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ДРЕВНИЙ ВОСТОК

WHERE WAS *MADĪNAT AL-KHAṬṬ*, THE SASANID STRONGHOLD IN NORTH-EASTERN ARABIA?

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Abstract: This study is an attempt to ascertain the geographical position of Punyāt Ardashir, the Sasanid stronghold in North-Eastern Arabia, identifiable with Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ of al-Ṭabarī's history. To do that, it is necessary to understand, what the names al-Khaṭṭ and Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ applied to. In mediaeval Islamic literature the name al-Khaṭṭ had different meanings and was used to denote a settlement in the region then called al-Baḥrayn and embracing the territory from Basra to Oman, an island in the Persian Gulf, and the coastal zone of the region of Baḥrayn. The word 'madīna' denoted a town when preceding the town's name, and a capital when followed by the name of the region. Therefore, it should not be assumed that Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ meant 'the town of al-Khaṭṭ'. The lack of references to Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ in the extant sources, including when such references would be expected, suggests that Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ was the capital of the region of al-Khaṭṭ, which had a distinct name. That regional capital is not necessarily identical with the settlement of al-Khaṭṭ. This means that the only firm basis for any tentative localization of Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ is its status of the regional capital. Madīnal al-Khaṭṭ is to be expected to have been the residence of the Sasanid marzbān, and to have been sharply defended by Persians during the Islamic conquest. The place which best fits to that description appears to be the fortress of al-Zāra situated in the territory of present-day al-Ḳaṭīf. Therefore, Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ is probably identical with al-Zāra.

Keywords: pre-Islamic Arabia, al-Khaṭṭ, Punyāt Ardashir, Sasanids, Dārīn

It is well-known that the name *Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ* appears in the monumental 'History of Prophets and Kings' by al-Ṭabarī (839–922/23). He states that Ardashir I (225–240), the founder of the Sasanid dynasty, built in the Baḥrayn region[1] the town of *F.sā Ardashīr* alias *Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ* [al-Ṭabarī, 1881–1882, p. 821].

That statement is reproduced by Ibn al-Athīr (1160–1233), who, so far as the Sasanid history is concerned, heavily depends on al-Ṭabarī. However, Ibn al-Athīr abridges the original text a little and only refers to *Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ*, without specifying its Persian name [Ibn al-Athīr, 1987, p. 296].

A town built by Ardashir in the Baḥrayn region is mentioned by several writers who do not follow al-Ṭabarī, but use information going back to his sources. The name of the town is written as:

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[1] The mediaeval region of Baḥrayn was not identical with present-day Bahrain and was thought to comprise the coastal lands between Basra and Oman [al-Bakrī, 1983, p. 228; Yāḳūt, 1977, 1, p. 347].

F.w.rān Ardashīr, by Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī (d. between 894 and 902/03) [al-Dīnawarī, 1960, p. 45],

B.w.rā Ardashīr, in an unknown writer's treatise *Nihāyat al-arab fī akhbār al-furs wa al-ʿarab* [The Utmost of What May Be Desired in Exposition of the History of Persians and Arabs], which, for the Sasanid history, is in many respects an extended version of al-Dīnawarī's book [*Nihāyat...*, 1996/97, p. 200],

B.t.n Ardashīr, by Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (ca. 893/94–between 961/62 and 970/71) [Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, 1921/22, p. 34],

Beh-tan Ardashīr, in the *Mudjmal al-tawārīkh wa-l-kiṣaṣ* [Collection of Histories and Stories] written ca. 1126/27 by an unknown writer who, in his history of the Sasanids, closely follows Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī [*Muğmal...*, 2000, p. 51].

It is to be observed that all those writers are essentially in line with al-Ṭabarī's statement, but never identify the town built by Ardashīr with *Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ*.

References to al-Khaṭṭ also occur with writers belonging to *Oriens Christianus*. Eutychius of Alexandria (877–940), like al-Ṭabarī, devotes a special fragment to towns built by Ardashir I and mentions al-Khaṭṭ, yet without quoting its Persian name. But Eutychius provides a geographical localization of al-Khaṭṭ, stating that it was situated in the west (looking from Iraq which the information obviously comes from), behind the river which is to be identified with Tigris [Eutychius, 1906, p. 108]. The *Synodicon orientale* contains a reference to a local church synod held on the island of Dārīn in May 677, in which the bishop of Ḥaṭṭā (this must be the Syriac equivalent of Arabic *al-Khaṭṭ*) took part, as well as the bishop of Hagar[2] [*Synodicon...*, 1902, p. 216, 482]. About a hundred years earlier, in February 576 another synod, of the Nestorian church of the Sasanid empire, was held, and the bishop of Hagar and *P.y.ṭ Ardashīr* gave a written approval to its decisions [*Synodicon...*, 1902, p. 128, 387].

