

# Professions in Palmyra: A Matter of Ethnicity

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## Syrians outside Syria

There is no better place to start with when studying Syriac identity in the Greek-Roman world than the Venetian little city of Concordia Sagittaria, 60 km to the north of Venice. A group of Syriac soldiers were stationed in that city in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD and had their sepulchral gravestones carved in Greek, on which each of them proudly asserted his foreign origins: ‘Here lies Aurelios Alexandros, Syriac man, from the village of the Mezianoï, inside the border of the city of Apamea,’<sup>1</sup> ‘Here lies Aurelios Makedonios Abbiba, from the hamlet (*ἐποίκιον*) of Genneos, inside the borders of Apamea,’<sup>2</sup> ‘Here lies Aurelios Marianos from the hamlet (*ἐποίκιον*) of Sekla, inside the borders of Apamea of Coelesyria.’<sup>3</sup> These exemplifications might go on and on, but suffice to say that the best contribution to the toponymy of the land of Apamea derives from this very group of Venetian inscriptions, the meaningful data of which for the historical geography of Syria have been studied by Denis Feissel.<sup>4</sup>

It is astonishing that those Syriac soldiers, who were buried in the so-called ‘military’ cemetery (*Sepolcreto dei militi*) in the western city of Concordia Sagittaria, treasured their own tiny homelands so much. It is as justifiable to doubt that some of the readers of those gravestones in Concordia Sagittaria might have had any basic knowledge where of Apamea of Coelesyria ever was, as much it is absolutely certain that nobody among them had ever heard about *Κώμη*

*Μεζιανῶν* or *ἐποίκιον Γεννέος*. The problem with those inscriptions is thus a problem of identity self-representation.

## Palmyrene Self-identity and Professions

Self-identity is a main concern in modern research in antiquity and does not need any further reflection here. Nevertheless, I start from this concept because I think that the subject of the crafts in Palmyra is first of all a problem of self-identity.

It has always been noted how rare in Palmyra the identification of personalities is by their professions. Recently both Jean-Baptiste Yon and Michael Sommer among others have highlighted thousands of people’s reticence to give information about their own professional activities. Indeed their mere personal data and little more are recorded on the stones they carved portraying them, and this pertained even to the institutional offices that many among them had performed during their lives. Thus Yon correctly states that ‘Si l’on étudie des inscriptions funéraires, on peut lire des généalogies, on peut reconstruire des familles, mais l’on n’apprend que peu de chose sur les activités que les défunts ont exercées pendant leur vie ... En fait, les renseignements précis sur les activités «professionnelles» quotidiennes sont très épars’.<sup>5</sup> This claim matches with Sommer’s view: ‘Schon auf den ersten Blick verstört, daß überhaupt nur ein geringer Anteil derjenigen Verstorbenen, die erkennbar der höheren sozialen Strata entstammen, die zu Leb-

1. *CIL* V 8723 = *IG* XIV 2321.

2. *CIL* V 8728 = *IG* XIV 2327.

3. *CIL* V 8730 = *IG* XIV 2329.

4. Most recent analysis Vannesse 2011; Feissel 1980; 1982. Cf. Zovatto 1946; 1971; Forlati Tamaro 1962, 1977; Bovini 1973.

5. Yon 2002, 99.

zeiten innegehabten Ämter in den Epitaphien erwähnt'.<sup>6</sup>

The publication of both *corpora* on the one side of the Palmyrene Aramaic inscriptions of Delbert R. Hillers and Eleonora Cussini in 1995 and on the other side of the Greek and Latin ones by Yon in 2012 makes it easier to estimate how 'épars' these data actually are.<sup>7</sup> Focusing only on the mentions of crafts – thus ignoring public and religious offices – and disregarding all activities connected with long-distance trade, that are the subject of other specific contributions,<sup>8</sup> the inscriptions that can be taken into account are just 23, to which the Tariff shall be added:<sup>9</sup> Twenty-three texts out of thousands of inscriptions that make Palmyra unique in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire.

