

**Septimius Odaenathus**

(Palmyrene: ['Dynt (Odainat)]; Arabic: أذينة [Udaina]; circa 220–267), was the founder king (Mlk) of the Palmyrene Kingdom who ruled from Palmyra, Syria. He lifted the status of his city from that of a regional center subordinate to Rome to the supreme power in the east. Odaenathus was born into an aristocratic Palmyrene family that had received Roman citizenship in the 190s under the Severan dynasty. He was the son of Hairan, the descendant of Nasor. The circumstances surrounding his rise are ambiguous; he became the lord (ras) of the city, a position created for him, as early as the 240s and by 258, he was styled a *consularis*, indicating a high status in the Roman Empire.

The defeat and captivity of Emperor Valerian at the hands of the Sassanian emperor Shapur I in 260 left the eastern Roman provinces largely at the mercy of the Persians. Odaenathus remained on the side of Rome; assuming the title of king, he led the Palmyrene army, fell upon the Persians before they could cross the Euphrates to the eastern bank, and inflicted upon them a considerable defeat. He took the side of Emperor Gallienus, the son and successor of Valerian, who was facing the attempted usurpation of Fulvius Macrianus. The rebel declared his sons emperors, leaving one in Syria and taking the other with him to Europe. Odaenathus attacked the remaining usurper and quelled the rebellion. He was rewarded with many exceptional titles by the Emperor, who formalized his self-established position in the East. In reality, the Emperor may have done little but accept the declared nominal loyalty of Odaenathus.

In a series of rapid and successful campaigns starting in 262, Odaenathus crossed the Euphrates and recovered Carrhae and Nisibis. He then took the offensive into the heartland of Persia, and arrived at the walls of its capital, Ctesiphon. The city withstood the short siege but Odaenathus reclaimed the entirety of the Roman lands occupied by the Persians since the beginning of their invasions in 252. Odaenathus celebrated his victories and declared himself "King of Kings", crowning his son Herodianus as co-king. By 263, Odaenathus was in effective control of the Levant, Roman Mesopotamia and Anatolia's eastern region.

Odaenathus observed all due formalities towards the Emperor, but in practice ruled as an independent monarch. In 266, he launched a second invasion of Persia but had to abandon the campaign and head north to Bithynia to repel the attacks of Germanic raiders besieging the city of Heraclea Pontica. He was assassinated in 267 during or immediately after the Anatolian campaign, together with Herodianus. The identities of the perpetrator or the instigator are unknown and many stories, accusations and speculations exist in ancient sources. He was succeeded by his son Vaballathus under the regency of his widow Zenobia, who used the power established by Odaenathus to forge the Palmyrene Empire in 270.

#### 40 **Name, family and appearance**

"Odaenathus" is the Latin transliteration of the king's name; he was born Septimius Odainat in c. 220. His name is written in Palmyrene as Sptmyws 'Dynt. "Sptmyws" (Septimius), which means "born in September", was Odaenathus' family gentilicium (Roman surname), adopted as an expression of loyalty to the Roman Severan dynasty and the emperor Septimius Severus who had granted the family Roman citizenship in the late second century. 'Dynt (Odainat) is the Palmyrene diminutive for ear, related to Udaina in Arabic and 'Öden in Aramaic. Odaenathus' genealogy is known from a stone block in Palmyra with a sepulchral inscription that mentions the building of a tomb and records the genealogy of the builder: Odaenathus, son of Hairan, son of Wahb Allat, son of Nasor. In Rabbinic sources, Odaenathus is named "Papa ben Nasor" (Papa son of Nasor); the meaning of the name "Papa" and how Odaenathus earned it is unclear.

The King appears to be of mixed Arab and Aramean descent: his name, the name of his father, Hairan, and that of his grandfather, Wahb-Allat, are Arabic; while Nasor, his great-grandfather, has an Aramaic name. Nasor might not have been the great-grandfather of Odaenathus, but a more distant ancestor; the archaeologist Frank Edward Brown considered Nasor to be Odaenathus' great-great or great-great-great grandfather. This has led some scholars, such as Lisbeth Soss Fried and Javier Teixidor, to consider the origin of the family to be Aramean. Byzantine historians of the sixth century, such as Procopius, referred to him as "king of the Saracens", meaning of the Arabs. The origin of Odaenathus' name does not indicate that he identified as an Arab, or that his rule had an Arab character. In practice, the citizenry of Palmyra were the result of Arab and Aramaean tribes merging into a unity with a corresponding consciousness; they thought and acted as Palmyrenes.