An interpretation of that evidence is provided by J. Marquart, who suggests that the names of the town quoted by Muslim writers and *P.y.ṭ Ardashīr* of the *Synodicon orientale* are connected to, and denote the same as, Panait, the name of a region in the southern quarter (*kust-i-nēmrōz*) of the Sasanid empire, which occurs in the geography of Ananias of Shirak (ca. 610–ca. 685).[3] On the basis of that, Marquart reconstructs the initial name which, in his opinion, was *Paniat-Ršīr*. According to him, it was the official Sasanid name of the town of al-Khaṭṭ (*die Stadt al Xaṭṭ*) [Marquart, 1901, p. 42].

An undoubted merit of Marquart's work is that it allows to ascertain the common origin of the town's different names occurring with Muslim writers. Marquart himself believes that it was *F.n.yādh*. By the time when al-Ṭabarī wrote, that form had long been forgotten. Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī explains his *B.t.n Ardashīr* as Persian *be-tan* meaning 'on the body', telling that the town was built upon, and partially from, the bodies of those who had fought against Ardashīr I [Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, 1921/22, p. 34; cf. *Muğmal...*, 2000, p. 51]. The fact that the original name was no longer used appears to explain of the variety of forms presented above.

Another important piece of evidence is signalled by E. Herzfeld, who points out to a seal kept in the British Museum. He transliterates the legend of the seal as *darînîk u puny(â)t arta-xšatr dar hamârk(â)re* (the accountant of the Government of Darînîk and Punyât-Ardashîr) [Herzfeld, 1930, p. 32].[4] Marquart's reconstruction is, thus, supported by an original Sasanid

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[2] *Hagar* is the Syriac name of the fortress called in Islamic sources *Hadjar*. It was situated in present-day Ḳaryat al-Ḳāra, a few kilometres to the north-east from al-Hufūf [al-Djanabī, 2004, p. 238].

[3] The name *Panait* is quoted after the Russian translation of Ananias's geography by K.P. Patkanov [*Armyanskaya geografiya...*, 1877, p. 67]. It is used here as the first choice because it fits best to Marquart's reconstruction of the name as presented above. A modern English translation by R.H. Hewsen has *Anatršir* [Hewsen, 1992, p. 72]. As for the Syriac name, it is reconstructed, by means of a slight conjecture, as *P.n.y.ṭ Ardashīr*.

[4] The title is now read as *āmārgar*. Literally it means 'a reckoner', [MacKenzie, 1971, p. 7], but here the sense would be better rendered as 'a financial officer'.

artefact. Perhaps, the *punyāt* of the seal is connected to modern Persian *bunyād* in the sense of 'foundation, basis' or 'wall'.

As to the geographical position of Punyāt Ardashir, Marquart places it, in his words, *in der Landschaft Qaṭīf in Bahrain*, or in the region of al-Ḳaṭīf in Baḥrayn [Marquart, 1901, p. 42]. He does not specify any grounds of that localization, but his view, supported by his undoubtedly correct and wise reconstruction of the name, has long been commonly accepted and not disputed by anyone. However, his theory has recently been challenged by Chr.-J. Robin, who suggests to identify al-Khaṭṭ with al-'Uḳayr. Robin's argument runs as follows:

– The *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* [Book on the Conquests of the Lands] by al-Balādhurī (d. c. 892) contains a fragment (discussed below under number 5) showing that al-Khaṭṭ is not identical with al-Ḳaṭīf, as Marquart allegedly suggests.[5]

– al-'Uḳayr is situated near al-Hufūf of which it is a natural port.

– The name *al-'Uḳayr* does not occur in ancient sources where al-Khaṭṭ is mentioned, whereas the name of al-Khaṭṭ ceases to be used when al-'Uḳayr appears. More concretely, al-'Uḳayr is referred to neither in the accounts of the Muslim conquest, nor in pre-Islamic poetry, where the name of al-Khaṭṭ is occasionally used.

– al-'Uḳayr is a centre of important archaeological excavations which show traces of pre-Islamic settlement [Robin, Prioletta, 2013, p. 140–141; cf. Robin, Tayran, 2012, p. 544–545].

