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Animals, Gods and Men from East to West

Papers on archaeology and history in honour of Roberta Venco Ricciardi

Edited by
Alessandra Peruzzetto
Francesca Dorna Metzger
Lucinda Dirven

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A GODDESS WITH DOGS FROM HATRA

Lucinda Dirven

The present article examines a Hatrene statuette of an anonymous enthroned goddess that has been in the possession of the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul since 1908 (FIGS 1–4). In 1954, Harald Ingholt was the first to publish this modest object, which was largely neglected in subsequent studies. Ingholt argued that the figure is flanked by lions and therefore represents the goddess Ataragatis. Personal observation of the statue showed that the lions are in fact dogs. Although enthroned goddesses are fairly common in Hatra and dogs feature in sculptures and reliefs from the city, this is the first instance that associates the two. This article sets out to explain their relationship and to determine the identity of the goddess. It is with great pleasure that I dedicate this modest study of a re-discovered Hatrene dog to Roberta Venco Ricciardi. Not only did she personally show me around in Hatra and Baghdad in 2002, she also generously shared her immense knowledge of Hatra with me for many years.

Goddesses are not commonly combined with dogs in the Syrian-Mesopotamian region during the first centuries AD. Traditionally, the Babylonian goddess Gula was associated with dogs, but her cult is not attested in Hatra, Palmyra and the surrounding cities. The only parallel to our statuette is the “deesse au chien” on the famous relief from the Temple of Nebo in Palmyra that was analysed by Ernest Will (FIG. 6). The identity of the Palmyrene goddess is unfortunately not clear there either; she is called “the good goddess” in the fragmentary inscription on the plinth, but it is unknown who is behind this epithet. Besides the animal that the two figures share, it is important to stress several differences. In the Palmyrene relief, an eagle is perched on the goddess’ throne, a Tyche-figure stands to her left, and the upper part of a small figure is represented crawling beneath her foot – three elements that are missing in the statuette from Hatra. The eagle associates the Palmyrene goddess with Bel. Palmyra’s main deity, and the Tyche that stands to her left suggests she is of primary importance to the city as a whole. Clearly, this is a figure with an outspoken local flavour and it is by no means certain that the Palmyrene goddess with the dog is identical with the one from Hatra.

For this reason, we start our exploration in Hatra itself and turn to Palmyra and other contemporary cities in the Syrian Mesopotamian desert only secondarily. After discussing other sculptures of enthroned goddesses from Hatra, the role of the dog in the religious life of Hatra will be examined. But before we turn to an analysis of the statue, we need to describe it in more detail.

Description

The small statue is made of so-called Mosul marble, high quality sandstone quarried close to present-day Mosul and commonly used for Hatrene sculptures (FIGS 1–4). It is 0.29 m high without the head, which is missing. Otherwise, the figure is in good condition. The enthroned figure is placed on a narrow base with the remnants of a Hatrene inscription. Only the first four letters on the right-hand side remain. They read glp’ “sculpted by...”. By analogy with other Hatrene inscriptions, it may be assumed that the name of the sculptor or deity followed, but unfortunately the text is badly weathered here. The female figure sits on a low seat with a high back, her body facing full front. Both her hands rest on her upper legs that point outwards somewhat. In her left hand is a palm branch, whereas she holds a small oblong object between the thumb and the index finger of her right hand. She wears a tunic with short gap-sleeves that falls over her sandaled feet to the ground. On top is a slightly shorter, sleeveless garment that is fastened to both shoulders with round fibulae and that is girdled just below her breasts with a double band with fringed ends that fall down between her knees. Her neck is adorned with two necklaces; a short necklace and a long braided necklace with a round medallion incised with two concentric circles. To the right of the throne, a small dog sits on its hind legs. Around its neck is a collar, probably with a bell attached to it (FIGS 3–4). A much smaller animal crouches at the left side of the throne. In all likelihood, this is also a dog (FIG. 2).

