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„Palmyre, cité grecque“? A question of coinage¹

Introduction

This paper brings the coins of Palmyra, for the first time, into the discussion on how to define the character of this oasis city in the Syrian steppe. Scholars working on Palmyrene civilization have generally ignored them. This paper aims to provide a counterbalance to this trend, and to comment on the usefulness of numismatics for the study of the city's religious culture and history.

In the last lines of the introduction to an important new book on provincial coinage, Chris Howgego hinted that a detailed look at Palmyra's idiosyncratic numismatic production would help to put in perspective the coinage of the multitude of those eastern cities whose civic issues have come to embody what is now known as ‚Roman provincial coinage‘. In other words, the degree in which Palmyrene coinage differed from that of the other cities draws attention to the emergence of a set of shared cultural values amongst those other cities, which minted more conventional, ‚standard‘ coins, while simultaneously emphasizing (more than Palmyra ever did!) their exclusiveness. As such, it sheds light on the way in which the „variations in how the game was played“ by most eastern cities should be understood, namely as variations amongst cities with a similar cultural viewpoint. No matter how different most other cities may have been between them with regard to their coins, they still fitted the general pattern. As for the Palmyrene coinage, „now that is different.“² This paper aims to explore those differences and the effect they had on the city's culture. In particular, my interpretation of some specimens and the publication of a countermarked coin in the appendix bear directly on our understanding of Palmyra as „the only publicly bilingual city in the Roman Near East.“³

The focus of the last part of this paper is on Palmyrene religion. It studies the degree to which the civic religious facade of Palmyra, according to its coinage, differs from other evidence for the distinctive cults in the city. As such, it aims to fill a gap left by

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at Royal Holloway in June 2004, at the second colloquium on the Greek city after the Classical age. I am grateful to Richard Alston and Onno van Nijf for the invitation to speak, which sparked off my attempts to tackle Palmyrene numismatics. I owe thanks to Karsten Dahmen for his help, to Michael Sommer for discussion, and to Fergus Millar and Chris Howgego for their detailed comments on my text. To the latter I owe special thanks also for his generous permission to publish a new coin in the appendix. Finally, I should like to acknowledge support by the British Academy through the award of a Postdoctoral Fellowship, held at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, during which this paper was conceived and written.

² C. Howgego, Introduction, in: id./V. Heuchert/A. Burnett (eds.), *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces*, Oxford 2005, 17.

³ F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC – AD 337*, Cambridge, Mass./London 1993, 470.

virtually all previous studies of Palmyra's religious structures and the city's unique divine world. At the outset, this paper will respond to the provocative title of a defining article on Palmyrene society, and will discuss whether or not its various aspects really lend themselves to a categorization of Palmyra as a ‚Greek city‘.

„Palmyre, cité grecque“?

„Palmyre, cité grecque“ is the title of an important article by Maurice Sartre, in which he argued that, for Rome, Palmyra was a city like all others, conforming to the model of a ‚Greek city‘ in every way.⁴ Despite the fact that the multiple references in Palmyrene epigraphy to the civic institutions of Palmyra are as good as identical to those known from other localities, the city has often been treated, so Sartre complained, as an anomalous case, as if it were „une entité particulière à laquelle ne s'appliquerait aucune des règles en vigueur dans les autres cités de l'Empire“.⁵ Sartre's systematic description of the political organisation of Palmyra, which „ne laisse planer à peu près aucun doute sur la nature et le fonctionnement des institutions de la cité depuis son intégration dans l'Empire“⁶, was meant to counter a widely attested doubt about its reality. This doubt had always been reinforced „par des considérations plus générales concernant l'hellénisme à Palmyre“⁷, the oasis city which in the eyes of many (as summarized by Glen Bowersock) „seemed not to be a truly Greek city because it lacked a theater, although it did have an agora and a *boulentérion* for the council; above all, it lacked athletic, musical, and poetic competitions“.⁸

Palmyra's constitution stands out most clearly in the famous tax law, which was brought to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg by a Russian prince after its discovery in 1881.⁹ Indeed, from the bilingual Tariff, which records a decree¹⁰ of the local council from AD 137, a substantial number of offices are known that are typical of a ‚Greek city‘, such as a *προέδρος* and a *γραμματεὺς* of the council and the assembly, *ἄρχοντες*, *σύνδικοι* and *δεκάπρωτοι*. Further offices are known from other inscriptions, such as *ἀργυροταμίαι*¹¹, *ἀγορανόμοι*¹² and a *γυμνασιάρχος*.¹³ As our documentary evidence is lim-

⁴ M. Sartre, *Palmyre, cité grecque*, *AArchArabSyr* 42, 1996, 385–405, esp. 397: „Palmyre fut pour Rome une cité comme les autres, et elle s'y conforma en tout point.“ Note that my question mark is similarly put behind the title of Sartre's article in the new book by M. Sommer, *Roms orientalische Steppengrenze. Palmyra – Edessa – Dura-Europos – Hatra. Eine Kulturgeschichte von Pompeius bis Diocletian*, Stuttgart 2005, 170–183. Despite some obvious overlap between our approaches, Sommer's accents are placed differently from mine, and I have therefore decided to leave the title unaltered.

⁵ Sartre (n. 4) 385.

⁶ Sartre (n. 4) 385.

⁷ Sartre (n. 4) 385.

⁸ G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Ann Arbor 1990, 7. Palmyra did of course have a theatre, still standing along the central colonnade. Built under the Severans, it remained however unfinished. Cf. E. Frézouls, *Les théâtres romains de Syrie*, *AArchSyr* 2, 1952, 87–91; id., *Recherches sur les théâtres de l'Orient syrien*, Syria 36, 1959, 224.

⁹ For the text, see D. R. Hillers and E. Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, Baltimore/London 1996, n°0259 [henceforth PAT]. Cf. J. Matthews, *The tax law of Palmyra: evidence for economic history in a city of the Roman East*, *JRS* 74, 1984, 157–80; J. Teixidor, *Un port romain du désert, Palmyre et son commerce d'Auguste à Caracalla*, *Semitica* 34, 1984; M. Zahrt, *Zum Fiskalgesetz von Palmyra und zur Geschichte der Stadt in Hadrianischer Zeit*, *ZPE* 62, 1986, 279–93.

¹⁰ Cf. Teixidor (n. 9) 59f., on the term used both in Greek and in Palmyrenean (*δόγμα/dgm*).

¹¹ PAT 1353 (AD 25).

¹² PAT 1398 (AD 193).

¹³ PAT 1406, known only via the transliteration in Palmyrenean (*gmnsyrks*). Cf. Sartre (n. 4) 392 with 402 n. 121.

ited, it must remain unknown whether the various ‚Greek‘ offices were introduced into the city simultaneously or gradually. The majority, but not all, of the Greek constitutional and administrative terminology is transliterated in the Palmyrenean counterparts of the relevant texts.¹⁴ And one of the main reasons why Palmyra has so often been discussed in terms of its differences, rather than as a standard ‚Greek city‘, is of course the very fact that its public inscriptions were to a large degree drawn up bilingually, employing both Greek and the local dialect of Aramaic. In addition, Latin was used occasionally and also (especially in the city’s hinterland) the proto-Arabic dialect commonly designated as Safaitic. Different languages were used in different sectors of society (e.g. the funerary context was dominated by Palmyrenean), yet the inscriptions in different languages do not represent different worlds, but, in the words of Jean-Baptiste Yon, „les différentes faces du même monde“.¹⁵

As far as the epigraphic material on which our knowledge is based is concerned, the council and the assembly are first attested alongside each other at Palmyra in AD 74, in what happens to be one of the very few trilingual texts from the city.¹⁶ According to the plausible restorations proposed, the Greek terminology (ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος) is transliterated into Palmyrenean (*bwl' wdms*), and partly also in Latin (*bule et civitas*). But the term for assembly is already attested on its own in two bilingual inscriptions from AD 24 and 25, one of which renders δῆμος with Palmyrenean *gbl*.¹⁷ In a text from AD 51, *gbl tdmry' klbn* (the community of all the Palmyrenes) functions as the counterpart of Παλμυρηνῶν ἡ πόλις, and the fact that the local Aramaic seems „moins précis“ may hint at the absence of the notion of ‚polis‘ at the oasis in the pre-Roman period.¹⁸ But if it could be argued that Palmyra’s organization under the empire came to be based upon that of a ‚Greek city‘¹⁹, it ought to be admitted that one cannot be certain of how different the activities of the βουλὴ and the δῆμος were from those of an indigenous and earlier (if hypothetical) council and assembly.²⁰

Either under Septimius Severus or under Caracalla, Palmyra became a *colonia*. By that time, as Fergus Millar has emphasised, the use of Latin, which had always been limited

¹⁴ Cf. M. G. Bertinelli Angeli, *Nomenclatura pubblica e sacra di Roma nelle epigrafi semitiche*, Genova 1970, 65–83.

¹⁵ J.-B. Yon, *Les notables de Palmyre*, Beirut 2002, 3. On Palmyrene bilingualism see *ibid.*, 23–36; T. Kaizer, *The Religious Life of Palmyra*, Stuttgart 2002, 27–34; D. G. K. Taylor, *Bilingualism and diglossia in Late Antique Syria and Mesopotamia*, in: J. N. Adams/M. Janse/S. Swain (eds.), *Bilingualism in Ancient Society. Language Contact and the Written Text*, Oxford 2002, esp. 317–24; H. Gzella, *Die Palmyrener in der griechisch-römischen Welt: kulturelle Begegnung im Spiegel des Sprachkontaktes*, *Klio* 87, 2005, 445–58.

¹⁶ J. Cantineau, *Tadmorea, Syria* 14, 1933, 174, n°2b.

¹⁷ PAT 1352–3.

