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EDITED BY
MICHAŁ GAWLIKOWSKI



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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i>
AAAS	<i>Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes</i>
AE	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i>
AM	<i>Athenische Mitteilungen – Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der antiken Welt</i>
ArchCl	<i>Archeologia Classica</i>
AS	<i>Antiquités syriennes</i>
BAR	<i>British Archaeological Reports</i>
BEtO	<i>Bulletin d'études orientales</i>
BGU	<i>Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen [Staatlichen] Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden</i>
BjB	<i>Bonner Jahrbücher</i>
BMC Arabia	<i>Coins in the British Museum. Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia</i>
BMC Parthia	<i>Coins in the British Museum. Parthia</i>
BMusBeyr	<i>Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth</i>
BSAA	<i>Bulletin de la Société archéologique d'Alexandrie</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CIS	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i>
CRAI	<i>Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</i>
DaM	<i>Damaszener Mitteilungen</i>
DHA	<i>Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne</i>
EtTrav	<i>Etudes et Travaux</i>
FGrH	<i>Fragmente Griechischer Historiker</i>
HR	<i>Cassius Dio, Historia Romana</i>
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae, Berlin</i>
IGLS	<i>Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie</i>
IGR	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes</i>
ILS	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>
Inv.	<i>Inventaire des inscriptions de Palmyre</i>
JGS	<i>Journal of Glass Studies</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i>
MEFRA	<i>Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome</i>
MUSJ	<i>Mélanges de l'Université St. Joseph</i>
NH	<i>Naturalis Historia</i>
PACT	<i>Journal of the European Study Group on Physical, Chemical and Mathematical Techniques applied to Archaeology</i>
PAM	<i>Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean</i>
P. Dura	<i>Dura-Europos Parchments and Papyri</i>
P. Oxy	<i>Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i>
PAT	<i>Palmyrene Aramaic Texts</i>
PNO	<i>La Palmyrène du Nord-Ouest</i>
RA	<i>Revue archéologique</i>
RdA	<i>Rivista di Archeologia</i>
RM	<i>Römische Mitteilungen – Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung</i>
RMD	<i>Roman Military Diplomas</i>
RTP	<i>Recueil des tessères de Palmyre</i>
SEG	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
SHA	<i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

THE WESTERN GATE AT PALMYRA

MARTA ŻUCHOWSKA

The area of the Western Gate, at the west end of the Great Colonnade at Palmyra, has never been explored, nor has it ever been discussed in publications concerning the site. Nonetheless, a reconstruction of the plan of this feature and its outward appearance is possible from the surviving remains, as is an interpretation of its function in the urban network of the city of Palmyra.

The state of preservation of the architecture is very poor. A single base and one pilaster with Corinthian capital decorating the northern part of the east wall are still standing [Fig. 1]. Numerous stone blocks from the walls are scattered over much of the adjacent area [Fig. 3].

The plan of the gate can be reconstructed from that single base found *in situ*. It comprised a central passage opening from the street and two lateral passages, narrower than the central one, exiting from the porticoes. The monument was equal in width to the Great Colonnade (about 25 m) and approx. 2.70 m deep. The central passage was 5.50 m wide, the lateral ones, now concealed under sand and tumbled stone blocks, approx. 2.50 m as calculated from the length of the preserved lintel – 3.40 m minus the width of the jambs – 0.45 m each [Fig. 4].

Seeing no evidence of bonding with the back walls of the porticoes of the Great Colonnade, we should consider the Western Gate as quite probably freestanding, connected with the portico columns by architraves spanning the space from the gate pilasters. In view of this, it is more than likely that the gate would have been adjusted in height to the porticoes of the Great Colonnade and the decoration of the entablature and cornice would have been a continuation of that of the porticoes.

The lateral doorways were rectangular and topped with decorated lintels. The central passage could have been rectangular with a flat lintel or else it could have had an arch over it. The common architectural solution in Palmyra is for all three doorways to be of the same shape, e.g. the Monumental Arch with its three arches and the Agora Annex [Fig. 5], the skene building of the Theater and the entrance to the Temenos of Bel [Fig. 6], the latter with five passages furnished with rectangular doorways. There is no example from Palmyra of rectangular and vaulted doorways being used in combination in the same structure. It seems probable therefore that the Western Gate was fitted with three rectangular doorways.