The fifth-century historian Zosimus asserted that Odaenathus descended from "illustrious forebears", but the position of the family in Palmyra is debated; it was probably part of the wealthy mercantile class. Alternatively, the family may have

belonged to the tribal leadership which amassed a fortune as landowners and patrons of the Palmyrene caravans. The historians Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl suggested that Odaenathus was part of a new elite of Bedouins driven from their home east of the Euphrates by the aggressive Sassanian dynasty after 220. However, it is certain that Odaenathus came from a family which had belonged to the upper class of the city for several generations; in Dura-Europos, a relief dated to 159/158 (470 SE [Seleucid year]) was commissioned by Hairan son of Maliko son of Nasor. This Hairan might have been the head of the Palmyrene trade colony in Dura-Europos and probably belonged to the same family as Odaenathus. According to Brown, it is plausible, based on the occurrence of the name Nasor in both Dura-Europos and Palmyra (where it was a rare name), that Odaenathus and Hairan son of Maliko belonged to the same family.

No definite images of Odaenathus have been discovered, hence, there is no information about his appearance; all sculptures identified as Odaenathus lack any inscriptions to confirm whom they represent. Two sculpted heads from Palmyra, one preserved in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek museum and the other in the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul, were identified by the archaeologist Harald Ingholt as representing Odaenathus based on their monumentality and regal style. The academic consensus does not support Ingholt's view, and the heads he ascribed to the king can be dated to the end of the second century. More likely, two marble heads, one depicting a man wearing a royal tiara, the crown of Palmyra, and the other depicting a man in a royal Hellenistic diadem, are depictions of the king. In addition, a Palmyrene clay tessera, depicting a bearded man wearing a diadem, could be a portrait of the king.

#### 90 **Odaenathus I**

Traditional scholarship, based on the sepulchral inscription from Odaenathus' tomb, believed the builder to be an ancestor of the king and he was given the designation "Odaenathus I". The name of King Odaenathus' father is Hairan as attested in many inscriptions. In an inscription dated to 251, the name of the ras (lord) of Palmyra, Hairan, son of Odaenathus, is written, and he was thought to be the son of Odaenathus I. Prior to the 1980s, the earliest known inscription attesting King Odaenathus was dated to 257, leading traditional scholarship to believe that Hairan, ras of Palmyra, was the father of the king and that Odaenathus I was his grandfather. However, an inscription published in 1985 by the archaeologist Michael Gawlikowski and dated to 252 mentions King Odaenathus as a ras and records the same genealogy found in the sepulchral inscription, confirming the name of King Odaenathus' grandfather as Wahb Allat; thus, he cannot be a son of Hairan son of Odaenathus (I). Therefore, it is certain that King Odaenathus was the builder of the tomb, ruling out the existence of "Odaenathus I". The ras Hairan mentioned in the 251 inscription is identical with Odaenathus' elder son and co-ruler, Prince Hairan I.

#### Rise

Palmyra was an autonomous city within the Roman Empire, subordinate to Rome and part of the province of Syria Phoenice. Odaenathus descended from an aristocratic family, albeit not a royal one as the city was ruled by a council and had no tradition of hereditary monarchy. For most of its existence, the Palmyrene army was decentralized under the command of several generals, but the rise of the Sasanian Empire in 224, and its incursions, which affected Palmyrene trade, combined with the weakness of the Roman Empire, probably prompted the Palmyrene council to elect a lord for the city in order for him to lead a strengthened army.

#### 115 **Ras of Palmyra**

The Roman emperor, Gordian III, died in 244 during a campaign against Persia and this might have been the event which led to the election of a lord for Palmyra to defend it: Odaenathus, whose elevation, according to the historian Udo Hartmann, can be explained by Odaenathus probably being a successful military or caravan commander, and his descent from one of the most influential families in the city. Odaenathus' title as lord was ras in Palmyrene and exarchos in Greek as revealed by bilingual inscriptions from Palmyra. The ras title enabled the bearer to effectively deal with the Sassanid threat, in that it probably vested in him supreme civil and military authority; an undated inscription refers to Odaenathus as a ras and records the gift of a throne to him by a Palmyrene citizen named "Ogeilu son of Maqqai Haddudan Hadda", which confirms the supreme character of Odaenathus' title. The office was created for Odaenathus, and was not a usual title in the Roman Empire, and not a part of Palmyrene government traditions.

