

# Reviews

**Trevor Bryce , *Ancient Syria. A Three Thousand Year History*, New York: Oxford University Press, paperback edition 2019, pp. 379, ISBN 978-0-19-882890-7**

This book is an exceptional resource for students, researchers, and even archaeologists because based on the events presented here, they can connect the archaeological discoveries and the culture layers.

The professional background of the author, ex-Professor of Classics and Ancient History at the University of New England, Australia where most of his work has been conducted in the field of Near Eastern history and civilization, reflects very well how this work/book was put together, researched and historically proved.

The author, Trevor Bryce, is a proven historian and a specialist. First, he becomes a classicist (for Latin language and literature) with an emphasis on Near Eastern history. He is an Honorary Professor and Research Consultant of the University of Queensland and an Emeritus Professor of the University of New England.

Trevor Bryce bases his investigations and conclusions on a detailed examination of the archaeological sources, the clay tablets, and historical writings, but also on modern works which analyze historical events. His work is ambitious because he seeks to present in very small detail the main actions that occur. The intriguing part is that the book covers around three thousand years of history. His writing is understandable and easy to follow, like storytelling, as his original intention.

The organization of the book becomes a problem from a scientifically point of view. The notes are placed at the end of the book, which makes it hard to follow the documentation part. Still, because the book wanted to be storytelling, this move helps, allowing the reader to follow the events without interruptions.

The structure of the book is as follows: in the beginning, a List of Maps<sup>1</sup> and Figures and Abbreviations are added, and at the end, we have three sets of Appendix: I. Chronology of Major Events and Periods, II. King-Lists and III. Literary Sources followed by the Notes and Bibliography. The Appendix lists are quite useful if you want to have a brief survey of what the book covers. Each part is divided into chapters, an irregular number of them.

Based on the sources and the works of modern scholars, the author Trevor Bryce reconstructs the historical events of Syria and the actions that influenced those events. The main focus of this historical narration is the political and military affairs from Bronze Age until the Arab conquest, especially centered on the individuals 'who sat atop the power structures of their societies.'<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this book is to present a fully comprehensive history of the region of Syria.<sup>3</sup>

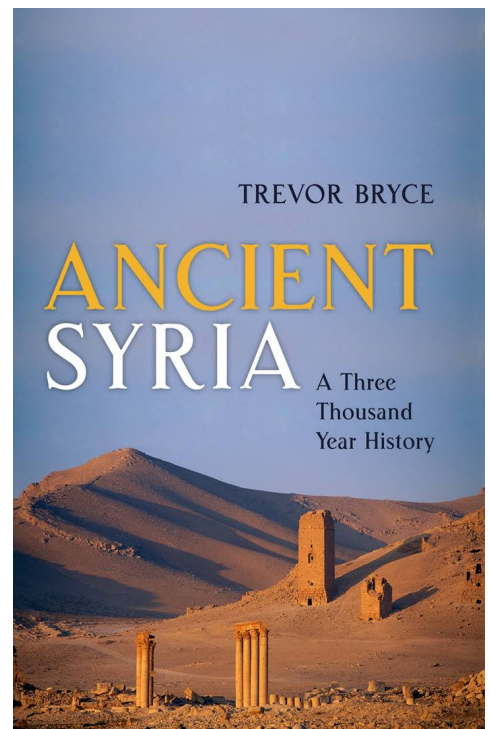
<sup>1</sup> BRYCE 2019, 146. The maps present how the territories changed and who rules them, with the name of the cities and territories.

<sup>2</sup> BRYCE 2019, 4.

<sup>3</sup> BRYCE 2019, 5.

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This book is divided in five parts<sup>4</sup>:

I. The first one covers the Bronze Ages with the rise of Ebla city for the Early Bronze Age through the ascendancy of Yamhad and Mari kingdoms for the Middle Bronze Age and the ending conflict between the Great Kingdoms of Late Bronze Age: Egypt, Hatti, Mitanni, and Assyria.

II. The second part begins with a new age, the Iron Age with the Neo-Hittite kingdoms and the Assyria domination of the region followed by the domination successively of the Babylonian and Persian Achaemenid empires, and the short-lived empire build by Alexander the Great.

III. The third part debuts with the death of Alexander and the disputes among his heirs, especially the Ptolemaic and Seleucid heirs, but also with the loss of the Seleucid empire against the Romans.