On the other hand, the width of the central passage (5.50 m) implies a lintel of a length in excess of 6 m (counting about 0.60 m for each jamb, a fragment of one is preserved nearby). A stone of this length would have likely been broken under its own sheer weight. No other gate in Palmyra has such a wide passage and it can only be supposed that in the case of the Western Gate some

other technique had been applied instead, a flat arch perhaps.¹ Unfortunately, the tumbled stones around the gate provide no clues and, moreover, a solution of this kind is not known from any other monument in Palmyra.

No evidence of a lintel could imply that the gate had never been finished for these explicitly technical reasons or that from the beginning it was planned as an open central passage flanked by two independent wings. An almost completely preserved frieze belies both these ideas. A stone preserving the centre rosette and a pattern of laurel leaves converging from opposite sides [cf. *Fig. 2*] would have been placed on the centre axis of the monument and therefore over the central gate passage, thus proving that the passage had indeed been covered. We remain ignorant, however, of the actual design of the gate top and the building technique.

Door height was reconstructed based on comparison with other monuments in Palmyra, where the usual width-to-height ratio is between 2:1 and 1.45:1. The latter proportion, known from the Agora for example, seems to have been applied in the Western Gate. The lateral passages would have been about 3.60 m high and the central passage would have risen to a height of about 8.20 m. The lintel over the central door would thus be more or less flush with the capitals of the pilasters in the façade and the columns of the Great Colonnade.

Decoration was restricted to Corinthian pilasters on both sides of the gate: two between the central and lateral passages, and one between each lateral passage and the sides. An architrave identical to that on the Great Colonnade ran over the pilaster capitals, changing to a richly decorated lintel above the main passageway. The frieze consisted of laurel leaves converging on a central point marked by an eight-petalled flower encircled with leaves [*Fig. 2*]. Apart from this, there were the ornamented side-door lintels. A cornice crowned the structure. Some ornamented consoles were found nearby, but we cannot be sure which part of the monument they had decorated. Small niches in the façade of the gate can be imagined in analogy to other monuments in Palmyra (Bel Temple Propylaeum, cf. *Fig. 6*, skene building of the Theatre) and elsewhere in the Roman Near East (Propylaeum in Philadelphia).

The façades appear to have differed in their decoration judging by the surviving elements of architecture. The inside face of the gate was decorated modestly in the severe style of the porticos of the Great Colonnade. The outside took on the more 'baroque' form typified by the latest examples of Palmyrene monumental architecture, e.g. the Monumental Arch and the Theater.

The gate on the inside joined the entablature of the porticos of the Great Colonnade. The last columns in the two porticoes stood on pedestals 0.45 m high, matching in height those of the gate pilasters. Other columns in the portico were placed about half a meter down [*Fig. 7*], suggesting the possibility of monumental steps leading up to the gateway. However, no traces of steps exist today and there is hardly any reason to suppose that they would have been dismantled, considering the number of readily available blocks from the tumbled structure. It is possible therefore that steps had been planned, but were never actually executed [*Fig. 8*].

Indications for the dating of this structure come neither from inscriptions nor from the archaeological record as no excavations have been undertaken in this area. Instead, we can be sure that the Western Gate was built as an addition to the Great Colonnade, which was constructed progressively for over a century from the middle of the 2nd century AD. Furthermore, an analysis of building technique can contribute to précising the date. It was at the turn of the 2nd and in the early 3rd century AD that the technique called by Barański *opus Palmyrenum* was introduced in Palmyra and it became common in the 3rd century (Barański 1995a : 63; 1996: 380). This typically Palmyrene form (hence the appellation) made use of big, but thin stone slabs, occasionally exceeding 3 m in length, but rarely 0.30 m in thickness. The technique was to place these slabs vertically back to back, joining them with mortar. Walls could be raised in this way in less time and with lesser expense than in the ashlar technique, but they were less resistant.

