

LATE ROMAN FORTIFICATIONS IN PALMYRA

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One of the most important monuments of ancient Palmyra, the Wall of Diocletian survives in fairly good condition and is regularly maintained and preserved through the efforts of the authorities of the Palmyra Museum. Despite being a major element of the ancient town panorama, it has failed to be the subject of a separate monograph and its dating continues to be debatable.

The traditional view, proposed by Henri Seyrig almost fifty years ago and now firmly entrenched among researchers regardless of an admitted need for further research (Seyrig 1950: 239–241; van Berchem 1954: 257), is that there were three main stages in the development of the city fortifications. The earliest defenses of Palmyra were protective more than anything else [Figs 1, 4]. Designed primarily as a customs wall (and this is how it is called traditionally even today: *sur al ġamarek*) running around the gardens, they were meant as a barrier against marauders from the desert and they may have had the added function of protecting the gardens from encroaching desert sand. These fortifications did not form a complete system, being constructed only where necessary, usually in flat terrain around the oasis and in the Valley of the Tombs. From the west no walls were needed, the hill slopes forming a natural barrier (Gawlikowski 1974: 231–242). The parts of these defenses that have been excavated leave no doubt as to their 1st–2nd century AD origin (Gawlikowski 1974: 234–236). The second stage in the development of the fortifications was associated with the reign of Diocletian. According to a Latin inscription, found in the ruins of the legionary camp, Sossianus Hierocles, the principal governor, was responsible for establishing the *castra* in Palmyra. This has commonly been assumed to be a reference to the construction of fortifications with square towers around the city (CIL III 133=6661; Gawlikowski 1984: 10; Kowalski 1997: 44) [Fig. 2]. In the third stage Justinian (527–565) was said to have extended and reinforced the walls of the Tetrarchs by adding U-shaped towers [Fig. 3]. Aqueducts and public monuments were also repaired, especially churches (Procopius, *De aedificiis* II.11.10–12).