¹⁸ Cf. Sartre (n. 4) 386: „le grec doit primer car c’est lui l’original comme le montrent plusieurs exemples où le palmyrénien ne fait que transcrire un terme grec qu’il ne possède pas, alors qu’on ne trouve jamais l’inverse dans les inscriptions officielles.“ The inscription is PAT 0269. Indeed, a passage in App. civ. V.9, the only literary source which refers to Palmyra in the first century BC, records how the πόλις was threatened by Mark Antony’s horsemen. However, the passage ought to be interpreted at least partly in the context of Appian’s own time, as is now argued in detail by O. Hekster/T. Kaizer, *Mark Antony and the raid on Palmyra: reflections on Appian, Bella Civilia V.9*, *Latomus* 63, 2004, 70–80.

¹⁹ E. g. Millar (n. 3) 324: „the crucial transformation which made Palmyra, in a certain sense, into a Greek city like others“.

²⁰ Cf. Kaizer (n. 15) 49f., partly building on M. van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, Oxford 1997, and stating that „the Greek polis system is often idealised in contrast to pre-existing and supposedly barbarian social organisations“.

anyway, had disappeared from the city's inscriptions²¹, and even in this phase the imperial terminology had generally been through a Greek filter on arrival at the oasis: thus in a text from AD 262 a *procurator* was called in Palmyrenean *ḫtrḫ*, from Greek ἐπίτροπος²² Similarly, the term *colonia* itself is transliterated in Palmyrenean as *qlny*, with κολωνεία as its counterpart. It is generally accepted that, with colonial status, a new constitution was introduced, and that Palmyra came to be headed by a pair of annual magistrates (*duumviri*, *ḫtrḫg* in Palmyrenean, after στρατηγοί) and acquired *aediles* (ἀγορανόμος in Greek, with the Aramaic counterpart *rb šwq*, ‚head of the market‘).²³ However, it has been noted recently that there were ἀγορανόμοι at Palmyra also before the city's promotion to colonial rank²⁴, and the same holds true for στρατηγοί.²⁵ It is of course natural that a ‚Greek city‘ had στρατηγοί and ἀγορανόμοι, but the use of the Greek titles of two existing offices at Palmyra for the designation of the chief colonial magistracies in the city delivers a warning that the Palmyrene division between the Greek city and the Roman colony was maybe not so clearly marked. The typically Roman priesthoods which traditionally formed part of the so-called colonial export package, *pontifices* and *augures*, are not attested at Palmyra, and in general the religious life of the city seems to have remained unaffected by the political developments of the early third century.²⁶

Throughout the period, one is faced with many *lacunae* in the Palmyrene epigraphic material, raising the question of whether one's findings reveal real patterns or merely result from the gaps in the ancient sources. Even if it can be shown that the magistracies themselves were completely normal for a ‚Greek city‘²⁷, some details at Palmyra appear to have deviated from the Greek norm. The relatively abundant evidence (that is, in a Syrian context) does not enable one to create a proper reconstruction of the genealogies of magistrates²⁸, and neither does it, in contrast to a city such as Bostra, provide references to individual βουλευταί.²⁹ Some of the formulaic patterns in ‚Palmyrene Greek‘ are very different from those in the other Greek cities of the empire. Although the assembly is referred to as Παλμυρηνῶν ὁ δῆμος³⁰, the expected ἡ βουλὴ τῶν Παλμυρηνῶν is not attested.³¹ Moreover, the inscribed honorific decrees are only resumés of what must have been the original versions, and they do not commonly specify the public functions of the honorand.³² On the other hand, as Kevin Butcher has recently stated with regard to the Palmyrenes, „like all good citizens of a *polis*, they were known collectively by the ethnic

²¹ Millar (n. 3) 327; id., Latin in the epigraphy of the Roman Near East, in: H. Solin/O. Salomies/U.-M. Liertz (eds.), *Acta Colloquii Epigraphici Latini*, Helsinki 1995, 409.

²² PAT 0284, example given by Yon (n. 15) 28: „même à l'époque de la colonie, le vocabulaire latin passe souvent par le filtre du grec avant d'arriver dans les inscriptions araméennes.“

²³ E.g. PAT 0278 (AD 242) and 1415 (damaged date).

²⁴ Yon (n. 15) 39. Cf. PAT 1398, a damaged bilingual inscription from AD 193.

²⁵ Sartre (n. 4) 391 f.

²⁶ On the development of religious institutions in some other Near Eastern *coloniae*, cf. N. Belayche, *Les formes de religion dans quelques colonies du Proche-Orient*, ARG 5, 2003, 157–79.

²⁷ One of the later magistrates (attested only in the 260s) is of course not a Greek office: the military function designated by the Persian title *argapeh*, transliterated both in Palmyrenean and in Greek. Cf. Kaizer, (n. 15) 49, n. 69.

²⁸ Yon (n. 15) 36.

²⁹ The one exception is Septimius Worod, Odaenathus' right-hand man, see PAT 0283 (AD 258). Cf. Sartre (n. 4) 388: „Faut-il en conclure que Palmyre comptait une *boulè* sans *bouleutes*?“

³⁰ PAT 1352–3 (AD 24–5 respectively).

³¹ Yon (n. 15) 33.

³² Yon (n. 15) 10–13.

of their city, as *Palmyrenoi*“.³³ But, especially in the first century AD, the ethnicon appears as an identifier alongside the individual's tribe, often both in Greek and Aramaic.³⁴ It was noted long ago that giving these different identifiers were really two ways of saying the same thing: in one bilingual inscription, a person is described in Greek as a Παλμυρηνός, while in the Palmyrenean version it is stated instead that he belonged to the *Bene Ma'ziyan*.³⁵

It is widely believed that a tribal system lay at the heart of Palmyrene society, and the curious fact that those who dominated this society were mostly honoured without being openly linked to public functions has been explained precisely in terms of „l'existence de liens tribaux“.³⁶ Recently, it has been shown once more to what degree this can contribute to the modern historian's unique perception of the oasis. Paul Veyne, in a bird's-eye view of Palmyra, chose to stress how different the city was from other Near Eastern cities: „Palmyre ne reposait pas sur un corps civique, mais sur un groupe de tribus et elle était dominée par quelques familles de princes-marchands.“³⁷ It is unlikely that the last word about the Palmyrene tribes will soon be said. The problem is defined by the fact that there are, on the one hand, at least fourteen groups which have been identified as ‚tribes“³⁸, while three inscriptions from the second half of the second century AD, on the other hand, record how, following civic decrees, ‚the four tribes‘ or ‚the four tribes of the city‘ erected statues of honorands ‚each in their own sanctuary‘.³⁹ Daniel Schlumberger was the first to argue in a classic article that ‚the four tribes‘ together formed the civic body of Palmyra⁴⁰, and Michal Gawlikowski stressed their artificial character, denying Schlumberger's thesis that their origin lay in Palmyra's historical or mythical traditions.⁴¹ It has proved difficult to come to an agreement about the relation between ‚the four tribes of the city‘ and the fourteen tribes which have been identified. It seems at least certain that both ‚types‘ of tribes existed at the same time. But other academic suggestions vary greatly. Were ‚the four tribes‘ units of citizens based upon a territorial division? Was there no connection at all between the traditional family structures and the artificial tribes? Were the traditional ones reshaped socially and religiously in the newly introduced civic ones? Or were three of ‚the four tribes‘ identical with the three older tribes which had the same name, and was the fourth civic tribe comprised of the remaining familial and other groupings?⁴² Dating the introduction into Palmyrene society of the civic tribes has proven to be equally controversial, but is to be fixed most likely either under Tiberius, when Palmyra became incorporated into the empire, or, according to the most recent contribution to the debate, under Claudius.⁴³

³³ K. Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, London 2003, 272.

³⁴ See Yon (n. 15) 52, with further references.

³⁵ D. Schlumberger, *Les quatre tribus de Palmyre*, Syria 48, 1971, 126: „dire qu'on était *des BNY M'ZYN*, ou dire qu'on était *Palmyrénien* étaient deux façons de dire la même chose.“

³⁶ Yon (n. 15) 97.

³⁷ P. Veyne, Préface, in: G. Degeorge, *Palmyre, métropole caravanière*, Paris 2001, 19.

³⁸ M. Gawlikowski, *Le temple palmyrénien. Étude d'épigraphie et de topographie historique*, Warsaw 1973, 31–41; P. Piersimoni, *Compiling a Palmyrene prosopography: methodological problems*, Aram 7, 1995, 252f; Yon (n. 15) 251f.

³⁹ PAT 2769 (AD 171), 1063 (AD 198), 1378 (AD 199). Listed by Kaizer (n. 15) 43–8.

⁴⁰ Schlumberger (n. 35) 121–33.

⁴¹ Gawlikowski (n. 38) 26–52.

⁴² For references to the debate, see Kaizer (n. 15) 48f., 64–6; Yon (n. 15) 66–72.

⁴³ M. Gawlikowski, *Palmyra: from a tribal federation to a city*, in: K. S. Freyberger/A. Henning/H. von Hesberg (eds.), *Kulturkonflikte im Vorderen Orient (Orient-Archäologie 11)*, Rahden 2003, 7–10. It was pro-

According to the three above-mentioned late second-century texts, each of the four tribes of the city had its own temple. It is generally accepted that these respective sanctuaries are listed in two bilingual inscriptions from AD 132 and 144, which had once accompanied statues set up in honour of a protector of caravans.⁴⁴ However, it ought to be added that these two texts themselves do not refer to any specifically 'tribal' status of the temples, and that they are inscribed more than thirty years before the earliest attestation of 'the four tribes'. Moreover, the four sanctuaries listed in the two inscriptions do not completely coincide: the text from AD 132 includes the temple of Baal-Shamin, while the one from AD 144 contains the temple of Allat instead, a discrepancy usually explained by scholars in terms of shared religious or organizational functions for the same tribe.⁴⁵ To cut a long discussion short, if the temples listed in these two texts are indeed those of 'the four tribes of the city', the following combinations can be established: the Sacred Garden, place of worship of Aglibol and Malakbel – the *Bene Komare* (the only of 'the four tribes' which is identified as such); the temple of Arsu/Ares – the *Bene Mattabol*; the temple of Atargatis – the *Bene Mita* (?); the temples of Baal-Shamin/Zeus and Allat/Athena – the *Bene Ma'ziyan*. According to Lucinda Dirven's thesis, the main gods worshipped in the respective sanctuaries of 'the four tribes of the city' acquired in this capacity „a municipal status“: not only did they become „the official gods of the city“, but also the focus of worship for Palmyrene expatriates.⁴⁶ We will come back to this theory, and its possible implications with regard to the interpretation of Palmyrene coinage, below.