It does not appear that there are enough grounds to unconditionally support Robin's view. Ibn Khurradādhbih (ca. 820/21 or 826/27–ca. 912/13) quotes al-Khaṭṭ among the settlements of the region of Baḥrayn [*Kitâb...*, 1889, p. 152], but includes al-'Uḳayr into his itinerary from Basra to Oman [*Kitâb...*, 1889, p. 60]. In the last fragment the coast of Hadjar (*sāḥil Hadjar*) is mentioned alongside al-'Uḳayr. There are, thus, no reasons to state that al-'Uḳayr appears instead of al-Khaṭṭ as the name of the same settlement, or that al-'Uḳayr was a port of Hadjar. The possible existence of a pre-Islamic settlement at al-'Uḳayr is not, of itself, an unbeatable proof of the latter's alleged identity with Punyāt Ardashir. Al-'Uḳayr might well have been a distinct settlement. Yāḳūt (1179–1229) states that Sasanid king Shapur I (240–271) settled Arabs from the valley of Euphrates at al-'Uḳayr [Yāḳūt, 1977, 4, p. 283].

To ascertain the geographical position of Punyāt Ardashir, it is necessary to review the cases where the name al-Khaṭṭ is used in the sources. It does not appear quite often and, unexpectedly, does not occur in Islamic geographical treatises of the 10th century, the golden age of Islamic geography. References to al-Khaṭṭ in other sources are not numerous either. They can be grouped as follows:

1. As stated above, al-Khaṭṭ is mentioned among settlements (*ḳurā*) of the Baḥrayn region. It occurs first with Ibn Khurradādhbih who quotes al-Khaṭṭ as first and al-Ḳaṭīf, as second, of those settlements [*Kitâb...*, 1889, p. 152]. Later on, other writers also refer to al-Khaṭṭ as a Baḥrayni settlement [Ḥamd Allāh Ḳazwīnī, 1915, p. 137; al-Ḥimyarī, 1984, p. 82; Ibn al-Faḳīh, 1996, p. 89; al-Idrīsī, 1974, p. 386; *Kitâb...*, 1889, p. 249; Yāḳūt, 1977, 1, p. 347]. However, no other significant information is supplied.

2. Pre-Islamic poets often mention *khaṭṭī* spears (*rimāḥ khaṭṭiyya*). Mediaeval commentators are almost unanimous in asserting that the spears were called so because al-Khaṭṭ was the place to which spears were brought on ships from India. This explanation, although in an incomplete form, occurs as early as in the Arabic vocabulary by al-Khalīl al-Farāhidī (d. 776/77, 786/87, or 791/92) [al-Khalīl, 1980, 4, p. 136]. Another relatively early writer, Abū-l-'Abbās Tha'lab (c. 815/16–904), twice states that al-Khaṭṭ is an island [*Dīwān...*, 1979, p. 27; Tha'lab, 2008, p. 95] and once calls it Khaṭṭ 'Abd al-Ḳays, i.e., al-Khaṭṭ belonging to the tribal confed-

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[5] *La plupart des auteurs ne se prononcent pas sur la localisation précise d'al-Khaṭṭ. Marquart ... a suggéré al-Qaṭīf*. As shown above, Marquart places Punyāt Ardashir in the region of al-Ḳaṭīf, but, strictly speaking, does not identify the two toponyms.

eration of Banū ʿAbd al-Ḳays [*Gedichte...*, 1928, p. 125], which, strictly speaking, does not rule out an identification with an island. It is noteworthy that in the *Dīwān* Thaʿlab quotes an earlier writer, al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 828/29) as stating that there are no spears on it, but once a ship on which they were transported, landed there. This 'on it' (*bi-hā* in Arabic) seems to be related to the island (*djazīra*). Therefore, the idea that al-Khaṭṭ was an island may come from al-Aṣmaʿī, let alone people from whom he takes his information.

Some other renowned commentators describe al-Khaṭṭ as an island, too. Aḥmad al-Naḥḥās (Copperman, d. 949 or 950) states that al-Khaṭṭ is an island in the Baḥrayn region, which ships land to [al-Naḥḥās, 1973, p. 637]. Similar statements are then found in the famous *Kitāb al-aghānī* [Book of Songs] by Abū-l-Faradj al-Iṣfahānī (897/98–967), and with Ibn Rashīḳ (999/1000–1064) [Abū-l-Faradj al-Iṣfahānī, 1905, 9, p. 146; Ibn Rashīḳ, 1981, p. 233].

