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Le tombeau des trois frères à Palmyre Mission archéologique franco-syrienne 2004-2009

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C. Historiography : Danish Research from Johannes Østrup (1893) to the Palmyra Portrait Project

(Rubina Raja and Annette Højen Sørensen)

Since 2012 the Palmyra Portrait Project research group based at Aarhus University has been working on compiling as comprehensive a corpus of palmyrene funerary sculpture as possible²³¹. At present the corpus includes more than 3300 portraits, which is far beyond what any scholar thought still existed of these portraits²³². The corpus is currently being prepared for final publication. The corpus makes up the largest group of portraits stemming from the Roman period and coming from outside Rome itself, which makes this group of material extremely significant in relation to the study of societal developments and local identities in the Roman provinces. Along with the research done on the funerary sculpture, researchers within the group have worked on historiographic aspects of the Danish research done in and on Palmyra throughout the last centuries. Most known is the work of Harald Ingholt on the palmyrene funerary sculpture, his ground breaking publication *Studier over Palmyrensk Skulptur* from 1928 as well as the field work, which he conducted in Palmyra in the 1920s and 1930s and which was published in a string of renowned international journals²³³. However, less known is the fact that the Danish professor Johannes Elith Østrup, who specialised in Middle Eastern culture and religion, visited Palmyra much earlier, namely in 1893, on a trip through the Middle East on horseback. Furthermore, the fact that it was the financial support of the Carlsberg Foundation, which to a large extent allowed Østrup's research and later the research and fieldwork carried out by Harald Ingholt in Palmyra, is often overlooked in research on the Danish archaeological engagement in the Middle East²³⁴.

JOHANNES ELITH ØSTRUP

The Dane Johannes Elith Østrup (1867-1938), was professor at University of Copenhagen (pl. 5.1). At the zenith of his career, he became rector of the university in 1934-1935²³⁵. He is usually described as an “orientalist”,

which is a poor label for what he in fact was, namely a pioneer in the study of the Middle East. Among other things he held the first professorship at University of Copenhagen in Islamic culture, a professorship which was created especially for him. He specialized in philology; among the languages which he mastered were Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Arabic. However, he also studied Muslim culture. As often for scholars of this period, he also had other interests. Among the many works he wrote, he authored a book on the founder of Carlsberg Breweries, J. C. Jacobsen, the father of Carl Jacobsen. Furthermore, he was highly engaged in political matters and in particular issues concerning the foreign affairs of Denmark in the Middle East. Østrup received several medals and distinctions for his work and in 1937 he published his memoirs in which he mainly dealt with the years of his career after 1893²³⁶.

Immediately after the defense of his higher doctoral degree in 1891 at the age of 24, Østrup went on a study trip to the Middle East in order to become fluent in various Arabic dialects and to familiarize himself with the cultures of the region. His journey began in Egypt from where he travelled on to Syria, Asia Minor and back to Denmark two years later²³⁷. His trip stands in the tradition of the time, when such educational travels were commonly undertaken when one came from a certain layer in society. During or shortly after Østrup's two-year-long journey through Egypt, Syria and Turkey, he wrote a long account, which was published as a monograph in 1894²³⁸. In this book and the report given later to the Royal Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen, he described his experiences in “et ridt gennem Ørkenen og Lilleasien” (a horseback ride through the Desert and Asia Minor)²³⁹ in which he gave vivid accounts of what he heard and saw and demonstrated his broad knowledge of ancient cultures as well as making numerous anthropological observations. He expressed his great fascination of the Orient and its vast cultural history and he even mentioned, he felt the presence of history more in places such as Damascus and Palmyra than in Athens²⁴⁰.

231. We would like to thank the Carlsberg Foundation for generously financing the Palmyra Portrait Project in the period 2012-2015 and for prolonging the project from 2016 until the end of 2019. Annette Højen Sørensen was employed as Post-Doc in the project (also financed by the Carlsberg Foundation) from 2012 until the end of 2014. See the webpage of the project for further information: <http://projects.au.dk/palmyraportrait/>

232. For introductions to the project see: KROPP and RAJA 2014 and 2015 as well as RAJA 2015a.

233. INGHOLT 1928 is his habilitation *Studier over Palmyrensk Skulptur*.

234. <http://www.carlsbergfondet.dk/> for more about the foundation's

work. Also RAJA 2016 on the Danish Palmyra research funded by the Carlsberg Foundation.

