

The Use of Parthian Costume in Funerary Portraiture in Palmyra

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Introduction

This paper will consider the use of Parthian costume in the Palmyrene funerary portraits as a signifier of status within the tomb. I will ask if we can reasonably discern from the evidence a particular context or situation that makes this choice of costume attractive and appropriate and also to establish if we can detect a shift in significance over time. Can we, for instance, see that banqueters came to prefer this mode of dress in any particular context or was its use seen in other formats? Did it mean the same thing or suggest different uses and applications? Did it in fact change from being the costume of religious ceremony in life or death to something more profoundly tied-in with a demonstration of status within the tomb? Was it a costume of profession and *negotium* or of *otium*, wealth and leisure or one that reflected social and political affirmations or all of these? Did it in fact signify the same dichotomy of dress seen in Rome in the early imperial period amongst the wealthier classes, of removing the toga and retiring to one's villa dressed in the Greek tunic as an act of withdrawal from the public domain into one's own personal space.¹ In the case of Palmyra, a removal of Greek attire in favour of Parthian dress. This does not seem wholly unlikely. As Palmyra developed in the first century, its government emerged as a model of Greek institutions like neighbouring cities in the region,² with Greek costume being the outfit of civic life. As such, it would represent a deliberate

choice of cultural preference reliant on context, not a blending but a juxtaposition.

The following study draws its statistical material from the Palmyra Portrait Project database that presently contains over 3,000 pieces. This vast and extensive resource allows for a diversity of questions to be asked of the material that were not possible before. Previous studies have been based on anecdotal evidence or much smaller collections that may, with the best of intentions, not have been able to realise the bigger view permitted by the bringing together of every known extant example. Of course, even the database is limited by the unhappy chance of mere survival and therefore the corruption of the complete and accurate picture. But the larger the number of portraits from which to draw conclusions, the more accurate and valid our arguments can be. Statistical data of percentages or the frequency with which certain phenomena occur and at what time period they are more or less popular becomes available.

The Funerary Context

One of the great benefits of the Palmyra material for scholars is the short flourishing of the funerary portrait burial practice within a very specific time period,³ from 50 CE to 273 CE. Of that material, as a result of previous detailed studies of iconographical and stylistic changes, we have relatively secure dates that allow us to chart changes in practice and priority.⁴ But more

1. Zanker 1990, 31.

2. Edwell 2008, 48. Also Dirven 1999, 19, and Millar 1993, 319-336.

3. Schmidt-Colinet 1987, 214-216.

4. For instance, Ingholt 1928 and Colledge 1976.

Fig. 1: Parthian Costume worn in a typically Palmyrene fashion. Ingholt Archive PS73. Musée du Louvre AO 2000. 3rd century. (© Palmyra Portrait Project. By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).



to the point: why is this even important? Because the realm of the dead reflects an ideology, a social convention and aspirations in a far more idealised and constructed format than anywhere else. Of course there had to be a compliance with burial convention and a shared language of iconography to make it relevant and permit it to convey meaning, but this context allowed a great capacity for the expression of intimate and personal values, of sameness but also difference. It is undeniable that there is a distinction between the views expressed in the tomb and those of the public world. Of the surviving evidence, honorific portrait statues of Palmyra, for example, show proportionally more toga or himation-wearing portraits and females in western style garb than in funerary portraits.⁵ The language of inscription is also different. In the tomb it is overwhelmingly Palmyrene Aramaic: public inscriptions were predominantly bilingual, although not exclusively so, with Greek being the civic language.⁶

5. Colledge 1976, 91.

6. Sartre 2005, 294 and 292-293.

The funerary portraits of Palmyra represented a local wealthy elite in a very different context and each was a one-off to be viewed privately by the family and loved ones within the tomb. Within the limitations of a relatively small space, each was created to represent a real person or multiple people. They were all different, some more so than others, and distinction could be included through combining the myriad styles and motifs available at the time. This could be done through the representation of the face, hair, inclusion of attributes,⁷ inscription, gesture and posture. But it could also be done through the choice of costume that contributed a significant layer of meaning.⁸ The variety of costume in the Palmyran funerary portraits is a reflection of the fact that costume was an important and active part of the construction of identity realised in the portraits, each one of which was designed either by the deceased themselves or their family to express the personal and social aspirations and values

7. Long 2013, 99.

8. Bartman 2001, 17.



Fig. 2: Detail of an embroidered tunic. Ingholt Archives. PS1020. Location Unknown. 3rd century. (© Palmyra Portrait Project. By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).

of the dead person in this world and the next. For sarcophagus boxes or lids, there was more scope for the inclusion of details, such as full rather than bust figures, with size being less of a restriction. Yet even here, there were conventions of display to be considered.