IV. Rome is the main actor in the Eastern territories. A series of other events are presented as well, like the Jewish rebellion against the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar or the Maccabean rebellion in the 2nd century BC, the uprising against the Romans in the 1st century BC and the Bar Kochba rebellion in the time of Hadrian's reign.

V. The last part presents Palmyra, an oasis in the Syrian desert. Its first historical mention date back in the 19th century BC under the name of Tadmor. Attention is focused on the short reign of queen Zenobia and its impact over the entire territories.

### Part I the Bronze Ages

In the Early Bronze Age, we have Mesopotamia and the first form of writing discovered. This area represents the birth of the Sumerian civilization, which mark the beginning of the first known empire in the Near East, the Akkadian empire (cc. 2334-2193 BC) founded by Sargon. On the other side of Euphrates, in Syria, the first archaeological excavations lead to the discovery of Ebla city, the first monumental construction in this region. The most striking discovery was a massive collection of thousands of clay tablets, fragmentary, in the cuneiform script. The writings are dated in the 24th century BC, which is the first proven form of writing in the Syrian province.

Based on the story from the tables, Ebla developed as a politically, commercially and culturally center. The Ebla phase ended with its destruction by the Akkadians. During the Middle Age, the Yamhad kingdom is mentioned. This Yamhad kingdom had a succession of 9 kings and its capital become Syria's most famous city – Aleppo. Another major outsider and a threat to Syrian territories was the Hittite empire. All the kingdoms from Near East to prove their power international they needed to exercise some control or influence over the region of Syria, because of its importance of trade and the value of goods that arrived there. The Hittites were interested in the lands of Yahmad kingdom, and after a series of fights, they were able to conquer the territories. In the time of Hittite king Suppiluliuma, in Late Bronze Age period, Aleppo became a viceregal center. Under Hittite domination, Syria prospers, but at the same time had to face many disputes with external enemies. The fall of the Hittite kingdom is caused by 'people of the sea'<sup>5</sup> which

marks at the same time the end of the Bronze Age period.

### Part II from the Iron Age to the Macedonian Conquest

During the new era, one of the most distinctive aspects was the appearance of a new population group, the Aramaeans. They had a great cultural and ethnical impact over the people of Syria and Palestine. Early Iron Age communities were able to develop free from the interferences of any major powers seeking to impose their dominance over them. This was possible just until the first millennium because in the end another Great Kingdom emerged and searched to impose its authority once again over Syria's territories.

This new group formed New Hittite kingdoms, arising in the south-eastern Anatolia and northern Syria. They kept traditions associated with the Late Bronze Age Hittites, by using a hieroglyphic script written in Luwian language; as a result, many Neo-Hittite kingdoms were components of Iron Age Hatti group. Their royal dynasties often included names of famous Hittite kings of the past as Suppiluliuma, Tudhaliya, Muwattalli. This fact reflects the link of the families between the old ones and the evolution of the new ones.

One of the first and most important Neo-Hittite states was the state of Carchemish on the Euphrates, name known since the Late Bronze Age period during which it became one of the two viceregal seats of Syria. The written sources do not present clearly what happened at the end of the Hittite kingdom. Based on the author's idea in Late Bronze Age many Anatolians, including Juwian-speakers, have settled voluntarily or compulsorily in Syria. The continuity of the royal links and their customs may reflect this.

Getting back to the Aramaeans, they were a group of pastoral tribals which spoke a West Semitic language called Aramaic, based on the sources. By the end of the second millennium, many Aramaeans adopted a more settled life which leads to the development of a series of cities like Bit-Zamani, Bit-Adini, and Aram-Damascus. This prefix 'Bit' - 'House (of)' reflects its tribal origins. Many Aramaean and Hittite elements blended in some Syrian states. Here the Aramaean ruling dynasties were established following a line of earlier Neo-Hittite rulers.

Another important kingdom, Israel, in the south of Syria, region Palestine, developed in the Iron Age period and become a major force in Syrian affairs, influencing politically, military, culturally and commercially. Other kingdoms or groups emerged such as the Canaanites and the Phoenicians, settling colonies in Sicily, Spain and north of Africa. Phoenicia was a wealthy area due to international sea-treading exchanges.

