

KRZYSZTOF JAKUBIAK

Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw

kz.jakubiak@uw.edu.pl

ORCID 0000-0003-3123-7564

## THE GAREUS TEMPLE FROM URUK: SOME OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE TEMPLE ATTRIBUTION

### ABSTRACT

To the south of the main hill overlooking the ruins of Uruk is the Temple of Gareus. Dated to either 422 SE or 110/111 AD, the temple is attributed solely on the basis of a Greek inscription found inside it. The temple and the deity worshipped therein are of

particular interest, as they represent some of the most enigmatic deities from the times of Parthian domination over southern Mesopotamia. It is possible that its origins are rooted deeply in the Mesopotamian religious tradition.

**Keywords:** Uruk, Parthian Period, temple, religion, Gareus, architecture

The site of Uruk, which is considered to be one of the most significant cities of the ancient Near East, has gradually come to be seen as a symbol of the study of southern Mesopotamia's past, thanks to the dedicated efforts of many researchers over many years.<sup>1</sup>

The research carried out at this vast site has revealed remains and evidence of the settlement and development of the city in the first centuries AD. One such architectural monument is the Temple of Gareus, which was found near the south-western outskirts of the city.<sup>2</sup> The location of the temple, and its significance for the urban community, have been the subject to detailed analyses. The same can be said of the building itself, which is one of the most interesting religious structures ever found in the area of present-day Iraq.

The temple is situated on a hill lying south-east of the two most important religious complexes, Bit reš and Irigal (Fig. 1). The hill on which the Temple of Gareus was built is separated from the main tell by a hollow. It is possible that a defensive wall may have existed in the immediate vicinity of the temple, though it is probable that this was no longer the case at the time of the temple's construction. Nonetheless, traces of the wall are still visible in the field.

### The temple

It seems likely that the temple was built around 111 AD, and that at this time a *temenos* wall was also added to surround it.<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting, however, that some have suggested dating the inscription according to the Parthian calendar, which would place it in 175/176 AD. This, however, seems less likely.<sup>4</sup> The *temenos* wall is more akin to a fortification than an enclosing element of a sacred building (Figs. 2, 3). The wall enclosing the sacred space, like the temple itself, was made of burnt bricks. The outline and construction of the *temenos* wall appear to be unique, bearing no resemblance to any *temenos* known from across not only Mesopotamia but also other parts of the Near East. The plan of the wall itself, behind which the *temenos* of Gareus was erected, is roughly square in form. The dimensions of the entire structure are thought to have been 60 × 52 m.<sup>5</sup> The façade of the *temenos* wall was carefully decorated with semi-circular imitations of defensive watchtowers, two on each side of the wall, and the corners additionally finished with round towers that also closely imitate military buildings. This architectural choice suggests that the building was deliberately designed to resemble

<sup>1</sup> Crüsemann *et al.* 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Downey 1988, 137–144; Kose 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Meier 1960.

<sup>4</sup> Merkelbach, Stauber 2005, 119.

<sup>5</sup> Kose 1998.

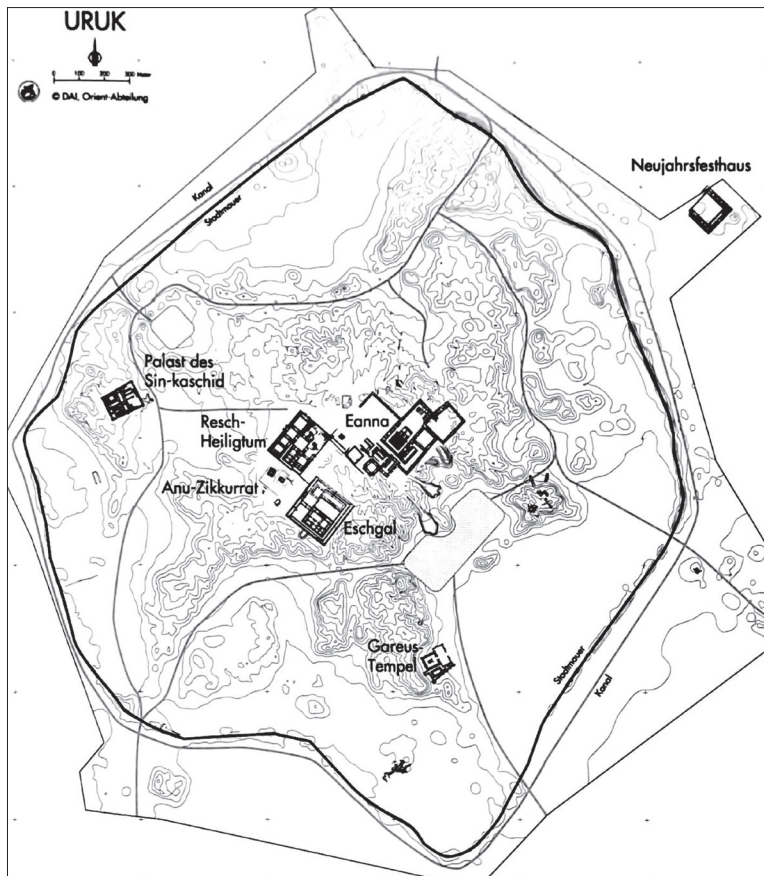


Fig. 1. Uruk, general plan (after: Crüsemann *et al.* 2013, fig. 1).

