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## **A Multifaceted Death: Funerary Portraiture in Roman Jordan**

### **Introduction**

The study of funerary portraiture in Classical antiquity has garnered long-overdue scholarly interest in recent years. This endeavour allows us, perhaps to a degree hardly attainable in other art historical and archaeological fields, to engage with the intimacies of ancient lived experiences. It also allows us to delve into the personal aspirations and modes of self-advertisement of the inhabitants of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean, since, by definition, a funerary portrait was the image through which the deceased hoped to be remembered, at least nominally, for all eternity.

Despite a number of studies devoted to funerary portraiture in Palestine (Skupińska-Løvset 1983), northern Syria (Wagner 1976; Blömer 2014), southern Syria (Sartre-Fauriat 2001a), and Palmyra (Kropp and Raja 2014), the archaeological and art historical exploration of this phenomenon,

to the extent of its full expression in the broader Roman Near East (and particularly in *Provincia Arabia*), had been, until recently, somewhat wanting in comparison to abundant and ever-increasing studies devoted to its manifold manifestations in Rome (Zanker 1975; Kleiner 1977; Walker 1985; Kockel 1993; Feraudi-Gruénais 2001), the Italian peninsula (Frenz 1985; Pflug 1989), the Western provinces (Braemer 1959; Faust 1998; Hope 2001; Carroll 2006), and in the Eastern Mediterranean, be it mainland and insular Greece (von Moock 1998; Lagogianni-Georgakarakou 1998), Asia Minor (Fıratlı 1964; Pfuhl and Möbius 1977/1979; Cremer 1991; 1992; Lochman 2003), Cyprus (Pogiatzi 2003), and Egypt (Parlasca 1966; Abdalla 1992; Corcoran 1995; Borg 1996; Riggs 2002; 2005). The dense and essential overview that K. Parlasca (1982) gave of funerary portraiture in the Hellenistic and Roman Near East did not, in this respect, sufficiently

address portraits hailing from the province of Arabia or from the Decapolis.

This disinterest may be partially explained, on one hand, by the difficulties associated with access to the relevant material due to its geographical dispersion and the political turmoil that has characterised the region for several decades. On the other hand, there is a long-standing belief, still partially held among members of the scientific community, that a potent “aniconic” tradition defined the cultural and religious practices of the inhabitants of the geographical realms of southern Syria and northern Arabia and shaped their artistic sensitivities.<sup>1</sup> This relative dearth of published scholarship was admirably remedied, at least concerning Roman Arabia, by two major studies: A. Barbet and C. Vibert-Guigue’s (1988/1994) monograph on the painting techniques and decorative patterns in the *necropoleis* of Abila-Quwayliba and T.M. Weber’s (2002) exhaustive monograph on Gadara-Umm Qays, which comprised a detailed study of funerary portraits documented in the Decapolis, including a precious number of portraits kept in Jordanian private collections. These studies, nonetheless, only marginally addressed the sociological and anthropological *raison d’être* of funerary portraiture, or only engaged with this phenomenon through the prism of civic and regional dynamics, as their set purposes were, respectively, the study of tomb painting from a predominantly technical and stylistic perspective (including an investigation of the frescoes’ architectural setting), and a reappraisal of Gadara’s history and that of its surroundings through

<sup>1</sup> On aniconism in Nabataean culture, see Patrich 1990, with the reservations of Parlasca 1993; McKenzie 2004: 560. For the broader Near East, see Gaifman 2008; Nunn 2008. As a cultural phenomenon, aniconism seems to have been most prevalent in the cultic, rather than the private, sphere of representation, with the notable exception of the *nefesh* symbols, which will not be discussed here.

the diligent recording of its archaeological and architectural remains (including the sculptural environment of its sacred, public, and funerary spaces). Finally, a symposium held in Copenhagen in 2017 strove, among other aims, to explore and characterise the blossoming of funerary portraiture in Roman Greater Syria, one simultaneously shaped by a confluence of regional and supra-regional cultural interactions, and rooted in a centuries-old indigenous visual culture (Blömer and Raja 2019; Lichtenberger and Raja 2019). Hence, an evaluation of funerary portraiture in Roman Jordan, akin to that given by A. Lichtenberger and R. Raja, is called for. Ideally, such a study would (1) take into account the typological variety of these *monumenta* (stelai, busts, sarcophagi, statues, tomb façades and doors, and painted frescoes), (2) strive to delineate the social values that patrons sought to promote and the behavioural norms and ideals upon which such an iconography was built, and (3) re-evaluate these portraits in their archaeological context in order to shed light on funerary portraiture as a “lived experience”, one that derives from and is constitutive of a religious and social mentality. This contribution aims to offer a general outline for such a project.

### **A Fitting Remembrance: Typological Variety within Funerary Portraiture**

As elsewhere in the Near East, and in the broader empire, funerary portraits in Roman Jordan were displayed on an impressive variety of media. The choice of the commemorative monument (Gk. *mnēmeion*), and particularly that of the portrait, was evidently determined by a combination of factors, such as the patron’s personal taste and financial means, the varying access to material (marble, limestone, basalt, sandstone, etc.) and talent (sculptors and painters, and their more or less specialised workshops), and the architectural setting into which the funerary

artefact was integrated. These different factors coalesced to produce a miscellaneous archaeological record of funerary portraiture in Jordan, since one encounters these images on tomb façades, sarcophagi, frescoes, and in the form of busts and even statues. Naturally, some tombs would have exhibited a combination of these artistic forms (for instance, a sarcophagus bearing a bust, set in an *arcosolium* whose outer panels were decorated with additional painted busts; see also Lichtenberger and Raja 2019: 143 n. 60, 147), which may illustrate the breadth of the typological and iconographic spectrum available for patrons to choose from. No evidence of funerary portraits that can be unquestionably dated to the Hellenistic period seems to have survived in the North Arabian realm, which is not to say that Hellenistic tombs in Jordan were devoid of sculptural ornaments: excavations conducted in the *necropoleis* of Gadara and its surroundings have brought

to light statues of sphinxes, lions, and other feline creatures which were meant to protect the tomb from violation and desecration (Weber 2002: 188, 413–4 nr. pl. 28 pl. 46.D, 427, nr. pl. 54 pl. 59.A–E), an apotropaic custom that would be perpetuated in Petra (and elsewhere in Jordan) until the Late Nabataean period—for instance, the “Lion Triclinium”, aptly named on account of the two lions protecting its entrance (BD 452;<sup>2</sup> McKenzie 1990: 158–9 pl. 135)—and beyond (e.g., in the vicinity of Gerasa the incised figure of a sphinx was noted on a tomb door: Lichtenberger and Raja 2019: 139–40).

#### *Tomb Façades*

The earliest funerary portraits to have survived in Jordan are still, for the most

<sup>2</sup> BD refers to the standard classification of Petraean tombs that follows the numbering in Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1904.