Moreover in the range of this scant cluster of Palmyrene inscriptions, some groups of documents shall be defined, that in my opinion further circumscribe the already limited representativeness of this cluster itself.

First of all many of the professions are listed in the Palmyra Tariff. This is an extraordinary document that cannot be considered as typical for the Palmyrene epigraphical *habitus*; more important, it is absolutely not related to the theme of self-identity of the inhabitants of Palmyra.

### Collegia

Among these groupings, one can be clearly identified in the four well-known dedications laid by professional *collegia* to Odaenathus or members of his house. We are talking about three Greek inscriptions (*IGLS* XVII/1, 55, 59 and 143) and a bilingual one (*IGLS* XVII/1, 56 = *PAT* 291) dedicated to the λαμπρότατος ὑπατικός Septimius Odaenathus (*IGLS* XVII/1, 55-56 and 143) or to his son Hairan, of equal status, (*IGLS*

XVII/1, 59) by voluntary associations named *συμπόσια* (*IGLS* XVII/1, 55, 59, 143) or *συντεχνία* (*IGLS* XVII/1, 56), and *tgm* in the only Aramaic sample (*IGLS* XVII/1, 56 = *PAT* 291). The latter word is a *hapax* in the Semitic languages and it has customarily been explained as a transliteration from Greek τάγμα, even though it experienced a successive semantic shift making it identical to *συμπόσιον*.<sup>10</sup>

Almost all the craft associations that laid those inscriptions raise big problems concerning their identification. The only one that can be identified for certain is the association of the goldsmiths and the silversmiths who laid *IGLS* XVII/1, 56: *συντεχνία τῶν χρυσοχόων | καὶ ἀργυροκόπων*. Quite astonishing for me is the fact that despite such a penury of attestations of both craft-guilds and simple crafts in Palmyra, the dedication *IGLS* XVII/1, 59 has survived, which was laid by a *συμπόσιον σκυτ(έ)ων καὶ ἀσκοναυτοποιῶν*, i.e. an association of leatherworkers and makers of leather bags for the navigation of the Euphrates, according to the customary interpretation of the latter word, once more a *hapax*, a Greek one this time. It is much more complicated to understand on what the members of the *συμπόσιον τῶν οὐ(α)ννων* (*IGLS* XVII/1, 55) or those of the *συμπόσιον τῶν κονετ[* (*IGLS* XVII/1, 143) worked. Once more we are talking about words that do not occur elsewhere in Greek texts and that show an undoubtedly fault in the writing, as far as the first one is concerned, while the second one is incomplete. We can certainly avoid exploring the explications of these words by now and simply accept the attempts to explain them by other scholars and last systematised by Ted Kaizer in 2002,<sup>11</sup> who proposes to understand *οὐ(α)ννων* in *IGLS* XVII/1, 55<sup>12</sup> as 'winnowers', i.e. those who separate the different parts of wheat; while for the other word, probably to be read as *κονετοί* he proposes three possible different translations: An association of cithara players according to an old hypothesis by Milik, or also an association of

6. Sommer 2005, 173.

7. *PAT* and *IGLS* XVII/1.

8. Cf. Seland elsewhere in this book, and Seland 2014.

9. A new edition of the Tariff: Shifman and Healey 2014: the old Russian edition of the Tariff has been newly edited by J. F. Healey in the *Supplements* of the *JSS*.

10. *PAT*, p. 418, s.v.; τάγμα: 'body of soldiers, division, and brigade'; 'order, rank': Liddle-Scott, s.v.

11. Kaizer 2002.

12. On this word Yon 2007, 410.

metal workers, as Gawlikowski thought, or furthermore the unprecedented meaning of ‘artichoke growers.’ In this connection, I suspect that all the meanings connected with agricultural life should be considered as highly improbable for reasons that I will explain. On the contrary, it seems clear to me that all these four public dedications are connected with craft-guilds linked to specialised craftsmanship that had to be flourishing and very dynamic in town.

