

INTRODUCTION

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The articles assembled in this volume are based on papers presented during a colloquium on Hatra that was held at the University of Amsterdam in December 2009. The aim of the colloquium was the same as of this book: to establish the status quo of research into this important late Parthian settlement, to determine the lacunae in our knowledge and to formulate the main topics of future research. Back in 2009, the time seemed particularly right for such a gathering; after years of archaeological research in which a huge amount of data had been assembled, investigations had come to an abrupt halt with the outbreak of the Second Gulf War in 2003. The colloquium was organised in anticipation of renewed research once the conflict had ended. At the time of the writing of this introduction, almost three years later, archaeological research in Hatra is still impossible and the Hatrene objects that are stored in Iraqi museums are extremely difficult to access for non-Iraqi scholars. It is hoped that this book contributes to keeping Hatra's memory alive and will fire enthusiasm into future generations of researchers, both in Iraq and abroad. So far, Hatra has yielded an immense amount of data that have great potential for a better understanding of the culture, politics and religion of the city itself, of the Jezirah region and of the Parthian Empire as a whole. Undoubtedly, the ruins still hide many more treasures for us. But an assessment of former research is crucial to future investigations.

STATUS QUO

The spectacular archaeological remains of Hatra are located in the Jezirah, in the north of present-day Iraq, about 50 kilometres west of ancient Assur, and 85 kilometres south-west of the modern city of Mosul. The city's excellent state of its preservation is explained by its sudden abandonment in 240 CE, after which it was never inhabited again. References to Hatra's successful resistance to Roman and Sasanian troops in classical and Arabic sources gave the ancient city a legendary status and turned it into a destination for European travellers at an early date. Research first started at the beginning of the last century, with the German expedition led by Walter Andrae, who was working in Assur at the time. Andrae paid the ruins only a few short visits, during which he and his team succeeded to photograph and record all visible remains. The two outstanding publications (1908 and 1912) that resulted from this fieldwork still are an indispensable starting point for all research into the city.

After Iraq's independence in 1951, the city became one of the preferred projects of the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage. Iraqi archaeologists have worked in Hatra with scarcely any interruption from the fifties till the present day.¹ Archaeological research concentrated on the Central Temenos with its monumental buildings, the fourteen small shrines thus far discovered in the domestic area of the city and the northern and eastern city gates and adjoining fortifications. In addition to excavations, the efforts of the Iraqi archaeologists have been concentrated on restoration of the ruins, in particular the buildings in the Great Temenos. When one compares photographs taken before the fifties with the present day situation, the magnitude of these repairs is clear.² Although perhaps stimulating for tourism (that could have flourished under different political conditions), these restorations may well have hampered a correct reconstruction of the city because they are not necessarily correct, are irreversible and obstruct future investigations.

Till about the middle of the seventies of the last century, Fuad Safar and Muhammad Ali Mustafa headed the Iraqi excavations. They published the results of subsequent campaigns in the journal *Sumer*. In 1974, *Hatra. The City of the Sun God* appeared, a monograph that covers their research into the Great Temenos and eleven small shrines. Unfortunately, the book is in Arabic and is difficult to get hold of in the non-Arab world. Although it is the most extensive publication on Hatra to date and lavishly illustrated, the description of architectural remains and sculptures is fairly short and it is frequently impossible to verify the research data. The work of Safar and Mustafa was carried on by Wathiq Ismail al-Salihi, Subhi Abdallah, Jabir Khalil Ibrahim and Hikmat Basheer al-Aswad. They investigated another three small temples in the city and the northern and eastern city gates and the adjoining fortifications. The London PhD thesis of Ibrahim (1986) - who was the director of the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage from 2001 till 2003 - focuses on Hatra and its position in the Jazirah. His archaeological fieldwork in the region surrounding the city is still unique in its kind. An overview of the archaeological work done after Safar and Mustafa is sorely needed. So far, the results were published in separate articles, mainly in the journals *Sumer*, *Iraq*, *Mesopotamia*, *Parthica* and the *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*. The quality of these publications varies; several of the articles in *Sumer* are in Arabic and the quality of the photographs in this journal is often deplorable.