1. Obelisk Tomb (BD 35), detail. Petra, AD 40–70 (© B. Annan).





2. The Urn Tomb (BD 772), detail. Petra, third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD (© B. Annan.2013: Beil. 1).



3. The Silk Tomb (BD 770), detail. Petra, first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD (© B. Annan).

part, on display on the rock-cut façades of the Nabataean capital of Petra, where six such images, heavily eroded, defaced or destroyed, are known, ranging from the late 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC to the late 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD. The first five are: (1) the Obelisk Tomb (FIG. 1; *BD* 35; Wadeson 2012 with earlier bibliography), where a draped figure is carved in a *naiskos* amid four monumental obelisks; (2) the Urn Tomb (FIG. 2; *BD* 772; McKenzie 1990: 144–7 pl. 91–7) where a slab bears the image of the owner of the tomb, perhaps a (yet to be identified) king (Wenning 2003: 135),<sup>3</sup> (3) the Silk Tomb (FIG. 3; *BD* 770; McKenzie 1990: 168–9 pl. 157d, 158e), on the façade of which are carved two heavily eroded reliefs, which may be interpreted as the

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the dating of the tomb—third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD—S.G. Schmid has tentatively identified the portrayed individual as the Nabataean king Malichus II (AD 40–70 AD; Schmid 2013: 766–7).

Dioscuri—owing to the apparently mounted horseman on the left, and the eroded horse figure inserted between the male figure and the edge of the frame to the right—or alternatively, as officers of the Nabataean cavalry; (4) the so-called “Turkmaniyyeh” Tomb (FIG. 4; *BD* 633; McKenzie 1990: 167–8 pl. 159a–b), where two busts are set in a rather small niche above a long (and well-studied) Nabataean epitaph (Conklin 2004 with earlier bibliography); (5) the misnamed “Tomb of the Roman Soldier” (FIG. 5; *BD* 239; McKenzie 1990: 147–8 pl. 98–103)—misnamed since, in all probability, it predates the incorporation of the Nabataean kingdom into the Roman Empire—adorned on its lower order, between each pair of supports, with a *loculus* slab bearing a relief, the central one showing a male figure in military garb (no doubt a high-ranking officer in the Nabataean army,



4. The “Turkmaniyyeh” Tomb (*BD* 633), detail. Petra, mid-1<sup>st</sup> c. AD (© J. Norris).





5. The “Tomb of the Roman Soldier” (BD 239), detail. Petra, third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD (© J. Norris).

if not a member of the royal dynasty), while the lateral ones perhaps depict, once again, the Dioscuri (Wenning 2003: 142), rather than, as has long been held, the sons of the tomb founder (this assumption was first formulated in Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1904: 158–60). All of these portraits, unfortunately headless, seem to have suffered intentional mutilation in consequence of a pervasive iconoclasm championed in the subsequent centuries by the Christian and Muslim inhabitants of the region, as J.S. McKenzie has recently argued (McKenzie *et al.* 2013: 270–1), and this disfiguration has rendered any identification of the figures reputedly elusive, and largely dependent on individual researchers’ subjective

interpretations. In an unpublished study,<sup>4</sup> and in an attempt to set the “portrait” theory on firmer ground, L. Wadeson sought to establish a correspondence between the number of figures depicted on the façade—marking the prominence of their display on these façades—and the architectural configuration inside the funerary chambers. She noted that all of the tombs featuring portraits share topographical and architectural characteristics: they are all situated either along major routes or overlook the city centre; most of them belong to large funerary complexes and have Classical temple-like façades pierced with *loculi*, along with large interiors (equipped with *arcosolia*, a rare occurrence at Petra) that would have hosted ritual activities. All of these elements point to the elevated status of the tomb owners

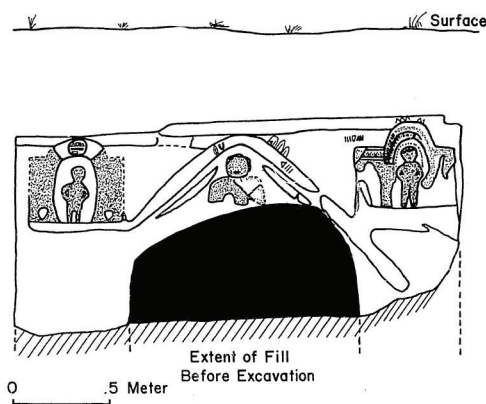
within Nabataean society, a position that might have earned them the privilege of being depicted on the façades (Wadeson forthcoming). Such a scholarly effort is praiseworthy, and brings fresh insights to the debate. Nevertheless, in the absence of new epigraphic or archaeological evidence, the uncertainty surrounding the identity of the portrayed individuals is bound to linger.

The sixth Petraean tomb (FIG. 6; BD 66 with earlier bibliography) was for the most part destroyed by heavy rains around 1847, and its appearance would have vanished completely were it not for a drawing sketched by the French scholar Léon de Laborde on the occasion of his visit to Petra in 1827 (1830: 57 pl. 51). This drawing gives a general view of the entrance of the Siq, and little detail of the tomb decoration can be discerned (see the illustration in Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1904: I 232 fig. 263).

<sup>4</sup> I wish to warmly thank Lucy Wadeson for sending me her unpublished manuscript.



6. Tomb of Arrianos (BD 66), detail. Petra, 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC–1<sup>st</sup> c. AD (after Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1904: I fig. 263).



7. Façade of the “Tombeau aux bustes.” Abila, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD (© M. Fuller).

From what I can gather, the relief, carved on an arched lintel above the doorway, showed some piece of furniture (an altar? or a table bearing offerings?) set at the centre of the scene—or alternatively, a defaced figure—and two seated figures in the corners, one slightly taller than the other, the figure to the right facing outwards, while the shorter one to the left seems to pivot towards the viewer. One may certainly regret that no early explorer discussed, if only in passing, the subject of the relief, focusing instead on the accompanying Greek funerary epigram incised on the tomb’s façade, which identified its owner as having been one Arrianos, a native of Petra, who died of an unspecified illness at the age of twenty-seven (*IGLS* 21, *Jordanie* 4 nr. 55). The scene in the lintel aligns, in terms of its composition and epitaph, with a family portrait, which would then have the parents sitting on each side, and Arrianos in the centre.<sup>5</sup>

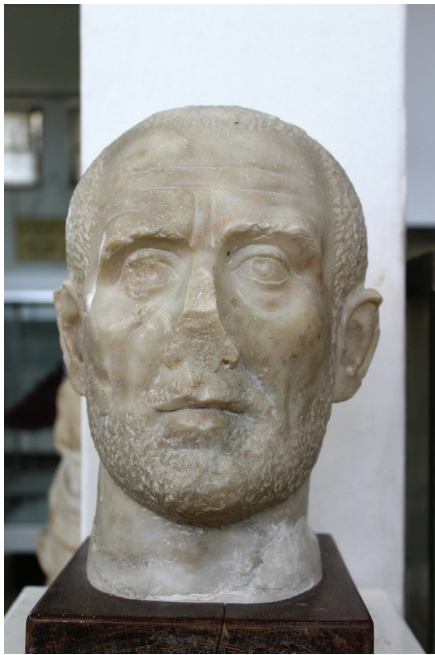
<sup>5</sup> I am tempted to recognise two broken legs on the table, in which case de Laborde could have mistaken a statue base for a table—I have no doubt, however, that any interpretation here is highly hypothetical, if not fanciful.