To gain control over the territory between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean was made possible in time of the Neo-Assyrian empire. King Ashurnasirpal II was the one who captured these territories without much blood shedding. Each march he made, cities proposed peace with him and decided to pay tribute to save their territories and people. As the end of the 8th century approached, all the kingdoms named Neo-Hittite have merged into the Assyrian provincial system. This system continued to exist until the end of the 7th century when the Assyrian history 'had run its course.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> BRYCE 2019, 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> BRYCE 2019, 93.

<sup>6</sup> BRYCE 2019, 136-137.

A new kingdom the Neo-Babylonian empire rising rapidly in place of the Assyrian one. For Syria and Palestine, the fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylonia meant an exchange of overlords.<sup>7</sup> Not just Babylonia wanted the Syrian territories, another opponent showed interest, that was the new pharaoh of the Saite Dynasty, Necho II. Now the important battles occur between the new Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar II, and the Egyptian pharaoh's army to gain control over Syria's and Palestine's territories. Babylonia's king ambitions to regain under his reign all the Assyrian empire territories become a success. Even after his death, the empire remained in a way stable. Still, by the time the last ruler of Babylon kingdom took the throne, the empire becomes weak and, in the end,, was conquered by the Persia's kingdom led by Cyrus II. Syria got a new overlord.

Defying the Media king, Cyrus<sup>8</sup> takes his kingdom. He becomes the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty. Syria's and Palestine's territories become part of Cyrus kingdom, most of them without any killings. The Achaemenid rulers did not force their strict domination; they perpetuated a policy where the occupied territories could conduct themselves. Major roads were built in the Syrian and Palestine region to connect the widespread Persian empire – across Mesopotamia and Syria, all the way to the Anatolia peninsula and south into the land of the Nile. In all Persian empire, Aramaic<sup>9</sup> was adopted as lingua franca, being widely spoken in Syria and Near Eastern world. The language contributing to the empire's cohesiveness. The entire Persian empire, administrative, was organized into regions named satrapies. Even though the straps themselves were royal appointees, cities and small states from Syria as Byblos or Sidon and Tyre functioned as semiautonomous units, conducting their administrative activities, performing their religious practices and pursuing their commercial enterprises. In this time, with Persian support, the Phoenician trade and commerce flourished.

Based on more accurate written sources<sup>10</sup> the rise of Alexander the Great Macedonian empire is presented. He becomes the ruler once his father died in 336 B.C. After he secured the mainland Greece, he made a more ambitious plan, to conquer the Persian empire. As a first step, he needed to take control over the Phoenician harbor cities, cities which provided the main navy force for the Persians. From here on we all know Alexander's stories and his conquests over what he named the whole world. He considered and openly proclaimed himself a living god. The battle from Gaugamela between Darius's army and Alexander's ended with the beginning of the fall of the Persian empire. Alexander's ambitions were beyond Persia territory, but his death ended all this ambitious. After his death, trade and commerce flourished on a scale unprecedented in the Near East, where cities from Syria become main points of an extensive international trading network.

### Part III Syria under Seleucid Rule

After his death, Alexander's empire was divided between his top generals. The focus for the generals was to

preserve their territories also to expand them but to do that they needed to fight each other.

One of Alexander's generals, Seleucus I, managed to lay the foundation of one of the greatest empires in Near East, the Seleucid empire.<sup>11</sup> This empire lasted almost a quarter of a millennium until its fall at the beginning of the 1st century BC. Its territories previously belonged to the Persians which were later integrated into Alexander's empire. He set up the capital Seleucia on the Tigris river.

Seleucus established throughout his empire a program to construct new settlements for ensuring the growth and development of the empire for many generations to come. Also, colonization's process with the Greeks helped ensure the spread of the Greek language<sup>12</sup> and its culture in all parts of the Seleucid realm. An open-minded policy of the ruler was to incorporate the traditional customs and beliefs of indigenous people, which were respected and preserved. They gained citizenship alongside Greeks in new and old foundations. Seleucus wanted more and after he defeated his former ally Lysimachus, he set his attention to gain Macedonia. Unfortunately, he did not survive this campaign.