The format of the loculus reliefs, albeit designed to fill a functional square space, on average 53cm in height, and the banquet scenes, all attest to the difference in self-representation depending on context. We are granted a view of individuals as they wished to be seen by their direct peers and not by the general public. These are more personal, more intimate representations. And as such, the costume they chose to wear in perpetuity has much to say about this side of their carefully constructed sense of self within their community.⁹

Gesture, Choice and Meaning

With regard to the use of portrait costume, whether public and honorific or funerary and more private, we must establish from the outset that no element of representation, costume or gesture, was ever made with-

out consideration of meaning. Whether it was a nod to tradition or convention and a repetition of established motifs, or a deliberate and distinct attempt to demonstrate a particular allegiance, viewpoint or affiliation, costume in portraiture was a highly-charged conveyor of meaning.¹⁰ The female loculus portraits, for example, with imaginative flair through the drapery or handling of the veil, display an array of meanings. For example, the so-called Beauty of Palmyra¹¹ raises a hand to the veil in a recognised gesture of mourning and restraint,¹² redolent of the Pudicitia female body type, yet also manages a successful conceal-and-reveal gesture,¹³ coquettish and alluring yet simultaneously conservative and hidden.¹⁴ In this way we see that even the handling of costume, let alone the choice of garment itself, was pregnant with significance. The important thing to bear in mind at this point is that portrait costume may or may not have actually been worn by the subject themselves whilst living, and as such

9. Butcher 2003, 328.

10. Long 2013, 72.

11. Colledge 1976, 262; Ingholt 1928, 148-149; Raja and Sørensen 2015.

12. Llewellyn-Jones 2003, 85.

13. Trimble 2000, 64.

14. Dillon 2010, 87-88.

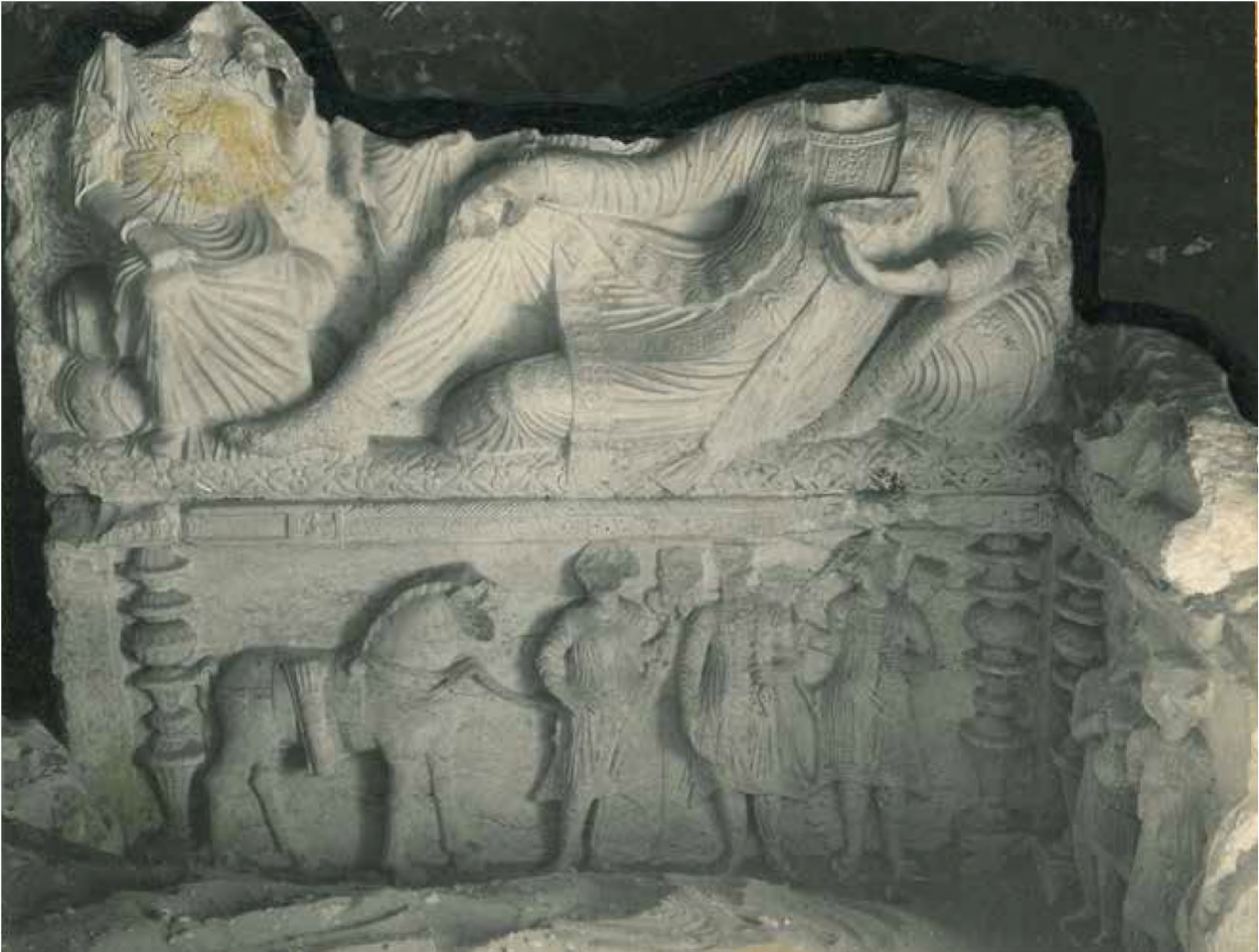


Fig. 3: Figures wearing the Parthian coat. Tomb of Maqqai. 3rd century. Ingholt Archive PS1007/1012/1008. (© Palmyra Portrait Project. By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).

