



DĀRĀ (CITY)

DĀRĀ, the name of a Parthian city and of a Byzantine garrison town of the Sasanian period.

Parthian Dārā. This Parthian town, located in the small province Apavartikēnē in Arsacid Parthia and said to have been founded by Arsaces I (r. ca. 247-17 b.c.e.; Justin 41.5.2-4; cf. Isidore of Charax in Jacoby, *Fragmente*, no. 781), is representative of the problems faced by modern scholars in reconstructing the early history of the Parthian kingdom. The most detailed account of the geography and history of Dārā is found in Justin's epitome of the 1st century c.e. historian Pompeius Trogus (41.5.2-4). According to this version, the city was situated on a pleasant, fortified site *in monte Apaorteno* (in mss. also Zapaortenon), ringed by high cliffs, with an abundant water supply, nearby woods, and animals for the hunt; Justin compared this foundation, ideal for a king, with the cities of the Achaemenid [Cyrus](#), of [Alexander the Great](#), and of Romulus (founder of Rome; 41.5.5). The elder Pliny (*Historia Naturalis* 6.46), who wrote later than Pompeius in the 1st century c.e., echoed his words.

Although the general region in which Dārā was located is named differently in other geographical sources (cf. the contemporary historian Isidore of Charax, 1.13, who described the region of Apauartikēnē, placed between Nisa and Margiana, as containing the city Apauartikē; cf. Walser, pp. 150-51; Ptolemy, *Geographia* 6.5: Partautikēnē, Artakana), the name of the city of Dārā was reported only by Trogus and Pliny; indeed the former considered it one of



Arsaces' great accomplishments. Determining the exact importance of Dārā is complicated, however, by Isidore's report of the city of Asaak in the region of Astauene (1.11; cf. Walser, p. 149; "in Atrektal—in the vicinity of Quchan," a quite fertile region). Arsaces was supposed to have been crowned king at Asaak, and an eternal flame was maintained there in his honor. For Isidore Asaak was thus the most significant, and Dārā was not even mentioned, even though Trogus had considered it of central importance. Marie Louise Chaumont has noted that Isidore's failure to mention Dārā may have reflected a decline in the importance of that city; it may in fact have been an Arsacid refoundation on an earlier site (1973, pp. 199-201).

As the scope and duration of Arsaces' reign are not known with certainty, the problem of the foundation of Dārā is even more complex. By the 2nd century c.e. Western authors were citing a new and variant account of the origin of the Arsacid dynasty. According to this version, the dynasty was not founded by Arsaces alone but by Arsaces and his supposed brother Tiridates, who were possibly of Achaemenid descent. Arsaces died after a two-year reign (Arrian, *Parthica*; A. G. Roos, in his edition of the fragments of this work, cited parallel passages from the even later authors Zosimus and Syncellus). Since at least as early as the second half of the 19th century, when George Rawlinson wrote on the subject, some modern scholars have attempted to reconcile the variants by assigning to Tiridates the foundation of Dārā; others, relying on prosopographical data from ostraca of the Parthian era excavated at Nisa, have denied the historicity of Tiridates altogether (cf. Wolski, 1959). A. D. H. Bivar (pp. 26, 30-31) favors the hypothesis that Tiridates founded Dārā, whereas the numismatist David Sellwood (p. 280) takes the opposite view; V. G. Lukonin (pp. 686-88) has provided a useful summary of the controversy.

It is clear that neither the location nor the founder of Dārā cannot yet be established with certainty. Among the Greco-Roman authors, whose accounts are the only ones that survive, several traditions about the foundation of the Parthian kingdom itself were in circulation (cf. the variant accounts of the death of Cyrus [Herodotus 1.214.5] or of the rise of Darius [Bīsotūn monuments; Herodotus 3.67ff.; Aeschylus, *Persae* 759-86]). In the version known to Trogus and preserved in Justin's general and idealized epitome the foundation of the city of Dārā played a significant role. Pliny, in composing his work, drew on the same basic version but omitted geographical data. Suggestions for the exact location of Dārā were assembled by Rawlinson (pp.



30, 605 nn. 3-5), N. C. Debevoise (p. 15 and nn. 61-62), R. N. Frye (p. 174), and Igor Khlopin (pp. 147-48).

Sasanian Dārā. Although the location and historicity of the second Dārā, a Byzantine fortified city and trading center 98 stadia from Nisibis and only 28 stadia from Sasanian territory in upper Mesopotamia, pose no problem to the historian, its existence was a direct cause for concern to the Sasanian dynasty. The city is mentioned in Western accounts of wars with the Sasanians, who repeatedly sought to neutralize the threat from the city.

Dārā was founded by the Byzantine emperor Anastasius (r. 491-518) in 507 c.e., after he had made peace with the Sasanian Kavād (r. 488-531, with interruption). It was well fortified and was later much improved, during the reign of Justinian (527-565), when the city served as a base for the Byzantine commander over Mesopotamia (Procopius, *De Bello Persico* 1.10.13ff., 1.22; Theophylactus 3.10.4; cf. Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 2.2-3 on the easy way to manipulate the water supply; idem, *De Bello Gothico* 4.7).

Dārā was thus one of the focal points of Sasanian military activity in the war between Kōsrow I (531-79) and the Byzantines. In 527, before Kōsrow took the throne, Sasanian forces had been defeated outside the city by Belesarius. In 540, after a lengthy siege, Dana purchased the withdrawal of Kōsrow's army. In a renewed Sasanian campaign in the 570s a trapped Byzantine army surrendered after a four-month siege, in 573, and Dārā fell to Kōsrow. The city changed hands twice again, within the context of internal political strife in both the Sasanian and Byzantine empires. Both Bahrām Čōbīn (see [bahrām vii](#)) and Kōsrow II (590-628), who were disputing the Sasanian throne, promised to return captured borderlands to the Byzantines, in order to obtain the support of the emperor Maurice (r. 583-602). Kōsrow II handed over Dārā in 590 but retook it in 604-05 after a nine-month siege; his attack was partly motivated by his desire to avenge the death of Maurice after the Byzantine revolt in 602 and to install on the Byzantine throne Theodorus, a putative son of the late emperor. After the decline of Byzantine power and the end of the Sasanian empire Dārā remained a border city between spheres allotted to rival Moslem princes through the Middle Ages until the Mongol conquest of northern Mesopotamia in 659/1261.



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