235. *Den Store Danske*. At this point the rector was only appointed for one academic year. During his office he was invited to speak at the 300 year anniversary of Richelieu's foundation of the *Académie Française*, ØSTRUP 1937.

236. ØSTRUP 1937.

237. ØSTRUP 1937, 9-10; ØSTRUP 1894.

238. ØSTRUP 1894.

239. ØSTRUP 1894, part of the subtitle of his book.

240. ØSTRUP 1894, 3.

During Østrup's stay in Damascus in the early months of 1893, he decided to take a trip on horseback into the Syrian Desert to describe some of the ancient ruins which had hitherto not been thoroughly explored by European expeditions. He knew the explorations of B. Moritz, *Zur antiken Topographie der Palmyrene* from 1889 and on this basis, he wanted to explore the area further. In March 1893, he and two local companions set out for a desert trip to Palmyra, Rusafa, Homs and back to Damascus²⁴¹. The expedition was financed by the Carlsberg Foundation and Østrup published his most thorough report on the journey in the series of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in 1895²⁴² (pl. 5. 2).

Østrup published maps and descriptions of Kasr-el-her, Rusafa, Serijje, Khirbet-el-maṭrân, Anderin and Kasr Werdân. In the Syrian Desert on the way back to Damascus and before reaching Homs, Østrup bought a horse from a Bedouin as he was a passionate rider²⁴³. He later decided to ride the horse not only from Damascus to Constantinople but all the way through Europe and back home to Copenhagen²⁴⁴. First he rode to Beirut to meet with the Danish Consul Julius Løytved who provided Østrup with all the necessary papers to travel through Turkey and back to Europe. During one of Østrup's stays in Damascus, he helped in getting a now unknown number of palmyrene sculptures out of Syria to a private Danish collection²⁴⁵. The Danish consul in Beirut Løytved was one of the main contacts of Carl Jacobsen, when Jacobsen was buying up what became the Palmyra collection at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek²⁴⁶.

THE DISCOVERY OF A PAINTED TOMB IN PALMYRA 1893

Østrup began his account of Palmyra in his 1894 monograph by explaining the route and entrance to Palmyra. He then went on to the history of the city and the local knowledge of the city's great past followed by an account of some of the ancient ruins²⁴⁷. He published more photos from Palmyra than many of the other localities he visited. These include some of palmyrene temples²⁴⁸. He continued his account by describing the "city of the dead" on the western and southwestern sides of the city. He described the existence of tower tombs and hypogea and mentioned that this was where most of the

well-preserved sculptures and other finds came from. He then went on to describe the art trade during the Ottoman period and the mutilation of the sculptures²⁴⁹. Furthermore, he described one of the spectacular finds he made in one of the tombs of Palmyra. The following passage has been translated from the Danish original:

« Inside one of these, which I studied further, I made an additional find, namely a fair number of paintings that in their form and execution, as well as in their artistic value, were reminiscent of the portraits discovered in Fayum. However, the correct Palmyrene attire and similar external criteria showed that here, with these works, we were dealing with domestic [Palmyrene] art, which likewise consisted of portraits, depictions of the deceased persons deposited in the relevant funerary vault. As far as I am aware, ancient relics of this nature have not previously been found to exist in Palmyra. Alas, at that point in time I did not have at my disposal such a sum as would have been required to hew out the paintings, which were done [directly] on the lime[-plastered] wall, and bring them to Beirut and on board a ship; and indeed, on this trip I did have altogether different tasks to attend to. I therefore did the only thing that could be done under those circumstances: I had earth piled over the entryway leading down into the vault, thus doing my best to protect the works hidden within it against destruction. I then impressed upon my memory the location in order to be able to find it again. This was, perchance, not the last time I would visit the city of Queen Zenobia. »²⁵⁰

He finished his first account of Palmyra by describing his study of the large cave spring in Palmyra close to the "city of the dead"²⁵¹.

In Østrup's more detailed report to the Carlsberg Foundation, he described Palmyra as his first interesting stop on the desert route and his finding of a painted tomb as the most interesting in Palmyra, which he described being of art historical value²⁵². He did not draw a map of Palmyra nor did he do any intensive archaeological studies as he only stayed a few days and did not have any workmen at his disposal.²⁵³

241. ØSTRUP 1894; ØSTRUP 1895, 5, March 16 – April 9 1893.

