CICERO'S REFERENCE TO BOSTRA (*AD Q. FRAT.* 2. 11. 3)*

Renewed interest in the history of Roman Arabia has naturally led to a reexamination of any references to that province and its cities.[1] The provincial capital, Bostra, has been a particular focus of interest. Perhaps the most problematic of these references occurs in a letter from Cicero to his brother Quintus dated ca. 13 February 54 B.C.: "Vos autem, homines nobiles, qui †Busrenum† praetextatum non ferebatis, Commagenum feretis?" So Watt's text.[2] For this notorious crux Orelli proposed *Bostrenum* (i.e., the Bostran), and was followed by Tyrrell and Purser and by the Loeb editor.[3] Again quite recently this reference to "the Bostran" (king) has been accepted as genuine.[4] Cicero's testimony could then be supportive evidence for a Nabataean king at Bostra, perhaps—like the king of Commagene alluded to in the same passage—a client of Rome.

Yet it is hard to imagine in the absence of any other evidence that the Senate (to whom this sentence was originally addressed) in 54 B.C. would have understood a reference to a nameless king of a distant and unimportant town.[5] Certainly Quintus and Cicero's senatorial colleagues knew of the Nabataean kingdom. Pompey's lieutenant M. Aemilius Scaurus had campaigned against the Nabataeans at their capital, Petra, in 62/61.[6] Coins commemorating this expedition were in circulation only four years before Cicero wrote this letter.[7] Bostra remained an obscure *caravanserai* of no interest to Romans; it was hardly a place-name that Cicero would have contrasted with the kingdom of Commagene.[8]

Let us turn to the manuscripts.[9] The oldest are G (saec. xiv–xv) and the group Δ (from the same centuries; the earliest is dated 1393), and all read consistently *quibus r(h)enum*. Other copyists produced *qui birretum* (R, dated

* An early draft of this paper was read by Professors E. J. Kenney and G. W. Bowersock. Their comments and criticisms were instructive and valuable, although neither is responsible for the conclusions drawn here. We also wish to thank Professor Eric Birley for his advice and encouragement.

1. G. W. Bowersock, "A Report on Arabia Provincia," *JRS* 61 (1971): 219–42; M. Sartre, *Trois études sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine*, Collection Latomus 178 (Brussels, 1982). These and many other contributions are now synthesized in the first narrative history of this province by G. W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (forthcoming from Harvard University Press). The authors would like to thank Professor Bowersock for allowing them to see this book in typescript.

2. *M. Tulli Ciceronis: "Epistulae,"* vol. 3 (Oxford, 1958), p. 69. The city's modern name is Busra al-Shām (i.e., Syrian Buṣra); Bostra is 120 km SSE of Damascus.

3. R. Y. Tyrrell and L. C. Purser, *The Correspondence of M. Tullius Cicero*², vol. 2 (Oxford, 1906), p. 128, n. 3; W. G. Williams, *Cicero: Letters to His Friends* (Cambridge, Mass,. and London, 1929), pp. 520–21, n.d. The "Bostran" was taken by them to be a "princeling" or "unknown tetrarch" of Nabataea. The reading *Bostrenum* was also accepted by R. Benzinger, *RE* 5 (1897): 789, s.n. "Bostra."

4. M. Sartre, "Bostra: Capitale de l'Arabie romaine," *Archaeologica* 94 (1976): 39: "N'est-il pas symbolique que Cicéron désigne le roi de Nabatène comme l'homme de Bostra et non comme celui de Pétra?" But see now Sartre's important study, "Rome et les Nabatéens à la fin de la république (65–30 av. J.C.)," *REA* 81 (1979): 37–53, esp. p. 53, where he acknowledges that the reading *Bostrenum* cannot be correct.

5. F. E. Peters, "The Nabataeans in the Hawran," *JAOS* 97 (1977): 267–71, has reviewed the available evidence for Nabataean occupation of ancient Auranitis.

6. Joseph. *AJ* 14. 5. 1, *BJ* 1. 8. 5. This was a pseudo-victory; Scaurus collected a large sum of money and withdrew to Syria—the Nabataeans remained undefeated.

7. M. H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage*, 2 vols. (London, 1974) 1: 446, no. 422.

8. The Hellenistic sources are silent except for a fleeting reference to Bostra in *I Macc.* 5:27. Neither Strabo nor Pliny the Elder mentions the city, and it appears in no papyrus document earlier than A.D. 107 (*P. Mich.* 466).