represents aspiration rather than reality.¹⁵ But because of the survival of clothing fragments found in tombs, we can be sure that such items really existed and were worn.¹⁶ The point is that the choice of attire made in a funerary portrait was a thoughtfully made decision that reflected an element of status.

Before we continue with our examination of Parthian costume, mention must be made of gender and roles as it has a bearing on the significance of costume choice. In general, male portraiture in the ancient world performed a different function from that of

women. Females were regarded as a single social group with minimal legal status who did not perform public roles or function in the same way as men.¹⁷ Nor did they operate in the same public spaces as their male counterparts. They were not subject to the same values, such as prowess or virility. Their portraits needed to reflect these social differences, and thus they are more concerned with reflecting abstract ideals associated with their sex, such as domesticity, beauty, status through wealth, correct deportment and self-restraint.¹⁸ Attributes held in the hands, like

15. Fejfer 2008, 335.

16. Curtis 2000, 33; see also Curtis this volume.

17. Fejfer 2008, 345.

18. Long 2013, 31.

the distaff and spindle, affirmed these qualities.¹⁹ There were many representational elements of overlap with male portraiture, such as participation in dining scenes, sometimes, though more rarely, reclining on the kline itself alone or with a husband,²⁰ and inclusion in family groups or with spouses occupying equal space. But because of the different social roles of females, the range of costume choice was more limited than it was for males. Hair might be covered by the veil or not, and the veil and himation might be decorated or draped in a plethora of different configurations. As a loose generalisation, women wore combinations of the eastern costume of diadem or headcloth, turban, veil, himation and tunic, but worn in multiple ways. Yet in many ways, this aspect of Palmyrene female portraiture reflects western portrait costume traditions: that costume choice, although restricted to a few key pieces, could be imaginatively draped in a myriad different but conservative ways.

In contrast, we can be more certain that the costume with which we are presented in male portraiture has a specific job to do. There is none of the enigmatic abstraction of females, but the clear and unambiguous message of office, position, profession and cultural signifiers. However, we will also see that this is laden with its own problems of interpretation. Outside of specific attributes of professions, costume also indicates affiliations on a local and wider level. In a city on the cusp of cultural boundaries, especially one with mercantile associations that added frissons of merging priorities and allegiances that changed over time, we will see that the choice of costumes could act as a powerful cultural marker not to be taken for granted.

Parthian Costume and Frequency of Use

The basic elements of Parthian costume worn by males consisted of a knee-length tunic with sleeves worn over trousers and boots.²¹ There were varia-

tions.²² Some garment types were commonly worn across the region. The Parthian costume was exclusively worn by men, male children and male servants. There might also be a chlamys included, or what Colledge refers to as a desert cloak,²³ or a belt, leggings or over-trousers secured at the hip or other additional items such as the overcoat. Trousers might be tucked into soft ankle boots (fig. 1). All these garments could be decorated with exquisite detail, particularly in the third century, as can be seen in figure 2.²⁴ It was clearly a very practical garment, allowing for free movement and riding. There were variances in garments that seemed specific to communities. For instance, a long coat was sometimes worn over the tunic, but not in Palmyra, except for two surviving examples on the same monument comprised of a sarcophagus relief and lid (fig. 3),²⁵ and nor was the V neck wrap-over jacket as worn by the well-known bronze statue of a prince found in a temple at Shami.²⁶ There is also a version of the costume comprised of a decorated tunic with a long mantle draped around the lower body, as seen on an altar with two full figure priests from the third century,²⁷ and also worn by the standing priest in figure 4.²⁸ It could be worn with or without trousers,²⁹ as such I will not be including examples of it in this study, unless the lower half of the figure is visible and shoes or trousers can definitely be seen. This will also mean excluding the *loculus* busts of priests. Without the presence of trousers or shoes, the tunic and mantle are essentially a version of the Greek outfit, and as such not distinguishable as a costume of Parthian origin. As well as this, Butcher notes

22. Curtis 1988, 285-287 and 311-314.

23. Colledge 1977, 133.

24. See also Schmidt-Colinet 1992, taf.41. Palmyra Museum. A tunic with a central stripe embroidered with running animals emerging from circles of foliage. 3rd century.

25. Tomb of Maqqai. Location Unknown. Ingholt Archive, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek PS1012/1007/1008.