Yet if ever we were able to solve all the philological problems regarding these four documents, I still consider them little meaningful as far as the theme of self-identity of the Palmyrene is concerned: All four date back to 569 Seleucid era, i.e. AD 258 (*IGLS XVII/1*, 55, 59, 143) in the month of April (*IGLS XVII/1*, 56) and they were all carved in the vicinity of the great colonnade (55 was reused in a late wall in the area of the tetrapylon; 56 was carved on the trunk of a column of the great colonnade; 59: is on the console of a column found to the East of the round street that surrounds the theatre; 143: is on column 11 after the southern corner of the portico C1). However, the titles of Odaenathus and his son Hairan on these dedications may be explained – this being a long debate in which I have participated and do not want to propose here again<sup>13</sup> – it is certain that AD 258 represents an important institutional turning point in Palmyra. The rise of the figure of the *rš dy tdmwr*, *δεσπότης τῶν Παλμυρηνῶν* who just by then became a *λαμπρότατος ὑπατικός*, a *vir clarissimus consularis*, came indeed through the *mimesis* of the Greek-Roman institutions (also city ones), but it cannot be considered as the clue of a real internal transformation of the Palmyrene society. The professional *συνέπεια*, surprisingly dynamic in that year AD 258, will never appear again in Palmyrene epigraphy, neither did they before that year. It would be astonishing if those craft-guilds had had any influence inside the Palmyrene society, given that among thousands of deceased of whom we know names and agnatic relationships, nobody decided to define himself as belonging to one of those voluntary corporations.

13. Gnoli 2000; 2007a; 2007b.

### *Craftsmen and professionals*

But this is not enough. If we try to curb the testimonies of crafts and working activities attested in Palmyra to the funerary inscriptions, our already meagre outcome is doomed to wear thin by far: two out of the most meaningful inscriptions under this respect – the one of a butcher (*PAT* 415: *tbh*), and the one of a baker (*PAT* 1458: *nhtwm*, from Akkadian *nubattimmu*)<sup>14</sup> – are dedications to divinities and they come from the precinct of temples, but from no necropolis. Another testimony is the picture of a sitting man who hits on an anvil on the *recto* of the tessera n. 36, in the collection of Ingholt, Seyrig and Starcky.<sup>15</sup> However it is highly dubious that it depicts the profession of anyone; of the four testimonies regarding sculptors (*glwph*), none comes from a funerary context, as *PAT* 1719 is outside Palmyra; *PAT* 1113 is from Dura Europos; *PAT* 320 is a signature below a dedication laid in the temple of Bel;<sup>16</sup> *PAT* 1410 is a very incomplete inscription in which only the word for ‘sculptor’ is readable and which was found in the *agorà*. *PAT* 1349 = *IGLS XVII/1*, 38, that is believed to identify a teacher (Aram. *sbr*, Gk. *καθηγητής*), was seen in ancient times in a very strange position in the peristyle of the temple of Bel, but has never been found again. It honoured a person with a Greek name, a certain Antiochos.

The only texts that can certainly be put forward to claim that in Palmyra existed some occupational identity that overlapped and interfered with family- and clan-identity are four Palmyrene busts, three out of which are preserved at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (*PAT* 614, 617, 618), while another one, *PAT* 5, is now at the National Museum in Damascus.<sup>17</sup> In all these reliefs the word that identifies the profession is one and the same: *mn*: ‘master craftsman’, deriving from Akkadic *ummānu*.