2 The relationship between the dog and Gula was already pointed out by Ernest Will in an additional note to his first article. Cf. note 3. On the goddess Gula see Frankena (1957–71), p.695–697. The goddess is still worshipped in her traditional sanctuaries in Mesopotamia (notably Urk and Babylon) at the end of the 1st century BC: Linssen (2004), esp. p.117. Her cult is, however, not attested outside these centers.
3 Will (1985) and idem (1986).
4 Due to the resemblance of this goddess to the figure of Gad Tadmor on a relief from Dura-Europos (Downey [1977], p.17–19, pl. III.5; Dirven [1999], pl. IV), several scholars have identified her as Ataragatis, in her function of Tyche of Palmyra: Mellinghoff (1969), p.98–101; Milik (1972), p.165; Drijvers (1976), p.19, pl. LI; Drijvers (1980), p.105–106; Parlasca (1984), p.169; Drijvers (1986), p.358. In contrast, Will (1985), p.53–54, notes that the so-called swimming figure is dressed and therefore not a swimmer. He concludes that “la déesse au chien n’est pas le même que celle au lion”. I have argued that the goddess with dog in the relief is the “tribal” manifestation of the goddess, as opposed to Astarte, the companion of Bel: Dirven (1999), p.109–110.
5 On the different types of stone used for Hatrene sculptures, see Homès-Fredericq (1963), p.8.
6 Most often we find the name of the sculptor here. Once – in H4 – the name of the deity follows. I thank Jean-Baptiste Von for his help with this issue.
The archaeological museum in Istanbul acquired the statuette in 1908, when Hatra was still part of the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman soldiers were stationed in its ruins. Both the stone, the style and the inscription of this sculpture are typical of sculptures from Hatra and hence the origin of the piece is not in doubt. Like all sculptures from Hatra, it dates from the period between AD 100–240, but it is not possible to be more precise. Nothing is known about the exact finding spot of the statuette. It arrived in the museum together with another sculpture from Hatra, however, in which a dog figures prominently. The latter relief represents a mastiff dog in profile on a pedestal, a standard and a standing young male figure (Fig. 5). Although we cannot be certain that the two sculptures originate from the same spot, it is remarkable that dogs figure in both. It is a point to which we shall return in the conclusion.

History of research
Harald Ingholt identifies the female as Atargatis, arguing that the goddess is seated among lions. He describes the object in her right hand as “a curious short staff”, perhaps a spindle. To this, Han Drijvers adds that the throne is decorated with fishes. Both Ingholt and Drijvers compare this statuette to the figure of an enthroned goddess flanked by lions, pictured on the so-called Kerberos-relief, which is discussed extensively below. Lions, fish and spindle are indeed the attributes usually found with Atargatis, the great goddess from Hierapolis, who was worshipped throughout Syria and Mesopotamia during the first centuries of the Common Era.

Upon fresh examination of the original, however, one must conclude that the three alleged attributes of Atargatis are based on a misreading of the monument. The so-called lions are in fact two dogs of different sizes that do not flank the throne, as lions usually do. The animal on the left-hand side wears a collar with a bell attached to it, which is characteristic of representations of dogs from Hatra. The so-called fish on the pedestal are in fact the remnants of an inscription. It is dubious that the object in the figure’s right hand is a spindle. I know of one female statue from Hatra with a spindle. In this statue of the young woman Abu from Temple IV, the stick ends in a knob of wool, the usual shape of the spindle. In contrast, the object in the statue under discussion is a small, narrow stick, which reminds one of a writing instrument. There are, however, no similar representations known from Hatra.

Enthroned goddesses in Hatra
Although enthroned goddesses are quite common in Hatra, dogs accompany none of these. In total, eleven assured instances of seated female deities are attested in Hatra. They are either shown enthroned on a chair or

