

THE RULES OF THE HOUSE (OF GODS) ADMINISTRATIVE AND RITUAL NORMS OF THE PALMYRENE TEMPLES¹

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Abstract

The epigraphic record from Palmyra brings light on the organization of the temples: personnel, management of feasts, economy and on the ritual practices towards certain deities like Allat and Shai ‘al-Qaum. These texts were previously called in the research literature “sacred laws” and what the scholarly debate nowadays labels with the term “ritual norms.” The aim of this paper, divided on the temple economy and personnel, and ritual behavior, is to understand through the scraps of information the administration of the Palmyrene temples and processes which shaped the life in the places of worship.

Keywords: administration, temples, cultic personnel, rituals, norms, Palmyra, Roman Near East, Aramaic.

Introduction

Religious practices concerning a deity were a mean of communication with the divine and as every interaction, especially hierarchical and unequal one, they belonged to a defined protocol.² They were a subject of certain rules according to the character of the worshipped god or goddess, time of the year, traditions and culture, term of purity and

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² Religion as a mean of communication is a theory by J. Rüpke. See Rüpke 2009, 31–41; Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 12.

related taboos. There were different regulations concerning food, ritual cleanness, clothing, having a beard or shaved head, etc.³ Some of the inscriptions contain recommendations on the procedures of ritual performance and practices. Such instructions facilitated the contact with the divine and suitability of rituals. The correctness and precision in the domain of cult were a warranty of success in being listened favorably by a deity.

Beside the cultic rules, existed also administrative norms concerning management of a temple life: providing supplies, taking care about constructions, renovations, donations of money, precisions about the priestly office, regulations in using the land or donation of precious objects, etc. These are all the elements necessary from the non-divine facet of temples which keep the sacred institution running.

The temple organization, both from the ritual and from the administrative and economic aspect, is still a blank page in the research on the religious practices Graeco-Roman East.⁴ The non-divine factors—economic and personnel—stay underexplored, mostly because of scarcity of sources for this region in the period of the *Haut Empire* (1st–3rd century CE). Such questions as: what the worshippers are allowed to do, bring or say to the deities, who are the ritual agents and temple personnel serving at the house of the gods and last, but not least what do we know about income and upkeep of the temples and their staff?, are still lacking their answers. The studies on the Palmyrene religions focused rather on the gods and archaeology of the temples, but when it concerned people, scholars concentrated on the iconography of priests and on the genealogical ties of the inhabitants of the Syrian city mentioned in the numerous epigraphic sources.⁵ The question of the sacral roles and number of Tadmorean temple workforces is remaining though. Ted Kaizer in his study of the religious life in Palmyra gathered few Palmyrene Aramaic inscriptions, which he called after Milik “sacred laws” from Palmyra.⁶ Maybe a “**full and complete** understanding of the so-called ‘sacred laws’ from Palmyra is beyond our reach,”⁷ however, the intention of this paper is to try here to shed some more light on the religious life within the Palmyrene sanctuaries. As first we take on focus temple decrees, made in stone by the high officials of the temples, to inform about certain duties and their execution in the Palmyrene sanctuaries. As second part of this paper, we look at two inscriptions specifying a kind of sacrifices suitable for such deities as Allat and Shai ‘al-Qaum.

³ Epigraphic evidence concerning Palmyra and Dura-Europos bring examples of divine barbers: RTP 680: association of barbers of Bel and in Dura Europos a man called Barates, a barber of the Palmyrene gods and another one of the god Nabu. See Yon 2007–2009, 92–93.

⁴ One of the first attempts were made by J.T. Milik in his monograph (Milik 1972, 282–322). Recently for the region of the Hauran see Mazzilli 2018. For Palmyra, see Kubiak-Schneider 2022; Kubiak-Schneider 2023, 37–44; Andrade – Raja 2023.

⁵ Milik 1972; Piersimoni 1995; Yon 2002; Raja 2016.