An Italian team led by Professor Roberta Venco Ricciardi worked at Hatra with intervals from 1987 till 2002. Their efforts have concentrated on soundings in the Great Temenos, the tombs and the excavation of several domestic buildings - issues that were largely ignored by the Iraqi archaeologists. In 1990, a Polish mission headed by Professor Michal Gawlikowski worked for one year in Hatra

- 1 Rumour has it that restoration of the great iwans was resumed in the spring of 2010. During this project the floors of the Great Iwans were renewed.
- 2 Gertrude Bell's splendid photographs, made during her visit in April 1911 give a good impression of the site before restoration. They are accessible via the Gertrude Bell Archive: <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/index.phpd>. For recent pictures of the city and it remains, see Sommer (2003a).

and investigated the remains of the ancient city walls inside the present fortification walls. The reports of both teams have been duly published and are of great importance for the reconstruction of the early history of the city, a history that is still very much unknown.

It is clear from the above that research into Hatra was predominantly an Iraqi affair. Due to the political situation in Iraq and the ongoing tensions between Iraq and the western world, publications of Hatra's finds are frequently insufficient and are sometimes difficult to access by western scholars. It has never been easy for western scholars to visit the ruins or to study the monuments stored in Iraqi museums. Consequently, the potential of this city for a better understanding of the Parthian world and its relationship with the Roman west has never been fully explored.

Although Hatra pops up in most studies related to various aspects of the Parthian world and its relation with the West, its monuments are hardly ever discussed in detail or compared with material from contemporary cities in the Syrian Mesopotamian desert, such as Palmyra, Dura-Europos or Edessa.³ The tendency has been to put Hatra on a par with these cities and to consider them representatives of the same culture before making an in-depth analysis of the Hatrene material.⁴ Hatra was, however, the only one of these cities that was part of the Parthian Empire for the greater part of its existence. Its potential for a better understanding of this culture is therefore unparalleled.

Very little is known about the history of the Parthian Empire and its relationship with the Roman West. Despite the fact that the Parthian Empire lasted almost five centuries and covered an immense area in central Asia and the Near East, hardly anything is known about the Parthians since their enemies wrote most of our literary sources. The remains of Parthian culture are equally sparse and are largely found in the most western regions of their vast empire. Hardly anything is known about the material culture in Ctesiphon, the Parthian capital in Mesopotamia. By far the majority of the sources that throw light upon this empire originate from regions at its borders, such as Hatra. This material entails possibilities for a better understanding of Parthian culture, but also specific methodological problems, for the situation in certain areas in the Parthian Commonwealth does of course not necessarily apply to the Empire as a whole.

In order to take full advantage of Hatra for understanding politics, culture and religion on the border of the Parthian Empire, it is essential that different finds like architecture, sculptures, coins and inscriptions are adequately published. So far, this was done several times for the now almost 500 Aramaic inscriptions that were found at the site - albeit most publications detach them from their archaeological context.⁵ The present author is preparing a catalogue of the sculptures that include the inscriptions, but the inaccessibility of the material greatly hampers this

3 There are, of course, several exceptions, such as Hauser (1998), Sommer (2003a) and (2005a). The 2000 issue of *Topoi* contains more than a few useful studies on various aspects of Hatra, as does *Dossiers d'archéologie* 334 (juillet-août 2009).

4 E.g. Drijvers (1977).

5 Major publications are Vattioni (1981) and (1994), Aggoula (1991) and Beyer (1998).

project. Secondly, it is essential that the cooperation between Iraqi and western scholars intensifies and that the results of Iraqi research are made fully accessible in the non-Arab world. The presence of Hikmat Basheer al-Aswad at the conference and his contribution to this volume give hope for the future.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The seventeen contributions in this volume are spread out over three themes that touch upon issues related to Hatra and its position in the Parthian Empire. The first section, "Between Parthia and Rome" discusses the relationship between Parthia and Rome on the one hand and Parthia and its vassal states on the other. Till recently, a few references with classical writers were all that stood to our disposal. Hatra's history also provides invaluable information in this respect. Information on Hatra's history is largely provided by archaeological sources that are discussed in the second section, "The City and its Remains". The third and final section, "Culture and Religion on the Crossroads", contains articles related to Hatra's position between the two great empires. Although most scholars agree that politically the city and its region belonged to the east, this by no means holds true for all aspects of its culture and religion.

