

# Palmyrene Funerary Sculptures from Singidunum<sup>1</sup>

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*Although many epigraphical and archaeological monuments of Syrian origin in the territory of Central Balkans' Roman provinces from the period of Roman reign have been discovered in the past, monuments from Palmyra are rare. Therefore, the three monuments of Palmyrene origin from National Museum in Belgrade, are even more important, because they represent valuable examples of Palmyrene funerary art from the Roman period. On two monuments, the very elite of Palmyrene society is represented – two Palmyrene priests dressed in their characteristic clothes with modius on their heads, while the third monument represents a funerary loculus stela of a young girl holding a bird (probably a dove) and grapes. The analysis of the iconography and stylistic traits of the monuments showed that they can be dated to the period of the 2nd-3rd century, during which (particularly during the reign of the Severan dynasty) the immigrants of Oriental origin came in several migration waves to Central Balkans' Roman provinces and inhabited bigger centres, including Singidunum, where they had their enclave.*

**Key words:** Palmyra, funerary monuments, loculus relief, priest, Singidunum

**A**mong different archaeological monuments from Roman period situated in National museum in Belgrade, three monuments belonging to the Palmyrene funerary sculpture attracted our attention. Although they have been published before, the elaborate analysis of their iconography, stylistic characteristics and their context within Palmyrene funerary sculpture with more precise dating, haven't been the focus of previous scholars (Вулић 1931: 231, n. 615, 235, n. 625, 626; Гарашанин 1954: 64, fig. 37; Grbić 1958: 101, T. LXX; IMS 1976: 85, n. 72; Cambi *et al.* 1987: 197, n. 145; Popović 1993: 71–76, Fig. 1–3; Tomović 1993: n. 6, Fig. 2.1–2, Fig. 4.4). All three monuments represent typical and well modelled examples of Palmyrene funerary sculpture, particularly since each monument belongs to the different type of the funerary sculpture of Palmyrene art.

The context of how the two of the three Palmyrene monuments – the head of a priest and the *loculus* relief of a priest, came to the National museum in Belgrade has been already debated by I. Popović (Popović 1993: 71–76).<sup>2</sup> As I. Popović showed, contrary to the presumptions made by certain authors that two

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<sup>2</sup> In previous literature about the two Palmyrene funerary sculptures with the representations of priests from the National Museum in Belgrade, it has been debated whether the sculptures of two priests were found in the area of the Belgrade fortress or its vicinity, as it was written in inventory book of museum, by one of the previous directors of National Museum, V. Petković. That opinion was accepted by two scholars, N. Vulić and M. Grbić, who in their works mentioned the monuments presenting Palmyrene priests (Вулић 1931: 235, n. 625, 626; Grbić 1958: 101). However,



Fig. 1. The head of a priest from National Museum in Belgrade (Photo: Documentation of National Museum in Belgrade).

monuments were gifts or were bought off by National Museum, both monuments with priestly presentations were found in the area of the Belgrade fortress (Ibid: 75). Two monuments with priests' representations were mentioned in the H. Ingholt publication "Studier over palmyrensk Skulptur" from 1928 and from that period on, they were described in other publications in the catalogue form (Mirković & Dušanić 1976: n. 72, 85–86). As for the third Palmyrene monument, funerary stela with the representation of a girl holding a bird and grapes in her hands, it was only published in I. Popović' article in which the context of finding of Palmyrene monuments from National Museum in Belgrade, is discussed.<sup>3</sup>

As it is previously mentioned, of three Palmyrene funerary sculptural monuments from National Museum in Belgrade, two monuments represent priests, while the third monument depicts a deceased girl with a bird and grapes. First Palmyrene funerary monument is actually a portrait bust of a priest which was, judging by the way of the head's size, way of modelling (full sculpture) and the way that the head was damaged, presented a part of a sculpture of a priest reclining in a banquet, most probably from a sarcophagus lid or a sarcophagus box.<sup>4</sup> The head of a priest represents a head of a young man carved in limestone, of 30 cm total height, height of the face 14 cm and width of the face 15 cm, slightly under life size (inv. number 09\_3001, Fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> It has been broken off at the neck height and the hat on the priest's head is slightly damaged on its frontal side. A young man is presented with a

typical cylindrical headgear of Palmyrene priest – a *modius*.<sup>6</sup> Around the *modius*, there is a laurel wreath with a medallion in the centre with a bust of a young beardless man. The priest is presented hairless and

K. Parlasca in his article published in 1989–1990, expressed his doubts about the original place of monuments' finding and wrote that they probably came to the National Museum' collection as a gift or were bought by National Museum. In her paper, I. Popović argued with previously mentioned presumptions and proved that two Palmyrene monuments were excavated in the area of Belgrade fortress and afterwards, in 1925., were situated in National Museum's *lapidarium*. The first mention of two Palmyrene monuments in the Museum's inventory books dates after 1927 (Popović 1993: 72–75).