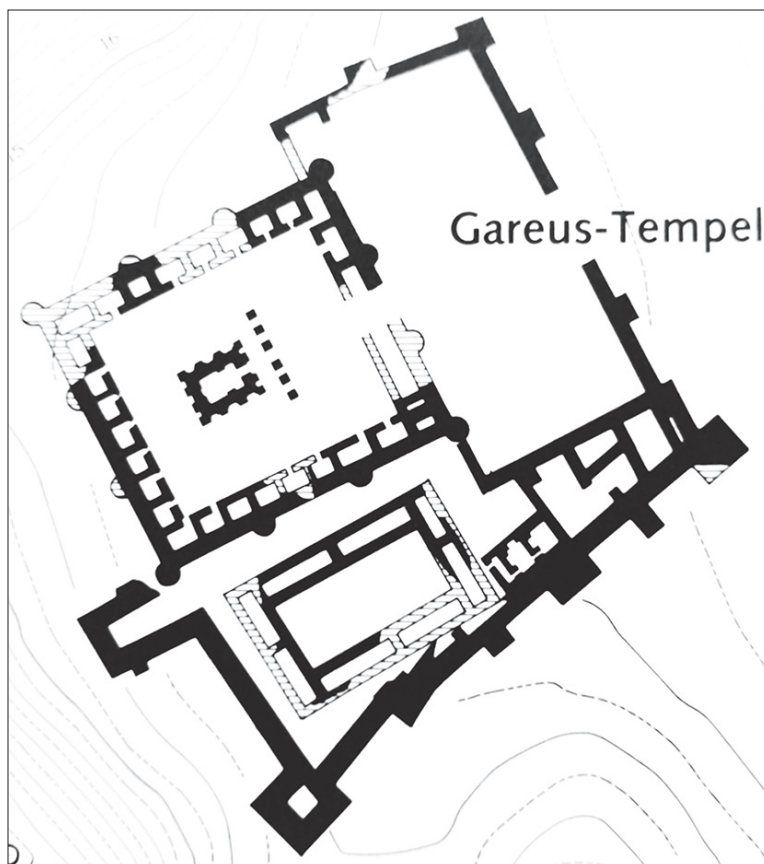


Fig. 2. Temple of Gareus, the whole complex (after: Crüsemann *et al.* 2013, fig. 1).

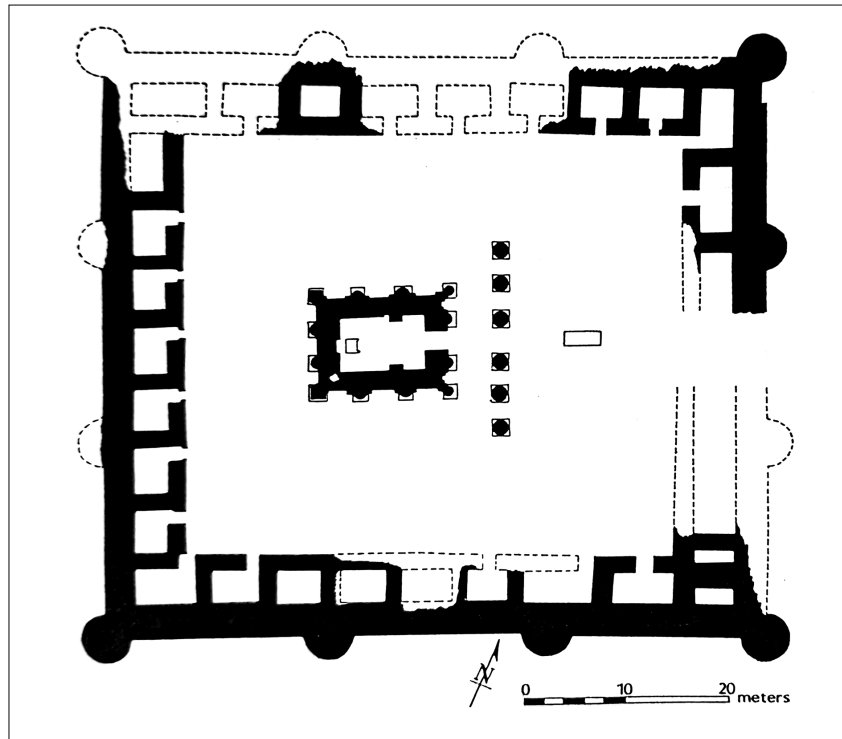


Fig. 3. Temple of Gareus, floor plan (after: Downey 1988, fig. 62).

a defensive structure rather than a building dedicated to religious purposes.

The sanctuary was accessed through an entry in the eastern façade of the *temenos* structure, as the partially preserved architectural structures show. Entering the interior of the complex, a striking temple can be seen on the axis of the entrance. The numerous rooms adjoining the inner side of the wall surrounding the sacred building also draw attention. Surprisingly, these rooms are mostly very similar in size and surround the entire courtyard. The *temenos*'s design evokes military architecture, with the central space occupied by the temple, which is surprisingly small at  $10.50 \times 13.70$  m.<sup>6</sup> Despite its modest size, the temple is adorned with elaborate exterior features. The decorative semi-columns or pilasters, as well as the architectural elements placed in the corners, correspond in a certain way to the external decorations of the *temenos* wall. A similar visual is at work in the wall surrounding the temple, albeit on a reduced scale. The outer wall clearly has additional architectural details that were deliberately added to the inaccessible, hidden temple behind it. The inner space demonstrates features of sacred architecture from the Babylonian tradition. The most important element was the main axis of the temple, which led from the entrance towards a niche in the back

wall. In front of this niche, the remains of a podium have been preserved, on which a statue of the deity had certainly been placed. The temple's most distinctive feature is the group of six columns that were erected in front of the sanctuary's façade (Figs. 4–5). These columns, which completed the temple's architecture, were free-standing and did not support any structural elements. This gave the temple façade, despite its modest dimensions, a more monumental character than one might expect by looking through the entrance to the entire sacred complex.