Commentators of poetry are not the only ones to deliver such descriptions of al-Khaṭṭ. Ibn al-Balkhī, who wrote in the first decade of the 11th century, in Persian, a 'Book on Persia' (*Fārs-nāmeh*), narrates, in his account of the campaign which Sasanid King Shapur II (309/10–379/80) undertook against the Arabs in the mid-320-es, that the king crossed the sea and disembarked at al-Khaṭṭ, an island from which spears were exported (to Arabia) [*The Fársnáma...*, 1921, p. 68]. Later geographer Ḥamd Allāh Ḳazwīnī (1281/82–after 1339/40) states that al-Khaṭṭ is an island on which Ardashir I built a town [Ḥamd Allāh Ḳazwīnī, 1915, p. 253–254].

3. The name al-Khaṭṭ was used to denote the coastal zone of Baḥrayn and Oman. Such use of that word is attested in such early a work as the vocabulary of Arabic by Ibn Durayd (837/38–933) [Ibn Durayd, 1987, p. 106]. Geographer Abū ʿUbayd al-Bakrī (ca. 1010–1094/95) quotes Muḥammad al-Anbārī (d. 939/40), a contemporary of Ibn Durayd, as stating that the Baḥrayn's coastline is called Khaṭṭ (without the *alif-lām* definite article) [al-Bakrī, 1983, p. 503]. Muḥammad al-Anbārī is mainly known as the author of the final version of the famous *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* collection of poetry and comments to it, initially written by his father al-Ḳāsim (d. 916/17). It is said in one of those comments, whether made by al-Ḳāsim or Muḥammad, that al-Khaṭṭ is a part of the region of Baḥrayn, which is above the sea [*The Mufaḍḍalīyāt...*, 1921, p. 245]. For al-Bakrī himself, al-Khaṭṭ is the coastline stretching from Oman to Basra and from Kāẓima to al-Shiḥr [al-Bakrī, 1983, p. 503]. The last statement is then reproduced by ʿAbd al-Munʿim al-Ḥimyarī, whose geographical treatise probably goes back to the late 13th century [al-Ḥimyarī, 1984, p. 220].

4. Al-Khaṭṭ is several times mentioned in accounts of the Muslim conquest of Baḥrayn. Ibn Saʿd (ca. 784–845) narrates that Muslim general al-ʿAlāʾ Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī[6] defeated Persians and their allies from the Arabic tribal confederation of Banū Bakr Ibn Wāʾil, then pitched his camp at al-Khaṭṭ, on the coast, and beleaguered his enemies, who had fortified themselves in al-Zāra. He compelled them to surrender and afterwards crossed the sea and conquered the island of Dārīn [Ibn Saʿd, 2001, 5, p. 278–279]. A similar account is supplied by Ibn Ḥubaysh (1110/11–1188/89), who depicts al-Khaṭṭ as being situated on the coast, and al-Ḥimyarī. Both writers tell that a Christian arrived to al-ʿAlāʾ and offered to show him a ford to Dārīn in exchange for delivery of his relatives, who at that time were on the island, to him. Al-ʿAlāʾ agreed, crossed to Dārīn and conquered it [al-Ḥimyarī, 1984, p. 230–231; Ibn Ḥubaysh, 1983, p. 186]. Al-Balādhurī quotes an account according to which the surviving Banū Bakr found their refuge in al-Khaṭṭ, but al-ʿAlāʾ conquered it [al-Balādhurī, 1987, p. 115–116].

Al-Balādhurī also speaks of the conquest of Dārīn. His description of the campaign against it is very similar to what has been presented above. A certain Karrāz al-Nukrī showed al-ʿAlāʾ

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[6] Ibn Saʿd omits some of al-ʿAlāʾs ancestors. In most sources al-ʿAlāʾ is referred to as Ibn ʿAbd Allāh [al-Balādhurī, 1987, p. 107; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, 2002, p. 580; Ibn Ḥadjar, 2008, p. 236]. However, al-Wāḳidī (747/48–822) calls the general al-ʿAlāʾ Ibn ʿĀʾidh [al-Wāḳidī, 1990, p. 154]. In yet another version the latter was called al-ʿAlāʾ Ibn Ṣadaḳa [Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, 1998, p. 2198].

a ford to the island. Al-ʿAlāʾ rushed into the sea (*takaḥḥama al-baḥr*) with a troop of Muslims [al-Balādhurī, 1987, p. 117–118]. Likewise, aṭ-Ṭabarī narrates that 'all of them, with a permission from God, crossed to Dārīn, walking like on soft sand above which was water washing the hooves of their camels' [al-Tabarī, 1890, p. 1972].