Most of the Western Gate was constructed of big slabs sometimes exceeding 3 m in length, but with a thickness between 0.60 and 1.10 m. The *opus Palmyrenum* technique was impractical in this case because of the breadth of the monument, measuring 2.70 m. Mortar alone appears not to have been used, hence the space between the standing stone slabs must have been filled with mortar-

1 I would like to thank Prof. Stanisław Medeksza for this suggestion.

bound rubble. Nevertheless, the use of big stone slabs indicates that the gate was not constructed before the early 3rd century AD.

A date in the 3rd century is also confirmed for the nearest part of the Great Colonnade. At this time columns started being constructed of four drums instead of the six to eight elements as had been the case before (Barański 1995: 47-46). Significantly, the last columns joined to the gate facade by a spanning architrave were built in this way. Only one of them is preserved, but it was surely built in connection with the gate. It has already been remarked that it stood on a pedestal matching in height and decoration that of the gate pilasters. Moreover, its console is turned to the east, toward anybody approaching the gate from the Great Colonnade, not like in the case of the other columns toward the street.

This arrangement is closely paralleled in the eastern façade of the Monumental Arch. There, too, two higher columns were added in front in order to join the monument to the pre-existing porticoes of the last section of the Great Colonnade, leading toward the Bel temple.

Further confirmation of the dating comes from an analysis of the architectural decoration. The capitals of the gate pilasters belong to a 3rd-century type, known from e.g. the Zabdāthe tomb (Filarska 1967: 87, 99-100) and the pillars east of the Monumental Arch (Żuchowska 2000: 192, Fig. 6c). Other characteristic elements, for example the frieze with the ornament of laurel leaves, are found also on monuments from the 3rd century, e.g. the Monumental Arch and Nymphaeum in the eastern part of the Great Colonnade.

The function of the Western Gate was mostly decorative: it framed the western end of the Great Colonnade which was the main thoroughfare leading through the city centre toward the most significant sanctuary — the Bel Temple at the other end of the town. But there was also a practical function, as the gate separated the inhabited part of the city from the western necropolis where the rich funerary temples started to proliferate in the end of the 2nd century. Indeed, one of them, tomb 86, was erected practically on the same axis as the Great Colonnade. The erection of the Western Gate cut off the tombs from view, thus showcasing even better the sumptuousness of the main street.

It actually did more than isolate the necropolis, for it also served to cut off the ostentatious city centre from the so-called Transversal Colonnade which is believed to be the hub of Palmyra's caravan trade. This 25 m wide street with flanking porticoes, which started being constructed probably in the second half of the 1st century AD, was traced nearly perpendicular to the axis of the Great Colonnade. Its suburban location and its width predisposed it for the economic function suggested for it. The junction with the Great Colonnade is well designed, the Western Gate fitting in line with the wall of the east portico of the Transversal Colonnade. The positioning of the gate at this point nicely isolated the architectural complex connected with the caravan trade from the more publicly impressive parts of the city.

In conclusion, the construction of the Western Gate can be regarded as testimony of urban development trends in Palmyra in force from the second half of the 2nd century when a new system of imperial architectures was introduced, resulting among others in particular districts with different functions being separated from one another by monuments like the Western Gate.

[2003]

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*Fig. 1. Pilaster of the Western Gate in situ
(Photo M. Żuchowska)*



*Fig. 2. Element of the architectural decoration of the Western Gate
(Photo M. Żuchowska)*



Fig. 3. The ruins of the Western Gate
(Photo M. Żuchowska)

