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Sîn City
Notes on the Moon God of Ḫarrān/Carrhae in the Partho-Roman Period

Michael Blömer

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3921-4036
Forschungsstelle Asia Minor, Münster University

Abstract

Today the city of Ḫarrān/Carrhae is mainly known for the famous battle, in which the Roman general Crassus was defeated by a Parthian army in 53 BCE. However, Ḫarrān was also one of the most important religious centres of North Mesopotamia. Since the Bronze Age, the moon god Sîn of Ḫarrān was popular in the wider region, and it is well known that the late Assyrian and Babylonian kings supported the cult and rebuilt the temple of Sîn. Archaeological evidence and written sources attest to the great popularity of Sîn of Ḫarrān at that time. Much less is known about the development of the cult in the subsequent periods, but the evidence assembled in this paper indicates that it continued to thrive. An important but so far largely ignored source for the study of Sîn are coins, which were minted at Ḫarrān in the second and third century CE. They suggest that some distinctive features of the Iron Age cult still existed in the Roman period. Most important in this regard is the predominance of aniconic symbolism. A cult standard, a crescent on a globe with tassels mounted on a pole, continued to be the main of representation of the god. In addition, two versions of an anthropomorphic image of the god can be traced in the coinage of Ḫarrān. The first shows him as an enthroned mature man. It is based on the model of Zeus, but his attributes identify the god as Sîn. The second version portrays him as a youthful, beardless god.

Late antique sources frequently mention that the people of Ḫarrān remained attached to pagan religion, but the veracity of these accounts must be questioned. A reassessment of the literary and archaeological evidence suggests that the accounts of a pagan survival at Ḫarrān are hyperbolic and exacerbated by negative sentiments towards Ḫarrān among writer from the neighbouring city of Edessa.

Keywords: Carrhae, Ḫarrān, Osrhoene, North Mesopotamia, moon god, Sumatar, ancient coins, cult standards, religious iconography, Edessa, Sabians.

North Mesopotamia was a key region of the ancient world. In the first three centuries CE, the main cities of the area, among them Edessa, Carrhae, and Nisibis were large urban centres of great strategic and economic importance. Yet, for several reasons, these cities and their culture play only a marginal role in broader discussion of the Near East in the Partho-Roman Period, which is largely dominated by studies in Palmyra, Dura Europos, and Hatra. Edessa received some attention for its role in the formation of Eastern Christianity and Syriac culture, but the other cities have been largely neglected. One important reason for the disregard of North Mesopotamia in the Partho-Roman period is the scarcity of archaeological and textual sources on the region, the other is that the study of the region requires transcending the traditional borders of scholarly disciplines.[1]

One of the places, which certainly deserves more attention, is Ḫarrān/Carrhae. Ḫarrān is located at the heart of a vast plain formed by the headwaters of the Baliḫ river (**Fig. 1**). The fertility of the plain, but also the strategic position at major trans-regional trade routes fostered the emergence of multiple urban sites in the Bronze Age.[2] Eventually, two main cities emerged, which dominated the plain: ʾŪrhāy/Edessa at its northern fringe and Ḫarrān at the heart of the plain. In the first half of the first millennium BCE Ḫarrān was the most important centre of Northern Mesopotamia. One of the reasons for the rise of Ḫarrān was the prestige of the local sanctuary of the moon god Sîn, who gained international reputation and was revered and promoted by the Assyrian kings. The last Assyrian ruler Aššūr-uballiṭ II even took residence at Ḫarrān after Assur and Niniveh had been lost. Later the Babylonian king Nabonidus patronized the temple of Sîn at Ḫarrān.

From a Roman perspective, Ḫarrān/Carrhae was inextricably linked to the famous battle of Carrhae, which was fought in the vicinity of the city in 53 BCE and ended in a fatal Roman loss.[3] For centuries, Roman writers associated the city primarily with Crassus' defeat.[4] However, more calamities befell the Romans at Ḫarrān. In 217 CE, the emperor Caracalla was murdered during a stay at the city, and the emperor Valerian was taken prisoner by the Persian Great king Šāpūr I in the plain between Edessa and Carrhae after a crushing defeat in 260 CE.[5] The large number of major military encounters between Rome and its eastern neighbours around Ḫarrān is not a coincidence. It underlines the strategic position of the city at one of the main lines of communication between Syria and Mesopotamia. Over centuries, North Mesopotamia was the most contested region of the Eastern Empire, and the Romans paid a high price to maintain control over it.

The following chapter aims to reappraise the cult of the moon god Sîn of Ḫarrān and its iconography in the Partho-Roman period. The combination of different sources promises to reveal new details on the god and his city. Special attention will be paid to coins, which were minted at Ḫarrān in second and third century CE. They reveal important details about the cult objects.

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[1] Palermo 2019.

[2] Creekmore III 2018.

[3] Traina 2011a; Traina 2011b. On the Roman reception of the battle, see also Lefebvre 2019.

[4] Overtoom 2017, 433–434.

[5] Kettenhofen 1982, 97–126.

Fig. 1. Map of North Mesopotamia in the Partho-Roman Period (Doliche Project, Forschungsstelle Asia Minor)

Sîn, the great lord who dwells in Ḫarrān

The moon god occupied a prominent role in the Semitic pantheon.[6] Time reckoning was based on the moon, and the observation of the moon allowed people to organize fieldwork and to exploit animals. Therefore, the moon was closely connected to fertility and the cycle of life, which is symbolized in the waxing and waning of the moon. Moreover, the moon offered orientation at night, which was important for the nomadic tribes of North Mesopotamia.

Among the various moon gods, which existed in Mesopotamia and Syria, the moon god Sîn, the supreme god of Ḫarrān, was the most eminent. His cult goes back at least as far as the Middle Bronze Age.[7] Sîn of Ḫarrān and his temple are mentioned in texts of the eighteenth century BCE from the archive at Mari.[8] However, the heyday of the cult was the Iron Age, when Sîn of Ḫarrān became one of the most important gods of the ancient Near East, who was recognised and revered in parts of Anatolia, North Syria, and North Mesopotamia.[9] His influence increased further after the Assyrian conquest, when the god was elevated to one of the central deities in the official state cult. The Assyrian

[6] Collon 1992; Theuer 2000; Niehr 2014, 132–134; Groß 2014, 149–150.

[7] The cult might have been transferred to Ḫarrān from Ur, see Holloway 2002, 390–391.

[8] Archi 1988; Holloway 2002, 391–393; Groß 2014, 140.

[9] Lewy 1945/1946; Green 1992, 19–47; Theuer 2000, 323–386; Holloway 2002, 388–425; Groß 2014.

kings capitalised on the reputation of the cult and further promulgated the veneration of Sîn in the western parts of the Assyrian Empire.[10] Various kings reported to have renovated the Eḫulḫul, the main temple of the god. An important aspect of the cult was the oracle of Sîn, which played a role in the Assyrian royal propaganda.[11] The eminent and supra-regional role of the moon god of Ḫarrān is evident in invocations of Sîn from different parts of the Near East, which identify him specifically as the god of Ḫarrān.[12] Most famous in this regard is an inscribed stele of Barrākib, king of Samal in North Syria, in which he calls Sîn, Baʿal of Ḫarrān, his lord.[13]

In contrast to most other deities of Mesopotamia, Sîn was rarely represented in an anthropomorphic guise, but in aniconic form as a crescent mounted on a pole with two tassels on a pedestal.[14] The combination of crescent and tassels is distinctive for the cult at Ḫarrān and allows to distinguish symbols of Sîn of Ḫarrān from other cult standards surmounted by crescents.[15] In the Assyrian and Babylonian period, this symbol became extremely popular and is widely attested in different media. By far the largest number of crescent standards can be found on cylinder seals and stamp seals (**Fig. 2**).[16] Most emblematic, however, are several basalt steles from North Mesopotamia and North Syria.[17] They either show an isolated crescent standard or a crescent standard framed by worshippers (**Fig. 3**).[18]

In addition to the depictions of crescent standards in sculpture and glyptics, there is growing archaeological evidence for three-dimensional crescents made of copper alloy, which are equipped with sockets could be mounted on poles. They have been found at Zincirli, Tell Halaf, and Seraʿ.[19] Another specimen has been discovered in Iron Age contexts at the sanctuary of Jupiter Dolichenus at Dülük Baba Tepesi (**Fig. 4**).[20] The piece from Seraʿ is the only one with two loops to fasten the tassels, which are visible in the reliefs. It is therefore very likely that the Seraʿ crescent indeed was the crest of a cult standard representing Sîn of Ḫarrān, whereas the other, smaller crescents without loops might also have been sceptres.[21] In any case, their relation to the moon cult is obvious.