The fact that articles are assigned to the same category does not mean that they do not touch on other issues as well. Frequently, the different categories overlap. Nor does their categorization imply that the authors in each section agree on all accounts. On the contrary; the following outline of the different contributions shows there are important differences amongst them. No attempt has been made to cover these up. On the contrary; they are brought to the fore because they show us the way forward concerning future research.

BETWEEN PARTHIA AND ROME

The three contributions in the first section, "Between Parthia and Rome", deal with Hatra's significance for our understanding of the political relationship between the super powers of the day; the Roman Empire on the one hand and the Parthian and Sasanian Empires on the other. Literary sources are our most important source of information to this respect. Unfortunately, these sources are fairly biased since they all have Roman authors. Be that as it may, it is clear that both western and eastern super powers showed a great interest in Hatra - a clear illustration of the geostrategic importance of the city. But to whom - if any - did the kingdom of Hatra belong? And what are the consequences of such a political alliance for its social organisation, culture and religion? Benjamin Isaac provides us with an overview of the available literary sources, all of which mention the city only in passing and in connection with the military conflicts between Rome and its major eastern neighbour. In Isaac's view, Hatra and its region were very much

part of the Roman Empire in the second and third centuries CE; a daring position not shared by most specialists in the field.

The other two contributions in this section by Michael Sommer and Leonardo Gregoratti do study Hatra in the context of the Parthian Empire, as do most articles in this volume. Sommer and Gregoratti by and large follow Stefan Hauser, who made a strong case for Hatra as a dependent ally of Parthia after 165 CE, when the Parthian king of kings granted the rulers of Hatra the title king after Oshroene was lost to the Roman Empire.⁶ In his article in the third section of this volume, Albert de Jong rightly notes that although Hauser's suggestion is eminently reasonable, it is wholly unsupported by the sources. Interestingly, Leonardo Gregoratti dates the intensified relationship between the Parthian king and the rulers of Hatra fifty years earlier, in 117 CE, shortly after the Hatrenes defeated the Romans. Gregoratti argues that the Parthian king favoured the rulers of Hatra with certain privileges as a reward for services rendered for the Empire. The frantic building activity in Hatra during the years 117-150 CE, before Hatra's rulers acquired the title king of the Great King of Parthia, accords well with Gregoratti's hypothesis. De Jong also notes that loyalty toward the Parthian Empire was frequently rewarded with a change in privilege: titles, territory and the attendant ritual prerogatives. The mechanism behind this process is discussed by Sommer, who quotes Flavius Josephus' account of the two brothers Asinaios and Anilaios, who ruled Parthian Babylonia in name of the Parthian king of kings at the beginning of the Common Era, to illustrate how the Parthian king of kings granted privileges and authority to local rulers in order to obtain political capital and consolidate his power.

Most historians assume Hatra was allied with Rome after the Sasanians defeated the Parthians in 224 CE, because there was a detachment of Roman troops in Hatra by 238-240 CE. In his article in this volume, Michael Sommer even labels Hatra a client kingdom during these years. In contrast, Stefan Hauser in his contribution denies a strong Roman influence even during Hatra's final years. These divergent opinions show how little we have to go on in establishing Hatra's political alliances over the course of time. In addition to the scant literary sources, there are several structures in the region around Hatra that historians either ascribe to Roman or Parthian military; an issue that definitely needs further research in the field.⁷

THE CITY AND ITS REMAINS

The articles in the second section "The City and its Remains" all deal with the reconstruction of Hatra's history on the basis of its archaeological remains. Apart

6 Hauser (1998), p.502-503 and p.516.

7 According to Hauser (1998), p.516-519, these structures constitute a Parthian *limes*, a suggestion followed by Gregoratti in this volume. Isaac on the other hand, argues one cannot speak of *limes* in a desert area, a doubt also expressed by Kaizer in his article in this volume.

from a few literary references in classical sources, the urban history of Hatra rests exclusively on the interpretation of material remains. Virtually all monuments that still stand today were constructed after the first century CE, with an outburst of building activity between 117 and 150 CE. As a consequence, little is known about the city's early history, its urban development in the second half of the second century and the situation during the last years of its existence. The articles in this section partly deal with these issues. Hatra's pre-history is particularly fascinating to archaeologists and historians; no less than three contributions discuss the early period. This is because Hatra's early years are crucial to a proper understanding of the city's *raison d'être*, an issue that is dealt with extensively by Ted Kaizer in his contribution.

