

150.

FUNERARY BUST OF A BANQUETING YOUTH

First half of the second century A.D.

Provenance: Palmyra

Material: grayish local limestone

Dimensions: h. 53.3 cm., w. 37.3 cm., d. 18.5 cm.

Gift of Elias S. David (y1962-92)

CONDITION: *Nearly complete; the rounded cut at the lower left was probably intentional. The head was broken and has been reset with plaster, perhaps incorrectly.*

The figure is detached on the sides and stands on a flat lower surface, which is much deeper to the right, nearly triangular. The sculpture represents the upper body of a man reclining on a dinner couch, his left

elbow resting on a pillow of which only the upper part is shown. The right arm was probably never represented. The man wears a tunic with sleeves and a himation draped around his left arm and shoulder. His right hand holds a kantharos, a large drinking vessel on a godrooned foot, rather clumsily rendered in this case; it should have two handles, but the one on the left, which is free and visible, is only a low





ledge with no hold for fingers. The young man is clean-shaven, his hair arranged in rows of short, wavy tufts. The nose is straight and marked with sharp vertical ridges that extend upward and arch to the sides to form eyebrows. The eyes are almond-shaped, the eyeballs indicated with two concentric circles. The ear lobes are sketchy and flat.

This sculpture is an example of the "economy version" of huge slabs representing one or more banqueters surrounded by family. Such slabs were set on the outer edge of sarcophagi whose front imitated a dinner couch complete with mattresses and pillows. In this case, the bust would have rested on a sarcophagus, toward its right corner, and would have been

accompanied on the left by another, similar sculpture whose outline is mirrored by the rounded cut where the right arm of this figure should have been.

The banquet motif is frequent in the funerary art of Palmyra. Only men recline and drink from hand-held cups, while women sitting on chairs accompany them and children stand behind. It is not clear whether the scene epitomized the promise of the afterlife or looked back to the happy family life left behind.

MG

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Unpublished.

151.

FUNERARY SLAB WITH MALE BUST IN HIGH RELIEF

First half of the second century A.D.

Provenance: Palmyra

Material: soft yellow local limestone

Dimensions: h. 43.5 cm., w. 33.0 cm., d. 19.6 cm.

Unrecorded acquisition (y205)

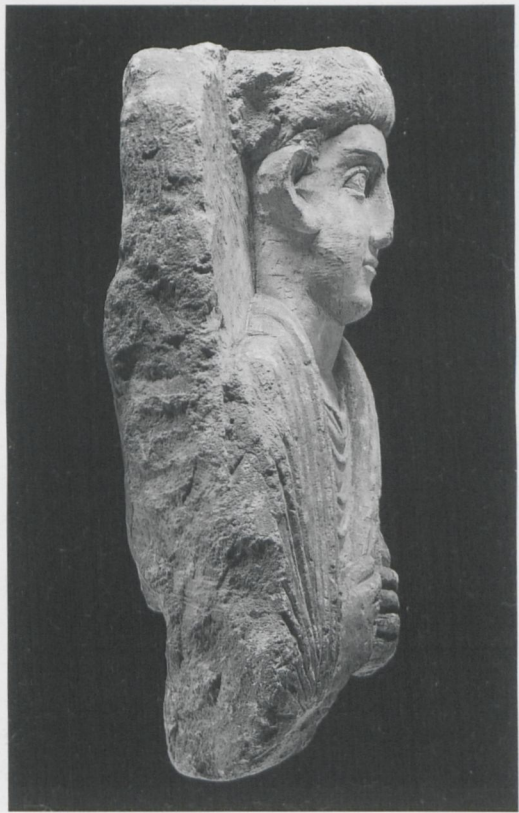
CONDITION: *Both right corners are missing; numerous chips, including the tip of the nose. The man's right shoulder and elbow were never sculpted, the arm being cut even with the edge of the slab.*

The bust depicts a clean-shaven man wearing a tunic and a himation. The left hand holds an olive branch. The folds of both garments are flattened, rendered practically in the same way as the fingers and the nose ridge; the ear lobes are not detached behind. The hair is rendered as two horizontal bands of short striations. The eyes, marked with two concentric circles, are set deep under protruding brows, which join the sharp vertical edges of the nose.

