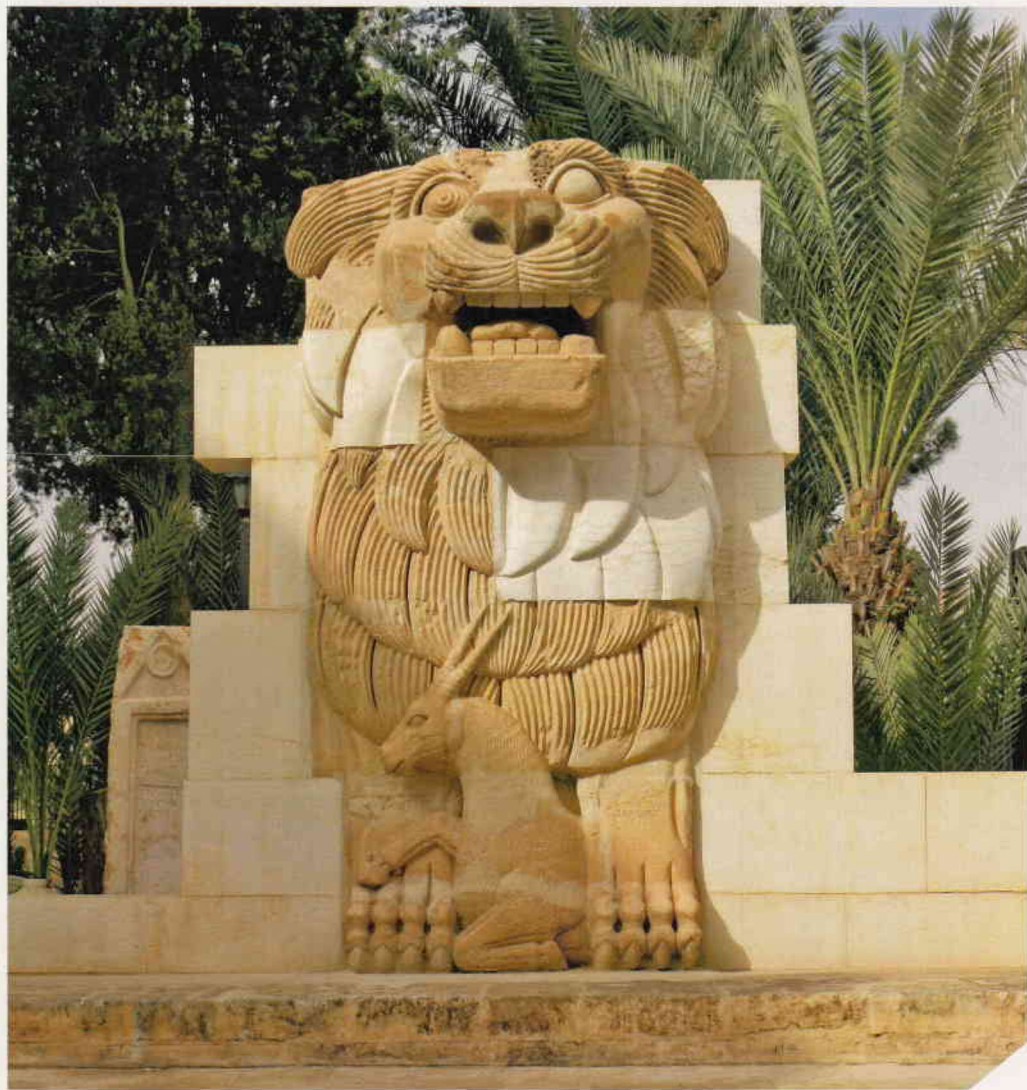


The lion from Palmyra



The lion from the sanctuary of the Arab goddess Allat in Palmyra gives shelter to a gazelle between his massive paws. An Aramaic inscription on one paw reads: *May Allat bless whoever does not shed blood in the sanctuary.*

The history of the lion reflects the comprehensive approach of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology (PCMA) specialists to their work: discovery and preservation, but also study and documentation, as well as popularization of the results.

*The Lion from Palmyra,
photo by M. Wagner,
2009, ©PCMA*



The preliminary protection and reconstruction works in the museum, photo by B. Markowski, R. Zukowski, K. Jurków, April-May 2016, ©PCMA

Restoration works in 2005, photo by B. Markowski, ©PCMA

Discovered in 1977 by the Polish archaeological mission in Palmyra, the relief of a lion probably dates from the turn of the eras. It was located on the outside wall of the sanctuary of the pre-Islamic goddess Allat. Found in pieces, the lion was reconstructed by Polish conservators and set in front of the Palmyra Museum. With time, it became a prominent symbol of the city. Polish specialists repeated the conservation works in 2005, when they also designed the sculpture gallery in the museum. During the war in 2015, the lion was smashed to pieces. In April and May 2016, Polish experts rushed to Palmyra with an archaeological and conservation rescue mission, to work on preliminary protection and reconstruction of the destroyed monuments.



The preliminary protection and reconstruction works, photo by B. Markowski, R. Zukowski, K. Jurków, April-May 2016, ©PCMA



Conservators and archaeologists from Poland were among the first foreign specialists who responded to the call of the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums of Syria (DGAM) for help in rescuing monuments of Palmyra. During both of this year's missions in Palmyra, Polish experts with experience from previous work in Palmyra, focused on rescuing the damaged artefacts, primarily collecting fragments of sculptures and stucco deliberately broken or damaged during the war. The provisionally reassembled objects are protected in museum rooms. The work carried out and specific guidelines on how to proceed with the different categories of artefacts have been summarized in a report submitted to the DGAM.

Excavations of the Polish Archaeological Mission were conducted without interruption for over half a century, from 1959 until the outbreak of war in 2011. Initially, the studied area was the Camp of Diocletian (the western district of the city) and the Valley of the Tombs (western necropolis). Since the 1990s, the mission worked on the urban infrastructure, urban planning and residential architecture, and the excavation moved to the city center, near the Great Colonnade. In recent years, Byzantine basilicas in the district located to the north of the Great Colonnade were studied. There were also works on urban fortifications and documentation of the Arab castle. The last discovery before the interruption of the works was the establishing of the original location of the Palmyrene Tariff near the city agora.

From the beginning of work in 1959, the results of every campaign have been published as part of the book series *Palmyre. Fouilles polonaises I-V* and *Studia Palmyreńskie*, as well as in the magazine *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* (<http://www.pcma.uw.edu.pl/pl/pam-journal/>).



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