**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**


**CHECKLIST**

**Near Eastern, Palmyrene, funeral stele of Herta, about 175 CE, limestone.**

*Yale University Art Gallery: Gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. Edgar Munroe; 1954.30.2*

**Near Eastern, Palmyrene, funeral stele of Herta, about 175 CE, limestone.**

*Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Fund; S.978.41*

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Cultural Hybridity in the Funerary Arts of the Roman Provinces

Romanization—the process whereby Roman customs and values spread across disparate areas of the Roman Empire—is often thought of in terms of a unilateral movement toward a single, homogeneous Roman culture. In truth, it was probably instead characterized by a dynamic exchange between imperial and provincial cultures. This installation presents examples of the kind of hybrid visual culture materialized in funerary art from certain locales across the Roman provinces. Through an examination of objects characterizing a certain cultural identity, local beliefs and imagery are also displayed in the work. The seated female figure in the top register who nurses an infant is most likely a depiction of the local fertility goddess. As a fertility goddess, she often is associated with childrearing and nurturing, which makes her appearance on the funerary stele of a child seem especially appropriate. The bottom register of the stele depicts a bull and a haystack, local imagery of sacrificial offerings often found in North African funerary and votive stelae (Varner, 12). The presence of such offerings and the fertility goddess demonstrates an enduring connection with pre-Roman religious practices. The combination of local North African motifs and specific Roman imperial attributes in this work also reflects the complexity and process of fusion involved in Romanization.

Like the stele of a boy from Africa Proconsularis, the funerary stele of Herta, daughter of Baida, from the city of Palmyra in the province of Roman Syria uses dress to communicate status and a shared Graeco-Roman heritage. In line with longstanding Near Eastern traditions regarding the afterlife, the stele, which would have sealed off a compartment for the body of the deceased in a funerary chamber, was believed to house the soul or personality of the individual who had died (Colledge, 58). While the burial and religious practices associated with this object show a continuation of Near Eastern customs, the female figure wears a traditional Greek chiton (tunic) and imitative (cloak), indicating an association to Hellenistic identity. Additionally, the allure and social position of the woman are expressed via the abundance of jewelry presented, multiple necklaces, rings, earrings, and a diadem indicate great wealth. This conspicuous display of riches may be related to the economic changes that took place in Palmyra during the era of Roman rule. The city was located on the trade routes between the Roman west and the Parthian Empire to the east, and, due to this advantageous placement and the Roman Empire's growing need for foreign goods, Palmyra became very prosperous during this time (Colledge, 14). The inferred wealth of the woman represented on the stele speaks to the economic growth that occurred under imperial rule.

Specific attributes or iconographic elements were not the only way in which mixed cultural identities could be expressed. Often the medium or style used to create a funerary representation communicates significant information about the identity of a patron or subject. The use of the encaustic technique (in which pigment is dissolved in beeswax and used to paint) in the mummy portrait of a youth, possibly from the Fayum Basin, for example, speaks to the diversity of cultures that were present in this area of Roman Egypt. Encaustic was a technique developed by the early Greeks, and its appropriation by the Romans suggests a diffusion of Graeco-Roman conventions through the empire. The naturalistic style of these portraits also derived from the Greek tradition. Classical texts indicate that naturalism and the ability to accurately capture the likeness of an individual were celebrated in Greek painting (Robey, 136). In the portrait of a bearded man from the second century, particular attention is devoted to the rendering of bushy curls and facial hair as well as specific facial features. Though this kind of naturalism speaks of a connection with Graeco-Roman heritage, the function of such portraits was still tied to traditional Egyptian religious practices involving the mumification of the body. The placement of a representation of the deceased on or near the mummy of an individual was based on beliefs about the afterlife that spanned thousands of years of pharaonic Egyptian culture (Walker, Bierbrier, Roberts, and Taylor, 9). The portraits, then, despite the heavy Hellenistic influence upon their style and technique, were essentially Egyptian in their purpose.

Cultural identity in the Roman Empire was not simple or unified. The diverse societies that became provinces under Roman rule experienced Romanization in varied ways. The intersection of imperial and provincial customs and the construction of cultural practices happened differently in each community, or even each household. The way in which a province, community, or individual negotiated this kind of cultural interaction and adaptation can provide modern viewers with insight into the concepts of identity and self-perception, then and now.

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Collection-Sharing Initiative

The majority of the objects in this installation are on loan from the Yale University Art Gallery as part of their innovative Collection-Sharing Initiative, which has been made possible by a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.


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