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PALMYRA

EXCAVATIONS IN THE ALLAT SANCTUARY 2005-2006

Michał Gawlikowski

The sanctuary of Athena-Allat in the western quarter of the ancient city (later Diocletian's Camp) was excavated by the Polish mission between 1974 and 1980. While the preliminary results have been consigned to several papers published during and after the excavations (Gawlikowski 1977; 1978a; 1978b; 1983a; 1983b; Drijvers 1975; 1976), the final report has yet to be offered. Work on the publication turned up some uncertain points concerning the architectural layout of the sanctuary and it is with the purpose of checking these that two short seasons of excavations were carried out in 2005 and 2006 inside the Camp of Diocletian.¹

1 From 11 May to 4 June 2005 and from 10 to 30 June 2006. Beside the present writer, the team included Krystyna Gawlikowska, art historian; Dagmara Wielgosz, Karol Juchniewicz, Marcin Wagner and Marta Żuchowska, archaeologists; Daria Tarara and Wojciech Terlikowski, architects; Aleksandra Trochimowicz and Bartosz Markowski, restorers. The inspectors were Khalil al-Hariri (both seasons) and Omar al-As'ad (2006). We are grateful for their assistance, as well as for the support of the DGAM in Damascus, in particular of Dr. Michel al-Maqdissi.

SACRED PRECINCT OF ALLAT

The sanctuary had been established in the 1st century BC outside the built area of the time (cf. Gawlikowski 1990), but the

founding of a Roman camp about AD 300 altered the site profoundly, obliterating many earlier features. The temple of Allat

