

Personal Names in the Aramaic Inscriptions of Hatra

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0 Introduction

Since the first archaeological investigations at the site in the beginning of the 20th century and especially since the resumption of regular excavations in the 1950s, the city of Hatra has been recognized as one of the most opulent Mesopotamian sites of the Parthian age. Located in Northern Mesopotamia, at a relatively short distance from Nineveh, present-day Mosul, and Assur, Hatra thrived between the 1st century BC and the 3rd century AD, before it was besieged and conquered by the Sassanian army in AD 240-1. The multifaceted nature of Hatra as a holy city and pilgrimage destination, a trade centre, and a crucial buffer zone between the Parthians and Rome comes is clear from the rich archaeological and textual evidence. This comprises monumental buildings, such as the impressive Temenos standing in the centre of the city and the fourteen Small Shrines scattered across the urban area, and inscriptions, together with finds in domestic buildings and graffiti which allow a glimpse of the private lives of the city's ancient inhabitants. The abundance of published and unpublished archaeological and epigraphic evidence allows modern researchers to carry out studies on a wide range of topics.¹

The Aramaic epigraphic corpus of Hatra consists of ca. 600 texts belonging to different categories.² Official texts such as foundation inscriptions, edicts, and dedications of statues are found together with other texts whose nature can be described as more spontaneous, a large part of which are graffiti; on the other hand, literary, ritual, administrative, and epistolary texts, which would offer linguistic samples of greater length and complexity, are lacking. The Aramaic dialect of Hatra has nonetheless gained an increasingly important place within Aramaic studies since the publication of the inscriptions that were progressively unearthed from the site and its surroundings. The fragmentation of the uniformity that characterized Official Aramaic under the Achaemenid Empire, in terms of both language and script, led to the development, from the 3rd century BC onward, of local varieties that became the official languages of smaller kingdoms. These varieties are conventionally grouped under the

¹ Cf. Dirven (2013b) and Peruzzetto, Dorna Metzger, Dirven (2013) for recent important contributions on the history, archaeology, and culture of Hatra.

² See below for bibliographical references and for the numbering of the inscriptions.

label ‘Middle Aramaic’.³ The language and script attested at Hatra, Assur, and nearby sites between the 1st and the 3rd century AD are part of this picture. Aside from their being proof of the flourishing of local kingdoms able to support chancelleries for the writing of official texts, these Aramaic varieties display for the first time some innovations that characterize the Eastern branch of Aramaic dialects (e.g. Beyer 1984, 46-7; Gzella 2011, 604-6), which is of great importance for studies of Semitics and historical linguistics. These innovations, such as the suffix /-ē/ instead of /-ayyā/ for the masculine plural determinate state of the noun, or the 3rd masculine singular imperfect prefix /l-/⁴ rather than /y-/ , are distinctive features of Eastern Aramaic also in its subsequent phase (Classical Syriac, Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, Mandaic). The most comprehensive description of Hatran⁵ Aramaic is offered by Beyer (1998, 121-40), while the new study of Contini and Pagano (2015) deals specifically with loanwords. More recent and concise overviews have been offered by Gzella (2011, 604-6; 2015a, 271-6). For a broader discussion cf. Beyer 1984, 77-153.

Due to the laconic nature of the available documentation in Hatran Aramaic, it was soon acknowledged that the many personal names attested in the inscriptions could constitute major evidence to detect linguistic and cultural phenomena and provide information that could not be retrieved from texts. As to the value of Hatran personal names as a source of cultural data, for example, I have shown elsewhere (Marcato 2016) that a bird’s-eye view of these names testifies to a pulsating cultural environment in which Aramaic and Arab elements interacted with Iranian, Akkadian, and Greek features.

On the linguistic side, the publication of *Die Personennamen der Inschriften aus Hatra* by Sabri Abbadi in 1983 provided a reference work on this topic. This was the first thorough linguistic study of these names and focused on their orthographic, phonological, morphological, and syntactical features. In addition, etymological remarks were supported by onomastic parallels drawn mainly from Semitic corpora (Akkadian, North-Western Semitic, Ancient North- and South-Arabian, Classical Arabic), accompanied by Greek and Latin transcriptions of the same names, as well as Iranian onomastics.

