

2. Ḥadīta Bēḡān Island

Polish Mission, Haditha Project *

The excavations started in the autumn 1979 and continued through 1982 with five successive campaigns, conducted by a team from Warsaw University under M. Gawlikowski and M. Krogulska. The island represents an Assyrian fortress in the middle of the Euphrates, some 25 km downstream from ʿĀna, reoccupied in Parthian times and used as a Roman frontier post in the first half of the III century A.D.

The island is surrounded by a massive stone wall up to 6 m in width, rising directly from the water level. In its first phase, possibly Middle Assyrian, the fortress measured only 120 m through 29 m. Facing the current from the North, a massive bastion, 25 through 29 m, is still preserved up to 5 m above the waterline. It probably supported a building which has left no traces. On the Western side an incurved wall buttressed by baked bricks joined with bitumen to prevent silting, formed probably a small harbour.

In Neo-Assyrian times this outer wall was extended, so as to form a bigger fortress 185 m long and up to 75 m across. Except at the site of the presumed harbour, the soil level rose through natural fluvial deposits to match the mostly artificial level within the original enclosure.

The finds relative to both periods are few and displaced. They consist almost exclusively of pottery fragments. The Assyrian literary sources, however, confirm the dating and allow the identification of the island as the fortress of Sabirutu, mentioned under Tiglat-Pileser I and again under Tukulti-Ninurta II (A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions II* (1976) pp. 27 and 102).

The island, under the name of Izan, reappears in the itinerary of Isidorus in the first century A.D., in relation to such places as Anat, Telbis and Hit, which are already mentioned in the Assyrian itineraries quoted above. The corresponding level consists of stone foundations of two partly excavated buildings, one of them a house and another probably a magazine. There are also several graves in huge storage jars, and one with a chamber built of stone. On the Eastern shore of the river there are some rock-cut tombs, presumably also from the Parthian period. The pottery finds are again rather poor and include mainly storage jars.

The Roman occupation started with a pottery kiln set in the ruins of the Parthian buildings, and soon a settlement developed upon the elder foundations. Most of the finds secured in the excavation come from this level. There are, first of all, many bronze Roman coins of the Severan period,

and also some terracotta lamps together with large amount of pottery. Most abundant are slim «torpedo» jars, made waterproof with bitumen; they are common throughout the Euphrates valley and in Seleucia, but their chronological range is not yet firmly fixed. There are also thin glazed drinking bowls, rounded bottles, and other types with Mesopotamian connections. On the other hand, the ribbed cooking pots, fired deep red, are typically Syrian. This so-called brittle ware seems to appear only in places under Roman control, e.g. in Ain Sinu, Dura-Europos, and recently on the island of ʿĀna. There is a number of metal objects, both bronze and iron, among them a bronze tray with a handle in form of a horse.

All this points out to a military occupation by an unit of the Roman army since the 198 A.D. war of Septimius Severus at the latest. The fortress stayed in Roman hands till the Sassanian onslaught in 238 or slightly later. Apparently, it was never used again by the military, but there are Sassanian and Abbassid occupational layers.

Some inscribed pottery fragments carry letters in Palmyrene, Latin, and a local script closely related to Hatra inscriptions. We are thus allowed to believe that the troops in charge of the island were recruited locally, partly in Palmyra. An officer from Palmyra commanded in 225 A.D. the place of ʿĀna and some outposts in the Western desert. It seems certain that this part of the Euphrates valley belonged to the territory of Palmyra, perhaps as far as the Wādī Ḥōrān, and with it to the Roman Empire.

M. Gawlikowski.

*) Cf. in addition M. Gawlikowski, *al-Āthārī* 1980/1, 37–8 (1st Season); *Iraq* 43, 194 (Resumé of seasons 1979–81); *LIAO* 3 (Mars 1981) 4.