Traces of ancient plaster on the right edge and above the head on right and left testify to the way of fixing the sculpture in the tomb slot after the funeral, rather negligently in this case. The inscription over the man's left shoulder is a nineteenth-century illiterate fake, intended to enhance the commercial value of the piece.

MG

BIBLIOGRAPHY
G. E. Post, *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*,
1891, 37.
Ingholt 1928, 103, n. 1.



152.

HEAD OF A WOMAN

Early second century A.D.

Provenance: Palmyra

Material: hard white local limestone

Dimensions: h. 24.0 cm., w. 19.5 cm., d. 17.8 cm.

Unrecorded acquisition, before 1922¹ (y1930-455)

CONDITION: *Broken at neck; much-weathered surface, exposing nummular voids inside the stone. Many chips, including the tip of the nose and the left temple with a part of the eye gone.*

The head was protruding above a funerary slab on which the torso had been represented in high relief. The face is almost square, with prominent cheekbones, a slightly pouting mouth, and a fleshy nose. The large eyes are marked with two concentric circles, sheltered under sharp, ridged eyebrows. The woman wore on her hair the usual attire consisting of a frontal band marked with vertical lines, a turban made of tightly twisted cloth rolled around the head, and a veil at the back. The hair appears only as two locks on each temple, partly covering the ears and brought to the back under the veil. The tips of the



ears are adorned with earrings taking the form of grapes, and strings of beads are hanging in front of each ear, possibly attached to the grapelike pendants.

Full-length representations show that in real life the veil reached to the ankles and was used to cover the whole figure when the woman appeared in public. In funerary portraiture, however, the face is always exposed. The grape earrings are typical of jewelry produced in the first half of the second century. As a recently found specimen has demonstrated,² they were made of pearls fixed on a silver core. Palmyra was en-

gaged in active commercial relations with the Gulf region, the main source of pearls in antiquity. The wearing of beads in front of the ears is a rare feature; the "beads" might even be pearls. MG

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unpublished.

NOTES

1. See p. 313, n. 1.
2. Witecka 1994, 73–74.

I 53.

HEAD OF A PRIEST

Mid-second century A.D.

Provenance: Palmyra

Material: hard white local limestone

Dimensions: h. 23.6 cm., w. 13.6 cm., d. 9.3 cm.

Gift of Edward Sampson, Class of 1914, for the Alden Sampson Collection (y1962-141)

CONDITION: *The fragment preserves the face, nearly complete, and part of the headgear. Chopped from the flat background, it is broken at the neck. The nose and the left ear are missing; chips on eyes and mouth.*

The head was probably part of a half-figure similar to cat. no. 150 above. An oval, clean-shaven face features a full mouth and elongated eyes under incised eyebrows. The pupils may have been marked with single circles. The preserved ear is almost square, rather crudely modeled in front, with a rough clump of stone behind. The head wears a cylindrical hat (*modius*) with the rim of an underlying cap shown above the forehead. Two vertical lines marked the front of the headgear, and a crown of olive leaves was attached to it, adorned with a central medallion, now chipped off.

The *modius*, so-called because of its resemblance to the Roman receptacle for measuring grain, characterizes the man as a priest.¹ The actual priestly hats





were probably made of felt or leather and worn on a skullcap. The olive wreath was of metal, possibly gold, and attached with a cloth strap behind, as shown also on this head. The wearers were always entirely clean-shaven, including the scalp. Some of them wore an unornamented *modius*, while those wearing a crown on it presumably enjoyed some more distinguished rank within the priestly order, though the exact meaning of the adornment is unknown. MG

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Unpublished.

NOTE

1. On Palmyrene priests, see Stucky 1973, 163–80.

I 54.

