

Proceedings of the 8th International Congress
on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East

Volume 1

Proceedings
of the 8th International Congress
on the Archaeology
of the Ancient Near East

30 April – 4 May 2012,
University of Warsaw

Volume 1
Plenary Sessions,
Township and Villages,
High and Low
– The Minor Arts for the Elite and for the Populace

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2014
Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Cover illustration: Impression of a third millennium BC cylinder seal from Tell Arbid in Syria combined with the depiction of a mermaid – a motif from Warsaw's coat of arms. Designed by Łukasz Rutkowski.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

For further information about our publishing program consult our website <http://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

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Printed on permanent/durable paper.

Printing and binding: Memminger MedienCentrum AG

Printed in Germany

ISBN 978-3-447-10132-5

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WAS HATRA THE SECOND BABYLON?

KRZYSZTOF JAKUBIAK¹

ABSTRACT

The significant role of Hatra among the urban centers of the Middle East is unquestionable. This city was famous not only thanks to its monumental architecture, but also because of its unique position among the Middle Eastern religious centers. The city's development flourished in the beginnings of the 2nd century AD. It was a time when Hatra began to play a special role in the religious life of the Aramaic speaking tribes settled in Northern Mesopotamia. One of the questions asked in this paper is whether the Hatra religious phenomenon was a development of older Mesopotamian, and especially Babylonian, traditions.

Hatra is rightly considered to be one of most important archaeological sites in Northern Mesopotamia. The ruins of the ancient city are located west of Wadi Tartar. The wadi runs in a north-south direction and is a very significant element in the Northern Iraqi landscape. The ruins of Hatra are located approximately 110 km west of Mosul and c. 60 km west of Ashur. The present state of the city's preservation indicates that Hatra was almost circular in its layout. Inside the city walls in the center of the urban space, we can find one of the biggest sacral complexes that ever existed in the Ancient Middle East.

We do not know much about the beginnings of Hatra (Ibrahim 1986: 96-107; Hauser 1998; Venco Ricciardi 1999/2000, 2000; Hauser 2000; Sommer 2005: 355-383; Gawlikowski 2009a). This issue remains a very enigmatic question, and surely our further research (if it is possible to conduct more fieldwork) should be focused on this important topic. Here, however, this subject will not be dealt with, as it is not crucial for the text below. The main subject is the significant and absolutely unique role that Hatra played during the greatest days of the city's existence. We will try to explain the reasons why a city in the middle of the desert became such an important and exceptional place in Northern Mesopotamia. We know that the magnificent city sanctuary was without a doubt the main target of numerous pilgrims who visited Hatra. Thanks to the Great Temenos, the city flourished. The growing splendor of Hatra was expressed in its monumental architecture. The extensive development of the city has been confirmed both by archaeological and epigraphic evidence. The questions which should be posed are the following: why Hatra, and why at that time?

The chronology of the Great Temenos and other city temples and shrines as well as information about Hatrene cults may cast some light on the question of the Hatra

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religious phenomenon. Some crucial elements of our investigation include the changes which occurred in the titles held by the first rulers of Hatra. At the beginning of the 2nd century AD, they were called MRY', which means 'the lord' (Ibrahim 1986: 99-103, Sommer 2005: 368-376).

We do not know precisely what kind of title was held by the rulers of the city earlier. The first known lord of Hatra was Worod, who first appeared in epigraphic sources around AD 116. His name was discovered on several other inscriptions (H 233, H 261, H 263 and H 266) (Aggoula 1991; Bayer 1998). The texts were very short and mentioned only the name and the title. Yet the fact they had been engraved in the Great Iwan is very important. In two cases the inscriptions had been placed on the walls at a height of 2.20 meters (H 261), 2.30 meters (H 263), and *c.* 5 meters in the case of inscription H 266. Two other inscriptions can also be linked to the first lord (or lords) of Hatra. The first of them (H 243) reads as follows:

[BYR]H KNWN 428 'YTY 'ŠLM BR YHYBW 'ŠYLY'
MNYN 3 [W'S] 15 'L HYHYHY WHY' ŠMŠBRK BR 'YZL' MRH

In the month KNWN (November/December) 428 (= AD 116) offered an 'ŠYLY' (the function is not clear)
'ŠLM son of YHYBW 3 *mins* and 15 *as* for (his) life and life of ŠMŠBRK son of 'YZL' his Lord

