

Palmyrene portraits from the temple of Allat. New evidence on artists and workshops

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To friends and colleagues from Palmyra

Several seasons of archaeological excavations conducted in the temple of Allat in Palmyra by the Polish mission of the University of Warsaw directed by Michał Gawlikowski brought to light many sculptural artefacts. This particularly rich and remarkable material is by no means homogenous. In fact, among the various sculptural items there are funerary sculptures that clearly did not belong to the original sculptural setting of the sanctuary, as well as honorific statues that, on the contrary, must have been displayed in the temple enclosure.

All the discovered sculptures were reused in later structures belonging to the temple, the camp of Diocletian (phase Allat IV according to the chronology established by Michał Gawlikowski) or the Byzantine dwelling constructed within the temenos of the sanctuary (phase Allat V).¹ The total number of funerary sculptures amounts to over 70 pieces, including about 60 portraits, most of which are badly damaged. The best specimens preserved intact or in almost complete form, are already well-known either from the publications of Michał Gawlikowski² or from the photographs published by Katsumi Tanabe in his often-consulted album *Sculptures of Palmyra I*.³

As for honorific statues, they were reassembled from several broken pieces to form seven almost complete sculptures. A number of fragments housed to-

day in the storeroom of the Archaeological Museum of Palmyra probably belong to four more sculptures, producing a total of eleven statues.⁴

The very beginning of the political and artistic history of Palmyra is still an object of research. One of the most important problems concerns its political status, particularly the question when, if ever, Palmyra became a Greek polis rather than a village, a confederation of nomadic or semi-nomadic population groups. In turn, the most vital questions concerning the artistic production of the city address the issue of the origin of official and private Palmyrene art, the rules and processes that influenced its appearance, and the date of its emergence.

The activity of early sculptural workshops is only one of the issues that are still to be investigated and the aim of this article is to offer a modest contribution to its reconstruction.⁵

Thus, the sculptures considered in this study belong, in chronological terms, to the very beginning of the artistic history of the city, i.e., to the period between the first and mid-second centuries AD.

1. Gawlikowski 1983a, 181-182; Gawlikowski 1983b, 59-67.

2. Gawlikowski 1987, 283-284.

3. Tanabe 1986, 319-320, 325, 358-359, nos. 350-352, 356, 389-390.

4. Gawlikowski 2008, 397-411.

5. On the early Palmyrene sculptures see especially Seyrig 1941, 31-44; Morehart 1956-57, 53-83.



Fig. 1: Sanctuary of Allat. Female head. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. 3/77. (Bartosz Markiewicz).



Fig. 2: Sanctuary of Allat. Female head. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. B 2319/8520. (Bartosz Markiewicz).

I. The first category discussed is that of funerary sculpture

Three female portraits have been chosen as the most representative. None of them have been published so far.

I.1. The first portrait, 21 cm high, is a head of a young lady (*fig. 1*).⁶ It was made of soft, greyish limestone. The portrait has a gentle oval face with full cheeks and chin, the mouth is small with full lips and a pronounced Cupid's bow; the contour of the lips is traced by a fine groove. The nose is straight with drilled nostril holes. The eyes are large, almost semicircular, with pupils and irises marked by two concentric circles; the irises touch the upper lids. The eyes are set under gently arched protruding brows that join the edges of the nose. The ears are large, with well-marked lobes, and they are decorated with five simple, circular earrings

6. Inv. 3/77. Dimensions: H. 21 cm.

– as it is fashionable also today. The hair is not visible, although two wavy locks probably flowed down onto the shoulders. The neck is marked by two horizontally carved grooves. On her head the lady wears a very simple frontal band marked by several vertical lines, a turban made of material tightly twisted and rolled around the head, and a veil. The portrait does not convey any sense of individuality, as is the norm in Palmyrene portraits at least in the beginning of their production, but this is not a point to be discussed in this paper.⁷

From the chronological point of view, this female head can be connected with some funerary representations belonging to the first group of Palmyrene portraits according to Harald Ingholt's classification.⁸ In fact, some similar facial features, such as the large eyes and the softly modelled small mouth with its curved upper lip and characteristic contour, are to be

7. See Long in this volume.

8. Ingholt 1928, 90-93.



Fig. 3: Sanctuary of Allat. Female funerary bust. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. B 2357/8500. (Courtesy of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw).

found in several private portraits dated to the first century AD, like the ones found in the tower-tomb no. 19 (figs. 5-6),⁹ or those of the wife of Bar'atê from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek dated to AD 65/66.¹⁰ What is more, the material from which this female head had been carved, namely the soft limestone, also suggests an early date - most probably the first half of the first century AD.