11 Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 211, p.219. The statue was made after Abu’s death and the spindle accords well with a funerary context. In the Graeco-Roman world, the spindle is frequently an attribute of deceased women, referring to their qualities as housewives. As such, we often encounter the spindle in funerary portraits, from Palmyra for example: Colledge (1976), p.155.
12 In Mari, on a relief from the North Gate: al-Salihî (1975), p.75–80, figs. 3–4; Invernazî (1988), fig. E, p.140 (Fig. 8). Goddess with high headdress covered by a long veil, dressed in the usual long tunic and over-garment, girdled below her breasts. She pulls away the veil from her face with her left hand. No attributes, apart from a long necklace with large round medallion, with a male (?) bust in relief. She is identified as Mari by the accompanying inscription.
2. Allat on the lintel from her temple: al-Salihî (1985), p.134–136, figs. 38–40; Invernezî (1989), figs. 66 (Fig. 9). Allat is shown enthroned on a camel that walks towards a nymph, an eagle and a snake. She has a high headdress covered with a veil and is dressed in the usual long tunic and over-garment that is girdled below her breasts. She pulls away the veil from her face with her left hand. In her right hand she holds an unidentified object, perhaps a lantern or jewel. The goddess wears a short necklace and a long necklace with a round medallion.
3. Allat on the lintel from her temple: al-Salihî (1985), p.136–146, figs. 41–45, 48–53; Invernezî (1989), p.132, fig. B. Allat is shown enthroned on a balance in her temple. Her clothing is the same as on no. 2, described above. She wears a long necklace with a round medallion adorned with an eagle. Behind her is a sacred standard, adorned with a disc with the bust of a sun god, a horseshoe shaped element and three discs with eagles.
4. Albaster relief representing a goddess riding a dromedary from the Temple of Allat: Krone (1992), p.282–283, no. 51; al-Salihî (1998), p.103, figs. 1–2. Female figure on the back of a dromedary, facing full front. Both arms point outwards and are bent at the elbow. In her right hand she holds a long thin object that touches her hair. The left hand (now missing) held the reins. On her head an eagle stands with spread wings.
5. Anonymous goddess on the so-called Kerberos relief (for references see below, note 29) (Fig. 7). Goddess on a throne flanked by two lions. In her right hand is a palm branch, in her left hand a standard with plain discs. On her head a polos on which stands an eagle with spread wings. She wears a long tunic and a slightly shorter over-garment, girdled below her breasts. Around her neck is a long necklace with a round medallion with two concentric circles. The base of the throne is adorned with two fish that face a circle in the centre.
6. Relief of an anonymous goddess on a small altar from Temple VIII: Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 266; Badly weathered figure that is shown enthroned between two lions. She wears a long tunic and over-garment, girdled below her breasts. On her head is a polos with a long veil. Around her neck a collar and a long necklace with a round medallion. The possible attributes that she held are no longer visible.
7. Statue of an anonymous goddess from Temple VI: Homês-Fridericq (1963), pl. II.1; Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 249. Female figure on a square seat with a rectangular slab that reaches till her shoulders in the background. She wears a long tunic, topped by a shorter over-garment, girdled below the breasts. The left hand rests on the upper left leg and holds a small ball. The right hand is raised next to the head. It originally held a staff or spear, now missing. Plain, crescent shaped diadem on the head. This statue was found in the naos and forms a pair with a bearded male, shown enthroned between two small lions.
8. Statue of an anonymous goddess from Temple VII: Homês-Fridericq (1963), pl. II.3; Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 255. Female figure on a square seat with a rectangular slab that reaches till her shoulders in the
seated on an animal. With the exception of the dog, the clothing and the attributes of these enthroned female figures is very similar to the statue that is now in Istanbul. Representations of standing female deities are of little help. None of these is associated with a dog and with the exception of Athena-Allat, their iconography is equally indistinct. All enthroned goddesses wear a similar long background. She wears a long tunic topped by a shorter over-garment, girdled below the breasts. Her right hand rests on the upper right leg, palm turned upwards. Her lowered left hand holds a palm branch. On her head is a small polos or mural crown encircled by a laurel wreath. A veil falls from her head.  

9. Statue of an anonymous enthroned goddess from Temple X; Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 307. Head and left arm are missing. Her opened right hand rests on her upper right leg, palm turned upwards. She wears a long tunic topped by a shorter over-garment, girdled below the breasts. Around her neck is one short necklace and two longer ones; one with a horse-shoe shaped element attached to it.  