A question of coinage

With Sartre's presentation of Palmyra as a 'Greek city' as a starting point, this paper has so far discussed some aspects of the city's society, and sketched part of an ongoing debate. Whether any remaining doubt as to the nature and the functioning of the institutions in the city after its incorporation into the Roman empire should really be removed, as Sartre suggested,⁴⁷ remains to be seen. One of the functions of the local council that he mentioned amongst its responsibilities, was the emission of civic coinage.⁴⁸ However, the coins themselves were absent from his discussion, and in fact they have received insufficient treatment in all major publications on Palmyra's society and religious life. The remainder of this paper is meant to provide a counterbalance.

The fact that the coinage of Palmyra is not taken into account in discussions of the nature of the city and its social and religious culture may come as a surprise, as civic coinage is the medium *par excellence* „by which the Greek cities of the Roman period,

posed long ago, by J. T. Milik, *Dédicaces faites par des dieux (Palmyre, Hatra, Tyr) et des thiasés sémitiques à l'époque romaine*, Paris 1972, 12, that the civic tribes were introduced under Hadrian, in the aftermath of his visit to the oasis. And a very fragmentary inscription (PAT 1385, probably of a later date, but re-inscribed), which refers to 'the three tribes', has led to the hypothesis that the number of civic tribes had once been less than four. See Sartre (n. 4) 399, n. 35; Yon (n. 15) 67.

⁴⁴ PAT 0197 and H. J. W. Drijvers, Greek and Aramaic in Palmyrene inscriptions, in: M. J. Geller/J. C. Greenfield/M. P. Weitzman (eds.), *Studia Aramaica*, Oxford 1995, 34–8 respectively. Listed by Kaizer (n. 15) 60–3.

⁴⁵ E.g. Drijvers (n. 44) 33.

⁴⁶ L. Dirven, *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos. A Study of Religious Interaction in Roman Syria*, Leiden 1999, 192.

⁴⁷ Sartre (n.4) 385.

⁴⁸ Sartre (n.4) 388.

in all areas, expressed their identity“.⁴⁹ However, the numismatic evidence from Palmyra stands out amongst the emissions of the cities, client kingdoms and provincial *koina* in the eastern part of the empire. The ‚Greek imperial‘, or ‚Roman provincial‘, coinage was literally ‚of the people of the city which produced it, with this notion expressed by means of the genitive plural of the respective ethnicon, and the accompanying legends often referred to the cities’ statuses or privileges, thus providing materials for the serious game of rivalry between them. As such, coinage of the Greek cities was especially relevant for their notables. As Kenneth Harl wrote, „the very act of minting expressed local political sovereignty“, and the coins formed „a mirror of the aristocracy’s patriotism and belief in that sovereignty.“⁵⁰ Unlike this ‚regular‘ provincial coinage, which was further characterized by an imperial portrait on the obverse, the bronze coins from the oasis in the Syrian desert bear no legends at all, with a very few exceptions which mention the name of the city (but no Παλμυρηῶν), and neither names nor heads of emperors appear on the obverse (with the exception of the coins from the latest phase in the city’s history, which are based on imperial coinage). Generally speaking, only representations connected with local cults are depicted. Palmyrene coins have been described as similar, also as regards their weight, to Parthian small change.⁵¹ That they have been so often overlooked by scholars working on Palmyra is probably due to the fact that they are perceived to be very disappointing. As Warwick Wroth once wrote, „extant Palmyrene coins are as a rule badly preserved and poorly executed.“⁵²

When William Wright visited the oasis in the late nineteenth century, he could write: „The sands of Palmyra are full of little copper coins. After strong winds the people of Palmyra gather them in handfuls. I bought hundreds of them for a few piasters. They are generally adorned with radiated heads, gazelles, fishes, zodiacal signs, and such like emblems.“⁵³ Modern scholarship is in a more difficult position, as Palmyrene issues appear in collections only seldom. Updated find lists are unavailable,⁵⁴ and one cannot be certain that those coins which are available form a reasonable reflection of what Wright once beheld. Students of the city’s coinage are still forced to turn to the monumental study by Robert du Mesnil du Buisson, which was based on forty-one Palmyrene

⁴⁹ F. Millar, *The Greek city in the Roman period*, in: M. H. Hansen (ed.), *The Ancient Greek City-State*, Copenhagen 1993, 243. Cf. C. Howgego, *Ancient History from Coins*, London/New York 1995, 62. It may be noted in passing that there is no absolute logic in the distribution of Roman provincial coinage: some minor, relatively obscure places could suddenly start to issue splendid coins, while some rich and important cities could decide to mint seldom or even not to mint at all.

⁵⁰ K. W. Harl, *Civic Coins and Civic Politics in the Roman East, AD 180–275*, Berkeley 1987, 21 f. Cf. Howgego (n. 49) 42 f.

⁵¹ A. Krzyżanowska, *Les monnaies de Palmyre: leur chronologie et leur rôle dans la circulation monétaire de la région*, in: C. Augé/F. Duyrat (eds.), *Les monnayages syriens. Quel apport pour l’histoire du Proche-Orient hellénistique et romain?*, Beirut 2002, 171: „les seules similitudes, concernant leur métrologie et leur facture, se trouvent dans le monnayage parthe.“

⁵² BMC, Syria, p. LVII. Cf. W. Szaivert, *Die Münzen von Palmyra*, in: E. Ruprechtsberger (ed.), *Palmyra. Geschichte, Kunst und Kultur der syrischen Oasenstadt*, Linz 1987, 244–8, at 244: „So reich und eindrucksvoll die künstlerischen Hinterlassenschaften aus Palmyra auch sein mögen, so enttäuschend ist das numismatische Material.“

⁵³ W. Wright, *An Account of Palmyra and Zenobia with Travels and Adventures in Bashan and the Desert*, London 1895, 155 f.

⁵⁴ See, however, the coin catalogues in the five volumes of K. Michalowski, *Palmyre, Fouilles Polonaises, 1959–1964*, Warsaw/The Hague 1960–1966.

coins in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris, as a starting point.⁵⁵ The approach by the French count is now a clear example of the questionable explanations to which pure speculation can lead, but the illustrations are reproduced splendidly. Some more recent studies of the Palmyrene coins exist in the articles by the numismatist Aleksandra Krzyżanowska, who has also presented a collection of typically Palmyrene coins from a hoard found at Alexandria, apparently brought there in the third century, and now in the National Museum at Warsaw.⁵⁶ She does not, however, apply the coinage to a discussion of how the city presented itself; some of her work is very self-referential and in general it does not take into account important discussions by others of Palmyra's social and religious history.

As I am not a numismatist, the following discussion of Palmyrene coinage will be limited, and I will not deal here with important issues such as the question of circulation. The main problem which lies at the heart of the study of the coins of Palmyra (apart from the serious defect that not all of them can be certainly attributed to the city!) is that they cannot be securely dated. In fact, they cannot even be roughly dated with any certainty. There are supposed to be two exceptions in this regard. Firstly, some coins depict a satyr figure often interpreted as Marsyas, symbolizing colonial status, and if this interpretation is correct they must date to the third century, after Palmyra became a Roman *colonia* either under Septimius Severus or under Caracalla.⁵⁷ However, identification of the satyr figure as Marsyas is not at all certain. If anything, the coins which show this figure are remarkably similar to other Palmyrene issues. I admit that in itself this is of course not a valid argument against the identification, but the appearance of this symbol of a political connection with Rome would be rather anomalous on the generally un-Roman coinage of the city. An interpretation of the image as representing Marsyas as symbol of the *colonia*, and the subsequent relevance to its dating, must therefore remain hypothetical. Secondly, there is a series of coins (on which I will not focus here at all) struck in Antioch and Alexandria and issued by the Palmyrene 'dynasts', Odaenathus' widow Zenobia and her son Vaballathus,⁵⁸ which were modelled on those issued by the Emperor.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ R. du Mesnil du Buisson, *Les tessères et les monnaies de Palmyre*, 2 vols., Paris 1944–1962.

⁵⁶ Krzyżanowska (n. 51) 167–73; ead., *Trésor de monnaies palmyréniennes trouvé à Alexandrie*, in: H. A. Cahn/G. Le Rider (eds.), *Actes du 8ème congrès international de numismatique*, New York – Washington, Septembre 1973, Paris 1976, 327–32. Cf. ead., *A hoard dating the destruction of a temple at Palmyra*, in: L. Casson/M. Price (eds.), *Coins, Culture and History in the Ancient World. Numismatic and Other Studies in Honor of Bluma L. Trell*, Detroit 1981, 39ff.

⁵⁷ The Marsyas figure is certainly no evidence that Palmyra possessed *ius Italicum*, as Szaivert (n. 52) 244 thinks. Cf. Kaizer (n. 15) 39. It is assumed that this privilege, whereby the city's territory and her inhabitants were exempted from taxes, was conferred on Palmyra from a passage in Ulpian, *De Censibus* (*Dig.* L. XV.1). In the context of colonies with *ius Italicum*, Ulpian writes *est et Palmyrena civitas in provincia Phoenice prope barbaras gentes et nationes collocata*. On the figure on coins in general, see E. W. Klimowsky, *The origin and meaning of Marsyas in the Greek imperial coinage*, *Israel Numismatic Journal* 6/7, 1982/3, 88–101.