<sup>3</sup> The Palmyrene *loculus* stela with the representation of a girl with a bird and grapes was found in the National Museum by dr I. Popović, who was the first to publish the monument (Popović 1993). On this occasion I would like to express my sincere gratitude to dr I. Popović for all the informations about the Palmyrene monuments from the National Museum in Belgrade, she was kind to share with me.

<sup>4</sup> There is little possibility that the head of a priest from the National museum in Belgrade represented part of a freestanding sculpture, because of their rareness. Funerary priestly representations from Palmyra can be divided into several groups by the type of the sculpture to which they belong: portraits on *loculus* reliefs, portraits on sarcophagi-lids and sarcophagi boxes, portraits on banqueting reliefs, portraits on freestanding sculpture in the round, portraits on stelae-shaped *loculus* reliefs and portraits in ceiling decoration (Raja 2016: 130).

<sup>5</sup> I would like to express my sincere gratitude to colleagues from National Museum in Belgrade, Deana Ratković and Jelena Marković, for their kindness of allowing me to use the photographs of three Palmyrene funerary monuments from the documentation of the Ancient History collection, National Museum Belgrade.

<sup>6</sup> *Modius* is the term used for describing a cylindrical hat with a flat top, different from the characteristic hat in the form of a complete cone with an apex which is usually worn by the priests in the Roman Near East (Dirven 2011: 205; Blömer 2015: 185–189). As H. Ingholt noticed, there were several variations of a basic *modius* represented in Palmyrene art: plain *modius*, *modius* with wreath with a rosette in the centre or with a medallion with a small bust in the centre (Ingholt 1934: 34–35). Although in any Palmyrene representation of a man with a *modius* there is no confirmation that he is a priest, Palmyrene funerary inscriptions testify about the professions of the represented deceased and therefore indirectly confirm that the *modius* was worn by Palmyrene priests (Raja 2015: 340). Additionally, Palmyrene funerary representations of men with *modius* represented beside them (on a pedestal next to them or held by a person presenting it to them) have been interpreted as the representations of former priests, whose status marker is *modius* (Kaizer 2002: 236; Raja 2017a: 426).

beardless. His face is oval with a forehead completely concealed by a high headdress. His eyes are large and oval, with incised irises and pupils, with heavily defined long curved eyebrows. The nose is straight and well modelled as the lips (lower lip is fuller), on which a slight smile is implied which gives a composed facial expression to a young man's face. The chin is quite prominent and ears are slightly sticking out. Stylistically, the facial traits of the head are simplified, with well modelled details (like the laurel wreath, the ears) combined with somewhat stiffen facial features, which deprave the face of its natural look. There are no traces of the paint in the priest's head, but judging by other known analogies, it can be presumed that it was painted.<sup>7</sup> There are visible cracks and punctuations on the face (in the area of the cheeks and the chin), but all the main portrait details are well preserved, which allows us to analyse the sculpted head more thoroughly. As it is already mentioned, there is a particular kind of hat, known as *modius* on a young man's head, which suggests that he was a priest. That is to say, it has been generally accepted that the *modius* is the symbol of a Palmyrene priesthood (Ingholt 1934: 33–35) although, as different authors remark, there haven't been any inscription so far next to the image of the person wearing a *modius*, that would confirm his identity as a priest (Raja 2015: 340; Heyn 2008: 184). However, inscriptions which accompany similar images of men with shaven heads and faces, with *modii* on their heads are known from so-called banqueting *tesserae* (small terracotta squares probably used as admission tickets to sacred funeral banquets) and identify them as priests, as also funerary sculptures and reliefs from Palmyrene tombs and sanctuaries, which show men with *modii* on their heads performing ritual sacrifices.<sup>8</sup> Palmyrene priests are depicted wearing a *modii* on their heads outside Palmyra as well (for example, on two Palmyrene reliefs from temple of the Gadde in Dura-Europos, Dirven 2011: 205, fig. 12.2), thus distinguishing themselves among other Syrian priests. Some *modii* were unadorned, while some like the one on the priest's head from the National museum in Belgrade, had laurel wreath encircling the *modius*.<sup>9</sup> As M. A. Colledge reminds, the image of wreath is presented very frequently in Palmyrene *tesserae* and in early Palmyrene sculpture it is shown in hands of a guardian goddess or priests. However, a wreath encircling *modius* in Palmyrene sculptures of priests is not known until AD 130–140 (Colledge 1976: 140). The wreaths presented on *modius* could have been of laurel, olive and oak foliage, probably made of gold, which is suggested by the traces of gilding found on one wreath (Stucky 1973: 173). Many questions and hypothesis about the use and significance of wreath on the *modii* of Palmyrene priests have been posed in the past and some authors think that wreath is the sign of apotheosis of dead priest, while the other scholars suggest that the wreath is a sign of priestly dignity.<sup>10</sup> In the centre of the wreath on the *modius* of the priest's head from the National Museum in Belgrade, a miniature bust of a young, beardless man wearing a tunic and a cloak, is presented.<sup>11</sup> This type of *modius*, encircled with a wreath adorned with a miniature portrait bust in the centre, represents the most elaborate type of *modius* (Heyn 2008: 189). Various authors differently interpret the symbolism of the miniature busts in the centre of the *modius*' wreaths, which can be beardless or with a beard – thus, H. Ingholt regards them as “badges of civic distinction given either by the city or by the religious authorities” (in his opinion bearded bust implies that the priest was appointed by the city, while beardless bust indicates that the priest was appointed by the clergy, Ingholt 1934: 36). Some authors interpreted them as a symbol of a certain rank in priestly hierarchy,