Dārīn is present-day island of Tārūt, the south-eastern part of which is now called Dārīn. It is separated from the mainland by a strait which is at present about one hundred metres large. In the sources Dārīn is invariably described as a big and populated island. There were numerous people on it [al-Wāḳidī, 1990, p. 162], and al-Mundhir, son of al-Djārūd, chieftain of Banū ʿAbd al-Ḳays, who remained loyal to the Muslims during the *Ridda*, asked al-ʿAlāʾ to attack the island where there were strong enemies [al-Kūfī, 1991, p. 43]. Shapur II, upon defeating the Arabs in 320-es, settled some of them, who belonged to the tribal confederation of Banū Taghlib, on Dārīn and at al-Khaṭṭ [al-Ṭabarī, 1881–1882, p. 839; al-Thaʿālibī, 1900, p. 529]. Yet the existence of two separate bishoprics, those of Dārīn and Ḥaṭṭā, in 677 rules out a possible identification of Dārīn with al-Khaṭṭ.

Strictly speaking, the evidence presented under this number 4 does not allow to determine whether al-Khaṭṭ was a town or a region. Yet it shows that al-Khaṭṭ was regarded as situated on the coast, probably opposite the island of Tārūt, and included thus the territory of present-day al-Ḳaṭīf. Staying there, al-ʿAlāʾ was able to both beleaguer al-Zāra situated east of al-ʿAwwāmiyya in the present-day Saudi district of al-Ḳaṭīf, and cross to Dārīn. Al-ʿAlāʾ might have had one more reason to stay there. Shapur II, going to his campaign in Arabia, crossed the sea and landed at al-Khaṭṭ [al-Ṭabarī, 1881–1882, p. 838–839]. Staying on the coast, al-ʿAlāʾ was able to prevent an eventual disembarkation of Sasanid reinforcements.

5. Al-Balādhurī quotes an account according to which in Muḥammad's time al-ʿAlāʾ was governor over the tribes of a part of the region of Baḥrayn, where al-Ḳaṭīf was situated, whereas another part comprising al-Khaṭṭ was entrusted to Umayyad Abān Ibn Saʿīd. Al-Balādhurī further states that he considers this account to be false and that Muḥammad dismissed al-ʿAlāʾ and appointed Abān in his stead [al-Balādhurī, 1987, p. 111]. As shown above, Robin quotes this fragment to prove that al-Khaṭṭ is not identical with al-Ḳaṭīf. Indeed, although al-Balādhurī does not hold the account for true, it may be held that for its author al-Khaṭṭ is distinct from al-Ḳaṭīf.

The evidence above shows that al-Khaṭṭ denoted at least three objects, namely, a settlement in the region of Baḥrayn, the coastline of the latter, and an island, perhaps, of Dārīn (Tārūt). The interpretation of Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ is even more complicated. The Arabic word *madīna(t)* could, depending on the context, denote a city, a town, or a capital of a region (as a city in relation to anything else, smaller towns, countryside etc.). To illustrate this, the following words of Ibn Khurradādhbih would be useful:

'The way from Iṣṭakhr to Sīrdjān (Arabic *al-Sīradjān*), the capital of Kerman (*madīnat Karmān*) ...'.

'... then to Sīrdjān, the capital of Kerman (*madīnat Karmān*), 11 *farsakh*s' [*Kitâb*..., 1889, p. 53].

But one page later, with respect to the same city:

'... then to the city of Sīrdjān (*madīnat al-Sīradjān*) 4 *farsakh*s' [*Kitâb*..., 1889, p. 54].

