The Harvard Semitic Museum Palmyrene Collection

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Three Palmyrene funerary busts are part of the collections of the Harvard Semitic Museum. This article discusses the epitaphs, the portraits, and their stylistic features, summarizes the funerary busts' documented history of possession, and offers a palaeographic analysis of the inscriptions.

Keywords: Palmyra; funerary portraiture; Palmyrene Aramaic; Palmyrene epigraphy; Palmyrene palaeography

Three Palmyrene funerary busts are part of the collections of the Harvard Semitic Museum. These previously unpublished inscribed limestone portraits depict two men (HSM 1894.3.1; HSM 1894.3.2) and one woman (HSM 1902.45.29). Several thousand portraits, created in the first three centuries c.e., have come from Palmyrene tombs, where they served to seal burial niches and commemorate the dead. These portraits were traded actively on the antiquities market in the 19th and early 20th centuries and are found today in museums and private collections in Syria, Turkey, across Europe, and in the United States. Funerary reliefs of this type continue to emerge in the collections of Western museums, some having entered those collections over a century ago (see, e.g., Albertson 2012; Hutton et al. forthcoming; and Hutton and Klein 2018).[1] Due to the manner in which they were traded, the Harvard Semitic Museum portraits, like numerous other examples, lack specific provenance records, and we cannot identify the tombs from which they originated. The Harvard Semitic Museum inscriptions are not dated, and as such we rely

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[1] The Palmyrene statuary and inscriptions published here are documented to have been in the collection of Harvard University's Semitic Museum long prior to April 24, 1972, the date of entry into force of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

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upon stylistic characteristics to place them into chronological groups (see below).

The purpose of this study is to make these inscribed reliefs available for further discussion and study. This is particularly important after the recent dramatic events that led to the destruction of hundreds of Palmyrene artifacts still in situ or housed in the former Museum of Palmyra.

The Inscriptions

HSM 1894.3.1: Relief-Bust of a Youth before a Dorsalium (Museum Registration No. 1272) (Fig. 1)

1. *mlʾ*   Malē,
2. *br*   son of
3. *mqy*   Maqqay.
4. *ḥbl*   Alas!

The first rectangular limestone relief (58 × 41 cm) depicts a youth with two book rolls in his left hand, before a curtain or *dorsalium* held by round pins and palm fronds. The four-line epitaph is carved to the right of his head in horizontal lines (**Figs. 2, 3**, detail of inscription). The monumental-style letters are neatly carved and are framed by the palm frond (see below). It is a typical epitaph, which records the name and patronym of the deceased and is followed by the usual exclamation of grief, *ḥbl*, "Alas!" The presence of the curtain hints at the possibility that this might originally have been a double portrait, depicting the deceased, Malē, and a sibling or another relative to his left (cf., e.g., the double bust in Ploug 1995: 208–10 no. 85, in which only one of the figures is backed by a curtain). The possible missing part of the original relief is now lost. However, in the surviving background portion beyond the palm frond, there are remnants of the ending of two or three lines: perhaps a *resh*, roughly corresponding to the third line of Malē's epitaph, and a *lamed*, corresponding to the fourth (see **Figs. 2, 3**, to the right of the palm frond [marked in gray in **Fig. 3**]). This other epitaph identified a relative who had died after Malē, as the presence of the curtain could indicate (see below). Whether the layout of this epitaph corresponded to that of Malē or consisted of two or three lines only, it is impossible to say on the basis of the surviving evidence. As other examples indicate, portraits were sometimes reduced to ease transportation and sale once they had been removed from their setting prior to modern scientific excavation of the tombs.

Both the name and patronym are widely attested: Malē, *mlʾ*, a hypocoristicon of Maliku, *mlkw*, and phonologically identical to *mly*, frequently occurs in Palmyrene onomastics (Stark 1971: 95). Malē's patronym, Maqqay, a hypocoristicon of Mokimu, *mqymw*, is similarly widespread (Stark 1971: 96). The epitaph does not make reference to his profession. However, the presence of book rolls in his hand could be a visual reference to an occupation involving writing or, in general, to Malē's literacy. In light of his apparently young age, this could hint at the fact that he was still a pupil.[2] Given the lack of additional information, it is difficult to connect this Malē and Maqqay to other Palmyrene inscriptions. A reversed sequence of a father Malē and his son Maqqay in *PAT* 2828, the epitaph of Ummabi, daughter of Maqqay, (son of) Malē, (son of) Luʿash, could refer to the same family.

HSM 1894.3.2: Relief-Bust of a Bearded Man (Museum Registration No. 1273) (Fig. 4)

1. *ṣlm ḥyrn br*   The statue of Ḥayran, son of
2. *bsʾ / nsʾ ḥbl*   Bassaʾ (or Nesaʾ). Alas!

The second relief depicts a bearded man (49 × 43 cm). A two-line, cursive-style inscription is carved vertically to his right (**Figs. 5, 6**, detail of inscription). The cursive style and the vertical orientation of the epigraph set this epitaph apart from the other two inscriptions (see below). Another difference concerns its formulation: The epitaph opens with the noun *ṣlm*, "statue, image," in construct with the man's name, Ḥayran, *ḥyrn*. This element, and its feminine counterpart *ṣlmt*, used in women's epitaphs, occurs repeatedly throughout the corpus, in combination with the personal name of the deceased (*PAT* 1996: 402–3; Cussini in Meischner and Cussini 2004: 102–3).[3] This combination may also occur in epitaphs ending with the exclamation of grief *ḥbl*, and in other instances, the interjection *ḥbl* is not recorded.[4]

The name Ḥayran is widely attested in the corpus (Stark 1971: 21–22). It is a one-word name meaning "good, excellent," cognate with Arabic *ḥayr*, with the same meaning, and the addition of the adjectival suffix *-ān* (Stark 1971: 88). The patronym is Bassaʾ, (*bsʾ*), or, according to the different interpretation of the first letter as *nun*, Nesaʾ, (*nsʾ*) (as suggested by Hutton, Greene, and Bonesho). Both Bassaʾ and Nesaʾ are well-known Palmyrene names. Bassaʾ may be analyzed as deriving from Arabic *bass*, "cat" (Stark 1971: 77). An interpretation in

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[2] For other suggestions, see below.

[3] The same formulation of *ṣlmt* + PN referring to images of women is found in Old Syriac and Hatran inscriptions (Drijvers and Healey 1999: nos. As6, As13; Aggoula 1991: nos. 5, 30, 34, 37).