10. Incense altar representing a goddess seated on a lion in relief, from Temple X; Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 304. The figure holds a spear in her raised right hand. On her head is probably a helmet. The clothing can no longer be discerned.  

11. Statue of an anonymous enthroned goddess from the naos of Temple XIV; al-Aswad (2013), p.111, fig. 38. Goddess on backless chair, facing full front. Object in lowered right hand is missing; in left hand a palm branch. Fluted polos or mural crown on her head. Long sleeved under-garment which falls to the ground, slightly shorter over-garment on top, girdled below her breasts. Long, double chained necklace with round pendant falls on abdomen. The statue is anonymous, but the finding place in the naos suggests this is Nanaia, the tutelary goddess of Temple XIV.  

12. Statues of standing goddesses are not very common in Hatra and are – like the enthroned ones – frequently anonymous.  

13. Standing figure with polos, long tunic and over-garment. In her left hand is a staff, her right hand rests on her hip. She is identified by the inscription on the back as the goddess Nanaia (H4); Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 176.  

14. From Temple II comes a relief that represents two female figures and a goddess with an areole and crescent: Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 192.  

15. From Temple III comes a relief representing three goddesses and a god standing in a row. The goddesses have poloi on their heads and carry palm branches in their lowered left hands. Two have fruits in their raised right hands, one has her right hand on her hip: Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 201.  


17. From Temple XIII comes a stele representing two male and one female figure in relief. The female is identified by the inscription as the Gennina Hadyrat: al-Salhi (1985–1986), p.103.  

18. From Temple XIV comes a headless statuette of standing female with long tunic and over-garment. With her raised right hand she holds a staff, in her lowered left hand is a palm branch. She is identified by the inscription on the back as the Gennina of Shanush: al-Aswad (2013), p. 111, fig. 37.  

19. Finally, mention should be made of a fragmentary relief of a goddess flanked by a bird (eagle?) from Temple I: Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 175 and p.396 (in colour). Since only the upper part is preserved, it can no longer be established whether the goddess was standing or sitting. In her right hand is a sceptre and on the pillar to her left perches a bird, probably an eagle. She wears a gilded polos topped by a long veil and elaborate jewellery. Her dress has short gap-sleeves. In addition, eleven instances of an Athena-figure are attested in Hatra:  


23. In the arch originally placed above the door of the pronaos of Temple V is a small figure of Athena: Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 238.  

24. At the left Originally placed above the door of the pronaos of Temple V is a small figure of Athena: Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 238.
her temple. (Fig. 9).23 The statue of an enthroned goddess from the naos of Temple XIV probably represents Nanaia, since this temple was dedicated to her.24 Allat is the only goddess that can be related to specific animals; several representations from her sanctuary show her riding a dromedary, whereas a relief from Temple X pictures her riding a lion.25 In the architectural decoration of her temple, dromedaries abound.26 The relief from her temple that represents her on camel back, pictures her with an eagle with outstretched wings standing on her head. In Hatra, Allat is also represented in the guise of the Greek goddess Athena and as such she is associated with a lion as well.27 Well-known is the relief from Temple V, which pictures an Athena figure standing on a lion flanked by two female figures.28

Although dogs accompany none of the enthroned goddesses from Hatra, there is one instance in which a seated goddess is associated with dogs. The well-known Kerberos relief from Temple I, pictures a goddess enthroned between two lions in the background of a ferocious male deity associated with snakes and scorpions who holds three dogs on a leash (Fig. 7).29 The dogs are frequently referred to as Kerberos, the mythological guardian of the underworld.30 The god is bearded, wears a diadem around his head on which an eagle with outspread wings stands, and has two snakes rising like a crescent from behind his shoulders. The base of the throne of the small goddess in the background is decorated with two fish. An eagle with outstretched wings stands on her polos – no doubt a reference to Shamash, Hatra’s most important deity – and in her right hand is a cultic standard.31 In her left she holds a palm branch. Because of the lions that flank the throne and the fish that decorate its base, the figure is habitually identified as Atargatis.32 Lions, fish and sacred standard indeed accord well with the iconography of this goddess in Syria and Mesopotamia.33