242. ØSTRUP 1895. The Carlsberg Foundation is housed within the building of the Royal Academy of Sciences and Letters, which the brewer Jacobsen donated to the Academy. All members of the foundation are recruited from the Academy and the Carlsberg Foundation still until today holds the share majority in Carlsberg Breweries A/S. Therefore, there is a close connection between the Academy, the foundation and the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, which is situated on the opposite side of the street in central Copenhagen.

243. ØSTRUP 1894, 193-194.

244. ØSTRUP 1937, 14-15.

245. ØSTRUP 1894, 90-91. These might indeed be the 16 pieces, which figure in the collection of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek as bought through Puttmann (see note 250).

246. JACOBSEN 1886, 4; LØYTVED June 22 1886; LØYTVED June 29 1886; CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1886, 14 n. 1. However, 16 pieces were bought for the collection in 1893, acquired through Puttmann. (HVIDBERG-HANSEN ET PLOUG 1993, 7-8).

247. ØSTRUP 1894, 83-90.

248. ØSTRUP 1894, 83, 85, 87-89.

249. ØSTRUP 1894, 89-92.

250. ØSTRUP 1894, 92 lines 3-19. Translated from Danish by Heidi Flegal.

251. ØSTRUP 1894, 92-93. He does not mention it as the Efqa spring, but it might well have been.

252. ØSTRUP 1895, 62.

253. ØSTRUP 1895, 62.

« Shortly before my arrival, near the most distant of the seven fortified towers lying some 1200 metres southwest of the city's acropolis, the *fellaheen* [peasants], in their usual search for antiquities, had found a funerary vault and excavated a small opening down into it. This aperture was so narrow, though, that apart from myself, only a couple of the thinnest among my companions, amply supplied with candles and matches, were able to squeeze their way through – but our observations of the interior fully counterbalanced this inconvenience. I found that the vault actually comprised a sizeable burial complex with room to accommodate the earthly remains of an unusually large number of people. From the anteroom into which the aperture led, three chambers stretched in different directions, as the loosely done sketch on the opposite page shows [Fig. 1, p. 64] (pl. 5. 3). All three were about equal in size; the middle chamber with a depth of 4.80 metres, a width of 4.50 metres and a height of around 5.25 metres. »

« In the two wings of the funeral chamber (*A* and *B*) the walls were interspersed with apertures for niches (*a a a*), the depth of which was about two metres. The width was about one half metre, and the height somewhere between two and three metres. Because the terrain itself was full of broken rock and similar debris, it was impossible to obtain very specific measurements. The sides of these niches were not straight and smooth, but seen from the end they offered roughly the following figure (Fig. 2) (pl. 5. 5). It was evident from this that here, as in numerous other funerary vaults of Palmyra, they would have been arranged for the insertion of coffins, which would have stood atop one another, almost as in certain Spanish burials, to the number of five in each niche. Of the coffins themselves nothing was left whole, but the bottom of every niche held a substantial heap of human bones. »

« The burial chamber denoted *C* had no niches, as the rear wall and more than half of both side walls were taken up by sarcophagi (*c*); the middle one of which bore a splendid relief of a reclining figure in natural size; and the fronts of the two others were embellished with a row of heads. Unfortunately these were all mutilated, which led me to assume that the place had already been visited previously by Mohammedans, and in such a period when heads of Palmyrene haut-reliefs had not yet gained value for the Palmyrene peasants as a coveted commodity. The ceiling was a rounded vault, and elegantly decorated in squares of green and white. »

« All of the pillars found between the niches (*b b b b*) were richly embellished with painted ornaments, among which was a stereotypical, coarsely done painting of a woman. One of these [recurring] ornaments was a round frame, and in each of these was found a bust

picture, quite excellently done, depicting the particular deceased. The characteristic features of each individual face were reproduced so exquisitely that at first glance one was obliged to feel convinced of its similarity to the person in question; and overall these pictures were, in style and in execution, surprisingly reminiscent of the portraits that are known to us from Fayum. The circumstance that we had, before us, genuine Palmyrene art was, however, quite evident, not only from the apparel itself but also from the stereotypical posture of the figures, which is the same as seen in the sculptural works, namely with hands held to the fore, on the chest, and the one hand supported in the chest fold of the garments. Virtually all the portrayals had Semitic features. These pictures are painted on lime [plaster], and thanks to their being located in a dark yet completely arid room, the colours had kept remarkably well. The great difference in artistic execution between the portraits and the surrounding friezes and pictorial ornaments shows that the production of the latter must have been left to ordinary tradesmen, whereas the bust portraits are the handiwork of a skilled craftsman – albeit here, of course, we are no closer to world-renowned artists than in the case of the portraits from Fayyum. »