[4] The formulation *ṣlm* without *ḥbl* may occur on the same types of artifact, i.e., busts, or on sarcophagi and group reliefs, and in *dipinti* on tomb walls. Note on the same relief with multiple epitaphs, *ṣlm* and *ṣlmt* PN + *ḥbl*; *ṣlm* PN, and PN only (*PAT* 1893); or *ṣlm* and *ṣlmt* PN, and PN *ḥbl* (*PAT* 1894) (see also PN + *ḥbl*, and *ṣlm* PN + *ḥbl* [*PAT* 1892]). It is generally assumed that when the group relief was commissioned, dead family members were indicated by *ḥbl* or by a curtain pinned behind their portrait (Colledge 1976: 78).

Fig. 1. HSM 1894.3.1, relief-bust of a youth, identified as Malē (Photo © N. E. Greene and C. E. Bonesho)

Fig. 2. HSM 1894.3.1, photo detail. (Photo © N. E. Greene and C. E. Bonesho)

light of Latin *Bassus* is also possible.[5] If the first letter is read *nun*, the name (Nesaʾ) would be a hypocoristicon from the root *NŚʾ. In the Palmyrene corpus, the name is spelled *nsʾ* and *nšʾ* (Stark 1971: 100).[6]

HSM 1902.45.29: Relief-Bust of a Woman (Museum Registration No. 2709) (Fig. 7)

1. *ʾmtlt*   ʾAmatallat,

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[5] Jürgen Kurt Stark (1971: 77) considers this less likely. The name occurs in *PAT* 0048, *PAT* 0053, and *PAT* 0054, referring to the same person, and in *PAT* 0068 and *PAT* 1458, referring to two other individuals. On a tessera, *PAT* 2527: ΙΟΥΛΙΟΣ ΒΑΣΣΟΣ.

[6] Palmyrene graphemes <š> or <s> are used to express etymological /ś/ (Cantineau 1936a: 41–43). With *samek*, Nesaʾ: *PAT* 0084, *PAT* 0096, *PAT* 0262, *PAT* 0405, *PAT* 0668, *PAT* 1354, *PAT* 1541, and *PAT* 1901. With *shin*, Nešaʾ: *PAT* 0018, *PAT* 0178, *PAT* 0254, *PAT* 0261, *PAT* 0324,

PAT 0345, *PAT* 0361, *PAT* 0503, *PAT* 0513, *PAT* 0563, *PAT* 0588, *PAT* 0630, *PAT* 0631, and *PAT* 0666–0667 (same person). Note for *PAT* 0668 the same genealogy, spelling of Nesaʾ, and other examples. In the Tariff, the patronym of one of the archons, Νεσα (*PAT* 0259:3), is spelled Nešaʾ (*PAT* 0259:I 3). Note also for *PAT* 1541 and *PAT* 2726 the same genealogy: spelling Nesaʾ in the first and Nešaʾ in the second case. Besides other Greek transcriptions, note in one case (*PAT* 0994) Latin Neses and Palmyrene Nešaʾ.

Fig. 3. HSM 1894.3.1. (Hand copy © E. Cussini)

2. *brt*   daughter of
3. *šlm*   Šallum.
4. *ḥbl*   Alas!

The third relief (60 × 36.8 cm) depicts a woman named ʾAmatallat, (*ʾmtlt*). The epitaph is carved to the left of her head in monumental style in four horizontal lines (**Figs. 8, 9**, detail of inscription). Like the first inscription, it is another standard epitaph that records the woman's name followed by her patronym and the exclamation *ḥbl*, "Alas!" The name ʾAmatallat, "Maid of Allat" (Stark 1971: 70), is attested in three other inscriptions, where it identifies other women, as indicated by their variant patronyms.[7] The hypocoristicon ʾAmataʾ (*ʾmtʾ*) is documented as well.[8]

Her father's name may be analyzed as a hypocoristicon, perhaps of the well-attested masculine name Šalamallat, *šlmlt* (Stark 1971: 51).[9] We can conclude this in light of his daughter's name, characterized by the theophoric element ʾAllat. Other cases of a masculine truncated form *šlm* are rare: It occurs twice on tesserae.[10] Another masculine name from the same root is Šalmaʾ, *šlmʾ*, found in funerary[11] and honorific inscriptions.[12] Finally, the form *šlmwy* occurs in two epitaphs (*PAT* 0684: "[Ḥer-]ta / daughter of ʿOgailu, [son of] Šalmuway"; and *PAT* 0692: "Šalmuway, son of Bonne").[13] More frequently, it occurs as a feminine name in the forms *šlm* (*PAT* 0093: "Šalam, daughter of ʿOgaʾ"), *šlmy* (found once in *PAT* 0576: "Šalmay"), and *šlwm* (e.g., *PAT* 0721: "Šalom, / daughter of / ʾAušay").[14]

The Busts and Their Art Historical Context
By Maura K. Heyn

HSM 1894.3.1

The first of the three sculptures in the Harvard Semitic Museum features a male depicted in high relief on a rectangular limestone plaque (58 × 41 cm) (see **Fig. 1**). The clean-shaven male wears a tunic and cloak, and appears before a curtain that is attached on either side by a circular pin with a knob-like object at its center. Two palm fronds extend above the circular pins. The significance of this curtain and the palm fronds, which do not appear behind the other two busts in this collection, is debated: The curtain may be shorthand for the interior of the tomb or for the funerary apparel. It might also symbolize the boundary between the world of the living and that of the dead. Its inclusion would appear to be random, though it may indicate that the person represented had already died by the time of commission

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[7] *PAT* 0168: "ʾAmatallat, daughter of Bareʿa"; *PAT* 0725: "ʾAmatallat, daughter of Mezabbana"; and *PAT* 0970: "ʾAmatallat, daughter of Ḥaira". In addition, "ʾAmatallat, daughter of [. . .]" (al-Asʿad, Gawlikowski, and Yon 2012: no. 16); and "ʾAmatallat, daughter of Ḥannibel" (al-Asʿad, Gawlikowski, and Yon 2012: no. 58).

[8] *PAT* 0057:2 and *PAT* 0058:8, both mentioning "Julia Aurelia ʾAmataʾ, daughter of Bolḥazay"; *PAT* 0070:2: "ʾAmataʾ, wife of Maloka"; and numerous other examples.

[9] Obviously, this is just a possibility.

[10] *PAT* 2104: "The sons of / ʾAʿalay, (son of) / Šalam"; and *PAT* 2184: "The sons of Šalam / the elder."

[11] E.g., *PAT* 0018: "Yarḥibolaʾ, / son of Nešaʾ, / (son of) ʿOgaʾ, (son of) Šalmaʾ"; *PAT* 0553: "ʿOgaʾ, son of Šalmaʾ, (son of) [Šam]šigeram"; and *PAT* 0562: "ʿOgaʾ and Šalmaʾ, / sons of Šalmaʾ, son of Taimeʾ."

[12] *PAT* 0289: "Julius Aurelius Šalmaʾ"; or *PAT* 0316: "Šalmaʾ, son of Maliku."

