

ANDREAS SCHMIDT-COLINET (in Zusammenarbeit mit KHALED AL-AS'AD und CARLA MÜTING-ZIMMER), *Das Tempelgrab Nr. 36 in Palmyra. Studien zur palmyrenischen Grabarchitektur und ihrer Ausstattung*. Ph. von Zabern, Mainz am Rhein 1992. Vol. I: pp. X+213, fig. 65; vol. II: pp. IV, pl. 76 (406 fig.), 73 *Beilagen*, 20 plans. *Damaszener Forschungen* 4.

This beautiful publication is the result of 10 seasons in the field, and certainly much more time at desk, all spent on excavation and study of one tomb in Palmyra. It could be asked, then, why this particular monument among 150 or so preserved on the site deserved such attention.

Before the work of the Syro-German mission (sponsored jointly by DAI Station Damaskus and the Palmyra Museum) started in 1981, tomb 36 was just a heap of stones, recognizable as yet another *tombeau-maison* or *Tempelgrab* of which dozens can be seen around Palmyra, especially in the close neighbourhood, i.e. in the best preserved necropolis known as Valley of Tombs. Admittedly, the tomb chosen for the *Modellprojekt* of S.-C. is one of the largest, and its decoration, even before the clearing, was striking as particularly rich.

The aim of the enterprise was to gain a precise idea of the original appearance of one of these "temple-tombs". A tremendous task, when one considers the number of blocks to be removed, drawn, and reassembled so as to make a coherent restoration. The prospect of such Brobdingnagian puzzle-game hindered any systematic architectural study until now.

As a matter of fact, a similar though smaller tomb has been excavated in 1929 by Jean Cantineau, and more recently studied for its sculptures by K. Makowski (*Damaszener Mitteilungen* 1, 1983, 175 ff., pl. 48 ff.). However, no elements of the exterior to speak of were found there. The monument was called *tombeau-maison* by the excavator, because of the peristyle court in the middle; most authors prefer however, for tombs of this type, the name of funerary temple, in reference to prostyle façades of some, e.g. tomb 86, the ruin of which was studied by C. Watzinger and K. Wulzinger (Wiegand, *Palmyra*, 1932, 71 ff., pl. 38 ff.) and called ever since the Funerary Temple.

The work at the site of tomb 36 started by recording and clearing of over 700 blocks from the rubble. What appeared was an underground square courtyard with arcades, surrounded with funerary *loculi*, but practically no elements of elevation remained standing above the ground level inside and the pilaster bases outside.

However, enough samples of decoration from various parts of the building have been preserved to provide the authors with data for a complete restoration on paper, assured except in minor points, carefully listed. Plain blocks are mostly lacking, having been removed to serve for other buildings some time in the 4th century or later. It has proved impossible, then, to restore the tomb on the site, unless unacceptable amount of new stone were used. Considering the original dimensions of the monument (18 m wide and 10 m high),

one cannot help thinking that a complete reconstruction would perhaps alter the appearance of the Valley more dramatically than someone used to it during last thirty years would like... Imagination, on the other hand, finds in this book everything it needs to visualize a major funerary monument from the beginning of the 3rd century.

The picture provided is indeed a surprising one. It is generally assumed that, in contrast to the earlier funerary towers, the so-called funerary temples reflect the gradual process of Romanisation, that is of adopting, in architecture as in other fields, Western style and manners. S.-C. sees there what he calls "Romanisation as Re-Orientalisation", i.e. the re-emergence, under Roman Imperial veneer, of age-old traditions and tendencies. The problem is a far-reaching one and highly speculative. As far as the present book is concerned, it is enough to say that the monument does not really resemble anything known from elsewhere, while in its sculptural decoration two distinct traditions can be distinguished: one of local funerary sculpture, the other linked to the workshops specialized in sarcophagi decoration, active in Asia Minor and on the Levantine coast.

Indeed, while the usual funerary banquet scenes, half-figures or detached heads catalogued in the book remain entirely in the mainstream of the Palmyrene art, the pediments are adorned with less frequent Dionysiac motifs, and with the quite unexpected figures of protagonists of the marine thiasos, including a dolphin-riding Eros holding an umbrella and looking rather sceptical about what he is doing (pl. 20 d). S.-C. shows that these subjects were either executed by sculptors from a place like Tyre, used to work on sarcophagi and induced this time to apply their art in a novel way, or at least copied from pattern books by local craftsmen eager to westernize.