The *temenos* wall, which resembled defensive structures, was not the only monumental element that determined the image of the southern part of the residential quarter. The remains of this wall are still visible in the landscape of Uruk to the south-west of Irigal and Bit Reš. Two more architectural complexes directly adjacent to the *temenos* temple walls stood out in the urban landscape. Together, these structures formed an entire architectural complex that divided the space adjacent to the *temenos* into three parts. In front of the *temenos* wall, where the gate to the temple was located, a rectangular structure was erected, also finished with buttresses or large avant-corps, clearly resembling a defensive building. No structures could be found inside this space, which clearly takes the form of a courtyard. It was evidently meant for religious

<sup>6</sup> Schmidt 1970.

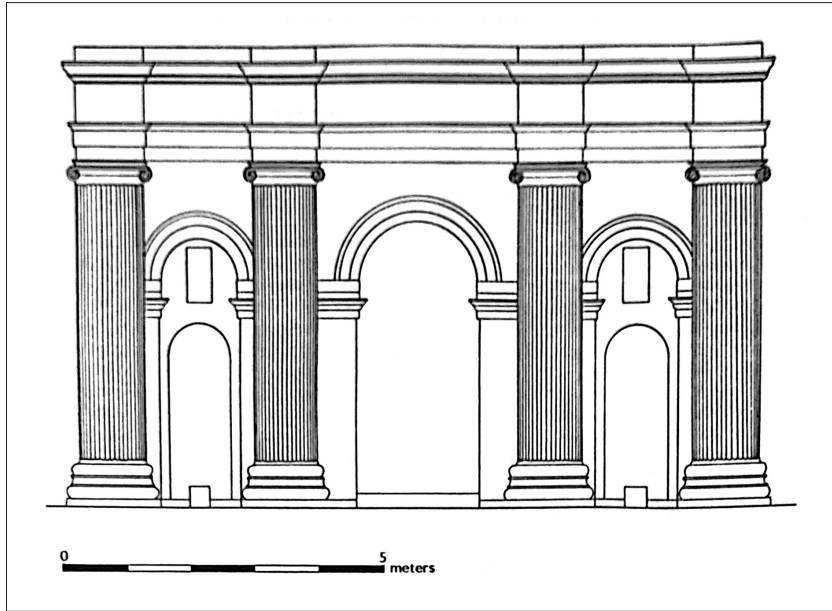


Fig. 4. Temple of Gareus, reconstruction of the northern façade, variant 1 (after: Downey 1988, fig. 60).

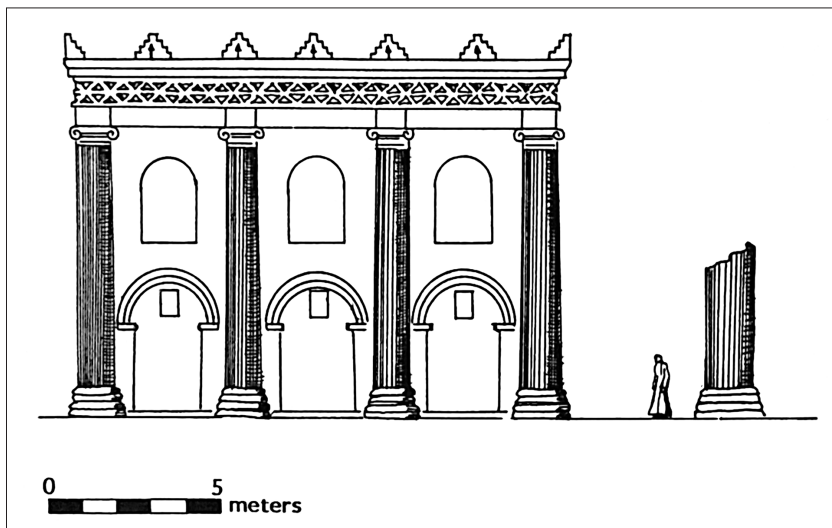


Fig. 5. Temple of Gareus, reconstruction of the southern façade, variant 2 (after: Downey 1988, fig. 61).

purposes or may have been used for religious rituals and ceremonies that are currently unknown. The rectangular shape of the courtyard is wider than the *temenos* wall. This suggests that the additional architectural element dominated, or rather obstructed, the *temenos* wall with the entrance to the temple area.

The second structure, erected on the southern side, is built on a somewhat irregular plan and no longer has such elegant proportions. This part of the complex is best described as trapezoidal. It is clear that it must have looked like a military building, as the walls, buttresses, bastion, and square corner towers are among the most massive architectural elements used in the construction of the entire temple complex. Behind the walls of this part of the complex were several structures, the most im-

portant, and certainly the largest, of which is the rectangular building with a central courtyard. If the interpretation is correct, the courtyard was surrounded by narrow rectangular rooms. The other building, much more modest, is a dwelling house squeezed between the walls in the eastern part of the complex under discussion.