[13] The numerous examples of the form *šlmn* in funerary (*PAT* 0461), dedicatory (*PAT* 0345), and honorific inscriptions (*PAT* 1066) are theophorous names. The same applies to the feminine form *šlmt* (*PAT* 0095, *PAT* 0612, etc.). An interpretation of the theonyms is uncertain: They derived from Phoenician Šalman or, more likely, from Akkadian Šulman and Šulmanitu. Their cult originates from an Arabic context, and in Palmyra they were worshipped with other Arab deities (Hillers and Cussini 1996: 415 with references).

[14] The form *šlm* in the last line of *PAT* 1251, a fragmentary epitaph, is the noun "peace" rather than a personal name (Cantineau 1936b: no. 98).
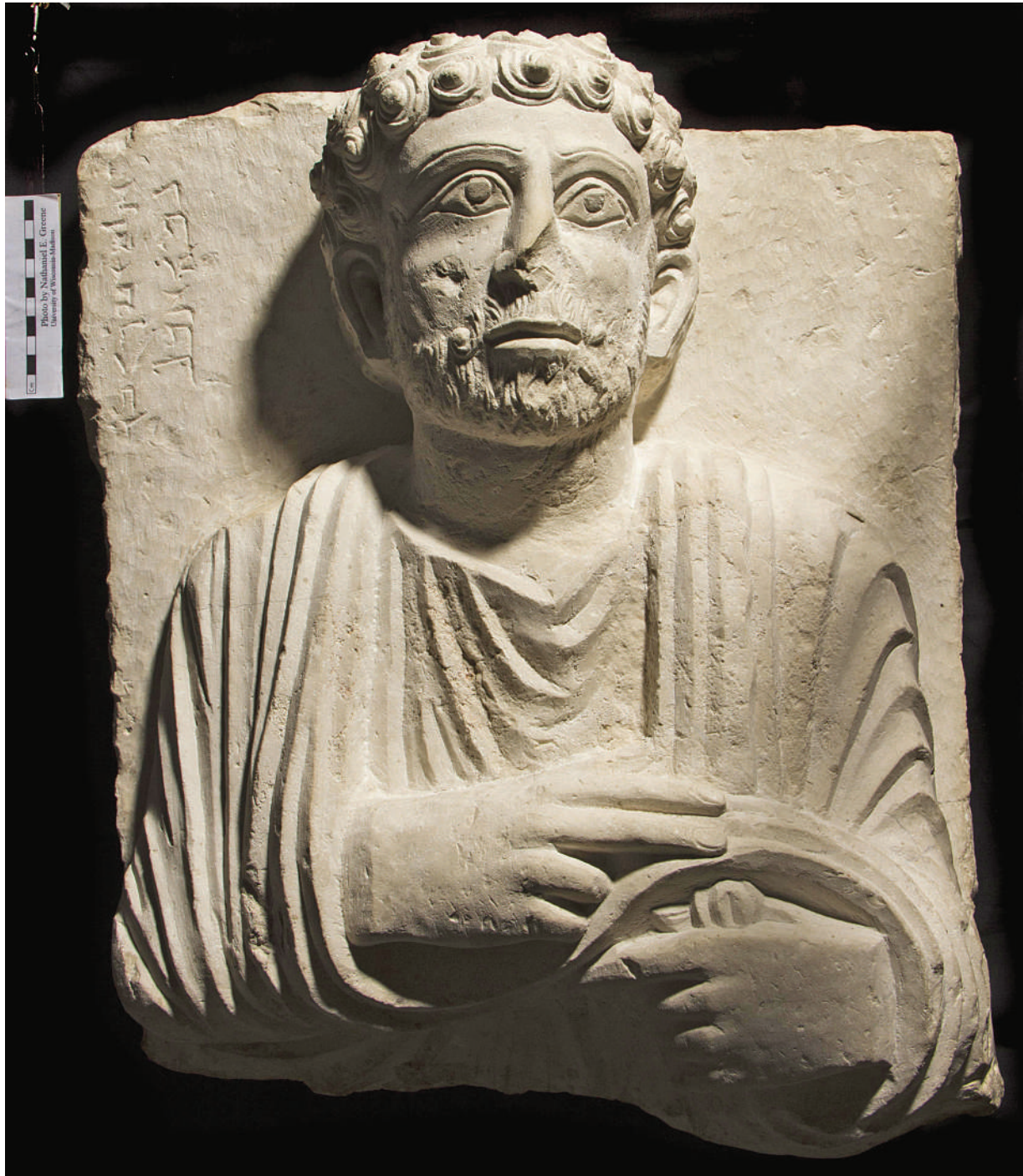
Fig. 4. HSM 1894.3.2, relief-bust of a bearded man, identified as Ḥayran. (Photo © N. E. Greene)

(Colledge 1976: 157). The palm fronds may symbolize victory over death (Dentzer-Feydy and Teixidor 1993: 76–77).

As is typical of Palmyrene male portraits, the draping of the deceased's cloak creates a sling around his right arm in an arrangement commonly seen in Roman funer-ary portraiture in the late 1st century B.C.E. and early 1st century C.E. (Kleiner 1977). This particular Palmyrene portrait differs a bit from the usual arrangement, how-ever, with the cloak originating on his left side, draping down in the front to catch his right arm in the sling, com-ing back up to loop around his neck, falling back down

Fig. 5. HSM 1894.3.2, photo detail. (Photo © N. E. Greene)

Fig. 6. HSM 1894.3.2. (Hand copy © E. Cussini)

on his left side, and then encircling his left forearm.[15] The deceased's right hand extends over the fold of the cloak, and in his left, also fully extended, he holds two book rolls. The book rolls, rendered here as rectangular sticks with two horizontal lines bisecting their visible portion, are a common attribute in Greco-Roman portraiture, though their significance is not easily determined (Colledge 1976: 68, 154). They could be an indication of literacy (and thus cultural refinement [Zanker 1993: 218]). Alternatively, in a funerary context such as that at Palmyra, the scrolls may represent the deed to the tomb (Ingholt 1928: 24; Ploug 1995: 47; Sokołowski 2014; see

above). The deceased also wears a ring with a circular bezel on the little finger of his left hand. Rings such as this, worn on the little finger of the left hand and modeled on a Roman prototype, start to appear on Palmyrene male and female portraits in the middle of the 2nd century c.e. (Colledge 1976: 152; Ploug 1995: 47 [citing also the discussion of rings in Mackay 1949: 169]; Dentzer-Feydy and Teixidor 1993: 74–75).

His hairstyle, brushed forward in wavy locks that curve slightly to the left with a straight hairline, became popular in Palmyra in the first half of the 2nd century c.e. (Ploug 1995: 76). His eyebrows are rendered as simple incised lines and still retain some of the original color. This same color outlines his large eyes and darkens the iris, which is depicted by an engraved circle that touches the clearly

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15 In Malcolm Colledge's classification of drapery arrangements, this would be #9 (1976: 245–46).