« The funds I had at my disposal at the time, while in Palmyra, were far too modest to let me even think of acquiring these rare pieces, and indeed I did primarily have other tasks to attend to. The actual practical difficulties of prising away the pictures would hardly have been great; for as we found out, the layer of lime [plaster] on which they are painted was fairly thick, so that it would be possible, by means of a thin saw, to separate this layer from the rock wall after first having chopped free space around it, so that only the picture itself stood out from the plane of the wall. By laying a wooden cladding on top of the picture for as long as this operation lasted, one would probably have been able to guard the lime [plaster] against splitting into bits. Such objections as the local Turkish *müdir* may have wished to voice against this unlawful treatment of antiquities would have fallen silent in the face of an appropriate *baksheesh*. »

« This funerary vault also offered something unusual in respect of its epigraphical features. The names of the deceased were not carved [into the stone], as is customary, but were painted upon the pillars in a brown colour, and the written characters differed in their nature from those appearing on the reliefs by being more cursive and more carelessly done. Thus here, the common interjection “Alas!” *הבל*, *habal*, which in the [carved] sculpture inscriptions is written *הבל*, appeared in the form *הבל*. The considerable damage, in conjunction with the poor lighting and my own grave

lack of proficiency in the field of Palmyrene epigraphics, did not allow me to determine anything certain from these lines, which apparently, as is commonly the case, contained nothing but names. »²⁵⁴

In the contribution to the XVIIIth International Congress of Classical Archaeology in Merida in Spain, Sørensen compared the descriptions given of the painted tomb by Østrup to the Tomb of the Three Brothers with which the Østrup-tomb had formerly been associated²⁵⁵. For this reason only a few things will be highlighted here.

The first scholar to conclude that Østrup saw and described The Tomb of the Three Brothers was Stryzowski in 1901²⁵⁶. After his observation, this identification was never discussed again and among others Kraeling passed on the note by Stryzowski as a fact²⁵⁷.

When reading the passages in Østrup's work, translated above, the location of the paintings (pl. 5. 3) is the most notable feature, which can be compared to the location of the paintings in the Tomb of the Three Brothers. As may be seen in pl. 5. 4 Østrup found paintings on pillars between the *loculi* in rooms A and B. In the tomb of the Three Brothers, paintings were confined to the back of the central room. Other features can however also be pointed out. Room C where the sarcophagi were placed according to Østrup had no *loculi* and only one full figure person reclined on the central sarcophagus. Both of these statements do not correspond with the Tomb of Three Brothers. The central sarcophagus in the tomb of the Three Brothers has two reclining males on the lid and *loculi* behind the sarcophagi. More features given by Østrup may be seen in pl. 5. 4.

One might speculate that Østrup made several wrong notes on the subterranean tomb, which he saw in the dim light or alternatively that the assumption made by Stryzowski concerning the identification of the tomb is wrong. The exact location of the Østrup-tomb is not clear, but Østrup mentions the distance of the tomb from the acropolis. The Southwest necropolis is situated more than 2000 metres from the citadel and unless Østrup was very wrong in measuring the distance of the painted tomb to around 1200 metres southwest of the acropolis, or his term "acropolis" referred to another hill in the area and not the highest point, we have to rule out the Southwest necropolis in which the Tomb of The Three Brothers is located. The westernmost part of the West necropolis/Valley of the dead, however, fits this distance of the citadel with the

Medieval fortress. The most solid proof existing of the tomb he saw may be found in his 1895 description with the sketches (pl. 5. 3 à 5). However, these were just sketches and we thus still have to take reservations towards which tomb Østrup's drawing in fact represented and whether his observations done by the light of matches and candles in fact were not quite generalizing. As outlined above much points to the conclusion that Østrup described another painted tomb, the identity of which we do not know today.