⁶ Kaizer 2002, 167–177. He was already then convinced about the inaccuracy of the term “sacred law” (*lex sacra*) which was commonly used to describe a particular group of Greek inscriptions containing some sort of regulations concerning e.g. sacrificing process and purification, see Sokolowski 1955; 1962. The nowadays scholarship prefers the term “ritual norms”, see <http://cgrn.ulg.ac.be> (website of the project Collection of the Greek Ritual Norms by the University of Liège, 25.04.2022); Carbon – Pirenne-Delforge 2013; Parker 2004. Concerning the texts of so-called sacred laws at Palmyra, the author of this paper will neither provide a new transliteration nor translation of the inscriptions, but only some extracts, because of the very fragmentary state of preservation and complex problem of the vocabulary. The Palmyrene texts mentioned here are quoted according to PAT (= Palmyrene Aramaic Texts) the most recent corpus of the Palmyrene Aramaic inscriptions.

⁷ Kaizer 2002, 177.

In addition, numerous tesserae, small clay tokens of different functions (administrative,⁸ labelling, identifying, voting, etc.), serve as an illustration of the regulations in life. The goal is to present here the organization of the religious practices and management of the cultic places in Palmyra in the 1st century CE. The present paper aims to provide a very new glimpse on the issue which was never profoundly studied, when it concerns Palmyrenes and their cultic practices. It will permit to look at the sanctuaries through the prism of temple personnel, economic, administrative and ritual organization.

Temple life—personnel and economy

Management of the cultic life within a sanctuary consisted of regular provisions, supplies of stuff for the temple and fulfilling the services of different branches of other ritual actors. The temple personnel needed instructions regulating the process of selection of priests, the course of important festivals and gatherings. The fragmentarily preserved inscription PAT 0991 probably from the first half of the 1st century CE concerns priests of Belastor and Baalshamin. We do not know if Belastor had his own cultic place or he was *synnaos* (co-habiting) with other Palmyrene deities.⁹ However, it is sure, according to the inscription, that he had his own ritual operators. According to this inscription, the process of choosing the ritual operators (particularly the headmasters of cultic celebrations: *rb mrzḥ* /*symposiarchos*, **Fig. 1**) was composed by two steps: voting and making an oath in front of a deity. Sometimes a deity was involved in such a procedure of appointing a high temple official, as it is in the case of the inscription PAT 1919: [*b*] *rbnwt* 'yn' *dy bwlh* ' . . . *dy* 'hd *yrḥbwl* 'lh' (during the office of a headmaster of the source, Bolha, . . . , whom chose Yarhibol, the god). Here that was the god Yarhibol who decided, maybe through an oracular activity,¹⁰ about a designation of a function of *epimeletes* as it is stated in Greek or *rb* 'yn', the chief of the (saint) source in Aramaic, the one who was taking care about the temple from its economic aspect.¹¹ He was responsible for maintenance of the temple, e.g. to provide funds and to supervise constructions, reparations and to manage the temple treasury.¹² Earlier than Palmyrene sources, the written sources from the Ptolemaic

⁸ Formerly they were considered as entry tickets for cultic banquets. This theory is maintained currently by some scholars (see e.g. Gnoli 2016; Raja 2015; 2020). The analogies show rather their administrative role, by e.g. presence of the stamps. The Palmyrene tesserae could be also used as documents of some accountant practices, through the comparative material from Tyre from the Hellenistic times (3rd century BCE). See Amadasi Guzzo 1999, 43. There are also lead tesserae from Rome and Egypt which are connected to the taxation. See Mitchiner 1984, 96.

⁹ Beside this inscription, the name of this particular deity is attested on 4 tesserae (RTP 125, 126, 127 and 211). PAT 2749 mentions that the god was honored with a portico in the temple of Bel by the Bene Mita (text from the mid-1st century CE).

¹⁰ In the ancient Mesopotamian temples that was a diviner who pointed out from the given list the chosen ones. This practice was still followed in the Seleucid times in Uruk. See Jursa – Hackl 2010, 155–157; Klinger 2003–2005, 622.

¹¹ See Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 78.