<sup>7</sup> Colledge 1976: 119. As D. Wielgosz-Rondolino showed, the paint was used on Palmyrene sculptures even in the earliest period of their modelling, in the 1st century, consisting of most frequently used red paint (probably red ochre), combined with range of colours (white, yellow, black), which can be best observed in one of the most famous Palmyrene funerary reliefs, known as the „Beauty of Palmyra“ from the tomb of Qasr Abjad (Wielgosz-Rondolino 2016: 178; Raja & Højten Sørensen 2015: 447–450).

<sup>8</sup> Stucky 1973: 163–180; Pictorial evidence in Palmyrene public and funerary portraiture and banqueting *tesserae* is abundant, contrary to the literary evidence for Palmyrene priests. However, the public and funerary sculptures offer more than enough evidence that hairless and beardless men wearing *modii* on their heads were priests – a very interesting example of even three generations of priests can be seen on a relief from the temple of Nebu (Raja 2016: 129–130). For more about so-called funeral banquet *tesserae* see Raja 2016a: 340–371.

<sup>9</sup> R. Stucky implies that the *modius* could have been made of felt (Stucky 1973: 172).

<sup>10</sup> R. du Mesnil du Buisson and M. Gawlikowski thought that the wreath is a sign of apotheosis of a dead priest, while M. Ingholt and H. Seyring were of opinion that the wreath encircling the *modius* is a sign of a priestly dignity (Stucky 1973: 177).

<sup>11</sup> It is presumed that from Hadrianic period to the 3rd century, *modius* was encircled with a wreath which had a central medallion with either male beardless bust or a bust of a priest with a *modius* in his head (Raja 2015: 341).

while others like M. Gawlikowski, suggest that the busts presented in the centre of the wreath on *modius* symbolize connection to some ancestral cult (in the context of ancestor first becoming a hero and then the object of an ancestor cult, Heyn 2008: 189; Raja 2015: 342). The presentations of Palmyrene priests carrying a *modius* with a wreath are quite rare – a search in the database within the Palmyra Portrait Project showed that in an example of 700 portraits, only 68 portraits were presented with a *modius*, out of which only 25 had a wreath tied around it (Ibid: 341–343). In our attempt to find out more about the Palmyrene priest's head from National Museum in Belgrade, we should also pose the question about the symbolism of the wreath presented on the *modius*. R. Stucky believed that different kinds of foliage used for the wreaths on *modii* indicated priests of different gods – thus, wreath of olive leaves implied the priest of god Baalshamin, while wreath of laurel indicated the priest of god Bel.<sup>12</sup> If previously mentioned hypothesis about the symbolism of busts on central medallion on *modius*' wreath and meaning of different wreath leaves indicating different gods are to be taken into account concerning the interpretation of a priest's head from National Museum in Belgrade, then the head of a priest could represent a Palmyrene priest of god Bel, who acquired his position by being appointed by the clergy. Judging by the stylistic characteristics – large eyes with incised pupils, large ears, straight nose and softly modelled lips, the head of a priest belongs to the first group of Palmyrene portraits according to H. Ingholt's classification (Ingholt 1928: 90–93) and is analogous to several known priestly busts, like the sculpture of a priest from the private collection in Beirut<sup>13</sup> or the head of a priest from the *loculus* relief situated in the British Museum, dated between AD 50–150 (inv. number BM 125033) (Raja 2016: 133, fig. 1) (Fig. 4). The very similar facial traits and expression can