26. Curtis 2000, 26 and Colledge 1977, fig. 121, 50 BC -AD 150.

27. Gawlikowski 1987, 284, pl. 34.

28. See also Sadurska and Bounni, 1994, 174-176, cat. 232, fig. 248

29. Curtis 1988, 282.

19. Cussini 2005, 26.

20. Schmidt-Colinet 1992, taf.73b. Palmyra Museum.

21. See Curtis, this volume.



Fig. 4: Standing priest, far right, in the barefoot version of the Parthian tunic used in religious ceremonies. The Tomb of 'Alaine. 3rd century. Palmyra Museum. Ingholt Archive PS1017. (© Palmyra Portrait Project. By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).

that priests were more likely to wear a ‘special dress’ of full length tunic over bare feet when performing ceremonies.³⁰ Therefore it is likely that busts of priests holding the alabastron and bowl, particularly before AD 150 when the type was most popular, are meant to be regarded as wearing this type of outfit. As such, it is not the Parthian costume trouser-suit and will not be included in the statistics of use. Later reclining priests in banquet scenes in a non-religious format, however, are shown wearing the full Parthian costume and these will be included.

The overall breakdown of those wearing the Parthian costume in the entire corpus as it stands so far is as follows:³¹

	50-150	150-200	200-273
Banquet Scene:³²	38	71	37
Reclining Males			
in Parthian Dress	14	25	18
with Chlamys	10	20	14
with Mantle	4	5	3
with Coat			1
Percentage in Parthian Dress	37%	35%	49%

30. Butcher 2003, 331.

31. The figures should not be taken as exactly precise. Problems of dating, damage and fragmentation means some evidence may be incorrectly attributed. But the figures assist in the identification of trends over time.

32. There are a total of 109 recorded objects that contain banquet imagery, including sarcophagus covers and boxes and relief carvings. These contain 323 portraits. See section below, *Banquet Scenes and Reclining Figures in Parthian Costume*, for a further breakdown of statistics.



Fig. 5: A male with sword, whip and background horse. Istanbul Archaeological Museum. Inv. 3749/O.M.204 AD100-150. Ingholt Archive PS 119. (© Palmyra Portrait Project. By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).

	50-150	150-200	200-273
Loculus Busts:	24	10	4
Total non-priest males/ Parthian Dress			
In Chlamys	23	5	2
Identifiable as riders	9	4	2
Identifiable as soldiers/ military	2	1	0
Unknown	12	0	0

Let us try and make sense of these figures. Who then wears Parthian costume in Palmyra, how do they wear it, what are they doing and what can it signify? As we

saw, it was worn by those in the caravan business and other riders whose profession is less clear but involves riding and use of the sword or an attribute associated with military activity. There are an additional 8 full figures who wear the same attire but whose context is not known.³³ Of the reliefs, the attributes that accompany such men are of the same nature. Hands may hold whips and sword hilts. Behind them may be positioned horses or camels, as in figure 5.³⁴ The full figure reliefs may show the same class of items but in a different layout. Here we see the Parthian costume used as a practical garment suitable for riding, as in the figures on the sarcophagus relief, figure 3. Not all caravaners or riders wear it, but it is seen being worn by the majority. We also see a cavalryman wearing the costume, whose inscription securely identifies him as such (fig. 6).³⁵ This again attests not only to the practicality of the costume but also indicates that it was worn by others than those on the caravan route but still in a professional capacity.

How do these men wear their garments? In an example in the Palmyra Museum from the Camp of Diocletian of a sarcophagus relief dated to 150-250, two full figures stand side by side wearing knee-length loosely belted Parthian tunics over trousers.³⁶ Each has a recurring circular pattern at the neckline and long sleeves with embroidered cuffs. The stripe down the front rather than the side of the tunic is the most commonly seen design of the tunic in Palmyra. The stripe of the male on the left has a series of leaf motifs enclosed in squares and separated by rows of beaded bands. That of the right hand male has a row of embroidered rosettes down his front. The hem borders are different. The male on the left sports a row of

33. For example, standing figure of a male in Parthian dress and sword belt. Palmyra Museum CD 18/77. Gawlikowski 1984, 101-102, fig. 170.

34. Colledge 1976, 247, Heyn 2010, app.6, cat no.9, Albertson 2000b, 144 n. 16, 148-49, pl. 32a.

35. Musée du Louvre, AO 14924, AD 150-200. Inscription translates as 'Apollinaris Vibius cavalry squadron Herculiana Aelius Montanus his heir'.