[10] Holloway 2002, 422.

[11] Holloway 2002, 411–423.

[12] Theuer 2000; Novák 2004, 334–335.

[13] Holloway 2002, 398–400.

[14] On the rise of aniconic divine symbolism in the Iron Age, see Ornan 2005.

[15] Keel 1994, 138–139.

[16] For a general overview of the crescent standard on seals, see Keel 1994, 148–162; Theuer 2000, 336–347; Ornan 2005, 163–167.

[17] The steles have been variously discussed, see Kohlmeyer 1992, 91–100; Keel 1994, 137–148; Holloway 2002, 401–403; Harmanşah 2019, 10–11.

[18] In a stele from Tell Ahmar two standards flank an anthropomorphic image of the god, see Kohlmeyer 1992, 100; Keel 1994, 143–144.

[19] For an overview of these items and their meaning, see Keel 1994, 144–145; Theuer 2000, 336; Moriconi 2018.

[20] Dülük Baba Tepesi find no. 10_115-200. H. 6.1 cm, w. 5,4. This is the smallest crescent of the group, and it is very likely that it was mounted to a sceptre rather than to a cult standard.

[21] It must be noted, however, that the reliefs with images of crescent standards show that the tassels were not usually connected to loops at the crescent, see Keel 1994, fig. 5.6.8–11. The standard on the stele from Zaraqotaq has loops, but the tassels are attached to the globe beneath the crescent, see Kohlmeyer 1992, 94–95 pl. 39, 3; Keel 1994, fig. 5.

Fig. 2. Dülük Baba Tepesi, Assyrian-Babylonian Stamp seal, red stone, 9th–6th century BCE, F. no. 07_120-501, Crescent standard with tassels on a pedestal (Doliche Project, Forschungsstelle Asia Minor)

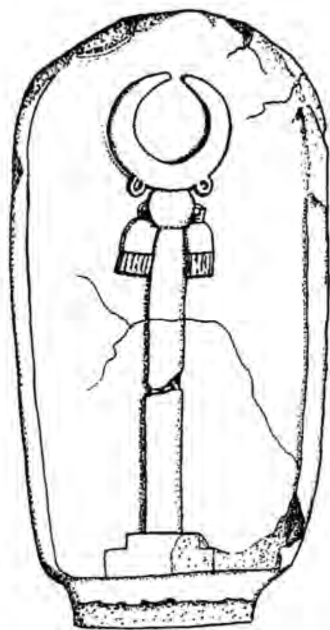

Fig. 3. Drawing of stele with crescent standard from Zaraqotaq, 8th century BCE, basalt, h. 162, Archaeological Museum of Aleppo (after Keel 1994, fig. 5)

Fig. 4. Dülük Baba Tepesi, crescent shaped mount, copper alloy, 9th–6th century BCE, F. No. 10_115–200 (Doliche Project, Forschungsstelle Asia Minor)

The collapse of the Assyrian Empire in 609 BCE must have been a hard blow to Ḫarrān, and the city and the temple appear to have been destroyed. However, the popularity of Sîn did not decline, and the last Babylonian king Nabonidus rebuilt Eḫulḫul.[22] The king was so much devoted to Sîn of Ḫarrān that he was accused of planning to supplant Marduk, the main god of Babylon, with him.[23] The fortune of Ḫarrān in the period after the collapse of the Babylonian Empire in 538 BCE is obscure, but it must have remained a regional centre. This is supported by the establishment of a mint at Ḫarrān in the late fourth century BCE by Antigonos Monophthalmos.[24] The coins show a lying crescent as mint mark, which indicates the continuous thriving of the cult of Sîn. Diodorus reports that some Macedonians were settled there in this period.[25] The further history of Ḫarrān in the Hellenistic period is shrouded in mystery and it remains obscure what happened when the Seleucids retreated from North Mesopotamia in the 130s BCE. Only the defeat of Crassus in 53 BCE put a spotlight on the city. Allegedly, the king of Edessa, Abgar II, pretended to support the Roman cause but lured Crassus and his army in a Parthian ambush near the city of Ḫarrān/Carrhae, causing one of the most severe Roman military defeats in history, the famous battle of Carrhae.[26] References to the battle abound in Roman literature, but they hardly shed light on the city itself. Plutarch identifies two citizens of Ḫarrān as Greeks in the context of the battle of Carrhae.[27] He also mentioned that Macedonian settlers from Ḫarrān rescued Lucius Afranius and his army in 65/64 BCE.[28] These reports suggest a Graeco-Macedonian presence at the city, but because of the lack of archaeological and epigraphical evidence from Ḫarrān itself, it is difficult to assess the character and self-identification of the population. It is notable, however, that Ḫarrān was one of the few cities that kept their ancient name.

The written sources remain largely silent about Ḫarrān and the cult of Sîn during the first two centuries CE.[29] The visit of Caracalla in 217 CE, during which he was killed, confirms that its prestige was unabated.[30] By that time, the city was a Roman *colonia* in the province of Mesopotamia, which had been established by Caracalla's father Septimius Severus.[31] Yet, numismatic evidence from this period suggests that the religious life of the city was still dominated by the ancient Near Eastern traditions.

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[22] Lewy 1945/1946.

[23] Beaulieu 2007. Critical of the idea that Nabonidus was planning religious reforms is Moukarzel 2014.

[24] Russeva 2019.

[25] Diodorus 19.91.

[26] Plut. *Crass.* 21–31; Dio 40.20–23.

[27] Plut. *Crass*. 25.

[28] Dio 37.5.5.

[29] On the complex political history of North Mesopotamia in this period, see Hartmann 2015; Edwell 2017; Blömer 2019 with further references. The political affiliation of Ḫarrān is difficult to assess. It is frequently assumed that the city was under the sway of the rulers of Edessa, but evidence to corroborate the claim does not exist. Edessa appears to have been the strongest power in the region, but the extent of the kingdom is unknown. The coinage of the city in the second century suggest that Ḫarrān was an independent political entity with close connections to Rome, but no details its political organisation are known. For the coinage see below.

[30] For a detailed discussion of the visit, see Hekster – Kaizer 2012.

[31] On the creation of the province, see Speidel 2007.