Fig. 7. HSM 1902.45.29, relief-bust of a woman, identified as ʾAmatallat. (Photo © N. E. Greene and C. E. Bonesho)
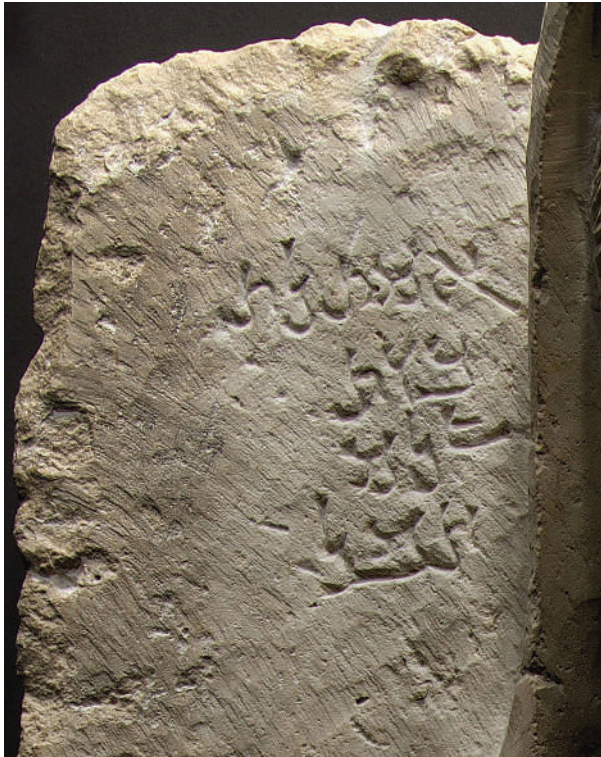
Fig. 8. HSM 1902.45.29, photo detail. (Photo © N. E. Greene and C. E. Bonesho)

Fig. 9. HSM 1902.45.29. (Hand copy © E. Cussini)

HSM 1894.3.2

The second bust is slightly smaller (49 × 43 cm) than the first. This bearded male, identified in the inscription above his right shoulder, wears a tunic and cloak (see **Fig. 4**). Like the draping of the first bust, the draping of this figure's cloak is also somewhat unusual. It is perhaps without parallel: Rather than returning over his left shoulder after catching his arm in the sling arrangement, the cloak seems to be drawn directly from the sling under his right arm across his torso to his left, where it is wrapped around his left wrist. The man holds only a loop of the cloak in his left hand; this is a more typical aspect of Palmyrene portraiture than is the peculiar draping of the cloak. He holds no other attributes and wears no rings. The gestures of his hands are interesting: With his right hand, emerging from the sling of the cloak, he extends the index and middle fingers; on his left side, he holds out the index finger only. The significance of these gestures is unclear, but perhaps they functioned to draw attention to the portrait in the tomb (Heyn 2010: 640).

His hair is rendered with several rows of snail-shell curls; his eyebrows are represented with incised, curving lines; and his eyes are overly large. The irises, which give the impression of gazing upward, are depicted with an engraved circle and retain some of their original color (more so in his left eye than his right). Continuing down the face, the nose is damaged, but the luxuriant moustache and beard have survived well. The edges of the moustache curve up jauntily in the "handlebar" style,[17]

defined upper eyelid. The pupil of his eye is not indicated. His nose is long and straight, his mouth is small, and his flat chin juts out a bit. His ears also protrude from the sides of his head. The skin of his face and neck is smooth.

The increasing popularity of beards in Palmyrene male portraiture after the mid-2nd century C.E. would suggest that this clean-shaven portrait predates that transition (Colledge 1976: 248). However, clean-shaven men (who are not priests) do continue to appear after 150 C.E., and this male's hairstyle and the manner in which his eye is rendered (with an engraved circle for the iris and the missing pupil) are more typical of relief-busts produced between 150 and 175 C.E. (Colledge 1976: 248; Ploug 1995: 126–27). In addition, the style in which the drapery is rendered is much more characteristic of the second half of the 2nd century. In view of these stylistic factors, it seems likely that the portrait was produced toward the end of the period dating from 150 to 175 C.E. (Colledge 1976: 248, group II).[16]

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[16] A comparable bust in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek is dated 150–170 C.E.; toward the end of the period, cf. I.N. 1052 = *PAT* 0749 (Ploug 1995: 128–30); and for a bust dated 170–190 C.E., cf. I.N. 1040 (Ploug 1995: 130–32). See also Sadurska and Bounni 1994: no. 64 (= *PAT* 1032), which the authors dated 160–190 C.E.
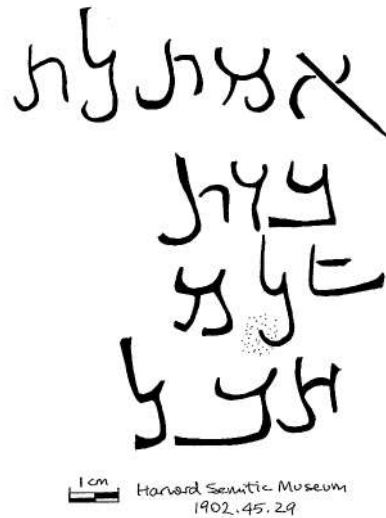
[17] Similar handlebar moustaches are seen on other male busts, most of which date to the first third of the 3rd century C.E.: a male bust in the

and the impression of a luxuriant beard is created with striations on triangular-shaped tufts of hair. The lips are thin and turn down slightly. Although the upward-gazing eyes are typical for portraiture created between 150 and 200 c.e. (Colledge 1976: 69), the stylistic evidence as a whole points clearly to a production date between 200 and 230 c.e. The curved groove for the eyebrows, the snail-shell curls, the manner in which the beard is carved, and the loop of cloak held in the left hand are all typical features of male portraits from the first third of the 3rd century (Colledge 1976: 251).

HSM 1902.45.29

The third bust (60 × 36.8 cm) depicts a female (see **Fig. 7**). The clothing worn by the deceased is typical of women in Palmyra: She wears a long-sleeved tunic and cloak, with a trapezoidal brooch holding her cloak in place on her left shoulder. The veil on her head extends down on both sides of her body, loops around her right forearm, and is drawn around her left arm by means of an extended right hand. She holds no attributes. Her left hand reaches up to hold the veil at neck height. Underneath the veil on her head, the woman wears a turban, and below this turban across her forehead she wears a diadem. The central panel of the diadem—which is framed by the woman's hair, diagonally brushed outward on both sides of her face—features two acanthus leaves. The lobes of her ears, unadorned by earrings, are visible beneath the outwardly brushed hair at the sides of her face.