Antiochus 'the Great' managed to restore the control over the territories that once were under Seleucus I. But he did not settle and extended his expedition into Thrace area. His operations in Europe inevitably force him to face Roman expandable actions. He wished not, yet, to confront Rome, therefore he tried four years of negotiations via diplomatic missions, but the results failed to satisfy Antiochus's perspective, so he prepared for war against them. The defeat of the Seleucid forces by the Romans started a new episode for the Near East territories and decided the future course of Antiochus's kingdom.<sup>13</sup> Because fate can never be controlled, Antiochus died abruptly and ignominiously.<sup>14</sup> One of the four sons of Antiochus III, Antiochus IV, sent to Rome as part of the agreement between the Seleucid Empire and the Romans, become the next king of the Seleucid empire. He was accepted as the perfect candidate by Rome, because of his time sent in Rome and the knowledge he acquired during his stay there.

His reign brought stability and continuity to the Seleucid empire. Still, because the time of peace never lasts long, Ptolemaic Egypt started a campaign to retake the Syrian territories and marched into a series of battles with Antiochus IV. Once he succeeded in crushing the Ptolemaic army, he decided to conquer the whole Egypt and Cyprus island as well. His plans never succeeded because the Romans moved on with their force against him, after finishing the Macedonian war. During the war against the Romans, he lost, but he still had people recognition. The Greek language becomes lingua franca in the world ruled by the Seleucids, this point proves the success of the promotion of the Hellenic culture by Antiochus and all his predecessors. By promoting diversity in their realm, indigenous people integration was easier. The Seleucid world offered the possibilities for its people to conduct freely their affairs and practice their customs as they wished, often in an honored way. We have

<sup>7</sup> BRYCE 2019, 138-140.

<sup>8</sup> BRYCE 2019, 145.

<sup>9</sup> BRYCE 2019, 148.

<sup>10</sup> BRYCE 2019, 150.

<sup>11</sup> BRYCE 2019, 165.

<sup>12</sup> BRYCE 2019, 168.

<sup>13</sup> BRYCE 2019, 186.

<sup>14</sup> BRYCE 2019, 190.



here a free and tolerance policy which was generally applied, but with a dark spot upon Antiochus reign, the Maccabean rebellion.

The 'chart of rights'<sup>15</sup> issued by Antiochus III was a liberation for the Jewish people against the Ptolemaic regime. The Seleucid army was welcomed by the Jewish because their territories were won back from the Egypt domination. Tolerance, local costumes, and tradition were kept by the Seleucid king, who was considered by the Jewish a liberator from Ptolemaic rule. The king even restored the Jews' right to govern themselves by their ancestral laws. Those who were abducted from the city and become slaves were freed and their property returned to them. All the favors ended once the new ruler Antiochus IV came in command. The relations between both sides turned to the worse. A group of members from the high society from the Jewish lines started to apply the Greek customs and to turn Jerusalem into a Greek city. This brought upon the local people hostilities which lead to a rebellion. The uprising is associated with a man called Judas Maccabaeus, who with a small group manage to escape the massacre in Jerusalem and fled into the wilderness. The guerrilla war against the king's forces won a series of victories, but the most notorious one was when the rebellions entered Jerusalem and searched to rededicate the Temple to its original state. Antiochus IV dies and in his place, a nine years old successor takes the throne. He was helped by his father military commander and friend Lysias who reversed Antiochus IV's abomination decree. Jewish people are left undisturbed; their temple is restored to them and are supported to conduct their lives accordingly with their ancestral customs. Although Judas wanted to create an independent city from the Seleucid rule, he failed and was killed. Later, the hostilities between the Maccabaens and the royalty move in a diplomatic area. The Seleucid kingdom rule is near to its end. Just an ultimo episode is worth mentioning the rule of Antiochus VII, who tries to save the empire from its continuing decline. He fights to conquer once again the lost territories which were part of the empire but the dispute with the Parthian king kills him and destroys his army. The Seleucid Empire ends in the time of Antiochus XIII because he is defeated by the Pompey the Great.

#### Part IV Syria under Roman rule

In 64 BC, Syria becomes a province of Rome once Pompey took under his attention the conquest of the Seleucid kingdom territories.<sup>16</sup> Antioch becomes the new administrative capital of the province. The people of Syria accepted easily the governance of Rome because they hoped for a greater political and economic stability than under the Seleucid regime. The new overlord, Rome, left its mark over the eastern territories under the Romanization process, by copying the Roman way of life including the baths, theatres, and stadium. Hundreds of towns and cities were built from scratch or refounded on the sites of earlier settlements. The retired soldiers become colonists on the territories, as they were formerly promised to receive land-grants as payment for their years of service. Both old and new cities

were connected through a network of roads as Via Maris which linked Egypt with Palestine and coastal Syria, via Nova Traiana between the Gulf of Aqaba to Damascus and a west-east route connecting Damascus with the Euphrates via Palmyra. At first, the Romans stopped with their expansion along the Euphrates river, becoming now neighbors with the Parthian kingdom.