14. See Cussini, this volume.

15. Ingholt et al. 1955, n° 36: on the obverse: *’nwš[t]’ dy bwlyd’ | mhrdt* ‘the treasure of Bel. Bôliada Meherdat’.

16. See Long and Sørensen, this volume fig. 7, and Cussini, this volume.

17. This very man is the only one known by Bounni 1990, 81 and n. 35.

Another example comes from the profession of physician. The latter is the only craft, besides the generic ‘craftsman,’ to appear three or four times in funerary contexts, below portraying busts. Once it comes with another word, *gwy*, ‘private (?)’, that rises a number of interpretation problems (*PAT* 874 = *CIS* II 4513; *PAT* 50, AD 213, from S.-W. Necropolis *ʿsy*, from Akkadian *asū*). I cannot solve the problem of the number of the occurrences of *ʿsy*. It has been recorded three times in *PAT*, but Yon has shown that one occurrence of this word has been overlooked by the editors of the *corpus* of the Aramaic inscriptions of Palmyra. Anyway this seems a relative problem, as all those occurrences come from one and the same tomb laid in the South-Western necropolis, and I believe that Galikowsky’s hypothesis, also accepted by Yon, to consider the word *ʿsy* as nothing else but a nickname that entered the naming of the family that was buried there is right:

‘Il est possible que le terme «médecin» ait été utilisé comme surnom par cette famille ... Dans ce cas, le mot s’appliquerait, dans le texte, au père de Yedi’bel et non à ce dernier. On a sans doute une preuve de cet emploi comme véritable «nom de famille» dans le texte VI de la tombe: la généalogie des deux propriétaires se présente ainsi: *ywlys ʿwryls nwrbl wml ʿbny mlkw rb ʿbr mlkw br mlkw br nwrbl dy mtqr ʿsy* («Iulius Aurelius Nûrbel et Iulius Aurelius Malê, fils de Malkû l’Ainé, fils de Malkû, fils de Malkû, fils de Nûrbel, qui est surnommé le médecin»).'18

I suspect that the same might well have happened with the busts of the Metropolitan Museum that show always one and the same word: *ʿmn*. If this was acceptable – but I ignore everything about the history and possible origins of these finds – we might speculate that these two names of crafts: *ʿmn* and *ʿsy*, ‘craftsman’ and ‘physician’, are nothing else but elements of the naming of two specific families. This way both the doctor and the craftsmen would disappear from our already scant testimonies of Palmyrene crafts.

My deductions about the words *ʿmn* and *ʿsy* may either be accepted or rejected, but I think that what is undeniable is the fact that professions did not identify

individuals in Palmyra, certainly not after they had died; moreover they were of little meaning also during their lives. To all this I just can add the two dedications on an altar by a butcher and a baker. All those who have dealt with this subject, did it gathering all testimonies of crafts together with institutional, religious and military offices. For the moment I have neglected the latter terminological categories, but my sense is that even if we comprised them, the general picture would change very little. Only connecting all those categories, concentrating *in primis* on long-distance trade, Adnan Bounni was able to write an article, *Métiers et fonctions à Palmyre*, in which however there is a disequilibrium on the side of the *fonction*. Nevertheless also on this side the situation is not actually clear. Even a convinced upholder of Palmyra’s ‘normality’ in the framework of the eastern cities of the Roman Empire, Maurice Sartre, had to admit that:

‘Si l’existence de la *boulè* n’est pas en cause, J. Teixidor a justement remarqué que les inscriptions de Palmyre ne mentionnaient à peu près jamais de bouleute ... C’est incontestablement un fait étrange quand on constate le nombre élevé de textes mentionnant la *boulè* à Palmyre, ou lorsque l’on compare cette situation avec d’autres villes de Syrie ... Faut-il en conclure que Palmyre comptait une *boulè* sans bouleute?’19

The answer to this question is obviously negative. The Palmyrene *boulè* was composed of *bouleutai*, but the latter did not consider it useful to report about this role of theirs on their funerary portraits. For this very reason we do not know anything about almost any personality who carried out specific functions inside the assembly.

## Self-representation

In the light of what I have tried to explain until now my position diverges from the approach of a young talented American scholar in his recent monograph *Identity, Community, and State Formation*. While trying to ‘map social identities,’ Andrew Smith puts the subject

18. al-Asʿad and Yon 2002, 102.