36. Colledge 1976, 76, pl.143 and Schmidt-Colinet 1992, taf. 69, fig. d. Palmyra Museum 2093/7431.

chevrons, whilst on the right are circles alternating with rosettes and incised squares. The front of the trousers also have stripes different from the others. The left hand male has a pattern identical to that of the hem of his colleague. The right hand male has a vertical row of circles. The trousers are tucked into soft ankle length boots. Each man wears a belt tied at the centre with the ends looped back under the belt. The left hand male grasps the reins of the camel in his right hand and a spear in the left. The right hand male holds an object that is unclear in the right hand and a long sword in the left hand, the belt of which is visible across the body and resting on the hip. The camel is weighed down with fancy goods, a shield and a decorated rug. This is clearly a static but also symbolic scene intended to convey something of the activities important to the subjects. But the delicacy of the costume might in many ways seem impractical. The fine embroidery would easily be damaged in harsh travelling conditions. But in the context of this relief, it is employed to express the wealth and elevated status of the men. Whether such finery was actually worn on a journey is unknown. As we saw above, pieces of fabric has been found in tombs that proved such exquisite embroidery did exist, but that is not the point. The richness of the garments worn by these men in this context, which must have been expensive to make and buy, speaks of their status as heavily tied up with their vocation. It also testifies to the fact that the means of earning a living was a matter to be celebrated in death, and an important facet of self-identity.

Parthian Costume as a Signifier of Status

But why is the outfit so eastern in origin and not Greek or Roman? I offer three possible reasons in response to this: firstly, that the activity of trade and following the caravan routes took place in the east and not the west and so was more appropriate. It was a costume originally designed for practicality by the nomadic Parthians, as V. Curtis explains.³⁷ Secondly, the costume of himation or even toga were completely

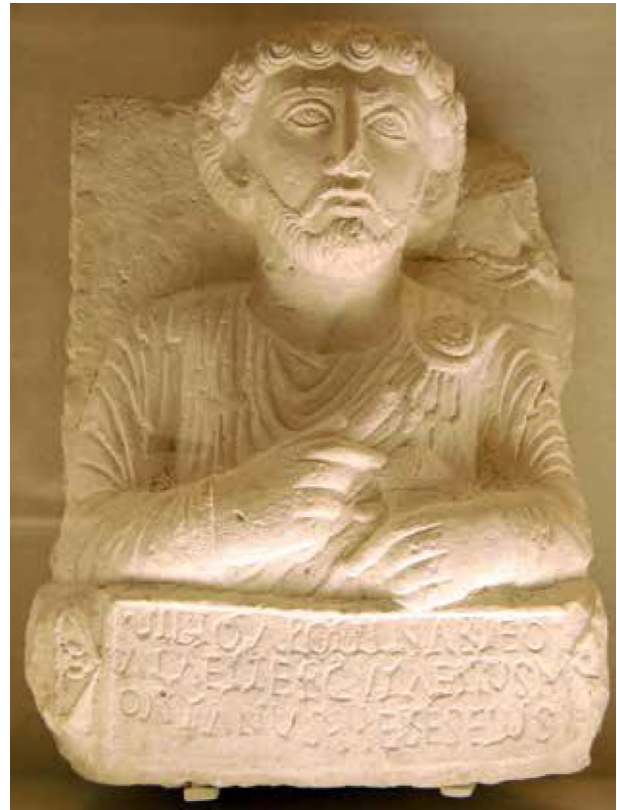


Fig. 6: Cavalryman. Musée du Louvre AO 14924. AD 150-200. (© Palmyra Portrait Project. By permission of Musée de Louvre).

impractical as travelling clothes. An example of a wealthy Roman in the act of travelling can be seen in the Zoilos Relief from Aphrodisias which shows the freedman of Augustus dressed for travel with a cloak tied about him and a soft wide travelling hat.³⁸ Although the frieze is earlier than our time period, dating from the end of the first century BC, it shows that the ungainly toga was not worn for travelling, or was at least covered up. In another part of the scene, Zoilos indeed dons the toga in order to be crowned by a personification of the Polis. Thirdly, the himation and toga may have been the costumes of the west, but they were also the ancient equivalent of the business suit, the dress of commerce, public life in the city and also

37. Curtis 2000, 25; Curtis, this volume.

38. Smith 1993, 35.



Fig. 7: Male wearing an unclasped chlamys. National Museum of Damascus. AD 100-150. Ingholt Archive PS570. (© Palmyra Portrait Project. By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).

of ceremony.³⁹ This is not the arena of the practical merchant, still less of a people who had more reason to identify themselves with the east and had a sense of their own independent status. As such, the Parthian costume reflected a political choice, as indeed to some extent did all costume choices, and whilst this is certainly true, it is also the case that practical and social factors and an identification with communities further to the east are just as relevant in this case, if not more so.