### The inscription discovered in the temple

The temple was attributed based on the discovery of a Greek inscription within the structure. The translation, collation, and commentary were all undertaken by Christian Meyer, who published his research in

*Baghdader Mitteilungen* in 1960.<sup>7</sup> The inscription in the ruins clearly indicates that Gareus was worshipped there. The text itself is an honorific inscription, containing not only the name of the deity but also additional details.

- 1 ἔτους βκυ', μηνὸς Δείου.
- 2 Ἀρτεμίδωρος Διογένους ὁ
- 3 ἐπικαλούμενος Μινναναῖος
- 4 Τουφαίου, στοιχῶν τῇ τῶν προ-
- 5 γόνων αὐτοῦ ἀγαθῇ προαιρέσει
- 6 ἀνέθηκεν Γαρεὶ θεῷ χωρίον Δα-
- 7 ιαμεινα. τὸ δέ κοινὸν τῶν
- 8 Δολλαμηνῶν, ὃν εὐχά-
- 9 ριστον, ἔκρ[ι]νειν ἀμεί-
- 10 ψεσθαι ἀντὶ ἀναθήματος ἀν-
- 11 δριάντα αὐτῷ στήσαι ἐν ναῶι Γαρεως,
- 12 στεφανοῦν τε αὐτὸν ἐν ἐκάστη γε-
- 13 νεθλιακῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν σύμπαντα χρόνον,
- 14 οὔσῃ ἔκτῃ Ἀπελλαίου, παρειστάν αὐτῷ
- 15 ἱερόθυτον καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἱερο-
- 16 θύτου πέμπειν αὐτῷ Ἀρτεμι-
- 17 δῶρῳ ὁσφὺν εὐσεβείας
- 18 καὶ εὐνοίας ἔνεκεν.

In translation, the text can be read as proposed below:

*In the year 422, in the month of Deios. Artemidoros, son of Diogenes, also called Minnanaios, son of Touphaios, following the good principles of his ancestors, dedicated the estate of Daiamenia to the god Gareus; the Koinon of Dollamenians, however, gratefully resolved to reciprocate the gift: to erect a statue to him in the Temple of Gareus and to crown him on every birthday of him who is the sixth Apellaios, for all time to provide him with a sacrificial animal and to send him, Artemidoros, a loin of the same sacrificial animal because of his piety and devotion.*<sup>8</sup>

The research that made it possible to learn about the temple and the inscription, the translation of which is presented above, was conducted quite a long time ago, but the finds still intrigue. The construction of the temple itself and the data or information gleaned from reading the text found inside the temple both merit attention.

### The temple architecture and its vicinity

Schmidt, von Haller, and Downay have accurately identified and interpreted the main elements of the

sacred building.<sup>9</sup> However, we must consider whether it is possible to go beyond identifying elements omitted by previous researchers and determine how the Temple of Gareus was situated within the urban space, what it might have looked like in the urban layout, and whether it dominated the spatial arrangement of this part of the city. This is a challenging task, because archaeological works have been conducted only in the immediate vicinity of the temple, focusing mainly on uncovering the remains of the sacred building. Consequently, the only available information is derived from the report. The discovery of several residential houses in the vicinity of the Gareus structure proves that the temple was planned and built in an already urbanised space. The topography of the surrounding area clearly shows signs of intense development. The land to the north and west of the temple is clearly raised relative to the terrain around it. This indicates the presence of residential buildings in the area, which, like the temple itself, have been well-preserved. This proves that the residential quarter was built at the same time and that the buildings were maintained well. The temple is far removed from the main *tell*, implying strongly that it was separated from the administrative and religious quarter situated there. Given the size of this part of the town and the proportion of land occupied by the temple compared to the rest of the 'district', it was undoubtedly the only impressive religious building in the entire urban complex. The Temple of Gareus stood out as the dominant and most magnificent element in the landscape of that part of Uruk during the Parthian Period. The temple's entrance, set within a *temenos* that evokes a fortified wall, was located in its eastern section. As no elements of it have survived, one can only surmise that it must have been, if not monumental in character, then certainly visually distinctive from the series of pilasters imitating the shapely defensive towers. The temple courtyard was entered through a gate, or *propyleia*. However, most people could only enjoy the view from the street running along the *temenos* wall. Passers-by and visitors to the temple would have seen a decorative colonnade upon crossing the thresholds of the *temenos*. This colonnade was probably much wider than the façade of the sacred building itself. The modest temple, hidden behind a colonnade imitating the layout of the temple in the *hexastylus prostylos* order, looked much more imposing from the perspective of the *propyleia*. This effect was achieved by aligning the columns so that, looking from the entrance to the temple, the second column from the left and the second column from the right were perfectly in line with

<sup>7</sup> Maier 1960.

<sup>8</sup> I would like to sincerely thank Professor Adam Łajtar for helping me to fully understand the quoted text.

<sup>9</sup> Schmidt 1970; Downey 1988; Kose 1998.



the corner of the temple. The distortion of perspective created by these columns, as seen from the preserved lower parts, is remarkable, as it makes the temple appear more monumental than it actually is.

The location of the temple within the city and its presumed importance to the local population render the inscription an important source – it reveals much about the inhabitants of the district at the foot of the main tell at Uruk. It is difficult to assume that the entire district was settled by the Dollamenoï based on a single reference. However, it is reasonable to assume that people belonging to this group may have lived in the vicinity – if not around the temple itself, then perhaps in the district of which the Temple of Gareus was a part.

