

Cover Page



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Title: Izates and Helena of Adiabene : a study on literary traditions and history

Date: 2012-11-20

10. Epigraphic and Numismatic Evidence

As we have seen in our analysis of literary sources ancient Adiabene was known under a number of different names – Adiabene, Assyria, Ḥadyab (chapter 8). This is quite natural for a country such as Adiabene located at the crossroads of cultures that has additionally featured multilingualism for centuries. What is more, epigraphic and numismatic findings reveal that Adiabene could be known under a number of other names. To be precise, we have three groups of sources that might contain relevant evidence which we will analyze. These are the following: the trilingual inscription of Shapur I on the walls of the so-called Ka'ba-ye Zardošt near Naqsh-e Rostam, inscription no. 21 from the ruins of the ancient city of Hatra (as well as inscriptions nos. 113 and 114) and finally a number of coins attributed to Adiabene.

10.1. Inscriptions

The inscription of Shapur I enumerates many countries which belonged to his kingdom, including Adiabene. Thanks to the trilingual nature of the inscription we can see how the Greek toponym Ἀδιαβηνή was rendered in the Parthian (“ntwšrkn”) and the Middle-Persian (“nwthštrkn”) languages¹²⁷⁷. There have been several attempts to understand the Iranian renderings. According to Marquart and Henning, one could notice a personal name of Ardašir the king of Persia (or one of the Adiabene rulers bearing this name) in the disputed term¹²⁷⁸. This explanation does not, however, cover all elements of the compound¹²⁷⁹. Further, Maricq connected this name with an ethnic name known from Greek and Latin ethnographers: Σίρακες, and with the Armenian name: Nor-Širakan¹²⁸⁰. Finally, Milik suggested that the Iranian translation, ntū(n)-šar (plus a suffix ag-an), means “people (et pays) de Natouniens”¹²⁸¹. Milik’s reading results from him identifying a proper name *Natounia* on one coin attributed to Adiabene (see below chapter 10.2.). Milik’s idea had a lot of resonance throughout scholarly literature. It has been rejected, among others, by Altheim/Stiehl¹²⁸², Drijvers¹²⁸³, and Huyse¹²⁸⁴. At the same time, it is commonly used as a working hypothesis by non-linguists, primarily archaeologists working on the so-called Natounia coins attributed to Adiabene as we shall see below (chapter 10.2.)¹²⁸⁵. The main problem with Milik’s theory is that it does not explain the meaning of this newly-suggested proper name, *Natounia* which is not attested elsewhere and in Milik’s theory its meaning remains an enigma.

What is more, the ruins of Hatra revealed a statue that was placed in the temple of Baal Shamin, and was completed with the inscription that reads ’tlw mlk’ ntwn’šry’ and this reading might be parallel to the Iranian renderings of the Greek toponym Ἀδιαβηνή from Shapur I’s inscription¹²⁸⁶. The inscription clearly gives a personal name (’tlw) of a king (mlk’) and a further

¹²⁷⁷ Maricq 1958: 304, n. 4 and 335, n. 6; Huyse 1999a: 115; Huyse 1999b: 20.

¹²⁷⁸ Marquart 1931: 81-82; Henning 1954: 49.

¹²⁷⁹ Maricq 1958: 304, n. 4.

¹²⁸⁰ Maricq 1958: 304-405, n. 4.

¹²⁸¹ Milik 1962: 57.

¹²⁸² Altheim/Stiehl 1967: 264-265.

¹²⁸³ H.J.W. Drijvers 1977: 824.

¹²⁸⁴ Huyse 1999b: 20.

¹²⁸⁵ E.g. Mathiesen 1992b: 214; Raschke 1978: 818, n. 722; Butcher 1991; Hoover 2009: 161-168.