The short chlamys or the larger cloak were seen on possible caravan travellers and riders, but there are other variants to the costume. The brooch might be clasped on the left shoulder rather than the much

more commonly-seen right shoulder, as in figure 6, above. A very few rider-types have the cloak draped over a shoulder without any brooch at all (Fig. 7), possibly only 3 in total.⁴⁰ It is not apparent from the evidence whether the version of the chlamys in such instances has a specific meaning, but it seems clear that there is a general message of sorts being portrayed because males holding riding attributes most frequently wear it in the less orthodox fashion. It may be that this is a cloak of practical outdoor use. Caravaneers, riders and other travelling males do not generally wear their cloaks in the same way that priests or reclining males do. No priest wears a shoulder mantle that is not clasped with a brooch of some kind and all are attached at the left shoulder. This might speak of a more ceremonial aspect to the well-draped chlamys. We will return to this particular point below. But it is also worth noting that the chlamys in the context of the relief could also add dynamic movement to a scene of riders in movement.⁴¹

The Parthian costume is also worn by male children that occupy the spaces behind parents, again without the chlamys. An example from Istanbul is representative of the type (fig. 8).⁴² Here we see the tunic and leggings with stripes as before. It is not clear why children are wearing this rather than the often seen plain long tunic. I know of no other example in the Near East where children wear the Parthian costume. There is no conclusive evidence from the reliefs or inscriptions that suggest these children died young or indeed that they grew into adulthood and donned Parthian costume or that the imagery reflects that they now never will. Thanks to the inscription, this is a rare case when we know a little something of the subject.⁴³ The central figure is the father and also the father and husband mentioned in another relief. In the other relief, we see the wife and daughter, one of

40. See Colledge 1976, 247. Also Palmyra Museum PM 450, Istanbul Archaeological Museum 3714/O.M 164.

41. Colledge 1977, pl. 22.

42. See Colledge 1976, 253, Heyn 2010, app.4, cat no.21

43. Inscription translates as 'Abd'astôr and his son Maqqai'. CIS 4422, PAT 0782.

39. Butcher 2003, 328.

whom is dressed in mourning for the other. Both are the same size filling equal space. The relevant question is, why is the son only shown in this small size behind the father? Did he die as a child rather than grow to adulthood as we may assume the daughter did? Regrettably, we cannot be sure and the answer is not forthcoming.

Returning to the boy's costume, the tunic has an embroidered neckline and cuffs of circular design. The central vertical stripe has the chevron stripe we have seen before. The waist is belted with a knot that loops under. The trousers are just visible. Costume is little help when attempting to decipher meaning in the cases of children, except to observe that they clearly held down no profession and therefore the costume is restricted to the conveyance of status. By this I mean that the preference to show the child dressed in the costume of the east is indicative of its kudos to certain users over the tunic more commonly seen worn by children in Greek-style dress, but for unclear reasons. The father is dressed in the himation of business and public life, and arguably showing Roman traits through the representation of an unflattering receding hairline, whilst the son is represented in a costume of the east. The attributes held by such children are possibly more suggestive of status. Holding birds, bunches of grapes and circular wreaths suggest abundance and the pastoral life. The bird may also allude to *otium* and leisure, as a kept pet and plaything. These are items not always exclusive to children, but certainly most common to them, as seen on a sarcophagus in Ostia. The majority of the Palmyrene children in reliefs are full-figure or slightly obscured, front-facing and, in the case of the loculus relief examples, much smaller than the central subject. This style of representation suggests a fusion of east and western iconography. Children as disproportionately small figures are a device seen since the fifth century in Greek funerary carving, as in an example of a stele of a mother with child and holding a tiny baby. The child is depicted as a very small adult.⁴⁴

44. Walters Art Museum. Late fifth century. Accession number: 23.176.



Fig. 8: Child in Parthian Costume. Istanbul Archaeological Museum. Inv 3745. AD 240. Ingholt Archive PS 276. (© Palmyra Portrait Project. By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).

Banquet Scenes and Reclining Figures in Parthian Costume

The final and largest group of Parthian costume wearing figures are the banqueters and their serving boys. Here we will focus solely on those figures who are se-

curely identified as wearing the Parthian costume. Some of these figures are draped to the ankles in a himation over their tunic, and although they may be wearing Parthian tunic and trousers beneath, it is not always clear this is the case, so these will be disregarded for the purpose of clarity.

There are a total of 109 objects that contain banquet imagery, including sarcophagus covers and boxes and relief carvings. Of these, there are 323 total portraits of recliners, seated and standing family members and serving figures, seated females and busts. There are 53 seated females and 8 reclining females, 2 of whom recline in front of a male and 6 who recline alone with or without an attendant where the entire relief survives.

The reclining banquet figure is an ancient and established motif widely used both east and west, especially in the context of the tomb.⁴⁵ The exact meaning has been long debated. Zanker, Stewart and others have concluded that such scenes represent the meal of the dead, the ritual within the tomb and a celebration of the deceased's life and family.⁴⁶ Iconographic elements in such imagery is usually prescriptive: the deceased leans on the left elbow, propped up by plump cushions on the kline (See figs. 1, 3 and 4). The right knee, if shown, will be bent. In early versions, the figures may be stacked behind each other with only the upper body visible.⁴⁷ One of the hands holds a cup or bowl, a piece of fruit or a pine cone. But the issue for us is not so much the overall meaning, but the relevance of the costume the male diner and any servant wears.