The little we know about Hatra's history before the Roman siege in 117 CE we owe to the Italian and the Polish excavations. Italian research concentrated on the early building layers behind the great iwans in the Central Temenos, whereas the Polish team focussed on the remains of the early city walls in the domestic area. It is probable that the early layers within the Temenos and the old city walls are related, but it is not clear how we have to envisage this correlation.

The article by Roberta Venco Ricciardi and Alessandra Peruzzetto provides an indispensable overview of the findings of the Italian excavations between 1996-2000. On the basis of their soundings, they reject the reconstruction of Iraqi archaeologists, who argued that Hatra developed from an Assyrian village into a larger Hellenistic centre. The Italian mission did not find any traces of habitation of the Assyrian period, nor did they find the remains of Hellenistic looking stone buildings that preceded the great iwans. Instead, they found several occupational layers of a settled or seasonal population that came to a halt for unknown reasons, probably in the Hellenistic period. Apparently, Hatra revived around the end of the first century BCE or the beginning of the first century CE. From this period dates a mudbrick wall that the Italian team found behind the great iwans. After a short period of time, probably around the end of the first century CE, a more monumental wall replaced this mudbrick wall. It was torn down after a short period of time, shortly after 117 CE, when the great iwans were constructed.

In his search for the wall that stopped Trajan in 117 CE, Michal Gawlikowski and the Polish team found the remains of a mudbrick wall 320 metres south of the present Temenos wall. Gawlikowski argues in his contribution that this wall is very similar to the earlier mudbrick wall that the Italian team found in the Temenos and he concludes that they were part of the same defence system. In Gawlikowski's reconstruction, the walled city was very small indeed and an area that fenced off the major religious buildings did not yet exist [figure 8].

Venco Ricciardi and Peruzzetto do not agree with Gawlikowski's reconstruction. They argue that the mudbrick wall behind the iwans was part of a temenos wall and that the defence wall was located about 300 metres further west. Hence in their view the walled city was slightly bigger and comprised a comparatively large temenos in its centre [figure 2]. They argue that this reconstruction is more likely because it is not probable that the great iwans were constructed at such a

short distance of the original defence wall.⁸ To this we may add that it is perhaps not feasible that a number of small shrines (nos. III, IV, XI, XII and XIV) were constructed at extra mural locations. However, the dilemma can only be solved if more remains of the outer and/ or temenos wall are recovered and for this new excavations are necessary.

Whether we follow the reconstruction of Gawlikowski or of Venco Ricciardi and Peruzzetto, it is clear that settlement started at the end of the first century BCE or the beginning of the first century CE, and that the city was much smaller before the thirties of the second century. Major construction works only started after Trajan besieged the city in 117 CE, with an increase during the reign of Lord Nasru, around 140 CE. In his contribution, Ted Kaizer looks into the reasons for the appearance of material culture and stresses that the reasons for initial settlement on the site and for Hatra's sudden rise and riches from the second century CE onwards are not necessarily the same. In his article, he concentrates on the reasons that are commonly adduced for Hatra's growth. As Kaizer rightly stresses, most historians agree there are a number of reasons, such as Hatra's strategic position for the super powers Parthia and Rome, its role in the caravan trade and its role as a religious centre for people from the eastern Jazirah. Kaizer subscribes to all these factors, but notes that too much stress on either one of these is bound to distort the historical truth. In addition, he postulates the hypothesis that Hatra probably developed through a symbiotic affiliation with the settlements in its territory. This suggestion is utterly sound but needs confirmation on the ground. Stefan Hauser called for such an investigation in 1998 but every initiative was called to a halt by the political situation.

We may push Kaizer's argument still a bit further and argue that the reasons for Hatra's beginning around the start of the Common Era and for its subsequent growth in the first half of the second century are not necessarily the same. The function of the city may well have changed over time as internal as well as external political and economic factors changed. In their contributions, Gawlikowski and Venco Ricciardi and Peruzzetto both stress the prominent role of religion during the city's early phase. According to Gawlikowski, Hatra's very name - enclosure - refers to this religious function. Parallels from the Arab world suggest that such sacred enclosures concomitantly fulfilled an important social role because they provided the desert peoples with a neutral ground.⁹ So perhaps Hatra started as a sacred enclosure and from here developed other functions when circumstances changed.