Outside Petra, surviving funerary portraits carved on tomb façades are strikingly rare, as I am aware of only two specimens. The first was recorded in Abila-Quwayliba, where a bust, adorning the entrance of the aptly named “Tombeau aux bustes” (FIG. 7; Barbet and Vibert-Guigue 1988/1994: 59 fig. 41a), is shown under a sort of rudimentary pediment, flanked by small-scaled figures set in small niches, with their hands placed on their hips. The second relief, which has been somewhat overlooked in recent literature, can be admired on the façade of the Western tomb in the “Al-Kahf” funerary complex outside Amman (FIG. 8; Conder 1889: 122–4 pl. 16; Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1904: II 201–5 figs. 795–801), where a defaced bust, draped in a mantle and possibly holding a scroll in one hand, is carved in the tympanum, amid a dense network of intertwined floral motifs. A second bust may be distinguished on the wall of the vestibule formed by an arch, above the doorway. A niche set above the entrance to the hypogea, if contemporaneous with the tomb in its first phase, could have housed a statuette (or a





8. Façade of the Western tomb in the “Al-Kahf” necropolis. Philadelphia, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD (after Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1904: II fig. 801).



9. Marble head of a male figure. Philadelphia-Amman, first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (© B. Annan).

sitting statue). The iconographic program's visibility, and consequently, the impression it made on visitors and passers-by was certainly enhanced by the architectural conception of the tomb itself, which one

accessed through a deep excavated sunk court or *dromos*.

### Sarcophagi

Sarcophagi constitute a second category of monuments which often bore funerary portraits, whether carved in the round on lids or in relief on the short and long sides of coffins, following a trend that gained momentum from the reign of Trajan onwards (Wrede 1990; Pasquier 2016: 111). While the wealthiest patrons would have had their marble sarcophagi brought over great distances and, one can safely assume, at considerable cost from specialised workshops in Attica or Asia Minor,<sup>6</sup> citizens of lesser means, who notwithstanding wished to emulate these affluent patrons, would commission native sculptors to carve sarcophagi in local limestone or basalt, some of which would, on occasion, feature portraits on their long or short sides. One may mention here a couple of basalt sarcophagi from the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD. The first, from Kharga (FIG. 10; Weber 2002: pl. 117.C), has two busts in a recessed panel, male on the left and female on the right, each clad in a *chiton* underneath a *himation*, and can be dated to the Severan period on account of the lady's coiffure arranged after that of Septimius Severus' wife Julia Domna. The second, from Irbid (FIG. 11; Lenzen and McQuitty 1988: 269 pl. XLVII, 1; Weber 1993: 70 n. 262; Weber 2002: pl. 117.D), features on its long side rectangular crudely draped busts on either side of a blank *clipeus*, characterised by small heads with ill-defined features atop elongated necks.

A number of these locally-produced

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, an Attic lid with a reclining couple in the Archaeological Museum of Umm Qays: Kintrup 2016: 294–5 nr. 263 pls. 63–4 with earlier bibliography; Lichtenberger and Raja 2019: 144–5. See also a male marble head, which could have belonged to a reclining figure on a sarcophagus lid in the Archaeological Museum of Amman: FIG. 9; Weber 2002: 510–1, nr. D 11 pl. 153.A–D with earlier bibliography.





10. Basalt sarcophagus decorated with a pair of busts. Irbid, first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (© B. Annan).



11. Basalt sarcophagus decorated with a pair of busts. Irbid, 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (© B. Annan).

sarcophagi, nevertheless, bear testimony to an admirable level of craftsmanship, and denote an intention of verisimilitude, as evidenced by a sarcophagus found in Abila-Quwayliba (FIG. 12; Koch and

Sichtermann 1982: 575 n. 33 fig. 590; Barbet and Vibert-Guigue 1988/1994: 115-6 figs. 32-36; Weber 1993: 70 pl. 12,1; 2002: pl. 117.A-B), on which a mature man, sporting a *paludamentum* that covers his torso, is





12. Sarcophagus with bust and winged putti. Abila, Tomb Q4, AD 180–220 (© B. Annan).



13. Gabled lid with a relief of a reclining figure. Basalt. Gadara, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (after Hoffmann 2000: fig. 41).

represented in bust-form between a couple of rosettes and a pair of torch-bearing winged *Erotes*. Another sarcophagus from Gadara-Umm Qays is noteworthy in that the deceased is represented reclining on a gabled lid (FIG. 13; Weber 1993: 78 n. 23; Hoffmann 2000: 227 fig. 41; Weber 2002: 450 nr. sk 2 pl. 83.D), after the “mixed kline-roof type” or “gemischten’ Typus” (Cambi 2016), a visual construction for which we may (despite it being sparsely attested in the

*corpora* of sarcophagi in the Imperial Near East) point to parallels in Nysa-Scythopolis (Baisan) and Ascalon (Asqalan) in Palestine (Mazor and Paran 2018) and Nebi Shīt in Lebanon (Fani 2005/2006).

#### *Stelai*

Image-bearing stelai seem to have derived from their archaic antecedents, *i.e.* plain stone slabs set vertically in the ground to signal the presence of a tomb as a consecrated



*locus*. Most stelai bore an epitaph in Greek, Latin, Aramaic, or North Arabian scripts, usually mentioning the name and immediate genealogy of the deceased and their age, or for the more elaborate ones, an epigram lamenting the loss of the relative and extolling his or her virtues and qualities. Portrait stelai would have been displayed upright within the funerary enclosure, yet very few, if any, of these documents, which would have been easily displaced by looters or upon the reuse of the tomb, were found in their original archaeological context. Worthy of mention are the limestone stele of Diodora, daughter of Herakleitos, from Pella-Ṭabaqat Fahl and dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD, whose decapitated bust shows a *chitōn* ornamented with *clavi*, on the surface of which are indicated, in peculiar fashion, round breasts with visible nipples above a *tabula ansata* on which is carved her brief epitaph (FIG. 14; Mittmann 1970: 179 nr. 15 pl. XVI fig. 31; Ibrahim 1988: 66; Weber 1993: 62–8 pl. 7.2; 2002: 484 nr. B 4 pl.



14. Basalt stele of Diodōra. Pella, 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (after Weber 2002: pl. 119.D).

119.D) and the uninscribed basalt stele of an officer from Gadara-Umm Qays, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD (FIG. 15; Weber 1993: 63 n. 208 pl. 10:1; 2002: 446 nr. pl 101 pl. 60.D; Gharib *et al.* 2017: 228, 230 fig. 6), whose figure, interrupted above the knees, is set in a rectangular frame under a pediment adorned with a rosette: a cloak (*sagum*) fastened with a round brooch (*fibula*) on his right shoulder, and under which one can distinguish the belted *pteryges*, covers his torso.