Temple and cult images of the moon god at Ḫarrān/ Carrhae in the Roman Imperial Period

Seton Lloyd, Bill Brice, and David Storm Rice started the archaeological exploration of Ḫarrān already in the early 1950s, and fieldwork was resumed by Turkish teams directed by Nurettin Yardımcı and currently by Mehmet Önal.[32] However, although the city area is not occupied by modern houses, long periods of prosperity and urban renewal between late antiquity and the Mongol destruction in 1260 have deeply transformed the topography of Ḫarrān and obliterated all traces of prior phases of occupation.[33] The excavations have not exposed significant traces of buildings that predate late antiquity and consequently, the location of the temple of Sîn at Ḫarrān is not certain and nothing can be said about its layout. The discussion about the temple has therefore been mainly based on textual sources. Islamic writers mention that the medieval castle of Ḫarrān had originally been a temple of the Sabians —an allegedly pagan group living at Ḫarrān in the early Islamic period—dedicated to the moon.[34] The veracity of this information cannot be confirmed, and it is also unclear whether this temple of the Sabians, if it existed at all, was identical with the ancient temple of Sîn.[35] The area of the Great Mosque has also been identified as the place of the temple, but the ongoing archaeological investigations in the area have not been able to support this claim.[36]

Another opinion is that the temple was not located in the city at all. This assumption is based on a remark made by the Roman writer Herodian. In the context of Caracalla's murdering he mentions that the temple of the moon goddess Selene, which the emperor wanted to visit, was some distance from Ḫarrān, so that he needed to leave the city and go on a journey.[37] However, Cassius Dio and the Historia Augusta tell a different story and report that he was killed before he had reached Ḫarrān.[38] Nevertheless, some scholars followed Herodian and even suggested that there was more than one temple of the moon. One of them was supposed to be located at Aşagı Yarmıca, a village 6 km northwest of the city, where an Iron Age stele with the crescent standard of Sîn had been discovered.[39] However, the report of Herodian has to be taken with a grain of salt. Given the longevity and continuity of the cult of Sîn at Ḫarrān, it seems certain that the

[32] Little has been published so far. See Lloyd – Brice 1951 for the first campaign, and Rice 1952 for the medieval remains; on the deep soundings on the höyük, which had arrived at early Bronze Age levels, see Prag 1970. The results of the campaigns directed by Nurettin Yardımcı have not been fully published, see Yardımcı 2008; Özfırat 1994. For the recent work at the site, see Önal *et al.* 2019.

[33] On the history of Ḫarrān in the Islamic period, see Rice 1952; for the period of the eleventh and twelfth century CE, see Heidemann 2002.

[34] Rice 1952, 37–46; Green 1992; Healey *et al*. 2020, 136. For the Sabians see below.

[35] The temple of Sîn from the Roman period was destroyed by Christians in the 380s, and it seems unlikely that it was rebuilt at the same spot, see Jones 2013 and below. Recently, traces of the apse of a church have been identified in the current structure, see Healey *et al*. 2020, 136.

[36] Green 1992, 14, 65; Groß 2014, 145. The inscriptions of Nabonidus have been found reused in the pavement of the Mosque, and Gadd 1958, 90 suggests that their original position was not far away, but this is pure conjecture.

[37] Herodian 4.13.3–5. The author identifies the god of Ḫarrān as Selene, the Greek goddess of the moon.

[38] Dio 79.4-5; HA *Caracalla* 6.6; 7.1.2.

[39] Lloyd – Brice 1951, 80.

temple of the Partho-Roman period still occupied the same position as the Eḫulḫul. The place of the latter is not known either, but its location in the city cannot be seriously contested. The spatial separation between city and main sanctuary would be unprecedented for the Bronze and Iron Age, and the god is referred to in Assyrian inscriptions as dwelling in Ḫarrān.[40] Moreover, about 100 partially baked bricks, which stamped inscriptions identify as bricks for the rebuilding of Eḫulḫul under Nabonidus, have been found in the excavations on the mound at the centre of the settlement.[41] The inscription explicitly mentions that the temple was in Ḫarrān, and the find place suggests that Eḫulḫul was located on the impressive city mound, west of the Umayyad mosque.

We must assume that the temple of Nabonidus continued to be used during the Achaemenid period, but that it was transformed according to Greek fashion at some point in the Hellenistic period. Coins of the third century CE present the sanctuary as a tetrastyle temple with a pediment (**Fig. 5**).[42] Representations of temples on civic coins of Roman Imperial period are very uniform and can hardly be used to make any claims about specific details of the architecture of the building, but they confirm that the temple of Sîn, like all other major sanctuaries of the Near East, which go back to the Iron Age, had been rebuild and adapted to contemporary tastes.[43]

Fig. 5. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Septimius Severus, copper alloy, 25 mm, 8.23 g, 12 h, Classical Numismatic Group, Inc., Electronic Auction 326, 07.05.2014, Lot 344 (Image courtesy of CNG Coins)

A frequently overlooked source on the temple provides some additional details: The late antique pagan writer Libanius alludes to the sanctuary of Sîn in his speech *Pro templis*. He says that

[40] Groß 2014, 144. A stele of Tell Ahmar shows an anthropomorphic image of Sîn flanked by two crescent standards on a building, which has been identified as the Eḫulḫul, see Holloway. However, the generic image does not reveal much about the actual design of the building.

[41] Schaudig 2001, 342–343. Another clue is the discovery of the Nabonidus stelai reused in the pavement of the court of the Great Mosque, see Gadd 1958.

[42] *BMC* Mesopotamia, 82, no. 4. For a discussion of the coins, see below.

[43] On this topic, see Drew-Bear 1974; Lichtenberger 2017.

> . . . on the frontier with Persia there lies in ruins a temple which had no equal, as one may hear from all who saw it, so very large was it and so very large the blocks with which it was built, and it occupied as much space as the city itself. Why, amid the terrors of war, to the benefit of the city's inhabitants, those who took the city gained nothing because of their inability to take the temple as well.[44]

He does not mention Carrhae explicitly, but the comparison with the Sarapis sanctuary of Alexandria suggests that this was a major cult centre close to the frontier with Persia. Christopher P. Jones has convincingly argued for an identification of the temple as the temple of the moon god at Carrhae.[45] The close vicinity of Persian territory makes it a more likely candidate than Edessa. After the Roman defeat of 363 CE, large swaths of land in Mesopotamia including the Khabur valley and the fortress towns of Singara and Nisibis had been lost to the Sassanians. This did not mean that Carrhae was located immediately at the border, as insinuated by Libanius, but the city was at the first line of defence against Sassanian assaults on the heart of Roman Mesopotamia.

The claim that the temple occupied as much space as the city underlines the vastness of the sacred area. A hint at the location might be the good view from the roof of the temple, which Libanius emphasizes. If the sanctuary had been located on the höyük, as is suggested by the finds the bricks belonging to the temple of Nabonidus, it would have indeed been the highest point at the centre of the plain and a good lookout.

To conclude, it seems safe to infer that there the sanctuary of Sîn was in the city of Ḫarrān. We must also assume that it occupied the same place as the Iron Age temple and was located at the city mound.

More rewarding than the discussion of the temple building is the study of the cult images and the general character of the cult in the Roman period. Particularly helpful are the coins of Ḫarrān. They provide a rich array of visual evidence for the cult of Sîn but have received surprisingly little attention.[46] No attempts were made to examine the coin images systematically and to relate them to the other pieces of evidence for the cult of Sîn in Partho-Roman times. Large numbers of coins were minted at Ḫarrān but also at the other main cities of North Mesopotamia—Edessa, Nisibis, Rhesaina and Singara—after the establishment of the province of Mesopotamia, apparently to supply small change to the massive number of Roman soldiers stationed in Mesopotamia and along the Euphrates.[47] However, the production of Roman style civic coins at Ḫarrān had started already well before the formal establishment of the Roman province under Septimius Severus. The first coins, which can be attributed to Carrhae securely were minted in the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus.[48] This coinage sheds important light on the political and economic situation of Northern Mesopotamia in the middle of the second century. By that time, the frontier between Roman and Parthian spheres of influence had shifted. The presence of Imperial portraits on the coins of Carrhae, but also Edessa, imply allegiance to the Roman Empire, an integration in the economic networks of the Roman Near East, and possibly the presence of Roman garrisons. The title *philorhomaios* indicates a formal

[44] Lib. *Or*. 30.44–45. Translation taken from Jones 2013, 860.