9. Inv. T5.19. Michałowski 1963, 214-215, no. 5, fig. 253.

10. Inv. 2816. Ploug 1995, 35, no. 1.

I.2. Stylistically different, carved probably some decades later, albeit from the same material (soft limestone), is another female head that was originally part of a funerary bust (fig. 2).¹¹ This portrait differs from the first portrait-head in facial features: the difference, in fact, lies in the mouth with narrow and straight lips sharply cut with a chisel, and in the eyes, which are more stretched out at the outer corners. Finally, in this portrait the hair is represented by two small curls, one on each temple and partially covering the ears; on either side of the neck long locks must have flowed down from behind the ears. The lady wears a typical female Palmyrene headdress: a frontlet decorated with acanthus leaves between pearls, a turban, and a veil. The ears are decorated with earrings in the form of bunches of grapes known from several Palmyrene portraits stylistically dated to the first half of the second century AD, but possibly introduced into Palmyrene female fashion much earlier.¹²

In terms of chronology, this portrait can be associated with some busts dated to the first quarter of the second century. They share similar iconographic elements, such as the grape-form earrings, ornaments of the frontlet and the overall appearance. For dating parallels, see for example the portrait of 'Alâ from AD 113/114 in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek,¹³ although this portrait differs in material, as it is made of hard, white limestone. The head from the temple of Allat, however, appears to be much closer to the sculptures from the end of the first century AD, sharing some of their technical and stylistic traits, such as the bold use of the chisel for carving and finishing the facial features, the shape of the eyes, as for example in the bust of Abinâ from AD 96, again from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.¹⁴ This suggests a date in the end of the first or the beginning of the second century AD.

I.3. The next one in chronological order is a female portrait finely carved in very hard white limestone

11. Inv. B 2319/8520. Dimensions: H. 21 cm.

12. Michałowski 1964, 83-84, no. 17, fig. 117.

13. Inv. 1079. Ploug 1995, 40, no. 3.

14. Inv. 1057. Ploug 1995, 37, no. 2.

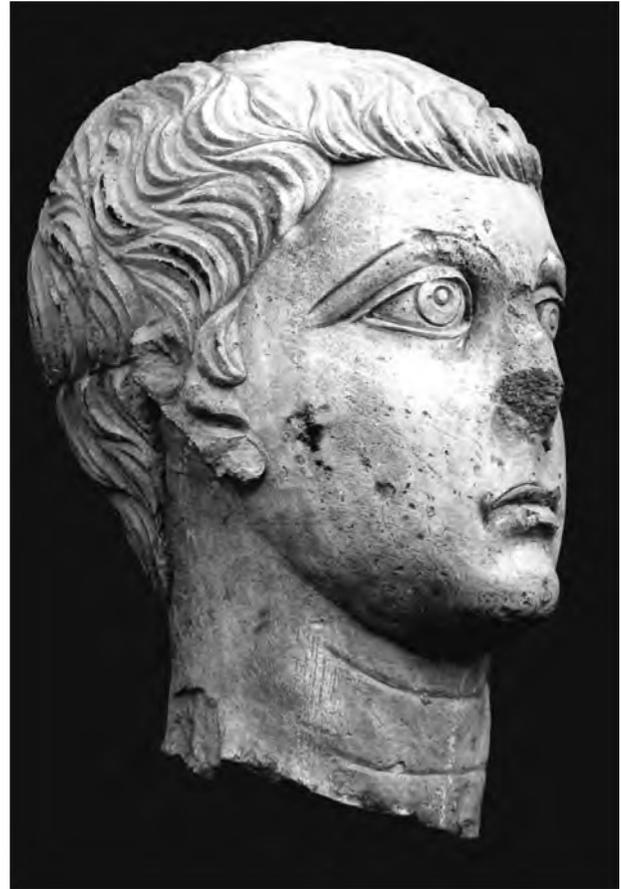


Fig. 4a-b: Sanctuary of Allat. Male head. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. B 2343. (Courtesy of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw).