The woman's eyebrows are rendered with double incised lines; the iris of her large eyes is depicted with an engraved circle, and the pupil within by means of a drill-hole. This use of a drill-hole to represent the pupil begins already during the mid-2nd century c.e. and continues throughout the 3rd century (Ploug 1995: 126–27). The woman's nose is straight, and her mouth rather small, with an upside-down V-shaped notch underneath the bottom lip and just above her chin. The chin is flat and juts out prominently. Three wrinkles are represented by three parallel and slightly curving grooves on her neck.

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of this female relief portrait is the lack of jewelry. Palmyrene women are well known for their elaborate displays of jewelry in their portraits: earrings, necklaces, bracelets, rings, etc. This paucity of jewelry is particularly surprising because both the raised position of her left arm, with her hand grasping the veil at neck height, and the extended position of her right hand, pulling the veil across her torso,

are typical for female portraits created in the 3rd century c.e. (Colledge 1976: 262), when it was also popular to wear abundant amounts of jewelry. For whatever reason, certain women from this period, including this one in the Harvard Semitic Museum, are depicted relatively unadorned. Other stylistic features corroborate the dating of this bust to the 3rd century, but the retention of certain features from the earlier period suggests a date very early in the century (ca. 200 c.e.). For example, the long-sleeved tunic is popular during the 3rd century (Colledge 1976: 262), but the trapezoidal brooch is a holdover from the second half of the previous century, with most women in the 3rd century opting for a circular style (Colledge 1976: 71). Comparable busts, either with similar hairstyles[18] or with analogous jutting chins and neck wrinkles,[19] date primarily to the late 2nd century and early 3rd century c.e.

History of Possession[20]
By Jeremy M. Hutton, Nathaniel E. Greene, and Catherine E. Bonesho

As indicated by their accession numbers, two of the three busts (HSM 1894.3.1, HSM 1894.3.2) were acquired by David Gordon Lyon on behalf of the Harvard Semitic Museum in 1894. The museum's records of these two funerary busts extend back to December 26, 1893. On that date, General Charles G. Loring, then executive of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, drafted a letter (addressed "My dear Sir," presumably in reference to Lyon) calling the addressee's attention to "two heads from Syria with Semitic inscriptions." The author of the letter and his addressee had previously communicated about

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[18] For a description of similar hair, see Ploug 1995: 147, 149 on Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek I.N. 1067, dated 170–190 c.e.

[19] For similar "jutting" chin, wrinkles on neck, and eyes, see Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek I.N. 1062 = *PAT* 0850 (Ploug 1995: 142–45). The jutting chin is also seen on I.N. 1067 (Ploug 1995: 147–48) and I.N. 1060 = *PAT* 0750 (Ploug 1995: 149–50). See also several comparable portraits from Palmyra (Sadurska and Bounni 1994: no. 36, fig. 178 = *PAT* 2659; no. 84, fig. 179 = *PAT* 1051).

[20] During the course of preparations for a research trip to the eastern seaboard in 2013, Hutton, Greene, and Bonesho were alerted to the presence of three funerary busts through personal communication with the staff of the Harvard Semitic Museum (Adam J. Aja, pers. comm., January 8, 2013); The University of Wisconsin team received permission from the Harvard Semitic Museum to perform research on these inscriptions. Greene and Bonesho traveled to Cambridge, MA, during June of 2013. They photographed the inscriptions on Harvard's campus on June 25–26 using reflectance transformation imaging. During that period, they were granted access to all of the files on the busts (Joseph Greene, pers. comm., June 25, 2013, August 12, 2013). It is with deep thanks that the authors cite Greene's communications, since he has been especially helpful in tracking down the pertinent records and in reconstructing the sequence of events whereby these inscriptions came into the possession of the Harvard Semitic Museum.

J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu (88.AA.50 = *PAT* 2714); four male busts in Palmyra (Sadurska and Bounni 1994: no. 58 = *PAT* 1027, no. 176 = *PAT* 1857, no. 177 = *PAT* 1858, no. 183 = *PAT* 1861); and a bust in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (I.N. 1046 = *PAT* 0637).

these artifacts, and the former had sent squeezes of the inscriptions. According to the letter, "[t]he owner fixes no price[,] and if you wish them[,] you could have them almost at your own [named price]." The cryptic final paragraph of the letter states, "[y]ou will find them here just outside of my door, but I trust you will let me see you when you come." Although other interpretations are possible, the author's use of the Museum of Fine Arts' letterhead in combination with his reference to his door would suggest that the artifacts were already in Boston. Evidently, negotiations for the bust were concluded by April 30 of the following year, when Loring wrote to the Harvard Semitic Museum that "[t]he two heads . . . will go out by express to-day or to-morrow." A third letter from Loring, in significantly less formal (and consequently more difficult) handwriting, provides the final written record of this correspondence, conveying the former owner's information concerning the funerary busts' purported provenance. Once again, Loring addressed the unnamed Harvard Semitic Museum official:

> My dear Sir
> The two heads you recently bot [sic] through this museum came, so Mr. Farah says, "from a tomb in an Assyrian City, 5 days from Damascus (horseback) now called 'Todmore'" [sic].
> This gives an added interest!
>   He rebels against the price paid.
>   Your[s] very trul[y],
>   Chas. G. Loring

According to the Harvard Semitic Museum's records, the "Mr. Farah" mentioned here was Alexander Farah of Tyre (perhaps a professional dealer of antiquities at the time?). Although this meager record of correspondence hardly validates these inscriptions' authenticity, it does provide some record of their whereabouts during the year prior to their accession into the collection of the Harvard Semitic Museum.

The third funerary bust (HSM 1902.45.29) was acquired eight years later from Georges Nassan, a merchant based in Damascus. An elegant two-page receipt from "G. Nassan & C.ie," dated May 1, 1902, lists several purchases, all of which can be identified by the registration numbers secondarily added in a different hand in the left margin. The last piece of merchandise listed is a "Petite [statue ancienne de Palmire]," which sold for 125.00 francs; the registration number identifies this as the artifact bearing our third funerary inscription. On the same receipt is listed a fourth inscribed bust ("Grand statue [ancien] de Palmire," 225.00 francs). This fourth bust entered the Harvard Semitic Museum's collection under the accession number 1902.45.28 [= PAT 2721]) but has subsequently been traded to the Harvard Uni-

versity Art Museums as part of a three-way deal with the Stanford University Art Museum (the Cantor Center for the Visual Arts), which "brought a portion of Stanford's Cesnola Cyprus Collection to the [Harvard] Semitic Museum" (J. Greene, pers. comm., August 12, 2013). That fourth bust currently resides in the Harvard University Art Museums' Arthur M. Sackler Museum. This paperwork attests to the busts' presence in the United States by 1902 and offers an unconfirmable and unfortunately vague attestation to the reliefs' original provenance.