[45] Jones 2013, 860–862.

[46] Hill 1916, 150–155 gives an outdated overview.

[47] Blömer 2022, 157–158.

[48] *RPC* IV.3, nos. 6482, 8037–8041, 8573. *RPC* IV 3, no. 10734 (temporary) has been attributed to Antoninus Pius, but the portrait of the emperor is so worn that no secure identification seems possible.

alliance between Rome and Ḫarrān.[49] Some (pseudo-)autonomous issues of Ḫarrān might date to the same period or even earlier.[50]

From the beginning, most reverse motifs refer to the cult of Sîn. This has always been acknowledged but no attempts were made to explain the nature of the objects on display and their role in the cult of Ḫarrān. In the following, a short overview and a discussion of the coin images will be offered.

The main motif on small denominations is a crescent surmounted by a star. Different types can be distinguished. Best attested is a crescent on a globe with two tassels.[51] It can be depicted either as an isolated object (**Fig. 6**) or placed on a pedestal. The shape of the pedestal varies, it can be rectangular (**Fig. 7**), stepped (**Fig. 8**), moulded (**Fig. 9**), or a table-like support with two legs (**Fig. 10**).

Fig. 6. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Lucius Verus, copper alloy, 22 mm, 8.12 g, 12 h, Münzkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, object no. 18257398 (Münzkabinett, Berlin)

Fig. 7. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Septimius Severus, copper alloy, 1.81 g, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, Fonds général 1843 (Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF)

[49] See Sommer 2010 on the contemporary use of the title *philorhomaios* as a royal epithet in Edessa.

[50] *RPC* IV.3, nos. 3984, 9574, 17188 (temporary). Coins with the symbol of the crab on the reverse and a Greek legend, which is possibly referring to a king, on the averse might also be from Carrhae, see Blömer 2022, 155–157.

[51] In the latest issues of Carrhae, only the abstract symbol of crescent and star without globe and tassels is shown.

Fig. 8. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Caracalla, copper alloy, 2,88 g, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, Fonds général 1879 (Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF)

Fig. 9. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Septimius Severus, copper alloy, 13 mm, 2.25 g, 6 h, Leu Numismatik, Web Auction 12 Lot 988 30.05. 2020 (Courtesy of Leu Numismatik)

Fig. 10. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Elagabalus, copper alloy, 18 mm, 3.11 g, 5 h, Leu Numismatik, Web Auction 3, 25 Feb. 2018, lot 747 (Courtesy of Leu Numismatik)

Some rare issues present a more detailed and embellished version of the scene (**Fig. 11**).[52] In them the stepped pedestal is decorated with dots, and two standards frame the scene. They are poles with small disks and a crossbar from which streamers hang down. These coins display an important detail of the central object. In addition to the tassels, a pair of animal ears, certainly of a bull, are attached to the globe beneath the crescent. This detail can also be recognized in some of the better articulated issues with the simple crescent on a globe on a pedestal. The bull's ears add another layer of meaning to the image. The object is characterized not only as the symbol of the moon, but also represents a bull. In conjunction with the ears, the pointed ends of the crescent could be understood as horns. This intriguing ambiguity or the object reveals the vitality of an ancient religious concept that goes back to the Bronze Age: the close association between the bull and the moon god.[53] This association finds its best expression in an enigmatic and widely discussed group of steles, most of which have been found in the Southern Levant.[54] They merge the symbolism of the cult standard with the depiction of a bull and anthropomorphic elements. The steles date to the Iron Age, but depictions of the object also appear in the Roman period and it a possible that some of the steles were still used at that time.[55]

Fig. 11. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Caracalla, copper alloy, 5.56 g, 20 mm, 12 h, Münzkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, object no. 18242438 (Münzkabinett, Berlin)

A variant of the same reverse type shows a small crab above the crescent on a pedestal (**Fig. 12**). Apparently, the crab was connected to Sîn of Ḫarrān as it also appears as the main symbol on pseudo-autonomous issues of the city (**Fig. 13**).[56] Other coins show

[52] *RPC* IV.3, no. 7865.

[53] The relation between bull, moon god, and storm god had attracted considerable attention in the later 1990s and is well studied, see Bernett – Keel 1998; Ornan 2001; Novák 2001.

[54] Bernett – Keel 1998, 1–44; Ornan 2001. Another fragmented stele comes from et-Turra, Jordan, see Wimmer – Janaydeh 2011.

[55] Seyrig 1959; Bernett – Keel 1998, 11–12.

[56] *RPC* IV.3, nos. 3984, 9574, 17188.

a crescent surmounted by a crab.[57] Most plausible seems an interpretation of the crab as the symbol of the Zodiac, cancer, which was seen as closely connected to the moon.[58]

Fig. 12. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, pseudo-autonomous, second second century CE, copper alloy, 11 mm, 1.17 g, *Obv.* crab / *Rev.* crescent on filleted globe with inscribed star, Leu Numismatik, Web Auction 3, 25.02.2018, Lot 744 (courtesy of Leu Numismatik)

Fig. 13. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Caracalla, copper alloy, 5,94 g, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, 1966.453 (Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF)

It is obvious that the crescent on pedestal represents a specific cult object of great importance related to the cult of Sîn and not just a generic image of moon and star as it occurs on the late coins of Ḫarrān minted under Gordian III (**Fig. 14**).[59] But what exactly is shown? Key to the understanding are the tassels. As mentioned above, the crescent with tassels on a pole was the most distinctive and most common symbol of Sîn in Iron Age. The combination of these elements was unique to the standards of Sîn allows

[57] *RPC* IV.3, no. 9575.

[58] For the symbolism of the crab and the connection between crab and moon, see Deonna 1954, esp. page 58.

[59] *RPC* IV.3, nos. 3436, 3437, 3445–3448, 3450, 3451 (temporary). The mint ceased to work after Gordian III, probably because of the capture of the city by Ardašīr I in 238 CE.

to distinguish them easily from other types of cult standards, which were common in all indigenous cults of North Syria and North Mesopotamia. If the crescent with tassels resurfaces on the coins of Ḫarrān, it must also represent the century old symbol of Sîn, even if it is dismounted from the pole. The globe beneath the crescent had not been a common element in the Iron Age iconography, but it can already be found in the stele from Zaraqotaq and in depictions of the symbol of Sîn in some late Babylonian cylinder seals (**Fig. 3**).[60] The rare images of full crescent standards of Sîn from the Roman period, which can be found at Sumatar and at Dura Europus, have the globe, too, and confirm that it had become an essential part of the crescent standard, possibly as a symbol of the full moon (**Fig. 24, 25**).[61] The omission of the pole could denote that the crest was kept in the temple separately and mounted on a pole only if it was carried in ritual processions. More likely, however, seems that it was omitted for compositional reasons. The elongated pole would have forced the die-cutter to reduce the size of the crescent considerably. Given the small size of the coins, details would have been difficult to distinguish, and large portions of the coin would have remained empty. We might therefore assume that the image of the crescent on a globe with tassels is an abbreviated representation of the ancient crescent standard.

Fig. 14. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Gordianus III, copper alloy, 30.49 mm, 15.43 g, 11 h, Agora Auctions, Sale 69, 26.09.2017, Lot 185 (Courtesy of Agora Auctions)

The motif of the crescent on a pedestal flanked by standards is reminiscent of another rare coin type of Ḫarrān, which displays the temple of the moon god (**Fig. 6, 15**).[62] It is a tetrastyle temple with objects in each intercolumnium. The objects in the outer intercolumnia are identical and can easily be recognised as cult standards. The poles are surmounted by crescents and decorated with discs. Below the crescents a triangle or a crossbar with streamers hanging down can be distinguished. They resemble the cult standards

[60] For the stele from Zaraqotaq, see Kohlmeyer 1992, 94–95 pl. 39, 3. For the seal images, cf. Dandrow 2021, fig. 4–7.