Inscription H 243 was engraved above the texts mentioning Worod. Mainly for this reason we can accept this inscription as a *terminus post quem* for his reign. It also seems possible that the first lord of Hatra began his period in power around the year AD 116. Inscription H 243 is commonly recognized as crucial in the reconstruction of the chronology of Worod's reign over Hatra. Moreover, there is another inscription, known as H 244, engraved on the same wall as H 243. The only problem with this text is that some reconstruction was necessary, especially in the fragment containing the date. Taking into consideration the context of the inscription, the date can be reconstructed as has been proposed, for instance, by Aggoula (1991: 121-122). The whole inscription can be read as follows:

[...]115? 'YTY YH[Y]BW 'ŠYLY'
MNYN 10 L'BD' DY S[G]YL 'L HYHYHY

415 (=103 A.D.?) has offered 'ŠYLY' YH[Y]BW
10 *mins* for the SGYL (the Great Sanctuary) construction for the life of...

Both these inscriptions indicate that the Large Iwans building process must have started at the beginning of the 2nd century AD, possibly during the period of Lord Worod's reign. Moreover, by considering the information from all of the above men-

tioned inscriptions, we were able to estimate some important facts. First, the central sanctuary of the city must have been under construction before the Trajan invasion of Mesopotamia. Second, around the year AD 116 the building process was still in progress and several fragments of the Large Iwans were already relatively high. Finally, for the first time the lord of Hatra, identified by his name, appeared in the sources.

The next lord of Hatra was Nashryhab. He was mentioned in six various inscriptions discovered in the city. We know nothing about him except the fact he was the father of Lord Nasru, one of the most important rulers of the city. Nasru was deeply involved in the process of the development of the city, especially in the field of sacral buildings construction. Alongside the title of lord, Nasru assumed another distinction, which was closely linked with the religious aspect of the city's functioning. In the inscriptions referring to Nasru we can find the title 'PKL' RB', which is equivalent to 'the highest priest'. The first inscription (H 67) was discovered in the ruins of Temple X and can be understood as follows (Safar and Mustafa 1974: 364-365; Aggoula 1991: 49; Bayer 1998: 45):

BNHŠ' T[B' 'L]	A good augury for the
HY' NŠRW MRY'	life of Lord Nasrw
'PKL' RB' D' LH'	the highest priest of god

The 'PKL' RB' title appears for the second time on inscription H 361. The text was engraved on the base of Lord Nasrw's statue, which was originally placed in the Small Iwans of the Great Temenos.

[SLM' DY NŠ]RW 'BY' 'PKL' RB[']	The statue of Nasrw the lord, the highest priest
[DY 'LH]' BR NŠRYHB MRY'	of god son of Lord Nashryhb

It is hard not to notice a striking analogy between the new title of the Hatrene lord and the similar title held by Babylonian rulers. A parallel title can also be found in Rome. However, the dignity or function of *pontifex maximus*, the highest priest, was never connected with the Roman emperors. By assuming the 'PKL' RB' title, Nasru probably realized a part of a well-considered plan: the improvement of Hatra's position as a major religious center.

A sequential part of that process could be observed during the reign of the next ruler of Hatra: Sanatruq I. Sanatruq was in power around AD 162/3-176/7. He was the first ruler of the city who assumed the title of king – MLK', around the same time the construction process of the main city sanctuary had been completed, the proof of which can be found in epigraphic sources. According to inscriptions H 379 and H 380, we may presume that the last construction erected in the area of the main sanctuary was a stone wall. The wall separated the eastern part of the Temenos from the Large Iwans, but it was fitted with a doorway making communication between both spaces possible. The inscription engraved on this door indicates that the building process of the sacral

enclosure was finished around AD 167. By assuming the title of king, Sanatruq not only crowned his ambitions but actually completed the development of his city into the main religious center in the region. At that moment Hatra became a place of extraordinary importance – a city with a monumental sanctuary ruled by a king.