19. Sartre 1996, 388.

of ‘occupational identity’ right after ‘Palmyrene family’ and marriage patterns. He describes ‘occupational identity’ in a frame that in my opinion does not correspond to reality. If the assumption that ‘By the second century AD and perhaps earlier, Palmyra was a cosmopolitan city supported by a host of individuals variously occupied. The streets buzzed with activity’ is certainly true and clear, less obvious and on the contrary quite complicated is the assertion that: ‘Importantly for this study, occupation provided a framework for the construction of a social identity above kinship relations. Occupation also provided a framework for the development of voluntary associations, a community of like-minded individuals mutually supporting one another.’<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Andrew Smith needs this pretended ‘professional framework’ to introduce the religious institution of the *marzēah*, the latter typical of Palmyra. Actually, the craft-guilds and the gatherings of the drinking societies were very different phenomena. They only share the same translation into Greek of their name, in both cases *συνπόσιον*, but also a more technical word, *συντεχνία*, is attested for the AD 258 craft-guilds, as I have already shown. However I think that the *marzēah*, diffused in all the Semitic and particularly Arabic world, shall be understood starting from its Semitic context and not from the way it was reproduced, translated and construed in Greek, as I have already shown elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> Well, in Aramaic the word for the drinking societies was always *marzēah*, never *tgm*, which on the contrary is attested for the craft associations in the AD 258 only bilingual inscription of Palmyra. To sum up: It is not possible to link together the craft associations of AD 258 and the *marzēah*, let alone the latter one and the professions that do not have any association.

While the *marzēah* is eminently a form of religious aggregation, even though it played an evident social function inside Palmyrene society, with an evolution of its role as I have already tried to sketch,<sup>22</sup> the pro-

fessional associations never played any comparable role in Palmyra and their occurrence in only one occasion in direct connection with the crucial year 258 is too much circumscribed not to become suspect. I think that the latter represent an import of association forms that were alien to Palmyrene society but acquired in imitation of the Greek-Roman habits and that never asserted themselves, thus leaving behind extremely scant traces.

### Professionals in the West: Some examples

I am perfectly aware that this kind of reconstruction is mainly based on an *argumentum e silentio* and that it is very dangerous: one way or another, the discovery of a text dated back, let us say, to the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century in which a professional association is attested will put all this reconstruction in disarray. Yet I do not think this is likely to happen. What I have called ‘reticence’ of the Palmyrene to show themselves in their professional activities or also in their magistrate functions testifies to an evident difference in respect to other situations, above all western ones, in the Roman Empire.

A comparison with the easternmost Italic city apart of Rome can be certainly explanatory. In the case of Ravenna, it was customary that any deceased would declare his professional activity during his life on his gravestone. This example can be explanatory for an unusually high number of illustrated steles from Ravenna. If the attestation of ‘crafts’ connected to the fleet are broadly prevailing for clear reasons, references to other professions not necessarily connected to it do not lack indeed. The percentage of crafts attested on epigraphs is further increased if we take smaller, closed and limited situations that are less ‘international’ than Ravenna into consideration, as a huge study by Alessandro Cristofori on the Picenum area demonstrates.<sup>23</sup> The difference with Palmyra is evident and certainly ascribable to cultural reasons. The singularity of Palmyra, so often postulated but less clearly explained, is thoroughly evident in this

20. Smith 2013, 107-108.

21. Gnoli 2016.

22. Gnoli 2016.

23. Cristofori 2004.

very respect. The explanation of the irrelevance of professions in the Palmyrene world might be explained from a socio-cultural perspective and it is a matter of self-identity.