[61] For a discussion of the crescent standards of Sumatar and Dura Europos, see below.

[62] *BMC* Mesopotamia, 82, no. 4.

at Hierapolis, Hatra, and elsewhere, and should not be considered as representations of Sîn, but as ancillary cult standards.[63]

Fig. 15. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Septimius Severus, copper alloy, 7.59 g, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, Fonds général 1846 (Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF)

Fig. 16. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Caracalla?, copper alloy, 13 mm, 1.47 g, Savoca Numismatics London, Monthly London Auction 4, 12.01.2020, Lot 531 (courtesy of Savoca Numismatics)

The object at the centre has a different form. It has a conical body and is placed on a pedestal and surmounted by a crescent on a globe with tassels. The same object can also be found as an isolated motif on a series of coins minted under Septimius Severus (and Caracalla?) (**Fig. 16, 17**). They allow the identification of additional details. One or two columns of oblique ridges divide the interior surface of the object. If two columns are indicated, they are separated by a vertical line running from the pedestal to the crescent on

[63] For cult standards in the Near East in general, see Ingholt 1954, 17–46; Dirven 2005; Blömer 2014, 164–171. A crucial question concerns the possible influence of Roman military standards on the iconography of the cult standards, see also Töpfer 2011, 179–186.

a globe. The pedestal is a table with four legs, and the crest is identical with the crescent on a globe with tassels, which has been discussed above.

Fig. 17. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Septimius Severus, copper alloy, 2.34 g, 14.5 mm, Sol Numismatik, Auction 1, 16.10.2021 Lot 87 (courtesy of Sol Numismatik)

This object has always been interpreted consistently as a baetyl.[64] Presumably, this claim has been based on a faint resemblance to the baetyl on the coins of Emesa and the assumption that baetyls had been popular in Near Eastern cults in general, but no explanation has been offered for how and why a baetyl had become the focus of the cult at Ḫarrān. In view of the traditional prominence of the crescent standard as the aniconic object, in which the god resides, a baetyl would be an odd addition. It must also be noted that the veneration of baetyls seems to be without parallels in North Mesopotamia.[65]

An alternative and more obvious interpretation is that the object is the crescent standard but outfitted or wrapped in a peculiar way. Given its transient character, the standard of Sîn could have been provided with different types of decoration on certain occasions. This might be reflected in the varying modes of representation.[66] The common feature, which never changed, is the crescent with the tassels. This allowed the object to be identified as the crescent standard of Sîn. The interpretation as a standard is also supported by a comparison between the coins showing the object in a temple framed by two standards and the crescent on a pedestal framed by two standards discussed above. The corresponding composition suggests that both images refer to the same main cult image of Sîn at the temple of Ḫarrān.

[64] *BMC* Mesopotamia, 82, no. 4; Segal 1953, 115; Drijvers 1980, 137; Tubach 1986, 184.

[65] The inscriptions at the Sîn sanctuary of Sumatar (Drijvers – Healey 1999: As 36 and As 37) mention the dedication of objects, which have been interpreted as baetyls, but this interpretation was influenced by the assumption that baetyls played an important role in the cult. For an alternative interpretation of the inscription, see Palmer 2015 and below.

[66] Similar looking aniconic symbols of Sîn can be found already on late Babylonian seals, see Dandrow 2021, 108, fig. 4–7.

Anthropomorphic images of Sîn

Since the Iron Age, rare anthropomorphic images of Sîn of Ḫarrān existed alongside the crescent standard.[67] This tradition lived on in the Roman period, and some coins of Ḫarrān present Sîn in a human form. Two very different types can be distinguished. The first type shows the god as a mature, bearded man seated on a throne (**Fig. 18**). He is holding the symbol of the crescent on a globe in his outstretched left hand. Another crescent sits on his shoulders. The scene is framed by two standards. The attributes unambiguously identify him as Sîn of Ḫarrān, but the coin type is clearly based on the iconic and ubiquitous image of the enthroned Zeus, which also occurred on the tetradrachms minted at Ḫarrān in the late fourth century BCE. This image was frequently adapted to represent supreme gods in the local panthea of the Near East. It was appropriate for Sîn as the supreme god of Ḫarrān, who was portrayed mature and bearded in the Assyrian and Babylonian period, too.

Fig. 18. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Alexander Severus, 5.14 g, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, Fonds général 1895 (Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF)

The second type presents a very different image of the god. He is depicted as a youthful man with full hair, wearing a diadem (**Fig. 19**). He has a crescent on his shoulders and an additional small crescent above his forehead. Again, the image of the god is flanked by two standards. This youthful image of the god seems to be influenced by Graeco-Roman images of Sol, Men, and other astral deities, who were presented beardless and young. However, the anthropomorphic image of the youthful Sîn appears to have been introduced already before the period of direct Roman rule. A bust of Sîn, which is preserved at his sanctuary at Sumatar, dates to the year 165 CE.[68] The face has been completely erased, but a crescent on the shoulders and the fillets of a diadem confirm an identification of the

[67] Collon 1992; Kühne 1997; Theuer 2000, 333–334, 345–347. A painted portray of Sîn in a procession of deities from the Assyrian period has recently been discovered in the region north of Ḫarrān at Başbük, see Önal *et al.* 2022, 581, 585, fig. 3.

[68] Drijvers 1980, 123. Two inscriptions are carved next the bust: Drijvers – Healey 1999: As 26, As 27.

figure as Sîn (**Fig. 20**).[69] Apparently, the god was The god Barmaren from Hatra, who also has a lunar aspect, shows a closely related iconography and attests that the idea of the youth of the moon god had pervaded Mesopotamia by the second centuries CE. In a statue from Hatra, Barmaren has a crescent on his forehead, another crescent on the shoulders and wears a diadem.[70] In contrast to Sîn, he is also equipped with two horns.

Fig. 19. Ḫarrān/Carrhae, Caracalla, copper alloy, 21 mm, 5.05 g, 6 h, Classical Numismatic Group Electronic Auction 205, 25.02.2009, Lot. 338 (courtesy of CNG)

A final remark concerns the youthful portrait of Sîn found on rare type of imitative SC coins (**Fig. 21**).[71] The image largely corresponds to the image on the coins of Ḫarrān. An Aramaic legend identifies the god as Sîn Māralāhē (lord of the gods). The imitative SC coinage was produced in Mesopotamia since the second century CE.[72] It has traditionally been attributed to Hatra, but it seems likely that other places were involved in their production, too.[73] This must be the case for the Sîn Māralāhē coins, because the cult of Sîn is hardly attested at Hatra and Hatran coins referring to him as lord of the gods would therefore be inappropriate.[74] Aggoula assumed that the coins were minted at Hatra, but for usage at Ḫarrān, which he claimed was under control of Hatra.[75] More recently, Kevin Butcher suggested that the coins were minted at Assur, because some specimens of this coin type had been found in the excavations at Assur.[76] Given the eminent role of Sîn at Ḫarrān and the correspondence of the portray of the youthful Sîn on the civic coins, an attribution of this imitative SC coin type to Ḫarrān seems more convincing. They could

[69] Segal 1953, 115. Green 1992, 66 appears to be the first to mention the crescent on the shoulders.

[70] Tubach 1986, 306–307 Abb. 9.

[71] Walker 1958, 170–172, "Type B."

[72] On the imitative *SC* coinage in general, see Walker 1958; Slocum 1977; Heidemann – Butcher 2017, 14–21; Butcher 2022.

[73] Heidemann – Butcher 2017, 14–21; Butcher 2022; Blömer 2022.