(*fig. 3*).¹⁵ To the right of her head there is a fragmentarily preserved inscription. The represented lady is missing both shoulders, as well as the right hand, although its traces are still visible on the breast. The figure wears traditional Palmyrene dress composed of a tunic and a cloak fastened below the left shoulder with a trapezoidal fibula decorated with a small rosette. On her head the lady wears a frontlet, a turban and a veil. The head is slightly turned to her right. The soft oval face has full cheeks. The eyes are large with broad upper lids. The eyebrows are undercut and slightly arched. The mouth is small, with full lips separated by a drilled furrow; there are still traces of red colour on them. The neck is full. The

hair around the face is concealed by the veil except for two small curls on each temple and longer locks that descend onto the shoulders. The draping of the garment is carefully modelled, although simplified. The folds are thin and widely spaced; on the chest they form a series of narrow, U-shaped lines. Semi-circular folds are also present on the left side of the chest. The left hand grasps a distaff and a spindle, whereas what remains of the right hand make clear that it must have been laid diagonally on the chest, similarly to several sepulchral busts attributed to the period between the second half of the first century and the mid-second century AD; as good examples it is sufficient to mention the funerary slab of Viria Phoibe and Caius Virius Alkimos from the British Museum (where the position of the left hand is

15. Inv. B 2357/8500. Dimensions: H. 59 cm.



Fig. 5: Male head. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. T 14.19. (Courtesy of the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences).



Fig. 6: Female head. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. T 15.19. (Courtesy of the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences).

different),¹⁶ the funerary bust of Ḥabbâ daughter of Moqîmû kept in the Louvre and dated to the second half of the first or the beginning of the second century,¹⁷ or a portrait bust of Ḥannâ daughter of Barîkai from the hypogeum of Šalamallat son of Malikû, dated to around the mid-second century AD.¹⁸

Moreover, several distinctive features of the portrait from the temple of Allat can be observed on funerary stelai dated to AD 130-150. An important parallel is found on an *imago clipeata* with a portrait of Šalammat from AD 145.¹⁹ The portrait is very similar from the stylistic and technical point of view, especially in the manner of execution of the small, smiling

mouth with lips separated by a drilled furrow and the metallic rendering of the rare folds on the tunic.

Furthermore, the rendering of the turban with a series of oblique and vertical incisions, as well as a similar gesture of the left, grasping hand with two outstretched fingers (fore- and middle fingers) can be found in several other portraits, such as, for instance, two sculptures from the hypogeum of Barîkî son of Zebîdâ: one belonging to Temâ daughter of Barîkî,²⁰ and the other to Aqmê daughter of Zebîdâ.²¹ The same iconographic feature is to be seen on the portrait of Martâ daughter of Arṭaban from the hypogeum of Arṭaban son of ‘Oggâ.²²

16. Inv. ME 12503. 125036 - IGLS XVII/1, no. 401 with full bibliography.

17. Musée du Louvre, inv. no. AO1557. Dentzer-Feydy and Teixidor 1993, 163, no. 167.

18. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. B 1775/6599.

Sadurska and Bounni 1994, no. 209, fig. 160.

19. CIS II 4249, tab. XLI.

20. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. 2016. Sadurska and Bounni 1994, no. 149, fig. 149.

21. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. 2018. Sadurska and Bounni 1994, no. 152, fig. 150.

22. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, without inv. no. Sadurska and Bounni 1994, no. 30, fig. 152.

The characteristic smile and the fold pattern compare well with the same features of the bust of Ḥannâ, mentioned above, whose eyes are also similar in form to the portrait from the temple of Allat.

All these busts are similar in the technical handling of the surface, particularly the use of the chisel for finishing the grooves. The draping of the garment is carefully modelled, although simplified. All of them follow the same model; each sculptor changed details of the scheme and modified the gestures, but followed the general layout of the design. It can therefore be concluded that these busts were carved in one workshop, which created its own scheme for the female portraits around AD 130-150. This physiognomic model became an element of fashionable self-representation in the second quarter of the second century AD.

II. The second category presented in the article comprises honorific statues

Unfortunately none of the sculptures in this category survived intact. Moreover, all the statues were found without the heads. Nevertheless, in the course of excavations two portrait heads belonging to honorific statues were found. They have already been published.

II.1 The first, over life-size head (*fig. 4a-b*) was carefully worked on all sides. The portrait depicts a young beardless man. The position of the neck indicates that the head was originally facing forward.²³

The youthful features are regular and the face is full and round with a prominent chin marked by a small dimple. The eyes are abnormally large and bulging. They have broad, sharply cut upper eyelids and strongly arched incised eyebrows. The pupil and the iris are marked by two concentric circles; the iris touches the upper lid. The slightly down-turned mouth has full lips, of which the upper one is bow-shaped and marked by a finely incised contour line.

23. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. B 2343. Dimensions: H. 40 cm. Gawlikowski 1987, 283-284, no. 8.



Fig. 7: Male head. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. T13/19. (Courtesy of the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences).

The nose, now broken, was straight and small with well-marked nostrils. The philtrum is strongly carved. The ears are big and plastically modelled, with large lobes and a characteristic triangular tragus.

The hairstyle comes forward from the crown in five rows of short, comma-shaped locks, which were carefully separated by chisel marks and have incised internal strands. The fringe of gentle curved locks is short and cut on the brow. One small curl falls in front of each ear. The hair is worked flat and close to the skull. Two horizontal grooves are visible on the full neck.

In its general appearance this portrait could be considered a local reception of the Julio-Claudian type, perhaps that of Germanicus, although this kind of hairstyle continued to be used in Palmyra into the third century, as is clear, for example, from the portrait of Šim'ôn son of Ḥairan dated to AD 243-244.²⁴

24. Ingholt 1928, PS 27.



Fig. 8a: Male head. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. T1/15. (Courtesy of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw).



Fig. 8b: Male head inv. T1/15 with traces of red paint. (Dagmara Wielgosz).

The honorific portrait-head shares many stylistic features with a series of male portraits, mainly of children, in various sizes, from 12 to 25 cm in height (figs. 5, 7-8a-b). These small heads were found in two tomb-towers, no. 15 and no. 19, both probably built at the latest in the beginning of the first century AD.²⁵ Indeed we can notice their strikingly similar overall appearance; the rendering and the shape of the eyes and of the mouth are the same; the sculptor's mark in the form of the ears, especially the triangular tragus, as well as the pronounced philtrum. Moreover, the heads show the same protruding chin with the small dimple; they were also made of the same material: a soft greyish limestone and most of them preserve traces

25. Michałowski 1963, 209-210, no. 1, figs. 247-248 and 214-215, no. 5, fig. 253; Michałowski 1964, 157-161, nos. 1-2, figs. 189-190.

of red colour (fig. 8b). The sculptural workmanship is much more careful in the case of the honorific statue than of the funerary ones, but this is not surprising.

The temple of Allat also yielded numerous fragments of architectural decoration in soft greyish limestone. From the stylistic and iconographic point of view, as well as on the basis of the technical handling, they are remarkably similar to those found in the so-called Foundation T in the sanctuary of Bel, dated to the first century BC or the very beginning of the first century AD.²⁶ Among these elements were fragments of an abacus decorated with the egg-and-dart pattern (Ionic kyma) and with a small head on each side (fig.

26. On sculptural fragments and the so-called Foundation T in the sanctuary of Bel, see e.g. Seyrig 1940, 277-282.



Fig. 9: Sanctuary of Allat. Capital (abacus). Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. B 2299. (Courtesy of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw).



Fig. 10a-b: Male head. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. CD 63. (Courtesy of the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences).



Fig. 11a-b: Sanctuary of Ba'alshamin. Male head. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. B 1861. (Courtesy of the Archive Paul Collart, Université de Lausanne. Patrick M. Michel)

g).²⁷ This head has, unexpectedly, the same sculptor's marks as the heads described earlier, especially the triangular tragus. Also the rendering of the hair, arranged in gentle locks around face, and the big eyes with sharply cut upper eyelids are very similar.

It seems clear that all of these heads, the honorific portrait, as well as the funerary and architectural decoration, must have been made by the same hand, by the same sculptor active in the first decades of the first century AD.

27. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. 2299. Dimensions: H. 13 cm; W. 52 cm. Gawlikowski 1987, 283-284, no. 47, fig. 9.



Therefore, we can say that the honorific portrait-head might have belonged to the earliest sculptural setting of the temple, that is, to the very beginning of the first century AD. This dating corresponds to the first phase of the construction of the temple of Allat (Allat I), which is known to have been built in the mid-first century BC at the latest,²⁸ although a mid-second century dating has been suggested for the head.²⁹ One might add that the general appearance of this head may have been inspired by a sculptural group representing Drusus, Tiberius and Germanicus. Some scholars have argued that this group, known from its dedication inscription of about AD 17-19 commissioned by Minucius Rufus, *legatus* of the *legio decima Fretensis*, exerted an influence on local Palmyrene sculpture.³⁰ We cannot, however, exclude the portrait's iconographic independence from imperial portraiture.