Fig. 2. The *loculus* relief of a priest Ammôn from National Museum in Belgrade (Photo: Documentation of National Museum in Belgrade).

be seen on the face of a sculpture of a husband presented on a funeral banquet relief dated between AD 100–130 or a priest from a hypogeum of Artaban (Sadurska 1994: 16–17, fig. 6, fig. 8). As we already mentioned, the head of a priest from the National Museum in Belgrade was probably originally attached to a sculpture decorating a sarcophagus lid, similar for example to the sculptures represented on a sarcophagus lid from the Hypogeum of Yarhai, west exedra, central *triclinium*, Valley of the Tombs (sculptural group consisting of seated woman, two reclining priests and two standing individuals, a priest and a man, Raja 2017a: 439, fig. 6) or the sculptural group of a priest Barateh with family members in the courtyard of the Palmyra Museum (Heyn 2008: 172–173, fig. 6–2). The head of a Palmyrene priest from the National Museum in Belgrade can be more precisely dated between 130/40–150.

The second Palmyrene funerary sculpture from the National Museum in Belgrade represents a sculpture of a priest on so-called *loculus* relief. It is carved in white limestone, with dimensions 51 x 43 x 24 cm (inv. number

<sup>12</sup> R. Stucky thinks that a wreath of olive leaves indicates the priest of Baalshamin, because the priests with olive branches were represented in the relief of Baalshamin temple. The wreath of laurel, in author's opinion, implies the priest of god Bel, because on the *tesserae* of Bel's thiasos, laurel branches are often depicted (although R. Stucky admits that laurel leaves appear too on the *tesserae* with images of other deities).

<sup>13</sup> The sculpture of a priest from a private collection in Beirut bears striking similarity to the head of a priest from the National Museum in Belgrade. The sculpture represents a young priest with a wreathed *modius* and a central medallion with a beardless bust of a young man on it, holding a laurel branch in his left hand. Based on small dimensions of the sculpture (0.92 m) and untreated back side of the sculpture, R. Stucky presumes that the sculpture of a priest from Beirut perhaps stood on a console of a street colonnade or in a sanctuary of the god to whose cult the priest belonged to (Stucky 1973: 166, fig. 3).