[74] The coin was attributed to Hatra by Walker, see Walker 1958, 170–172, "Type B", which was rejected by Slocum, see Slocum 1977, 45–46, who did not suggest an alternative mint. On the use of the epithet Māralāhē, see Tubach 1986, 386–406; Healey 2019, 59.

[75] Aggoula 1972.

[76] Heidemann – Butcher 2017, 18–20; Butcher 2022, 166–167.

have been minted in the period before the Eastern wars of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, during which Carrhae became more closely attached to the Roman Empire and started minting coins according to Roman models.

Fig. 20. Sumatar, sacred mount, rock relief with bust of Sîn (photo: author)

Fig. 21. Ḫarrān/Carrhae (?), copper alloy, 24 mm, 12.64 g, *Obv.* Head of Sin left / *Rev.* retrograde SC with crescent above and star below within wreath, Roma Numismatics Limited, E-Sale 75, 15.10.2020, Lot 375 (courtesy of Roma Numismatics Limited)

The evidence of Sumatar

Crucial for the understanding of the moon cult of Ḫarrān in the Partho-Roman Period is the site of Sumatar (Yağmurlu), located in the rugged Tek Tek mountains, 30 km north-east of the city (**Fig. 22**). A steep höyük, which is occupied by the remains of a Medieval castle, forms the centre of the settlement.[77] A lower town extends to the west of the mound, and many rock cut tombs riddle the adjacent slopes. Monumental tombs and monumental funerary monuments sit on the surrounding hilltops.[78] Moreover, two sanctuaries of Sîn with several reliefs and inscriptions have been discovered. They are dated to the 160s CE and reveal that Sumatar was the religious and political centre of the wider region.[79] In the 160s CE, this region was under control of Edessa, but local allegiances might have shifted over time.

Fig. 22. View of Sumatar from the West. At the centre *höyük* with castle, on the left the sacred mount with sanctuary of Sîn (photo: author)

Two sanctuaries, both located at the periphery of the settlement can be associated with the cult of Sîn. The main site spreads over the flat top of a barren hill, which is overlooking the mound of Sumatar in the east.[80] Two rock reliefs, one of them showing the bust of Sîn, and several inscriptions carved in the bedrock are preserved (**Fig. 20, 23**).

[77] Segal 1953, 112–116. The medieval history of the site has not been explored yet.

[78] Segal identified the tombs erroneously as temples, see Segal 1953, 112–115. He corrected this view, see Segal 1970, 56 and Drijvers 1980, 139–140, but his original interpretation still reverberates in scholarly work (e.g. Green 1992, 71–72) and, most importantly, in popular accounts of the site. For other funerary monuments from Sumatar, see Drijvers 1973; Albayrak *et al.* 2019; Albayrak 2021.

[79] For the inscriptions, see Drijvers – Healey 1999, As26–As54; Add 3–5.

[80] Segal 1953, 101–102; Drijvers 1973; Drijvers 1980, 122–145; Healey 2019, 54–58.

The precise character of the cult installations is difficult to ascertain, but this was obviously an open-air precinct. No traces of built structures have survived. The image of Sîn mentioned above certainly played a central role in the cult activities at the site. Additional details are provided by the inscriptions, which have been carved in the bedrock. The inscription As 36 mentions an altar, and both As 36 and As 37 refer to the dedication of cult objects and the funds to maintain them.[81] They are called *neṣbetā* in Syriac, which has been interpreted as pillar.[82] Most recently, Andrew Palmer proposed that it should be understood literally as sapling, meaning that the object was made of wood.[83] Given the importance of standards in the cult of Sîn, the objects were most likely crescent standards with wooden poles. If this interpretation is correct, the inscriptions contain important evidence for the use of cult standards. They could be set up in the open, which required regular care to prevent the wood from degrading. For this reason, the inscriptions mention that the objects were endowed with funds to secure their maintenance. The inscriptions also reveal that the political elite of the region was involved in the organisation of the cult.[84]

Fig. 23. Sumatar, sacred mount, rock reliefs (photo: author)

[81] Drijvers – Healey 1999, As 36. As 37; Palmer 2015.

[82] Palmer 2015 with an extensive discussion of the previous readings and interpretations.

[83] Palmer 2015, 76: “all things considered, then, it seems likely that the *neṣbetā* was a sculpted wooden monument set in a hole in the rock on the summit of the blessed hill to the east of the sacrificial altar. It may have resembled the slender monument crowned with the moon’s horns which is depicted in Pognon’s cave at Sumatar.” See also Healey 2019, 58.

[84] Healey 2019, 54–60.

A second sanctuary had been published already by Henri Pognon in 1907.[85] It consists of two connected rectangular underground rooms carved in the lower slope of the hill rising at the western periphery of the settlement. The walls of the smaller northern room are lavishly decorated with larger-than-life images of dignitaries accompanied by Aramaic inscriptions.[86]

A large rectangular niche is carved in the rear wall of the main room (**Fig. 24**).[87] The niche is flanked by the reliefs of two crescent standards. The reliefs are very worn, but the identification is unambiguous. Crescents are mounted on poles, with long wavy tassels hanging down.[88] Simple crosses, which have been crudely incised above the crescents, might rather been later additions than stars surmounting the crescent.

In contrast to the hilltop sanctuary, the inscriptions of the cave do not mention Sîn or religious activities but identify the names and titles of the portrayed men.[89] Therefore, the cave has been interpreted as a tomb or as an assembly room of the local aristocracy.[90] However, the layout of the room bears no resemblance at all to a tomb. The arrangement of the room, with the central niche framed by crescent standards clearly suggests a religious purpose of the room. The walls and the floor of the large niche are carefully smoothed but plain, and it must be assumed that the main cult object, probably a three-dimensional crescent standard, was placed in it. There is no parallel for a cave sanctuary of the moon god, but cave sanctuaries did exist in the wider region.[91] A religious function is also supported by the iconography of the reliefs. All of them are turned towards the niche. Some of them are scarifying on a thymiaterion in front of them. Moreover, they wear tall heads, which differ from the usual headgear of men in Edessa, but resemble the tall conical hats of priests, which are attested in Roman Syria.[92]

[85] Pognon 1907, 23–38; Segal 1953, 102–104.

[86] Haensch 2009, 222–224 points out that one of the figures, Aurelius Ḥapsay, who was a *libertus* of the Roman Emperor, must have been a financial agent of the Roman state. His presence corroborates the strong ties between Edessa and Rome at that time.

[87] The niche is much deeper than indicated in the sketch plan by Pognon 1907, 27.

[88] The precise character of the standards has not been recognised by previous scholarship. Pognon 1907, 25 says "c`est un croissant place au sommet d`une sorte de hampe ressemblant un peu à un corps humain très allongé et très étroit." Segal 1953, 103 speaks of "pillars, tapering at the bottom with a round head.'" Likewise, Drijvers 1980, 130 saw the standards as a "a horned pillar of oval shape, resembling a stylized human person wearing horns on his head. Between the horns a cross is carved evidently symbolizing a star." However, he identified them as the symbols of Sîn of Ḫarrān (Drijvers 1980, 137–138). So did Tubach, who explicitly referred to them as standards, but still calls them convex pillars (Tubach 1986, 200–201). The poles are in fact perfectly straight. The tassels can be easily distinguished at the left standard, while this area is heavily eroded at the right. The wrong identification of the standards as horned pillars appears to have not only influenced the interpretation of the objects dedicated in the hilltop sanctuary, which are mentioned in the inscriptions Drijvers – Healey 1999, As 36 and As 37, as pillars, but also the idea of the veneration of baetyls at Ḫarrān. Later, it has been used as an argument to support the idea that late antique Stylites continued traditions of pillar symbolism rooted in local region, see Frankfurter 1990.