28. Gawlikowski 1990, 105-106; Gawlikowski 1983a, 179-198; Gawlikowski 1983b, 59-67.

29. Equini Schneider 1992, 122-123, fig. 6.

30. Colledge 1976, 89; Sadurska 1988, 75-86.

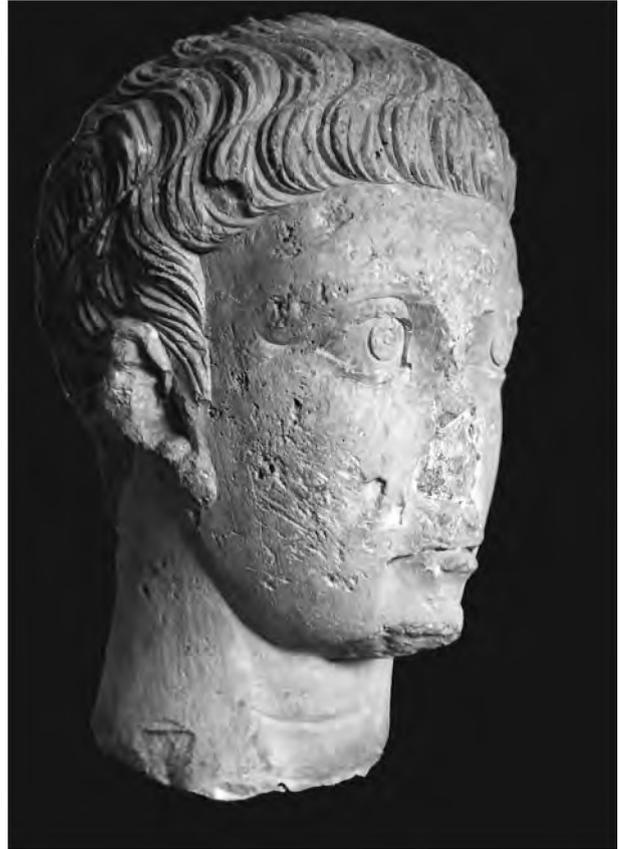


Fig. 12a-b: Male head. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, inv 1093. (Courtesy of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen). Photo Ana Cecilia Gonzalez.

II.2. The second over life-size honorific head was found by Kazimierz Michałowski in the Diocletianic camp in 1960s (*fig. 10a-b*),³¹ but it must have belonged to one of the honorific statues from the temple of Allat. With the head discussed above (*fig. 4a-b*) it shares the material, i.e., the soft greyish limestone, and the shape of the eyes, which are large, with the iris and pupil incised, although they have heavier, sharply articulated lower eyelids. However, since it portrays a mature man with a long face, it differs in some facial features. Two furrows that cross the tall brow. The down-turned mouth is small and the lips are separated by a drilled groove. The ears are large, well pronounced, with a characteristic globular, and not trian-

gular, tragus, and the neck is marked by three incisions. Also the hairstyle is different, composed of flat, sharply cut locks arranged in two concentric tiers: one rests over the ears and on the back and the other forms a short fringe, slightly arched across the brow and gently parted above the inner corner of the left eye. The top of the head, only roughly sketched with flat and claw chisels, may have been covered by a headdress, possibly a modius made from a different material. Moreover, the head was made for insertion into a separately carved body and a portion of the tenon is still visible in the lower part of the neck.

As in the case of the first honorific head, also here we have some minor details revealing the artists' scarcely conscious shorthand and conventions in portraying, for example the form of the globular tragus that I risk to call a sculptor's mark or Morellian detail.

31. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. CD 63. Dimensions: H. 35 cm. Michałowski 1963, 116-117, no. 7, figs. 163-164.



Fig. 13a-c: Male head. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. 7/07. (Bartosz Markiewicz)

Three similar heads: one over life-size, belonging to a honorific statue found in the temple of Ba'alšamīn (fig. 11 a-b),³² another also over life-size of unknown function, kept today in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (fig. 12a-b),³³ and the third one, most probably funerary judging by its dimensions, found in the temple of Allat (fig. 13a-b),³⁴ might have been executed by the same sculptor. Indeed they share with the honorific portrait-head the facial features and hairstyle, as well as the characteristic globular tragus.