However, as shown by the lists of personal names included in Beyer (1998, 2013) and Bertolino (2008), the publication of more than 200 new inscriptions in the last three decades and new readings of certain pub-

3 Cf. the remarks on this terminology in Moriggi 2012.

4 Together with /n-/ in a subsequent phase, but not at Hatra.

5 As customary in latest publications, I use “Hatran” with reference to language and script, while “Hatrene” for history and culture. Correct, where necessary, the use of “Hatrene” in Marcato 2016.

lished texts have progressively called for a fresh comprehensive analysis. The corpus of 341 inscriptions studied by Abbadī has now increased to approximately 600; moreover, many texts have been read anew, which has occasionally led to radically different interpretations of individual personal names.

The present work aims at providing an updated and easy-to-consult overview of the 376 personal names attested in Aramaic inscriptions found at Hatra. Certain other texts discovered at the site, for example, a jar fragment with the name *nbwḥny*, probably imported in the 4th or 3rd century BC from Failaka or Bahrain (Bertolino 1996a, 313; 2000, 134), a Palmyrene Aramaic stele (PAT no. 1604), three Latin inscriptions (Oates 1955), two as-of-yet unpublished ‘Egyptian’ texts, unpublished Greek graffiti (Bertolino 2013, 187 n. 1; Moriggi 2013b, 318 and n. 7), a tombstone with a Nestorian cross and a short Syriac inscription (Ricciardi Venco, Parapetti 2016, 394-5), and two 12th-century Arabic inscriptions (Andrae 1912, 164-5) are here excluded. Names are contextualized in the frame of contemporary onomastic corpora and analyzed as to their linguistic features. The analysis focuses to a large extent on Semitic onomastics (as the great majority of Iranian and Greek names attested at Hatra are well-known) and consists of: an “Onomastic Catalogue”, a “Linguistic Analysis”, and a “Concordance” section. This book does not offer a detailed assessment of the placement of these personal names within the Hatrene social and cultural environment. It is hoped, however, that the data herein presented will stimulate further studies, in the wake of recent contributions such as those on bilingualism in the late antique Near East (Taylor 2002) and on the diverse linguistic and religious situation at Dura Europos (Kaizer 2009).

The “Catalogue” makes reference primarily to the main editions of Hatran inscriptions (Vattioni 1981, 1994; Aggoula 1991; Beyer 1998, 2013). All attestations of personal names have been checked against photographs of the relevant inscriptions; in the case of missing or untraceable photographs, readings have been verified with the aid of hand-copies, predominately those included in the *editio princeps* of each text.⁶ The more recent editions of texts usually include hand-copies and, often, also good-quality photographs. In a few cases (H 1073, 1074, and the newly numbered 1125), it was not possible to retrieve satisfactorily legible photographs or hand-copies. The personal names attested in these texts (cf. especially Beyer 2013) thus have not been included in this book due to the impossibility of gaining a certain reading. Multiple attestations of the same individual in the same text are grouped together (ex. H 79:5,7). “Attestations” are separated if, in the same text, the same name refers to

6 Cf. Aggoula 1991 for bibliographical references, although these are not always complete and fully reliable (cf. the thorough review by Sima 1995-96).

different individuals. In cases of ambiguity or for the same individual in different inscriptions, see the footnotes.

Every entry presents the name's transliteration and most probable meaning(s), followed by its "Other readings" (if attested), brief etymological remarks, onomastic parallels, and attestations in the Hatran corpus. Alternative readings have been culled from the aforementioned main collections of Hatran inscriptions, which are more recent and generally more reliable than the *editiones principes* and the studies which appeared shortly after these. Reference to older literature is made only sporadically. Names are not vocalized in this work, despite Beyer's (1998, 2013) meticulous vocalization of Hatran texts, including the onomastic corpus. Firstly, the consonantal writing and the inconsistent use of *matres lectionis* frequently gives rise to ambiguous interpretations. Moreover, Beyer's reconstruction is largely based on Classical Syriac, whereas we do not have conclusive data regarding the pronunciation of Hatran Aramaic nor do we have elements that enable a precise evaluation of the connections between Syriac and Hatran, although a close relationship between the two is beyond question. For the sake of clarity and to avoid inconsistencies within this book, the orthography adopted for the transcription of theonyms follows that generally found in the scientific literature (for example, Maren or Marten instead of the grammatically more correct Māran and Mārtan, cf. Beyer 1998, 2013). However, Hatran spellings have been adopted when they are well established; in these cases, the use of a different spelling for the same theonym refers to the ancient Mesopotamian deity. One may thus observe the coexistence of Hatran Assor and Akk. Aššur; Hatran Iššar and Akk. Ištar; Hatran Nergol and Akk. Nergal; Hatran Šamš (Šmeš in Beyer 1998, 2013) and Akk. Šamaš.

