵ At the same time the trade routes with Syria were being repaired which is evidenced by the founds of the Roman mile stones in the vicinity of the.⁴⁶ In 235/236 Ardašīr apparently gained control of fortresses in Roman Mesopotamia (Nisibis and Carrhae).⁴⁷ Again at the same time active diplomatic attempts of Ḥaṭrā can be observed. Three Latin dedications from Ḥaṭrā, the first of which is dated to the 5 June, 235⁴⁸ and the other two are by Quintus Petronius Quintianus a tribune of the Ninth Cohort of Moors (238),⁴⁹ show that Roman troops were stationed there.⁵⁰ But the regular presence of Roman troops at Hatra in years 235-238 is uncertain.⁵¹

Roman active policy towards Ḥaṭrā changed the power situation of the border zone. It should be considered if the actions of Severus Alexander (222-235) aimed only in securing of the control over the trade routes in the Near East. Sources agree that the sons of Ardavān found sanctuary in Armenia where they could prepare to further struggle with Sasanian usurper. "Here he suffered a reverse at the hands of the natives, some Medes and the children of Medes, and the children of Artabanus, and either fled (as some say) or (as others assert) retired to prepare a larger expedition." [Cass. Dio 80.3.3]. "Then when he marched against Armenia, he was defeated by the Armenians and Medes who were joined in an attack upon him by the sons of Artabanus." [Zonaras XII 15]. Armenia took up military actions against Ardašīr, motivated by the defense of the local Parthian royal lineage. "But at the start of the next year Khosrov king of Armenia began to raise forces and assemble an army. He gathered the armies of the Albanians and the Georgians, opened the gates of the Alans and the stronghold of the Chor; he brought through the army of the Huns in order to attack Persian territory and invade Asorestan as far as the gates of Ctesiphon... in order to seek vengeance from the blood of Artavan." [Agathangelos 1.19]. The position of Armenia towards Ardašīr was strengthened by the alliance with Rome confirmed by the actions taken by Severus Alexander in course of his Persian expedition. "One army he ordered to overrun the territory of the Medes and to reconnoitre the northern regions and pass through Armenia, which seemed to favour the Roman cause" [Herodian 6.5.1]. The connections of the hatrean aristocracy with the dynasty abolished by Ardašīr and the actions of Severus Alexander towards Parthian Armenia allow stating a thesis that the Emperor aimed in bringing back to Iranian throne of the Arsacids. Persian campaign of Severus Alexander ended up in defeat and withdrawal of the Roman armies in 233.⁵²

In 238/239 Ardašīr began another campaign in Mesopotamia,⁵³ in course of which, after two years of siege he finally captured Ḥaṭrā. "Have you not seen al-Ḥadr, whose people always enjoyed ease of life? But does anyone favored with ease of life enjoy it forever? Šāhabūr of the Hosts (al-Junūd) remained before it for two years, wielding his battle axes there." [Ṭabarī 828]. The city was taken as a result of betrayal of al-

⁴³ WINTER (1988) 71.

⁴⁴ WIESEHÖFER (1982) 446.

⁴⁵ HAUSER (2013) 122-126; FOIETTA (2016) 247.

⁴⁶ STEIN (1941) 299-316; FIEY (1952) 229.

⁴⁷ KETTENHOFEN (1982) 21-22; KETTENHOFEN (1995) 159-177.

⁴⁸ AE 1958, 238: "(This altar was) presented on the fifth day of June in the consulship of Severus and Quintianus"; OATES (1955) 39, No 79.

⁴⁹ AE 1958, 239: "To the Unconquered Sun God, Quintus Petronius Quintianus, military tribune of the First Parthian Legion, tribune of the Ninth Gordian Cohort of Moors, set up (this statue) which he had vowed to the cult of the place"; OATES (1955) 39, No 80; AE 1958, 240: "Consecrated to Hercules for the health of our Lord the Emperor, Petronius Quintianus, a native of Nicomedia (?), (set up this statue) to the patron deity of the cohort; OATES (1955) 40, No 81; about *Cohors IX Maurorum Gordiana*, see JUNTUNEN (2015) 419-423.

⁵⁰ MARICQ (1957) 288-296.

⁵¹ HAUSER (2013) 131-133.

⁵² On the war see: MAKSYMUK (2015) 29-31.

⁵³ SEG 7 (1934) 743b, lines 17-19: "On the thirtieth day of the month of Xandikus of the year 550 (20 April 239), the Persians descended upon us"; KETTENHOFEN (1982) 20.

Nadīrah, the daughter of the Hatrean king⁵⁴ and then demolished. “Sābūr then reduced the city to ruins” [Ṭabarī 829].

The foundation of datation of this event is a certain fragment in biography of Mani from *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis*. “When I was twenty[-four] years old, in the year in which Dariadaxir, the king of Persia, subjugated the city of Hatra, and in which Saporesh, his son assumed the mighty diadem in the month of Pharmuthi on the [eighth] day according to the moon”⁵⁵ [P. Colon. Inv. 4780]. Mani was born on the 8th day of month Nissam of year 527⁵⁶ of Seleucid (Babylonian) era.⁵⁷ This date reflects 14. 04. 216.⁵⁸ Based on this it is possible to assume that capturing of the city took place in year 551 of Seleucid (Babylonian) era which means between 14. 04. 240 and 31. 03. 241.

Conclusion

Ḥaṭrā was a city in Upper Mesopotamia which in course of the second century gained vague importance in Iranian-Roman border zone and resisted the attempts of capturing by the Roman armies. Taking the power in Iran by Ardašīr I changed the situation of Ḥaṭrā. New ruler’s drive to regain the monopoly with the Far East directed his military actions towards mutinous Arab cities. The assault of Ḥaṭrā (229) was not determined only by the economic factor. The connections of the Hatrean aristocracy with the dynasty abolished by Ardašīr, activity of Walagaš (VI), the resistance of the Arab tribes and first of all, Arsacids remaining at power in Armenia posed very real threat to new Persian dynasty. Although the regular presence of Roman troops at Hatra in years 235-238 is uncertain, however Ardašīr must have engaged large forces in besieging the city. Capturing Ḥaṭrā after two years siege and only in 240/241 clearly demonstrated that the shift of the dynasties in Iran did not happen instantly after defeating of Ardavān IV (216-224) on the plain of Hormzdagān 16 years earlier.

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⁵⁴ Ṭabarī 828-830.

⁵⁵ 17/18 April, 240.

⁵⁶ PUECH (1939) 596-601.

⁵⁷ Problem of datation based on the manichaean texts, see. RICHTER-BERNBURG (1993) 71-80; CHAUMONT (1979) 209-237.

⁵⁸ HENNING, TAQIZADEH (1957) 108-109; KLIMA (1962) 309, n. 52.

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Summary

The capture Ḥaṭrā in light of military and political activities of Ardašīr I

Ḥaṭrā was a city in Upper Mesopotamia which gained strategic importance in Irano-Roman border zone in 2nd century AD and managed to successfully resist the attempts of capturing by the Roman army. Power shift in Iran which resulted in taking over of Iranian throne by Ardašīr I (224-242) changed the situation of Ḥaṭrā. Below considerations are an attempt to analyze economic, political and first of all military factors which allowed capturing the city in 240/241 by the Sasanian army.

Keywords: Sasanians, Ardašīr, Arabs, Ḥaṭrā, Roman Empire, Persian Gulf, Wars