The first example we will discuss is amongst the earliest banquet scene known and dates to the earliest period of funerary sculpture, AD 89-110.⁴⁸ The iconography loosely represents the most common for banquet scenes of the time. The diners themselves are stacked, the cushions on which they lean are visible

beneath their left elbow. They have chosen to represent themselves in the himation, but the serving boy is a different matter. He wears the full Parthian regalia of belted tunic with embroidered neckline and cuffs. He wears trousers with a central stripe under leggings attached at the hip by the dagger-like attachment. He also wears a plain chlamys over the shoulders secured with a brooch at the right shoulder. He holds a ladle and a jug.

The second example shows a slightly later scene dating to the mid to later period of production (fig. 9).⁴⁹ This time, the diner is wearing the Parthian costume as well as his servants. But there are distinctions. The central male is the only one wearing a decorated chlamys. The decorated neck, cuffs, central stripe of the tunic and leggings and the decorated ankle cuffs are all different. The boots are also beautifully decorated. He wears the dagger-like object at his hip. The boys' outfits are notably different. Although they too wear the Parthian costume, the striped decoration is relatively conservative in relation to the central figure. There are rows of pom-poms or circles at the neckline, cuffs, central tunic and legging stripes and the tunic hem. Although the lower half of the boy on the right is obscured by the reclining male, the similarities in the upper half of his costume lead the viewer to believe that the rest of the outfit would have been exactly the same as that worn by his fellow. The boots of the boy on the left appear undecorated. They hold the objects we saw in the previous example, the ladle and ewer and also a bowl. Clearly hierarchy is expressed through the costume decoration. The central male, identified by inscription as Malku, son of Moqimu, is gorgeously dressed. Every aspect of his costume oozes expense and, through this, refined culture and status. The outfits of the boys' are without doubt provided and paid for to further reflect the wealth of Malku. Their dress is more uniform-like than his, being of a simpler design and matching. But why has the main figure decided not to wear the himation and wear this costume instead? And why are the serving boys almost always shown wearing it?

45. Stewart 2008, 161

46. Zanker 2012, 26; Stewart 2009, 254.

47. For example Tomb F, main chamber, east sarcophagus. Colledge 1976, 247, 255

48. Palmyra Museum 1720/6391 Ad 89-110. Sadurska and Bounni 1994, 16, cat. 5, fig. 208.

49. See Danti 2001, 33-40 pl. 37.

Fig. 9: Reclining male with serving boys in matching tunics. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Inv B8902. AD 150-250. Ingholt Archive PS 262. (© Palmyra Portrait Project. By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).



The answer is, in my view, tied up with the same use of the costume as we identified in the early caravaners. We might be safer in assuming that dining is a more appropriate activity in which to wear such beautiful attire, but we can still no more make the assumption that it was actually worn in the dining room than on the desert road. That it is worn in these examples signifies that the patron wished in the private and intimate space of the tomb to express *otium*, leisure and dining with friends and family: that his cultural affinities lay in the east, an aspect of his life that was viewed as prestigious, not only for the wealth with which it provided him, but possibly for the identification with the caravan trade that we cannot securely prove in this case. Andrade observes that it was a direct interaction with this aspect of their lives and more direct bonds of ‘kinship and reciprocity’⁵⁰ that we see being negotiated in representations of this kind. It speaks of a successful and fluid negotiation of cultural influences on the crossroads of conflicting ways of life. In this way,

50. Andrade 2013, 178.

we can see the adoption of the Parthian costume reflecting tensions seen in the bilingual inscriptions of the public spaces, of acknowledging two, even three spheres of cultural influence, and of selecting an aspect of these depending on context.⁵¹ Andrade also suggests that of the languages used in inscriptions by the inhabitants of Palmyra, the use of Aramaic script was considered the more personal and prestigious, not least because it was most frequently used in the confines of the tomb. The choice of costume reflects the higher value placed on this sphere of cultural layer.

We move on to two more banquet scenes from the early to mid-third century. The first shows a scene very similar to the last one, with a luxuriously dressed male in Parthian costume and a single serving boy (fig. 10).⁵² The *chlamys*-wearing male and the more simply dressed youth share the same iconographic conven-

51. Andrade 2013, 184. Also 179.

52. Palmyra Museum 1793/6642, AD 239. Sadurska and Bounni, 1994, cat. 193, 145-146.



Fig. 10: Reclining male with an attendant. AD 239. Palmyra Museum. (© Tanabe 1986, No. 437).

tions as before. Only the patterns of the larger male are different. The boy's costume has the same small circular pattern as the previous relief. Instead of a jug or cup, he holds out a *modius* to the diner. This image confirms what we observed previously, that only matters of most importance to the subject are reflected. Here, the male is or was a priest. This and his eastern costume have been chosen to define him in perpetuity.