09\_2985, Fig. 2). *Loculi* reliefs represent one of the types of the Palmyrene funerary sculpture, made on more or less rectangular slabs mostly of local limestone, depicting a bust or a half-figure of deceased, shown alone or with members of the family. Beside the representation of the deceased, there is often a Palmyrene Aramaic inscription with the name of deceased (and if other persons are presented beside deceased, with their names too).<sup>14</sup> *Loculi* reliefs served for sealing of the compartment where the deceased was buried (whether in above-ground so-called tower tombs or subterranean large tombs *hypogea*) (Henning 2013: 159–176). It is presumed that they were probably copied from the freedman reliefs produced in Rome, by the indigenous population in Syria or in Palmyra in the 1st century (Kropp & Raja 2014: 395). The *loculus* relief from the National Museum in Belgrade depicts a half-figure of a Palmyrene priest, identified by the wreathed *modius* with an elongated empty medallion on its centre. The sculpture is presented in high-relief, frontally, approximately up to the waist. The face of a young hairless and beardless man is oval, with elongated eyes lacking pupils, almost schematically carved with heavy eyebrows emphasized with incision marks. The nose is relatively long with wider nostrils. The young man's mouth is small and well-shaped, as the chin. Ears are large and lop. The priest is dressed in a tunic depicted as a series of V-shaped folds, over which is a himation which is also folded. Priest's right hand with all fingers stretched is depicted in a sling of the himation and with it, he is holding the folds of the himation thrown over his left shoulder. His left arm is bent in the elbow pressed on his body and in his left hand, which index finger is extended, the priest is holding a *schedula*.<sup>15</sup> Both hands of the priest are quite big. Above his left shoulder, a text in Palmyrene Aramaic is inscribed in four rows: “ 'MWN BR | NŠ' 'G' | ŠLM' | HBL” (translation: “ 'Ammôn son of Nesha (son of) 'Ogga (son of) Shalma, Alas!’” (Mirković & Dušanić 1976: 85–86, n. 72). Therefore, on the *loculus* relief from the National Museum in Belgrade, the priest Ammôn is presented in the way as the most of the males featured in the bust form in Palmyrene funerary sculpture are presented – wearing “Graeco-Roman” dress (tunic with a draped cloak) in the arm-sling arrangement (right arm presented in a sling of the folds of the cloak), which is typical for Roman funerary reliefs dated to the Late Republican period and early Empire (Heyn 2008: 170). Although the young man from *loculus* relief from the National Museum in Belgrade isn't holding any attributes associated with sacerdotal activities, like a jug, a bowl for incense, a balsamarium, olive branch etc., it can be presumed that he is a priest judging by the wreathed *modius* on his head. Although the wreath is carved quite schematically (as the whole presentation of priest Ammôn), the wreath encircling the *modius* is made of laurel foliage and has an oval empty medallion in the centre which could have been made of gold.<sup>16</sup> As it was previously mentioned, from the 1st century B. C. in Roman funerary reliefs it became popular to present men with their right arms in the sling of the toga, with fingers of the right hand usually extended. The same position of the right arm in the cloak's sling and right hand with extended fingers over the fold of the cloak can be observed in the majority of the Palmyrene *loculus* reliefs (251 of the 323 Palmyrene male portraits are represented in described way, Heyn 2010: 634) and in that context, the representation of priest Ammôn from National Museum in Belgrade represents no exception. However, on the left hand of priest Ammôn only index finger is extended, while other fingers are clenched. As M. Heyn discusses, on Palmyrene funerary male portraits, contrary to the right hand, the left hand displays more gesture variations – after most frequent gesture of all fingers being extended or clenched, the second most often represented gesture of the left hand in male relief busts is the gesture where only index finger is extended, while other fingers are clenched (Heyn 2010: 634, T. 2). In the funerary representations of priests and men holding sacerdotal objects, the extension of the index finger of the left hand was very popular. The reason for the popularity of this gesture among priests and participants in religious representations isn't known. As it is already mentioned, in the left hand of priest Ammôn, there is a writing attribute presented: a book roll known as *schedula*. H. Ingholt was the first author to introduce the term for this writing attribute, which resembles a narrow tablet, but has trapezoidal and not rectangular shape (Sokolowski 2014: 380–

<sup>14</sup> Within the group of so-called *loculus* reliefs, there is a sub-group of *loculus* banqueting reliefs, presenting a reclining deceased on a kline, accompanied by a wife or by family members (Raja 2016: 127).

<sup>15</sup> A *schedula* is the writing attribute that priest Ammôn holds, which was previously wrongly identified as a scroll (Cambi *et al.* 1987: 211, n. 175). The *schedula* represents one of the items belonging to the group of writing attributes, with which the images of deceased on Palmyrene funerary portraiture were presented: tablet (*tabula*), *stylus*, wax tablet, roll (*volumen*), diptych, *codexes* and double *schedula* (Sokolowski 2014: 378).

<sup>16</sup> R. Stucky describes that some of the *modii* were adorned with a rosette or round / oval empty medallion in the centre. Some medallions were made of gold, judging by the traces of gilding visible on the medallion of some heads of the Palmyrene priests (Stucky 1973: 174).

381). The representations of *schedula* in Palmyrene funerary sculpture (mostly held in left hand by men in relief portraits) increase in number from the 2nd century, replacing from that time images of tablets (Colledge 1976: 69, 247–253). The *schedula* represented on the funerary *loculus* relief with the image of priest Ammôn, belongs to the second type of *schedulae*, which have a curved end and sometimes engraved name of the deceased on them.<sup>17</sup> Interpreting the representations of priests with *schedula* in their left hand, H. Ingholt thought that depicted writing attribute perhaps had a certain role in the funeral rites, had some religious significance or represented the deed of the tomb (documents that prove legal title to burial place, Ingholt 1934: 33). Whatever the symbolism of *schedula* was, in this particular case, presented in the hand of the priest, it emphasized even more the high social status of the deceased in the context of his erudition and knowledge. Ichnographically, *loculus* relief of priest Ammôn is analogous to the presentation of priest Yarhibôlâ, which was originally in one of the tower tombs or *hypogea* of Palmyra (afterwards added to the collection of the Museum of Archaeology in Beirut, *Ibid*: 32). Stylistically, the *loculus* relief of priest Ammôn is carved only with a chisel and represents quite rigid and schematic work, with some details well depicted (mouth, chin). It bears certain similarity in the facial traits of the head and stylistic features of the *modius* to the fragmented funerary relief of the priestly bust from the Vatican Museums (inv. number 56599) dated to the second half of the 2nd century (Novello & Tiussi 2017: 101, cat. 7) and is very similar in the details of dress modelling and hands gesture to the depiction of a man from the *loculus* relief from Archaeological Museum in Istanbul (inv. number 1041), dated between AD 230–250 (Raja 2017: 118, fig. 3), while the facial traits are stylistically close to the priest's head from the *loculus* relief situated in Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (inv. number 1034) dated to the 3rd century (Raja 2018: 15) (Fig. 5).