#### Busts

The bust is, by far, the most widespread and favoured form of funerary portraiture in the imperial Near East and



15. Basalt stele of a soldier or veteran. Gadara, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD (after Gharib *et al.* 2017: fig. 6).

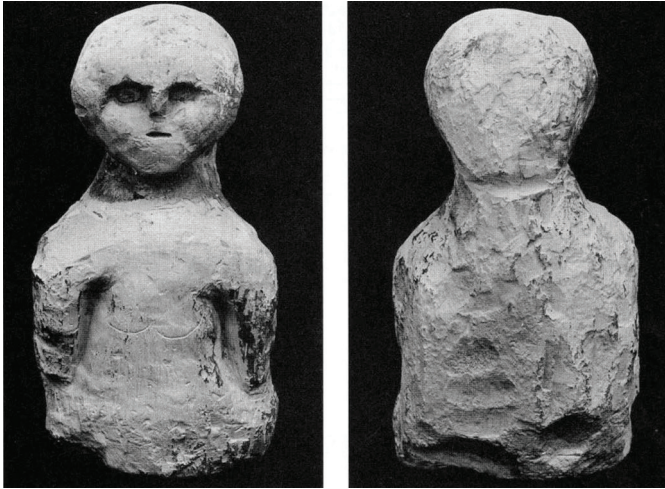


particularly in Roman Jordan, where I was able to gather no less than 130 specimens. Indeed, the bust form was, in many respects, a most suitable image-bearer: (1) its production did not require, *most often*, as we will see, too specialised a training; (2) it could be acquired for a *relatively* modest cost; (3) its format could accommodate the architectural setting of the tomb (whether it was placed free-standing in or above the burial niche: Lichtenberger and Raja 2019: 144); and (4) its appearance evoked, to some extent, the full-figure statuary's three-dimensionality, so that a bust must have functioned, more often than not, as a stand-in for a statue. Most of the busts found in the necropoleis in Jordan are rather rudimentary: the bust of Theodōros, from Abila-Quwayliba, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (FIG. 16; Weber 1993: 66 n. 231; 2002: 475–6, nr. A 33 pl. 111.A–B), is characterised by an oval-shaped head with a flat face,

slanting eyebrows, closed eyelids, thin nose, narrow lips and monstrously widened chin, resting on a massive cylindrical neck and a block-like torso lacking any indication of anatomical features. One can hardly believe that the author of such a portrait sought to reproduce the appearance of a particular individual, or to individualise the image through physiognomic characteristics, yet the patron must have judged it sufficiently expressive as to have it stand *in lieu* of the deceased, whose identity is given by the brief epitaph carved on the torso: *Θάρσει, Θεόδωρε* (“Be brave, Theodōros”). A second bust—contemporaneous, uninscribed, and of the same provenance (FIG. 17; Weber 2002: 475 nr. A 31 pl. 112.A–D)—features an abstract bust with rather bloated forms, deep-set eyes, and arms that are merely delineated through shallow carving under the armpits: the only hint at the deceased's gender is given by faintly incised breast



16. Limestone funerary bust of Theodōros. Abila, 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (after Weber 2002: pl. 111.A–B).



17. Chalk female funerary bust. Abila, 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (after Weber 2002: pl. 112.A-D).

contours (which might have been added at a later stage of its existence). Such “crude” portraits are attested all over the Roman Empire, and strikingly similar items have been unearthed, for instance, in Baelo Claudia in Hispania (Jiménez Díez 2007) and in Kenchreai, the eastern port of Corinth (Rife *et al.* 2007: 162 fig. 14). One may pause here to ponder what “added value”, so to speak, in terms of prestige and symbolic performance, such generic portraits brought to the “commemorative equation”. Perhaps, in such cases, the mere inclusion of a portrait—independent of the likeness (in the sense of *eikōn*) it might have borne to its model, or of its “truthfulness”—was a statement in and of itself, a proclamation of status, of cultural sophistication, in other words, of *savoir-vivre* or rather, *savoir-mourir*. It also serves, from an art historical perspective, to illustrate how this “portrait habit” permeated a rather wide segment of society. The unflattering aspect of these crude portraits should not, however, obscure the fact that this phenomenon was essentially confined to the social circles of the most affluent citizens of the Decapolis, since these portraits were most often displayed in hypogea and monumental tombs, the very construction of which represented a substantial investment. Furthermore, the

bust form was sufficient—indeed, most effective—in its commemorative function, in that it reduced the deceased’s identity to two elementary components: the name (epitaph) and the face (image)—Lat. *nomen* and *vultus*; Gk. *onoma* and *prosōpon*—which were, for the Classical mind, the two ultimate seats of individuality (Frontisi-Ducroux 1995).

#### Wall Painting

An additional mode of funerary self-representation allows us to gain a glimpse of a fleeting—indeed, long lost—reality, in which the ancient viewer’s senses must have revelled, which is that of a colourful antiquity. While in Sidon on the Phoenician coast, we know of some Late Hellenistic or Early Imperial painted stelai (Gubel 2002), no such documents have yet been found, to my knowledge, in Jordan where painted funerary portraits most often adorn walls on the edges of *loculi* and *arcosolia* within funerary enclosures. One particular archaeological site, Abila-Quwayliba, has provided us with a wealth of such documentation (Barbet and Vibert-Guigue 1988/1994, *passim*).

Remarkable among those Abilene portraits is the bust, painted above a *loculus* in the eponymous tomb H3 (“tombeau du Vieil Homme”), of an elderly man shown





18. Framed portrait of an elderly figure. Abila, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD (© Cl. Vibert-Guigue).



19. Portrait of an elderly lady in a wreath. Abila, first quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (© M. Fuller).

above an elaborate garland of flowers and beneath two festoons of red, yellow, and green floral motifs, and set in a floral frame against an ochre background (FIG. 18; Barbet and Vibert-Guigue 1988/1994: I 42 nr. 13, 223–6 fig. 111). He is dressed in a white tunic into which is sewn a red *clavus*—no doubt some insignia of his social rank, one that is yet to be clarified—his white hair, moustache, and beard, his receding hairline, and wrinkled forehead attest to his old age. Another partially preserved painting, in the tomb H60, shows in a floral medallion a woman whose face, with its greying hair and sagging flesh, seems to exhibit features of old age (FIG. 19; Smith and Mare 1997: 313 figs. 11–2). Old age is a notable feature in a body of portraits, whether in the Near East or the wider Roman Empire, as it is a frequent subject of ridicule in Classical literature and was only reluctantly expressed in portraiture (Fuchs 2008, with earlier literature in n. 5), despite the wisdom and moral authority such traits would have conventionally conferred upon the depicted individual. Indeed, the ancient sitter often underwent rejuvenation in portraiture, yet the youth to which the portrait lays claim to is often belied by the advanced age mentioned in the epitaphs. In comparison,



20. Pair of painted portraits under loculi. Abila, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD (© A. Barbet).

two (unpublished?) portraits painted on the edges of *loculi* in the tomb H4 (FIG. 20) undeniably depict a young man and a young woman, whose remains must have been deposited in the niches above. One wonders whether they were relatives, given their side-by-side depiction, and the slight resemblance to one another that can be detected in their portraits?