FRAGMENTARY HEAD OF A PRIEST

Second half of the second century A.D.

Provenance: Palmyra

Material: hard white local limestone

Dimensions: h. 17.3 cm., w. 14.3 cm., d. 11.4 cm.

Gift of Edward Sampson, Class of 1914, for the Alden Sampson Collection (y1962-142)

CONDITION: *The piece is broken diagonally from the left temple to the tip of the nose, which is chipped off; the lower part of the face is missing entirely. The headgear is nearly complete, but the figure in the wreath is badly broken. The back surface is chopped off from a slab.*

The head was part of a funerary half-figure of the usual type (see cat. no. 150). The eyeballs are marked with two concentric circles, a feature that does not occur after ca. A.D. 150. The brows are set off as sharp

ridges, and a horizontal wrinkle just below the priestly hat spans the forehead. The headgear has the usual two vertical grooves and is banded with a wreath of leaves meeting in front at a small draped bust, bare-headed, whose face is entirely broken away.

MG

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unpublished.



155.

HEADRESS OF A PRIEST

Second—third century A.D.

Provenance: Palmyra

Material: hard grayish local limestone

Dimensions: h. 15.9 cm., w. 19.5 cm., d. 20.8 cm.

Gift of Edward Sampson, Class of 1914, for the Alden Sampson Collection (y1962-140)

CONDITION: Broken bottom surface, complete around. Top and back surface unworked; visible chisel marks. Head of the small bust attached separately (probably modern repair).

The fragment displays the usual features of the priestly headgear (see cat. nos. 153 and 154 above). The olive wreath is rendered with particular precision. A small bust is placed in the center; the man represented is bareheaded and wears a tunic and himation with carefully rendered folds.

The *modius* is too large to have been part of a funerary half-figure. The head of its owner was

probably projected above a huge slab representing a banquet scene, set on a sarcophagus in the form of a dining couch, of which many have survived in situ in underground tombs of Palmyra. We have no clues regarding the identity of the small figures on the *modius*; in some cases they wear a *modius* themselves. They might represent the wearer's ancestor or predecessor in office.

MG

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unpublished.



156.

HEAD OF A BANQUET ATTENDANT

Late second—third century A.D.

Provenance: Palmyra

Material: hard white local limestone

Dimensions: h. 15.0 cm., w. 11.3 cm., d. 16.5 cm.

Unrecorded acquisition, before 1922¹ (y1930-441)

CONDITION: *Originally protruding in high relief on the front wall of a sarcophagus, intentionally broken around, at neck and on the left. The tip of the nose is broken off; chips on the chin.*

This head of a young man is clean-shaven, with the hair arranged in three rows of “snail curls” around the face. The eyes are elongated, the eyeballs not marked (perhaps once painted).

The class of banquet relief to which this fragment belongs stood on sarcophagi that were provided with furniture legs at their corners and a mattress on top to imitate dining couches. The central panel of such sarcophagi often presents, somewhat incongruously, standing figures of young servants who usually hold the drinking utensils but who could also be preparing for a ritual sacrifice or a hunting party. This head belonged to such an attendant.

MG

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Unpublished.

NOTE

1. See p. 313, n. 1.



157.

FUNERARY SLAB WITH MALE BUST
IN HIGH RELIEF

First half of the third century A.D.

Provenance: Palmyra

Material: hard white local limestone

Dimensions: h. 48.5 cm., w. 41.4 cm., d. 21.3 cm.

