



ABGAR III. ADMINISTRATION

iii. Administration

The king of Edessa had certain prerogatives. He alone was entitled to wear a diadem with the tiara worn by noblemen, possibly also by the priests; he also carried a scepter. The local Syriac *Chronicle* (ed. Guidi, p. 3) describes him as residing in a “great and beautiful palace” (Syr. *ʿapadnā*; Parth. *ap(p)adān*, OPers. *appadāna*) “at the source of the springs” beside the pools of sacred fish (see below). After the flood of A.D. 201 it was rebuilt as a summer palace; a winter palace was then erected on the citadel mount nearby (where two columns still stand). After A.D. 88-89 the kings were buried in a great tomb tower reserved for them.

The regnal year of the king provided the official system of dating, side by side with that of Roman emperors. The king maintained personal control of the military force of the state and of taxation. Abgar the Great’s style of government was direct and paternalistic. He seems to have had his own confidants (Syr. *šarrīrē*), who included his secretary and keeper of the archives. He supervised personally the measures taken at the flood of 201; he forbade the building of booths near the river and ordered that artisans should not pass the night there in winter time.

The principal officer of the state after the king, the “second in the kingdom,” had the title of *pašgrībā* (Parth. *pasāgrīw*). From the Syriac inscription on a column we learn that Queen Šalmath, wife of Abgar (the Great?), was daughter of a *pašgrībā* (Segal, *Edessa*, pl. 29a and p. 19; his head possibly appears on a



coin). The nobleman who governed the marches east of Edessa occupied by the semi-nomad 'Arab was called, both in Greek and Syriac, "governor of the 'Arab" (*arabarchos*). The *nūhadrā* (Parth. *naxwadhār*, *noxadhār*) was probably of lower rank. In the time of Abgar the Great, the *nūhadrā* evidently controlled the city administration. Order was maintained in the city by the *gezīrāyē*, a term possibly of Iranian origin. City officials included surveyors and other experts. The king himself housed the workmen employed on the upkeep of the royal buildings. In the royal archives were preserved records of private transactions as well as of matters of state; they had a high reputation for accuracy.

By Roman historians the term phylarch is applied to members of the Abgar dynasty; the city was divided into districts allocated to phylae or clans, each administered by an archon. The king ruled through a council of elders. A description of Edessan chiefs as "those who sit with bended knees" may reflect the Parthian practice by which nobles squatted at court, but the Syriac text is not certain (G. Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai the Apostle*, London, 1876, p. 5; Syr. text, line 15). The nobles of Edessa—called "great men" or "free men"—lived in mansions in the vicinity of the palace. Artisans formed an important category of the population; there is evidence for slaves in the latest period of the kingdom.

Outside the city were villages and farms, dependent economically on the city-dwellers and paying taxes to the royal treasury. In the uncultivated area beyond, like the Tektek mountains east of Edessa, lived the 'Arab governed by the *arabarchos*. One of his functions was to protect them against the Beduins (Syr. *Ṭayyāyē*, after the Arab tribe *Ṭayy*).

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