



AMIDA

AMIDA, Pers. Āmed (modern Dīārbakr/Diyarbakır), town situated at 37° 54' north latitude and 39° 56' east longitude on a plateau dominating the west bank of the upper Tigris. It lies at an ancient crossroads where the route from 𐭠𐭥𐭥𐭥 (Arm. Xarberd) in the north to Mārdīn in the south intersects the main east-west highway running from the Caspian coast to Edessa and on to the Mediterranean. This advantageous position was no doubt occupied from earliest times; the stele of Naram-Sin, grandson of Sargon, erected about 2300 B.C. was found in the neighborhood. Part of the citadel itself may date from the 4th century B.C., while the medieval walls are thought to contain materials taken from an ancient palace, possibly that of Tigran II (the Great) of Armenia (r. 95-56 B.C.). Amida has sometimes been identified with Tigran's capital, Tigranocerta, but the latter town was probably at the nearby ruins of Mayyāfāreqīn (Gk. Martyropolis). Amida is probably the Ammaia of Ptolemy (5.18.10), but the major classical references are found in the histories of Ammianus Marcellinus (18) and Procopius (*Bello Persico* 1), since Amida was in the area contested by the Roman and Sasanian empires. In the early 4th century A.D., Constantius fortified Amida and based Legio V Parthica there, threatening Iranian territory to the south. As a result, the Sasanian Šāpūr II besieged it in A.D. 359 with the assistance of the Chionites. Plague soon broke out amongst the 120,000 defenders, but their sallies hampered siege operations. After seventy-three days the walls were breached; Ammianus, who was present himself, escaped to Antioch, but most of the Roman leaders were executed. The residential area was destroyed. The city reverted to Roman control, but in A.D. 502 it was attacked again by the Sasanians under Kavād.



The walls resisted battering rams, and an assault mound was undermined; when it collapsed, many Persian notables were killed. Disheartened, the invaders had begun to withdraw when the local courtesans appeared on the battlements making alluring gestures; the Magi interpreted this as a favorable omen and the retreat was halted. An underground tunnel was discovered and the town fell again, this time after eighty days. Thousands died in the assault and subsequent occupation, when the male population was herded into the amphitheater to perish of starvation. Roman efforts to recapture were unavailing and the city was recovered only with the offer of a thousand pounds of gold. Fortunately, this burden did not fall on the local inhabitants, whose taxes were remitted for seven years by the emperor Anastasius in recognition of their valor.

Many of the Syriac writers of Mesopotamia, such as the poet Isaac of Antioch, came from Amida, which was a center also of Christian theological study; disputes between the Melkite and Monophysite sects sometimes led to violence. Dissatisfied with harsh Byzantine taxation, the citizens gave up Amida in 639 to the Muslims with little struggle, but there was little conversion to Islam for some time, and for centuries thereafter, the bishop of Amida was recognized as Metropolitan of Mesopotamia.

As the power of the 'Abbasids declined, smaller dynasties such as the Hamdanids of Mosul gained control of northern Mesopotamia; by about 401/1010 the ruler of Amida was Naṣr-al-dawla Aḥmad b. Marwān (d. 453/1061). The town walls, still extant, were reconstructed mainly by the Artuqids, a century later; these are rightly regarded as a prime example of military architecture of the period. The conflict between the Ottoman and Safavid empires centered on the border area around Amida, which frequently changed hands, but after the battle of Čālderān, the town remained under the Ottomans.

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