¹²⁸⁶ Caquot 1952: 101.

designation (ntwn' šry')¹²⁸⁷. The last word was read ntyn' šry' by Caquot and Altheim/Stiehl¹²⁸⁸, but as ntwn' šry' by Milik, Vattioni and Beyer¹²⁸⁹. The second reading fits well the name known to us from the inscription of Shapur I¹²⁹⁰. Milik referred his interpretation of the legend coins to this Hatra inscription and suggested the reading: 'tlw, king of the people (country) of Natounia. An alternative proposal has been made by Beyer in the latest corpus of Hatra inscriptions who suggests the reading: "König aus/von (der Stadt) Natūn'eššār (=Adiabene=DER-(GÖTTIN)-ΙΣ(Σ)ΑΡ-ÜBERGEBENER^{KANAAAN.} (oder: aus der Sippe des N.)"¹²⁹¹. This is a promising explanation; however, it needs one correction. In popular opinion, the participle natūn is absent in Aramaic, and that is apparently why Beyer interprets it as a passive participle of the "Cananean type"¹²⁹². This interpretation is controversial for geographical and historical reasons: it suggests a West-Semitic form for the area dominated by East-Semitic languages. However, both participles qatūl and qattūl¹²⁹³ appear in the Aramaic onomasticon from Babylonia¹²⁹⁴, and the verb root *ntn* is attested in Old and Official Aramaic¹²⁹⁵. Thus, the phrase in question is translated by E. Lipiński as "Donné par Ištar". Consequently, the whole construct from Hatra can be understood as follows: nttūn is understood as an archaically Aramaic participial form¹²⁹⁶, 'šr as a proper name of the goddess Ishtar¹²⁹⁷, and the expression is closed with a yud-gentilic: y'. This explanation, unlike Milik's theory, suggests a meaning of the proper name that appears in inscriptions and also works for the Iranian renderings. Namely, the only irregularity that remains to be explained is the lack of *n* in the Parthian nwthštrkn. This can, however, be the result of the assimilation of *n* into a double š. In this light, Adiabene under its Semitic name *ntyn' šr* means a country connected with Ishtar and this fact fits well what we otherwise know about the great popularity of the cult of Ishtar in this region.

The personal name on the inscription is also problematic¹²⁹⁸. Teixidor argued that the etymology of the name of Izates (Ιζάτης) goes back to the Parthian *azada* or *azades* meaning *free, noble*¹²⁹⁹. Since the Hatrene 'tlw is understood as the Arabic root 'atāla ("to be of noble origin"), then 'tlw would be merely the Hatrene Aramaic translation of the Iranian name¹³⁰⁰. Further, Teixidor suggested that the attire worn by the king, especially its tiara was unique only for Parthian kings, but could be also used by Izates since he was granted this privilege by Artabanos II according to Ant. 20:67. However, Teixidor's hypothesis is untenable for quite a

¹²⁸⁷ The form ntwn'šry' also appears in Hatra inscriptions nos. 113 and 114 to express a geographical characterization of a certain donor.

¹²⁸⁸ Caquot 1952: 101; Altheim/Stiehl 264 who actually holds that both readings are possible.

¹²⁸⁹ Milik 1962: 52; Beyer 1998: 33.

¹²⁹⁰ Altheim/Stiehl 1967: 264.

¹²⁹¹ Beyer 1998: 33.

¹²⁹² Beyer 1998: 33.

¹²⁹³ According to E. Lipiński 1982: 119, n. 20, the second radical should be doubled, and „le redoublement de la seconde radicale n'est souvent marqué dans les transcriptions cunéiformes et grecques“.

¹²⁹⁴ Zadok 1977: 127-130, 135-136.

¹²⁹⁵ Hoftijzer/Jongeling 1995: 767; Koehler/Baumgartner 2001: 1935-1936.

¹²⁹⁶ Lipiński 1982: 119 and n. 20.

¹²⁹⁷ Lipiński 1982: 117-120. By contrast, H.J.W. Drijvers 1977: 824 also understood ntwn as the participle and 'šr as an object of the participle (and y' as a "Zugehörigkeitsadjektiv"), but identified the proper name as that of Assur. However, the Hatrene consonant that makes the difference here is equivalent to the Aramaic šin, and the name of god Assur is written in Hatra inscriptions with the Hatrene equivalent of šin (Beyer 1998: 128, see Beyer 1998: 145 and 152 for the Hatrene spellings of Assur and Ishtar respectively).

