Published: December 15, 2003
Last Updated: June 6, 2013

HATRA

HATRA (Ḥaṭrā; Ar. Ḥażr), a strongly fortified city in Upper Mesopotamia (today northern Iraq), situated at 35° 40′ N and 42° 45′ E in the midst of the desert steppe of the northern Jazīra (the area between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris), about 3 km to the west of the Wādī Ṯarṯār (running fairly parallel to the Tigris River from north to south) and some 50 km west-northwest of Assur, the capital of ancient Assyria (q.v.). In so far as can be judged by the archeological and epigraphical remains, the city seems to have flourished in the 2nd century C.E., when it was greatly enlarged. It was, however, deserted soon after its conquest by the early Sasanians, who had broken the power of Hatra. Ammianus Marcellinus (25.8.5), who as a participant of Julian's Oriental campaign in 363 did see the ruins (on the march back led by Jovian), spoke of an "old city situated in an uninhabited area and deserted for a long time past" (*uetus oppidum in media solitudine positum olimque desertum*). The ruins at the place called now Ḥażr, which still today are quite impressive, were rediscovered in modern times by European travelers of the 19th century, first by J. Ross in 1836 and 1837. The first to measure the site and to survey and record the ruins was Walter Andrae of the German excavation team working in Assur from 1906 to 1911. Systematic excavations have been undertaken only from 1951 by Iraqi archeologists, first concentrating on the Great Temple. In the course of time they uncovered parts of this great city of the Parthian period, including more than a dozen minor shrines, the northern town gate, and a number of tombs (for a comprehensive account see Ṣafar and Moṣṭafā).

Name. The name of the city is attested several times in the Hatrene

inscriptions in the Aramaic form *ḥṭrʾ*,i.e., *Ḥaṭrā* (cf. Beyer, p. 168), which most likely means “enclosure, hedge, fence,” denoting a fortified settlement (*pace* to others who have tried to derive it from Arabic). *Ḥaṭrā* (thus also in Syriac) normally is rendered by the plural forms (cf. also Syr. *Ḥaṭrē*) Gk. *Átra*, nt. in Dio Cassius (75.11.2, etc.) and several early Christian writings such as the Pseudo-Clementine epistles (see Vattioni, p. 3, n. 19) and *Átrai*, fem. in Herodian (*History* 3.9.3), as well as in a quotation from book 17 of the lost *Parthica* by Arrian (q.v.), mentioned by both the grammarian Herodian (*Prosodia*, p. 264, l. 18) and Stephanus of Byzantium (s.v. *Átrai*); moreover we find once each Gk. *Átra*, fem. sing. in the Cologne Mani Codex (q.v.; P. Colon., inventory No. 4780, acc. *Átran*), Lat. *Hatra* (acc. *Hatram*) in Ammianus (loc.cit.) and *Hatris* on the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (cf. Miller, fig. 241). The ethnonym is *Atrēnoí* in Dio Cassius (68.31.1, 76.11.2) and Herodian (*History* 3.1.2, etc.).

History. There is no reliable evidence concerning Hatra from pre-Parthian times. Some scholars have assumed that a settlement was founded there in the Assyrian or, at the latest, Achaemenid times, but that is merely conjecture due to the lack of any reliable evidence. Hatra seems to have been the seat of a local dynasty since the 1st century C.E. Its location in the Parthian-Roman border zone on the important caravan routes linking the east to Syria and Anatolia, as well as its connection with the Roman network of roads, enabled the city and its dynasts to increase their power consistently. Thus, Hatra at that time may have been one of the eighteen kingdoms within the Parthian Empire, which are mentioned by Pliny (*Naturalis historia* 6.112). In other words, Hatra was an independent small kingdom (including not only the town, but also its wider surroundings) ruled by local dynasts or (later) “kings” subordinate to the Parthian “king of kings.”

The light of history falls on this important fortified trading and caravan city for the first time in the year 117 C.E. in connection with Trajan’s military expedition into Mesopotamia. Trajan, who had planned to extend the Roman frontier up to the river Tigris, marched southwards along the river Euphrates, capturing great parts of Babylonia up to the Persian Gulf and even Ctesiphon (q.v.). On his retreat from there he attacked the Hatrenes (who had joined the revolt against the emperor) in vain (Dio Cassius, 68.31.1-2). Though Dio Cassius says that Hatra was “not a great nor prosperous city,” it must have been of some strength and importance, even if the siege failed chiefly because of “the lack of water, timber, and green fodder” (Dio Cassius, 68.31.1). Emperor Septimius Severus met the same fate eighty years later, when the Hatrene king

Barsēmías (thus Herodian, *History* 3.1.3, etc.; probably he is none other than the king *ʿbdsmyʾ ʿAbdsēmyā* of the inscriptions; see Drijvers, 1977, pp. 823 f.) supported Septimius's rival Pescennius Niger, and when Septimius laid siege to Hatra twice (in 193 and 197) without achieving anything. His siege engines were burned, and many of his soldiers fell or were wounded by Hatrene archers; the position of the city, its strong walls, and the strength of its warriors eventually forced the emperor to withdraw (Dio Cassius, 76.9.5-10.1, 11.1.-12.5; Herodian, *History* 3.1.2-3, 5.1, 9.1-9).