Hairan I was apparently elevated to co-lordship by his father, as an inscription from 251 testifies. As early as the 240s, Odaenathus bolstered the Palmyrene army, recruiting desert nomads and increasing the number of the Palmyrene heavy cavalry

(clibanarii). In 252, the Persian emperor, Shapur I, started a full-scale invasion of the Roman provinces in the east. During the second campaign of the invasion, Shapur I conquered Antioch on the Orontes, the traditional capital of Syria, and headed south, where his advance was checked in 253 by a noble from Emesa, Uranius Antoninus. The events of 253 were mentioned in the works of the sixth-century historian John Malalas who also mentioned a leader by the name "Enathus" inflicting a defeat upon the retreating Shapur I near the Euphrates.

### Reign

140 Faced with Shapur I's third campaign, the Roman emperor Valerian marched against the Persian monarch but was defeated near Edessa in late spring 260 and taken prisoner. The Persian emperor then ravaged Cappadocia and Cilicia, and claimed to have captured Antioch on the Orontes. Taking advantage of the situation, Fulvius Macrianus, the commander of the imperial treasury, declared his sons Quietus and Macrianus Minor as 145 joint emperors in August 260, in opposition to Valerian's son Gallienus. Fulvius Macrianus took Antioch on the Orontes as his center and organized the resistance against Shapur I; he dispatched Balista, his praetorian prefect, to Anatolia. Shapur I was defeated in the region of Sebaste at Pompeiopolis, prompting the Persians to 150 evacuate Cilicia while Balista returned to Antioch on the Orontes. Balista's victory was only partial: Shapur I withdrew east of Cilicia, which Persian units continued to occupy. A Persian force took advantage of Balista's return to Syria and headed further west into Anatolia. According to the Augustan History, Odaenathus was 155 declared king of Palmyra as soon as the news of the Roman defeat at Edessa reached the city. It is not known if Odaenathus contacted Fulvius Macrianus and there is no evidence that he took orders from him.

### Persian war of 260 and pacifying Syria

160 Odaenathus assembled the Palmyrene army and Syrian peasants, then marched north to meet the Persian emperor, who was returning to Persia. The Palmyrene monarch fell upon the retreating Persian army between Samosata and Zeugma, west of the Euphrates, in late summer 260. He defeated the Persians, expelling Shapur I from the province of Syria. In early 261, Fulvius Macrianus headed to Europe accompanied by Macrianus Minor, leaving Quietus and Balista in Emesa. Odaenathus' whereabouts during this 165 episode are not clear; he could have distributed the army in garrisons along the frontier or might have brought it back to his capital. The Palmyrene monarch seems to have waited until the situation clarified, declaring loyalty to neither Fulvius Macrianus nor Gallienus. In the spring of 261, Fulvius Macrianus arrived in the Balkans but was defeated and killed along with Macrianus Minor; Odaenathus, when it became clear that Gallienus would eventually win, sided with the Emperor and marched 170 on Emesa, where Quietus and Balista were staying. The Emesans killed Quietus as Odaenathus approached the city, while Balista was captured and executed by the King in autumn 261.

### Ruler of the East

175 The elimination of the usurpers left Odaenathus as the most powerful leader in the Roman East. He was granted many titles by the Emperor but those honors are debated among scholars:

Dux Romanorum (commander of the Romans) was probably given to Odaenathus to recognize his position as the commander in chief of the forces in the east against the Persians; it was inherited by Odaenathus' son and successor Vaballathus. 180 Corrector totius orientis (righter of the entire East): it is generally accepted by modern scholars that he bore this title. A corrector had overall command of Roman armies and authority over provincial governors in his designated region. There are no known attestations of the title during Odaenathus' lifetime. Evidence for the King bearing the title consists of two inscriptions in Palmyrene: one posthumous dedication describing him as MTQNN' of the East (derived from the Aramaic root TQN, meaning to set in order); and the other describing his heir Vaballathus with the same title, albeit using the word PNRTT' instead of MTQNN'.

185 However, the sort of authority accorded by this position is widely debated. The problem arises from the word MTQNN'; its exact meaning is unclear. The word is translated into Latin as corrector, but "restitutor" is another possible translation; the latter title was an honorary one meant to praise the bearer for driving enemies out of Roman territories. However, the inscription of Vaballathus is clearer, as the word PNRTT' is not a Palmyrene word but a direct Palmyrene translation of the Greek term Epanorthotes, which is usually an equivalent to a corrector.