#### Miscellanea

In addition to the categories of funerary portraiture discussed above, one encounters a few documents that, though seeming



21. Tomb door decorated with a bust on its lintel, detail. Irbid, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD (photo by Rami Tarawneh; CC BY-SA 3.0; commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Archaeological\_Museum,\_University\_of\_Jordan\_41.JPG).

*unica*, may hint at a wider typological palette of funerary portraiture that would have been in use in antiquity. Furthermore, when considered in a regional perspective, we find that these monuments are not as isolated as it might appear *prima facie*.

An altar, for instance, from Philadelphia-Amman, is adorned with busts on its sides, one of them representing a Hermes *psychopompos*, hence favouring the monument's funerary purpose (Weber 2002: pl. 161.A–D). While this portrait-bearing altar finds no immediate parallel, to my knowledge, in Roman Jordan, one may point to substantial *corpora* of such documents in Rome (Boschung 1987), the Western provinces (Kleiner 1987), and even the Hauran (e.g., Abdul-Hak and Adul-Hak 1951: 65 nr. 26; Dentzer and Dentzer 1991: 126 nr. 5,39 pl. 8.265 nr. 5,40 pl. 8.602), the Ledja (al-Maqdissi 1984: 11 fig. 11), and Dmeir near Damascus (Weber 2006: 32 nr. 12 pl. 8 a–d, with earlier bibliography). Given the central importance of sacrificial rites in the pagan

mortuary rituals (whether Greek, Roman, or North Arabian), it is certainly not surprising to encounter such image-bearing altars upon which, in all probability, no such rites were performed.

A tomb door, found in Ham south of Irbid and currently on view in the garden of the archaeological museum of the University of Jordan (FIG. 21; Shraideh and Lenzen 1984: 299 pl. LVII; Weber 2002: 189 n. 1445; Annan 2019: 430–1 figs. 5–6), exhibits on its lintel the armless bust of a young man, carved in high relief, between two elaborate rosettes, while the door jambs are adorned with a crawling snake—which, as an apotropaic creature, protects the tomb and, given its chthonic nature, communicates with the Underworld—and a long torch—perhaps mirroring the one visitors must have carried into the hypogeum, but also an allusion, according to F. Cumont (1949: 48–50), to the “rebirth” of the deceased through the illumination of the abode of the dead. The youth, bare-breasted—and this very



nakedness holds heroic undertones—with his head turned frankly to the right, seems to emerge from the flat stone, and this vivid sculptural treatment must have struck with poignancy the passer-by. Similar depictions of the deceased, prominently featured on the door lintels of funerary complexes, have been documented in Tyre (Dunand 1965: 12 pl. VII.1) and in the Jewish necropolis of Besara-Beit Shearim in the Lower Galilee (Avigad 1976: 81–2 fig. 33 pl. XXVII.2 pl. XXIX.5).

Among all categories of images, free-standing sculpture was apparently, in the Imperial Near East, the form deemed least suitable for funerary portraiture, a matter that has not been, to my knowledge, properly addressed, and that still needs clarification. Are we to deduce from this scarcity that the form was too closely associated with official portraiture (*i.e.*, that of emperors, governors, and high officials) and honorific practices (statues of benefactors)? Or did it perhaps resonate too inappropriately with cult statues (Gk. *agalmata*) for it to be tolerated in a funerary context without infringing on the sacred privilege owed to the gods? Or was it simply perceived as too presumptuous? Perhaps, alternatively, the architecture of the tombs itself did not provide the material conditions for the erection of statues within the funerary chambers. Rarity, however, does not equate vacuum, and some exceptions suggest that sculpture in the round was not an unknown phenomenon in the city of the dead. In the Jordanian realm, if we are to exclude niches carved in the façades, whose dimensions may suggest their having housed statues, I know of only two examples of funerary portraits in the round, both of which have been discussed by T.M. Weber. The first, carved in basalt, was found in Abila-Quwayliba and is now kept in the courtyard of the archaeological museum of Irbid (FIG. 22; Weber 2002: 190, 466 nr. A 3 pl. 99.B; Lichtenberger and Raja 2019: 141). The head, which might have



22. Basalt male funerary statue. Abila, 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (© B. Annan).

been worked separately, has not survived. The male figure, clad in a *chitōn* and draped in a *himation*, stands on his left leg, the right leg being slightly bent. The deceased's left arm, enveloped in the loop of his cloak, is bent across his chest, his left hand perhaps originally clenching the hem of his mantle, with the fabric marking several angular creases as it crosses the body and covers the slightly bent right arm, from which it hangs freely in long and thick folds, an attitude consistent with the so-called "arm-sling" or *Normaltypus* pose (on which, see below). The second statue, which was discovered in 1998 in the northern necropolis of Gadara-Umm Qays (Weber 2002: 190, 427–8 nr. pl. 55 pl. 72.E), apparently adopts this same

pose, despite a greater liberty taken in the treatment of the draping of the cloak. Though fragmentary (the head, the right arm, and the feet along with the plinth are missing), this sculpture is most interesting in that its initial display, based on its *in situ* context, may be recovered, and it is therefore likely to provide evidence, if not for a cult of the dead, then at least for commemorative rites held around the portrait statue, the details of which will be dealt with below.

Having briefly surveyed the typological variety of funerary portraits in Roman Jordan, an attempt will now be made to extract from this corpus the social discourse conveyed by the iconography, and to delineate the values that patrons were keen on promoting through this imagery.

### **Thus Have I Lived: Themes and Social Values through the Lens of Funerary Iconography**

Delving into this corpus, one cannot fail to notice an impressive recurrence across media (whether the portraits were displayed on frescoes, sarcophagi, stelai, or in the round) and a remarkable persistence over the centuries of a number of iconographic schemes that were seemingly attached to specific roles, genders, and social configurations, thus forming a consistent repertoire shared, as we will see, across the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond.