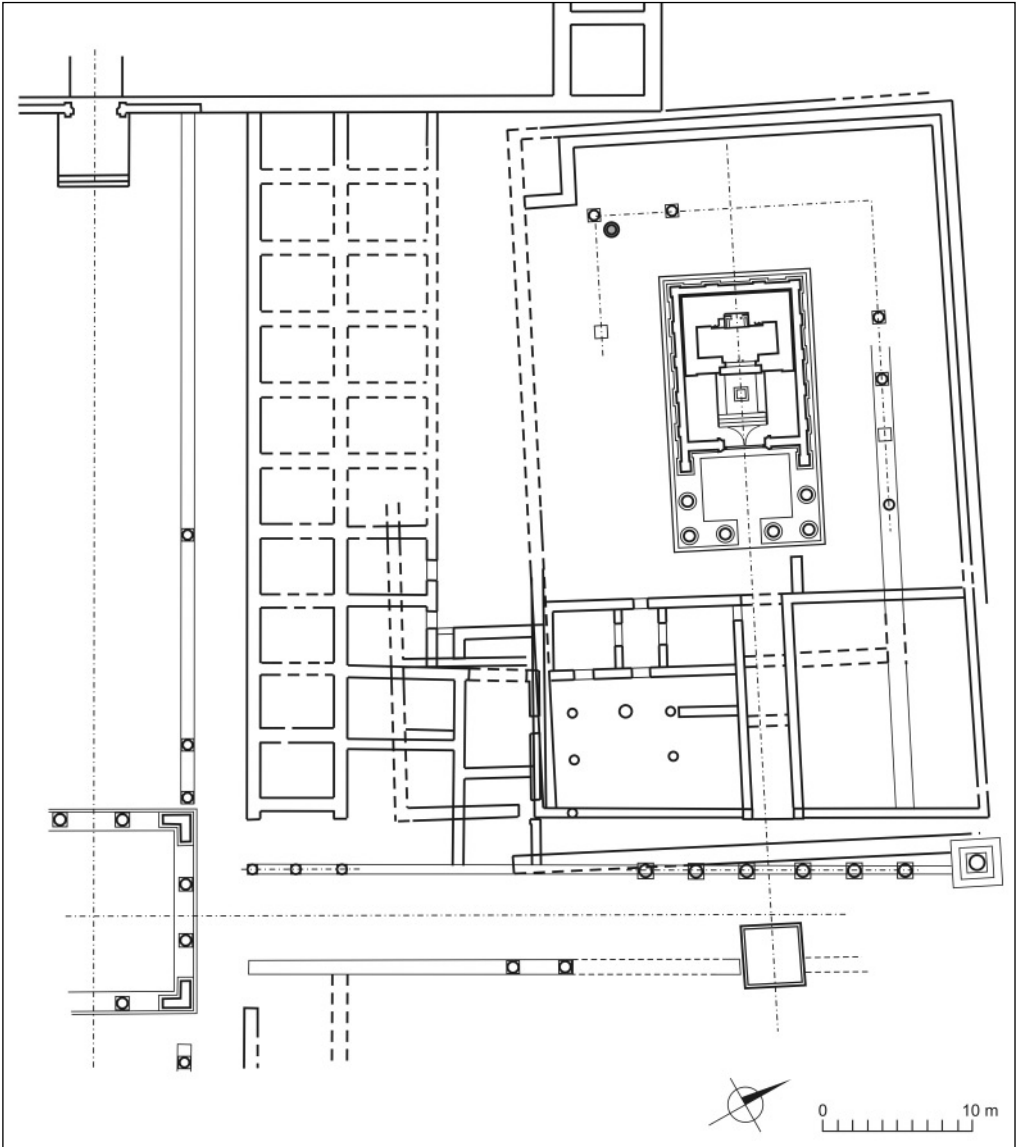


Fig. 1. The Allat sanctuary inside Diocletian's Camp
(Drawing M. Puskarski et alii)

itself survived among the camp barracks for a century, but the actual outline of the precinct changed to accommodate military installations. The main dig in the past had been concentrated on determining as much as possible of the original layout; now it was hoped that spot work could help fill in some of the blanks, especially with regard to the limits of the temenos.

The course of the west and north walls of the sanctuary were identified already in 1975 [Fig. 1]. Surviving foundations permitted two parallel and contiguous enclosures to be traced, one of the 2nd century AD and one contemporary with the building of the Camp. The latter wall contained many reused stones, some of them robbed from the tombs and some belonging to the sanctuary. Among them were fragments of honorific statues once displayed in the porticoes of the sanctuary. Most of them were recently reassembled in the Palmyra Museum by the team's restorer B. Markowski (Trochimowicz, Markowski 2005: 466-468, also cf. Figs 9-10, below).

In 2005, the foundations of the south-western corner of the temenos were identified, along with a short stretch of the two enclosure walls on the southern side. Not much is left of the earlier enclosure, but the line of the later one is traced clear enough. Incorporated into the wall structure was yet another early honorific statue and fragments of some other sculptures. Several terracotta lamps have confirmed the dating of the later foundation to the Tetrarchy period.

On the eastern side, the one facing the temple and containing the entrance, the limits of the temenos are not as well established. It was utterly destroyed by the laying of the *Via Principalis*, a street running longitudinally in line with the army barracks entrance and like the camp as a whole, at an angle to the sanctuary.

The builders of the camp, however, had every intention of respecting the temple of Allat-Athena, Minerva being traditionally one of the main devotions of the Roman army. In order to integrate the sanctuary in its new surroundings, the gate of the 2nd century temenos was removed from its original (as yet unidentified) location and reset in line with the *Via Principalis*, where it remains standing since Late Antiquity, bearing a much weathered Aramaic inscription mentioning Allat and her temple. Six early columns were aligned in front of the gate, likewise replaced from wherever they could have stood in the 1st century AD. The collapsed remains of these columns were reassembled in 1975 in their secondary location.

Earlier remains still in place include a foundation running at an angle between these columns and the gate, and a huge honorific column erected in AD 64 (and re-erected in 1975 together with the sundial on the socle remaining in place) for a certain Shalamallat son of Yarhibola by Allat and the members of his tribe in recognition of his building activities in the sanctuary. The orientation of the two structures, corresponding to that of the cella of Allat and the three remaining walls of the temenos, had been taken as evidence of their contemporaneity with the rest of the precinct in the 1st century AD and later. However, a recent computer simulation by Daria Tarara proved that the wall standing on the old foundation would have cast a shade on the sundial for most of the day. This finding spurred the excavators to check the foundations, establishing in effect that the column of Shalamallat now stands on the dismantled northeastern corner of the temenos wall and cuts through the walking surface associated with it. It follows that the foundation of the east wall of the sanctuary



Fig. 2. The square monument in the Via Principalis, as seen from the west (top) and north (Photos M. Gawlikowski)

goes back to the first half of the 1st century AD at the latest.