The word *madīna(t)*, thus, denotes a town when preceding the town's name, and a capital when followed by the name of the region. Consequently, Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ may have the meaning of either 'the town of al-Khaṭṭ' and 'the capital of the region of al-Khaṭṭ'. Th. Nöldeke, who edited a translation of al-Ṭabarī's history of the Sasanids, elects the first solution and puts *die Stadt Chaṭṭ*, 'the town of al-Khaṭṭ' [Nöldeke, 1879, p. 20]. Both Marquart and Robin, although disagreeing on the identification of *Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ*, believe that it was a settlement (*die Stadt al Xaṭṭ*, *la bourgade d'al-Khaṭṭ*) [Marquart, 1901, p. 42; Robin, Prioletta, 2013, p. 140]. It appears that the same interpretation is adopted in the modern English translation of al-

Ṭabarī's history by C.E. Bosworth where one reads 'the city of al-Khaṭṭ' [Bosworth, 1999, p. 16].

In addition to the existence of al-Khaṭṭ in the mid-9th century (as mentioned by Ibn Khurradādhbih, see above), the 'town' solution may be supported by some evidence supplied by antique writers. Pliny the Elder (22-24–79) refers to a town of Attana which he, basing on accounts of merchants, depicts as one of the two most famous towns in the Persian Gulf region (Plin. *Naturalis Historia* VI. 32. 149). Claudius Ptolemy, who wrote around 150 A.D., refers to a village (*kōmē*) of Atta (Ptol. VI. 7. 15). It would, of course, be interesting to establish a connection between Attana / Atta and Ibn Khurradādhbih's al-Khaṭṭ. However, it should not be taken for granted that the latter is a continuation of the former. By the time Ibn Khurradādhbih wrote, the Baḥrayn region had undergone a series of dramatic changes caused by migrations of the Tanūkh Arabs (second half of the 2nd century A.D.), submission to the Sasanids (first half of the 3rd century A.D.), invasions of Banū 'Abd al-Ḳays and Shapur II's sharp counteroffensive against them (320-es), and, of course, the Islamic conquest. Those probably brought about important shifts both in ethnic structure of the population and the way of life. It might well be that Banū 'Abd al-Ḳays founded a new al-Khaṭṭ, not identical with the old settlement. Besides, Claudius Ptolemy's reference to Atta appears in his list of the possessions of *aigaioi* or *etaioi* (probably, an incorrect writing of *attaioi*, those of Atta), alongside two other settlements, Sarkoē (al-Zāra?) and Karada each of which is depicted as a town (*polis*). If the identification of Attana with Atta is correct, then in about a century a famous town became merely a village not worth being described as a *polis*. This would suggest a gradual decline of antique Atta, which, in its turn, is an argument against, rather than for, continuity.

Above that, Polybius (ca. 208–ca. 125 B.C.) describes Chattēnia as a region (*chōra*) (Polyb. XIII. 9) and Pliny the Elder refers to *regio* (kingdom or region) *Attene* (Plin. *Naturalis Historia* VI. 32. 147). This shows that in Antiquity al-Khaṭṭ was also known as a region.

Reverting to Sasanid times, it is noteworthy that the writers speaking of the most important time of the Baḥrayn region, that of its conquest by Muslims, do not mention Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ. This is all the stranger given that Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ built by Ardashir I as a Sasanid stronghold was likely to have been at least one of the principal aims for al-'Alā' and his fellows. This silence suggests that *Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ* was a common noun rather than the proper name of a town and denoted the Sasanid Baḥrayn capital which must appear in the accounts of the Muslim conquest under another name. It is not necessarily identical with the settlement of al-Khaṭṭ mentioned above under number 1.

This essentially means that the search for Punyāt Ardashir begins again. The lack of a concrete identification only leaves one basis for such search, namely, the status of Punyāt Ardashir as the capital of the region. It should be expected that Punyāt Ardashir was the residence of the Sasanid *marzbān*, the military commandant of the region, was protected by the strongest garrison and, finally, was the Sasanid troops' stronghold in their struggle against the Muslims.

Should the extant evidence be put to that test, the results would be rather unclear. Al-Balādhurī states that in 8 A.H. (1 May 629–19 April 630) Muḥammad wrote to Sībukht (in Middle Persian *Sībokht*), the *marzbān* of Hadjar, and called upon him to embrace Islam [al-Balādhurī, 1987, p. 107; cf. Yāḳūt, 1977, 1, p. 348]. Ibn Sa'd provides a similar account, although he distorts the Sasanid official's name, writing *Usaykhit Ibn 'Abd Allāh* instead of *Sībukht*, and describes him as 'the lord of Hadjar' (*ṣāḥib Hadjar*) [Ibn Sa'd, 2001, 1, p. 238]. Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī supplies a list of Sasanid governors of Arabic lands and points out, among them, to Dād Fīrūz Kh.sh.n.sh.fān,[7] of whom he states that he ruled over the region of Baḥrayn