### Discussion

A separate problem that we are unable to deal with at present is the attempt to guess where these inhabitants may have come from. Only a single ancient reference – the very first lines in Strabo's Book XVI – mentions *Dolomene*, Δολομηνή, as a place near Ninos, or Nineveh (Strabo XVI, 1.1).<sup>10</sup> Assuming this information is reliable, it suggests a possible migration from the north southwards, although the reasons for such a population shift remain uncertain. Despite extensive research, no tribal name or toponym equivalent to Dolomenoi has been found in Assyrian or Aramaic sources. We are, therefore, dealing with a small community, a congregation, or something similar, which escaped the attention of earlier sources because of its modest size. The name itself is clearly of Semitic origin, possibly Akkadian. In Aramaic *d'lamm* can be translated as the adjective 'northern'. The Akkadian dictionary contains two terms that fit well with the Graecised variant of Akkadian words. The first of these is *dalāmu*, which can be translated as 'underworld'. Another word that corresponds better with a human group is *dalāum*, which means to 'praise, sing, glorify' someone, including a god. The latter term denotes a group of worshippers or people who praise a deity, and thus by implication may refer to a congregation, association, or clan of priests from northern Mesopotamia. They may have felt isolated in Uruk, and we can assume they brought traditions, or modes of worship, from their homeland.

The Dollamenoï, or a part of that group, possibly arrived in Uruk from northern Mesopotamia, so it is reasonable to assume that some architectural elements of the Temple of Gareus should be traceable in the north. At

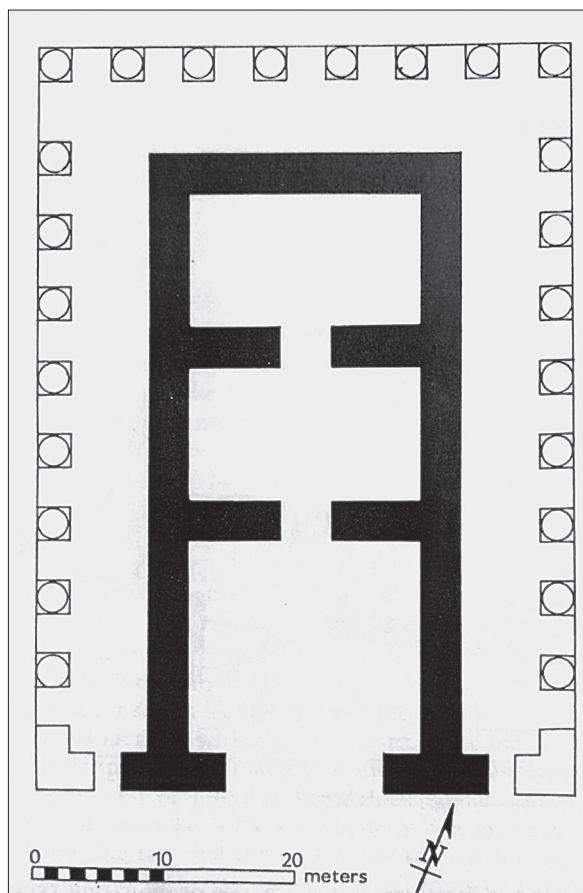


Fig. 6. Ashur, the *peripteros* temple floor plan (after: Andrae 1967, fig. 237).

the current state of research, it is difficult to find close affinities or even similar sacred structures in northern Mesopotamia. In Nineveh, which still existed during the Parthian Period, there was a temple dedicated to Nabu/Apollo, but its architectural form does not resemble the temple known from Uruk.<sup>11</sup> However, there are three sacred buildings that resemble, or maybe even drew inspiration from, the Temple of Gareus. One is the so-called 'Peripteros of Ashur' (Fig. 6).<sup>12</sup> This temple is different in scale, but the floor plan is very similar. The columns surrounding the temple proper, arranged in what W. Andrae called a *peripteros*, gave the building its monumental character, much like the columns in the façade did in the Temple of Gareus. The other two buildings are located in Hatra. The first is the so-called 'Barmaran Temple', erected on a podium and surrounded by a colonnade, whose most characteristic element is the Syrian arch placed in the *tympanum* (Fig. 7).<sup>13</sup> The 'Shahiru Temple',

<sup>10</sup> Oelsner 2014, 305–306; Roller 2018, 885.

<sup>11</sup> Reade 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Andrae, Lenzen 1967, 64–67; Andrae 1977, 258–259.

<sup>13</sup> Safar, Mustafa 1974; Jakubiak 2014, 24–27.