#### *Arm-Sling*

The most common scheme for male figures is that conventionally known as the “arm-sling”, “bound-elbow” or *Normaltypus* pose, which is first adopted in the portrait statue of the Athenian orator Aischines in the Early Hellenistic era (Fehr 1979: 16–24; Lewerentz 1993: 18–57; Filges 2000: 101–8; Masségliia 2015: 96–9), and which consists in having one’s body enveloped in the *himation*, with one arm brought over the chest and draped in the loop of the mantle. A favoured attitude in honorific statuary, meant to



23. Basalt funerary bust. Gadara, 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD. (after Weber 2002: pl. 75.A).

embody the ideal citizen, one actively involved in the public affairs of his *polis*, yet that can demonstrate self-control (Gk. *sōphrosynē*), the *Normaltypus* is abundantly attested in funerary iconography, into which it must have migrated not long after its inception, since we encounter it repetitively on Hellenistic stelai from Asia Minor (Pfuhl and Möbius 1977/1979, *passim*) and Syria (for instance in Sidon: Gubel 2002: 97–8 nr. 89 and in Antioch: Bel *et al.* 2012: 334–5 fig. 324). In Jordan, this scheme, illustrated by the two funerary statues discussed above, reverberated across the typological spectrum, as we find it in an abbreviated format on numerous busts (*e.g.*, in Gadara, FIG. 23; Weber 2002: 414–5 nr. pl 30–2 pl. 47), thus highlighting the patron’s intention to encapsulate its honorific symbolism “at low cost”, so to speak.

#### *Women Draped in Death*

While men were commonly placed in the *Normaltypus* pose, no specific scheme seems to have been associated with portraits of women in Roman Arabia, since, most often, they were represented in bust form with their heads potentially veiled (therefore rendering it difficult to identify the famous Herculaneum Women types, ubiquitous in statuary elsewhere).



Noteworthy is the absence in our corpus of some female attributes, such as the spindle and distaff which were widespread in northern Syria (Wagner 1976, *passim*) and Palmyra (Sadurska and Bounni 1994: 189; Cussini 2005: 37–8), and the absence of the depiction of mothers holding their children in their arms, such as can be found in southern Syria (Sartre-Fauriat 2001a: 265–6 fig. 355; Weber 2006: 30–1 nr. 9 pl. 6.a nr. 10 pl. 6.b, 40 nr. 19 pl. 14.b).<sup>7</sup> However, other popular schemes do occur, such as the so-called “Penelope scheme”, which consists, for a female figure, of having the head slightly bent, with the cheek resting against her clenched fist (Settis 1975: 13–6; Balty 2000: 11–2). The gesture, which can be traced back, in its earliest manifestations, to 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC Greek Classical iconography, evidently alludes to the pensive and melancholic posture of Odysseus’ wife, and metaphorically, to her exemplary fidelity to her husband. In the Jordanian realm, it is

featured, in one of its variants, on a framed painted female portrait in the Abilene tomb Q13 (FIG. 24; Barbet and Vibert-Guigue 1989/1994: I 183; II pl. 105b, VII.1). A female portrait bust, perhaps from Gadara (FIG. 25; Weber 2002: 440 pl. 67.E with earlier literature), holds a mirror against her breast, again a recurrent attribute of women in the Graeco-Roman world (Balensiefen 1990). Indicators of the depicted individual’s gender seem to have been widely understood to patrons and sculptors, as one frequently notices on otherwise abstract busts the inclusion of breast contours or jewellery and, for male figures, beards (Lichtenberger and Raja 2019: 146).

#### *Funerary Banquet*

The banquet motif, whereby the portrayed is shown reclining on a couch, sometimes in the company of a relative or servants, is one of the most persistent and ubiquitous schemes in ancient art, as some of its earliest occurrences can be traced back to 7<sup>th</sup> c. BC Assyrian reliefs (Dentzer 1982: 56). From its eastern origins, it went on to diffuse throughout the

<sup>7</sup> Note, however, on a male bust in Gadara, the rare depiction of a child’s face: Weber 1993: 82 n. 52 pl. 12:2; 2002: 443 nr. pl 93 pl. 79.A.



24. Painted portrait of a lady. Abila, first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD (© A. Barbet).



25. Basalt female bust shown holding a mirror. Gadara (?), 2<sup>nd</sup> –3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (© B. Annan).

visual culture of the entire Mediterranean world over the following millennium, and became a favoured mode of representation, particularly in the funerary sphere (see most recently: Draycott and Stamatopoulou 2016; for the Roman world: Dunbabin 2003). In Roman Arabia, some patrons chose to depict themselves in this manner, whether in the round on sarcophagus lids (cf. the Attic sarcophagus in Gadara-Umm Qays, mentioned above), or in frescoes, as in an (unfinished?) fragmentary banquet scene showing a mature man reclining on a *klinē*, with a table (Lat. *mensa tripes*), a *thymiaterion*, and a *cantharus* set in the foreground (FIG. 26; Smith and Mare 1997: 313 fig. 13). No consensus has yet been reached among scholars as to the ancient viewers' reception of the banquet scene motif, some interpreting it as an allusion to the blessed afterlife that the deceased were destined to enjoy in the hereafter, while others favoured a worldly

and 'retrospective' reading—namely that the scene either depicts the meals enjoyed during the deceased's lifetime, or those in which relatives would partake during commemorative ceremonies, perhaps in company of the deceased, whose presence was materialised via their image (Dunbabin 2003: 109). Whichever interpretation one chooses to retain, the banquet scene inevitably exuded prestige, leisure, and opulence.

#### *Poets Draped in Death?*

A great number of images show the deceased grasping a scroll (Lat. *volumen*) in one hand,<sup>8</sup> an attribute which, once again, and in the absence of epigraphic testimonies which may explain its significance, has

<sup>8</sup> For instance, in Roman Jordan, on exclusively male busts from Gadara-Umm Qays: Weber 2002: 415 nr. pl 33 pl. 58.E, 430–2 nr. pl 61 nr. pl 63, pl. 63.A–F, 439 nr. pl 83 pl. 76:C–D, 444 nr. pl 96 pl. 75:B and Gerasa-Jerash: Lifshitz 1963: 91 pl. 8 A.



26. (Unfinished?) banquet scene painted in an arcosolium. Abila, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (© M. Fuller).