At this point it is useful to turn back to the inscriptions from Concordia Sagittaria, from which we started. In those texts the Syriac soldiers show their pride about their origins from the hinterland of Apamea and in a couple of cases of Antioch. Those places were defined with meticulous precision on their grave-stones, which were laid thousands of miles away from their homes, in the fogs of the high Adriatic coast. The Palmyrene who served in Dacia, Northern Africa or elsewhere in the Roman world or even stayed in Rome defined themselves always as Palmyrene, without any further specifications. Daniel Schlumberger described the layout of the settlements in the area N-W of Palmyra in such terms:

‘nos villages ou hameaux consistent en des groupes lâches de constructions distribuées sans ordre. Cette disposition est dans un contraste frappant avec la concentration qui est de règle dans les villages des plateaux agricoles ou des oasis de la Syrie moderne. Les sites sont de dimensions médiocres. Ils s’étendent rarement sur plus de 500 mètres dans leur plus grande longueur.’<sup>24</sup>

But what is important for us is that he was not able to restore even one ancient toponym for the area he studied. The toponymy of the Palmyrene area is to the greatest extent an empty list for us. So here the Syriac dichotomy is well represented, according to the division that Gertrude Bell fittingly named *The Desert and the Sown*.<sup>25</sup>

### *The Desert and the Sown: The patchwork of Syrian Identity*

The Sown is the area of the great Hellenised cities, with their farmland densely inhabited by people of Aramaic descent who were accustomed to farming; while the Desert are the stony sweeps of the Arabic inland. A land of shepherds, of people perpetually on

the move, both to graze flocks or to trade silk and spices. The shepherds have always been co-essential to the Aramaic farmers who supplied the big Greek cities. Both gave ancient Syria its specific unique nature that a long time ago Mikhail Rostovtzeff condensed in an imprecise however suggestive sentence:

‘la Syrie a toujours été un pays de transit, où se sont rencontrées et mêlées les trois grands civilisations du Proche-Orient: Babylonie et l’Assyrie, Égypte et Égée. Aussi n’a-t-elle jamais eu la sienne propre. Elle s’est contentée d’une mosaïque d’emprunts.’<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of the outdated features implicit in this picture and that are even clearer in what immediately follows this quotation,<sup>27</sup> Palmyra stays the only example of a completely Arab big city known to us from the Greek-Roman antiquity, with the exception of the Nabatean cities, that however acquired their own characteristics since the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC because of the peculiar history of their people.

Palmyra was not born of the overlapping of different cultures, so some pretended Arabic-nomadic substratum that was superimposed over a non-migratory situation; neither a nomadic society that suddenly decided to turn its structure becoming a settled society. Reality is far more complex and veiled. A tribal society with an agnatic structure that aims at thriving in the closeness of big urban centres cannot do without any centre of gravity for its own economic and trade activities. All this can happen in various ways, which have been studied as far as the ancient Near East is concerned by Michael Rowton, who employed the definition of ‘enclosed nomadism’ and of ‘dimorphic structure’ to define this kind of situations.<sup>28</sup> I tell nothing new to the scholars of Palmyra as these concepts have been widely used and divulged by Michael

24. Schlumberger 1951, II.

25. Bell 1907.

26. Rostovtzeff 1935, 3.

27. The allusion is to the explicit use of the discredited and now unusable term of ‘syncretism.’ For an updated, original and complex reflection about Syrianness, Greekness etc. in Roman Syria as well as in Palmyra cf. Andrade 2013; in general Aijmer 1995.

28. Rowton 1973a; 1973b; 1974; 1976a; 1976b; 1977.

Sommer.<sup>29</sup> Rowton's studies, that were innovative in the 1970's, gave rise to a series of anthropological investigations that can help shed new light on the real functioning of the Palmyrene society inside the Roman Empire.

## Palmyra in the framework of traditional Arabic societies

The study of traditional societies based on agnatic tribal relationships in the Arabic peninsula have been conducted specifically in the underdeveloped inland of Yemen and the Sultanate of Oman by a big team of scholars and have produced remarkable results in recent years. We are talking about important researches in many respects, that shall be used very cautiously however to adapt their paradigms to the ancient world. The main difference between the ancient and the modern arabic societies is that the latter ones upon which these surveys have been conducted, are completely and deeply Islamic, thus they present us with very deep modifications in this respect that cannot be underestimated.