Palaeographic Notes
By Eleonora Cussini

In January 1996, I copied the inscriptions and studied the Harvard Semitic Museum reliefs as part of an ongoing project in connection with the research conducted with Delbert R. Hillers for *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts* (*PAT*). When possible, we felt it necessary to examine directly the inscriptions included in our volume. As a result of several research trips made to museums in the United States, Europe, and the Near East, I inserted into our research files collation notes and corrections or, as was the case with the Harvard Semitic Museum reliefs, the Aramaic text and English translation of the three unpublished inscriptions.[21] Since *PAT* had already been completed, we decided to keep track of new inscriptions published by others and give them progressive *PAT* numbers in our private files. The same applied to new inscriptions found in the course of field trips.[22]

As I went through the Harvard Semitic Museum's acquisition records, made available during my visit to the museum, I realized it was impossible, based on the available information, to track the tomb or tombs from which the three reliefs originated. As seen above, the bust of Malē and that of Ḥayran had been bought in 1894 in Tyre, from Farah, while the bust of ʾAmatallat was purchased eight years later in Damascus from Nassan, together with another funerary relief (*PAT* 2721). This last relief bears the epitaph of another Malē, son of Maliku, and of his son, Maliku. In this case, as in the previous ones, one cannot identify the tomb.[23] It is not possible to

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[21] After the publication of *PAT*, we updated our joint research files (© Hillers/Cussini) by creating a digital version of errata and adding new bibliographic references and a complete English translation of all the Palmyrene epigraphs; we also added other published texts not included in *PAT* and unpublished epigraphs resulting from my museum work. Our joint work was halted by Professor Hillers's untimely passing in September 1999, while I continued my research at the Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italy.

[22] The Harvard Semitic Museum inscriptions were entered in the Hillers/Cussini research files as *PAT* 2846 (HSM 1894.3.1); *PAT* 2847 (HSM 1894.3.2); and *PAT* 2848 (HSM 1902.45.29).

[23] The genealogy of this Malē, son of Maliku (*PAT* 2721), cannot be connected to ʾAmatallat's family. With regard to *PAT* 2721, it may be

find out whether Nassan traded two artifacts originating from the same or two different tombs. The same holds true for the two reliefs sold by Farah. As in several other cases, prosopographic reconstruction is hindered by the lack of additional distinctive features, such as unique names, nicknames, or professions. This, alongside the brevity of the three inscriptions, which record two generations only, make it difficult to connect them to other family groups.

The first (HSM 1894.3.1) and the third (HSM 1902.45.29) epitaphs show different examples of Palmyrene Aramaic monumental or formal script, while the second one (HSM 1894.3.2) is written in another script generally referred to as "cursive" or, following Jacqueline Pirenne (1963), "Syro-Palmyrene" script. Cursive style or, rather, different cursive styles or handwritings were mainly used on perishable writing material (Naveh 1975; Cussini in press). There are, however, examples of cursive scripts on stone, as shown by various inscriptions, including funerary epitaphs comparable to the one discussed here. In this as in other known cases, the inscription is written in vertical lines.[24] Verticality, however, was a functional feature determined by the available epigraphic surface and not by the type of script employed. There are cursive epitaphs written in horizontal lines and examples of epitaphs in monumental or mixed formal and cursive script written in horizontal and vertical lines (Naveh 1975; Cussini in press).

On the first relief, beyond the palm frond, there are light traces of another inscription (see **Fig. 3**). This was perhaps the epitaph of a relative who was originally depicted next to Malē. Only faint remains of it may be detected on the worn surface: On the first line, halfway between the first and the second line of Malē's epitaph, there is an oblique stroke after the break (the remains of a *he*?), followed by two letters. One line below is a *dalet* or, more likely a *resh*, perhaps the last letter of *br* "son of" (?). Below it, there is a *lamed* (?), possibly the ending of *ḥbl* "Alas!" Reconstructing this other inscription is impossible.

The Script of HSM 1894.3.1 and HSM 1902.45.29

Inscriptions HSM 1894.3.1 (Malē's epitaph) and HSM 1902.45.29 (ʾAmatallat's epitaph) are both written in a monumental script. Some differences, however, may be observed between the two. Palaeographic comparison

may be conducted on six letters out of a total of ten available examples (**Fig. 10**). Overall, ʾAmatallat's epitaph (HSM 1902.45.29), which displays a wider palaeographic specimen, shows more formal and elegant features, especially illustrated by the shape of *khet*, *mem*, and *resh*.

Aleph. In the two inscriptions, we find something close to the regular shape of the Palmyrene monumental *aleph*. In Malē's epitaph (HSM 1894.3.1), it is carved higher than the rest of the line; in both inscriptions, the oblique stroke is elongated, as in other monumental-style inscriptions (e.g., *PAT* 0482, tomb foundation text [95 c.e.]; *PAT* 0544, epitaph on a relief, etc.). This feature—like other examples of prolonged strokes or ligatures one sees in other Palmyrene writing specimens on stone—seems to be influenced by the practice of writing in cursive on perishable writing surfaces by means of an inked stylus.

Bet. There are four examples of *bet*, two in each inscription. As is the case with other letters, the specimens in Malē's epitaph are slightly taller than the two in ʾAmatallat's. The first *bet* in line 2 of Malē's has a longer bottom horizontal stroke, connected to the vertical stroke of the following *resh*. In ʾAmatallat's epitaph, the *bet* in line 4 has a longer bottom stroke and a bigger head.

Khet. The example in Malē's epitaph is squared in shape and differs from the rounded one in ʾAmatallat's inscription. The latter has a shorter right vertical stroke and a longer left stroke that is tilted inward. With regard to this letter, too, Malē's example is taller and wider.

Yod. There is one example in Malē's epitaph. It is not raised to the top but carved on the same imaginary line with the other letters. It has the shape of a comma and has almost the same dimensions as the other letters.

Lamed. Five examples are preserved. Those in Malē's inscription are taller (especially that in line 4, which extends below the line) than the three in ʾAmatallat's epitaph and do not display the same sinuousness and elegance. A third possible example on Malē's relief (beyond the palm frond) pertains to another epitaph and is very faded.

Mem. Each inscription has two examples. Those in Malē's epitaph are squared, wider, and taller than those in ʾAmatallat's inscription. These last examples are characterized by rounder features and inwardly tilted bottom strokes. These features, as noted above with regard to *khet*, well illustrate the slight differences in style displayed by the two inscriptions written in monumental style.