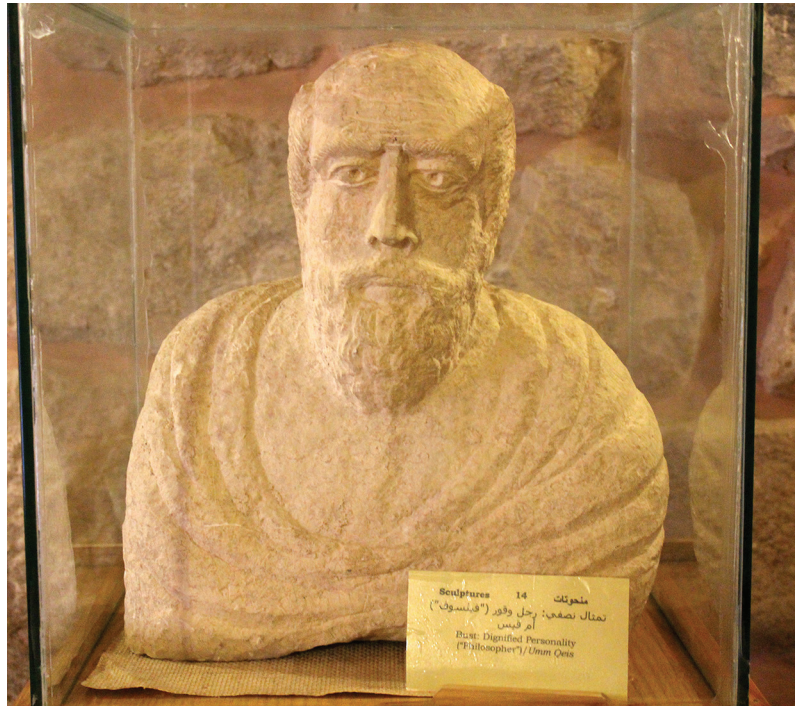
divided art historians over its interpretation, some seeing in it a reference to the deceased's will (i.e., an explicit sign of the testator's accomplishment of his familial, social and religious duties), others as an allusion to the portrayed person's philosophical and literary inclinations. The first interpretation has recently received substantial arguments in a dense article by J.-Ch. Balty (2016) who connected the recurrence of this attribute in the exceptionally rich corpus of 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD funerary stelai commemorating military personnel of the *legio II Parthica* (stationed in Apamea-Qal'at al-Madhiq in Northern Syria) with the numerous epitaphs inscribed on these same stelai. Balty notes rather interestingly that the only specimens that do not feature this attribute do specify in the texts the portrayed individual's intestacy, thereby favouring an identification of the *volumen* with the testator's will.

The latter interpretation, which has long been held as the most likely, certainly has its own iconographic proponents when combined with other visual and epigraphic elements. Unique in this sense in Roman Jordan is a splendid (and unfortunately lost) elaborately framed relief from as-Şalt that was originally inserted into the back wall of a monumental tomb, above a sarcophagus facing the entrance. The relief shows a man, bare-chested with the exception of a *himation* draping the left side of the torso and on which run deep curvilinear folds, holding a scroll in his left hand (FIG. 27; Hadidi 1979: 131 pl. XLIX; Barakat 1980; Weber 1996: 517; 2002: 189–90). This styling, combined with the well-trimmed beard and the receding hairline (Zanker 1995: 224), is consistent with a particular type of representation, namely that of the learned man or *pepaideumenos*, following which one would liken oneself, through particulars of dress, hairstyle, posture, and attributes, to archetypal representations of philosophers (Borg 2004). This iconographic phenomenon spread across the



27. Limestone relief of a bare-chested man. As-Şalt, 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (© Th. M. Weber).

Empire in the course of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD, having received powerful impetus from the cultural movement known as the Second Sophistic (Anderson 1993). Another funerary bust, perhaps from Gadara-Umm Qays (FIG. 28; Weber 2002: 416–7 nr. pl. 37 pl. 49.A–D), with its long beard and bald head, is similarly evocative of portraits of philosophers, and denotes its owner's intent to advertise himself as such. Certainly one may expect to find in this cultural milieu a desire to portray oneself as a servant of the Muses, since the cities of the Decapolis were famous in antiquity for having produced eminent philosophers, sophists, poets, and orators (Graf 1992; Gatier 1993: 20–5; Sartre 2001: 294–9, 867–71), and several (male) individuals in nearby Ḥawrān are indeed praised in their epitaphs for their



28. Limestone bust of an elderly man in the guise of a philosopher. Gadara (?), 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (© B. Annan).



29. Painted panel of a female figure holding a codex and a stylus. Abila, early 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD (?) (© A. Barbet).



oratory skills, their intellectual abilities, and their philosophical leanings (Sartre-Fauriat 2001b: 209–10). Surely, the significance of the *volumen* as an attribute varied, and both readings (intestacy and learning), in addition to a few more, must have been valid depending on the context of representation, as had been eloquently pointed out by H.-I. Marrou (1938: 190–1; see also Borg 2004: 162–3; Balty 2016: 85–6).

Although the scroll, as a sign of a literate education (Gk. *paideia*), was, in Classical portraiture, predominantly the prerogative of men, it could on occasion be featured in female portraits (Bielman 2003). In Abila, a Late Antique fresco in the tomb Q1 shows the full figure of a young woman facing the viewer and writing with a *stylus* on an open *codex* (FIG. 29; Barbet and Vibert-Guigue 1988/1994: I 78 pl. 13.a pl. I.1; Lichtenberger and Raja 2019: 145 fig. 9.17).<sup>9</sup> Did such attributes, again, refer to her will, or were they an indication of her perfected *paideia*? If we consider the adjacent and opposite panels adorning the same tomb, and which were apparently devoted to different episodes or facets of this woman's life,<sup>10</sup> then we are tempted to support the second interpretation.

An inspection of the funerary corpus of Roman Jordan brings to light a number of phenomena that characterised these art forms: the recurrence—indeed, near hegemony—of these iconographic schemes reflect a visual reification of social and gender roles that must have necessarily

<sup>9</sup> For similar figures holding *codices* in the catacombs of SS. Peter and Marcellinus in Rome, see Roberts and Skeat 1983: pl. VI, and on a portrait medallion from Flavia Solva in the province of Noricum, see Dolenz 2001: 86 fig. 3.

<sup>10</sup> The first shows her holding two palm leaves, perhaps in reference to some victory in a contest; the second depicts her presenting the viewer with an open *volumen*; and on the third she holds two objects in her hands, either *paterae* or a *crotalum* (Barbet and Vibert-Guigue 1988/1994: I 78–9; Skupińska-Løvset 2001).

been at odds with lived realities, yet were nevertheless mirrored and complemented by the laudatory lexical repertoire of epitaphs: men were unfailingly portrayed as wise and prudent individuals, devoted fathers and model citizens, while women were praised for their beauty and modesty, and depicted as chaste and faithful wives or loving mothers (Sartre-Fauriat 2001b). Also notable is the absence, in the Jordanian and wider Near Eastern corpus of funerary portraiture, of any iconographic reference to the deceased's crafts and professions, as if one was chiefly valued by his fellow citizens, in the Near Eastern societies of the Imperial period, for one's moral conduct, public benefactions, and active involvement in one's civic community (Rey-Coquais 2002: 263–4), in contrast to what can be observed in the Western provinces, where freedmen took pride in advertising their trades (Zimmer 1982).

### **Lest you Forget Me: Echoes of Funerary Commemoration in the Archaeological Record**

Finally, upon examining this material, the essential and increasingly central issue in current art historical approaches to ancient art must be addressed, namely the display context of portraits and the ways in which it shaped the ancient viewing experience. In a funerary context, our understanding of this display context (the recording of which having often been frustratingly omitted in early excavation reports) would also seek to reconstruct the commemorative rites that were performed around the portrait, a task rendered most delicate by the heavy looting that for centuries has afflicted tombs and *necropoleis* in the region. Nevertheless, by drawing upon Classical literary sources, archaeological and iconographic testimonies in neighbouring regions, and Jordan's own documentary evidence, one may hope to achieve an understanding of these rites.