¹²⁹⁸ Abbadi 1983: XXIV, XXVII, n. 21, 8.

¹²⁹⁹ Teixidor 1967: 3.

¹³⁰⁰ Teixidor 1967: 3.

Chapter 10: Epigraphic and Numismatic Evidence

good number of reasons. First, apart from the fact that Teixidor's explanation of the name of Izates is not beyond question (see below pp. 181-182), the link between both etymologies is purely speculative. Furthermore, the statue comes from the second half of the 2nd c. CE or the early 3rd c. CE (see below p. 195)¹³⁰¹. Besides this, the statue presents a worshipper of Baal Shaamin¹³⁰², and his Parthian attire, especially its headgear, is not exclusively characteristic of Parthian kings¹³⁰³. Last of all, Altheim/Stiehl suggests *Ātal* for the reading of *'tlw*¹³⁰⁴, but Beyer reads the name *'Aṭlū*¹³⁰⁵. These readings point to an otherwise unknown ruler of the 2nd c. CE or the early 3rd c. CE who contributed to the temple of Baal Shaamin, and this fact shows us that Hatra could play the role of superregional sanctuary¹³⁰⁶. If the names, "nwthštrkn" and "ntwšrkn" in the inscriptions of Shapur I, are parallel to *ntwn'šry'* from Hatra, and we think that they are, then *'Aṭlū* has to be seen as an otherwise unattested ruler of Adiabene in the second half of the 2nd c. CE or the early 3rd c. CE.

10.2. Coins from Adiabene

Remarkably, a proper name similar to Aramaic (Hatra) and Iranian renderings (Shapur I's inscription) of the toponym, *'Αδιαβηνή* appears on some Oriental coins attributed to Adiabene (one of whose inscriptions inspired Milik's interpretations mentioned above, p. 175) to which we now turn our attention.

There is indeed a small number of coins attributed by some scholars to Adiabene. First of all, there are some coins known as "Natounia coins". This issue is, however, a little complex. First, there is the question of the name "Natounia", as to whether the inscription is to be read in such a way; and, secondly, whether or not it can be attributed to the kingdom of Adiabene. Thirdly, the label 'Natounia coins' in fact embraces a few groups of coins, and a thorough discussion must take account of some diversity among these coins.

One basic distinction has to be introduced among 'the Natounia coins'. Namely, four items bear inscriptions that unambiguously allow us to identify them as belonging to one group, while others do not have legends. The inscriptions are as follows¹³⁰⁷:

1. *Νατουν/ιέων τ[(ὠν)]/πρὸς τῶ/Κάπρω*
2. *Νατου/νισαρ/οκερ/των*
3. *Αντουνη/σαρ[οκερτων...]*
4. *Νατουνισ/σαρο/κερ[των/...]*

¹³⁰¹ Teixidor 1967: 2; Niehr 2003: 175-177.

¹³⁰² Indeed it is not the palace where the statue was found (as suggested by Teixidor 1967: 2) but the temple of Baal Shamin. Teixidor interpreted the statue as a monument set up on behalf of a victorious king who conquered Hatra. However, the archaeological context makes it clear that we have to do here with the statue of a worshipper of Baal Shamin in Hatra.

¹³⁰³ Olbrycht 1997b: 27-61.

¹³⁰⁴ Altheim/Stiehl 1965: 227, n. 2; 1967: 267.

¹³⁰⁵ Beyer 1998: 33.

¹³⁰⁶ H.J.W. Drijvers 1977: 824-825. By contrast, Altheim/Stiehl 1967:267 suggests that this inscription points to an otherwise unknown ruler of the 2nd c. CE Hatra who took over the city after the fall of a Hatra local dynasty due to the Roman-Parthian wars that run through that territory in the 2nd c. CE. Yet, Hatra resisted all Roman attacks in the 2nd c. CE, and so there is no reason to suggest the fall of its dynasty.

¹³⁰⁷ Inscription readings are quoted in accordance with Milik 1962: 51.