9. As noted in Watt, *"Epistulae,"* 3: 1–3, 69.

1419) and *qui burrenum* (V, saec. xv). Cratander (1528) in marginal notes rendered *quibus r(h)enum* as *qui Busrenum*, and Orelli (1829–31) emended further to *qui Bostrenum*. On the face of it, none of these makes much sense, grammatically or otherwise, once the impossibility of a reference to Bostra is accepted.

To what *did* Cicero refer? An examination of this problematical passage in the context of the other relative parts of *Ad Q. fratrem* 2. 11 is now essential. Let us omit the crux:

> Gaudeo tibi iucundas esse meas litteras, nec tamen habuissem scribendi nunc quidem ullum argumentum nisi tuas accepissem. nam prid. Id., cum Appius senatum infrequentem coegisset, tantum fuit frigus ut pipulo [convicio] coactus sit nos dimittere. de Commageno, quod rem totam discusseram, mirifice mihi et per se et per Pomponium blanditur Appius. videt enim, hoc genere dicendi si utar in ceteris, Februarium sterilem futurum; eumque lusi iocose satis, neque solum illud extorsi oppidulum quod erat positum in Euphrati Zeugmate sed praeterea togam sum eius praetextam, quam erat adeptus Caesare consule, magno hominum risu cavillatus. 'quod vult' inquam 'renovari honores eosdem, quo minus togam praetextam quotannis interpolet decernendum nihil censeo. vos autem homines nobiles, qui praetextatum non ferebatis, Commagenum feretis?' genus vides et locum iocandi. multa dixi in ignobilem regem, quibus totus est explosus. quo genere commotus, ut dixi, Appius totum me amplexatur. nihil est enim facilius quam reliqua discutere.[10]

It becomes obvious at once that the object of Cicero's ridicule, and the Senate's amusement, is the reigning king of Commagene, who interestingly remains unnamed. History knows him as Antiochus I, whose strategic territory (on the west bank of the Euphrates—see map) was a bone of contention between Rome and the Parthian empire. But within the imperial spheres of interest there is a hint of interdynastic rivalry in this letter. Commagene had been a semi-independent kingdom for about a century before Pompey's restructuring of eastern affairs. Antiochus was then given limited autonomy north of what became *provincia Syria,* but he yearned for additional territory. Cicero's letter allows us a glimpse of Rome's eastern affairs in 54: a client-king has overstepped his bounds by annexing territory outside his jurisdiction; at Cicero's instigation the Senate has forced the king to relinquish a small town *quod erat positum in Euphrati Zeugmate*. Also at issue was the king's request to the Senate to renew the honor of wearing the *toga praetexta,* a privilege awarded Antiochus by Julius Caesar. It is precisely here that the contrast is drawn between the king who Cicero argues should be refused the toga, and another personage who has already been denied it. Cicero's presentation of this comic episode makes it clear that the laughter at the king's expense is composite: *neque solum* regarding the town or village he had seized and was forced to abandon, *sed praeterea* the particular honor he wished reconfirmed. This apposition of denials is no more coincidental than Cicero's manifest contempt for the king and his ambitions. The person with whom this *ignobilem regem* is compared should complement the humorous scenario sketched so deftly. Whoever it is should also allow Quintus to appreciate his brother's parenthetical remark (*genus vides et locum iocandi*) on this affair, even

10. Watt, *"Epistulae,"* 3: 69–70.

if every nuance is not apparent to us. We might look, as D. R. Shackleton Bailey did, at Cicero's propensity for *double entendre*.

Nearly thirty years ago Bailey proposed that the crux involved supposing that ". . . the nobles in Cicero's audience had resented the occupation of a curule magistracy by a certain low-born person named or nicknamed Burrhinus."[11] No such person was known to Bailey then. More recently, T. P. Wiseman[12] has suggested that a certain Burrienus (attested as *praetor urbanus* in 83) or his son might be the person sought by Bailey. Hence Bailey's subsequent resolution of the crux as *qui Burrenum*.[13] This affords an additional (but not necessary) pun on herbal medicines in use at the time, but hardly addresses the question of why the Senate would yield to Cicero's invectives against the king of Commagene's territorial expansions and social ambitions.[14] To answer these questions we must consult the available historical sources for the period, and supplement these with geographical observations whenever relevant. The map provided will assist.