It was in the period between those failed sieges at the beginning and the end of the 2nd century that Hatra reached the peak of its prosperity and became one of the most beautiful cities in the East. The Arsacids (q.v.) wielded the supreme power in Hatra, but their fall at the hand of the rising Sasanians changed the situation for the city (cf. Wiesehöfer, 1982, p. 441). The new great king Ardašīr I (q.v.) besieged Hatra in vain, too, some time in the 220s C.E. (Dio Cassius 80.3.2). Three Latin dedications (see Oates), the first of which is dated to the year 235 and the other two are by a senior officer, show that Hatra was on the Romans' side in the first years of Sasanian rule and that Roman troops were stationed there. That the city of Hatra was conquered in 240-41 (either by Ardašir or during his co-regency with his son Šāpūr I) is clear now from the unambiguous evidence of the Cologne Mani Codex, which puts that event into the same year when Ardašir's son Šāpūr was crowned as co-regent (Cologne Mani Codex 18.2-8). The Sasanian conquest, which led to the permanent abandoning of the settlement (see above), a victim of the Roman-Sasanian struggle, is described in the medieval Arabic and Persian traditions in rather strange stories that mingle truth and fiction about its former greatness and its eventual fall (Ṭabari, I, pp. 827-31, tr., V, pp. 31-37; Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 33 ff.; Maqdesi, *Badʾ* III, pp. 157-58; Ma-sʿudi, *Moruj*, ed. Pellat, secs. 1407-11; Ebn Qotayba, IV, pp. 119-20). The widespread popular legend about the Hatrene princess Nażira and her betrayal of the city for love is still lives on in the modern fairy tale (by the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen) "the princess and the pea" (cf. Christensen, 1936).

Inscriptions, onomastics. The main historical sources found in Hatra herself are the nearly 500 inscriptions and graffiti in Aramaic script and language (cf. Beyer, esp. pp. 28-114), some of which are dated according to the Seleucid era (at least from year 409 [= 97-98 C.E.] to year 549 [= 237-38]). They are mostly short memorial, votive, tomb, or building inscriptions found on the walls or vaults of buildings (of the larger *ayvān*s, the Šamaš Temple, the other greater

or smaller shrines, the partition walls within the temenos area, the city gates, etc.), or on statues, altars, reliefs, block of stones, etc. They are in the local eastern Mesopotamian dialect of Middle Aramaic (q.v.), written in the eastern ductus of the Middle Aramaic script (with 22 letters). Neither the script nor the language shows any marked difference from other contemporary specimens found at other places in the region. Moreover, two bilingual (Greek-Aramaic) inscriptions written in the same Hatrene ductus were uncovered at Dura Europos (q.v.). We know also of three Latin (see above) and several (unpublished) Greek inscriptions from Hatra, as well as of two small texts in Palmyrene Aramaic. Besides, there is a great deal of copper and silver coins (including a coin hoard buried after the reign of the Parthian king Volagases IV), which still wait for a systematic publication and treatment.

The texts contain a great number of personal names (of dedicators, founders, rulers, officials, etc.), thereby giving an idea of the mixed population of Hatra (cf. Abbadi): Apart from the Semitic, i.e., both Aramaic and Arabic names, which are in the majority (and for which one may refer to the royal title *mlkʾ d-ʿrb* "king of ʿArab [or the Arabs]" conceded to the rulers of Hatra), we find a considerable number of Iranian names (among them *Aspād*, *Afrahāṭ*, *Aštāṭ*, *Valagaš*, *Vorōd*, *Mihrā*, *Mihra-dāt*, *Manēš*, *Nōxdārā*, *Sanaṭrūq*, *Tīridāt*).

From the inscriptions we know also the names of several "lords" (*mrjʾ māryā*) or, from about the middle of the 2nd century, "kings" (*mlkʾ malkā*) of Hatra, which can help to establish parts of the genealogy of the ruling dynasty, even though some rulers (marked by +) cannot be exactly identified (cf. Drijvers, pp. 819-28; Bertolino, p. 12): Vorōd+ (*wrwd*, "lord," the first one known by name at Trajan's time), Maʿnū+ (*mʿnw*, "lord"), Našrīhab (*nšrjhb* "lord"), Naṣrū (*nṣrw* "lord," Naṣrīhab's son), Valagaš/Volagases (*wlgš,* Naṣrū's son, evidently the first "king of ʿArab," shortly after 150), his brother Sanaṭrūq I (*snṭrwq* [Gk. Sanatroúkēs], "king of ʿArab"), ʿAbdsēmyā (*ʿbdsmyʾ*, Sanaṭrūq's son, according to inscription no. 290 "king" in the year 192-93; in all probability he is to be identified with the king named Barsēmías by Herodian, *History* 3.1.3), Sanaṭrūq II (the last king of Hatra until 240-41). His son ʿAbdsēmyā is called "crown prince" (with the title *pšgrbʾ pašgrīḇā* borrowed from Parthian as are several others), but did not ascend the throne.