190 According to the historian David Potter, Vaballathus inherited his father's exact titles. Hartmann points out that there have been cases where a Greek word was translated directly to Palmyrene and a Palmyrene equivalent was also used to mean the same thing. The dedication to Odaenathus would be the use of a Palmyrene equivalent,

while the inscription of Vaballathus would be the direct translation. It cannot be certain that Odaenathus was a corrector.

200 Imperator totius orientis (commander-in-chief of the entire East): only the Augustan History claims that Odaenathus was given this title; the same source also claims that he was made an Augustus, or co-emperor, following his defeat of the Persians. Both claims are dismissed by scholars. Odaenathus seems to have been acclaimed as imperator by his troops, which was a salutation usually reserved for the Roman emperor; this acclamation might explain the erroneous reports of the Augustan History.

205 Regardless of his titles, Odaenathus controlled the Roman East with the approval of Gallienus, who could do little but formalize Odaenathus' self-achieved status and settle for his formal loyalty. Odaenathus' authority extended from the Pontic coast in the north to Palestine in the south. This area included the Roman provinces of Syria, Phoenice, Palaestina, Arabia, Anatolia's eastern regions and, following the campaign of 262, Osroene and Mesopotamia.

### **First Persian campaign 262**

210 Perhaps driven by a desire to take revenge for the destruction of Palmyrene trade centers and to discourage Shapur I from initiating future attacks, Odaenathus launched an offensive against the Persians. The suppression of Fulvius Macrianus' rebellion probably prompted Gallienus to entrust the Palmyrene monarch with the war in Persia and Roman soldiers were in the ranks of Odaenathus' army for this campaign. In the spring of 262, the King marched north into the occupied Roman province of

215 Mesopotamia, driving out the Persian garrisons and recapturing Edessa and Carrhae. The first onslaught was aimed at Nisibis, which Odaenathus regained but sacked, since the inhabitants had been sympathetic towards the Persian occupation. A little later he destroyed the Jewish city of Nehardea, 45 kilometres west of the Persian capital Ctesiphon, as he considered the Jews of Mesopotamia to be loyal to Shapur I. By late

220 262 or early 263, Odaenathus stood outside the walls of the Persian capital. The exact route taken by Odaenathus from Palmyra to Ctesiphon remains uncertain; it was probably similar to the route Emperor Julian took in 363 during his campaign against Persia. If he did use this route, Odaenathus would have crossed the Euphrates at Zeugma then moved east to Edessa followed by Carrhae then Nisibis. Here, he would have descended south along the Khabur River to the Euphrates valley and then marched along the river's left bank to Nehardea. He then penetrated the Sassanian province of Asōristān and marched along the royal canal Naarmalcha towards the Tigris, where the Persian capital stood.

225 230 Once at Ctesiphon, Odaenathus immediately began a siege of the well-fortified winter residence of the Persian kings; severe damage was inflicted upon the surrounding areas during several battles with Persian troops. The city held out and the logistical problems of fighting in enemy territory probably prompted the Palmyrenes to lift the siege. Odaenathus headed north along the Euphrates carrying with him numerous prisoners and much booty. The invasion resulted in the full restoration of the Roman lands which had been occupied by Shapur I since the beginning of his invasions in 252: Osroene and Mesopotamia. However, Dura-Europos and other Palmyrene posts south of Circesium, such as Anah, were not rebuilt. Odaenathus sent the captives to Rome, and by the end of 263 Gallienus added Persicus maximus ("the great victor in Persia") to Odaenathus' titles and held a triumph in Rome.

235 240 245 **King of Kings of the East**  
In 263, after his return, Odaenathus assumed the title of King of Kings of the East (Mlk Mlk dy Mdnh), and crowned his son Herodianus (Hairan I) as co-King of Kings. A statue was erected and dedicated for Herodianus to celebrate his coronation by Septimius Worod, the duumviri (magistrate) of Palmyra, and Julius Aurelius, the Queen's procurator (treasurer). The dedication, in Greek, is undated, but Septimius Worod was a duumviri between 263 and 264. Hence, the coronation took place circa 263. Contemporary evidence for Odaenathus bearing the title of King of Kings is lacking; all firmly dated inscriptions attesting Odaenathus with the title were commissioned after his death, including one that is dated to 271. However, Herodianus died with his father, and since he is directly attested as "King of Kings" during his father's lifetime, it is unimaginable that Odaenathus was simply a king while his son was the King of Kings. An undated inscription, written in Greek and difficult to decipher, found on a stone reused in the Palmyrene Camp of Diocletian, addresses Odaenathus as King of Kings (Rex regum) and was probably set during his reign.

