



ḤARRĀN

ḤARRĀN, an ancient town of Upper Mesopotamia, now located in the modern Turkish province of Diyarbakir approximately 40 km/25 miles south-southeast of **Edessa**, or Urfa. It is the Greek “Hai Kharrai,” and Roman “Carrhae,” but has a more ancient history as the “Ḥarrānu” of Assyrian texts; in the Old Testament it is known as the dwelling-place of Abraham before he relocated to Palestine (Gen. 12:4-5).

Ḥarrān was always a place of strategic importance due to its location on caravan routes connecting Anatolia and Syria with Iraq and Persia. In Assyrian times it was the center of a cult of the moon god Sin, boasting a shrine which was adorned by the Assyrian kings. Biruni (p. 204) mentions that, as Sin’s sacred city, Ḥarrān was designed according to a moon-shaped plan. From the time of Alexander the Great onwards, Greek elements settled in the town, and so the deities worshipped there eventually received Greek names. It was this strong pagan imprint which led some early Church Fathers to designate it Hellenopolis, or “city of the [pagan] Greeks”; although Ḥarrān became the seat of Melkite and Monophysite bishops, the indigenous community, which followed the older paganism, survived Christian disapproval into Islamic times. Emperors tended to leave the town alone because of its strategic position in the region of Osroene, adjacent to the frontier with their enemies, the Sasanian Persians (see Pauly-Wissow X/2, cols. 2009-21; Mez, pp. 311-12, 560-63).

Ḥarrān capitulated peacefully to the Arab commander ‘Eyāḍ b. Ġanam in 18/639 or 19/640 (Ṭabari, I, pp. 2504-6, 2507, 2578; Balāḍori, *Fotuḥ*, pp. 174, 175,



186), and subsequently became one of the most important towns of the district of Diār Moḍar. It was favored by the Umayyad caliphs, and Ebn Abi Oṣaybe'a states that 'Omar II transferred a school of medicine from Alexandria to Ḥarrān (I, p. 116). More certainly, Marwān II transferred his capital from Damascus to Ḥarrān, apparently with the aim of watching over the discontented eastern provinces (Ṭabari, II, p. 1892). According to Ya'qubi (II, p. 405), Marwān spent 10 million dirhams for the construction of his palace there. It was from Ḥarrān that he set out to confront in battle the 'Abbasid revolutionaries, and through which he later fled (Ṭabari, III, pp. 45, 47).

Under the 'Abbasids, Hārūn al-Rašid provided the town with a water supply by constructing a canal from the Nahr Balīk, but Ḥarrān is mentioned in the sources primarily for being the center for a persistent strain of paganism. In 215/830, Ma'mun is said to have offered the population the choice of conversion to Islam, or any of the protected religions, or death; the Ḥarrānians, however, survived by arguing that they were the Koranic Ṣābe'un, and therefore already "People of the Book" (*ahl al-keṭāb*; see Ebn al-Nadim, ed. Tajaddod, p. 385; tr. Dodge, II, pp. 751-52). Ḥarrān flourished under the early 'Abbasids as a prominent seat of learning, especially in the sciences; it became a major center for the translation of Greek texts on astronomy, mathematics, and medicine under the guidance of the outstanding scholar and translator Ṭābet b. Qorra (d. 288/901).

In the 4th/10th century, the geographer Maqdesi describes Ḥarrān as a pleasant town with a citadel built of stone, while, two centuries later, Ebn Jobayr remarks on the stone town walls (Le Strange, p. 103). The ruined citadel and congregational mosque still survive as evidence of the town's florescence, and excavations in the 1950s under the direction of D. S. Rice (pp. 36-84) revealed the extent of the original walls and their many gates. The town continued to flourish under the Ayyubids, and Ṣalāḥ-al-Din enlarged its great mosque, but Hülegü and his Mongol army arrived there in 658/1260; the Mongols later deported the population and destroyed public buildings, so that, in spite of the success of the Mamluks in regaining the Jazīra and Ḥarrān at the beginning of the 8th/14th century, the town never revived.



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