Why the city suddenly boomed during the reign of Lord Nasru is still not entirely clear. Gawlikowski suggests that after Hatra's victory over the Romans the Parthian king favoured the desert city as a useful fortification against the Roman enemy. Leonardo Gregoratti independently arrives at the same conclusion. Many historians date the strategic interest of the Parthian rulers in Hatra after 165 CE, when Hatra had become the westernmost possession of the Parthian Empire. We

8 Compare also the comments made by Stefan Hauser in note 27 of his article in this volume.

9 Dirven (2006-2007).

see this reflected in the changed title of Hatra's rulers, but not - and this is noteworthy - in its urban development. It may well be that we have to date the intensified relations with the Parthian Empire earlier, after the defeat of Trajan which the Parthian king may have considered a service rendered to the empire.

Concomitantly with the development of the Great Temenos a number of small shrines were built in the domestic area around the sacred enclosure. In total fourteen shrines have been found; Krzysztof Jakubiak lists the evidence from the first thirteen shrines, whereas Hikmat Basheer al-Aswad publishes the material from the temple that was most recently unearthed by Iraqi archaeologists. Although some of the finds from Temple XIV were published previously, al-Aswad's contribution in the present volume is the most extensive description of the temple and its finds in English. The eldest inscriptions from the small shrines are a dedicatory inscription from Temple VIII that is dated in 98 CE and an inscription from Temple XIV dated in 100/1 CE. Hence these two buildings are more or less contemporary with the second monumental wall that the Italian team found behind the great iwans. Most shrines are located inside the area that the Italian mission takes to be the walled city before the construction of the last city wall. Only four shrines are located in the area that was added later to the city (nos. V, VI, X and XIII), as are the tombs. This suggests that nearly all the small shrines existed in the days of the old city and that only few temples were added during its final stage. It seems that small shrines were enlarged and rebuilt on a regular basis, but unfortunately such a building history does not yet exist.

The small shrines were named after the sequence in which they were found. Jakubiak shows that this is for the better, since it is frequently not clear to whom these temples were dedicated.¹⁰ In most temples a number of deities are represented in reliefs and statues or are mentioned in inscriptions and graffiti. Only when we possess the dedicatory inscription (as with Temple XIV that was dedicated to Nanaya) or when the cult image was found in situ in the cult niche of the cella (as with the Heracles-figure in Temple XI), can we be certain to whom the temple was dedicated. The fact that several gods were worshipped under the same roof agrees with ancient Babylonian customs. This also holds true for a number of deities that received a cult in the small temples, such as Nabu, Nanaya and Nergal.

A god that was extremely popular in the small shrines is a Heracles figure. He was worshipped in Hatra under several names and in several guises, one of which is discussed by Susan Downey in her article on clothed Heracles-figures. Jakubiak relates his popularity in the small shrines to Heracles' identification with the Babylonian deity Nergal, the god of the netherworld. His popularity in the small shrines is probably related to the ancestral cult that was celebrated in these shrines. Whereas Nergal's association with the Greek god testifies to Hellenistic influence,

¹⁰ Already pointed out by Kaizer (2000).

his connection with dogs is probably due to Iranian influence; contrary to Greek and Semitic customs, dogs figure prominently in Iranian funerary practices.¹¹

An article by Stefan Hauser in which the end of the city is discussed concludes the section on archaeological remains that throw light on the urban history. Thanks to the Cologne Mani codex the year in which Hatra fell can be established as 240 CE. The immense significance of this siege was, however, not entirely clear. In his article Hauser discusses and analyses the siege works of Hatra that have been known since long but that have only recently been identified in greater detail thanks to analysis of high-resolution satellite images and areal photographs of the area taken in the 1950s. These Sasanian siege works are the most extensive ancient siege works known to date and throw new light on the military tactics and political position of the new Sasanian rulers in Mesopotamia. Hauser shows that both literary sources and archaeological remains make abundantly clear that the fall of Hatra confirmed the power of the new Sasanian rulers in Mesopotamia and as such was of immense importance. What remains to be solved though, is why the Sasanians chose to abandon a city with such an important geostrategic setting.