Qoph. There is one specimen in Malē's inscription. It is a monumental-style *qoph* and very closely resembles the *mem* found next to it, to the point of appearing almost identical. In the Palmyrene script, *mem* and *qoph* are similar, albeit not as close in shape as here. Monumental *mem* has a short, concave top stroke (e.g., *PAT* 0594, epitaph on a stone tablet), whereas *qoph* displays a longer horizontal top stroke and shorter vertical strokes

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connected to *PAT* 0354 (191 c.e.) and *PAT* 0360 (207 c.e.), two religious dedications. Five generations of that family may be reconstructed, including Maliku's sons, Wahaba (*PAT* 0354) and Malē (*PAT* 0360); Malē's wife, Makki; and her father, ʿOgaʾ (*PAT* 0360).

[24] For Palmyrene and contemporary vertical inscriptions on stone and other writing material, see Naveh 1976; 2009: 230–32.

HSM 1894.3.1
Malē's epitaph
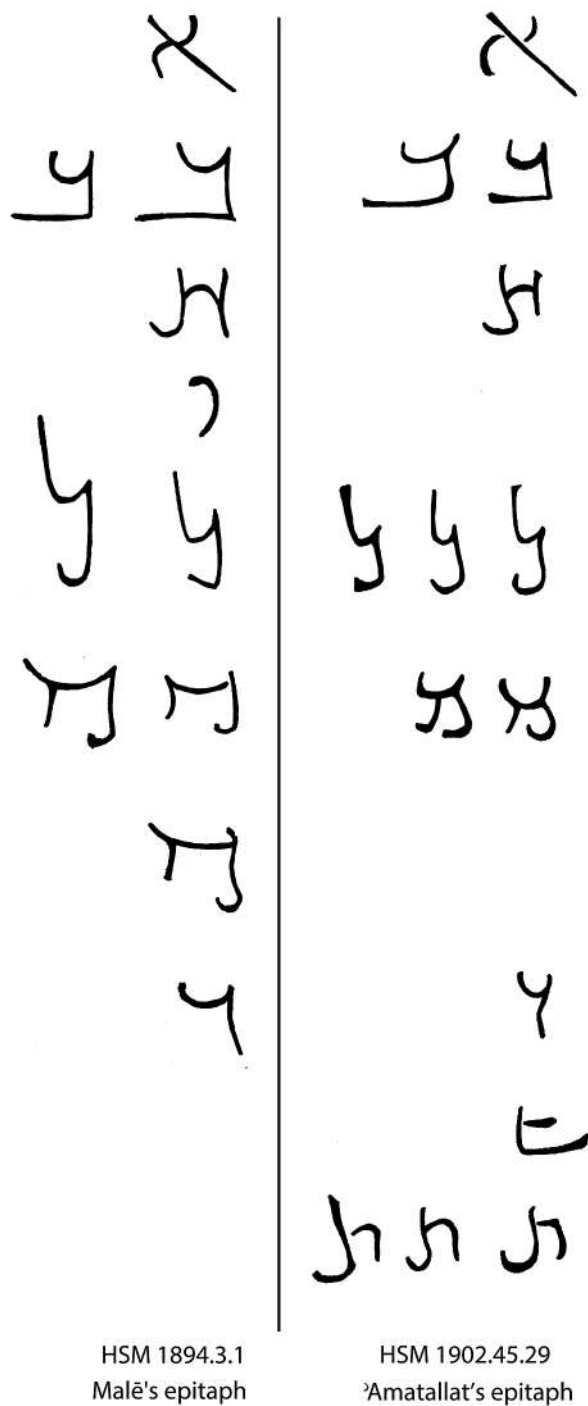
HSM 1902.45.29
ʾAmatallat's epitaph

Fig. 10. Palaeographic chart: HSM 1894.3.1 (left); and HSM 1902.45.29 (right). (© E. Cussini)

or legs (e.g., *PAT* 0318, dedicatory text on an altar [55 c.e.]). In Malē's epitaph, as in other examples of monumental *qoph*, the horizontal top stroke is just slightly longer than that of *mem*.

Resh. There is one example of *resh* in each epitaph. In addition to the smaller size and rounder shape, the one in ʾAmatallat's epitaph displays a more formal character with a two-segment pointed vertical stroke (this Palmyrene monumental feature is less marked in the other epitaph). The top diacritic dot, which occasionally marks *resh* as opposed to *dalet*, is not indicated. There is possibly another partly preserved example of *resh* on Malē's relief, beyond the palm frond.

Shin. There is one example in ʾAmatallat's inscription. It is raised above the line, the right (here bottom) and middle strokes are horizontal or almost horizontal (the bottom stroke slightly rises to the right) and not oblique as in monumental-style specimens (e.g., *PAT* 0332, dedicatory text on an altar [114 c.e.]; *PAT* 0545, epitaph on a funerary relief), while the left stroke is vertical.

Tav. There are three monumental examples in ʾAmatallat's inscription. The third specimen, in line 2, has a bigger left stroke than the two examples in line 1.

The Script of HSM 1834.3.2

The second relief, Ḥayran's epitaph (HSM 1894.3.2), is written in cursive script. Ten letters are preserved (**Fig. 11**; see also **Fig. 6**): three of them—*aleph*, *lamed*, and *nun*—are particularly important because, in the cursive script (here and in other Palmyrene inscriptions on stone), they differ significantly in shape from the formal-style shapes examined above. Other letters that are also characterized by distinctive cursive shapes—for example, *tav* (with a loop to the left, or, as we would expect here, as a zigzag *tav*) or flat *ayin*—are not preserved in this inscription.[25]

Aleph. This letter differs from the monumental examples, including those in the other two inscriptions discussed herein. It consists of two short bottom strokes (one oblique to the right, a vertical to the left) and a top oblique right-to-left stroke. Specimens of this type of *aleph* may be found in other cursive-style inscriptions—for example, *PAT* 0738 and *PAT* 0773 (Klugkist 1983: 59–60).[26]

Bet. There are two (or perhaps three) examples. The first in line 1 (*br*) is a cursive-style *bet*. It is squared and short, the top part almost entirely horizontal with an upward end. The second specimen at the end of line 2 (*ḥbl*) is taller, as are all the other letters in that line. It is a monumental-style *bet*, marked by a more defined top part: a right-to-left oblique stroke with an almost vertical short stroke to the left. The other (possible) specimen, at the beginning of line 2, is debated (**Fig. 11**: *Bet*, second