¹² Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 78. These tasks were not limited only to Palmyra. Epigraphic sources like IGLS 11.22 and 46 from Lebanese villages attest the same duties of an *epimeletes* serving in the local temples.

Egypt attest the *epimeletai* as financial officials connected to the civil administration.¹³ However, the Aramaic title *rb ʾyn*, the chief of the source, as it was a domain of the god Yarhibol, can combine both spheres: cultic and organizational. A chief of the source could probably be a highest temple profession at the “sacred source.” That would explain why the god himself was involved in the process of nominating the official.



Fig. 1. Image of a *symposiarchos* on a tessera. ©J.-B. Yon

The process of choosing or appointing of a ritual actor appears also in other Palmyrene texts. The text PAT 1981, dated on the first half of the 1st century CE¹⁴ and found in the Diocletian Camp in the colonnade leading to the so-called Temple of Standards (Fig. 2),¹⁵ mentions a group called *ʾhydy*, translated by Kaizer as “office-holders” deriving from the Aramaic verb *ʾhd*, “to choose.”¹⁶ It is possible to translate this term as “the chosen (ones).”¹⁷ The title of office-holders is in the case of the three texts quoted

¹³ Clarysse 2013: <https://www.trismegistos.org/arch/archives/pdf/361.pdf> (27.05.2022).

¹⁴ It is not surprising that both texts (PAT 0991 and 1981) of similar function are dated on the 1st century CE. It is a period when the major temples of Palmyra are built. It can be connected to the change of publishing information on the legal issues (also concerning tombs and receiving public honors) and use of stone as a medium for texts.

¹⁵ This text can be attributed either to the temple of Allat or to the temple of Shamash, which were in the vicinity.

¹⁶ Kaizer 2002, 171. Milik 1972, 286 proposed the translation: “liturge.”

¹⁷ DNWSI v. *ʾhz*; <https://cal.huc.edu> (20.05.2022): charged with an office. This term appears in the Palmyrene inscriptions in the context of the temple norms: PAT 1981, 2774, 2775 and 1521. It can be translated also “the chosen one” what point out as well the selection process of the temple personnel.

by Kaizer is connected with giving or paying a pledge or making a financial security (*mškn* derived from Akkadian *maškanu*¹⁸). One may ask: the chosen for what? For which kind of an office? For a ritual operator, some kind of a priest? For an administrative office? In my opinion, the Aramaic term ^h*hydy*² can be connected to be in charge of a cultic function. It can be that this word determines the collectivity of the ritual agents who served in a temple without a specification on the particular functions. Other possibility is that the ones who were named in the inscriptions “the chosen ones” could be related as the ones who could get into the cella of the god. Knowing from the Mesopotamian sources from the pre- and Hellenistic periods and treating religious practices in the polytheistic *milieus* of the Near East through the lens of *longue durée*, there were many priestly professions: temple enterers, diviners, exorcists, sacrificers, etc.¹⁹ The sacred professions neither fall into oblivion during the reign of Achaemenids nor under the Seleucids.²⁰ There is no doubt that in Palmyra was not different. The usual term for a priest in the Palmyrene Aramaic is *kmr*’, but beside it the tesserae and inscriptions attest other offices related to the ritual service.²¹ The selection process of a priest or other cult specialist was strict. It was based on the genealogical and purity criteria. First of all, the candidate for a ritual agent in a temple had to have ties with the families, especially he had to be a descendant of an initiated father or other male member of the family.²² What is more, the candidate and his family had to have in their possession a special document (called prebend) entitling him or their offspring to be appointed to the temple service.²³ That is why many tesserae point out the names of the families who were related to different deities.²⁴ The family Bene Ate‘aqab mentioned in the PAT 0991 was exactly such a family.

Second, but not less important, criterium was the physical condition, here described as “purity.” The candidate could not have any handicap or marks on his body, his head had to be shaved. Palmyrene priests fall well under this description. The numerous iconographic representations show the members of the local clergy without beard and with clean shaved head wearing a priestly hat.²⁵

¹⁸ CAD, s.v. *maškanu*, DNWSI, s.v. *mškn*.