Fig. 3. The funerary stela of a Palmyrene girl from National Museum in Belgrade (Photo: Documentation of National Museum in Belgrade).



Fig. 4. *Loculus* relief depicting a priest and a child, British museum (inv. n. BM 125033) (photo: Raja 2016: fig. 1).

<sup>17</sup> The shape of the first type of *schedulae* is straight, while the shape of the second type of *schedulae* is curved. First type of *schedula* is almost twice more often presented on the Palmyrene funerary portraiture, than the second one, (Sokolowski 2014: 379, T. 1). On the *schedulae* of the second type, a name of deceased can be engraved, like in the case of Bennuri whose name was engraved in Aramaic. A. Sadurska thinks that the second type of *schedulae* actually represent a stylized depictions of keys (because of their curved end), but L. Sokolowski remarks that in Palmyrene funerary sculpture keys are always represented as L-shaped, not in trapezoidal shape (*Ibid*: 381).

As it was already mentioned, *loculus* reliefs present most common type of Palmyrene funerary sculpture, where the deceased is depicted in frontal pose with an inscription in Palmyrene Aramaic above his/hers shoulder which contains the name and genealogy of the deceased, with the earliest dated funerary portrait from AD 65/6 (Heyn 2010: 631–632). The largest group of priestly presentations actually comes from *loculus* reliefs – around 90 priestly portraits (Raja 2016: 132). After the analysis of numerous examples of priestly representations on *loculus* reliefs, R. Raja concludes that they are almost always depicted alone, without family members.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the inscriptions in Palmyrene Aramaic which accompany the priestly representations on *loculus* reliefs, attest to the genealogy of the family, but don't point out to other family relations, which is the case in other representations of deceased (Raja 2016: 132–133). Stylistic characteristics of the *loculus* relief of priest Ammôn from National Museum in Belgrade imply the period between AD 230 and 250, as the time-span for its modelling.



Fig. 5. *Loculus relief depicting a priest, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (inv. n. 1034) (Photo: Raja 2018: 15).*

The third Palmyrene funerary sculpture from the National Museum in Belgrade represents another funerary sculpture type from Palmyra – a high-relief funerary *stela* made from limestone, dim. 55.5 x 28.5 cm (inv. number 09\_2939, Fig. 3). On the *stela*, a young girl is frontally represented standing with right arm held alongside the body and left hand bent in elbow, set across the chest. Unfortunately, the representation of a girl is damaged in the area of her face, but it can be distinguished that on her oval face, eyes were well depicted as a bit elongated with incised pupils and with slightly curved eyebrows. Girl's hair is styled in wavy strands brushed forward, with the length to the middle of her neck. Her forehead is well modelled and ears are quite large. The girl is dressed in a long chiton, with emphasized folds on the arms and series of V-shaped plaits on the upper part of the girl's body. In her right hand, the girl holds a bunch of grapes, while in her left hand she holds a bird, probably a dove or a pigeon. Above her left shoulder, there is an inscription in Palmyrene Aramaic.

The largest group of the Palmyrene funerary sculpture is represented by *loculus* reliefs, within which is a sub-group consisted of smaller size *stelae* with representations of full-length figure (approx. 50 cm high). This type of Palmyrene funerary sculpture was presumably adapted by Palmyrene artists from earlier funerary free-standing *stelae*, for their use inside the tombs and in time became of rectangular shape, as *loculus* reliefs (Colledge 1976: 239; Krag & Raja 2016: 136). During the 1st century, these *stelae* were used for closing burial chambers *loculi*, where deceased was buried, but never achieved the popularity of *loculus* reliefs, they ceased to be used during the later second half of the 2nd century. Most frequent representations on this sub-type of Palmyrene funerary sculpture are depictions of women with children, but from the end of the 1st century through the 2nd century, their popularity decreases in favour of group portraits (Krag & Raja 2016: 155). The children alone are not frequently depicted in Palmyrene funerary sculpture – usually they are represented with their parents (most often their mothers), thus in opinion of R. Raja underlying the status that motherhood had in Palmyrene society (Raja 2017a: 428–429). Beside *loculus stelae*, children were also depicted in banquet reliefs, sarcophagi and wall paintings, always easily recognised by their attributes, smaller size and clothing. As M. A. R. Colledge observes, children were shown differently, according to their sex and with various attributes – girls were distinguishable from boys