⁵⁸ H. Mattingly, *The Palmyrene princes and the mints of Antioch and Alexandria*, *NC* 16, 1936, 89–114; H. Seyrig, *VHABALATHVS AVGVSTVS*, *Mélanges offerts à Kazimierz Michalowski*, Warsaw 1966, 659–62; E. Equini Schneider, *Septimia Zenobia Sebaste*, Rome 1993, 87–99 (esp. on iconography). On the period in general, see U. Hartmann, *Das palmyrenische Teilreich*, Stuttgart 2001.

⁵⁹ There are, e. g., a few coins on which Vaballathus is associated with Heracles, a figure who is otherwise absent from Palmyrene coinage (though not from the religious life of the city as such): G. Mazzini, *Monete imperiali romane IV*, Milan 1957, 171 with Tav. L, M/4v (RIC V.2, 585, n°4); RIC V.2, 585, n°7. It is likely that, by associating himself with this deity, the Palmyrene usurper intended to continue an imperial tradition

It is assumed that Palmyra had countermarked eastern imperial bronzes before striking coins itself,⁶⁰ and that the city did not mint before the first half of the second century AD, and continued to mint well into the third century.⁶¹ If this rough dating is correct, the Palmyrene coinage may have appeared in the aftermath of Hadrian's visit to the oasis.⁶² The ἐπιδημία of an emperor was of course a good time to acquire the right to mint, and often the production of coins by a city is directly linked to an imperial visit in economic terms.⁶³ But if the Palmyrene coins indeed reflect a visit by a Roman emperor, their non-Graeco-Roman appearance is striking. And it would be even more striking for those Palmyrene coins which (supposedly) date from a later period, such as the ones depicting the 'Marsyas figure' (which could be put forward, as I have hinted, as an argument against interpretation of the satyr figure as Marsyas). Alternatively, the coinage from Palmyra could be earlier than is generally assumed. A passage dating from the first century AD, incorporated in the Palmyrene tax law from AD 137, seems to refer to the coexistence of imperial coins on the one hand and bronzes struck in Palmyra, or at least in the Near East, on the other. It is stated, in the section which represents an edict from Gaius Licinius Mucianus, governor of Syria in AD 67–9, 'that the tax on sacrificial animals must be rendered in *denarii*, as Germanicus Caesar also made clear in his letter to Statilius (probably a *procurator*⁶⁴) that taxes ought to be collected according to the Italian *assarius*, and that tax under a *denarius* the tax farmer will collect according to local custom in small coinage.'⁶⁵ Thus, at least by the time of Mucianus' governorship, Roman denominations were applied as equivalent values to the locally produced coinage (κέρμα⁶⁶) in the

in order to substantiate his claim to the purple. Cf. V. Picozzi, *Le monete di Vaballato*, *Numismatica II*, 1961, 123–8.

⁶⁰ C. Howgego, *Greek Imperial Countermarks. Studies in the Provincial Coinage of the Roman Empire*, London 1985, 3. His Palmyrene examples (n°683, stamped with a Π and an Aramaic T, and n°694, stamped with an Aramaic T only) are dated to the reign of Tiberius (Pl. II–III). On the use of bilingual countermarks at Palmyra, see the appendix below.

⁶¹ For different dating efforts, see *BMC Syria*, p. LVII; Du Mesnil du Buisson (n. 55) 29f.; A. Krzyżanowska, *Le monnayage de Palmyre*, in: T. Hackens/R. Weiller (eds.), *Actes du 9ème congrès international de numismatique*, Berne, Septembre 1979, Louvain-La-Neuve/Luxemburg 1982, 445–57; C. Augé, *La monnaie à Palmyre*, in: J. Charles-Gaffiot/H. Lavagne/J.-M. Hofman (eds.), *Moi, Zénobie reine de Palmyre*, Milan 2001, 99ff.

⁶² Hadrian's visit is recorded in PAT 0305 (AD 130/1). One century later, Palmyra was visited by Severus Alexander, see PAT 0278 (AD 242/3). Note that, according to Du Mesnil du Buisson (n. 55) 36 pl. CIX, one coin reads the abbreviated new name of the city, which it acquired under Hadrian. See below, n. 118.

⁶³ Cf. K. Harl, *Coinage in the Roman Economy, 300 BC to AD 700*, Baltimore 1996, 111: „Visits by emperors, such as those by Hadrian with his large retinue, also stimulated the need for bronze coins.“ In contrast, however, M. Sartre, *L'Orient romain. Provinces et sociétés provinciales en Méditerranée orientale d'Auguste aux Sévères (31 avant J.-C. – 235 après J.-C.)*, Paris 1991, 96: „en réalité, la décision d'émettre ne paraît avoir aucun rapport avec les nécessités de l'économie.“ In any case, one ought to be careful when associating civic issues with imperial visits. On the methodological difficulties see A. Johnston, *Caracalla's path: the numismatic evidence*, *Historia* 32, 1983, 58–76.

⁶⁴ But see Matthews (n. 9) 179, n. 30.

⁶⁵ PAT 0259, l.181–5 in Greek: τὸ τοῦ σφάκτρου τέλος εἰς δηνάριον ὀφείλει λογεῦσθαι] καὶ Γερμανικοῦ Καίσαρος διὰ τῆς πρὸς Στατεῖλι[ον ἐπισ]τολῆς διασαφήσαντος ὅτι δεῖ πρὸς ἀσσάριον ἰτα[λικόν] τὰ τέλη λογεῦσθαι τὸ δὲ ἔντος δηναρίου τέλο[ς] συνθηεῖα ὁ τελώνης πρὸς κέρμα πράξει; l.102–7 in Palmyrenean: *mks' dy qsb' 'py dnr hyb lmtshw hyle dy 'p grmnqws qsr b'grt' dy keb lshyls psq dy b' ksr dy [y]h]n mksy' 'py 'sr 'ytlq['] gbn umdy gw mn dnr hyb mks' hyle 'dt' '[r]pn yb' gb'.*

⁶⁶ Note, with PAT p. 399, that the Palmyrenean counterpart has '[r]pn, a correspondence which is also found in the Greek and Syriac versions of the gospel story according to St. John in which Jesus clears the Temple of the money changers (John 2:15).

process of collecting taxes on produce imported from Palmyra's hinterland⁶⁷ into the city, as they seem to have been in nearby Dura-Europos.⁶⁸ As regards the Italian *assarinus*,⁶⁹ it seems to have functioned as a construct, to 'translate' local bronzes into imperial language, rather than that Roman troops stationed in the region were expected to import sufficient imperial coins into the Levant.⁷⁰ In any case, our understanding of the place of the Palmyrene coinage within the wider framework of coin circulation in the Near Eastern provinces is very limited,⁷¹ and even more so what can be known about the basic handling of money matters at the oasis. Thus, the omnipresent money-changer, who would have been the main beneficiary of „the dichotomy between the bronze and silver coinages“,⁷² is virtually absent from the Palmyrene record, with the exception of a very brief text, from the Jewish necropolis at Beth She'arim, set up by the sons of a man from Palmyra who had been either a money-changer or a banker (Λεοντίου Πολυμρηνοῦ (*sic*) τραπεζίτου ἡμεῖς).⁷³ It will be clear that, as far as I am concerned, the date of the Palmyrene issues remains uncertain, apart from the fact that they seem to have predated the phase in which the city was under the control of Odaenathus' widow Zenobia and their son Vaballathus (and even that is debatable: the coins as discussed here could of course also have been used synchronically with those of the Palmyrene dynasts which were modelled on Roman imperial coinage).

What does the Palmyrene coinage tell us about the city's identity?⁷⁴ In contrast to the later dynastic coins, the issues of the so-called ‚cité grecque‘ were not based on the sort of coinage which was in vogue in the other cities of the Eastern provinces. Unlike Levantine cities such as the north-Syrian tetrapolis of Antioch, Apamea, Laodicea and Seleucia Pieria, the Palmyrene oasis does not, as far as we know, seem to have issued coins in the Hellenistic period. It could be argued from this that therefore there was no ‚Greek‘ tradition to follow. However, the cities of the Decapolis and of Provincia Arabia did produce coinage which was typical of a ‚Greek city‘ in the Roman period, even if they too were almost completely lacking coin traditions by the time Pompey conquered the region, and their integration into the Eastern provinces was, also as far as their coins were concerned, much more complete.⁷⁵ Furthermore, like Roman imperial coinage,⁷⁶

⁶⁷ And thus not „on the products of the Far Eastern Trade“, as Harl (n. 63) 108, still thinks.

⁶⁸ Thus Howgego (n. 60) 60 with n. 51.

⁶⁹ The restoration ἰτα[λικόν] in Greek is confirmed by the Palmyrenean *ʾyṯlqʾ*].

⁷⁰ See on the circulation of imperial bronzes in the East in the early first century C. Howgego, *Coinage and military finance: the imperial bronze coinage of the Augustan East*, NC 142, 1982, 1–20. Cf. J.-P. Rey-Coquais, *Syrie romaine, de Pompée à Dioclétien*, JRS 68, 1978, 68f., on Roman troops at Palmyra, and H. Seyrig, *Textes relatifs à la garnison romaine de Palmyre*, Syria 14, 1933, 155–8, for the hypothesis that they had been stationed there already in the Flavian period.

⁷¹ But see Krzyżanowska (n. 51) 168.

⁷² Howgego (n. 60) 94.

⁷³ J.-B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* II, Rome 1952, n°1010, probably dating from the third century AD. See now D. Noy/H. Bloedhorn (eds.), *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis* III, Syria and Cyprus, Tübingen 2004, 80ff., Syr. 51.