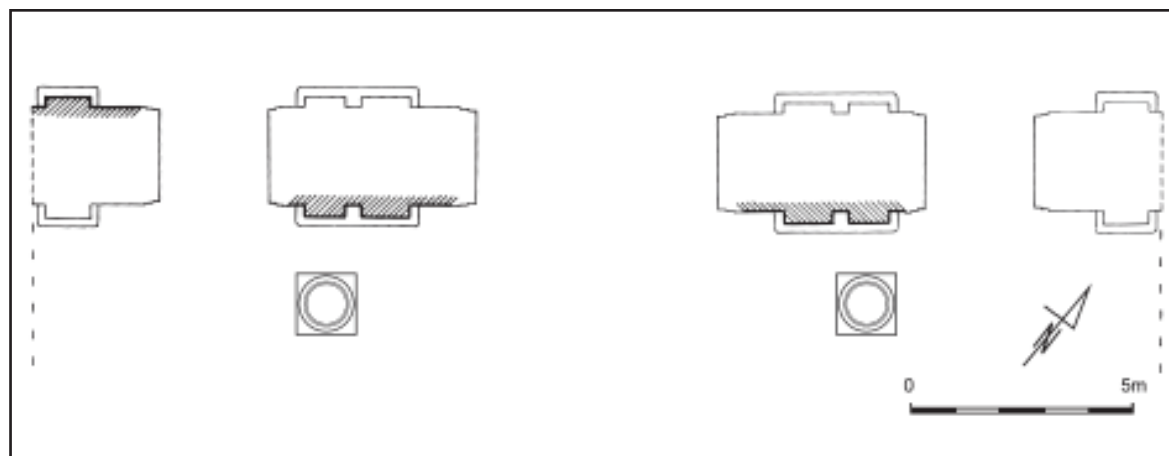


Fig. 4. Reconstructed plan of the Western Gate based on preserved elements
(Drawing M. Żuchowska)



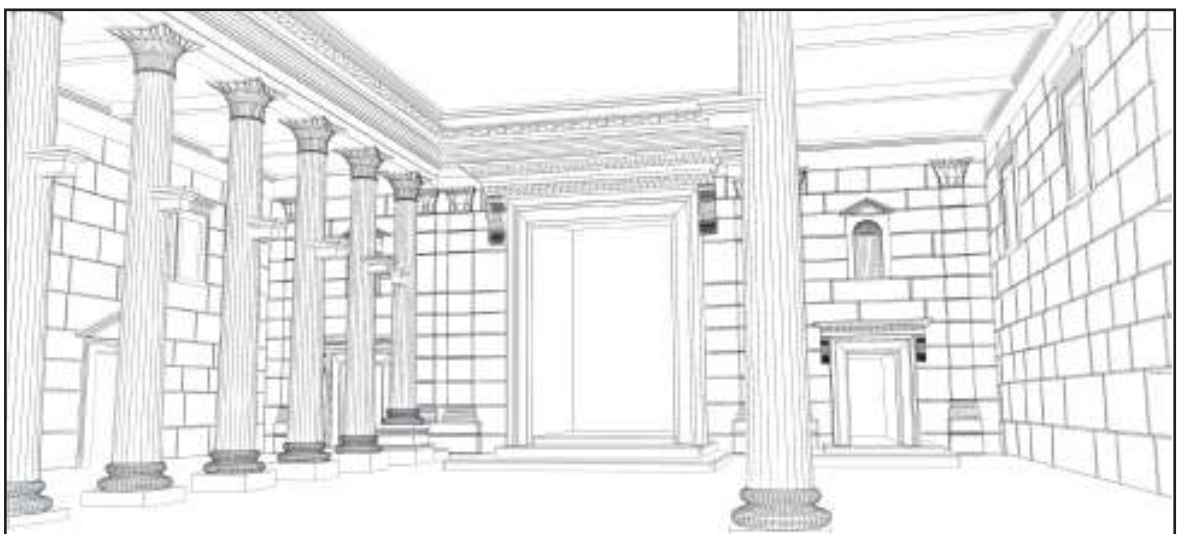
*Fig. 5. Entrance to the Agora Annex in Palmyra
(Photo M. Żuchowska)*



*Fig. 6. Propyleum of the Bel Temple temenos in Palmyra
(Photo M. Żuchowska)*



*Fig. 7. Columns of the north portico of the Great Colonnade and a pilaster of the Western Gate
(Photo M. Żuchowska)*



*Fig. 8. Proposed reconstruction of the Western Gate at Palmyra
(Graphics R. Żukowski)*