250 255 260 According to the dedication, Herodianus was crowned near the Orontes, which indicates a ceremony taking place in Antioch on the Orontes, the metropolis of Syria. The title was a symbol of legitimacy in the East, dating back to the Assyrians, then the Achaemenids, who used it to symbolize their supremacy over all other rulers; it was later adopted by the Parthian monarchs to legitimize their conquests. The first

- 265 Sassanian monarch, Ardashir I, adopted the title following his victory over the Parthians. Odaenathus' son was crowned with a diadem and a tiara; the choice of Antioch on the Orontes was probably meant to demonstrate that the Palmyrene monarchs were now the successors of the Seleucid and Iranian rulers who had controlled Syria and Mesopotamia in the past.
- 270 **Assassination**  
Odaenathus was assassinated, together with Herodianus, in late 267. The date is debated and some scholars propose 266 or 268, but Vaballathus dated the first year of his reign between August 267 and August 268, making late 267 the most probable date. The assassination took place in either Anatolia or Syria. There is no consensus on the manner, perpetrator or the motive behind the act.
- 275 According to Syncellus, Odaenathus was assassinated near Heraclea Pontica by an assassin also named Odaenathus who was killed by the King's bodyguard. Zosimus states that Odaenathus was killed by conspirators near Emesa at a friend's birthday party without naming the killer. The twelfth-century historian Zonaras attributed the crime to a nephew of Odaenathus but did not give a name. The *Anonymus post Dionem* also does not name the assassin.
- 280 The Augustan History claims that a cousin of the King named Maeonius killed him.
- Theories of instigators and motives  
Roman conspiracy: The seventh-century historian John of Antioch accused Gallienus of being behind the assassination. A passage in the work of the *Anonymus post Dionem* speaks of a certain "Rufinus" who orchestrated the assassination on his own initiative, then explained his actions to the Emperor who condoned them. This account has Rufinus ordering the murder of an older Odaenathus out of fear that he would rebel, and has the younger Odaenathus complaining to the Emperor. Since the older Odaenathus (Odaenathus I) has proven to be a fictional character, the story is ignored by most scholars. However, the younger Odaenathus could be an oblique reference to Vaballathus and Rufinus could be identified with Cocceius Rufinus, the Roman governor of Arabia in 261-262. The evidence for such a Roman conspiracy is weak.
- 295 **The children of Odaenathus and Zenobia were:**  
Vaballathus: he is attested on several coins, inscriptions, and in the ancient literature.  
Hairan II: his image appears on a seal impression along with his older brother Vaballathus; his identity is much debated. Potter suggested that he is the same as Herodianus, who was crowned in 263, and that the Hairan I mentioned in 251 died before the birth of Hairan II. Andrade suggested the opposite, maintaining that Hairan I, Herodianus and Hairan II are the same.  
300 Herennianus and Timolaus: the two were mentioned in the Augustan History and are not attested in any other source; Herennianus might be a conflation of Hairan and Herodianus while Timolaus is most probably a fabrication, although the historian Dietmar Kienast suggests that he might be Vaballathus.  
305 Possible descendants of Odaenathus living in later centuries are reported: Lucia Septimia Patabiniana Balbilla Tyria Nepotilla Odaenathiana is known through a dedication dating to the late third or early fourth century inscribed on a tombstone erected by a wet nurse to her "sweetest and most loving mistress". The tombstone was found in Rome at the San Callisto in Trastevere. Another possible relative is Eusebius who is mentioned by the fourth century rhetorician Libanius in 391 as a son of one Odaenathus, who was in turn a descendant of the King; the father of Eusebius is mentioned as fighting against the Persians (most probably in the ranks of Emperor Julian's army). In 393, Libanius mentioned that Eusebius promised him a speech written by Longinus for the King. In the fifth century, the philosopher "Syrian Odaenathus" lived in Athens and was a student of Plutarch of Athens; he might have been a distant descendant of the King.
- 310 **Burial and succession**  
320 Mummification was practiced in Palmyra alongside inhumation and it is a possibility that Zenobia had her husband mummified. The stone block bearing Odaenathus' sepulchral inscription was in the Temple of Bel in the nineteenth century, and it was originally the architrave of the tomb. It had been moved to the temple at some point and so the location of the tomb to which the block belonged is not known. The tomb was probably built early in Odaenathus' career and before his marriage to Zenobia and it is plausible that another, more elaborate, tomb was built after Odaenathus became King of Kings.  
325 Roman law forbade the burial of individuals within a city. This rule was strictly observed in the west, but it was applied more leniently in the eastern parts of the empire. A burial within a city was one of the highest honors an individual other than