CULTURE AND RELIGION ON THE CROSSROADS

The last section in this volume, “Culture and Religion on the Crossroads”, includes articles that touch upon issues of cultural and religious interaction between Rome and the Parthian and Sasanian Empires. Hatra was located between the two super powers Rome and Parthia and dealt with both. Politically, the city belonged to the Parthian Empire and was involved in several military conflicts with the west. Periods of confrontation will, however, undoubtedly have been alternated with periods of coexistence. There also must have been a considerable amount of peaceful interaction, transcultural exchange, and acculturation. This interaction was greatly helped by the fact that there was no fixed border between the western and eastern empires but a permeable border zone that comprised large areas of the Syrian Mesopotamian steppe. This ambiguous situation - politically part of the Parthian empire and culturally situated in a region that transcended the political borders - makes it extremely difficult to pin down culture and religion in Hatra.

Crucial to the whole discussion is how we define Parthian culture and religion. If we follow Albert de Jong in his contribution and define Parthian as referring to the people from the region Parthia, the kings drawn from that people and the language they spoke, regions like Hatra belong to the Parthian Commonwealth: a region within the orbit of the Parthian Empire but not inhabited mainly or chiefly by Parthians or other Iranians. The problem is, of course, that Parthian culture is almost exclusively known through the regions in this Commonwealth where we also have to reckon with other cultural influences.

11 On the ancestral cult in the small shrines, see Dirven (2005a) and on Iranian influences in the cult of Nergal, Dirven (2009), cited with approval by De Jong in his article on Parthian cultural influences in Hatra in the present volume.

In case Hatra was part of the Parthian Empire during the greater part of the second and third centuries CE, what are the consequences of this alliance for the cultural and religious situation in the desert city? This is the main theme of De Jong's contribution, in which he argues that Hatra belonged first and foremost to the Parthian Commonwealth and that the impact of Parthian culture in the city must have been substantial. He insists that it is misleading to think of Hatra as a city between Rome and Parthia on all accounts except that of figurative arts. He argues that "between" is frequently taken to mean "indigenous", and refers to the Aramaic speaking urban civilisation that can be found in the dry steppe of Syria and Mesopotamia. De Jong points out that the notion of indigeneity is frequently coupled with the Parthians' presumed lack of a distinctive culture. Consequently all cultural elements are either termed Roman or indigenous and Parthian cultural elements are frequently neglected. In this article, De Jong shows that a Parthian cultural presence can be detected in the western domains of the Parthian Empire in a number of fields, such as Iranian loanwords, personal names, titles, clothing, jewellery and weapons and a strong preference for Parthian stories. This, he argues, is the result of a process of elite acculturation, with leading families appropriating cultural elements characteristic of the Parthian courts.

In his article on Hatra and Palmyra, Jean-Baptiste Yon discusses the contemporaneous monumentalization of public space in the two cities and therewith touches upon the shared urban civilization in the cities in the *bādiya*, the dry steppe of Syria and Mesopotamia of which Hatra and Palmyra are both part. In order to explain these similarities, Yon discusses the evidence for transhumant relations across the steppe between the Roman and the Parthian Empires. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that tribes had members on both sides of the frontier. This does not imply that it is not true; the modern evidence for tribes who are on both sides of the border is abundant. Although one cannot reconstruct the direct lines of contact, it is clear that similarities between Hatra and cities in Roman Syria are not confined to sculpture, but pertain to other cultural expressions as well, such as monumental architecture and public inscriptions. In Yon's view, the cultural similarities between Palmyra and Hatra largely predate the period of strong Romanization of Palmyra; despite the fact that they belonged to two different political formations they were part of the same world, that deviated from classical culture as we know it. Yon does not use the word "indigenous" to characterize this culture, nor does he deny that Parthian culture left its mark in Hatra as well. The two options are simply not mutually exclusive.

An example of western influence is the well-known mask sculpted next to the entrance of one of the iwans of the central temple complex. Klaas Dijkstra proposes a new interpretation of the accompanying inscription in which he argues that inscription and sculpted head should be considered as a unity. If the reading *grgn*, "gorgo" is correct, this is the first instance in which the Greek name of a divine being is transcribed in Hatrean Aramaic. This reading is, however, partly inspired by the head that shows affinity with Graeco-Roman Medusa-heads. Be that as it may, it is clear that the head derives from a western model that is interpreted by the Hatrene sculptor in a new and unique way. It is noteworthy that such

'Roman' motives are particularly popular in the architectural decoration of the great iwans, carvings that belong to the earliest sculptures from Hatra. Why these motives were particularly popular just after the Hatrenes defeated Tranjan's army in 117 CE is in need of further research.