Part 3: Material and Political Environment of Adiabene from the 3rd c. BCE to the 3rd c. CE

Coin no. 1 is stored in the British Museum¹³⁰⁸. The obverse shows a female bust (facing left) wearing a turreted crown, the reverse presents palm-branch and arrow, as well as the inscription¹³⁰⁹. A female bust wearing a turreted crown is widely identified as the city goddess Tyche¹³¹⁰. Coin no. 2 was first published by le Rider¹³¹¹. The coin is said to have been purchased on behalf of the Cabinet des Médailles in Beirut. It again shows a turreted and diademed bust of Tyche (to the right) on the obverse, the reverse presents the inscription, as well as images of a palm and a spear (or arrow). Coins nos. 3 and 4 come from the Nisibis hoard (the deposit ca. 32/31 BCE at the latest) and were published by Seyrig (known as the Nisibe no. 6 and Nisibe no. 7 respectively)¹³¹². Coin no. 3 presents the turreted and diademed head of Tyche (to the right) on the obverse; the reverse features a palm branch and a spear (or an arrow), as well as the inscription. Coin no. 4 also presents the turreted and diademed head of Tyche (to the right) on the obverse, while the reverse features a palm, a spear (or an arrow) and a star, as well as the inscription.

Thus, four coins, despite some difficulties in reading their inscriptions, can be easily attributed to one group. Further, the image of Tyche is repeated throughout all inscribed exemplars. What is more, there is another iconographical element that appears on all items, that is, a palm branch; additionally, all four coins feature a spear or an arrow.

There is also another group of coins labeled by some scholars as “Natounia coins”. First of all, Seyrig lists ten anepigraphic series from the Nisibis hoard that he calls “monnaies orientales incertaines”¹³¹³. They include three types. First, five series present a bearded male bust on the obverse, and a bust of Tyche on the reverse¹³¹⁴. Second, two series feature a dromedary on the reverse (and a radiate, diademed bust on the obverse)¹³¹⁵. Thirdly, two series show a bust of Zeus on the obverse and a bust of Tyche on the reverse¹³¹⁶. Furthermore, Hoover lists fourteen anepigraphic coins that are said to have recently appeared “on the market and in private collections”¹³¹⁷. However, Hoover’s list also includes four coins already published in the Nisibis hoard by Seyrig. Hoover distinguishes two series among these coins. The first contains nine items (incl. three coins from Seyrig’s collection)¹³¹⁸. The obverse presents a radiate youthful male head (to the right), the reverse features a rider holding short rod in his extended right hand, mounted on a dromedary (standing right) and a wreath border. The second series counts five items (incl. 1 Seyrig’s exemplar)¹³¹⁹. The obverse shows a radiate youthful male head (to the right), the reverse pictures a dromedary (standing left) and a wreath border. Three items are overstruck on previous issues, twice the original can be determined (each in one series) as that of Antiochos VIII (125-96 BCE). These two anepigraphic series are apparently linked to each other through the rare element of a wreath border. As Hoover puts it: “the leaves are so thin and spindly as to look more like pine needles than the laurel most commonly used for coin borders in

¹³⁰⁸ Hill 1922: CXVIII-CXIX, 147; pl. XXIII and no. 22.

¹³⁰⁹ Hill 1922: 147.

¹³¹⁰ M. Meyer 2006: 336-337.

¹³¹¹ Le Rider 1959-1960: 30-32, pl. III, 27 and C-E.

¹³¹² Seyrig 1955: 88, 104-105.

¹³¹³ Seyrig 1955: 88-89.

¹³¹⁴ Seyrig 1955: 88-89; 105-107.

¹³¹⁵ Seyrig 1955: 88-89; 107-108.

¹³¹⁶ Seyrig 1955: 88-89.

¹³¹⁷ Hoover 2009: 161.

¹³¹⁸ Hoover 2009: 161.

¹³¹⁹ Hoover 2009: 162.