As the Syria and Palestine's affairs settled down, Marc Antony turned his attention towards Parthia. His campaign was not successful, he lost the battle and was forced to return in Egypt because of the ascension of Octavian. After he took the power in his own hands and becomes the emperor or *princeps* over the Roman world, Octavian needed to prove his imperial authority by solving the territorial problems in Armenia and Parthia. Syria becomes one of Rome's most important provinces, governed by the emperor's appointee. One of the most difficult problems in the Roman world was to set up frontiers which were practicable to defend. Most of the time they searched territories which across the actual frontiers would become 'weak periphery', that means they search to avoid direct contact with enemy territory. In Syria's case, Armenia becomes such a buffer territory, between the Romans and the Parthian kingdom.

A new episode in Jewish history is the revolt under Hadrian's reign of Bar Kochba.<sup>17</sup> Once again, the threat to the Jewish traditions and beliefs by the western resulted in a revolt. Unfortunately, Rome did not give up upon their way of being and Hadrian was decisive in imposing their Roman ways. He established a new colonia Aelia Capitolina on the site of Jerusalem. A temple to Jupiter was built in the place of the remains of the second Jerusalem temple. With this background, the revolt upraised and continued for four years. There were registered a few victories for the Jews, but in the end, they were defeated. Judea becomes Syria Palestina and the Jews were cast out of the city. Those who dare to return were sent to death. Their identity was stolen and the practice the ancestral customs were entirely forbidden. Still, under the next ruler, in time of Antoninus Pius, the Jews could revive and maintain their religious beliefs, customs and to practice their traditional forms of worship.

During the time of Achaemenid empire, between Central Asia in the east to the Aegean coast of Anatolia in the west, large groups of nomadic herdsmen and merchants from the deserts of north-eastern Arabia began moving into Syria and the Levant. A few from them settled in southern Jordan and called themselves the Nabataeans. They become famous during the Hellenistic and Roman times as one of the great trading people from Near East. The rose-red city Petra becomes their hub of routes. Another Nabataean city was Bosra. This kingdom had its army whose purpose was to protect the stations along the kingdom's trading routes and to defend its cities. Petra was the center for processing and repacking many raw products before being sold. From their inscription, they have used Aramaic language. Under Trajan, the Nabataean kingdom was incorporated under Roman control. Petra was, according to Arab tradition the place where Moses struck a rock and water rushed out, where Aaron, Moses brother was buried. In the Greek language, Petra means 'rock'. It was not properly settled until the

<sup>15</sup> BRYCE 2019, 199.

<sup>16</sup> BRYCE 2019, 221.

<sup>17</sup> BRYCE 2019, 241.

Hellenistic period, but it was strategically placed. Inside the city, a hydraulic system very advanced was discovered which contained dams, cisterns, and channels to control floods and drought. It became a man-made oasis city. Petra remains the dominant city during the Hellenistic and begins of Roman times until Trajan sets the capital of Arabia in Bostra.

The influence of Syrian society becomes clear by the time a new era in Roman history began. The Severan period<sup>18</sup> opened one of the most distinguish ruling time, starting with the founder of its dynasty, Lucius Septimius Severus.

Just a few years after his throne ascendance, Septimius begins one of the most important enterprises of his career, the conquest of Parthian-Mesopotamia. By full force, he attacked, captured and sacked all the obstacles. Mesopotamia becomes a province of Rome. Caracalla had the same aspirations as Greek Alexander and conducted a campaign in Parthia where he would subjugate not just a part of it, but all the Parthian realms would fall to him.

An important episode that is worth mentioning is how another great empire, the Sasanian kingdom, emerged and become an enemy for the Romans during their most vulnerable time, the crisis years when almost all the emperors were assassinated. From 247 BC until 224 AD, the greatest power in the east has been the Parthian kingdom. In 224, a new empire overthrew the Parthians, the Sasanian kingdom. They sway much of the eastern half of the Near East, a territory in which they kept their political and military influence until the Arab conquest in 651 AD. Their ambition was to resurrect the power and glory of the Achaemenid Empire. By the time the last ruler of the Severan dynasty died, the Sasanians reached its highest peaks. Though it never achieved its founder's ambition, it remains a significant threat to all Roman eastern territories.