It is, however, unlikely that this goddess represents Atargatis, notwithstanding the appropriate attributes. Although inscriptions show that Atargatis received a cult in Hatra, her cult must have been of minor importance in the city. Reference is made to a priest of Atargatis in an inscription from the first temple,34 and two inscriptions from Temple IV mention Atargatis together with Maren, Marten, Barmaren and Baalshamin.35 A small altar from Temple VIII represents a goddess enthroned between lions in relief, but unfortunately an inscription does not identify her.36 It is unlikely that a goddess that is fairly insignificant in Hatra is pictured in the Kerberos relief with the eagle of Shamash on her head.

It is far more likely that the goddess in the Kerberos relief is a representation of the goddess Allat, whose cult was far more important at Hatra. In contemporary representations from Syria and Mesopotamia, Allat frequently adopts the attributes of Atargatis.37 Hence she is repeatedly pictured with lions or fish. There are good reasons to assume that this was the case in Hatra as well. First of all, Allat is the only goddess in Hatra that is repeatedly associated with lions.38 Secondly, only she is pictured with an eagle standing on her head.39 Thirdly, the fish on the base of the throne are also attested in the decoration of Allat’s Temple.40 The standard that the goddess carries does not necessarily refer to the Hieropolitan cult, since this object was well known in Hatra where it is associated with a number of deities.41

The so-called Kerberos relief associates Allat with a male deity with dogs. Possibly, therefore, the statuette in Istanbul represents Allat, who borrowed the dog from her associate. If it could be pointed out that the couple was frequently associated in Hatra, the plausibility of this hypothesis would be greatly augmented. But first, it is necessary to establish which Hatrene god was commonly associated with dogs.

Nergal and his dogs

At Hatra, dogs are as a rule associated with the god Nergal, the Ancient-Babylonian deity of the underworld, the god of pestilence and sudden death.42 In Hatra, this god was worshipped in the guise of the Greek Heracles, as

23 Above, note 14, nos 1–3.
24 Above, note 14, no. 11. In the same temple, a statue of a similar female figure was found, but standing; above, note 15, no 6.
25 Above, note 14, no. 10. She can be identified as Allat thanks to the spear and the helmet, two attributes characteristic of this goddess.
26 Cf. the article by Kaizer in this volume.
27 All instances of Athena-Allat were found in the small shrines. Admittedly, none of these is identified as Allat. Since, however, Athena is the usual associate of the Arab goddess in Syria-Mesopotamia during this period, it is fairly certain that she is behind the Greek-looking goddess: Starcky (1981), p.565–568 lists the instances. In contrast, representations from the Temple of Allat picture the goddess in tunic and overgarment, with a high headdress covered by a veil — the usual outfit of most Hatrene goddesses.
28 Above, note 15, no. 9.
30 It is by no means clear whether this is indeed the case; other representations of dogs from Hatra picture normal creatures instead of a kerberos and the inscription from Temple X referred to below, note 51, refers to three dogs. Cf. the extensive discussion in Dirven (2009), p.64–65, where I conclude that it is best to leave the identity of the creature undecided.
31 On the diadem with eagle, see Dirven (2008), p.222, where the use of this attribute with mortal royal figures is discussed.
33 Cf. above, note 11.
34 H5.
35 H29 and H30 (both not dated).
36 No. 6 in note 14, above.
38 On a relief from Temple V, Athena-Allat is depicted standing on a lion: above, note 15, no. 9; On a relief from Temple X, Athena-Allat is riding a lion: above, note 14, no. 10.
39 This is the case in a relief of Allat riding a dromedary from her temple: above note 14, no. 4.
40 Cf. the article by Ted Kaizer in this volume.
41 For an overview of the evidence for cultic standards at Hatra, see Downey (1970) and Dirven (2005).
42 On the cult of Nergal see Wiggermann (1999).
A goddess with dogs from Hatra

well as in more local manifestations. Hatrene inscriptions refer to the god as nrgl or nrgl klb'. Various interpretations have been proposed for this phrase that are all grammatically possible: “Nergal the dog”,43 “Nergal of the dog”,44 or “Nergal keeper of the dog”.45 In addition, numerous statuettes of dogs were found in small shrines in which the cult of Nergal-Heracles was important.