[89] Drijvers – Healey 1999, 125–139 As 44–54.

[90] Drijvers 1980, 136–139; Drijvers – Healey 1999, 40.

[91] A late Hellenistic cave sanctuary is located at the Euphrates in Commagene near the village of Damlıca, see Şahin 1991. Another case sanctuary has been discovered in Perrhe, likewise in Commagene, see Blömer – Crowther 2014. Only recently, an underground sanctuary dating to the Assyrian period was found north of Şanlıurfa, see Önal *et al*. 2022.

[92] For the priestly dress in local cults of Syria, see Blömer 2015.

Fig. 24. Sumatar, cave sanctuary (Pognon's cave), view of the rear wall with niche flanked by reliefs of crescent standards (photo: author)

It might well be that the two sanctuaries have been connected but were used for different rituals in the cult of Sîn. Both were constructed in the same period, and the same people are mentioned in the inscriptions. The character of both sites differs considerably. The open-air sanctuary on the hill offered a panoramic view of the surrounding landscape. Most importantly, it allowed the observation of the moon during the night, and we must assume that rituals were performed here in the face of the moon. The cave was located beyond the settlement, too, but in the valley on the opposite side. The secluded underground room evoked a completely different sensory environment, dominated by darkness and isolation. Possibly the goal was to create an artificial nocturnal atmosphere, an eternal night. This duality of religious experience in the cult of Sîn at Sumatar might have been similar at the temple of Ḫarrān. In Libanius' obscure description of the temple, he mentions the good view of the surrounding area from the roof. This could imply that rituals were performed on the roof at night. On the other hand, Libanius speaks of ". . . the secret devices of the ceiling and all the sacred statues made of iron that were hidden in darkness, escaping the sun . . ." inside the temple.[93] The explicit reference to darkness recalls the dark cave of Sumatar.

[93] Lib. *Or*. 30.45. Translation Jones 2013, 860.

The cult of Sîn of Ḫarrān beyond the Carrhae

As has been mentioned above, the cult of Sîn of Ḫarrān had a pronounced international character in the Assyrian and Babylonian period. For the subsequent periods, it is difficult to assess the impact of the cult. However, there are some indications that the cult continued to play a role in the wider region. Not surprising is his veneration at Sumatar. It was under the control of Edessa when the extant monument for the Sîn worship were constructed, but the site is closer to Ḫarrān than to Edessa. In general, it seems safe to assume that Sîn of Ḫarrān was also worshipped in Edessa and the neighbouring cities, even though there is little direct evidence.

A relief with crescent on a globe with two tassels on a pole, which rises from a stepped pedestal attests to the veneration of Sîn of Ḫarrān at Dura Europos (**Fig. 25**).[94] Since the stele has been found in the court of the temple of Atargatis, it has been interpreted as a connected to her cult. Cult standards are indeed common in her cult, and in the well-known relief of Atargatis and Hadad from Dura Europos, a standard topped by a crescent is placed between the gods.[95] The configuration of this standard as well as all other standards associated with Atargatis differ from the standards of Sîn. They have fillets hanging from a crossbar and disks attached to the pole.[96] Since the crescent standard on the stele replicates all details of the standard of Sîn of Ḫarrān, there can be no doubt that this monument was dedicated to him. His veneration at Dura Europos must not surprise, because the city was closely connected to the urban centres of North Mesopotamia, as is witnessed by papyri of Dura and the Middle Euphrates.[97]

The demise of the cult of Sîn at Ḫarrān

A final question, which cannot be discussed in full here, concerns the alleged longevity of the cult of Sîn at Ḫarrān. It is widely believed that the veneration of the moon god and other deities at Ḫarrān continued well into the Islamic period. Like no other city of the Near East, Ḫarrān is perceived as a bastion of pagan religion.[98] This popular belief of the strong pagan resistance at Ḫarrān is fed by two sources. On the one hand, several Christian sources refer to the continued veneration of ancient gods at Ḫarrān.[99] As in all regions of the Near East, Christianity became dominant in Ḫarrān in the middle of the fourth century CE. However, in contrast to Edessa, little information on the early history

[94] Downey 1977, 178 with fig. 178.

[95] Downey 1977, 9–11, no. 2.

[96] Dirven 2005; Blömer 2014, 164–171.

[97] Goldstein 1966 on *P. Dura* 28, which documents the sale of a slave by a woman from Edessa to a man from Ḫarrān.

[98] Green 1992; It is still claimed that most of the population did not convert to Christianity or Islam, see Strohmaier 2011, 305.

[99] For an overview of the sources, see Drijvers 1982; Green 1992, 51–64.

Fig. 25. Stele with crescent standard from the temple of Atargatis, Dura Europos, Dura Europos Archive, Yale University, Negative number dura-c8~01 (courtesy of Yale University)

of the Christian community at Ḫarrān exists.[100] At the council of Nicaea, Ḫarrān was not represented, but a bishop of Ḫarrān became Metropolitan of Edessa in 361.[101] For the year 363, Ammianus Marcellinus reports that Emperor Julian visited Ḫarrān and offered sacrifices to the moon god according to local customs.[102] This implies that in contrast to some other major sanctuaries of North Syria and North Mesopotamia, the cult of Sîn was still up and running at that time. When Egeria visited Ḫarrān in 383 CE, she met the Christian bishop and mentions two churches, one inside the city and one outside, where the house

[100] The *Acta Archaelai*, written in the first half of the fourth century, convey the image of strong Christian presence at Ḫarrān in the 270s CE and mention a bishop, but this has been dismissed as fictional based on the presupposition that the city was still mostly pagan a century later, see Lieu 1999, 140–146; Scopello 2019.

[101] *Chronicle of Edessa*, §24.

[102] Amm. Marc. 23.3.2. In the fifth century CE, Theodoret of Cyrrhus claims that this included a human sacrifice, see Theod. *Hist. Eccl*. 3.26.2–3. Ḫarrān is frequently mentioned in the Julian Romance, a fifth or sixth century story about the last pagan emperor. The city is portrayed as the mother of paganism and contrasted with the Christian city of Edessa, which is clearly Edessan propaganda.

of Abraham was believed to have stood.[103] She also mentions festivities for martyrs on the following day, which attracted many monks from the surrounding regions, and pilgrimage sites in the vicinity of the city. In a surprising twist, Egeria states that there was hardly any Christians living in the city. In the light of her previous remarks, this is certainly an exaggeration.[104] Soon after Egeria's visit, the temple of Sîn was demolished, as can be inferred from Libanius' speech *Pro Templis* mentioned above. A *terminus ante quem* is 385–387 CE, the time in which Libanius wrote his speech.[105] This violent act could indeed be interpreted as a response to pagan resistance at Ḫarrān, but it is also in line with contemporary efforts to remove landmarks associated with the pagan past from urban landscapes. Christian writers of the fifth and sixth century CE continue to refer to the city as a hotbed of paganism. Their accounts contain some knowledge of the pagan pantheon and local ancient myths, indeed, but it is rudimentary and corrupted.[106] In some accounts, like the Fall of the Idols of Jacob of Sarug, (451–521 CE), it remains unclear to what extent the gods mentioned were still considered to be widely popular, because not only Ḫarrān, but also Antioch, Hierapolis and Edessa are mentioned.[107] That paganism was still strong in the latter cities in the later fifth century CE is hard to believe.