In its general appearance the discussed head is very similar to the first honorific portrait. The large eyes are indicative of the dating. Already the first publisher of this head, Kazimierz Michałowski, postulated a first century AD date, and Eugenia Equini

Schneider narrowed it down to the first half of that century, which seems plausible to me.³⁵

The evidence presented above permits to make an attempt to establish a dating of the placement of honorific statues, at least the oldest ones, in the temple. It seems that they were introduced in the first half of the first century AD at the latest – some time before February of AD 64, when an honorific column was offered to Šalamallat son of Yarhibôl (fig. 14).³⁶ The column is decorated with a high-relief sculpture that represents a kind of transitional phase between honorific sculptures in the round standing on bases or on the ground, and statues put on column brackets, which were to become the most popular means of honouring distinguished individuals.

32. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. B. 1861. Dimensions: H. 35 cm. Dunant and Stucky 2000, pl. 24, no. 82.

33. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, inv. 1093. Dimensions: H. 32 cm. Ploug 1995, 110, no. 33.

34. Palmyra, Archaeological Museum, inv. 7/07. Dimensions: H. 26 cm. Unpublished.

35. Michałowski 1963, 116-117; Equini Schneider 1992, 120, fig. 5a-b.

36. On inscription see IGLS XVII/1, no. 124 with full bibliography.



Fig. 14: Temple of Allat. Column of Šalamallat. (Marcin Wagner).

The idea for the column of Šalamallat could have been taken from existing honorific statues that either stood on the ground or were designed for setting on a base, before statues on brackets became popular. They were probably even made by the same workshops.³⁷

The first century and the beginning of the second century AD (Allat II) is the time when porticoes were added to the temenos of the temple. Since their col-

37. See below note 40: sculptures from the sanctuary of Ba'alšamîn. In the old storeroom of the Archaeological Museum of Palmyra there was a drum of a column with two female sculptures (inv. 454) carved in high-relief, see Ingholt 1938, 95-97, pl. 20, fig. 3; Yon 2002, 166. The iconography of the female figures closely resembles that of the funerary reliefs of the first century AD.



Fig. 15: Sanctuary of Ba'alšamîn. Column tambour with a male figure, excavation inv. 249. (Courtesy of the Archive Paul Collart, Université de Lausanne. Patrick M. Michel).

umns did not have brackets yet, new honorific sculptures presented then still had to be set on bases or on the ground.

Honorific statues of the same character were found in the sanctuary of Ba'alšamîn.³⁸ As the sanctuaries of Ba'alšamîn and Allat belonged to the same tribe of Benê Ma'zîn, to find the same type of portraits and statues in both places is not surprising. Also the construction process of the two temples shows some significant parallels, which could be an interesting topic for another paper.

In both temples we notice the presence of high-relief honorific sculptures carved together with the tambour of the column (*figs. 14-16*).

38. Dunant and Stucky 2000.

In the temple of Ba'alšamîn, the high-relief sculptures came from a large enclosure, probably the portico C₄ dated to the 60s on basis of epigraphic sources. One of these inscriptions is a dedication of Portico C₄ to Ba'alšamîn by Yarahai son of Lišamš in September AD 67.³⁹ Therefore, the dating of the majority of the headless honorific statues from the sanctuary of Ba'alšamîn was set for ca. the 60s/70s based on typological and iconographic resemblances to these relief figures.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, some of them could have been set up in the temple much earlier, before the construction of the porticoes, as in the temple of Allat.

The decoration of the two temples gives us some information on the workshops active in first-century Palmyra. They produced all kinds of sculpture, i.e., architectural decoration, honorific statues, and sepulchral sculpture. The sculptors must have worked together with craftsmen responsible for sculpture colouring, since some of the funerary heads have preserved traces of a red paint, most probably red ochre (fig. 8b).⁴¹ They offer some of the earliest evidence of painting in Palmyra.⁴²

Since the two honorific heads from the temple of Allat (figs. 4a-b and 10a-b) differ in sculptor's marks, we have to assume that there were either at least two workshops or two different artists from the same workshop producing for the tribe of Benê Ma'zin. Already in this early period Palmyra's population demanded sculptors' work on a large scale.

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39. Dunant 1971, 14-16, nos. 1a and 1b.

40. Dunant and Stucky 2000.

41. No analytical study of the painting technique has been performed. It is likely that the red pigment (most probably ochre) was only one of the paint layers, a ground, for a combination of pigments including calcite or white lead used to reproduce the skin tones.

42. See also the results of polychromy analysis of the so-called Beauty of Palmyra, a third-century funerary relief (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, inv. 2795). Tracing Colour, a Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Project.



Fig. 16: Sanctuary of Ba'alšamîn. Column tambour with a male figure, without inv. (Courtesy of the Archive Paul Collart, Université de Lausanne. Patrick M. Michel).

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