<sup>18</sup> R. Raja writes that out of 87 examples of *loculus* reliefs representations of priests, only in four cases they are depicted with other family members (Raja 2017: 123).

by hairstyles and dress: they were depicted wearing a long folded chiton, while boys were dressed in short tunic with trousers (Colledge 1976: 67). In many Palmyrene *loculi stelae*, like in antecedent Greek funerary reliefs, children were presented with two characteristic attributes which symbolised a childhood: the bird and the bunch of grapes (Colledge 1976: 156; for the examples, see Sadurska & Bounni 1994: 67–68, n. 92, fig. 18, 68–69, n. 94, fig. 12, 97, n. 131, fig. 6, 97–98, n. 132, fig. 7 etc.). In the *loculus* reliefs, 36.4 percent of monuments represent the images of girls, while 63.6 percent represent the depictions of boys, thus making the representations of boys more numerous than the girls (Krag & Raja 2016: 143). Although the bird which a child holds is usually of unknown kind, it can be presumed that the girl from *loculus stela* from National Museum in Belgrade holds perhaps a sacred dove of Syrian goddess Atargatis (in Roman period Dea Syria) or the girl's pet pigeon (Colledge 1976: 158). Ichnographically, the representation of the girl from *loculus stela* from National Museum in Belgrade is very similar to the depiction of a girl from the funerary stele from Colket collection (Albertson 2000: 160–162, fig. 1) and by the treatment of the dress and the attributes of a bird and grapes is analogous to the depiction of a girl from the *stela* from hypogeum of Sassan (Sadurska & Bounni 1994: 82, fig. 17). By the stylistic and technical features concerning the treatment of the girl's face and modelling of the folds of the dress, the representation from the funerary *stela* from Belgrade is close to the presentation of the boy Masheku from a *loculus* limestone *stela* dated to the 2nd century<sup>19</sup> and the *stela* representation of a boy holding a bird and bunch of grapes from Paris (Raja 2016a: 143, fig. 9). Stylistic features of the presentation from Palmyrene funerary monument from National Museum in Belgrade, imply the middle or the second half of the 2nd century, as possible period of *stela*'s carving – there is no *dorsalium* presented on the *stela*, the girl's dress is not so richly folded but with wide folds and girl's right arm is held to the side and not completely outstretched like in the children's representations from *stelae* dated in the later 2nd century (Albertson 2000: 162). Therefore, the proposed time span for the funerary *stela* with a representation of a girl with a bird and grapes from the National Museum in Belgrade would be between AD 140–170.

Palmyra, situated in the Syrian Desert between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates, was included in the Roman Empire from the Augustan period, when its growth started and lasted during the next three centuries, due to its position, richness of the land and pleasant nature (Pliny XXV.1). Because of its favourable geographic position, it represented a crossroad between Roman and Parthian Empire and an important commercial, political and cultural centre. As Palmyra developed into a polis, its aristocracy who was attracted to Roman customs, adopted in time certain architectural and sculptural traits of the Roman culture (Smith 2013: 56). Although a centre inhabited with diverse population, Palmyra was in the Roman period also an important religious centre where indigenous tradition intertwined with Hellenistic and Roman one. Thus, a unique culture was formed, which incorporated strong eastern customs and local traditions with Greek influences and certain Roman values. Previously said can be clearly observed in Palmyrene art, which comprises public and funerary portraiture, mostly preserved in the so-called *loculus* reliefs and chronologically later form in the shape of sarcophagi (Raja 2017: 120; Kropp & Raja 2014: 393–394). From more than 3000 portraits that corpus of Palmyrene funerary sculpture encompasses in Palmyra Portrait Project, up to 25 percent of all male representations show priests and about 10 percent of all Palmyrene funerary representations (more than 300 funerary portraits, Raja 2018: 14) are priests (Raja 2017: 115–122), while on around 7 percent of the monuments, children are depicted. Priests represented elite of Palmyrene society and a highly desired service. Judging from numerous inscriptions from Palmyra, priestly function was hereditary – it was transferred from father to a son. However, in some cases, like in the case of certain Haddudan, priestly function could be paid for.<sup>20</sup> Beside representing the social elite, priests also belonged to wealthy families and therefore had prominent position and influence in Palmyrene society.