In general, the strong bias towards Ḫarrān in many writings might reflect the rivalry between Edessa and Ḫarrān. Ephrem Syrus and the authors of the Doctrina Addai and the Julian Romance, a fictional and polemical account of Emperor Julian, wrote at Edessa in the fifth century, and they used the allegation that Ḫarrān was not a Christian city as a powerful tool to disparage the city and contrast it to Edessa.[108] It might well be that their accusations, apparently based on events in the time of Julian, stuck with Ḫarrān and were later reiterated by authors like Procopius, who claims that the city adhered to the "old faith" at the time of Justinian.[109]

It is also noteworthy that written sources and archaeological evidence are not in accordance on this matter. The general scarcity of archaeological evidence from Ḫarrān has been mentioned already, but remains of an Early Christian Basilica are still visible on the ground in the north of the city.[110] Moreover, recent finds of Christian inscriptions from the Early Byzantine period reveal the existence of further churches and point to the

[103] *Itinerarium Egeriae* 20–21.

[104] The inconsistency of Egeria's report is frequently glossed over, and only her remarks about the pagan dominance is quotes, see Green 1992, 55.

[105] On the date of the speech, see Petit 1951; Nesselrath 2011, 33–37.

[106] In the Syriac Cave of Treasures, written in the sixth century CE, rudimentary memories of the local deities have been integrated in the account of Ḫarrān at the time of Abraham, see Toepel 2019. However, rather than supporting the vitality of paganism, these euhemeristic stories show how the ancient deities have become figures of the past in Christian folklore. Isaac of Antioch present the sun god as the main god of Ḫarrān, see Isaac of Antioch, *Homiliae* XI.51–62; 99–102; 159 (ed. G. Bickell; trans. Drijvers 1980, 158). This clearly reflects the rise of the sun god to the helm of the late Antique pagan pantheon but is difficult to reconcile with the religious life of Ḫarrān. It is noteworthy that Sîn and Ḫarrān are absent in enumeration of pagan gods of Syria and Mesopotamia in the Apology of Pseudo-Meliton, where only Edessa and Hierapolis are mentioned, see Lightfoot 2009.

[107] Landersdorfer 1912, 408–409.

[108] Drijvers 2011, 290–291.

[109] Procopius, *De bellis* 2.13.

[110] Lloyd – Brice 1951, 106–108; Keser Kayaalp 2021, 25–26. She also refers to mentions of two monasteries immediately outside the city.

coexistence of different Christian denominations.[111] This evidence for Christian worship is hard to reconcile with the narrative of a predominantly pagan population. It would also be very difficult to understand why the Roman administration of Mesopotamia would have tolerated that the inhabitants of one of the main bulwarks against the Persians were not Christians and thus potentially unreliable. While it would be unwise to reject the claims made by these authors entirely, it must be asked to what extent the accounts of a pagan survival at Ḫarrān are topical, hyperbolic, and exacerbated by negative sentiments towards Ḫarrān among writer from Edessa rather than painting an accurate picture of the religious life of the city in the early Byzantine period.

The second reason why Ḫarrān is deemed a stronghold of paganism is the appearance of the Sabians of Ḫarrān in Islamic sources.[112] There can be little doubt that by the tenth century CE, people whose belief systems deviated from Christian and Islamic religion were present at Ḫarrān, but it seems farfetched to regard them as practitioners of the cult of Sîn and other ancient deities of the local pantheon. The sources rather point to a highly complex and hybrid amalgamation of beliefs inspired by ancient philosophical thinking.[113] This is certainly captivating and requires further investigation, but one wonders to what extent the fascination with the mysterious and extraordinary has misled scholars to exaggerate the notion of pagan survival.

Conclusion

The sanctuary of Sîn at Ḫarrān was of supra-regional importance in the Iron Age. It continued to be a significant religious centre in the Partho-Roman period but has attracted little attention in modern scholarship. Few details about religious life of the city at that time have survived, but a quick survey of the source material allows to draw some conclusions. It is obvious that some of the characteristics of the Iron Age cult continued in the Roman period. Most important in this regard is the predominance of aniconic symbolism. The crescent standard remained the main representation of the god and the main subject of veneration. The transmission of the symbol over several hundred years is fascinating and fits in the wider picture of continuity of local religion in the Near East between the Iron Age and the Roman period.[114] Evidence for the cult of Sîn at Ḫarrān is largely missing for the period between the demise of the Babylonian Empire and the second century CE, but this long gap does not imply discontinuity. The cult evolved and adapted to new trends and fashions, but some key elements and rituals were transmitted through time.

In view of the lack of archaeological evidence for the cult of Sîn at Ḫarrān, the iconography of coins minted at the city in the second and third centuries CE constitute an

[111] Healey *et al*. 2021.

[112] On the Sabians of Ḫarrān in general, see Chwolsohn 1856; Green 1992; Strohmaier 2011; Mattila 2021.

[113] Tardieu 1986 has proposed that the ideas had been conceived of by the philosophers, who left Athens when the Academy was closed, went to Ḫarrān, and established a Platonic school of teaching among the pagan population of the city. This idea was refuted with good arguments by Fox 2005. See also Mattila 2021.

[114] Bunnens 2015; Blömer 2017. At Edessa, the ancient symbol of Nergal resurfaced on coins of Elagabal, see Dandrow 2021.

important source for the study of Sîn in the Roman period. The coin images underline the importance of aniconic astral symbolism and the role of the cult standards at Ḫarrān. An object, which rare coins show as the main cult image in the temple of Sîn, has been interpreted as a baetyl, but it should be considered a crescent standard, too. Evidence for the veneration of a baetyl in the cult is absent and the notion that Sîn was venerated in the form of a baetyl should therefore be dismissed.

In addition to the aniconic representations of Sîn, two versions of an anthropomorphic image of the god can be traced in the coinage of Ḫarrān. The first shows him as an enthroned mature man. It is based on the model of Zeus, but his attributes identify the god as Sîn. The second version portrays him as a youthful, beardless god. The co-existence of these conflicting image types illustrates the difficulty to integrate the god in the framework of Graeco-Roman divine iconography. As the supreme god of Ḫarrān, as the lord of the gods, he was assimilated to Zeus, but as an astral deity his correlate was a youthful figure. A male moon god at the top of the pantheon was inconsistent with Greek and Roman perceptions of divine hierarchy and created an uncertainty, which also reverberates in the gender-switching assimilation of Sîn to Selene by Roman authors. However, these issues will not have had an impact on the lived religion at Ḫarrān and the wider region, where people easily merged local traditions with Graeco-Roman influences. Therefore, the cult of Sîn at Ḫarrān attests to the vigour of local Mesopotamian religion in the Partho-Roman period. The strong continuity of Iron Age systems of belief also raises the question about the settlement of Macedonians at Ḫarrān in the early Hellenistic period. If they came there indeed in substantial numbers, their impact on the religious life of the city appears to have been marginal.

Another conclusion is that the survival of the cult of Sîn and other gods in the Christian period should be considered more cautiously. The picture of Ḫarrān as a pagan stronghold in the Early Byzantine period seems to be fictional. It is based on misleading remarks of late antique writers and fuelled by the allure of portraying the enigmatic Sabians of medieval Ḫarrān as worshippers of Sîn and the last pagans. It cannot be excluded that some people of Ḫarrān were more stubborn in their allegiance to pagan gods than citizens of other cities of the region in Late Antiquity, but it seems very likely that Ḫarrān was a predominantly Christian city at the time of the Arab conquest, just like Edessa and Amida.

In general, it is to be hoped that the ongoing archaeological excavations at Ḫarrān, but also at Sumatar and other places of Turkish North Mesopotamia will reveal new information on the cult of Sîn. Another important contribution to a better understanding of the cult would be a thorough and comprehensive study of the coins of Ḫarrān.

ABBREVIATIONS

BMC Mesopotamia – G. F. Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia* (A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum), London 1922.

RPC IV.3 – *Roman Provincial Coinage*, vol. IV.3, From Antoninus Pius to Commodus (AD 138–192): Lycia-Pamphylia to Arabia (https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/).

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