It thus appears that this wall was demolished when an extension to the temenos was constructed, most probably funded by Shalamallat shortly before AD 64. Testing for this extended eastern limit of the sanctuary did not produce results, presumably because the construction of the later military barracks destroyed anything in the way.

We were able, on the other hand, to excavate and study a curious monument standing in front of the gate of Allat, right in the middle of the *Via Principalis*. This square foundation is oriented like the Allat temenos and measures 4.05 m to a side, are taking into account the missing corners [cf. *Figs 1, 2*]. It was built of irregular broken stones, bonded in mortar and faced with soft limestone blocks, in the same

way as the first chapel of Allat, the foundations of which are preserved inside the cella. Like this chapel, called *hamana* in the cella inscription, it had a low step on three of its sides, excluding the façade, in this case facing south. This structure was razed to a level corresponding to the late surface of the street, but what is left of it now rose above the Diocletianic level of the *Via Principalis*.

The laying of the stones strongly suggests that the foundation had supported four thick walls around a small room reserved inside, about 2 m wide from east to west and slightly less deep behind an entrance on the southern side. The floor level of this room would be higher than the preserved remains and would require some outside steps to be accessed. For no apparent technical reason the foundation was laid on clean sand filling a trench cut in culturally sterile soil.

If these observations are correct, we have here another *hamana*, similar and parallel to that of Allat. It is tempting to associate it with an inscription found in 1974, reused very close to this monument (Gawlikowski 1976). The stone is of the same soft quality and could have been a lintel; it says that a certain Belhazai has offered "this *hamana*" to the god Shamsh in 31/30 BC. If the attribution is valid, the chapel of the Sun god would have stood in front of the Allat temenos before being included within the extended temenos.

Found next to the *hamana* foundation were fragments of corner merlons in soft limestone featuring volutes and acanthus leaves [*Fig. 3*]. This further emphasizes the similarity between this monument and the first chapel of Allat enshrined later within the 2nd-century cella.

Excavations also brought to light some installations of the 4th century or later. Among them, two limekilns dug into the



Fig. 3. Fragmentary merlon found in connection with the hamana (Photo M. Gawlikowski)

ground not far from the archaic foundation could have easily been responsible for the disappearance of most of its stones. Deep under the floor of one of the kilns, close to the probable *hamana*, several upright stones formed the casing of a square object about 15 cm to a side, very possible a wooden post; its dating is unclear [Fig. 4].

At the other end of the sanctuary, a deep pit near the northwestern corner turned out to be filled with column drums and other architectural elements, apparently discarded after the destruction of the temple in 273. The recovered lot of pottery sherds needs to be studied in detail before more can be said. Nearby, but already outside the temenos wall, a sunken structure made of upright pottery tiles could have been a basin, if only any traces of waterproof mortar could be discerned. This feature of uncertain use is associated with 4th century material and overbuilt with a wall on a higher level. Another foundation to the north of it, even higher, seems to mark the limit of the area containing the supposed basin. This late



Fig. 4. Casing of a wooden post (?) under the floor of a limekiln
(Photo M. Gawlikowski)

enclosure is made of building blocks of soft limestone, coming probably from the earlier temenos wall; several reused 1st century pieces were identified in its structure. Both features need further excavation.

The usual lot of broken and displaced sculpture discovered this season contained two outstanding pieces carved in soft limestone and clearly part of the original outfitting of the Allat sanctuary from the early 1st century. One represents a man on horseback extending a wreath in his right hand and holding a lamb under his left arm [Fig. 5]. He wears the typical early dress with sleeved tunic and ample trousers marked with a vertical band of embroidery. As it was found in the above mentioned late enclosure, close to an inscription mentioning two brothers, Wahballat and Malku, already known from funding a colonnade in AD 55, it is possible that our rider was one of them, while the slab could have been part of a larger composition including his brother and the figure of the goddess.

The other relief found in 2006 comes from a similar late foundation close to the square building in the *Via Principalis* [Fig. 6]. It represents a hunter on horseback, aiming arrows at a leopard (*Panthera pardus nimr*, identified by Gianluca Serra, a conservationist based in Palmyra at the time of the discovery). It is the first case of this motif in the art of Palmyra. It recalls curiously the tiger hunter on the mosaic found in 2003, but the two images are clearly three centuries apart: the soft limestone used, the manner of representing tunic folds, and finally the full profile view of the hunter, are features dating this sculpture to the beginning of the 1st century AD at the latest.