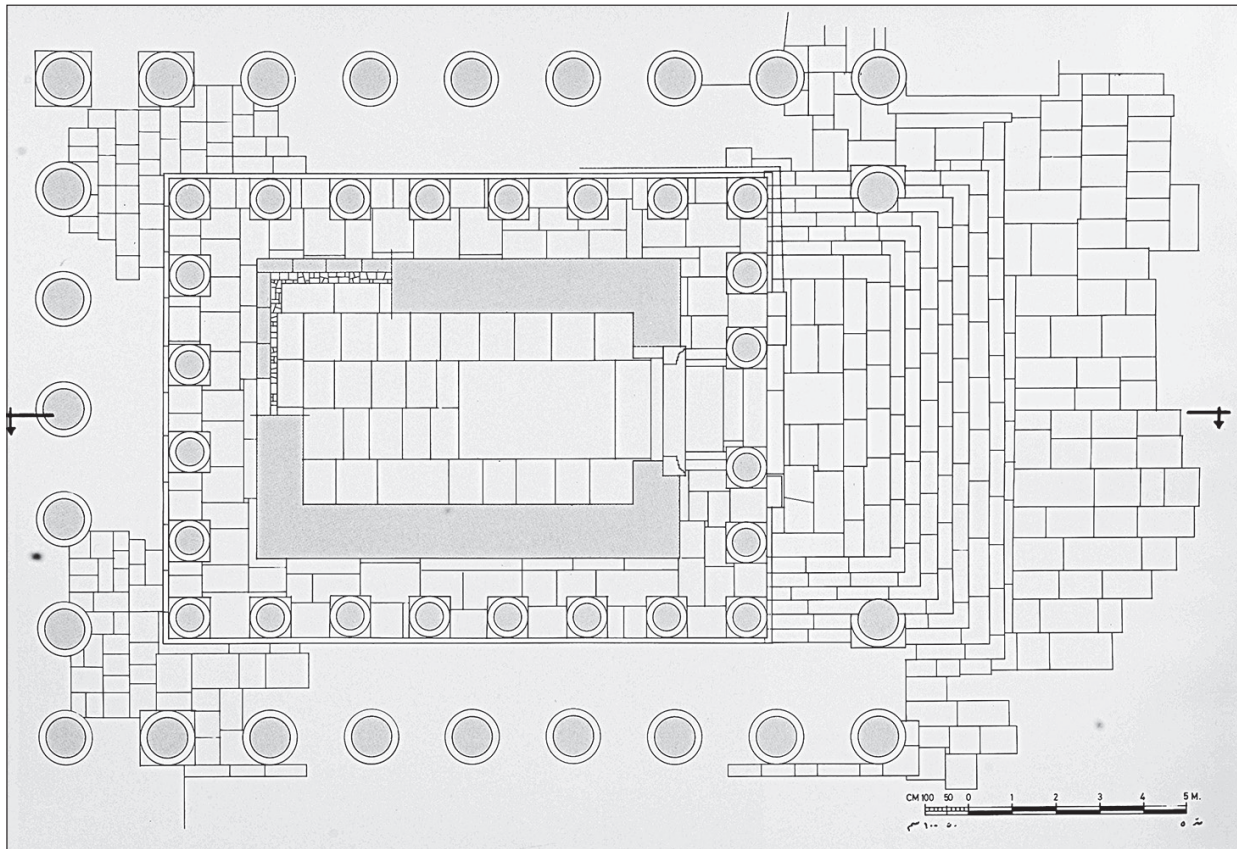


Fig. 7. Hatra, Temple of Barmaran floor plan (after: Safar, Mustafa 1974, fig. 345).

also located within the *temenos*, exemplifies the similarity (Fig. 8).<sup>14</sup> Here, it lies not in the temple plan, but in the decoration of the façade. Just as in Uruk, the columns in front of the Shahiru Temple, or those forming part of its façade, clearly were not structural elements but rather purely decorative.

The above-mentioned inscription also features the name Minnanaios, which merits attention. Unlike the other names in the inscription, it is not Greek. Merkelbach and Stauber have demonstrated it to be a Mesopotamian name, and therefore local.<sup>15</sup> This name contains a theophoric element referring to the name of the Sumerian goddess Nanaya. This goddess has clear traces of worship in Hatra, which corresponds to the place of origin of the Dolamenoï, namely northern Mesopotamia.<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that Nanaya was not the only ancient Mesopotamian deity worshipped in Hatra. The widespread worship of Nergal is also attested there, a deity

who, like Nanaya, originated in the Sumerian pantheon.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that across northern Mesopotamia and ancient Assyria elements of the 'primordial' religion, or rather the oldest known from the region to date, survived and remained practiced in Hatra, and probably elsewhere. In short, these places were religious outposts, where an old form of religion became petrified.

The architectural elements discovered during the excavations make it clear that the building was adorned with carved embellishments. The iconography indicates beyond doubt that these were representations of fantastic creatures, commonly seen in Mesopotamian art. In this case, however, the hybrid depicted has a scorpion's tail, a body of a winged lion, and a head of a dragon, which is slightly reminiscent of the Babylonian Mushkushu (Fig. 9).<sup>18</sup> It is often interpreted as a sea dragon, but this is incorrect. Rather, the depiction combines several iconographic elements that link all the components of the world together.

<sup>14</sup> Safar, Mustafa 1974; Jakubiak 2014, 29–30.

<sup>15</sup> Merkelbach, Stauber 2005, 118–119.

<sup>16</sup> Jakubiak 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Jakubiak 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Kose 2013, figs. 57.3, 322.