Chapter 10: Epigraphic and Numismatic Evidence

the Hellenistic period”¹³²⁰. Furthermore, the motif of a radiate youthful male head and that of a dromedary show up in both series. Thus, it is clear that both series come from the same mint (and can tentatively be labeled as the “camel coins”¹³²¹).

The question arises as to how to relate the coins bearing the inscription to the anepigraphic items. Generally speaking, we can distinguish two distinctive groups among all anepigraphic series. First, the first group features a bust of Tyche and a bearded male bust (in some cases identified as Zeus), and so it can be associated relatively safely with the inscribed items (the Natounisarokerta coins) which also bear the image of Tyche. The second anepigraphic group includes ‘the camel coins’ that feature images of a radiant male head (beardless) and a dromedary with or without a rider; both figures are identified as the image of the sun god Shamash and that of Arsou, the god of the evening star, respectively¹³²². Both deities, frequently labeled as Arabic¹³²³, are well attested in the Palmyra and Hatra pantheons¹³²⁴. Consequently, Seyrig considered Palmyra and Hatra (and not Natounia or Natounisarokerta) as possible locations where the camel coins were minted¹³²⁵. Other scholars found this identification problematic since both places were not considered to be important enough in the 1st c. BCE to strike its own coinage¹³²⁶. Hoover suggested that all anepigraphic groups mentioned above are linked to each other, (and to the inscribed items), through the rare element of a wreath border, and consequently should be attributed to the so-called Natounia¹³²⁷. Since all these disputed coins come from the same hoard, this is a plausible connection, though not unquestionable.

We now return to the first question posed above. Can the name on the coin legends refer to the Greek name Adiabene? First of all, it is clear that there is some difference between coin inscription no. 1 from the British Museum which does not contain any element ΙΣ(Σ)ΑΡ and three other inscriptions that do. In this context, only inscriptions nos. 2-4 can be parallel to the Hatra and Ka‘ba-ye Zardošt inscriptions. If we must insist on one interpretation of the coin legends (that they apparently form one provenance group), then let us simply remark that one instance (Natounia) counts less than three instances (Natounis(s)ar). The reading ΝΑΤΟΥΝΙΣ(Ο)ΑΡΟΚΕΡΤΩΝ matches the above-mentioned inscriptions from Hatra and Ka‘ba-ye Zardošt well. Namely, as regards the coin legends, the suffix ΚΕΡΤ comes from a typically Iranian element and means “made, built”, the Greek omicron can be seen as a common Greek conjugate and ΝΑΤΟΥΝΙΣΑΡ is parallel to the Hatra inscription. In this way, ΝΑΤΟΥΝΙΣ(Ο)ΑΚΕΡΤ clearly resembles constructs like Tigranokerta – “built by Tigranes”. In summary, all three phrases (from Hatra, the coins nos. 2-4, the inscription from Hatra) have the same common base which is Semitic in origin - ntwn`šr – given by Ishtar. This expression has been used to name a geographic or ethno-geographical entity. The Greek coin legends already use the Iranized version of this Semitic name wherein an Iranian suffix -κερτ is added to a primarily Semitic name, and the whole phrase makes the following sense – “made (or built) by the country (people) given by Ishtar”. The last historical observation – the ethnicon found in the coin legends

¹³²⁰ Hoover 2009: 163.

¹³²¹ Hoover 2009: 163.

¹³²² Seyrig 1955: 105-108.

¹³²³ On the problematic aspect of such a label, see Kaizer 2002: 56-57.

¹³²⁴ See Kaizer 2002: 85, 56-57, 99-100, 107-108, 154-157 (Shamash), 116-124 (Arsou) for Palmyra, and H.J.W. Drijvers 1975: 240-249, esp. 243 for Shamash in Hatra; Tubach 1986: 255-266 for Shamash in Hatra, esp. 286-290 on coins with the image of Shamash.

¹³²⁵ Seyrig 1955: 107-108.

¹³²⁶ Hoover 2009: 162-163.