The most important evidence for the cult of Nergal klb' comes from Temple X, a small shrine in which numerous representations of a Heracles-figure were discovered.46 In addition, several representations of dogs originate from this shrine that are linked with Nergal either by the accompanying representation or by an inscription.47 The base of a statuette of which only the bare feet, lion skin and club remain, has an inscription that dedicates the object to nrgl klb'.48 It proves that the figure of Heracles was in fact identified as Nergal in Hatra – which explains the popularity of the Heracles-figure in this small shrine. The front of a small altar pictures a bearded god raising an axe.49 The three other sides each show a dog. Unfortunately, the features of the god are largely lost, but the traces suggest he was bearded, with an eagle standing on a diadem tied around his head, features that bring to mind the god on the Kerberos relief from Temple I. The dogs suggest that this deity should be identified as Nergal. The cover of an offering box representing a dog in relief was, according to the fragmentary inscription, made for Nergal.50 In the same shrine, an alabaster statuette of a dog was found, with an inscription on the plinth mentioning three dogs.51 There is a lot of debate about the reading of this inscription, to which we shall return shortly.

The cult of nrgl klb' is not confined to Temple X. The god is also mentioned in the inscription in a bronze bell found in the court of the central temenos, close to the Great South Iwan,52 and in a graffito from the East Gate.53 In addition, mention should be made of a statuette of a dog which probably originates from Temple V, a shrine in which both Athena-Allat and Heracles-Nergal figure prominently.54 Enigmatic and hardly known are the reliefs on two stones from the arch of iwan 9, in the façade of the North Iwan of the great temple complex in the central temenos. On one stone we see dogs attacking bovine animals, whereas on the other dogs assault busts of two horses.55 Although the exact meaning of these scenes is a mystery to me, it is telling that the North Iwan was dedicated to Barmaren, a god who was closely associated with Nergal.56 Last but not least, mention should be made of the relief with the enthroned dog that is now in the Museum in Istanbul.

Nergal’s association with dogs in Temple X and elsewhere at Hatra, allows us to identify the god on the Kerberos relief from Temple I as Nergal. In turn, this enables us to identify the standard and the dog in the relief in Istanbul as Nergal’s. Of special note are the two snakes that rise like a crescent from the god’s shoulders in the Kerberos relief. The same motif can be seen on the standard that stands to the god’s right. The bust on the first disc from the top has the same snake-shaped crest. The standard on the relief with the dog that is now in the Archaeological Museum at Istanbul is almost identical to the one on the Kerberos-relief. Because these are the only two instances of this particular type found in Hatra so far, the standard and dog on the relief in Istanbul are probably related to the cult of Nergal. The dog on the pedestal may, in fact, be Nergal klb', Nergal in the appearance of a dog.57 Hence the figurines display the same ambiguity as the divine name; the relief from Istanbul suggests that Nergal may indeed have been worshipped in the guise of a dog, whereas the relief from Temple I and the small altar from Temple X suggest that Nergal was a keeper of dogs.58

Nergal’s association with dogs was not confined to Hatra, but was widespread in the north of Syria and Mesopot-ами.