the Emperor and his family could receive in the Roman Empire. A notable person may be buried in this manner for different reasons, such as his leadership or monetary donations. It meant that the deceased was not sent beyond the walls for fear of miasma (pollution), and that he would be part of the city's future civic life. At the 335 western end of the Great Colonnade at Palmyra, a shrine designated "Funerary Temple no. 86" (also known as the House Tomb) is located. Inside its chamber, steps lead down to a vault crypt which is now lost. This mausoleum might have belonged to the royal family, being the only tomb inside the city's walls. Odaenathus' royal power in itself was sufficient to earn him a burial within the city walls.

340 The Augustan History claims that Maeonius was proclaimed emperor for a brief period before being killed by soldiers. However, no inscriptions or other evidence exist for Maeonius' reign, the very existence of which is doubtful. The disappearance of Septimius Worod in 267 could be related to the internal coup; he could have been 345 executed by Zenobia if he was involved; or killed by the conspirators if he was loyal to the King. Odaenathus was succeeded by his son, the ten-year-old Vaballathus, under the regency of Zenobia; Hairan II probably died soon after his father, as only Vaballathus succeeded to the throne.

### Legacy and reception

350 Odaenathus was the founder of the Palmyrene royal dynasty. He left Palmyra the premier power in the East, and his actions laid the foundation of Palmyrene strength which culminated in the establishment of the Palmyrene Empire in 270. Hero cults were not common in Palmyra, but the unprecedented position and achievements of Odaenathus 355 might have given rise to such a practice: a mosaic panel excavated in Palmyra depicts a man in Palmyrene military outfit riding a horse and shooting. According to Gianluca Serra, the conservation zoologist based in Palmyra at the time of the panel's discovery, the tigers are *Panthera tigris virgata*, once common in the region of Hyrcania in Iran. Gawlikowski proposed that it is Odaenathus depicted as the archer and the Persians as the tigers in the mosaic; the title of *mrn* (lord) appears on the 360 panel, an honor carried only by Odaenathus and Hairan I. The panel indicates that Odaenathus was probably treated as a divine figure, and may have been worshipped in Palmyra.

Odaenathus' memory as an able king, and loyal Roman, was used by the emperors 365 Claudius II and Aurelian to tarnish Zenobia's reputation by portraying themselves as Odaenathus' avengers against his wife, the usurper who gained the throne through plotting. The King was praised by Libanius; and the fourth-century writer of the Augustan History, while placing Odaenathus among the Thirty Tyrants (probably because he assumed the title of king, in the view of the eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon), speaks highly of his role in the Persian War and credits him with saving the 370 empire: "Had not Odaenathus, prince of the Palmyrenes, seized the imperial power after the capture of Valerian when the strength of the Roman state was exhausted, all would have been lost in the East". On the other hand, Odaenathus is viewed negatively in Rabbinic sources. His sack of Nahardea mortified the Jews, and he was cursed by 375 both the Babylonian Jews and the Jews of Palestine. In the Christian version of the Apocalypse of Elijah, probably written in Egypt following the capture of Valerian, Odaenathus is called the king who will rise from the "city of the sun" and will eventually be killed by the Persians; this prophecy is a response to Odaenathus' persecution of the Jews and his destruction of Nahardea. The Jewish Apocalypse of Elijah identifies Odaenathus as the Antichrist.

