



DURA EUROPOS II. THE INSCRIPTIONS

ii. INSCRIPTIONS

Beside the many documents in Greek, Latin, and Aramaic, there are several written traces of an Iranian presence in Dura Europos. On the paintings on the walls of the synagogue (Figure 30/5) three graffiti have been scratched in Parthian script and another twelve written in ink in Middle Persian. One more in Parthian and five in Persian are written in ink on the walls of the House of the Frescoes (Figure 30/17), and a last in Parthian at the entrance to the redoubt. Two further graffiti in Parthian are to be found incised on the walls of the temple of Zeus Megistos (Figure 30/23), one being a precise date: *ŠNT 522 YRH' d'r šht 11 pty hwnn* "year 522, month Adar (i.e., March 211 or 212 C.E.), on the 11th in the morning." Finally, a long graffito in Persian is scratched on the north jamb of the main door of the synagogue. All these graffiti have been published in facsimile, but, because most are partially illegible, no fully satisfactory readings or complete interpretations have been achieved so far. The type of the synagogue graffiti is, however, clear. They mostly begin with a date, the name of the Zoroastrian month, the number of the year (presumably the 14th and 15th regnal years of the unnamed king Šāpūr I, 240-70 C.E.), and the name of the day. Then comes the name of the writer, in almost every instance qualified by the description "scribe" (*dibīr*), and sometimes those of his fellow visitors, followed by the text of his message. A typical and practically certain Persian example (no. 42) is written on the



himation of a figure on panel WC 2: /1/ *BYRḤ prwrtyn QDM* /2/ *ŠNT X III II WYWM lšny* /3/ *'MT yzd'ntḥ[m]pr[n]b(g)* /4/ *dpywr ZY tḥmy 'L* /5/ *ZNH BYT' [Y'TWNt]* *'Pš ZNH nk'l* /6/ *ps(nd)yt* “(It was the 1st) month of Frawardīn in the year 15 and the (18th) day Rashn when the scribe Yazdān-tahm-farrbay, the strong, [came] to this house, and he liked this picture.”

In addition to the graffiti, more than a dozen inscribed ostraca have been found at half a dozen different sites. Nearly all these inscriptions are written in Parthian. Those that are most legible are clearly lists of deliveries of different quantities measured in *grbn* (i.e. *grīβān* “modi”), and so probably of grain, from persons identified by name and either profession or patronymic. In three of them the same person is mentioned, *ršnw hštrp*, Rašn *šahrab* (satrap), presumably an official organizing the collections of grain, almost certainly under Roman administration. The purpose of the one Middle Persian ostrakon is obscure. It contains a list of some twenty-seven professions, in no evident logical sequence. They range from the humble *n'np'k* “baker,” *kpškly* “shoemaker,” and *kštkly* “plowman” to officeholders like *zynd'nyk* “jailer,” *dpylpty* “chief scribe,” and *š'pstn* “harem keeper.”

Finally, three pieces of parchment with Parthian and Middle Persian text have been found at two different sites. Two are parts of letters, one in each language; the other is a tiny fragment apparently of a Persian document. The Parthian letter consists only of the beginning “From Sānēsarakān to Husraw-(?)” and three lines of polite introductory formulas. The Persian letter, written on both sides in a rather imperious tone, contains enough text to suggest that it was sent by “a highly-placed army-general to another of slightly inferior rank,” probably “during the brief occupation of Dura by the Persians in A.D. 253” (Henning, 1959).

(For abbreviations found here, see “Short References.”)

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Figure 30. Plan of Dura-Europos in the Roman period. After Matheson, p. 18.