¹³²⁷ Hoover 2009: 163.

is linguistically the same as that used in the Hatra inscription, but does not necessarily refer to the same geographical entity, because the addition of the river appellation, on the Kapros, which could be introduced in order to distinguish Natouniasarokerta on the Kapros from the other one, which was probably more well-known¹³²⁸. Furthermore, “the Νατουμισ(σ)αροκερτα coins” are all bronze issues, and as such constitute only a local mintage that did not have to be interpreted as authorized by ‘state-like’ entities. Lastly, its provenance to the Nisibis hoard means that they represent local issues of a city located on the Little Zab in the 1st c. BCE (32/31 at the latest)¹³²⁹.

Since the Νατουμισ(σ)αροκερτα coins are not attestations of the production of coinage by the kingdom of Adiabene, does it mean that we do not know any coins of Adiabene? On the contrary, it seems that we do know some coins of Adiabene and their identification came independently from two scholars – E. Lipiński and F. de Callatay¹³³⁰. In 1982, Lipiński suggested that king ᾿Αβδισσαρος who appeared on some coins attributed to Armenia should be seen as king of Adiabene¹³³¹. The suggestion was entirely of a linguistic and historical character – the name of the king suggested a worshipper of the goddess Ishtar whose cult was known to be particularly widespread in Adiabene¹³³². In 1996, de Callatay reinterpreted one legend on the coin (owned by Cabinet des Médailles de Bruxelles) struck on behalf of Abdissarès previously attributed (on exclusively stylistic grounds) to Armenia or Sophene – [ΒΑΣ]ΙΑΕ[ΩΣ] [ΑΒ]ΔΙΣΣΑΡΟΥ [Α]ΔΑΙΑΒΗΝΟΥ¹³³³. This particular coin belongs to type 2 of Abdissares’ coinage¹³³⁴. There are no clues as to a date, stylistic features are close to those known from Seleucid coinage, and so a date around 200 BCE has been suggested, though a later dating up until the beginning of the 1st c. BCE is also possible¹³³⁵.

To sum up, the epigraphic and numismatic evidence reveals the existence of two kings of Adiabene who do not appear in literary sources – Abdissar[]¹³³⁶ and ᾿Αῖλῦ. Further, it shows that rulers of Adiabene could mint their own coinage, though this issue requires further studies. Next, Adiabene was also known as the country connected with Ishtar, and this fact confirms the great popularity of the cult of Ishtar in the region.

¹³²⁸ Likewise already Hill 1922: CXVIII: „a distinguishing epithet”.

¹³²⁹ Seyrig 1955: 100-104; Raschke 828: 760.

¹³³⁰ There are no references to Lipiński 1982 in de Callatay’s paper from 1996. What is more, there is one more item of coinage that has been suggested as struck on behalf of the Adiabene rulers. In 1990 the German Bankhaus H. Aufhäuser (today after the fusion called Hauck & Aufhäuser Privatbankiers KGaA) got into possession of one coin that was previously unknown and published only in 2001 by Hendin as the first coin ever from Adiabene (see Hendin 2001: 455, pl. 937 and Tameanko 2005: 19). This item has never been object to scholarly investigation, and therefore it is hardly possible to decide on its authenticity.

¹³³¹ Lipiński 1982: 117-124.

¹³³² Lipiński 1982: 117-124.

¹³³³ De Callatay 1996: 135-145. Note that the inscription reads [Α]ΔΑΙΑΒΗΝΟΥ, and not [Α]ΔΙΑΒΗΝΟΥ. However, this irregularity can be explained. The Greek α is phonetically identical to ε (thus we have [Α]ΔΕΑΒΗΝΟΥ) and both ε and ι have the consonantal value [y] before α (like in [Α]ΔΕΑΒΗΝΟΥ and [Α]ΔΙΑΒΗΝΟΥ) and consequently are both pronounced as [ya]. See Tromp 2005: 31 and 35.

¹³³⁴ De Callatay 1996: 135.

¹³³⁵ See de Callatay 1996: 142.

¹³³⁶ In fact, the name is recorded only in the genitive, consequently both ᾿Αβδισσαρος (so Lipiński) and Abdissarès (so de Callatay) are grammatically possible as the nominative.