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46 Nergal is the only deity mentioned in inscriptions from this temple: H72-H73. Four fragmentary reliefs and a statuette representing a Heracles-figure were found in the naos: al-Salihî (1969), nos 98–100, nos 36, 37, 39, 41. One of these is identified by H71 as Nergal: al-Salihî (1971), pl. XXXIV, d. An altar with a representation of Heracles and a cultic standard in high relief on the front comes from the pronaos: Safar & Musafà (1974), fig. 303. From the pronaos are also a statuette of a clothed Heracles-figure: Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 310; Downey (1969), p.93, fig. 2, and a statuette of a naked Heracles-figure: Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 311; Downey (1969), p.213.
47 In addition to the material listed above, a plain bronze plate was found in the pronaos with inscription H70. Unfortunately, there is no drawing or picture available. Caquot (1955), p.268, reads: nrgl klb', whereas Aggoula (1991), p.50, has: nrgwklb'.
48 Above, note 46.
49 411/132. IM 58115. Mosaic marble. H. 0.14, W. 0.08, Th. 0.075. Only the upper part of the altar is preserved. The figures in relief are badly worn: Downey (1970), p.227–229, fig. 1; al-Salihî (1971), p.113–115, pl. XXXIII–V; Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 312. This object was hidden in a coffin placed in the north-west corner of the pronaos.
50 H73. Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 318.
51 H72 Safar & Mustafa (1974), fig. 313. For the discussion on the reading of the inscription, see below, note 66.
52 Safar III = Aggoula (1991), appendix no. 15.
53 H433.
54 This alabaster statuette of a dog that sits on its hind legs is about 0.20 m high (head missing) and was on display in the National Museum in Baghdad in the spring of 2002. Its Museum Number (IM56743), tallies with the numbers of other objects from Temple V, whereas the field number (2/H/117) is indicated on the ground plan of the shrine published by Safar & Mustafa (1974), p.371. Hence its origin from Temple V is fairly certain.
55 For the stone with the bovine animals: Von Gall (1970), pl.3.4. The stone with the horses is unpublished.
56 For the association of the two gods, see below note 71.
57 Ingoldt (1954), p.35, interpreted the dog as an attribute of the god represented on the left-hand side, arguing that it would be hard to name a god who would be represented in Hatra in the guise of a dog. However, at that time the inscriptions referring to nrgl klb' had not yet been found.
58 One way to explain this ambiguity would be to assume with Tubach (1986), p.268, that we should not take “Nergal the dog” to mean that Nergal actually was a dog, but that the dog was Nergal’s animal. Tubach suggests this may be compared to the relationship between the god Maren and the eagle in Hatra. The eagle was Maren’s animal but also the object of a cult of its own.
nia during the period of Parthian domination. Traditionally, the Babylonian god is associated with the lion and the bull; the dog is only attached to his person from the Parthian period onwards. In an earlier publication, I argued that this novelty is probably due to Iranian influence. In the Iranian world, dogs are intimately connected with the underworld and as such have an emphatically positive connotation.

Nergal, Allat and dogs

The Kerberos-relief shows that Nergal and his dogs are associated with the goddess Allat, which in turn suggests that the goddess with the dog in Istanbul represents Allat. This is substantiated by other instances in which Nergal-Heracles and Allat-Athena are combined. A relief from Temple V – a small shrine in which a great number of Athena-figures were found – represents Athena with a bearded god who holds a snake and a dagger. The god is anonymous, but the similarities with the god on the Kerberos-relief strongly suggest he ought to be identified as Nergal. A relief from the Temple of Allat pictures a clothed Heracles-figure together with a female – probably Allat, and Athena assists a Heracles-figure in his fight against centaurs, represented on an offering-box found in Temple VII. Athena and Heracles are also associated on the lid of an offering box from Wadi Mur, a site about 40 kilometres east of Hatra.

Last but not least, we should mention the evidence from Temple X, the temple in which Nergal klīb` is most important. Significantly, Athena-Allat is also attested in this temple in a relief in which she is represented riding a lion. Possibly, the goddess also figures in an inscription in the base of an alabaster statuette of a dog, that has been the subject of much debate.

André Caquot, proposed to read ĥlt klīb` ‘n’ šārm dy ‘bdytīy lšt(i) and translates ‘Three dogs that I, Shadram, made for the lady’. The reading lšt(i) was rejected at first, since the connection between dogs and a “lady” did not make sense at the time. Now that it is clear that Nergal-Heracles is recurrently associated with the goddess Allat, the dedication of the statue of a dog to a goddess suddenly makes sense and should be taken into consideration again.

It is clear that Heracles-Nergal and Athena-Allat are closely related in Hatra. In the Graeco-Roman world, the Greek hero and the goddess of wisdom and war are frequently associated in myth and iconography. It is dubious, however, that this explains their connection in Hatra, where indigenous deities lurk behind classical looking gods. In their explanation of this relationship, most scholars assume that Athena-Allat is Nergal’s consort. In what follows, I want to propose an alternative relationship, and argue that they are the second and third members of the Hatrene triad respectively. Literally, this would mean that Allat was Nergal’s mother. I doubt, however, that we should take this literally.