In the years after the fall of the Severs, all the Roman emperors tried to keep the Sasanians outside the eastern territories, but the king Shapur had not any intention to maintain a peaceful relationship with Rome. On the throne of Rome came emperor Valerian's disastrous times, when he and his son, Gallienus, divided the empire in half, the son in the west and the father would take the east. Valerian had no chance against the Shapur, and after losing most of his troops in battles or by plague, he tried to persuade diplomatically the Sasanian king, without any success. Shapur never intended to negotiate with the Romans, but for façade, he requested the king himself to present before him. The Roman king presented himself in front of Sapur. Valerian was seized by the enemy and ended his days as a slave in Persis.

The capture of Valerian was the biggest disaster Rome ever faced, considered by both ancient and modern writers as the lowest point the Roman Empire reached in its history. It was bad enough for the army commanded by the emperor to be defeated in battle, worse if the defeated emperor was killed in the process, but to be captured and held as a prisoner that was the worst possible outcome.

## Part V the Rise and Fall of Palmyra

From the author point of view, the story of Palmyra's rise and fall is 'one of the most extraordinary episodes in the

<sup>18</sup> BRYCE 2019, 247.

history of the ancient Near Eastern world, and indeed of the ancient world in general.'<sup>19</sup>

Palmyra was located between the Euphrates and the coastlands of Syria, this oasis settlement was a natural interest for the caravan trade from the remote eastern world like Indonesia, China and India to bring goods and products to the lands of the Mediterranean. Originally the name of the city was Tadmor, name which was found in the letters of the Assyrian merchants in the 19th century BC. In the texts of the Late Bronze Age, the city appears under the name of Emar on the Euphrates. Tadmor/Palmyra have played an important role in the history of Near Eastern trade, for both regional and international sources. Starting just from the late 2nd century BC (late Hellenistic period) archaeological discoveries inside the city become more substantial. Still, an impact on the city had the first two centuries of the Roman imperial period, where the city experienced the greatest development. As a particularity before the Roman intervention, Syria had its army for defense because of its vulnerability in the middle of the desert. Its development as an urban center started in the 1st century BC.

After Syria became a Roman province, Palmyra was allowed considerable freedom in the management of its affairs, the development, and expansion of its commercial enterprises. Once the Nabateans were conquered by the Romans and the trade routes were freed, by the 1st century AD Palmyra's position becomes a major advantage for the locals. The trade routes were moved north, and Palmyra became the eastern hub for the trading operations. Still, in the 1st century, all the great building projects become features of the city urban landscape. The first temples were built, temples which even today stand proudly in from of their grandiosity. During Septimius Severus, the city becomes a Roman Colonia, the highest status a city can receive, for which all its inhabitant's enjoyed full Roman citizenship rights. The language most used in the written records is the Aramaic one, although there was a mixture of Aramaic, Greek, Latin, and Arabic. Silk and spices were among the wealth-generating exotic items which were traded.

Septimius Odenathus or Udaynath was a figure from the higher society of Palmyra who played an important role after the capture of Valerian. He defended the city against the Sasanian king and managed to win back for Rome all its eastern territories and eliminated for the time the menace of the Sasanians. Odenathus died abruptly and suspiciously. In his place, his son, Wahballath, and his wife, Zenobia, as a regent, as the son was minor, took over. With his death, the way to the Palmyra's power was left open for his wife. Just for a couple of years, Zenobia will become one of the most powerful rulers of the Eastern part and a powerful enemy of Rome.