### Modern scepticism

380 The successes of Odaenathus are treated sceptically by a number of modern scholars. According to the Augustan History, Odaenathus "captured the king's treasures and he captured, too, what the Parthian monarchs hold dearer than treasures, namely his concubines. For this reason Shapur [I] was now in greater dread of the Roman 385 generals, and out of fear of Ballista and Odaenathus he withdrew more speedily to his kingdom". Sceptical scholars, such as Martin Sprengling, considered such accounts of ancient Roman historians "poor, scanty and confused". However, the coronation dedication of Herodianus' statue, which stood on the Monumental Arch of Palmyra, records his defeat of the Persians, for which he was crowned, thus providing Palmyrene evidence that explicitly mentions the war against Persia; the victory 390 attested is probably related to the first Persian campaign and not the battle of 260. The historian Andreas Alföldi concluded that Odaenathus started his wars with Persia by attacking the retreating Persian army at Edessa in 260. Such an attack is rejected by sceptical scholars; Sprengling noted that no evidence exists for such an engagement. The Iranologist Walter Bruno Henning considered the accounts of 395 Odaenathus' attack in 260 greatly exaggerated. Shapur I mentions that he made the Roman prisoners build him the Band-e Kaisar near Susiana, and built a city for those

400 prisoners, which evolved into the current Gundeshapur; Henning cited those arguments as evidence for Shapur I's success in bringing his army and prisoners back home and Roman exaggeration regarding Odaenathus' successes. Sprengling suggested that Shapur I did not have enough troops to garrison the Roman cities he occupied, and he was old and focused on religion and building; hence, Odaenathus merely retook abandoned cities and marched on Ctesiphon to heal Rome's pride, while being careful not to disturb the Persians and their emperor. Other scholars, such as Jacob Neusner, noted that while the accounts of the 260 engagement might be an exaggeration, Odaenathus 405 did become a real threat to Persia when he regained the cities formerly taken by Shapur I and besieged Ctesiphon. The historian Louis Feldman rejected Henning's proposals; and the historian Trevor Bryce concluded that whatever the nature of Odaenathus' campaigns, they led to the restoration of all Roman territories occupied by Shapur I - Rome was free of Persian threats for several years after Odaenathus' 410 wars.

### **Shapur II (Middle Persian: 𐭩𐭧𐭩𐭧𐭩𐭧𐭩 Šābuhr, 309–379)**

415 also known as Shapur the Great, was the tenth King of Kings (Shahanshah) of the Sasanian Empire. He took the title at birth and held it until his death at age 70, making him the longest-reigning monarch in Iranian history. He was the son of Hormizd II (r. 302–309).

420 His reign saw the military resurgence of the country and the expansion of its territory, which marked the start of the first Sasanian golden era. Thus, along with Shapur I, Kavad I and Khosrow I, he is regarded as one of the most illustrious Sasanian kings. His three direct successors, on the other hand, were less successful.

425 At the age of 16, he launched enormously successful military campaigns against Arab insurrections and tribes.

430 Shapur II pursued a harsh religious policy. Under his reign, the collection of the Avesta, the sacred texts of Zoroastrianism, was completed, heresy and apostasy were punished, and Christians were persecuted. The latter was a reaction against the Christianization of the Roman Empire by Constantine the Great. Shapur II, like Shapur I, was amicable towards Jews, who lived in relative freedom and gained many advantages in his period (see also: Rava). At the time of Shapur's death, the Sasanian Empire was stronger than ever, with its enemies to the east pacified and Armenia under Sasanian control.

### **Etymology**

435 Shapur was a popular name in Sasanian Iran, being used by three Sasanian monarchs and other notables of the Sasanian era. Derived from Old Iranian \*xšayaθiya.puθra 'son of a king', it must initially have been a title, which became – at least in the late 2nd century AD – a personal name. It appears in the list of Arsacid kings in some Arabic-Persian sources; however, this is anachronistic. Shapur is rendered variously in other languages: Greek Sapur, Sabour and Sapuris; Latin Sapore and Sapor; Arabic Šābur and Šābur; New Persian Šāpur, Šāhpur, Šahfur.

### **Accession**

440 When Hormizd II died in 309, he was succeeded by his son Adur Narseh, who, after a brief reign which lasted few months, was killed by some of the nobles of the empire. They then blinded Hormizd's second son, and imprisoned the third (Hormizd, who afterwards escaped to the Roman Empire). The throne was reserved for another one of Hormizd II's children, Shapur II; some sources say that Shapur was born forty days after his father's death while others say that he was infant at the time. A legend 445 exists that Shapur was crowned while still unborn, with the crown being placed upon his pregnant mother's womb. This story was known to Western historians such as Agathias (6th century), who writes that the magi had prophesied that the child would be a boy. Modern historians C. E. Bosworth and Alireza Shapour Shahbazi consider this story to be fictional. The sex of the infant could not have been known before 450 Shapur's birth, writes Bosworth. The crowning of the infant Shapur after the elimination of his older brothers was a means for the nobility and priesthood to gain greater control of the empire. They maintained their control until 325, when Shapur reached maturity at the age of sixteen.