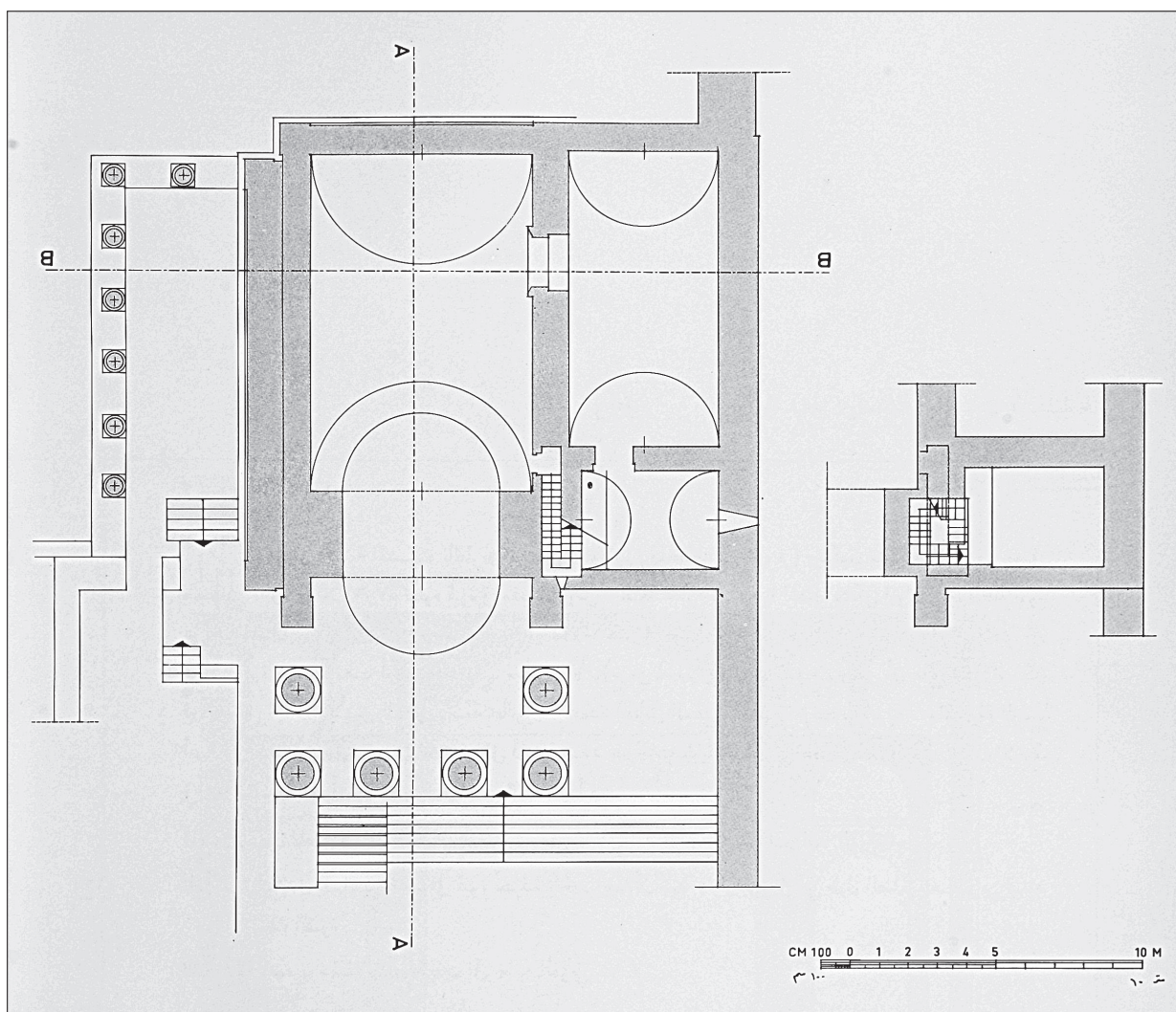


Fig. 8. Hatra, Temple of Shahiru floor plan (after: Safar, Mustafa 1974, fig. 338).



Fig. 9. Uruk, Temple of Gareus, decorated brick from the temple (after: Kose 2013, fig. 57.3).



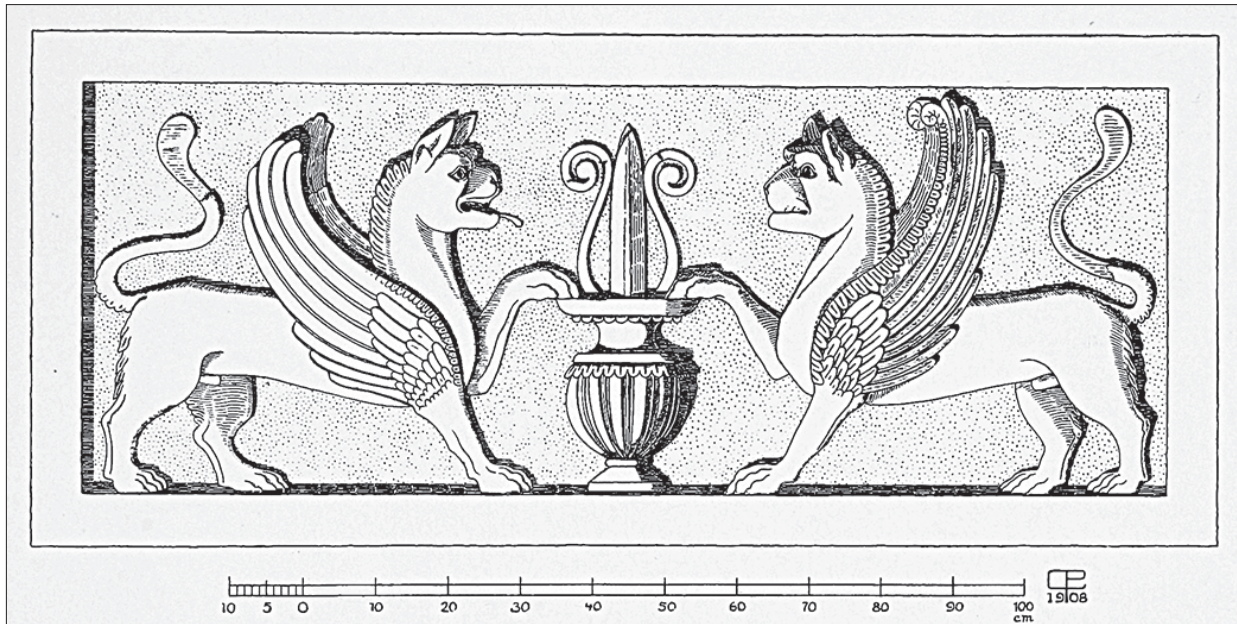


Fig. 10. Hatra, bas relief decoration from Room 10 in the Great Iwans complex (after: Andrae 1912, fig. 251).