The inscriptions present, however, also some theonyms, thereby enabling us to identify several members of the Hatrene pantheon: At the top is Šamaš (*šmš*), the sun-god, twice described as *ʿlhʾ rbʾ* "the great god," the tutelary god of Hatra (cf. Dio Cassius, 68.31.2, 76.12.2), which in a coin legend even is called *ḥtrʾ d-*

šmš “Ḥaṭrā of Šamaš.” The oft-mentioned divine triad of (a) Māran (*mrn)* “Our Lord,” (b) Mārtan (*mrtn*) “Our Lady,” and (c) Bar-Mārēn (*br-mrjn*) “Our Lord’s and Lady’s son,” who can be equated with (a) Šamaš and perhaps with (b) Nannay and (c) Dionysus (see Drijvers, pp. 829 ff.), also holds important position. The three names, however, are actually only epithets that have taken the place of the original theonyms; in only two passages is Šamaš explicitly called the father of Bar-Mārēn. In all, the religious situation of Hatra was rather similar to that of Dura Europos and Palmyra, showing some mixture of ancient Mesopotamian, Iranian, and Greco-Roman elements.

Archeological remains. As already mentioned, Hatra flourished in the 2nd century, which was made possible by the weakness of the Arsacid Empire and Hatra’s (at least temporary) role as a buffer state between the two great powers in the East and the West.

The extensive ruins are bordered by two concentric and nearly circular (but actually rather polygonal) fortification walls of about 2 km in diameter and 6 km in circumference. This ring-wall (3 m broad, 10 m high) of clay bricks with 4 gates, 11 bastions, and 28 great—and more than 160 smaller—towers is the essential fortification complex of Hatra. Some 300 to 500 m in front of that wall is a circular circumvolution, the purpose and origin of which are at issue. In the center of the city is a huge rectangular, so-called “temenos” of about 440 to 320 m, surrounded with a wall and divided into several courts by partition walls. All the buildings inside the temenos are temples characterized by *ayvān*s (great halls open to the front and roofed with high barrel vaults), but there are no closed houses. That gave Ernst Herzfeld (1914, p. 671) the idea that the actual court life took place in tents and that those great courts contained some kind of a bedouin camp. The main characteristic of those large rectangular *ayvān*s, namely the barrel vault, is an innovation, which in the Parthian period came in quite suddenly, suggesting a kind of a technical revolution at that time.

The main shrine in that central temenos area is the so-called Great Temple (or Great Ayvān), to which, as an extension, is added the square temple of the sun-god Ša-maš, as the relief at the doorframe makes perfectly clear. As always in Hatra, the architectural history becomes plain only by the dated inscriptions. Thus we can say that those *ayvāns* and the Šamaš Temple were built at the beginning of the 2nd century (see Bertolino, passim). Smaller shrines of Hellenistic type must have existed before these, but it can not be excluded that some of the smaller temples surrounding the Great Ayvān are older, too.

Because the very center of the city, namely this temenos area, contains only temples and shrines, but no palace, Daniel Schlumberger (pp. 128 ff.) regarded Hatra as a religious center and a holy town indeed, characterized by some kind of theocracy. But it can hardly be denied that originally Hatra had won its power and prosperity as a trading center.

The exterior wall of the Great Temple is made of imposing masses of undressed stone; its outside cover is of hewn blocks of stone which around the entrances and archivolts are decorated by sculptures and masks showing classical motives popular among the Parthians. The most typical features, chiefly of the great *ayvān*s, are masks taking up an entire slab and showing a fixed and usually youthful face. Hellenistic influence is discernable in the details of the cornices, column bases, capitals, stucco ornaments, etc. Hundreds of stone statues and statuettes (in part portraying gods or members of the ruling dynasty), as well as the sculptured figures in general, are in the typical Parthian style, representing a strange post-Hellenistic-Oriental mixture characterized by frontal view, symmetry, and static appearance, but at the same time showing the Parthian costume marked by long-sleeved coats, knee-length tunic, trousers, etc. A significant peculiarity is in standards called *smj' sēmyā* (a loanword from Gk. *sēmeîon*) with rings and crescent moons and crowned by eagles; rather surprisingly, they are worshipped like gods.

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