

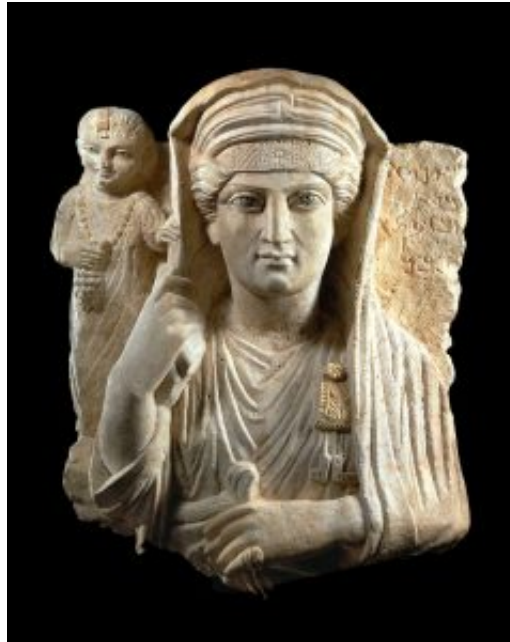
## PALMYRAN LIMESTONE POLYCHROME RELIEF BUST OF A NOBLEWOMAN AND CHILD

Ne-Syrian, Palmyran: 2nd-3rd century A.D.

Limestone

57cm H x 47cm W

Reference: 6767



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It is a funerary piece, which represents the bust of a mature woman accompanied by her child. The faces are idealised, except for few wrinkles on the mother's cheeks, no other personalised detail is indicated. The inscription is probably of a genealogical nature. The mother's features are of a remarkable beauty; the contours of her oval face are very fine. The eyes are almond shaped, the iris is lightly engraved while the pupil is drilled. Her eyelids and eyebrows are sharply carved.

She is dressed in a tunic which folds in a v shape around her neck and chest. On her head, she wears a turban and veil, which descend down to cover her shoulders and left arm. With her left hand she holds a portion of the fabric while her right hand holds a part of the veil. She is adorned elegantly: a floral diadem on her forehead, a beautiful large gold fibula from which suspended on a cord are two little keys and two precious stones rings on her little finger.

The little girl stands on a small pedestal next to her mother. Her features are more realistic than that of her mother, she has the large cheeks of a child, and her hair is short and flat. On her head, vertically placed, is a small diadem with three pendants, and she wears a bead necklace and bracelets. She wears a long tunic which reaches down to her feet. Her left hand touches her mother's veil, while in her right, she holds vine of grapes. Some Palmyran funerary reliefs feature the deceased accompanied by either a small feminine or masculine figure which often represents members of the same family (a wife, the child, brothers or sisters). The children (girl or boy) are either sculpted in the arms or behind the shoulders of the principal figure.

The female figure on this relief is most certainly the matriarch of the family. The woman's importance is evidenced by the presence of a little

girl – a symbol of education, and the two keys of a house – a symbol that she is the keeper. Burial architecture in Palmyra is well known and is characterised by three particular types of monuments: tomb-houses; towers, a typical Syrian funerary burial construction; and hypogea (or underground tombs) which are most common and from which this sculpture probably originates from. These forms of architecture house individual burial places, often by family groups, in loculi, (holes dug to receive the deceased) which are disposed horizontally and vertically along the walls of the tomb. Slabs decorated in relief such as this sealed the tomb of each loculus. Although considered as idealised, these can be considered as portraits of the deceased and the inscription a genealogical one. Stylistically, this sculpture could be attributed to the beginning of the second group of Palmyran sculpture, Circa 2nd century A.D.

### PROVENANCE

Ex-private collection, collected in the early 1960's, Lebanon.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Literature on the Palmyran period and its particular style is vast – as an introduction, one may consult:

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On sculpture in particular:

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On sculpture of women in similar poses:

M.A.R. COLLEDGE, op. cit., p. 69-71, fig. 83 et 85.

A. SADURSKA – A. BOUNNI, op. cit., # 45, fig. 183, # 71, fig. 184.

Women with children:

A. SADURSKA – A. BOUNNI, op. cit., # 188, fig. 159, # 190, fig. 158.

Syrie, Mémoire et Civilisation, Cat. Expo. Paris, 1993, p. 296, # 236.