¹⁹ Löhnert 2007, 274–276.

²⁰ Krul 2018, 104; Corò 2005.

²¹ Like *mashmashu* incantation priest (RTP 304, see Kubiak-Schneider 2022, 84.), *afkal*—the wise (PAT 0410, 0411, etc. see Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 77–79), *asu*, medical exorcist (PAT 1558, see also Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 81–82). See also Aliquot – Yon 2018, 204–205. These titles at all, and so maybe other cultic professions, demonstrate a linguistic tie to the Akkadian vocabulary designing similar temple offices. In my opinion the reference of the religious vocabulary of Roman Palmyra to the Akkadian religious vocabulary can influence significantly our understanding of religious processes, practices and structures in the temples of Palmyra between 1st cent. BCE – 3rd cent. CE. There is a continuation of religious traditions and of a specific language reflected in the Palmyrene epigraphy. For this see Kubiak-Schneider 2021 and Kubiak 2016.

²² For Palmyrene priests see Kaizer 2002, 240–242; Raja 2016, 128. Priesthood as hereditary profession is also in Mesopotamia, see Jursa 2010, 155–156.

²³ Jursa 2010, 155–156; Kubiak-Schneider 2022, 84–85.

²⁴ RTP 95 mentions *bny ydy’bl*, RTP 99: *bny ’grwd*.

²⁵ Raja 2016, 129; Aliquot – Yon 2018, 207–208. There are also representations of the priests of emperors’ cult wearing a wreath, having hair and beard, see Wielgosz 1997, 69–77.



Fig. 2. Temple of Standards seen through the temple of Allat. ©A. Kubiak-Schneider

After selection and voting, the new priest was anointed, most probably with a scented oil. The inscription PAT 1981 mentions a mysterious place called “house of oil:” *byt mšh*²⁶. The explanation by M. Gawlikowski as a place for the ceremony of anointment seems accurate here, especially when it is connected to the deity named in the two Palmyrene tesserae *gd mšh*²⁷, the Protector (Gadde) of the anointment.²⁶

The text PAT 0991 states that temple officials as headmasters of a cultic association called *marzeḥa* were appointed mostly for a year: *dy hymn bšth* (who is entrusted for a year term)²⁷ and were chosen from the members. They presided the *maqlutu* offering (i.e. burnt-offering) what was on their charge.

Lines 3–6: *ʔnš mnhwn ywmʔ dy yhwn sm[kyʔ ___ gbrʔ dy]*
mrzḥʔ dy yhʔ bršhwn lmql[wt ʔ ___]
ʔlʔ gbr dy yhwʔ ʔhyd brš[hwn ___]
*s(lʔn) 3 šry ldhb ...*²⁸

Translation: Someone amongst them, the days on which there will be banquets ___ the member of the *marzeḥa*²⁹ who will be at their head for the burnt-offering ___ but a man who will be cho-

²⁶ Gawlikowski 1973, 117; Kaizer 2002, 171.

²⁷ PAT 0991, l.10. It seems that an annual rhythm of appointing the priests and yearly rotation of the ritual personnel was a common procedure in the Near East. See Klinger 2003–2005. Beside the priests, or rather ritual officials, who were appointed in the annual scheme, there were also people assigned for short terms: month or just for a particular festival. See Corò Capitanio 2004, 257.

²⁸ For the text see Kaizer 2002, 168–169.

²⁹ For this term in the present vocalization see Gawlikowski 2022. I left this term without translation being aware of a big debate on its meaning in the scholarly literature (e.g. recently Gnoli 2016). See also: <http://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/honorary-statue-erected-by-the-civic-council-for-zebida-117-ce/> (24.05.2022).

sen at their head (or granted an office of their head) _ _ _ 3 Tyrean selas in gold . . . (translation: A. Kubiak-Schneider).