The three Palmyrene funerary sculptures from the National Museum in Belgrade represent three different sculptural types of the funerary portraiture from Palmyra during the period of Roman reign. The first funerary portrait represents the head of a young priest, which was originally probably attached to a figure reclining in a funerary banquet on the lid of a sarcophagus. Although the rest of the priest's body

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/a-palmyrene-limestone-relief-for-masheku-circa-5509060-details.aspx>, accessed on 15. 02. 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Certain Haddudan is mentioned in inscription as a person who paid the expenses for his nephew to become a priest (Piersimoni 1995: 554).



is missing, analogous to other known similar sculptures (for example already mentioned sculptural group from sarcophagus lid from Hypogeum of Yarhai or the sculptural group of priest Barateh in the courtyard of Palmyra Museum), it can be presumed that the priest was probably dressed in a Parthian dress – long-sleeved tunic belted at the waist, worn over loose trousers decorated with bands of embroidery, with a cloak over them (Heyn 2008: 170, fig. 6–2). He was probably presented with family members, with inscription next to him, giving his name and a perhaps a date. The head of a priest from National Museum in Belgrad represents an exquisite example of Palmyrene funerary portraiture, quite rare because of the detail of the *modius* encircled with the laurel wreath with central ornament in the shape of a miniature bust of a beardless young man in himation and cloak. The significant position and wealth of this particular Palmyrene priest who is presented and his family, are additionally implied by his possible burial in sarcophagus on which lid, the presentation of deceased was presented. The second Palmyrene monument represents a priest Ammôn on so-called *loculus* relief, the most common funerary type of Palmyrene sculpture. The priest Ammôn is depicted alone, as it is most often the case with priestly representations on *loculus* reliefs and R. Raja suggests that the reason for representing priests almost exclusively alone in *loculi* reliefs (contrary to the sarcophagi representations where they are presented with family members), isn't a religious one but that it was done because a *loculus* relief marked a single grave within a context of a larger family tomb, while the sarcophagi lids with family scenes often presented a few generations of priests on one lid (Raja 2016: 141). Due to the fact that priestly depictions on *loculi* reliefs emphasized the status of the priest himself contrary to the sarcophagus representations where the emphasis was on the family scene, R. Raja concludes that *loculi* reliefs in some way presented condensed family scenes *per se* (Ibid: 143).

The third funerary monument from Palmyra now situated in National Museum in Belgrade is a *loculus stela* with a representation of a young girl holding a bird and a bunch of grapes, typical symbols of childhood interrupted by early death. Although stylistic and technical features of the monument imply a solid, but not highly skilfully modelled high relief, the representations of children in full-length figure on *loculi stela*e are not so frequent and cease to appear in the second half of the 2nd century, which is approximately *terminus ante quem* for the stela from National Museum in Belgrade.

Of all three Palmyrene funerary monuments from National Museum in Belgrade, the most exquisite one, which testifies about the wealth and the highest degree of Hellenisation of the deceased, is the head of unknown priest. It is well known that the richest inhabitants of Palmyra which belonged to the elite of the city, weren't buried in *loculi*, but in the *sarcophagi* as it is the case with the head of a priest from National Museum and since the funerary portrait represents a priest whose *modius* is adorned in a most elaborated way, with a wreath centrally decorated with a miniature bust of a young beardless man, it can be presumed that deceased priest represented the very elite of the Palmyrene society, from the first half of the second century. The second funerary monument, *loculus* relief of the priest Ammôn, also testifies about a member of the priestly elite, who was serving in a temple of one of the deities of Palmyrene *pantheon*, around the middle of the third century. The third funerary monument from Palmyra, *loculus stela* with a representation of a girl holding a bird and grapes, represents equally interesting testimony, where the represented child is depicted alone, in full-length figure, without a mother or father, which isn't such a frequent occurrence in so-far known funerary monuments from Palmyra. At the moment, more detailed informations about precise location where the monuments could have been found are lacking, but hopefully future archaeological excavations on the territory of Belgrade fortress, could result in new discoveries of other parts of the three Palmyrene funerary sculptures of even new finds from once powerful and prosperous Syrian city of Palmyra.

## Abbreviations

IMS                            *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure*, I, II, III/2, IV, V, VI, Beograd, 1976–1995.

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