*Fig. 5. Relief of a man carrying a sacrificial lamb. Mid 1st century AD
(Photo M. Gawlikowski)*



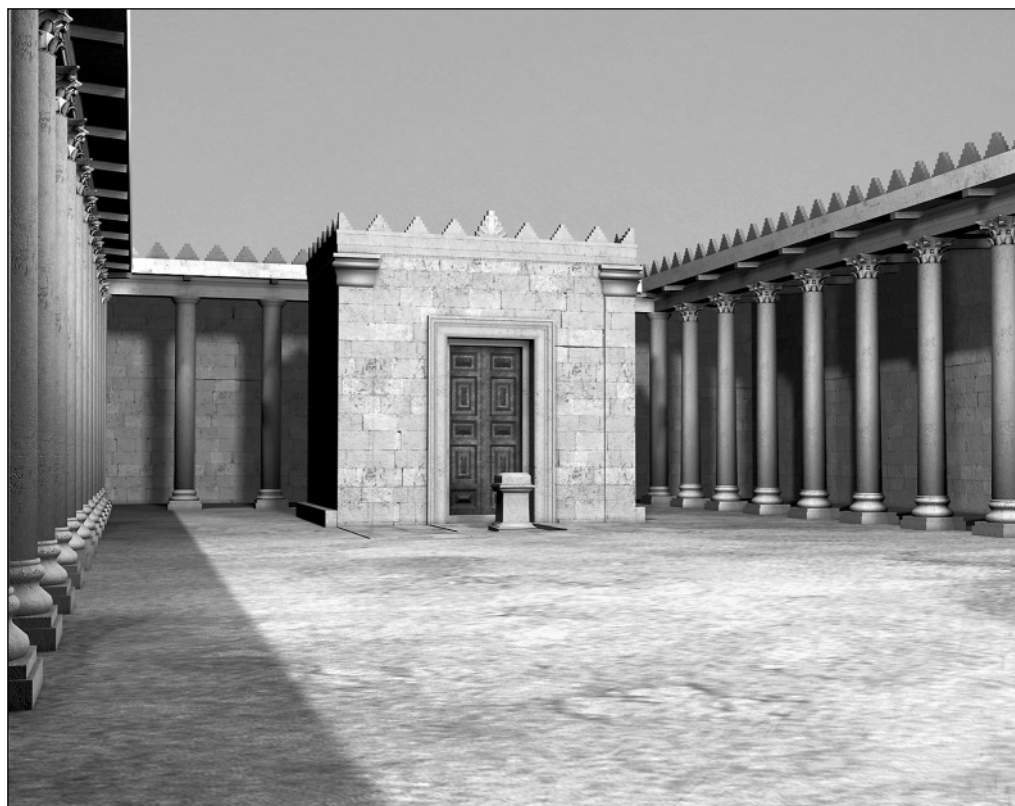
*Fig. 6. Leopard hunter. 1st century BC/1st century AD
(Photo M. Gawlikowski)*

MUSEUM WORK

Following up on a promise to help in re-arranging the local museum exhibition, the team's restorer added three more early statues to those already installed in the long hall leading up to the statue of Athena from the Allat temple (assembled in its present position by Polish restorer Józef Gazy in 1976). There are now seven life-size statues standing along the left wall and one head fixed between them, giving an idea what they would have looked like in the porticoes of the sanctuary [Fig. 8]. The armored figure standing at the

beginning of the line was more likely a cult statue of a god. The opposite wall now holds five posters explaining in Arabic and English the development of the sanctuary during four and a half centuries of its existence [Figs 7, 8]. At the end of the hall, the marble Athena stands alone as the main focal point of the hall.