The next three kings of Hatra were, respectively, Nashryhab, Abdsamyā and, finally, Sanatruq II who ruled the city until its bitter end during the Sasanian siege around AD 327/8. However, before this sad date in the history of the land arrived, the city had managed to become an extraordinary place, the religious heart of the whole region.

For a better understanding of the Hatra phenomenon, we should take a look at the most characteristic monuments within the city. The Great Temenos takes up 1/5 of the whole city area, which makes this construction unique in the whole Middle East. The oldest remnants of buildings in the area of the later sacral enclosure was discovered by an archaeological team led by Roberta Venco Ricciardi behind the Large Iwans in the western part of the construction (Venco Ricciardi 1999/2000; Peruzzetto and Valentini 2000). The walls named MP and MC doubtlessly belonged to a large structure but their original function is still unexplained. As mentioned above, some information about the Temenos building process can be incurred from the Aramaic inscriptions discovered in Hatra. These ancient texts indicate that the Temenos construction had been started shortly before the Trajan siege of Hatra, which took place in AD 117. The inscriptions discovered on the Gate leading to the western part of the Temenos give us the year AD 167 as the date of the end of the building process.

A very important if not crucial aspect of the whole discussion pertains to whether all the buildings located inside the sacral enclosure were typical temples or sanctuaries, or were they rather constructed for other religious or ceremonial purposes. Some indications can be found in the Temenos ground plan. If we take a closer look at this plan, we can easily recognize the three major parts of the sacral enclosure. The first, and largest, is taken up by the eastern ceremonial court, the second is located in the north-western part of the complex, and the third is placed in the south-western part of the sacral space.

The largest eastern part of the Temenos was accessible for pilgrims and other visitors on certain days of the year. Here we can distinguish two temples: the building called temple C (also the Barmāren or Hellenistic temple), and the sanctuary devoted to goddess Allat, which was attached with its back to the stone wall separating two courtyards in the northern part of the cultic complex (Safar and Mustafa 1974: 327-349; Venco Ricciardi 2000; Sommer 2003; Gawlikowski 2009b). In the same area, one of the most enigmatic structures of the whole complex – the *hypaithral* building – had been erected.

It is hard to recognize the remains of individual cultic structures in the second courtyard situated in the north-western part of the sacral enclosure. This part is dominated by the ruins of the monumental Large Iwans. Iwans themselves were surely used for cultic purposes or even some religious ceremonies could have been practiced there, but from the functional point of view they should rather be considered as places for ritual banquettes. In other words, the main function of the Iwans was more likely to provide space for large, spectacular events than serving the purposes of strictly cultic activities.

The Large Iwans extended to the third, south-western part of the Temenos. However, in this fragment of the sanctuary, the Iwans buildings were reserved exclusively for the lords, kings and the high priests (Apakla Raba), in other words the highest elite of Hatra. However, the third part was probably the most important area of the sacral enclosure. Here we can also recognize the main sanctuary devoted to Shamash, two other sacral structures dedicated to Shahiru and, on the opposite site, the temple of Samiya.

The high level of Hatra's development found its reflection in the internal spatial organization of the city. Alongside the Great Temenos, a very important role in the city's religious life was played by the so-called small sanctuaries or small temples. So far, 14 different buildings of this kind have been discovered in various parts of the city (Safar and Mustafa 1974: 350-367; Al Salihi 1983; Downey 1988: 159-173; Al Salihi 1990; Kaizer 2000). A few of them functioned in the direct vicinity of the Great Temenos, quite clearly implicating their function. The other sacral buildings can be found among the dwelling structures. Some of them were encircled by their own temenos walls. Basically, we can distinguish three categories of small temples. The first would include the shrines which were accessible for pilgrims and the citizens of Hatra [(the temples located nearby or opened toward the Great Temenos (Beit Allaha)]. Secondly, there were district temples available only for the local people. The buildings surrounded by the temenos walls belong to the third category of temples. Most of these were originally constructed outside the older city walls. During the city development process, these temples had been incorporated into the urban structures and protected by a second city curtain wall line.