Onomastic parallels are selected firstly from amongst the Middle Aramaic onomastic material: epigraphic materials from Assur and other North-Mesopotamian sites; Palmyrene and Old Syriac materials; Greek and Latin transcriptions of Semitic names in inscriptions from Palmyra, the Palmyrene, Dura Europos, Emesa, and Emesene. The majority of the Aramaic inscriptions from Assur (A 7, 9, 10, 13-15, 17-27, 29-33, 35-40, 42) have been checked against the photographs taken by the German Archaeological Mission led by W. Andrae between 1903 and 1914, currently preserved at the Vorderasiatisches Museum of Berlin. Inscriptions that could not be collated were checked against photographs published in the main editions.

Due to the composite nature of Hatrene society, where the urban community lived side by side with (semi-)nomadic groups, Arab names are contextualized within the frame of Nabataean and Ancient North-Arabian onomastics. Among the latter, reference is made mostly to Safaitic names, due to their abundance, chronological span (1st-4th century AD), and wide geographical distribution (present-day Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi

Arabia).⁷ Painstaking reference is not made to personal names included in HIn. and already dealt with by Abbadī 1983; conversely, names analyzed in more recent works, if particularly relevant, are referred to (e.g. King 1990; Ababneh 2005; al-Manaser 2008; Rawan 2013). The transliteration of Ancient North-Arabian follows Al-Jallad 2015.

Due to geographical contiguity, cuneiform sources of the 1st millennium BC have been examined as well. Aramaic, Arab, and Iranian names were first checked against PNA (*The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*), the standard repertoire of Neo-Assyrian onomastics; for Neo- and Late-Babylonian names, aside from the catalogue offered by Nielsen (2015), a selection of names is offered from amongst temple (Ebabbar and Ezida) and private archives (Egibi, Murašû, Nappāḥu), occasionally accompanied by other relevant administrative documents.

Reference to other corpora and languages (Old and Official Aramaic, other NWS languages, Ancient South-Arabian, Classical Arabic) is made only in case of significant parallels: extensive reference to these corpora can be found in Abbadī 1983; moreover, the bibliography cited for certain languages has not been recently updated (e.g. for Phoenician and Punic onomastics). For the sake of brevity, and to keep the “Catalogue” to a relatively short and reader-friendly form, for every onomastic parallel a maximum of 5 attestations are indicated.

In some cases, it was not possible to trace a convincing etymology, because the name could not be related to any root or already known name, or more than one interpretation was plausible, or even because a name could derive from a common Semitic root equally productive in several Semitic languages (Marcato 2016, 352).⁸ In these cases, these personal names have been labelled with ‘Uncertain meaning’ in the “Catalogue” and listed under “Unclassified” in the “Linguistic Analysis”.

The “Catalogue” is followed by a “Linguistic Analysis” of personal names that gives an outline of the most significant aspects concerning phonology, morphology, and syntax. This section is introduced by two charts that gather Hatran personal names on the basis of their linguistic affiliation, the first of which is a revised version of the summarizing chart published in Marcato (2016, 347). The criteria for grouping these names on a linguistic basis are again those specified in Marcato (2016, 348) and, for practicality’s sake, they are quoted at the beginning of the “Linguistic Analysis”, after the revised version of the chart.

After the linguistic analysis proper, a section on the semantic taxonomy

⁷ For linguistic, sociolinguistic, and broader cultural issues regarding the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula and Levant, cf. the studies collected in Macdonald 2009.

⁸ The name Šadram/Šardam (*šdr̄m* or *šrd̄m*, H 72), which Marcato (2016, 352) adduced as a good example for names whose etymology is highly unclear, is given here the new reading *šrrmry*. Cf. 4.1. “Summarizing charts”.

of Hatran names based on the categories systematized for the first time by Noth 1928 is inserted. This overview is conceived as a tool which will hopefully enhance further studies on the topic. The whole section ends with a brief description of the religious significance of Hatran theophoric names. Bearing in mind the complexity of this topic, which deserves a full treatment founded upon all available epigraphic and iconographic evidence, this part is intended as both a systematization of and an addition to the preliminary considerations already expressed in Marcato 2016.

Concordance between the names presented here and those studied by Abbadi (1983), in the form of charts, constitute the final section.