The chthonic world is manifested by the scorpion, the lion is identified with the earth, and the wings and the dragon link this animal to the heavens. This symbolism encapsulates the complexity of the world. While the interpretation is therefore correct, one must ask what element may have permeated all these worlds or linked them together to form a single religious amalgam or concept. It is important to note that similar decorations have been found in northern Mesopotamia – three examples are known in total, all belonging to the same category of monuments. Representations similar to those found in the Temple of Gareus were unearthed on stone cornices adorning monumental buildings in Nineveh and Hatra. The artefact found in Nineveh came from the archaeological site of the south-west palace of Kuyundjik.<sup>19</sup> This massive cornice was decorated with fantastic creatures similar to those placed antithetically in front of a vessel resembling a crater. The only difference is that the scorpion's tail there was replaced with a lion's tail. Two further monuments were unearthed at the site of the Great *Iwans*. The first was found in the passage between the *iwān* and the square temple projecting beyond the narrative at the back of the *iwān* complex.<sup>20</sup> This fragmentary surviving cornice is lavish and elaborate, with its most noteworthy feature being a depiction of a griffin, strongly elongated in proportions. The silhouette of the creature is simplified, but despite few

formal similarities with the representation from Uruk, it undoubtedly carries a similar meaning and symbolism. The Walter Andrae expedition found a second representation in the northern *iwāns*, in the entrance to Room 10 (Fig. 10).<sup>21</sup> This cornice depicts a composition with two griffins facing a crater or vase emitting a kind of stylised flame. This element is crucial, as it is the best-preserved part of the whole composition. It is, therefore, essential to address the key theme arising from the analysis of the Temple of Gareus: Who was worshipped as a god in the southern part of Uruk? Given the elements presented above, it is reasonable to conclude that the name Gareus is a protoplast of Mesopotamian deities and possibly of early origin. Alternatively, the name can be explained through the Akkadian language. The Akkadian dictionary contains the word *girru*, meaning 'fire'. The Sumerian god Girra, known as Girru in the Akkadian variant, likely derives his name from this word.<sup>22</sup> Although regarded as a deity associated with fire, he himself did not embody fire, even when seen as a destroyer, an arsonist, or deity responsible for reed fires. In the Old Babylonian Period, he was identified as a purifier, a bearer of lightning, or even a judge. It is also crucial to note that *Girru* is one of the forty-sixth epithets of Marduk, appearing notably at the end of *Enuma Elish*. Moreover, Girru was believed to reside in Irigal. This suggests that the cult of Gareus, at least in its later form,

<sup>19</sup> Reade 1998, figs. 13, 76.

<sup>20</sup> Dirven 2022, figs. 11, 138.

<sup>21</sup> Andrae 1912, figs. 251, 149.

<sup>22</sup> Frayne, Stuckey 2021, 115–116.

continued a very long-standing tradition of worship rooted in the distant past. Since the god resided in Uruk, in the temple of Irigal, it can logically be assumed that a group of his followers, hailing from northern Mesopotamia, moved south, bringing with them their traditions of sacred architecture and religious expression. This may have been done in an effort to remain close to the god's principal seat. Although we cannot say with certainty whether this was the sole motivation for the Dollomenoi group's settlement in Uruk, the cult of Girru/Gareus evidently survived in northern Mesopotamia, just as the cults of Nanaya and Nergal did. It is likely that the followers of Gareus overcame significant challenges to return to the regions from which their deity originated – the southernmost parts of Mesopotamia and one of its oldest religious centres, which had been continuously active for many centuries, ever since the foundation of the city. This points to a strong sense of religious awareness or, more likely, to elements of the story that still elude us – such as the identity of Gareus himself or his role in the late religious landscape of southern Mesopotamia. Much remains to be discovered.

The creation of the temple was no coincidence. A major religious centre, focused around a massive sanctuary, developed dynamically around the same time in northern Mesopotamia, namely in Hatra. The beginning of this sanctuary's expansion coincided with the creation

of the inscription found in the ruins of the Temple of Gareus. Notably, the cult of Gareus is not attested in the north – we must thus consider the aforementioned possibility that members of this congregation came from that region. What we may be witnessing is a relocation of the fire deity's place of worship away from its original location and closer to Irigal. It is also possible that the cult of Girru – known as Gareus in its final phase – was in decline. The Dollomenoi group may have been among the last of his followers, attempting to revive the cult at its birthplace. This could represent the final chapter in the history of the cult of this enigmatic Mesopotamian deity, whose temple stands among the unique religious structures discovered at Uruk. If this interpretation is correct, then the identity of Gareus worshipped there becomes clear: He was a relatively obscure deity. The cult of Gareus is another example of how ancient Mesopotamian beliefs endured in Uruk, a process likely analogous to what occurred in Hatra, where the continued worship of Mesopotamian deities is also attested. The worship of Gareus either remained in the consciousness of the local population or was kept alive by the last followers of Girru/Gareus who migrated from the north. Notably, the migrants settled in Irigal, where their god was believed to have originated from, apparently in order to remain close to the holiest places of their tradition.

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