HARALD INGHOLT AND PALMYRA

Harald Ingholt (1896-1985) was a Danish philologist, theologian and archaeologist²⁵⁸. After several employments at Danish institutions, universities as well as Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Ingholt was offered a position at Yale University, where he advanced to a professorship and stayed until his retirement in 1964. He began to study Semitic philology at University of Copenhagen in 1914, he thereafter studied theology, a study which he finished in 1922, whereafter he went to America. He began there to be interested in Palmyra and the archaeology of the region. In 1924 Ingholt began his archaeological fieldwork in Palmyra in collaboration with the French scholar Maurice Dunand. In 1925 another French colleague, the architect Albert Gabriel, joined Ingholt. In 1928 Ingholt conducted his last large fieldwork campaign in Palmyra, but he returned in 1937 for one last smaller campaign where he excavated the Grave of Malku, which became one of his best published excavations²⁵⁹. In the 1928 campaign two Danish architects, Charles Christensen and Johannes Prip-Møller, also participated. The same year 1928 Ingholt published the monograph *Studier over Palmyrensk Skulptur*, which remains a standard work to this day.

During his campaigns in Palmyra, Ingholt also managed to add some further spectacular pieces to the Palmyra collection at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, where he acted as "underinspektør" in the years between 1925 and 1930. It was the Rask-Ørsted Foundation who financed the purchase of these objects²⁶⁰. The most spectacular of these remains the so-called *Beauty of Palmyra*, which, within the Palmyra Portrait Project, could be situated securely within its original grave context. This famous sculpture can now with certainty be said to come from the house tomb Qasr Abjad, which Ingholt excavated in November 1928²⁶¹.

254. ØSTRUP 1895, 63-64; Translated from Danish by Heidi Flegal.

255. SØRENSEN 2014; SØRENSEN 2016.

256. STRYZGOWKI 1901, 13.

257. KRAELING 1961-62.

258. RAJA et SØRENSEN 2015a for a brief overview of the career of Harald Ingholt and his work in Palmyra.

259. Rubina Raja would like to thank the daughter of Harald Ingholt, Mary Ebba Ingholt Underdown, for providing the exact year of the campaign.

260. RAJA et SØRENSEN 2015a, p. 24-25 for more information on these purchases.

261. RAJA et SØRENSEN 2015b for the full object biography and further references.

THE PALMYRA PORTRAIT PROJECT AND DANISH
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN PALMYRA

In 2011 the Palmyra collection at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek laid the ground for exploring the possibilities to apply for a larger research project, which would compile all known palmyrene funerary sculpture in a specially designed database. The Palmyra collection at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek is the largest collection of palmyrene funerary sculpture housed in a museum outside of Syria ²⁶². The collection was to a large extent compiled in the 19th century, when the brewer Carl Jacobsen, who was a keen collector of antiquities and in particular also impressionistic paintings, decided that Palmyrene sculpture along with Greek and Roman sculpture and portraiture also should have a prominent place within his private collections. In the late 19th century, the Rabbi Simonsen, on the request of Carl Jacobsen, wrote the first catalogue of the Palmyrene collection housed at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, a monumental building in central Copenhagen, which Jacobsen had constructed for the purpose of making his collections available to the public ²⁶³.

Within the framework of the Palmyra Portrait Project, the published and unpublished work by Harald Ingholt has been scrutinised and several unpublished parts have been and are being prepared for publication. This includes Ingholt's

extensive paper archive of palmyrene sculpture, which is housed at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek and which has been digitized and concorded with the portrait-database. Furthermore, Ingholt's unpublished excavation diaries are being prepared for publication by Raja and Yon and will appear in the series *Studies in Palmyrene Archaeology and History*, Brepols, Turnhout.

Conclusion

Within the Palmyra Portrait Project it is possible to contextualise objects from Ingholt's fieldwork in Palmyra as well as published material, which until now has been stored in archives at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. The combination of the collection at the museum, the archives of Harald Ingholt, his unpublished excavation diaries and the publications of other Danish scholars who have conducted research in the Middle East has provided us the possibility of bringing new material and conclusions to light. It is also through this historiographic and archival research that we have come across the work of Johannes Elith Østrup and its implications for the understanding of one of the famous tombs in Palmyra.

262. See the catalogue by HVIDBERG-HANSEN et PLOUG from 1993 for the collection. Furthermore, see the more substantial publications on the Palmyrene collection in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek by respectively

HVIDBERG-HANSEN 1998 on the Palmyrene inscriptions and PLOUG 1995 on the Palmyrene sculptures.

263. SIMONSEN 1889.