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[25] For examples of cursive-style *tav*s, marked by a left loop as in Old Syriac script, see Cussini in Meischner and Cussini 2004: esp. 103, fig. 5.
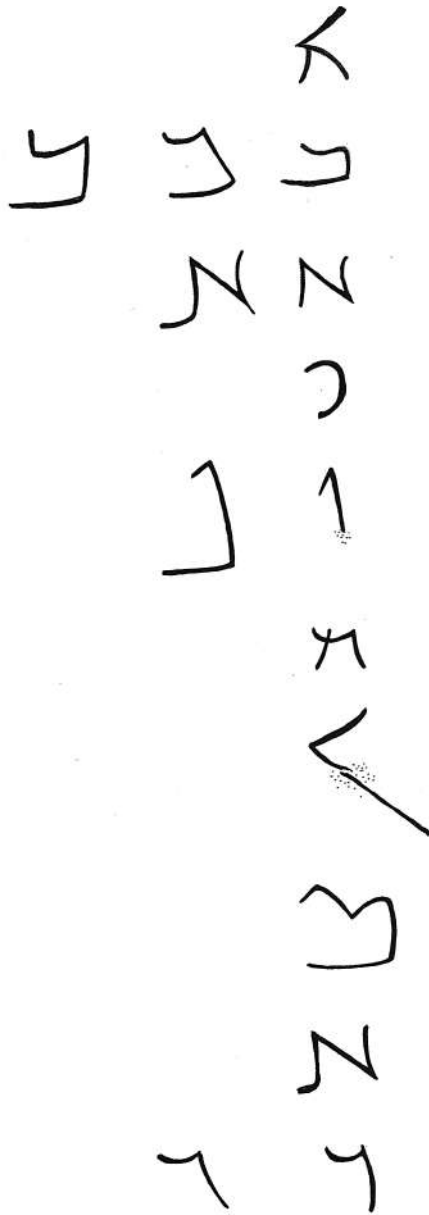
[26] On *PAT* 0738, see Greene, Heyn, and Hutton 2012.

in stance and shape may be observed in the two certain specimens of *bet*, which also vary in terms of dimensions.[28] The stone presents small marks not related to the carving of this and other letters. Direct examination of the stone and photographs, however, shows the presence of a head, compatible with the shape of *bet*. As seen above, both readings of *bs'* and *ns'* are plausible in terms of Palmyrene onomastics.

Khet. There are two cursive-style examples. They both show a left concave vertical stroke, an oblique stroke, and a vertical stroke to the right, resembling an uppercase N (cf. *tsade* below). This shape is widely attested in cursive-style epitaphs (e.g., *PAT* 0803) on funerary reliefs and in numerous other examples.

Yod. There is one example, rounded, as in Malē's epitaph.

Lamed. There are two cases. They both display the pointed-top cursive shape. The example in line 1 is partly damaged, and the bottom horizontal stroke is not visible.

Mem. There is one example. The left stroke (in formal-style specimens, usually carved to the right end of the top bar) here crosses the top bar, as in earlier Aramaic shapes.

Nun. A backward-head *nun* marks the end of Ḥayran's name. This type of final *nun* also occurs in formal-style examples (e.g., *PAT* 0620). The Harvard Semitic Museum specimen displays a long, slightly convex, top-oblique stroke. This joins the long left-to-right oblique stroke at an acute angle (partly damaged). What Hutton, Greene, and Bonesho read as an example of medial *nun* (line 2) seems to me a *bet* (see above). Monumental or cursive medial *nun*, in fact, never shows a head like the one visible in this case.

Samek. The only extant example, in line 2, displays a vertical right stroke, slightly round at the bottom, where it joins a long horizontal stroke. The top part consists of a two-humped stroke, the leftmost part slightly pointed. This cursive shape differs from monumental-style specimens, marked by a top convex stroke and a short right-to-left oblique tick on the left end of the stroke (e.g., *PAT* 0470, tomb foundation text [79 c.e.]). There are numerous other cursive examples (e.g., *PAT* 0792, epitaph on a funerary relief) also in vertical lines.

Tsade. In line 1, *tsade* looks like an uppercase N: the right stroke slightly convex, an oblique middle stroke, and a left vertical stroke with a short foot at the bottom. As in monumental-style examples, this letter closely resembles *khet*. Unlike in this inscription, there are examples of oblique middle-stroke *tsades* alongside *khet* with a horizontal middle bar in the same text (e.g., *PAT* 0968, on a funerary relief, in vertical lines, and other

Fig. 11. Palaeographic chart: HSM 1894.3.2. (© E. Cussini)

example). It is read as *nun* by Hutton, Greene, and Bonesho, who interpret the slightly rounded top part of *bet* "as a pock mark connected to the top of the vertical stroke by a curving groove." They consider it a *nun*, especially in light of the stance of the vertical stroke.[27] Differences

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[27] Stance, however, does not seem a decisive argument when considering the overall features of this inscription; note, e.g., the different stance of *resh* in the same line: *ḥyrn* and *br*.

[28] In my opinion, differences in stance are also a consequence of the fact that the inscription was carved vertically.

examples). In cursive script, it is also very similar to the zigzag *tav*. As noted above, however, our inscription has not preserved this last letter.

Resh. The two specimens differ in their stance. The first (in the personal name *ḥyrn*) has a slightly convex shape, while the second one (*br*), an oblique stroke. No clear diacritics can be detected on the damaged surface, marked by a crack running across the head of the second specimen, chisel marks, and other small, rounded breaks.

The three Palmyrene reliefs in the collection of the Harvard Semitic Museum are not, strictly speaking, a small corpus—that is, inscriptions of related dead, possibly from the same tomb. As noted above, nothing is known about their precise findspot. Furthermore, their genealogies do not allow us to connect them and suggest they originated from the same tomb. They are, like many other Palmyrene artifacts whose provenance is not recorded, examples of funerary reliefs and epitaphs. A closer look at the inscriptions shows that the writers— the same artist who sculpted the reliefs or another craftsman?—followed conventional formulations ("name + patronym + Alas!" in the first and last case; and "statue of + name + patronym + Alas!" in the second) and variant layouts (horizontal lines to the right, in Malě's relief; vertical lines to the left, in Ḥayran's; horizontal lines to the left, in ʾAmatallat's). Not surprisingly, the script reflects three different *handwritings* and scripts as well as various skill levels.

The three inscriptions do not present a date formula. The inscription of Ḥayran, which bears distinctive cursive elements, is carved on the most recent artifact, a bust that is stylistically dated toward the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd centuries c.e. An overview of extant examples shows that there are frequent cases of mixed monumental and cursive shapes in the same inscription, and that cursive script on stone is attested across the Palmyrene corpus alongside monumental script, and it is not used in given periods only.

Conclusion

The addition of the three Harvard Semitic Museum Palmyrene funerary reliefs provides new material for the study of Palmyrene portraiture and epigraphy. Despite the fact that they were traded in the late 19th century and reached the United States shortly thereafter, the reliefs and their inscriptions remained virtually unknown and were not included in historical editions of Palmyrene texts, such as the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*. Due relevance has been given here to an in-depth analysis of the history of their acquisition, conducted on documents and correspondence from the Harvard Semitic Museum's files. Provenance and details of acquisition of archaeological artifacts have always been an issue of foremost importance, and it is particularly relevant nowadays.

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