The last aspect of Hatra's unique position as a main religious center of the region is, in my opinion, connected to the issue of the gods worshiped in the city. Aside from the very popular gods of the Middle East, especially in the beginning of the Common Era, i.e. Shamash, Atargatis, Allat, Bel, or Balshamin, we can also find divine names from previous ages, such as Nergal, Nanaya or Zaqiqu. The divine triad, Maran, Barmaren and Martan, were the most important deities in the Hatrene pantheon. These gods held a crucial role in numerous ceremonies and other cultic activities. We should mention here that Maran was usually identified with the main deity of Hatra – Shamash. The two other deities were, respectively, Martan, the wife of Shamah, and their son, Barmaren (son of the Lord). Yet, at a certain point in time, the old deities known from immemorial Babylonian traditions reappeared in the pantheon of Hatra. These 'forgotten' deities were adopted by the Aramaic-speaking tribes, who brought back petrified cults and reconstituted the old gods among the other deities in the holy city. In Hatra we can observe how age-old traditions intermingled with the local religious system and how the old Babylonian gods merged with the deities known from the Western Semitic (Aramaic) pantheon. The rulers (and at the same time the highest priests!) of Hatra were consequently trying to introduce their vision of the city, which could successfully replace Babylon on the religious map of Mesopotamia.

The reappearance of the cult of the old deities together with the impressive city development process, parallel to an increase in its religion significance, are in my

opinion very important factors and evidence of the exceptional position of Hatra. It must also be emphasized that the most flourishing and prosperous period of Hatra's history was simultaneous with the downfall of Babylon and especially the collapse of its Main Sanctuary – Esagila. If we note that the Great Temenos in Hatra was named similarly – SAGYL, we have uncovered the last element of the puzzle (inscriptions H 107, H 191, H 192, H 202, H 225, H 240, H 240-256).

In conclusion, the high position of Hatra seems to have been much more closely connected to the religious role of the city than with simple economic factors, especially the so-called caravan trade. Moreover, we can observe that Hatra's significance grew with the process of development of the Great Temenos. Before the beginning of the 2nd century AD, Hatra was a religious center but on a very limited scale. From that time onwards, the city gradually expanded its range. Finally, in the middle of the 2nd century Hatra became much more important than the declining Babylon. In that period, the lords of Hatra became kings. It is striking that the moment when the ruler of Hatra assumed the crown was actually convergent with the moment the Great Temenos was completed. We can suppose that the royal title was strongly connected with some traditional religious function known from Babylon; a sacred duty only a king could fulfill.

Of course, the military aspect of Hatra's actions against the Romans during the Lucius Verus campaign in the region around AD 165 could have played an important role in changes in the position and rank of the city rulers, but these two factors are not mutually exclusive (Sartre 2001: 633-637).

What happened to the great gods, their cults and their believers when the temples collapsed and the empires fell? We do not know exactly when Hatra began to play the role of a safe haven for old cults and religions. We know, however, that when the Esagila sanctuary in Babylon had been abandoned, a new great religious center in Mesopotamia flourished (Boiy 2004: 186-192). The lords and kings of Hatra knew perfectly well how to make the city attractive for pilgrims and believers who were looking for spiritual support. Therefore, it was not the caravan trade that made Hatra so important and rich, since the city was at a certain distance from the main trade routes. 'Holy business' was the real foundation of the city's prosperity. All this would not have been possible if Babylon and its Esagila sanctuary had remained powerful. The downfall of the main Babylonian sanctuary might have opened the path to Hatra's accumulation of wealth and paved the road to the exceptional role the city played in the Ancient Middle East.

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HATRA	BABYLON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An inscription from temple VIIIb dated to AD 97/98 • Inscriptions from temple XIV H 463 dated to AD 110/111 H 464 dated to AD 111/112 H 465 dated to AD 114/115 • Inscriptions from the Temenos H 243 dated to AD 116 H 244 dated to AD 103 H 223, H 261, H 263, H 266 dated to <i>c.</i> AD 116 H 380 dated to AD 167 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last astronomical diaries dated back to 60/59 BC • Babylon is mentioned as being under siege when Mithradates III escaped from Orodes II (the civil war <i>c.</i> 58/55 BC) • According to Diodorus's (II.9.9) testimony, the city was almost entirely abandoned and some space inside the city wall was used for agricultural purposes. (80-20 BC) • Pliny (Nat. Hist. VI 121-122): here we have information about the temple of Bel functioning, but the city was empty and abandoned. (AD 23-79) • According to Talmudic sources from the 'Avodah Zarah 11b, the temple of Bel was still in use in the 3rd century AD (on a very limited scale)