It is highly probable that Allat was in fact the goddess behind the epithet Marten, “Our Lady”, the second member of the Hatrene triad who was associated with Hatra’s two most important male deities. The only certain representation of this goddess from the North Gate is very similar to the representation of Allat from her temple; not only are outfit and jewellery the same, but both make the same characteristic gesture with their left hand, that pulls away the veil from the face (Figs. 8–9). The relief of Marten was found at the North Gate of the city. It is perhaps significant that representations of the goddess Athena-Allat were also prominent at this location. The fact that this is the only goddess pictured with an eagle on her head, also suggests she was closely connected to Maren, whose animal is the eagle. Allat’s elevated position in the pantheon of Hatra is also apparent from the location of part of the inscription that poses difficulties. Instead, Vattioni (1981), p. 47 reads: ḥlt klīb` ‘n’ šalār mry ‘bdytīy lšt: ‘Three dogs that I, Shadram, the lord, have made for Shat’.

Caquot (1955), p.269; Milik (1972), p.166, who is in turn followed by Drijvers (1978), p.172. Alternatively, Milik and Drijvers read the last word as lš(s)dr. Shadrāra. The reading Shadrafa is not likely, since there is no reason to assume that both deities are somehow related in Hatra.

On Heracles and Athena in classical art and myth, see the paragraph by J. Boardman in the entry ‘Herakles’ in LIMC V (Zürich & München 1990), p.143–154.

This was already suggested by al-Salihî (1989a), p.23. al-Salihî’s interpretation rests primarily upon H364, an inscription in which mention is made of the master [of the Temple] of Marten. Marten is probably one of the manifestations of Allat, and as such should not be equated with the goddess. This explains why she is mentioned in five inscriptions together with the triad: H52, H74, H75, H82, H151. At the gate two reliefs with Athena-figures were found: al-Salihî (1980), p.174, fig. 27 and fig. 28. (in Arabic). From the same location come three Heracles-figures: al-Salihî (1980), 160, fig. 3, fig. 5, fig. 23. In addition to Athena and Heracles, the eagle figures prominently at the gate, and reliefs of Marten and Barmaren were found here. If Heracles-Nergal-Athena-Allat are indeed closely connected with Marten en Barmaren, the cult around the North gate focuses on the Hatrene triad.

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A goddess with dogs from Hatra

her sanctuary; it is the only temple dedicated to a goddess located inside the great temenos.

Whereas Allat was related to Marten, Nergal was associated with Barmaren, the son of our Lords. This hypothesis is not new. On the basis of a graffito in which Nergal takes the place of the third member of the Hatrene triad, Jean Hoftijzer already argued that the two should be equated.71 Although it pushes the evidence too far to identify Nergal with Barmaren, it is clear that the two were intimately related in Hatra. The two snakes that rise like a crescent from the shoulders of Nergal on the Kerberos relief, suggest a relationship with the moon god Barmaren.72 In turn, a snake sometimes accompanies Barmaren.73 On the Kerberos-relief, the small altar from Temple X and the relief from the Temple of Allat, Hercules-Nergal wears a diadem with an eagle. This is a rare attribute for Hatrene gods, only attested with Allat and Barmaren. Well-known examples are the relief of Barmaren from Temple XIII, and the relief that was found by the Italian Mission in Building A.74

Concluding remarks

We may conclude that the statuette in Istanbul represents Allat, a goddess that was closely connected with the god Nergal in Hatra. In Hatra, dogs were Nergal’s animal, or even figured as his manifestation. The association of this animal with the goddess mirrors the intimate connection between the two deities in Hatra. The fact that the statue arrived in the museum together with a relief that centres on Nergal and his dog can hardly be a coincidence. It is hoped that future excavations in Hatra will shed more light upon a relationship that was tentatively reconstructed in this article.

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