The eastern neighbor of Commagene was another small kingdom called Osroëne. The history of each of these regions closely parallels that of the other during the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods.[15] Each emerged as semi-independent in the twilight years of the Seleucids. The inhabitants of each were Semitic-speaking peoples related to the Arabs of lower Mesopotamia and greater Syria. Rome recognized the ruler of each kingdom as a client-ally and buffer against Parthian expansion into the Tigris-Euphrates region. At about the same time that Antiochus was confirmed on the throne at Samosata (modern Samsat), Abgar II of Osroëne was acknowledged at Edessa (modern Urfa). The natural border between the two kingdoms was the Euphrates. This river had two major crossings, both named Zeugma ("bridge"). The northern Zeugma joined Samosata and the fortress Seleucia; it was known to Strabo (*Geog.* 16. 2. 3) as "Zeugma of the Euphrates." This was the ancient crossing on the most direct route between Samosata and Edessa. Strabo goes on to say in the same passage that Seleucia was given to Antiochus by Pompey.[16] The southern Zeugma, according to Pliny (*HN* 5. 86–87), was founded by Seleucus, who named the settlement on the west bank Seleucia and its eastern counterpart Apamea.[17] It is to one of these Zeugmas that Cicero refers in his letter. The northern crossing seems indicated; *Euphrati Zeugmate* corresponds closely to Strabo's expression. Somewhere in the region of this bridge, Antiochus had seized a small town. The place cannot be identified, but it can hardly be located on the western side of the Euphrates, since that territory already belonged to Commagene. The town must therefore have been

11. "Notes on Cicero, *Ad Quintum fratrem*," *JRS* 45 (1955): 36.

12. *New Men in the Roman Senate 139 B.C.–A.D. 14* (Oxford, 1971), p. 217, no. 71.

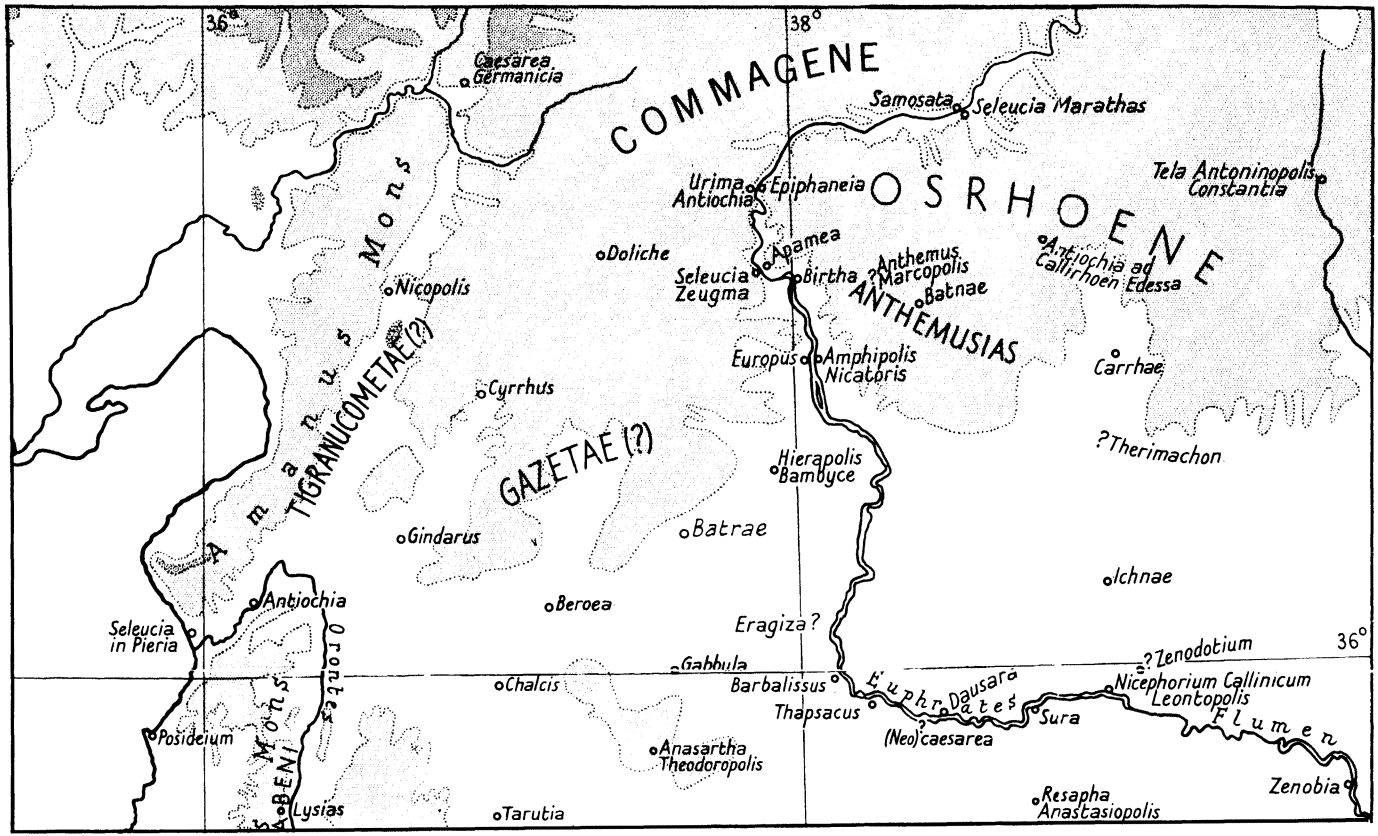
13. *Cicero: Epistulae ad Quintum Fratrem et M. Brutum* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 67, 192–93; cf. his "Two Studies in Roman Nomenclature," *ACS* 3 (1976): 19.