Tabele 1: Process of Hatra taking on the role previously played by Babylon

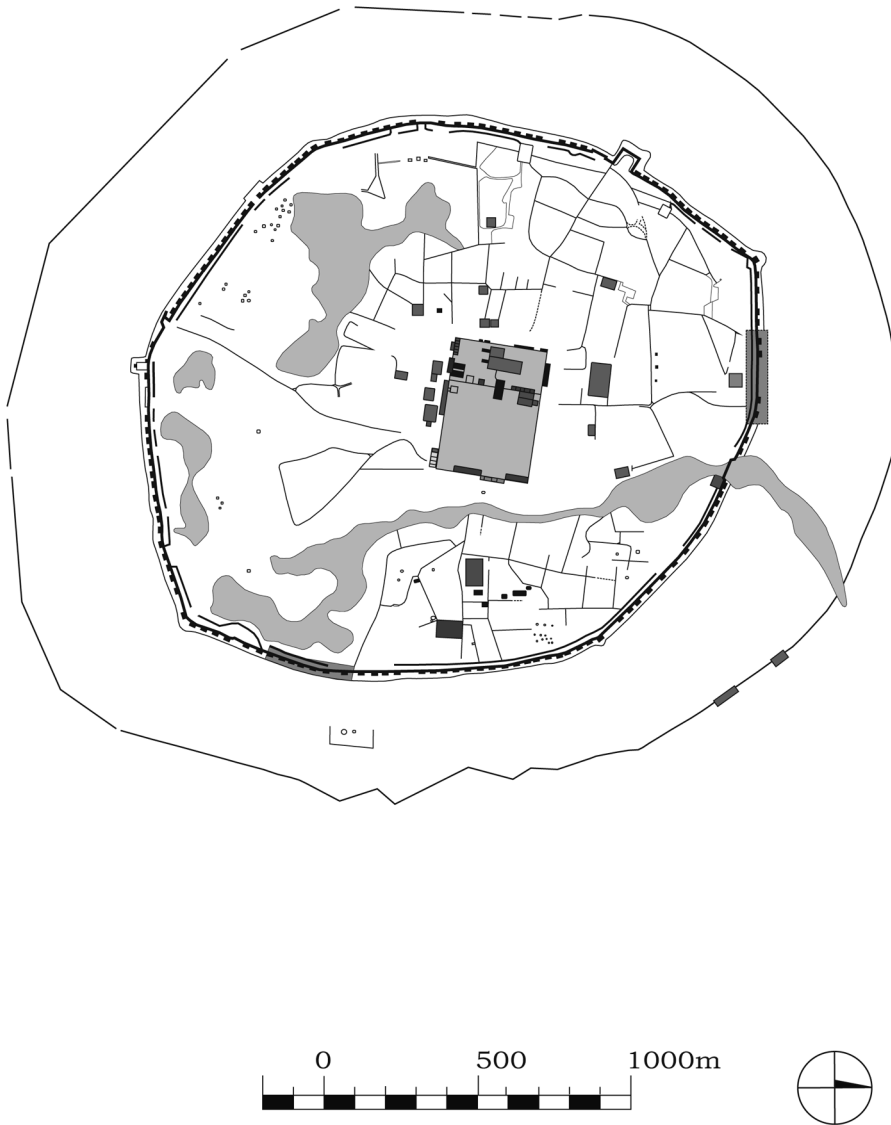


Fig. 1: Hatra, General Plan.
(Drawn by O. Wasilewska)



Fig. 2: Temple E in the eastern part of the temenos.
(K. Jakubiak)



Fig. 3: Iwan of Trinity from the southern part of the temenos.
(K. Jakubiak)



Fig. 4: Great Iwans.
(K. Jakubiak)



Fig. 5: Main Sanctuary – view from the east.
(K. Jakubiak)