

ENGLISH SUMMARY

THE SANCTUARY OF ALLAT IN PALMYRA

The sanctuary of Allat is situated in the western part of the ruins of ancient Palmyra, within the later rampart of what is known as Diocletian's Camp. The Camp was excavated from 1959 on by Kazimierz Michałowski who, fourteen years later, entrusted the dig to the present author. The location of the sacred precinct was known from the 1930s thanks to an inscription on the still standing gate of the sanctuary, but the excavation did not begin until 1974. It took four seasons to uncover the temenos. The Polish team was joined by Dutch colleagues from Groningen: the late Professor Han Drijvers, an eminent Syriac scholar, who undertook the task of publishing the inscriptions, and Matthias Versteegh, who is the author of many of the photographs in this volume. Drijvers's contribution, edited and supplemented by the present author, appears in this volume [*Chapter XI*].

Further test trenches were excavated in 1979, 1985 and 1986, then again in 2005–2007. The long gestation of this book allowed many new insights to be formulated over the years, hopefully justifying at least in part the delay. In the meantime, the present author has presented and discussed essential features of the monument and its history in a range of different publications.

The sanctuary existed for at least 450 years. For the sake of clarity, this span has been divided into six main phases dubbed ALLAT I to ALLAT VI. The relevant inscriptions are listed on pages 27–28. Curiously enough, the foundation date of the precinct results from a comparison of an inscription found outside the sanctuary and of another one, discovered in the sanctuary of Baalshamin (pp. 30–31). The end of the cult is dated by coins found in the temple (pp. 274–276), studied by Aleksandra Krzyżanowska.

The six phases of the sanctuary are as follows:

ALLAT I

The original shrine founded by Mattanai b. Qainu in the mid-1st century BC [*Inscription 12*]. It survived for more than 300 years.

ALLAT II

Collective designation embracing diverse structures in the temenos around the primitive shrine, mainly the porticoes around the rectangular courtyard; dated to the 1st century AD and the first half of the 2nd century.

ALLAT III

The temple built about the mid-2nd century by the curator Taimarṣu to enclose the old shrine. The same Taimarṣu offered the standing gate of the sanctuary [*Inscriptions 1–2*].

ALLAT IV

An impoverished version of the temple rebuilt shortly after destruction of the original shrine by the Roman troops of Aurelian. It survived into the 380s, when it was finally sacked by Christians in the reign of Theodosius.

ALLAT V

A mansion founded in the courtyard, on top of the ruined structures, probably as a residence of the legionary commander. The site of the temple itself was left waste.

ALLAT VI

Rebuilding of the mansion after destruction; some new enclosures in the Islamic period.

THE FIRST SHRINE (ALLAT I)

The building was a small one to begin with, 7.35 m wide and about 5.50 m deep. The restored height in our drawings is 5.50 m, corresponding to the height of the colonnades in the courtyard porticoes. The walls were inordinately thick, about 1 m laterally and up to 2.15 m at the back, reserving inside a chamber about 5.20 m wide and 2.60 m deep. The walls were made of a rough hardstone from the nearby hill and faced with regular plaques of soft limestone. Based on a find of one half of a capital of a corner pilaster, the front can be restored as having four pilasters, two on either side of the door [Fig. 22]. A dozen crowsteps from the tops of the walls were also found along with a few fragments of seated eagles, once probably adorning the roof [Fig. 199].

The door had two wings opening inwards. When ajar, they restricted any view of the sides of the chamber, but exposed the cult image of the goddess to anyone standing outside at the entrance. The cult image stood on a slab of hard limestone, which featured several mortises for mounting the enthroned statue [Fig. 33]. The disposition of the mortises excludes a cult relief such as was common later in shrines scattered throughout the Palmyrene. The appearance of the idol is restored securely thanks to several miniature copies. It sat between two lions flanking the throne, within a niche framed with an elaborate vine-scroll relief and crowned with a lintel adorned with an eagle with spread wings between two sitting ones [Figs 30–32]. The goddess was crowned with a *kalathos* and held a long scepter in her right hand. The statue was perhaps composite, allowing it to be carried around in processions. The chamber was just large enough to house the statue of the enthroned goddess, limiting the approach to just a few officiants at a time.

In front of the shrine there was a square pavement of hard limestone supporting the main altar. Its base was found on the pavement, moved slightly to the side. The crowning was found separately in secondary use. It was decorated on two opposing sides with Ionic volutes, Victories, and marine monsters [Fig. 38]. The height of the altar could be restored at about 1.70 m.

A later inscription [Inscription 2] gives the name of the ancient shrine. It was called the “old *ḥamana*” as opposed to “this temple”. The much discussed term applies here clearly to the primitive shrine, being a repository for the sacred *maṣṣeba* (“idol” or “stele”) made by the founder Mattanai. There is no way the name could be applied to a burning altar, as was previously thought (pp. 62–64) or to a building housing such an altar.

THE EARLY TEMENOS (ALLAT II)

From the beginning the shrine of Allat must have been standing within an enclosure. The only material remains of this consist of a stretch of wall to the west. It is laid about 2 m higher than the shrine, 12 m behind it, proving that the ground was originally sloping down toward the east.