Work is underway on transferring showcases containing an array of small fragments of bronze, coins, and textiles unrelated to the sanctuary to the first floor of the museum. Another presentation,



*Fig. 7. The first temple of Allat
(Design D. Tarara)*

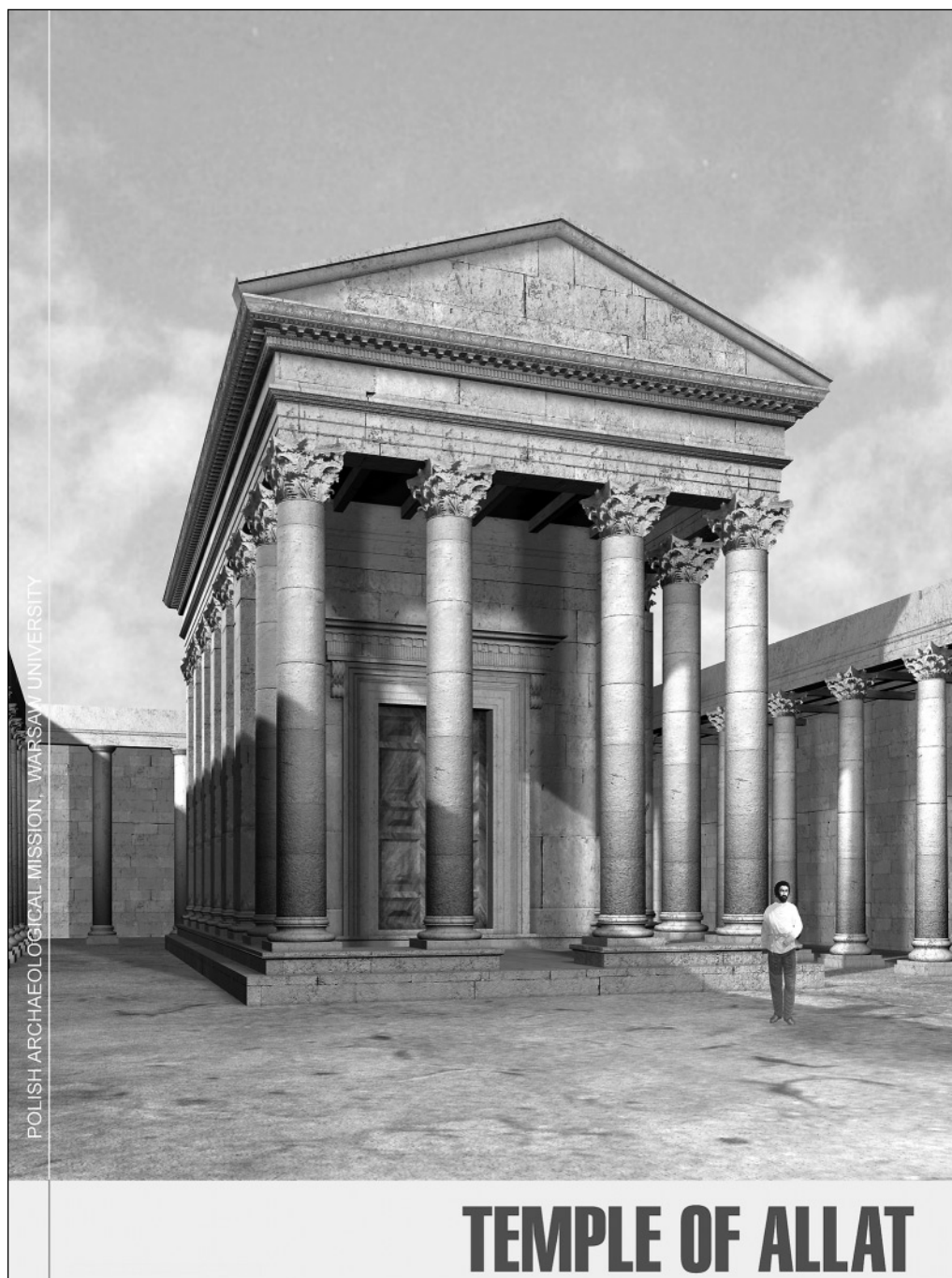


Fig. 8. *The temple of Allat about AD 150*
(Design D. Tarara)

which is in the process of being prepared by D. Wielgosz, concerns the marble trade of Palmyra with a display of different kinds

of marble found in the city and includes a poster explaining the sources from which they were brought.

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Fig. 9. Archaic statues reassembled in the Allat hall of the Museum
(Photo M. Gawlikowski)

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