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[7] Reference is made to the Sasanid governor of the Baḥrayn region, probably named Azād Pērōz Gushnāspān (son of Gushnāsp) (cf. *Fīrūz Ibn Djushaysh* in al-Balādhurī [al-Balādhurī, 1987, p. 117], *Azād Fīrūz Ibn Djushnas* in al-Ṭabarī [al-Ṭabarī, 1881–1882, p. 985]. In Islamic sources he has the reputation of a harsh and cruel governor, who mu-

[Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, 1921/22, p. 91]. In addition to that, Ḥamd Allāh Ḳazwīnī states, in his description of the region of Baḥrayn, that Hadjar, its capital, was built by Ardashir Bābagān, i.e., Ardashir I [Ḥamd Allāh Ḳazwīnī, 1915, p. 137]. It can be inferred therefrom that Hadjar is Madīnat al-Khaṭṭ which, in al-Ṭabarī's words, was built by Ardashir I.

The alternative data are as follows. Yāḳūt mentions in his geographical encyclopaedia the *marzbān* of al-Zāra, who in pre-Islamic times collected tributes from Medina and Tihāma [Yāḳūt, 1977, 1, p. 83]. Elsewhere in that treatise Yāḳūt states that the *marzbān* of al-Zāra is referred to in accounts of the Muslim conquest [Yāḳūt, 1977, 3, p. 126]. Indeed, al-Balādhurī narrates that al-ʿAlāʾ beleaguered al-Zāra and took it after a siege, and the *marzbān* of Zāra called for a single combat and was killed by one of the Muslims. In the previous fragment he states that al-Zāra was the residence of Fīrūz Ibn Djushaysh (i.e., Pērōz Gushnaspān, see above) and al-ʿAlāʾ took it during ʿUmar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's rule [al-Balādhurī, 1987, p. 117]. The strategic role of al-Zāra can be seen in other sources too. Al-Wāḳidī states that the Persians, after their defeat at the fortress of Djuwāthā, retreated to al-Zāra and al-Ḳaṭīf [al-Wāḳidī, 1990, p. 175]. Abū Muḥammad al-Kūfī (d. c. 926) writes essentially the same [al-Kūfī, 1991, p. 44]. Ibn Saʿd tells, in his account partly discussed above, that al-ʿAlāʾ, upon defeating the Persians at Djuwāthā, marched to al-Ḳaṭīf. There were many Persians there, but he defeated them. The rest of them retreated to al-Zāra, and al-ʿAlāʾ beleaguered them there [Ibn Saʿd, 2001, 5, p. 278].

Since no other data are available, the only available solution is the choice between Hadjar and al-Zāra. The second solution appears more plausible. The sources do not show Sasanid forces defending Hadjar as a centre of their possessions against Muslims. But Persians were unlikely to simply abandon the capital of Baḥrayn and the *marzbān*'s residence. Likewise, in the long run they are unlikely to have held their capital of the region of Baḥrayn at Hadjar situated far from the coast and advanced towards the desert. Should they have done so, they would have had to work a lot to provide the big garrison with all necessary supplies, and the Arab tribes, i.e., potential enemies, could easily pass by the fortress, cut the Persian communications, and isolate and block the *marzbān* and his troops. Therefore, a different reconstruction is needed, and most probably it would be as follows. The Sasanid capital of the Baḥrayn region was al-Zāra situated near the coast. Its position allowed to bring reinforcements or to evacuate the place and retreat to Persia, whichever the situation might require. Hadjar, together with other strongholds, such as Djuwāthā, protected al-Zāra from south-west, against possible raids of Arab tribes. In case of defeat Sasanid troops were to retreat to north-east, to al-Zāra, which, following the extant sources, they did. Therefore, at the actual stage of the research there are grounds to believe that al-Zāra was the Sasanid capital of the region of Baḥrayn and appears in sources under the names of *madīnat al-Khaṭṭ* and Punyāt Ardashir.

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tilated Arabs guilty of crossing the border without authorization and committed the ill-famed massacre of Banū Tamīm at al-Mushaḳḳar. He is said to have been at al-Zāra at the time of the Muslim conquest and to have either embraced Islam following al-ʿAlāʾs capture of Dārīn [al-Balādhurī, 1987, p. 118] or perished during the siege [Yāḳūt, 1977, 1, p. 349].

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