A levelling and extending of the temenos followed at an undetermined date, but not later than the mid-1st century AD. The sanctuary became a regular rectangle surrounded by walls, 49 m long and 32.50 m wide, the shrine equidistant from the long lateral walls but pushed back toward the western end [Fig. 92]. The new west wall doubled the early one, while the three other walls seem to have been laid on virgin ground. Only the foundations exist, preserved in part [Figs 40–44]. The east wall, being the front one, had its foundation laid more carefully of regular blocks of soft limestone, 1.12 m wide, using some architectural *spolia*. There is no trace of the original gate to the temenos.

Colonnades grew progressively around this courtyard. The earliest portico stood on the eastern side, behind the gate. Its columns are extant, but removed to a secondary position. They are fluted and were crowned with Corinthian capitals from the early decades of the 1st century AD. Later assembly marks show there were no less than eight columns in the initial design. Our restitution admits six columns against the east wall and two beginning one of the lateral porticoes. This hypothetical design was subsequently altered [Figs 103–105] and probably never completed.

The next portico that is attested stood on the southern side of the courtyard to the west. It was founded by two brothers, Wahballat and Malku of the A'aki family, in AD 55 [Inscriptions 4–9]. In AD 114, Wahballat b. Bariki set up the western portico. It counted eight columns with Tuscan capitals. The upper surface of architraves show that there was no frieze upon them, just some light wooden roofing. Only some un-

dated elements subsist of the northern portico, none of them in place.

A remarkable intervention occurred in AD 64, when a high freestanding column was erected to honour a benefactor of the sanctuary, Shalamallat [Figs 66–69]. For reasons unclear, it was planted right on the northeastern corner of the temenos, forcing the demolition of part of the east wall and its rebuilding presumably a little in retreat [Fig. 71]. The column bore an inscription [Inscription 31], a figure of the honorand in relief and a sundial. It has been established that the hour could be read until between 2:15 and 3:30 p.m. depending on the season, before the restored wall cast its shadow [Fig. 70].

Another similar column was erected for Nashum and his son, sometime in the 1st century. Two drums [Inscription 32–33], were found in secondary use and the original location of this column within the sanctuary cannot be established.

The only other monument in the temenos that can be attributed to this stage is a rectangular foundation close to the primitive shrine and aligned with it on the eastern side [Figs 75–77]. Neither its destination or exact date may be determined.

Late foundations in the temenos yielded several blocks once belonging to a huge relief sculpture of a frontal lion [Figs 79–81]. This was restored in front of the local museum, first in 1977 by Józef Gazy, then redesigned in 2005 by Bartosz Markowski. The animal stands 3.46 m high and it protects between its paws an antelope of the species *oryx leucoryx*. As the sculpture had been evidently part of a wall, it would have guarded the entrance to the precinct. The short text [Inscription 19] invoked a blessing of Allat “for whoever does not shed blood on the sanctuary”, presumably meaning that bloody sacrifices were forbidden there.

In front of the gate there stood outside a square monument 4.10 m to the side, on the axis of the temple [Figs 84–88]. It is perhaps as old as the primitive shrine. Rather than another *hamana*, as suggested by a text [Inscription 11] of 31/30 BC found nearby, it may be a monumental altar, probably in use up to the very end of the existence of the sanctuary.

THE ANTONINE TEMPLE (ALLAT III)

The temple built in the mid-2nd century was a *prostylos* with four columns in front and one on each side towards the antae. The walls were provided with pilasters. Only one course of the north wall still stands, but the podium is complete. Inside, the floor level is lower than expected, because the older building was preserved complete inside the new temple, closely encased by the blocks of the 2nd century podium. The architect of the new temple took great pains to keep the primitive shrine intact, inserting parts of the foundations beneath the old walls standing practically at ground level. A step which ran on three sides of the shrine was undercut to accommodate the later walls [Figs 13–15]. The interstice between the walls of the two buildings was reduced to a few centimeters.

Outwardly, the temple was Vitruvian in plan and proportions, just as the slightly earlier Baalshamin temple (AD 130). The parallel is so close [Fig. 133] that one wonders whether the architect was not the same in both cases, the two sanctuaries having been administered by the same tribe of Bene Ma'azin. The temple of Baalshamin was just shorter because of lack of space, while the Allat temple measured 11 by 22 modules between the vertical tangents of the columns and pilasters. The obligation to enshrine the old building induced however some modifications inside: there are steps down from the door to the inherited pavement, the difference of levels being reduced by the lower pronaos floor surrounded on three sides by columns standing on a podium; only the central passage was level with the pronaos pavement [Fig. 109].

The steps inside were flanked by high benches right and left, reaching a level normally kept by the floor in a typical temple [Fig. 122]. The benches are not preserved, but their existence is shown by some jutting out blocks and the raw surface of walls beneath their level. The use of these benches can only be guessed at: exhibition of vota or space for banqueting.