14. Wiseman himself (*New Men*, p. 217) was unsure of the pun.

15. The slender collection of relevant texts is discussed by A. H. M. Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*[2] (Oxford, 1971), pp. 219–22, 260.

16. Strabo's concise note on Commagene is worth translating in full: "Commagene is somewhat small. It has a naturally fortified city, Samosata, where the palace was located, but now [i.e., since A.D. 18] it has become a [Roman] province. And the territory surrounding it is blessedly fertile, but small." The city's eastern territory was restricted by the Euphrates.

17. *HN* 6. 119: *dicta est et in Zeugmate Apamea* (referring back to 5. 86). Throughout his work Pliny refers to the natives of Commagene and Osroëne as "Arabs" and the region as "Arabia"; this is indicative of the very *inclusive* terms for Near Eastern peoples used by those from farther west in the Mediterranean.



Map adapted, by permission, from A. H. M. Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*[2] (Oxford, 1971), opposite p. 226.

east of the river, within the territory belonging to Osroëne. The shadowy history of the two kingdoms does not allow us confirmation of this, but the logical significance of Cicero's statement lends support to our contention that the Senate was faced with a squabble between rival clients. Some disposition had to be made quickly, not only with the territory seized, but regarding Antiochus' request that his right to wear the *toga praetexta* be renewed. With characteristic directness, Cicero saw to it that the king returned the town, and that his request was denied. It is precisely at this point in the letter that the unknown personage is introduced. Since the king of Commagene is never named by Cicero (perhaps an intentional slight), we should not expect a personal name to resolve the crux. We suggest that the king of Osroëne is the solution, and that Cicero wrote: "Vos autem, homines nobiles, qui Osrenum praetextatum non ferebatis, Commagenum feretis?"

That this emendation is textually plausible can be demonstrated. *QVIOSRENUM* in the original could easily become *QUIUSRENUM* through the quite common *O/U* confusion in uncial[18] or other scripts. Another common hazard of manuscript transmission is the spelling of geographic names; one need look no farther than Watt's or Bailey's apparatus on *Euphrati Zeugmate* for evidence of this. Osroëne would be remote in time and place to a medieval European scribe.[19] The presence of the *b* can best be explained as a later copyist's attempt to extract some recognizable Latin words from the by-then incomprehensible *QUIUSRENUM*. Hence, *quibus r(h)enum*. This made nonsense of the syntax, but yielded the recognizable word *Rhenum*. Joining *-bus* to *r(h)enum* made acceptable syntax but no sense.[20] Thus the *crux criticorum* may have emerged.

But it is not enough to propose an emendation that is historically, geographically, and textually convincing. One must examine again the Senate's uproarious laughter at what Cicero had to say. *Eumque* [i.e., Antiochum] *lusi iocose satis* was Cicero's way of denigrating a monarch whom he regarded as a clown among kings, a comic figure not above stealing his neighbor's property with one hand while asking honors from his Roman patrons with the other. That this was an Arab king no doubt added to the merriment, since Cicero's ethnic prejudice regarding Near Easterners was no secret.[21] The Senate reacted predictably: *magno*

18. L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*[2] (Oxford, 1974), p. 32. See also the useful comments in F. W. Shipley, *Certain Sources of Corruption in Latin Manuscripts* (London, 1904), pp. 40, 82, 84. A very similar situation is described (in emending a passage of Josephus) by J.-P. Rey-Coquais, "Notes de géographie syrienne antique" *MUB* 40 (1964): 310–12.