The sum of 3 Tyrean selas (or shekels?) in gold is difficult to understand: either it is an amount the chosen one has to pay to the temple in behalf of the organized cultic meal or it is his share for him for presidency.

When the assigned person does not meet the written regulations or violates otherwise the rules of the house of the gods (e.g. by stealing) then he needs to pay fines (*hty*—literally a sin offering or a sin recompense).³⁰ The fines are also mentioned in the other texts of this sort: PAT 1981³¹ and PAT 2774, 2775 and 1521³², also dated on the 1st century CE or even earlier as it concerns the latter. The fines are only a financial penalty, they do not contain any threat of the divine punishment. It was an assurance for the temple in case of a disloyal servant for protecting the temple incomes. In this case, the fines were paid to the temple treasury securing the financial reserves. The material charges (paid in money or precious metals, or in goods) in case of default refer rather to the sphere of the temple administration (i.e. all what concerned the organization of the temple as an institution) and that is how they are accounted for. It does not belong to the ritual domain (i.e. all what concerned directly the deity) and not from the ritual and sacred aspect, which would be rather severely punished than only by payment.³³ It is completely different situation than in Hatra, where it seems that the regulations were much more harsh. A member of the temple staff (e.g. a female musician and a female singer) who escaped the duty of service for the cultic place was sentenced to death by the deity.³⁴ Or if someone was caught for stealing tools, like axe, shovel, ladder, but also tents from the construction of the temple of Barmaren had to die by stoning. The sentence was pronounced by the deity through the dream interpreter (*hlm*?).³⁵ That can be explained that these particular instruments were a direct property of the god, unlike the Palmyrene temple funds which did not have a sacred dimension.

Except the sacrifices and daily activities concerning the deity (clothing, washing, feeding), charged of ritual offices were among others responsible of providing food to the temple and of its distribution. The collated text PAT 2774 and 2775 mentions meat, bread, oil and wine. They were essential supplies for the temple economy. This inscription emphasizes that this was just (i.e. according to the law) to bring them to the house of the gods (i.e. temple of Bel) and to the “enclosed space of the god Yarhibol” (*lmh dy*

³⁰ The issue of the fines is present in the texts PAT 0991, 1981 and most probably, despite it is not preserved at the collated text PAT 2774, 2775 and 1521.

³¹ See also Milik 1972, 300–302.

³² T. Kaizer is treating these 3 fragments as they would be of the same text after Gawlikowski 1973, 56–58. See Kaizer 2002, 172–174.

³³ Curses calling upon the divine justice are not really well attested in Palmyra. However, in Assur or in Hatra (nowadays Iraq) there are texts like A 11b which is a building inscription in Parthian Aramaic and attests a cultic association called the “wanderers.” According to the text the divine punishment would come upon someone who forgets about them and their foundation of the building material of the temple. H 30 which calls upon high deities in case of a murder of a person for making divine revenge. What is interesting, on the same level for the Hatreans is to step in a shoe in a temple, see below (H 29). Hatrene and Assur inscriptions are quoted after Beyer 1998.

³⁴ H 342.

³⁵ H 281 from 2nd or 3rd century CE.

kšr yhbw lbt ʔ[lyhʔ __ __] | wldwrʔ dy yrhbwl ʔ[hʔ __ __]). The expression *lmh dy kšr* legally validates the fact of bringing supplies for the temples by the temple personnel.³⁶ Food was counting as an income, both for the staff and for the gods. This practice is reflected on the numerous tesserae which refer to the food provisions and rations. Some short texts accompanying the small tokens from Palmyra contain the Aramaic *mkl* (sometimes shortened to simple “*mim*”) which mean: “expanded goods,” “food” or “bread” and quantity of provisions.³⁷ The portions are represented under the images of jugs and ladles on the Palmyrene tesserae. Some tesserae mention giving in possession a bull or a ram to a god (**Fig. 3**).³⁸ It is not clear if these animals were sacrificed by slaughtering and burning on the altar or if they lived freely in the temple area.