⁷⁴ Cf. Krzyżanowska (n. 61) 456f.: „il ne peut s'agir ici ni de questions de prestige, ni de représentation.“

⁷⁵ A. Spijkerman, *The Coins of the Decapolis and Provincia Arabia*, ed. by M. Piccirillo, Jerusalem 1978; C. Augé, *La place des monnaies de Décapole et d'Arabie dans la numismatique du Proche-Orient à l'époque romaine*, in: id./F. Duyrat (n. 51) 153–66.

⁷⁶ In AD 193 a Palmyrene was honoured by the members of a caravan who had come up with him from Spasinou Charax (PAT 0294), because he had spent on them „an amount of three hundred old gold *denarii*“ (χρυσᾶ παλαιὰ δηνάρι[α] τριακόσια ἀναλ[ωμ]ᾶτω[ν]/*nār dnryn dy ddb ʿhygn tlt mʿb*), „presumably Antonine

coins from the other cities in the Near East⁷⁷ cannot have been unknown in the trading city that was Palmyra,⁷⁸ and in many other aspects of life notions coming from the Graeco-Roman world certainly did manage to infiltrate Palmyrene civilization. But despite the apparent metrological and other correspondence between Palmyrene and Parthian coinage mentioned above, it cannot be taken for granted that Palmyra looked to its Arsacid neighbours for inspiration for its local issues. In any case, however one chooses to interpret or date the local coins of Palmyra, it is clear that some organ (or maybe just a number of individuals?) was responsible for their ‚composition‘. Not all cities in the Roman East provide equal evidence, but it is generally assumed that the local council had to approve each particular issue, and that certain magistrates undertook (or rather supervised) the arrangements.⁷⁹ An exploration of which gods and goddesses appeared on the Palmyrene coins should therefore be able to shed light on the question of which cults in the city were considered to be ‚civic‘.

Palmyra's civic religious facade according to its coinage

What can the study of coinage contribute to our understanding of the nature of religious life in the Near East under Roman rule? Different source materials often provide different sorts of information on deities and their cults. In many cases, the basis of our knowledge of Near Eastern religion is founded on epigraphic material, often found where it was originally set up and often dated. Through excavations we also learn about the different forms and functions of sanctuaries, and about the distribution of temples over a city. Iconography is important because the variety of sculptures, frescoes and other visual representations makes clear how deities could be depicted in multiple ways. Amongst these sources, coins stand out, as they were not the result of the piety of an individual or a small group like a family, but instead issued by the city as a collectivity. One could therefore argue that coins are more significant than individual dedications: the religious imagery on coins was supposedly recognized and worshipped by the entire population of the place where they were minted.

It is thus not surprising that an important recent study of religion in the Decapolis, by Achim Lichtenberger, is based in the first place on numismatic evidence, starting from the principle that depictions on coins were relevant for the city that issued them, as the motives were chosen by the citizens, and were directly connected to the city as a collectivity.⁸⁰ However, one ought to be aware that the evidence for cults on a city's coinage does not provide us with a complete and impartial view of the various aspects of worship in that city, but presents a mere civic facade of religious life.⁸¹ Concerning the

pieces struck at 45 to the pound“, explained by Harl (n. 63) 291, in terms of „preferences for older coins of a familiar type or those of high purity“.

⁷⁷ Cf. the coin catalogues in the five volumes of Michalowski (n. 54) for examples.

⁷⁸ For a recent discussion, see A. Marcone, *Moneta e commercio in una città di frontiera: Palmira tra II e III secolo D. C.*, in: G. Urso (ed.), *Moneta, mercanti, banchieri. I precedenti greci e romani dell'Euro. Atti del convegno internazionale, Cividale del Friuli, 26–28 settembre 2002. I Convegni della Fondazione Niccolò Canussio 2*, Pisa 2003, 187–204.

⁷⁹ P. Weiß, *Zwischen Routine und Euergesie, Traditionen und Trends: das kaiserzeitliche Städtegeld des Ostens*, in: E. Schwertheim (ed.), *Stadt und Stadtentwicklung in Kleinasien (Asia Minor Studien 50)*, Münster/Bonn 2003, 99.

⁸⁰ A. Lichtenberger, *Kulte und Kultur der Dekapolis. Untersuchungen zu numismatischen, archäologischen und epigraphischen Zeugnissen*, Wiesbaden 2003, 1.

⁸¹ T. Kaizer, review of Lichtenberger (n. 80) in *PLEKOS* 6, 2004, 53–7.

Decapolis, it is of course the case that it is precisely the coinage of the various cities, of this so-called ‚league‘ that contributes most to the impression of a cultural cohesion between the ‚constituent members‘, long after any practical entity had gone.⁸² In contrast, it is clear that a similar study of Palmyrene religion would not be feasible with the present paucity of numismatic evidence related to the oasis. But neither should the coins of Palmyra be completely ignored in a study of the city’s religious life, as they have been in all recent works on Palmyrene cults. The final part of this paper therefore aims to start filling this gap, and hopes to provoke other scholars to contribute to this debate. Before we turn to the coinage itself, a few general remarks about the religious life of the city are necessary.

The cults of Palmyra are very distinctive.⁸³ The divine world of the city was inhabited by a large variety of indigenous and other ‚Oriental‘ deities, some of whom were identified with Greek ones in bilingual inscriptions, although most of them had their names transliterated in Greek.⁸⁴ The monumental temple of Bel, built upon a tell east of the city’s centre, functioned as the heart of the religious life of the oasis. The designation ‚temple of Bel‘, however, is a simplification of the actual situation, even if inscriptions both from the early first century AD and from the second half of the second century AD referred to the sanctuary in precisely this manner.⁸⁵ In AD 32 a new building, the first part of what later became the *cella* which is still standing on a platform in the middle of the *temenos*, was dedicated not just to Bel, but to Bel, Yarhibol and Aglibol.⁸⁶ Later in the first century, the groundplan for the new building (the first part of which was somehow never properly finished) was altered, and a second shrine was built opposite, possibly not only with an eye to grandeur, but also to provide the goddess Astarte, who is often associated with Bel, with a proper home.⁸⁷ But these were not the only gods worshipped within the large *temenos*. The present ‚temple of Bel‘ was preceded by earlier structures⁸⁸, and according to inscriptions and sculptures found in an old foundation wall, the former sanctuary was home also to other deities, among whom were Bolastor, Bel-Hamon, Manawat, Herta, Nanai, Malakbel, and a Heracles figure probably identified with Reshef.⁸⁹ Both before and after the construction of the first part of the new central shrine in AD 32, porticoes within the *temenos* were dedi-

⁸² Cf. T. Kaizer, Some remarks about religious life in the Decapolis, *Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientwissenschaft* 38, 2004, 173–85.

⁸³ See the standard article by M. Gawlikowski, *Les dieux de Palmyre*, in: ANRW II.18.4, 1990, 2605–58.

⁸⁴ Id., *L’Hellénisme et les dieux de Palmyre*, in: Ο ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΑΤΟΛΗ, International Meeting of History and Archaeology, Delphi 6–9 November 1986, Athena 1991, 245–56, esp. 246–8.

⁸⁵ PAT 0270 (AD 19); 1352 (AD 24); 2769 (AD 171); 0260 (AD 175).

⁸⁶ PAT 1347, an inscription from AD 45 honouring the man who had dedicated the new *bykol*, ‚temple‘, thirteen years earlier.

⁸⁷ M. Pietrzykowski, *Adyta świątyni palmyreńskich. Studium funkcji i formy* (Polish, with a French summary), ed. by M. Gawlikowski, Warsaw 1997. Cf. Dirven (n. 46) 71.

⁸⁸ Recently, the exploration in the 1960s of the stratification of the tell on which the temple was built (going back to the third millennium) has been re-examined by M. al-Maqdissi, *Note sur les sondages réalisés par Robert du Mesnil du Buisson dans la cour du sanctuaire de Bêl à Palmyre, Syrie* 77, 2000, 137–58. And newly-published soundings in the eastern part of the *temenos*, showing a row of columns ca two meters below the level of the *cella* but parallel to it, have revealed the first archaeological remains of the late-Hellenistic structures. Cf. A. Bouuni/M. al-Maqdissi, *Note sur un sondage dans la cour du sanctuaire de Bêl à Palmyre, Topoi* (Lyon) 11, 2001, [2003], 17–34.

⁸⁹ Gawlikowski (n. 38) 56–60.

cated to these and other deities.⁹⁰ It then comes not as a surprise that by the time of the first-century building works the sanctuary at large could still be known as 'the house of the gods of the Palmyrenes',⁹¹ even if 'temple of Bel' was already widely accepted early on, and became the preferred name over time. The inclusion of Yarhibol and Aglibol in the dedication of the new building in AD 32, and also the installation of Astarte in the *cella* a few decades later, could simply (though hypothetically) be explained as the direct result of the initiative of the respective benefactors.⁹² As regards the other temples at Palmyra, similar remarks (though in different degrees) can be made about their conventional names. In virtually all of them various deities were worshipped, while on the other hand some gods and goddesses were at home in more than one sacred place.⁹³

In addition to the cults which were at home in the temple of Bel, other aspects of religious life in Palmyra have also sometimes been discussed in terms of their relevance to the city as a collectivity. Due to its obvious importance for a city situated in the central Syrian steppe, the deity linked to the Efqa spring naturally springs to mind as a candidate for some sort of 'federal', or even 'civic' form of worship.⁹⁴ However, the physical structures at or in the vicinity of the Efqa are extremely limited, and it is certainly surprising that Yarhibol, known as god of the source from an inscription found at Dura-Europos,⁹⁵ was not worshipped at the Efqa under his own name.⁹⁶ According to Lucinda Dirven, the deities, after whom the likely candidates for the respective temples of 'the four tribes of the city' were named, functioned as official city-gods.⁹⁷ Her theory is based upon the assumption that it was those same deities whom expatriates worshipped alongside Bel, but that hypothesis is seriously weakened by the fact that the necessary identifications of the divine figures appearing in inscriptions and on sculptures from outside the oasis as the above-mentioned gods and goddesses do not fit very neatly.⁹⁸ A final 'civic' deity would be the *Gad* of Palmyra, the city's personified Good Fortune. As is confirmed by a bilingual inscription,⁹⁹ the Palmyrenean word *gd* is the equivalent of *τύχη*, and it is especially in its role as the Good Fortune of a city that *Gad* responded most clearly to the Greek notion.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁰ Kaizer (n. 15) 75–8.