*Gift of Mrs. W. Lester Glenney and her sister, Mrs. Field
(y1946-109).*

CONDITION: *Minor breaks on edges, lower left corner of the background missing. The sculpture is complete except for the tip of the nose and some chips. On the surface to the left of the head, patches of modern plaster indicate possible modern reuse as a building stone.*

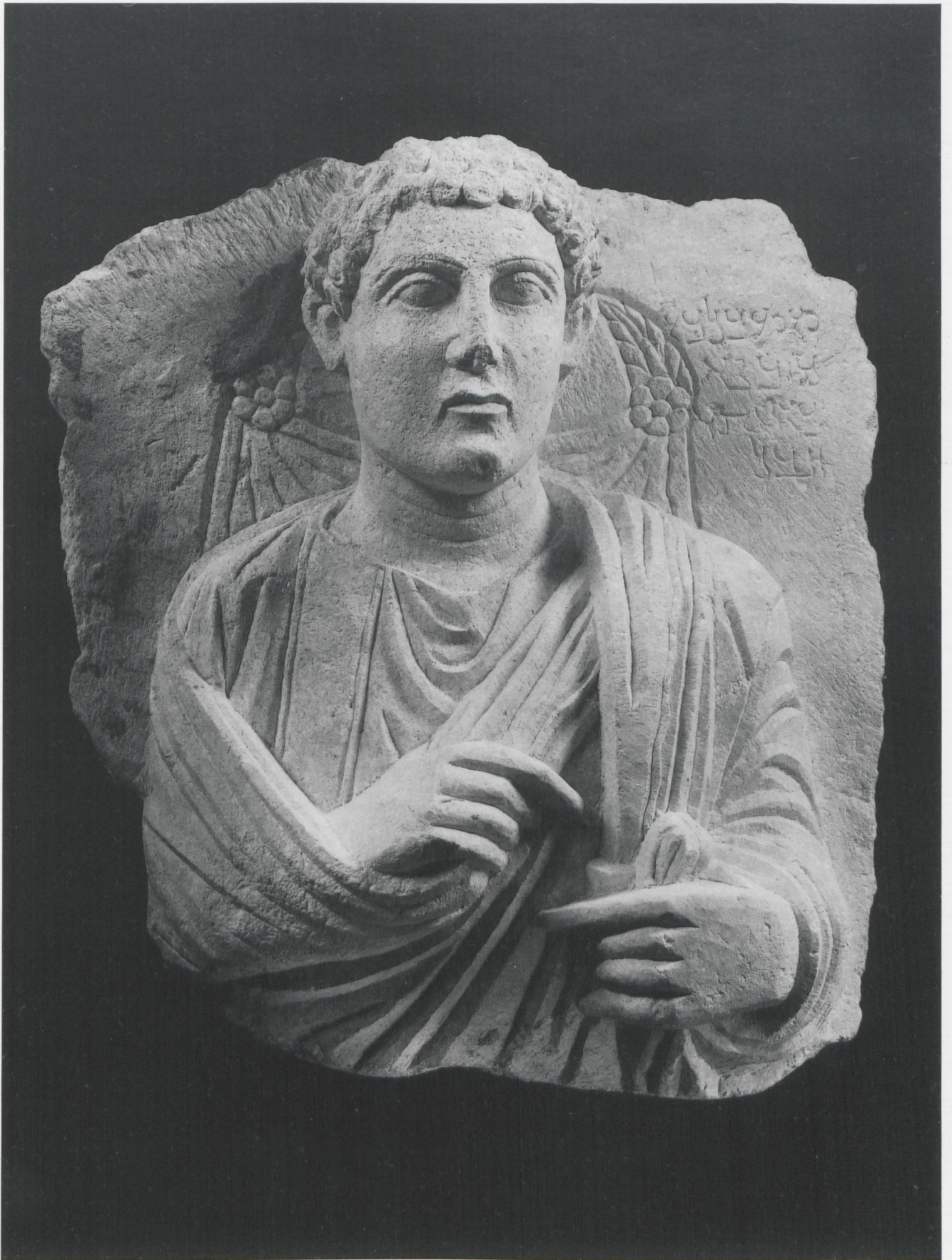
A frontal bust of a man, turned very slightly to his left, is nearly detached on the flat surface of the slab.