Zenobia becomes *de facto* ruler of the Palmyrene world because she acts merely as a regent for her son. She is presented as a powerful, charismatic figure, noted for her beauty as well as her combat skills in the hunt and on the field of battle by both Classical and Arab sources. What can be concluded after examining the sources was that she is indeed part of Arab descent and one of her recent ancestors was a desert sheikh. By the time of her birth somewhere

<sup>19</sup> BRYCE 2019, 275.

around 241, her family was almost certainly a settled part of Palmyra's urban community. It was indeed a highly distinguished family, of wealthy merchants, with an impact in the city affluent elite commercial class, being under Roman patronage as well. Because of her status and wealth, Zenobia was a fitting candidate for the man who had assumed the kingship of Palmyra.<sup>20</sup>

During her reign, she wanted to consolidate her authority within the region of Syria and part of north-western Mesopotamia, without provoking Rome. In the west, Claudius Gothicus was busy with the Gothic threat, leaving Zenobia free to pursue her military enterprises and her ambitions in the east. Somewhere in the spring of 270, Zenobia started her grand program of military expansion in the west. She marched into the Roman Province Arabia and even took the territory called Arabia Felix. She could claim that she was doing this on Rome's behalf, by securing its territories in the Syrian-Arabian region. Still, her purpose was to establish her control over the access to the Red Sea and the Nile Delta while her next objective was to take over Egypt. It is a must to present the development of the western part of the empire. A very capable man took over the throne, Lucius Domitius Aurelianus. He was able to prove himself one of the most formidable rules of Rome. He succeeded in securing all the western threats, like the Germanic invasion from Italy, or the Vandal invasion in Pannonia, or the Gaul crisis.

Zenobia was aware of the new king, but she did not stop her ambitions. She ordered the invasion of Egypt. This action changed drastically the relations with Rome. Egypt had a Roman Governor, and by invading its territories meant a declaration of war against Rome itself. After the battles with the Egypt Governor, Zenobia entered the land of Nile and proclaimed herself the Queen of Egypt. Her rule over Egypt was an enlightened one, with a genuine, liberal cosmopolitan environment, where the traditions of all elements of the population were respected and preserved in the cohabitation of Arab, Aramaic, Greek, Roman, and native customs, lifestyle, and ideals. At first, Zenobia tried to convince Aurelianus that her actions were not a rebellion against the Rome, on the contrary, she wanted to become his ally, his colleague and a ruler of the eastern part. She did not stop to Egypt with the conquests; she went even further to Asia Minor. She did not manage to impose her influence here. Alarming news came from the west where Aurelianus had rejected any prospect of a diplomatic settlement with her and was already marching with a large army to the east to solve once and for all Rome differences with the queen. Zenobia has withdrawn all her troops from Egypt to defend the Palmyra's territories.

Zenobia was defeated only after three battles. The first one took place near Antioch, where Zenobia left the city for Emesa with her army. Then in Emesa most of her forces were killed, and she needed to run back in Palmyra for her last stand against the Roman emperor. Here, she waited for help from Persia, help which never came. In the end, together with her son and the closed personal, Zenobia was captured and taken to Rome. Aurelianus entered the city in triumph with two-star attractions, one Zenobia and the

other, the Gallic chief, Tetricus. What happened with the queen afterward is not clear, as the historical sources tell different stories. What it is known though, is that the queen left a mark deep into the memory of the people and in the history as well.

As for Syria, things remain the same, during Aurelianus and Diocletian's reign. Diocletian managed to conclude a treaty with Sasanians, which confer Syria's city stability. He also built a new fortification on the *limes* and made new roads to improve the communication system and to ease the march of the troops. By the Byzantine era, Syria was integrated into the imperial bureaucratic system. Arrangements imposed were not all the time welcomed by the local population but were offered new opportunities for many local Syrians to become officials for the state in their home districts. An impact change started with Christianity as the official religion in the Roman empire. It began especially from Antioch region, therefore the adaptation of a Syrian religion by the greatest power of antiquity can be considerate a 'Syrianisation of Rome'.

Persia continues to be a thorn in the back for Syria. The situation was not alarming until the reign of Justinian when Persia indeed become an open threat to Syria. Justinian and his followers did not manage to protect the eastern frontiers, thus Persia conquered Antioch in the 7th century AD. The constant warfare between the Byzantine and Sasanian inevitably weakened beyond recovery their armies. This paved the way for a new intruder, the Arabs. Syria was the first land invaded by the Muslim army. They came here to stay, therefore in 661 Damascus was chosen to be the capital of the first Muslim empire. Syria was not just a part of the Muslim world; it was the center of it.

Trevor Bryce offers readers some of the most detailed studies over the region of Syria and is more than a valuable contribution to the field, is a resource which can be used by any researcher, any scholar or person who wants to identify or just to know events, actions, characters from three thousand history about Syria.

<sup>20</sup> BRYCE 2019, 298.