19. There are very few Latin references to Osroëne per se; see the indices to Ammianus, Eutropius, and Festus. It is a derivative of Ὀσρόης (Dio Cassius *Excerpta* 48. 22) or *Osroes* (Procopius *de Bello Persico* 1. 17), perhaps the eponymous dynast. Pliny (*HN* 6. 129) notes instead the tribal name *Orr(h)oei;* this became the ethnicon Ὀρροηνός (Dio Cassius *Hist.* 40. 20. 23; Steph. Byz. *Ethnica*, s.n. "Βάτναι"). Latin epigraphy (*CIL* 6. 1797) provides *Orrhenoru(m)*. O. Krückmann (*RE* 36 [1943]: 1590, s.n. "Osroëne") accepted Pliny's rendition as "die richtige Form." If so, Cicero may have written *qui Orr(o)enum* and that, rather than "Burrienus," became *qui burrenum* (V, saec. xv) through the same process by which *qui Osr(o)enum* might become *qui Bostrenum*. Regardless of spelling, we maintain that Cicero referred to the king of Osroëne.

20. For other instances of this, see W. M. Lindsay, *An Introduction to Latin Textual Emendation* (London, 1896), pp. 15–16.

21. Cf. his caustic comment in *Prov. cons.* 5. 10: "Iudaeis et Syris, nationibus natis servituti." "Syrian" here would embrace the regions under discussion; cf. Pliny's use of "Arabs" in note 17 above. We owe this reference to Prof. Bowersock.

hominum risu cavillatus. The diplomatic situation then prevailing in the two Arab kingdoms lent itself to the intentionally barbed question: Would the Senate which refused the toga to one mini-monarch allow another the pretension of wearing it? There is as yet no evidence that Abgar II was refused this honor, but the known outline of his reign does not exclude such a possibility.[22] The variant readings or emendations noted above are much less satisfactory or convincing precisely because they do not address themselves to the multiple factors involved.

We believe that the solution proposed above satisfies every consideration. The word to be restored must compare and contrast geographically, historically, and politically with *Commagenum* in the same sentence. Such a word must accommodate itself to a passage composed for delivery with intentional rhetorical flourishes. This same word must demonstrate that it would have been instantly comprehensible to Cicero's Senate colleagues. It must also plausibly demonstrate that it lends itself easily to errors of manuscript transmission. Lastly, it must satisfy the joking ambiance which pervades all portions of the letter to which it relates.

Our examination of this crux benefits especially from a review of the historical and geographical background of Cicero's letter, important aspects overlooked by other commentators. We therefore submit that there is a solid basis, textual and contextual, for believing that the emendation we propose is preferable to anything so far suggested in the discussion of this notorious crux.

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22. If Dio's (40. 20) account is accepted, Abgar was a prime mover in the ultimate defeat of Crassus just eighteen months after Cicero wrote this letter. Was this Abgar's repayment of some Roman insult? No motives are given. Or was this Dio's way of shifting blame for a disastrous military blunder? If our interpretation of the historical background of this letter is correct, Abgar must have been somewhat mollified by having his territory returned and his rival dynast snubbed by the Senate. His subsequent betrayal of Crassus would then be less credible. It is worth noting that Plutarch's *Life of Crassus* omits any mention of Abgar; indeed, it is a certain Ariamnes, designated "phylarch of the Arabs" (21), who is blamed by Plutarch for betrayal of the Roman forces. This appears to be a parallel to the situation described by Strabo (*Geog.* 16. 4. 22–24) regarding the Nabataean guide Syllaeus (whom Strabo refers to as *epitropos*), who was blamed for the failure of the Roman expedition to Arabia Felix under Aelius Gallus. There is some indirect evidence that Abgar II may not have lived to witness (or participate in) Crassus' final, fatal expedition; see J. B. Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 11–12, esp. p. 12, n. 2.

THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVISION OF PROPERTIUS, BOOK 2

The question of the unity of Book 2 of Propertius is a vexing one. The most recent contribution to the discussion is that of O. Skutsch,[1] who reviews critically the arguments for division, underlines the evidence of the ancient grammarians,[2]

1. "The Second Book of Propertius," *HSCP* 79 (1975): 229–33.
2. Based on the argument of B. L. Ullman, "The Book Division of Propertius," *CP* 4 (1909): 45–51.