Fig. 3. Tessera. ©J.-B. Yon

It is important to explain here that each of these inscriptions referred to a particular place of worship and temple community. None of them can be taken as the universal

³⁶ The verb *kšr* is used in the legal context concerning the Tariff of Palmyra (PAT 0259).

³⁷ RTP 569–591, 689–708, see Kubiak-Schneider 2022, 82–83.

³⁸ RTP 630 (two sheep).

and general administrative regulation for all the temples in Palmyra. Furthermore, as A. Grand-Clément pointed reasonably out, the inscriptions under the technical term “*leges sacrae*” contain only partial information and cannot be treated as general prescriptions for all cultic places.³⁹

Instructions of ritual behavior

The food deliveries were a foremost component of sacrifices, which constituted daily nourishment for the gods. None of the texts mentioned above in this paper provides details how to perform the rituals. These are only regulations of the management of the temple from the economic aspect. In the matter of fact, we do not have any large epigraphic evidence concerning ritual norms in the Roman and Parthian East.

However, two Aramaic inscriptions PAT 1122 and PAT 0319 contain a short notice on the matter of ritual performance. The first text is written on the orthostat shaped in the form of a monumental lion protecting an oryx antelope (**Fig. 4**), which was placed at the wall, most probably at the entrance to the temple of Allat in Palmyra.⁴⁰ The 3-lined inscription makes public that the spilling blood in the sacred precinct is not well seen by the goddess (**Fig. 5**). Bloody sacrifices must have been performed outside of the *temenos* and, perhaps, a cooked, dried and without any trace of blood meat was then offered to the goddess. Or maybe she did not receive any meat offering? It is however less likely. We can also exclude the herds of animals living at the sacred precinct, because the temple of Allat was very small in comparison to other temples in the city.⁴¹ However, what is convincing, it is the connection postulated by Drijvers to the northern and central Arabic concept of *hima*, which was a sort of a natural park for the animals where a hunt and killing of the animals was prohibited. There were living oryxes, gazelles, but also domesticated animals like camels and sheep.⁴² The image of the lion and the oryx between the paws refers visually to this ritual norm: a predatory animal is guarding his natural prey and keeping it alive.⁴³ This is also an allusion to the protective and wild character of the goddess.⁴⁴

³⁹ Grand-Clément 2017, 50. She points out oral transfer of religious knowledge in the ancient Greek context. However, we can add to this also existence of cultic archives, which stored texts written on the perishable materials, which could have been sealed. Many of the Palmyrene tesserae bear a stamp seal, which could have been attached to the documents. This theory needs further studies. For the first attempts see Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 85–86.

⁴⁰ Gawlikowski 2017, 95.

⁴¹ Lightfoot 2003, 476 when it concerns the temple of Atargatis and also temples of other goddesses. For the temple of Allat in Palmyra see Gawlikowski 2017.

⁴² Henninger 1981, 257–258.

⁴³ Gawlikowski 2017, 98.

⁴⁴ Epigraphic material, mostly from the Northern Arabic side, shows Allat as a protective goddess who is called for security upon during the caravan expeditions or pasturage. See <http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd/ociana> (25.05.2022).



Fig. 4. Lion of Allat. ©A. Kubiak-Schneider

As the cult of Allat had its place in the Palmyrene religious landscape, having own sanctuary, the other god, named Shai ‘al-Qaum was a divine foreigner in Tadmor. The inscription PAT 0319, a dedication by a Nabatean soldier to the god of his cultural attachment was made in Palmyrene style (the script of the inscription and calling the deity “good and rewarding”⁴⁵). The text contains an explanation that the deity does not drink wine (or rather fermented drinks): *lšy^š?lqwm ?lh? ?b? wškr^š dy l?| št^š ħmr*. It is a ritual restriction for those who read the text and want to honor the deity that Shai ‘al-Qaum should not receive a fermented, i.e. alcoholic offering. Going further, if the deity does not drink wine, so possibly his cultic experts do the same.