### **War with the Arabs (325)**

455 During the childhood of Shapur II, Arab nomads raided the Sasanian homeland of Pars, particularly the district of Ardashir-Khwarrah and the shore of the Persian Gulf. At the age of 16, Shapur II led an expedition against the Arabs; primarily campaigning against the Iyad tribe in Asoristan and thereafter he crossed the Persian Gulf, reaching al-Khatt, modern Qatif, or present eastern Saudi Arabia. He then attacked 460 the Banu Tamim in the Hajar Mountains. Shapur II reportedly killed a large number of the Arab population and destroyed their water supply by filling their wells with

sand. [

After having dealt with the Arabs of eastern Arabia, he continued his expedition into western Arabia and Syria, where he attacked several cities – he even went as far as Medina. Supposedly because of his cruel way of dealing with the Arabs, piercing the shoulders of captives, he was called *Dhu'l-Aktaf* ("the man with the shoulders") by them. [a] However, Theodor Nöldeke considered this a later folkloric explanation of an honorary epithet meaning "the man with the broad shoulders", i.e., capable of bearing the weight of kingship. Not only did Shapur II pacify the Arabs of the Persian Gulf, but he also pushed many Arab tribes further deep into the Arabian Peninsula.

Furthermore, he also deported some Arab tribes by force; the Taghlib to Bahrain and al-Khatt; the Banu Abdul Qays and Banu Tamim to Hajar; the Banu Bakr to Kirman, and the Banu Hanzalah to a place near Hormizd-Ardashir. Shapur II, in order to prevent the Arabs from making more raids into his country, ordered the construction of a wall near al-Hira, which became known as *war-i tāzigān* ("wall of the Arabs").

The Zoroastrian scripture *Bundahishn* also mentions the Arabian campaign of Shapur II: During the rulership of Shapur (II), the son of Hormizd, the Arabs came; they took Khorig Rudbar; for many years with contempt (they) rushed until Shapur came to rulership; he destroyed the Arabs and took the land and destroyed many Arab rulers and pulled out many number of shoulders.

With Eastern Arabia more firmly under Sasanian control, and with the establishment of Sasanian garrison troops, the way for Zoroastrianism was opened. Pre-Islamic Arabian poets often makes mention of Zoroastrian practices, which they must have made contact with either in Asoristan or Eastern Arabia. The Lakhmid ruler *Imru' al-Qays ibn 'Amr*, who was originally a vassal of the Sasanians, may have suffered from Shapur II's raids in Peninsula. He seemingly swore fealty to the Romans, possibly after the incident.

In the accounts of the historians regarding Shapur's campaign against the Arab lands, as well as his mistreatment of the Arabs, the burning of cities, and the flooding of water sources, there are undoubtedly significant exaggerations. These embellishments stem from Persian sources that have been greatly overstated. However, the Roman historians' narratives about this event do not support this claim.

### War with the Romans

Ever since the "humiliating" Peace of Nisibis concluded between Shapur's grandfather Narseh and the Roman emperor Diocletian in 298, the borders between the two empires had changed largely in favor of the Romans, who in the treaty received a handful of provinces in Mesopotamia, changing the border from the Euphrates to the Tigris, close to the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. The Romans also received control over the kingdoms of Iberia and Armenia, and gained control over parts of upper Media in Iran proper. Shapur's primary objective was thus to nullify the treaty, which he spent much of his reign trying to accomplish.

Another cause for Shapur's wars against the Romans was their attempts to meddle in the domestic affairs of the Sasanian Empire and hurt Shapur's kingship by supporting his brother Hormizd, who had been well received at the Roman court by Constantine the Great and made a cavalry commander. Shapur had made fruitless attempts to satisfy his brother, even having his wife sent to him, who had originally helped him escape imprisonment. However, Hormizd had already become an avid philhellene during his stay with the Romans, with whom he felt at home. Another reason was Constantine's declaration of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in 337. He had also declared himself the defender of all the Christians in the world, including those living in the Sasanian realm.