⁹¹ PAT 1353 (AD 25); 0269 (AD 51). Possibly also *ibid.* 2774 (early first century AD?); 2749 (AD 48/9); Cantineau (n. 16) 174, n°2b (AD 74). Cf. Butcher (n. 33) 363.

⁹² T. Kaizer, Reflections on the dedication of the temple of Bel at Palmyra in AD 32, in: L. de Blois/P. Funke/J. Hahn (eds.), *The Impact of Imperial Rome on Religions, Ritual and Religious Life in the Roman Empire. Proceedings of the Fifth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire*, Leiden 2006, 95–105.

⁹³ Cf. Kaizer (n. 15) 79–157.

⁹⁴ Gawlikowski (n. 38) 121: „la vie communautaire postulait la création de sanctuaires poliades. Nous en connaissons deux, l'un consacré à Bel, l'autre, auprès de la source Efqa, à Yarhiból.“

⁹⁵ PAT 1099. According to one theory, Yarhibol's name actually means 'Lord of the Spring', see S. Dalley, *Bel at Palmyra and elsewhere in the Parthian period*, *Aram* 7, 1995, 140, followed by Kaizer (n. 15) 145 n. 407. See, however, the review by E. A. Knauf of the latter in *SCI* 22, 2003, 349 n. 11.

⁹⁶ For all references, see Kaizer (n. 15) 143–8, and now also D. Piacentini, *Palmyra's springs in the epigraphic sources*, *Aram* 13/14, 2001/2002, 525–34.

⁹⁷ See above, n. 46.

⁹⁸ For criticism, see Kaizer (n. 15) 153f.

⁹⁹ PAT 0273.

¹⁰⁰ T. Kaizer, *A study of the variety of appearances of Gad in Aramaic inscriptions and on sculptures from the Near East in the first three centuries AD* (part 2), *OLP* 29, 1998, 46–50. See now also N. Belayche, *Tychè et la Tychè dans les cites de la Palestine romaine*, *Syria* 80, 2003, 111–38.

In contrast to most of the other sources from Palmyra, the coins seem to have been issued by the city as a collectivity (although, admittedly, they do not say so). It seems, therefore, a simple question to ask to what degree the religious facade of Palmyra according to its coinage relates to the non-numismatic evidence for cults at the oasis. Any possible answer would be very relevant indeed for our understanding of the civic religious outlook of the city. However, as is alluded to above, the Palmyrene coins are very hard to interpret. Only in very few occasions can one be certain about the figurative representation employed. The reconstructions offered by Du Mesnil du Buisson and later by Krzyżanowska, and their respective interpretations, are sometimes overconfident.¹⁰¹ Other visual sources make clear that many gods could be depicted with a solar nimbus, and that more than one goddess could be seated next to a lion. It seems especially hazardous to label a god too easily as Malakbel, who must have been the most enigmatic of all inhabitants of the Palmyrene divine world, as he was associated, in varying appearance, with many deities. His characterisation as a ‚solar god‘, especially popular amongst Palmyrene soldiers who served under Roman flag, was only a secondary development influenced by the religious notions in vogue in the Roman army at that time.¹⁰²



Plate I: Coin of Palmyra. From R. du Mesnil du Buisson, *Les tessères et les monnaies de Palmyre*. Planches, Paris 1944, n°XCI. I.a: obverse showing a Nikè figure, with Greek legend ΠΑΛΜΥΡΑ I.b: reverse showing busts of three gods, with remains of Aramaic legend [t]d[mr] (?)

Only very few coins are inscribed. Of these, the main one shows on the obverse a Nikè figure holding scales in her right hand and, possibly, a palm in her left hand. Above the figure the legend reads ΠΑΛΜΥΡΑ (Pl. Ia). The reverse shows a god wearing a *kalathos* who is surrounded by two other gods with respectively a solar crown and a crescent (Pl. Ib). The figures on the reverse are generally taken, on convincing iconographic grounds,¹⁰³ to represent Bel, Yarhibol and Aglibol, the three gods to whom the first part of the new *cella* of the temple of Bel was dedicated in AD 32. In the same way that the name ‚temple of Bel‘ became the preferred one over time, it is very likely that the ‚triad‘ had become a true ‚civic‘ symbol by the time that Palmyra had started to mint coins, even if the above-mentioned hypothesis,

¹⁰¹ Du Mesnil du Buisson (n. 55) *passim*; Krzyżanowska (n. 51) 169–70, with the illustration on p. 173, classifying the divine figures in nineteen groups.

¹⁰² Dirven (n. 46) 170–89.

¹⁰³ Cf. H. J. W. Drijvers, *The Religion of Palmyra*, Leiden 1976, pl.VII and IX,1 (both with Arsu), and H. Ingholt/H. Seyrig/J. Starcky, *Recueil des tessères de Palmyre*, Paris 1955, n°118.

that the original coalition of the three gods in the dedication of the new shrine in AD 32 followed from an individual benefactor's preference,¹⁰⁴ is correct. It is usually assumed that the few legends which actually are put on the coins are in Greek only.¹⁰⁵ If that is indeed the case, it is of course as one would expect on this medium. However, I would like to postulate here, speculative as it may seem, that there are in fact very slight traces of Palmyrenean on the reverse. It is possible to recognise an Aramaic character on the reproduction of the coin in the volume of plates by Du Mesnil du Buisson, underneath the central figure with the *kalathos* (Pl. Ib). In fact, the French count himself read it as well, and placed a *-b-* on his drawing of the coin.¹⁰⁶ As the bottom horizontal line of the *-b-* (of *bl*, „Bel“?) is not visible on the extremely clear photographs, one may instead read a *-d-* (which is of course undistinguishable from a *-r-*). Taking into account the space on either side, one could postulate that it is the *-d-* of *[t]d[mr]*, „Tadmor“, the indigenous name of Palmyra. It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that this is a hypothesis.¹⁰⁷ But if it is correct, it matches not only the public bilingualism of the inscriptions from the city, but also the bilingual countermarks which the Palmyrenes had applied in the early first century to ratify coinage for circulation in their territory.¹⁰⁸ As for the other coin types with a legend, they either show a female figure seated next to a lion on the obverse and a Nikè figure holding a wreath over an altar stone on the reverse, or a head of a city goddess with a mural crown on the obverse and a lion and a crescent on the reverse.¹⁰⁹ It is not a surprise that the city goddess, with her typical headgear, appears on Palmyrene coins, as such a figure was widespread in the cities of the Roman Orient.¹¹⁰ As regards the palm tree, which appears on other issues, it is tempting to bring this into connection with the very name of the oasis, although the fact that the popular etymologies of both its Greek and its indigenous name are problematic makes such a link less convincing.¹¹¹

As regards the various figures, busts and symbols on the other coins, one should approach them by asking, again, which Palmyrene deities one would expect to appear on civic issues. Thus, it would be unlikely to encounter gods, who — according to our non-numismatic sources — received a cult only in a more private or family context, on

¹⁰⁴ This in contrast to the argument by H. Seyrig, *Bél de Palmyre, Syria* 48, 1971, 94, that with the construction of a new cella in AD 32, the priesthood of Bel introduced, on theological grounds, an official triad.

¹⁰⁵ Most recently stated by M. Meyer, *Bilder als Zeugnisse städtischer Identität in Palmyra?*, in: K. S. Freyberger et al. (n. 43) 280: „Wenn die Münzen überhaupt eine Legende haben, dann stets eine griechische (den ausgeschriebenen oder abgekürzten Stadtnamen). Dies galt als angemessen für das Medium Münze (obwohl nur Kleingeld für den lokalen Gebrauch geprägt wurde). Die Münzen der Parther trugen ebenfalls durchweg griechische Legenden.“

¹⁰⁶ Du Mesnil du Buisson (n. 55) pl. XCI (both a full scale and a magnified version) and pl. XCIV, 1 (drawing).

¹⁰⁷ Neither Krzyżanowska (n. 51) 173, pl. I, nor the nineteenth-century classic by F. de Saulcy, *Numismatique de la Terre Sainte. Description des monnaies autonomes et impériales de la Palestine et de l'Arabie pétrée*, Paris 1874, 64 with pl. XXIV.8, refer to any trace of Palmyrenean.

¹⁰⁸ See above, n. 60, and the appendix below.

¹⁰⁹ BMC Syria 150, n°6, pl. XVIII.3, with the Greek name of the city written in full, and p. 150 n°7, pl. XVIII.4, with the name abbreviated, respectively.

¹¹⁰ K. Parlasca, *Die Stadtgöttin Palmyras* (Bonner Jahrbücher 184), Bonn 1984, 167–76; S. B. Matheson (ed.), *An Obsession with Fortune. Tyche in Greek and Roman Art*, New Haven 1994.