The wording of these two Palmyrene texts is striking. None of them states explicitly that an activity is strongly prohibited. The one concerning the goddess Allat formulates positively that the non-bloody offering will be prized by the goddess. The second one to

⁴⁵ Kubiak 2013, 231.

the Nabatean deity makes clear that the deity has different preferences than wine. At all the expression that a god does not drink wine (*lʾ štʾ ḥmr*) puts in the picture a daily practice of feeding and giving beverages to the deities in the temple. It is a clear indicator of the perception of the gods by the society: who had similar “biological” needs as human beings (eating, drinking, sleeping, clothing, celebrating, etc.) resulting from a religious concept of a divine body, image and will in the polytheistic religions.



Fig. 5. Inscription on the paw of Allat's lion. ©A. Kubiak-Schneider

Outside of Palmyra, among such norms of ritual behavior (sort of ritual *savoir-vivre* or *faire*) we find in the Near East among others an interdiction of eating or sacrificing fish in Hierapolis Bambyke at the cult of Atargatis and Hatrene instruction to be bare-foot in a temple.⁴⁶

Such regulations were important mark of diversification of cultic places and permitted the adaptation of the ritual behavior and actions according to the different traditions.⁴⁷

Conclusion and perspective

All the mentioned texts, equally the administrative instructions and ritual regulations, are giving an insight into the early stage of the management of the Palmyrene temples by

⁴⁶ Lightfoot 2003, 11, 511; Beyer 1998: H29; Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 104.

⁴⁷ Grand-Clément 2017, 52–53.

their attribution to the 1st century CE (or earlier, concerning the collated text PAT 2774, 2775 and 1521). There are no similar texts from later times from Palmyra, what can be simply a hazard of findings (Palmyra remains in about 70% not excavated). I would not search here any sudden change in the religious practices, but rather development of epigraphic expression and publication “updates” in stone as an official medium. The sacred places, but definitely not new in the urban landscape of Palmyra, underwent modernization and rebuilding in stone, following the current trends. Also, one of such trends was publishing norms in stone. We should be aware that there were, most likely, much more such inscriptions containing temple regulations. The transfer of the official documents from the archive of texts on perishable material to the stone was a guarantee first of a fast reference, second of a public and long-lasting access. It was certainly helpful at any controversy and dispute.⁴⁸

To summarize briefly, this study shows the organization of the religious life within a temple. These texts explain duties of the office-holders, ritual specialists and other members of the temple personnel and make clear what happens when someone does not follow the regulations. The texts make emphasis on the choosing of the cultic personnel through voting and, probably, some divinatory action involving sometimes deities. The temple community was much more complex and *kmry'*, the priests, were only a part of a bigger corporation, i.e. temple. The texts together with the images on tesserae point out the importance of food sharing, understood as an income of the temple and of the personnel. Even though the texts are preserved in fragments, they attest an important, organizational aspect of cultic life. The presented above evidence explicitly refers to the religious life showing the Palmyrene places of worship from the organizational aspect, which permits to understand them from the human input.

This paper adds another brick for understanding how the Near Eastern temples functioned from the economic, administrative and ritual sides in the post-Hellenistic times, a topic which still needs exploration and scientific courage of looking beyond the state of preservation of documents. The scraps, which we dispose of, are enough to create a colorful mosaic with connecting elements even from the chronologically and geographically distant areas.

ABBREVIATIONS

CAD – L. Oppenheim *et al.* (eds.), *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 10: M, Chicago 1977.

DNWSI – J. Hoftijzer, K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, 2 vols., Leiden 1995.

IGLS – J. Aliquot, *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie*, vol. 11: *Mount Hermon*, Beyrouth 2008.

PAT – E. Cussini, D. R. Hillers, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, Baltimore 1996.

RTP – H. Ingholt, H. Seyrig, J. Starcky, A. Caquot, *Recueil des Tessères de Palmyre*, Paris 1955.

⁴⁸ We know about controversies at Palmyra concerning tax laws. They were the reason why the famous Tariff of Palmyra was published in stone with old law sections and set in a quite central place as a reference.

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