The free-standing statue of a bearded deity flanked by eagles from Temple V, also testifies to contacts between Hatra and Roman Syria. In his study of this famous Hatrene statue, Andreas Kropp convincingly shows that this is the Hatrene interpretation of the celebrated cult statue of Apollo of Hierapolis, known from the description of the fifth-century author Macrobius and several representations. In spite of the statue's archaic flavour, cuirass and Tyche-figure make clear that this creation dates to the Hellenistic period or later. The archaic character of the statue may have been a conscious creation, inspired by the venerable age of the Babylonian god Nabu with whom Hierapolitan Apollo was associated. In Hatra too this statue was linked with the god Nabu; a small copy of this statue was found in the small temple dedicated to this god. Interestingly, the statue is not just a faithful copy of the Hierapolitan original but was adapted to the local situation. Kropp points out that the solar bust on the chest is a novelty that undoubtedly serves to associate the god with Shamash. This incites the question whether other elements of the statue were also interpreted according to Hatrene beliefs and customs; a valid question that is extremely difficult to answer at the present state of affairs. Equally enigmatic is the fact that a Hierapolitan cult statue turns up in another city, 400 kilometres to the east. It shows that cities in the *bādiya* were connected but unfortunately we don't know anything about the nature of these contacts.

In his contribution on the triad of Hatra, Jürgen Tubach investigates the identity of the three deities that were the most important, but least studied gods of Hatra: Maren, Marten and Barmaren. Tubach confines his research to the male deities, since little is known about the character of Marten. In fact, contrary to her male partners, it seems that none of the iwans in the great temple was dedicated to her worship. Why she is such a bleak figure in the religious life of Hatra is in need of further research. Tubach argues that both Maren and Barmaren were gods of Babylonian origin, as are a number of other elements in Hatrene religion. In his view, these traditions are explained by Hatra's continuous history from the Achaemenid or Hellenistic period into the Parthian period. This assumption is contradicted by the latest archaeological findings of the Italian mission in Hatra. They show that the site probably does not go back to the Assyrian period and that the material remains do not substantiate any cultural continuity. This raises the question for the origin of these Mesopotamian traditions. Were they perhaps much more alive in Parthian Mesopotamia than is generally assumed? The continuity of Babylonian traditions in the Parthian period received fairly little attention so far and is in need of further research.¹² This holds true in particular for the reinterpretation of these traditions in the course of time, an issue that is also touched upon

12 An exception is Dalley (1998).

by Tubach in his article. If Babylonian traditions were still alive in the Parthian period, this implies that they were subject to change.

The last two contributions, by Simon James and Sylvia Winkelmann, both discuss weaponry as evidence for intercultural contacts. Times of peaceful co-existence are often considered fruitful for cross-frontier exchanges. James shows that periods of war may be equally stimulating since hostile forces tend to be eager to copy admired enemy traits. James' starting point is a cheekpiece from a Roman-looking helmet found in Hatra. It is the stepping-stone to a discussion of martial interactions between Romans, Parthians and Sasanians in the Middle East. According to James, the Hatra cheekpiece is part of an animal-faced Ostrogothic helmet type, a regional helmet variant created by and for Rome's eastern soldiers. He argues that its presence in Hatra may be explained in various ways, which is indicative of the complexities of cultural interaction in Hatra.

Sylvia Winkelmann's article starts from representations of weapons in Hatra figurative art and presents a valuable catalogue of the different types of swords and daggers that are attested here. In her search for the origin of these weapons, she shows that the Parthian people adopted weapons like the scabbard slide and long sword from the nomadic peoples of the Euro-Asian steppes. In all likelihood, this happened around the beginning of the Common Era or slightly earlier. It is noteworthy that weapons from Hatra and other territories to the west of Parthia are very similar to those from eastern territories. Winkelmann notes that the same pertains to jewellery and clothing. This suggests a communal source and it lies close at hand to assume that this was the Parthian court. It is clear that weapons in representations from Hatra primarily function as status markers. Weapons provided the Hatra elites with symbolic capital because it linked them to the central political power. As such, they provide us with an excellent example of the process of elite acculturation that is key to Parthian culture in the Parthian Commonwealth.