¹¹¹ De Saulcy (n. 107) pl. XXIV.10; BMC Syria, 49, n°1–2. On the incorrect etymologies, see E. Will, *Les palmyréniens. La Venise des sables*, Paris 1992, 33.

coinage for which city authorities were responsible. According to the interpretations by Du Mesnil du Buisson and by Krzyżanowska, there are no depictions of Yarhibol on the coins of Palmyra apart from his inclusion in the above-mentioned ‚triad‘. It ought to be remarked, however, that many of the radiate figures which they label ‚Malakbel‘ are more probably representations of Yarhibol: the latter appears alongside Bel always with a radiate nimbus, while the solar aspects of the former are, as mentioned earlier, only secondary, and appear above all outside Palmyra. In any case, there are no clear-cut references to the Efqa spring.¹¹²

As for the above-mentioned theory that the main gods of the temples of ‚the four tribes of the city‘ in that capacity obtained ‚municipal status‘, it could be tested by looking for the respective deities on the coins. Firstly, Aglibol and Malakbel, whose cult was centred on the so-called Sacred Garden, have been recognised on a number of issues.¹¹³ But the depictions on these coins cannot be matched to the sculptures of the ‚holy brethren‘ from Palmyra without serious problems: as was mentioned earlier, Malakbel is hardly ever depicted with solar symbolism at Palmyra itself, and his characterisation as a ‚sun god‘ outside his hometown, amongst Palmyrene soldiers, seems influenced by the religion of the Roman army. Instead one could think of an association on the coins of Aglibol with Yarhibol, as they appear also together with respectively lunar and solar symbols on sculptures alongside Bel.¹¹⁴ Cosmic symbolism seems to have reigned supreme in Roman Palmyra,¹¹⁵ and it is not unlikely that the divine representations of the moon and the sun are in that capacity depicted on the city’s coins. Secondly, Baal-Shamin, identified in Greek inscriptions with Zeus, is recognizable by the fact that he is the only bearded god wearing a *kalathos* at Palmyra. On one coin an ox and a crescent seem to be depicted on the reverse, on another a head of a Tyche and the abbreviated name of the city (ΠΑΛΜ) have been postulated.¹¹⁶ Allat, whose centre of worship may have been interchangeable with that of Baal-Shamin as a temple related to one of the ‚four tribes‘, is absent from the coins, and so is the symbolism of Athena, with whom she was identified at Palmyra. In her cult, the lion seems to have played a major role.¹¹⁷ The animal appears on at least six coins, which have on the obverse the head of the city goddess with a mural crown,¹¹⁸ but there is no supporting evidence to suggest that the goddess Allat acted as the Tyche or *Gad* of Palmyra. Allat did not have a monopoly on the lion, and both on a fresco and a relief from Dura-Europos, the Tyche/*Gad* of Palmyra is depicted as seated with a lion next to her.¹¹⁹ Thirdly, Atargatis, better known as

¹¹² Contra Du Mesnil du Buisson (n. 55) 216f., who recognises Yarhibol and the ‚betyl of the source‘ on some coins, e.g. on the reverse of a coin of which the obverse shows the so-called Marsyas figure (pl. XCII–XCIV): „c’est dire qu’il s’agit d’un monument public, de signification municipale.“

¹¹³ E.g. Ibid., pl. XCV–XCVII and pl. C; Krzyżanowska (n. 51) 173, pl. XIII–XIV.

¹¹⁴ E.g. Drijvers (n. 103) pl. VII and IX; Kaizer (n. 15) pl. III.

¹¹⁵ Cf. M. Gawlikowski, *Aus dem syrischen Götterhimmel. Zur Ikonographie der palmyrenischen Götter* (Trierer Winckelmannsprogramm 1–2, 1979/80), Mainz 1981, 17–26.

¹¹⁶ With ox and crescent: Du Mesnil du Buisson (n. 55) pl. C.23 (photograph) and pl. CL.23 (drawing); Krzyżanowska (n. 51) 173, pl. VIII. With Tyche and name: *ibid.*, 173, pl. VII.

¹¹⁷ An enormous lion, holding a antelope between its legs, was part of the original enclosure of the temple of Allat, see K. Tanabe (ed.), *Sculptures of Palmyra I*, Tokyo 1986, pl. 163.

¹¹⁸ Du Mesnil du Buisson (n. 55) pl. CV; CVII–CIX, with 745–7. On one of them (pl. CIX.36), Du Mesnil du Buisson read AAP (invisible on the photograph as far as I am concerned), which would stand for the abbreviated new name of the city, ‚Hadrianè Palmyra‘.

¹¹⁹ Dirven (n. 46) pl. IV and pl. XIII respectively.

the ‚Syrian goddess‘ from Lucian’s work on the temple at Hierapolis,¹²⁰ could also be accompanied by a lion. The temple of Atargatis at Palmyra has never been identified, and in fact we only know about it from the inscriptions which seem to list the sanctuaries of the ‚four tribes‘. It is likely that, seated with a lion next to her as on the famous relief from Dura-Europos¹²¹, she is depicted on the Palmyrene coins which have on the reverse a Nikè figure holding a wreath over a conical stone.¹²² Fourthly, the presence on coins of Arsu, identified at Palmyra in bilingual inscriptions with Ares, is highly doubtful. In Palmyrene iconography, Arsu is nearly always depicted with a small round shield, and sometimes with a camel, and such a deity is completely absent from the city’s coinage as far as our evidence is concerned. However, in the remains of what was once the temple of Arsu, many *tesserae* were found on which the figure of Arsu is associated with a *caduceus*. And this symbol of Hermes appears on Palmyrene coins between *cornucopiae*.¹²³ It cannot be known whether Arsu was actually associated, or even identified, with Hermes as such. It is also possible that the *tesserae* point to a dual nature of Arsu, on the one hand a military god, on the other hand a mercantile one. The notions combine well with the fact that Palmyrene caravans travelling through the desert were in need of protection. In any case, the depiction of the *caduceus* on Palmyrene coins, issued by the city as such, does not refer unambiguously to Arsu, and it is more likely that the Greek symbol is a general reference, especially in combination with the horns of abundance, to the source of Palmyra’s wealth.¹²⁴

I hope to have made clear that the gods after whom the sanctuaries of ‚the four tribes of the city‘ were named do not appear on the Palmyrene coins in any specific capacity as ‚gods of the city‘. Or rather, if these deities, or at least some of them, were depicted, it did not happen in a methodical and consistent manner. But another deity, whose temple is not amongst those belonging to one of ‚the four tribes‘, is without any doubt present on the coins. One exemplar shows, very clearly, a lyre, the symbol of Apollo, who was identified with Nebu at Palmyra. Another coin, though less clearly, is said to show an Apollo figure playing the lyre.¹²⁵ At first sight, the presence of Nebu on the coins seems logical. Not only did he inhabit a temple in the heart of Palmyra, but he was also, at least according to Mesopotamian mythology, the son of Bel, the most important deity of the city. However, it is important to realise that there are no references in Palmyrene inscriptions to a ‚temple of Nebu‘. In other words, it is not necessary to look for one.

¹²⁰ On which see now, above all, J. L. Lightfoot, *Lucian, On the Syrian Goddess*. Edited with Introduction, Translation and Commentary, Oxford 2003.

¹²¹ M. A. R. Colledge, *The Parthian Period*, Leiden 1986, pl. XXXI.b.

¹²² Krzyżanowska (n. 51) 173, pl. III.a–b. Note the different and speculative reconstruction by Du Mesnil du Buisson (n. 55) pl. XCIII–XCIV.2, of what must be a similar coin. There is no reason to follow *ibid.*, 734–6 with pl. XCVII–XCVIII.14–15, where coins of a city goddess with mural crown on the obverse and a god with solar crown on the reverse are interpreted as Atargatis and Malakbel. Cf. Krzyżanowska (n. 51) 173, pl. IV; BMC Syria, 149 n^{os}3–5, pl. XVIII.2. The combination of the two divine names would, in itself, of course not have been an anomaly, as they appear together in a bilingual inscription from AD 140, see PAT 0273.

¹²³ Du Mesnil du Buisson (n. 55) pl. CVI; Krzyżanowska (n. 51) 173, pl. XIX. Note that *ibid.*, 170, wrongly states that „ce symbole n’est pas caractéristique de la région de Palmyre.“

¹²⁴ It is possible that the theme as such was copied from coins, with a similar image of a *caduceus* between crossed *cornucopiae*, which are generally attributed to Commagene and which seem to have circulated widely in the Eastern frontier zone. See A. Burnett/M. Amandry/P. P. Ripollès, *Roman Provincial Coinage I*, London/Paris 1992, n^{os}3868–9.

¹²⁵ Du Mesnil du Buisson (n. 55) 749 with pl. CVIII–CIX.40–41 respectively.

As is the case with most other temples in the city, the conventional designation is a gross oversimplification of the religious situation.¹²⁶ As Jean-Baptiste Yon has recently shown, the inscriptions from the sanctuary reveal a contrasting presence of two families not necessarily connected to each other, the Belshuri family, which had „un intérêt culturel“ in the temple, and that of Elahbel, for whom it served more as a „lieu de représentation“.¹²⁷ The fact that neither family used a tribe or clan designation in the context of the temple stands in sharp contrast to the situation in other centres of worship at Palmyra. Thus, it is only inscriptions found in one of the necropoleis that reveal that the Belshuri family is identical to the *Bene Baa*. Why did these families, in this particular shrine, not mention their tribal connections in the proper fashion? Should it be linked with contemporary developments in Palmyrene society at large? Or, taking into account the lack of external references to this temple, was it because of its nature as a more intimate family shrine? Naturally, the latter explanation does not seem to fit in with the depiction on the coinage of Palmyra of the lyre, unambiguously the symbol of Nebu/Apollo. On the other hand, the notions of Nebu as a god worshipped by two particular families, and of Nebu as son of the most important Palmyrene god, are not mutually exclusive.

Concluding remarks

The Palmyrene coinage remains enigmatic, and it seems that very little can be concluded firmly at this stage. Only a few obvious points of comparison exist between, on the one hand, the civic religious facade of Palmyra according to its coinage, and, on the other, the religious aspects relating to the city as an entity as they can be known from non-numismatic evidence. There is a city goddess, identified as such by her mural crown, who appears both on coins and on sculptures in combination with the name of the city, indeed in a similar way as elsewhere in the Roman world. There is, on the obverse of some coins, a probable depiction of the three gods to whom the new *cella* of the temple of Bel was dedicated in the first half of the first century AD, a temple which in reality housed ‚the gods of the Palmyrenes‘ and which may have been symbolised by reference to Bel, Yarhibol and Aglibol together. But the ‚civic‘ nature of most other divine figures portrayed on the coinage of Palmyra cannot be taken for granted, and — in as far as they can be properly identified — their inclusion in what would elsewhere be called ‚civic issues‘ seems at first glance a surprise.