These exotic scenes were set above exedrae around the ground floor peristyle, and crowning an elaborate façade outside. The architectural composition of the latter is not applied on the wall but protruding in high relief, including laterally a two-storey system of niches and a make-believe baldachin in the centre above the triple entrance, real this time. On the sides and the back of the monument there were elements of other mock niches between pilasters.

Someone looking at the standing monument could have no inkling that behind the imposing walls the inner structure reached only about three-fifths of the height of the façade; upon entering, one could see the crowsteps above the peristyle against the sky, with no suggestion of the rough backside of walls towering behind.

The whole apparatus appears to the present reviewer as a rather late imitation of Hellenistic architecture, such as must have existed in Alexandria and was reproduced on the rock walls of Petra. There is no compelling ground to see there Oriental influence other than indirect, in spite of the (imperfect) parallel of the "Parthian palace" in Assur (p. 36, fig. 11), in my eyes just another offshoot of the same tradition.

As a matter of fact, S.-C. is inclined to explain his evidence in Oriental terms because of a theory he adopted about the possible owner of the tomb. In the badly damaged foundation inscription (*Inventaire* IV 21) there is a sequence of Aramaic letters which can be construed as representing the proper name *Worod*. Even if a translation like "anybody from among the heirs..." (*nš mn wrw[š...]*) is also possible, admittedly with a grammatical difficulty about the second *waw*, but in accordance with the apparent meaning of the Greek fragments, the *Worod* reading is at least as likely. The problem is in the identity of the man.

S.-C. would like to see in him a high dignitary of equestrian rank at Odainat's court, Julius Aurelius Septimius Worod, whose brilliant career is traced for us by inscriptions from 258 A.D. on (cf. D. Schlumberger, *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 9, 1942/43, p. 60 ff.). Among other honours bestowed upon him, he was agoranome and *argapet*, a Persian title which, according to E. Will (*Les Palmyréniens. La Venise*

*des sables*, 1992, p. 181) would in this case designate an ethnarch, i.e. the leader of the Iranian colony in Palmyra. If so, a tomb dated on stylistic grounds to about 210–220 A.D. could not be built by the *argapet* himself, and S.-C. thinks that he was rather a son or grandson of the builder. In such a case, however, he would be certainly born in Palmyra. Why should he, then, differ in any way from his fellow-citizens?

It seems indeed that he did not. The "Persian factor" was introduced twenty years ago, with due caution, by D. Schlumberger in one of his last papers (*Syria* 49, 1972, p. 339–341). Schlumberger wanted to identify Septimius Worod of Palmyra and a "Vorod l'agoranome" mentioned in the inscription of Shahpur at Naqsh-i Rostem among the grandees of the Sassanian court (A. Maricq, *Classica et Orientalia*, 1965, p. 72). He would thus be rather a Palmyrene refugee in Persia than the other way round, as is sometimes believed; more probably, we have evidence there for two different persons.

The main argument for the identity of the two is the fact that in both cases no ancestry is given. However, among the scores of Persian dignitaries named in Shahpur's inscription many are in the same position. What is more, two generals of Zenobia, Septimius Zabda and Septimius Zabbai, both obviously native to their city, do not name their fathers either, in their own inscriptions (*Inventaire* III 19–20). It looks as if they were following a custom of the court, and so would the Worod from Palmyra. This is not a compelling reason to suppose him alien, or of alien ancestry.

Tomb 36, Worod's or not, is a splendid example of funerary architecture in Palmyra, differing from most other tombs of the 3rd century in size and richness, but probably not in spirit. The comparative chapter, based on schematic drawings of several standing ruins (pp. 42–64), shows at counterpoint what the limits of surveying are and how unexpected the results obtained by a conscientious excavation might be.

As S.-C. has demonstrated, there is basically no separation between the repertory of architectural ornament and of embroidery as represented in sculpture and on surviving textiles. His current research, set in motion by the present book, is concerned with these parallels, opening a new perspective on Palmyrene civilization and its place between East and West. Waiting for the fruits of this study, there is already every reason to congratulate S.-C. for a work well done, a *Modellprojekt* indeed.

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