Communities and individuals in the

Greek and Roman worlds were very much concerned, if not obsessed, with perpetuating one's memory *post mortem*, and funerary portraiture was but one form through which this perpetuation could be achieved. Indeed, the portrait, as the deceased's double—his *imago*—must have triggered an emotional response in the viewer, but as the recipient and seat of the ancestor's memory, it was also owed posthumous honours, materialised through sacrificial rites, which is why Roman jurists defined the tomb as a *locus religiosus* or *locus sacer* (Laubry 2012). Commemorative rites and familial commensality, integral components of the funerary portrait's purpose, would take place on particular occasions, such as the deceased's birthday or the anniversary of his or her death, and on calendar days devoted to the dead. Traces of such ceremonies (such as tableware and cooking ware, lamps, stone benches, wells, ovens, adjoining gardens, etc.) are often recorded in funerary precincts.<sup>11</sup>

During the American excavations at Abila, headed by H. Mare, a terracotta incense burner which must have been used during sacrificial rituals was found in tomb H 59 (FIG. 30).<sup>12</sup> Other items that belonged to the sphere of ritual activities are evoked in painting: *thymiateria* (e.g., in the 'Tombeau des Candélabres' at Abila: Barbet and Vibert-Guigue 1989/1994: II pl. III.4), or torches (as on the tomb door from Ham discussed above). Visitors to the tomb would have also brought offerings to the dead. Such an offering scene is depicted, in my view, on a fresco painted on the back wall of an *arcosolium* in the luxurious tomb H 60 (FIG. 31; Smith and Mare 1997: 312 fig. 10).

<sup>11</sup> For commemorative ceremonies in the Greek world, see Garland 2001: 104–20; in the Roman world, Scheid 2005: 161–88; in the Nabataean world: Perry 2016; Perry 2017, with earlier bibliography.

<sup>12</sup> I wish to thank Michael J. Fuller for bringing this find to my attention and for sending me photographs of the object.

This early  
3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD



30. Terracotta incense burner. Abila, 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (© M. Fuller).

painting shows two draped figures, their heads possibly girded with floral wreaths, standing between high candelabras and slightly turned towards each other: the male figure on the left presents the female figure, no doubt his relative, with a garland of flowers which he holds by both ends, while the woman extends her arm towards him, holding an indistinct object in her hand (a small bouquet of flowers?). The scene is strongly reminiscent of the *collocatio*, or lying-in-state, relief from the famous early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD Tomb of the Haterii that lay outside Rome, which shows a mourner standing over the dead woman (probably



31. Painted *arcosolium* showing two figures between candelabras. Abila, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (© A. Barbet).





32. Pair of painted female mourners. Abila, 2nd–3rd c. AD (© A. Barbet).

Hateria), about to place a similar garland on her bier (Trimble 2018: 335–6 fig. 12.8 with earlier bibliography). A lost Pompeian stucco relief that once adorned a mausoleum, sketched in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by J. Overbeck, is somewhat more explicit in that it represents a mourning woman placing *taeniae* on a child's (?) skeleton seen lying on a pile of rubble (Overbeck 1884: 419 fig. 221). Another Abilene painted panel in tomb Q 14 (the so-called “Tombeau des Femmes Voilées”), represents, in a frame over a Corinthian capital, two female figures

wrapped in ochre brown mantles, whose faces are unfortunately disfigured (FIG. 32; Barbet and Vibert-Guigue 1989/1994: I 182, 189; II pl. 97 pl. 106.a pl. VI.4). Their afflicted attitude, with their stiff pose and right arms bent over the chests, suggests that they are mourners rather than the deceased, and the fact that they were depicted alone, and not in a funeral procession (as on the Amiternum and Haterii reliefs: Flower 1996: 93–8 pl. 5–6; Bodel 1999), implies that they were relatives of the deceased rather than professional wailers hired to

conduct the lamentations (Lat. *Praeficae*: see Kudlien 1995).

One of the most eloquent documents attesting to rites involving the funerary portrait is provided by the aforementioned basalt statue from Gadara-Umm Qays, which was found lying before a rock-cut tomb. In the immediate vicinity of the recess into which the plinth of the statue was set, excavators found an altar and a circular cavity that a libation bowl would have fit into, and from which runs a narrow drain for liquid offerings (Weber 2002: 381 fig. 101; Lichtenberger and Raja 2019: 141). Benches were also carved in the rock around this installation to accommodate the bereaved. The statue, in its initial setting, conspicuously stood at the tomb entrance, and the tomb itself was located on a high promontory overlooking the Yarmūk Valley on one side, and the Sea of Galilee on the other: the scenery itself no doubt lent the whole monument prestige and majesty and, in this context, the statue must have been invested, in addition to its commemorative function, with a *quasi*-cultic quality.

### Conclusion

As it currently stands, the corpus of funerary portraiture I have assembled in Roman Jordan numbers 219 items. Out of this number, 95 hail from Abila and 62 from Gadara. As has been noted by T.M. Weber (1993: 69–70) and A. Lichtenberger and R. Raja (2019: 139, 142), these two cities concentrate the main body of Roman-era funerary portraits in Jordan, while the citizens of Gerasa, for instance, seem to have favoured plain sarcophagi decorated with pelta shields (Lichtenberger and Raja 2019: 140). Certainly this discrepancy among Decapolitan cities in regards to funerary portraiture cannot be solely ascribed to the varying intensity of archaeological surveys and exploration, but must have reflected a marked preference among the inhabitants of these two cities

for funerary self-representation, and one may detect, upon closer inspection, idiosyncratic and *polis*-specific trends in this art form (Lichtenberger and Raja 2019: 147). Moreover, the recurrence of a finite number of iconographic schemes and attributes (*Normaltypus*, Penelope, *volumen*, etc.), which can be observed throughout the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean, allows us to appreciate the extent to which the Classical visual language (*koinē*) permeated Decapolitan aesthetics, and found vivid echoes within Nabataean culture.

The meticulous recording by excavators of funerary artefacts deposited in the tombs, and their systematic integration in art historical analysis, could further shed light on the manners in which the funerary portrait was incorporated into mortuary processes and commemorative practices. Furthermore, the architectural reconstruction of funerary complexes, such as that of the “Tomb of the Roman Soldier” achieved by the *International Wādī Farasa Project* (Schmid 2012 with earlier bibliography), may circumscribe the display context of these images, and narrow down the audience for which they were intended. Finally, the most recent and stupendous discovery of painted frescoes in the provisionally named “tombeau du Fondateur” in Capitolias-Bayt Rās (see Aliquot *et al.* in this volume), is a potent testimony to the fact that the Jordanian soil still withholds evidence that is bound to further our understanding of an art form that was essential to personal self-perpetuation, for as Cicero put it (*Philippics* 9.4.10), “the life of the dead is set in the memory of the living”.

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