The numismatic evidence from other cities in the Roman empire leads to the assumption that the produce of the local mint was the responsibility either of the local councillors or of individual magistrates who were especially appointed with a view towards this task. This does not necessarily imply that the situation in Palmyra must have been identical. With the important position of various tribes in Palmyrene society in mind, other possible scenarios, such as tribal leaders in charge of private mints, should not automatically be brushed aside. In any case, those responsible had plenty of imagery to choose from in their creative process. Surprisingly, the ‚ubiquitous‘ soldier god, known from

¹²⁶ Kaizer (n. 15) 89–99. The text volume of the official publication has now finally appeared, twelve years after the plate volume it accompanies: A. Bounni/J. Seigne/N. Saliby, *Le sanctuaire de Nabū à Palmyre. Planches*, Paris 1992, and A. Bounni, *Le sanctuaire de Nabū à Palmyre. Texte*, Beirut 2004.

¹²⁷ Yon (n. 15) 81–7, esp. 83 f.

many Palmyrene reliefs (and also from frescoes coming from a Palmyrene context in Dura-Europos),¹²⁸ is as good as absent from the coins. Taking into account the fact that „civic coins in the Roman Levant as early as the Flavian period [...] show local gods in similarly militant dress“,¹²⁹ this is not what one would expect. Epigraphic evidence from Palmyra suggests that it is difficult to pin down what precisely was ‚civic worship‘ in the city. The council and the assembly are recorded to have paid homage not only to the obvious gods and goddesses, but also to the ‚minor‘ inhabitants of the divine world, even those which seem to have been the focus of worship above all of particular families or other sub-groups of society.¹³⁰ The coins, if indeed issued by the Palmyrene council, seem to confirm this.

What this tells us about Palmyra as a ‚Greek city‘ is another matter. Palmyrene coinage, if it should indeed be dated to the second and third century AD, may be different from that of the issues of other cities in the Roman East, but it still shows, in its own way, some Graeco-Roman influence, with the mural crown of the city goddess, the *caduceus* and Nebu/Apollo’s lyre as the clearest examples. As far as non-numismatic sources are concerned, various patterns of religious culture which are known from the Greek cities in the Eastern provinces can be observed also at Palmyra.¹³¹ The city’s partial conformity to Classical models will have affected the way in which ‚indigenous‘, non-Classical religious aspects functioned in society. As regards its coinage, even a limited study shows that, despite the outward appearances of Palmyra’s civic institutions being similar to those of a ‚Greek city‘, the activities and responsibilities of the magistrates involved resulted in an outcome which remained very different. As Paul Veyne recently imagined, a visitor from the west would have found, despite an initial sense of recognition, much that was wholly unfamiliar at the oasis.¹³² In the study of the unique world of Palmyra, its bronze coinage deserves to be taken into full consideration.

Appendix: a new bilingual countermark from Palmyra on a sestertius of Nero¹³³

Palmyra had countermarked coins before it started to mint. In his major work on the countermarks which were stamped on what is now generally known as Roman provincial coinage, Chris Howgego included two examples of eastern imperial bronzes, struck in Antioch, which were countermarked in Palmyra. One of them was stamped with an Aramaic *T*, of Tadmor, the indigenous name of the city (pl. III), the other one was stamped twice, once with the same *T* and once with a Greek Π of Palmyra (pl. II).¹³⁴

¹²⁸ H. Seyrig, *Les dieux armés et les Arabes en Syrie*, Syria 47, 1970, 77–112.

¹²⁹ Harl (n. 50) 79. E.g. *ibid.*, pl. 34,1, the god Ariel, armed with spear and shield, on a coin from Rabbath Moba.

¹³⁰ Kaizer (n. 15) esp. 259.

¹³¹ *Id.*, *Religious mentality in Palmyrene documents*, Klio 86, 2004, 165–84.

¹³² Veyne (n. 37) 8ff.

¹³³ I wish to express my thanks once more to Chris Howgego, who not only drew my attention to the bilingual countermark on the sestertius published in a sales catalogue in 1994, but also showed me the unpublished specimen and then kindly allowed me to publish it here. I am deeply indebted to him for his guidance, but it should be emphasised that he is not responsible in any way for my interpretation or any remaining errors.

¹³⁴ Howgego (n. 60) n^{os} 694 and 683 respectively.



Plate II: Countermarked coin of Palmyra, double stamped with a Π and an Aramaic *T*. From C. Howgego, *Greek Imperial Countermarks*, London 1985, n°683.



Plate III: Countermarked coin of Palmyra, stamped with an Aramaic *T*. From C. Howgego, *Greek Imperial Countermarks*, London 1985, n°694.

As is clear, the latter coin had received two individual stamps, which are placed neither parallel nor in any other particular relation to each other. Two new coins can now be brought into the discussion. Both are countermarks on a Nero sestertius. The first one (pl. IV) has been published only in a sales catalogue of ancient coins and antiquities.¹³⁵



Plate IV: Countermarked coin of Palmyra, single stamped with a Π and an Aramaic *T*. From Frank L. Kovacs, *Ancient Coins & Antiquities. Fixed Price List 27*, Spring 1994, 3, n°55.

The obverse has Nero's head, with *NERO CLAVD CAESAR AVG GER PM TR P IMP PP*. It is countermarked with a Π and an Aramaic *T*, both characters being on one single stamp. They are placed in parallel, but orientated in opposite directions, as if to make sure that from whatever angle one looked at the countermark, one would always be able to read one of the two characters. The reverse is a representation of the port of Ostia. It shows seven ships, a statue and a reclining figure, with *AUGVSTI* above and *S PORT OST C* below. The coin was minted at Rome, ca AD 64.¹³⁶ It is interesting,

¹³⁵ Frank L. Kovacs, *Ancient Coins & Antiquities. Fixed Price List 27* (Spring, 1994), 3, n°55: „large countermark of uncertain meaning“.

¹³⁶ RIC I², 162, n°178. Cf. D. W. Mac Dowall, *The Western Coinages of Nero*, New York 1979, n°120.

though of course completely extraneous, that a coin of the port of Ostia ended up being countermarked by a city that under Hadrian, in the *Tarif*, referred to its function as a *portorium* by means of the Aramaic transliteration of λιμήν: *mks' dy lmn' dy hdryn' tdmr*, 'the tax law of the emporium of Hadriana Tadmor'.¹³⁷



Plate V: Countermarked coin of Palmyra, single stamped with a Π and an Aramaic *T*. From a private collection, previously unpublished. © Chris Howgego. V.a: obverse; V.b: reverse

The second coin (pl. V.a-b) is published here for the first time. It comes from a private collection, and although both sides of the coin are damaged, the countermark itself is extremely clear, and executed on the obverse with a stamp of higher quality than the first one. Again, the Π and the *T* are on one and the same stamp, placed in opposite directions. Like the first one, the obverse of this sestertius (pl. Va) has Nero's head, but the legend is only partially legible, -----] [C]AE[S]AR AUG GER P M T[---]. The reverse (pl. Vb) shows the temple of Janus, with a heavily damaged inscription, which must originally have read [PACE P R TERRA MARIQ PARTA I]ANVM CLVS[IT S C].¹³⁸ Unfortunately, due to the damaged legends it is impossible to pin down the precise type, but the coin must have been minted ca AD 65–6.¹³⁹

The bilingual countermarks cannot be anything else than Palmyrene. In contrast to other Near Eastern sites, where a Semitic language was present as a vernacular but remained unemployed in public epigraphy, the Palmyrene oasis was, as far as our evidence is concerned, the only city in the Roman Levant whose civic inscriptions were set up to a large degree in both Greek and Aramaic.¹⁴⁰ The application of a bilingual countermark, using either two individual stamps or one single stamp for the Greek and the Aramaic initial of the city's name, is in accordance with the bilingual inscriptions and also makes the above-mentioned hypothesis, that Palmyra issued at least some coins with a bilingual legend, more likely. Considering the fact that we are dealing with *sestertii* of Nero, Palmyra probably countermarked them in the third quarter of the first century AD, making a clear statement already then of its self-representation as a bilingual city.

¹³⁷ PAT 0259. On the terminology, see Matthews (n. 9) 172 and 175, n.g. 9.

¹³⁸ The alternative legend, *PACE P R VBIQ PARTA IANVM CLVSIT S C*, does not seem to appear on sestertii whose obverse legend agrees with what can be read on the obverse of our coin.

¹³⁹ RIC I², 166, n^{os}264, 266 (Rome, ca AD 65); 169, n^{os}323, 325 (ca AD 66); 177, n^o438 (Lugdunum, ca AD 65) = Mac Dowall (n. 136) n^{os}148, 139, 162, 156, 419 respectively. Cf. U. W. Hiesinger, The portraits of Nero, *AJA* 79, 1975, 113–24, esp. 120f, dating the obverse type to the years between AD 64–8.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Millar (n. 3) 470.

Summary

Coins of Palmyra, generally ignored in discussions about the nature of the city's civilization, throw important light on her self-identification and on the way in which the public façade of her religious life was conceived. From a Graeco-Roman perspective, the unfamiliarity of Palmyra's coinage stands out. This paper shows that, like many other aspects of Palmyrene society, the coins reflect the city's unique position in between the Roman and the Parthian world, indeed as the only one in the Near East whose bilingual nature was expressed in public documents. In the appendix, a new countermarked coin of Palmyra is published here for the first time.