Behind the figure a piece of hanging cloth is represented, fixed with two rosette-headed nails, each also securing a palm branch. To the right, an engraved inscription in Aramaic (letters 1.5 cm. high):

ydy^ʿbl br / mzbⁿ / brwq^ʿ / hbl

[Yedi^ʿbel, son of Mezabbana (son of) Barôqa. Alas!]





The man's name, which means "(the god) Bel knows," is relatively common in Palmyra. The veil stretched behind him indicates that he is portrayed here as a dead person, the circumstance expressed also by the exclamation closing the text.

Yedi'bel wears a tunic provided with a wide vertical band with marked borders on the right of his chest, which represents an applied piece of embroidery; the latter was probably once painted with a pattern or intended to be so. He is draped in a himation covering both arms but off the right shoulder. His left hand is grasping the loose end of the drapery, his right emerges from the folds of the cloak which pass diagonally across the chest. The folds of both garments are sharp and V-shaped, except for a wavy vertical line falling from the left shoulder, which marks the brim of the cloak.

The full, round face, clean-shaven, is surrounded by curly hair arranged in several rows of tight "snail" locks. The chin protrudes, flattened on the tip; the mouth is small and pinched, the nose straight, even with the forehead. The eyes are almond-shaped, with pupils marked with small circles, once painted. Slightly arched grooves mark the brows.

This is a funerary monument typical of Palmyra from the end of the first century A.D. to the end of Palmyrene art, marked by the sack of A.D. 272. Such slabs were used to close burial slots in the walls of family tombs, either dug underground or built in the form of towers (until ca. A.D. 120) and elaborate mausolea during the second and third centuries. When

the tomb chambers were entirely filled, half-figures of the deceased would have been closely packed in vertical rows of five or more slabs, one above the other in each row. The tombs were in principle intended for large families and many generations, but in practice parts of them, especially underground, were often sold to relatives or even strangers. Even so, few tombs were ever filled, and most were subsequently robbed.

Placed as they were on a crossroads between East and West, the Palmyrenes used simple draped clothes of the Classical world just as often as trousers and richly embroidered tunics fashionable in Mesopotamia and Iran. In this case, the Greek mantle covers a garment that could have been decorated with quite elaborate patterns. Scraps of such were actually found in some tombs.

Few Palmyrene funerary busts show individual traits that would allow them to be described as portraits in the usual sense. Most, like this one, represent only a conventional type: a young man or old, a lady, a boy. What was generally sought was not the likeness of the deceased but a material abode for his soul, believed to inhabit the stone. Such at least were the beliefs to which the earliest inscriptions bear witness, though they might have become only dimly felt by the time the tombstone of Yedi'bel son of Mezabbana had been carved. MG

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CIS II 4312, pl. LIII (inscription).
Hillers and Cussini 1995, no. 669.

158.

HEAD OF A MAN

Third century A.D.

Provenance: Palmyra

Material: hard white local limestone

Dimensions: h. 8.6 cm., w. 7.5 cm., d. 8.8 cm.

Unrecorded acquisition, before 1922¹ (y1930-447).

CONDITION: *The head is broken at the neck; the top and the right forehead are missing; and the tip of the nose is chipped off. A fragment of flat background and a trace of a raised border remain to the proper left of the head.*

The man has a full beard and mustache, sharply separated from the cheeks and marked with short chisel strokes on a slightly raised surface. The hair is arranged in three rows of curls around the forehead. The eyes are elongated, with lids running as two parallel bars toward the ears, which are deeply pierced with a drill. The eyeballs are marked with a single circle each, the brows grooved.

This fragment is detached from a funerary slab, which, instead of bearing a half-figure in high relief, represented the deceased within an ornamental border, reclining on a couch and being served by a cup bearer.² The figures were necessarily rather small, but the features do not differ significantly from those of the more frequent funerary busts, and like most of the latter, they represent a type rather than an individual.

MG

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unpublished.

NOTES

1. See p. 313, n. 1.
2. For parallels see Colledge 1976, 78–79, pl. 109; Ruprechtsberger 1987, 25.