The preservation of the complete shrine and of the altar in front of it strongly suggests that there was no roof over the naos. Indeed, a channel for the evacuation of rainwater from the lower floor subsists to the right of the descending steps [Fig. 120] leading into the soil levelling under the pronaos pavement and presumably some sort of draining installation. The pronaos itself should have been covered, probably with a flat roof masked in front by a pediment.

Some loose elements of the higher parts of the temple have been found: four fragments of an inscribed door lintel [Fig. 114, *Inscription 2*], fragments of both pediments [Figs 126–127], and several pieces of the cornice [Fig. 124], although not a single one from the architrave or frieze. The column height also remains unknown, and only one very battered capital of an anta could be recognized. We have admitted for our restitution column shafts of 9.5 modules (about 80 cm each). Given normal entablature proportions, the total height of the temple at the top of pediments could be calculated as 11.20 m above the podium or 13.85 m above the zero level for the whole sector. This is about the same as the height of the Shalamallat column at the temenos corner (13.66 m). The horizontal metrical dimensions of the temple, recalculated in modules, are given in the table on page 154.

The lofty temple stood amid porticoes just 5.50 m high, inherited from the earlier phase. Only the eastern colonnade was higher, reaching at roof level some 7 m above the ground [Fig. 132]. Open to the sky, the naos treasured the venerable old shrine intact. Two freestanding pediments gave the illusion of a classical building. The upper surface of the cornice and the back pediment leave no doubt that no further members were laid above them. This solution is not uncommon in Palmyra, in the so-called temple tombs and even in the Bel temple with its restored terrace.

THE POST-ZENOBIAN RESTORATION (ALLAT IV)

Very soon after the sacking following the capture of Palmyra by Aurelian's troops in 272 the sanctuary was restored to the cult. The old *hamana* was reduced to rubble and the idol disappeared, but the walls were still standing at least to a certain height. It is uncertain whether the columns of the pronaos remained in place. Whoever was in charge had first to secure the preservation of such remains as were still around: they were assembled on the spot of the primitive shrine and sealed in a kind of podium from wall to wall at the back of the temple. Some of these relics were recovered during the excavation.

The front of this podium was made of slabs of soft limestone originally from the revetment of the shrine. It went across the vacated base of the statue and was plastered at both ends against the loose fill. Four pedestals were installed right in front of this partition, two in line with the façade and two to the fore. They are not identical and once supported small columns forming a dais. It is assumed that the whole back part of the temple was covered with beams resting on these columns. The front part remained open to the sky [Figs 135, 139, 142].

The dais served the purpose of mounting a new cult statue. This was a Pentelic marble figure of Athena of good Attic workmanship of the 2nd century AD [Fig. 185, *Sculpture 20*]. Such an order could have been made only in Palmyra's heyday, probably to decorate a public building. Picked up somewhere in the town, this copy of a classical 5th century creation became the personification of the Arab Allat of old.

The statue was set up on a salvaged half of a pilaster capital from the primitive shrine used as a base [Fig. 141]. The goddess stood holding a lance in her raised right hand and a round shield in her left. The sculpture appears to be a copy of a statue which had once been part of a group arranged in the Ares temple on the Athenian Agora. The torso of this statue, practically identical in appearance, is on display in the Agora Museum [Fig. 189]. The head repeats traits of the Phidian Parthenos, but it is not certain that the original Agora statue did, too.

The altar of the temple remained, but the side benches disappeared. The one to the right was replaced by a much lower one, made of an earthen embankment retained in place by a reused inscribed stone [Fig. 143].

The impoverished temple stood within the Roman legionary camp, surrounded by the barracks [Fig. 157]. The new worshippers must have been the military, seeing perhaps the goddess as Minerva, so popular with the Roman army. The probably ruined temenos walls were buttressed with new walls on the west and north. The foundations of these contained many discarded stones, some of them damaged sculptures from the sanctuary and some scavenged in tombs. The front wall was taken down altogether and replaced by another following the direction of a newly traced camp street. This meant a change of orientation of the sanctuary façade. While the column of Shalamallat remained in place, the 2nd century temenos gate was taken down and rebuilt as part of the new wall. In the street in front, six columns of the

old portico were carefully replaced [*Fig. 95*]. Their drums were marked with letters prior to removal and it was restored somewhat shorter (p. 110).

The restored temple survived for another century. The final destruction occurred in the wake of the anti-pagan edicts of Theodosius. The event can be dated to the 380s thanks to a hoard found in the rubble (p. 273). The statue of Athena was broken and found on the floor where it fell.

LATER OCCUPATION (ALLAT V AND ALLAT VI)

Shortly after the sack a mansion was built in the temenos, leaving the site of the temple abandoned [*Figs 159–162*]. Very likely, this was the residence of a legionary commander. Its walls contained some fragments from the destroyed temple, such as pieces of the inscribed lintel, crowning of the altar, and a shoulder of the Athena statue. This house was destroyed in an earthquake sometime in the 6th century and was restored as a much humbler dwelling. Islamic occupation on the site is patchy and inconsequential.