In the final relief we will discuss, we see another aspect of distinction (fig. 11).⁵³ The overall iconography is almost identical except for significant details. This time, even the serving boy is wearing an elaborately patterned tunic. Just as before, he wears no chlamys, but the reclining male does. Only the boots are plainer, appearing undecorated. The standing figure also appears to be wearing a sword belt. He has

his hand on his right hip and, although he holds a bowl and is proportionately smaller than the reclining male, he does not appear quite as subservient as the serving boys in the former reliefs. We do not see the Parthian tripartite hair in Palmyra, but here we see a hairstyle on the larger male that is reminiscent of the look. Rather than the top and side bunches, there is a central wavy section with two distinct curly sections on each side. Could this be an even more striking attempt to identify oneself with a culture predominantly of eastern origin? As such, it is an added layer of cultural affinity that links the subject with the east rather than to Greece or Rome.

It would seem that in the dining room at least, the Parthian costume was an option chosen by priests or non-priests as a cultural symbol. It was not the only outfit choice available, the himation and tunic costume is also widely seen. But the fact that it was chosen, and in increasing numbers towards and into the third century, indicates that it was imbued with a social relevance that was seen fit to commemorate with-

53. Palmyra Museum 2253/8113, AD 200-250; Charles-Gaffiot et al. 2001, 344, no. 149. Ingholt Archive, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek PS 1061; see also Curtis, this volume.

Fig. 11: Reclining male with serving boy in equally lavish costume. AD 200-250. Palmyra Museum. Ingholt Archive PS 1061. (© Palmyra Portrait Project. By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).



in the tomb. Despite the elaborate and unique nature of the embroidered details, some garment elements became standard attire worn together and used repeatedly. No diner is seen without the chlamys, or at least a himation over the shoulder or part of the outfit. In the same way, serving boys are not subject to the same convention and some but not all do not wear the chlamys at all. Perhaps it was incomplete not to have an over-garment draped over the two-piece suit when reclining to dine. No two Parthian outfits are the same with the exception of serving boys, and this differentiation was a trait unique to the Palmyrene funerary portrait. In this way, attention to detail clearly indicates blatant wealth but also an attempt at differentiation, status and cultural ideology. It also links the subject with cultures from further east rather than Rome or the civic institutions of the Greek world. In much the same way that the Romans donned eastern Greek dress to recline to dine in the privacy of their homes, an increasing percentage of Palmyrene males make

the associations with the Parthian east in the tomb, expressing a preference for a perceived luxury and status that looked away from the west.

Why do priests and non-priests alike in the later period increasingly choose to use this style of representation, and why do all perform the same task of dining? Why have the priests in effect lain down on the kline and put aside their religious attributes? Perhaps one reason might be the increasingly secular nature of the portraits, and that status is not confined to the holding of office such as a priesthood, but became related to being primarily a member of the Palmyrene social elite. With an increase in wealth, status and political confidence enjoyed by the Palmyrenes at the turn of the third century,⁵⁴ do we witness this inflated sense of their own identity reflected in the portraits? As Edwell notes,⁵⁵ Rome came to be ever more reliant

54. Edwell 2008, 60.

55. Edwell 2008, 62.

on the prowess of Palmyrene auxiliary troops at this time, and this and the special status as a thriving trading city enjoying autonomous rights ensured that the citizens were in a position to enjoy an elevated position of local importance. I would argue that this partly explains the adoption of Parthian costume by local elites of all roles in their funerary portraits. Identity was not tied up with being a Roman colony as it was for some neighbouring communities. Quite the opposite, in fact. The city was spared and preserved as an independent city exactly because of what it had to offer to the Romans. The connection between appearance, costume and political climate might just as easily be demonstrated by considering that following the visit to Palmyra by Hadrian in AD 129, the beard became popular for male adults in funerary reliefs, but there was no increase in the choice of Parthian costume at this time, most likely as the current emphasis lay in reflecting Hadrian's philhellenic tastes and the fact that Palmyra benefitted from his patronage, becoming at this time a free city.⁵⁶ The increase in instances of the costume coincided with the burgeoning in confidence as a regional power as noted above that was the beginning of a time of challenge to Rome. As such, at times of cultural manoeuvring, we can chart changes to appearances in funerary portraits of males that reflect an altered emphasis.

Conclusion

It becomes clear that the Parthian costume became increasingly common in Palmyrene funerary portrait art amongst males of all ages. It was the practical garment of the professional traveller and rider but was still shown highly decorated in impractical situations as a symbol of status in reliefs. As it became the predominant outfit of choice in the increasingly popular banquet scene, it also reflected wealth, a political confidence and also the eastern cultural affiliation that the subjects chose to express within the privacy of one's own family and peers, enjoying the trappings and luxury of the dining room and surrounded by

elaborate couches and appropriately dressed serving boys. Choice of costume did matter. One could look east or west, and some, but not all, Palmyrenes chose to increasingly look east, to the source of wealth and in increasing opposition to Rome. Since it first came to be adopted in the region, the outfit had been deliberately selected or eschewed in order to make statements of political and societal membership. But the costume was not without local twists. Male children did not wear the chlamys, only some serving boys did. All reclining diners wear a chlamys or mantle of some kind. Nowhere else is seen the array of decorative combinations.

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⁵⁶ Edwell 2008, 46-47.

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