The reading of the fresh works by William and Fidelity Lancaster on the traditional societies in Oman and Yemen (but also those in the north of the Peninsula are mentioned) is of the greatest interest. What is interesting is what they have derived as far as the concept of profession in those societies is concerned. The following quotation regards the people around Ra's al-Jinz on the coast of Oman:

'They pointed out that over a lifetime, a man might well move between fishing and herding, and a herder might go to sea for a year ... Individuals learnt the skills of others without formal training, but by observation, common-sense, and practice. A man from a herding family said he had learnt how to make his living by fishing, and a husband and wife who had worked as potters in Bilad Bani bu 'Ali were said to have learnt their skills, neither had been born into potters' families ... Multi-resource economics, a truism for anthropological descriptions of pastoral societies since the 1970s and

extended to settled agricultural Arab tribes, has been less used by archaeologists. Most tribespeople, asked about their source of livelihood, say either what they are doing at that moment or their most reliable source of profits – not the aggregations of assets and options on which they can draw as members of working productive and consuming groups. Attempts to find a definable economic unit for Arab societies have confounded many researchers and is best resolved by Fabietti from research with Shammar bedouin as 'a dynamic unit towards which converge resources from a variety of sectors, procured and organised by mobile individuals belonging to a parental group whose dimensions and composition are not definable *a priori*.' This description is consistent with all the social groups with whom we have worked and about whom we have read and leads into concepts of tribe/*qabila*, family/*aila*, and community/*jama'a*.<sup>30</sup>

The social structure of Palmyra had to be to a great extent very similar to that of the very small traditional underdeveloped societies of Oman. Small groups based upon family relationships belonging to wider groupings, the tribes, that exerted a lesser influence from an economic and social point of view, conducted complex activities, nevertheless not only activities of subsistence even less non-profit-making. The members of the families were also members of the tribes, that altogether built a community, but no one was recognisable for his/her profession. They all used to share know-hows, which apparently may seem astonishing. Work is always considered as something little specialised, which is true also when, according to our contemporary standards, we should be in the presence of highly specialised jobs such as engineering: The Lancasters explicitly mention a number of different types of water supply systems that were essential to the agricultural activities in dry lands.<sup>31</sup> What actually matters according to the Lancasters is:

'Tribal membership conferred jural identity, which gave access to tribal resources for livelihood and prof-

29. Sommer 2005.

30. Lancaster and Lancaster 2012, 108-109.

31. Lancaster and Lancaster 1999. About water supply systems Laureano 2001; specifically on Palmyra and its territory, Meyer 2013.

its, to develop and therefore own resources without denying access to others for subsistence, a requirement to defend resources and rights and thus to bear arms, and the absolute obligations to be generous and to provide protection to all who asked for it.<sup>32</sup>

Palmyra was for such families that lived scattered around the city, what Dubai or Sharjah represented for the families of western Hajar:

'People in the western Hajar chose their markets according to what they were selling and what they needed to buy. They used Dubai and Sharjah, and to a lesser extent Ajman or Ras al-Khaimah town, for selling live goats for meat, tobacco, charcoal, honey and dairy goods. These places were bigger markets with more buyers and the money realised from sales bought more, as Dubai and, to a lesser extent Sharjah, were where imported goods came into the region by steamship.'<sup>33</sup>

Obviously Palmyrene society was far more complex than the traditional societies of Oman about which the Lancasters report to us; no doubt that the higher classes of that society had lived for centuries in a more or less close contact with other provincial *élites*, that in turn had been more or less deeply Hellenised. What remains is the fact that, if the society that produced the *Notabilat palmyrénienne* was similar to the ones I have just described, then what should surprise are the poor and sporadic testimonies of crafts attested in Palmyra, rather than their total lack.

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