

Production Economy 5 October 2017

Book of Abstracts

Organisers:

PhD student Julia Steding (Aarhus University)

Professor Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)



CARLSBERG FOUNDATION

Outline

Within the framework of the Palmyra Portrait Project, funded by the Carlsberg Foundation, a series of one-day conferences have been organised over the past years. The conferences held in fall 2017 and spring 2018 will focus on the theme of production economy and use this term as a main line of enquiry into understanding processes of production and economy in Palmyra in the Roman period.

Sculptures, sarcophagi and reliefs are well-studied remains of ancient societies, which provide information about identity, self-representations and status in ancient societies. However, only in recent decades has the focus in research shifted to view these objects as lines of enquiry into other areas and mechanisms of ancient societies such as production economy, which in turn offer substantial information about societal hierarchies and lines of production.

The aim of the first one-day conference is to bring researchers together who focus on various aspects of production and the participants involved in the production process of stone-carved products. This includes studies of different materials that has been used frequently in the region of wider Syria. Therefore, specialists dealing with carving techniques and tools in relation to marble and limestone are invited.

Little is known about the technical aspects of the production process. Only one workshop situation has been excavated, and the archaeological remains from the workshops at Aphrodisias were able to answer only a few questions. By looking at the production outcome itself, we will get to know more about the different steps of the production process of portraits and the development of the techniques in the region of wider Syria.

Through the debate about the technical methods, further investigations on the division of labour and productivity (speed and scale) can be made. During the conference the work of sculptors, painters and workers at the quarries will be brought together, to answer questions on the interactions of the different participants in the process and the distribution of the different steps of production. Was a single sculptor responsible for the production of a complete portrait, including the carving/working of the background, the facial details and the inscriptions? Or were specialists hired to focus on individual details of the portrait? Was the working speed – and therefore the productivity – influenced by a division of labour?

Another focus closely connected with these questions is the relation between the sculptors and the costumer: Was the carver able to make a costumer-made representation, and to which extent was the costumer able to influence the final product? Were portraits produced to be sold 'off the shelf' or individualised from the first to the last step of production?

The conference will bring together all these aspects to create a comprehensive overview over the production economy in the region of wider Syria during the Roman period.

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Programme

8:45–9:15	Registration and coffee	
9:15–9:30	Opening Rubina Raja and Julia Steding	
9:30–10:00	Production economy – questions and lines of enquiry: The case of Palmyra Rubina Raja	Chair: Julia Steding
10:00–10:25	Discussion	
10:25–10:55	Quarrying stones in the Roman Near East: A comparative study concerning Palmyra and Baalbek Jeanine Abdul Massih	
10:55–11:20	Discussion	
11:20–11:50	Methods of carving marble sculpture in the Roman world and the definition of ‘workshops’ Amanda Claridge	
11:50–12:15	Discussion	
12:15–13:15	Lunch at the Studenterhuset	

13.15-13.45	The polychromy of Palmyrene portraits: Workmen and colouration Clarissa Blume	Chair: Rubina Raja
13.45-14.10	Discussion	
14.10-14.40	Carving the Palmyrene portrait reliefs: Some preliminary observations Will Wootton	
14.40-15:05	Discussion	
15:05-15:35	Production and value of Palmyrene funerary portraiture Julia Steding	
15:35-16:00	Discussion	
16:00-16:30	Coffee Break	
16:30-17:00	The local production of sculpture in Roman North Syria and the agency of the stone material Michael Blömer	Chair: Julia Steding
17:00-17:25	Discussion	
17:25-18:00	Final discussion and closing Rubina Raja and Julia Steding	
18:30	Speakers' dinner Restaurant Mefisto, Volden 28, 8000 Aarhus C	

ABSTRACTS

Production economy – questions and lines of enquiry: The case of Palmyra

Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)
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Through the compilation of a corpus of Palmyrene funerary sculpture within the framework of the Palmyra Portrait Project, it is now, for the first time, possible to meaningfully address issues of ‘production economy’ on the basis of a large-scale collection of monuments displaying portraits from the Roman period (1st century CE–3rd century CE), all stemming from one place, the Syrian desert city Palmyra. The corpus offers insight into fluctuations in production and trends in the portraiture and categories of funerary monuments that were produced over a period of more than two hundred years. While it is clear that workshops and hands of craftsmen exist, it still remains unclear, for example, how many workshops would have operated in Palmyra at any given time. Furthermore, the collection of now more than 3,000 funerary portraits also raises questions about the way in which there might or might not have been working relations between producers of the funerary sculpture and those who were involved in the construction of the funerary monuments. Was there any communication between the constructors of buildings (tower tombs and hypogea) and those of the workshops that produced the decorative schemes for the graves? While these questions might not be answered in detail, the corpus does offer the possibility of beginning to enquire into such problems, and this paper will focus on some of these issues.

Quarrying stones in the Roman Near East: A comparative study concerning Palmyra and Baalbek

Jeanine Abdul Massih (Lebanese University)
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In this paper, a comparative study is presented with reference to two major sites in the Roman Near East: Palmyra and Baalbek. The latest investigation of the quarries at Baalbek offers the opportunity of comparing the two exceptional quarries. In the Near East, stone exploitations have rarely been subject to detailed scientific scrutiny, and none of the quarries have been properly excavated till today. The quarries of Palmyra were partly surveyed in the past, while those of Baalbek were recently studied intensively through technological and socio-cultural viewpoints. The result allows us to consider the different stages of stone extraction in relation to the architectural constructions. Taking the study of the Baalbek quarries as our starting point, the techniques and socio-economic aspects of the Palmyra quarries can be reconstructed and explored.

Methods of carving marble sculpture in the Roman world and the definition of ‘workshops’

Amanda Claridge (Royal Holloway, University of London)
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The paper briefly addresses the question of the location, size and composition of Roman marble-carving workshops from the perspective of the archaeological and technical evidence. It will argue that production was not reorganised in the Roman period on an industrial scale, concentrated in a few major centres exporting finished works to a commercialised market, as is often supposed. The enormous quantity of output attested by the surviving works was achieved by traditional methods, with some technical advances, but mainly by a massive increase in the numbers of specialist carvers at work in small units, following their markets and operating over much wider geographical areas.

The polychromy of Palmyrene portraits: Workmen and colouration

Clarissa Blume (Ruhr-Universität Bochum)
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Palmyrene portraits are extraordinarily specific in their appearance, both in regard to their material – a local limestone – and their style. They are known for their accurate sculptural layout and their richness in detail. However, their finish was not done by the sculptor; rather, they were painted with various colours, such as ochre or pink, and coated with gold leaf. On top, their polychrome decoration was even enhanced by the addition of elements made from other materials, such as precious stones to depict jewellery. This presentation aims to offer insight into the polychrome appearance of Palmyrene portraits. Moreover, it will present knowledge on the collaboration between different specialised workmen on the overall polychrome appearance of ancient sculptures.

Carving the Palmyrene portrait reliefs: Some preliminary observations

Will Wootton (King's College London)
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In 2012, Ben Russell and Will Wootton were invited to examine the technical characteristics of the reliefs in the collection of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. At that time we were working on the Leverhulme-funded project Art of Making in Antiquity: Stoneworking in the Roman World – now published at www.artofmaking.ac.uk. This paper reviews the materials we looked at, the methodology we used and the preliminary outcomes of the analysis. This brief examination is contextualised in terms of the previous scholarship and we make a few suggestions for further study.



Production and value of Palmyrene funerary portraiture

Julia Steding (Aarhus University)

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Palmyrene funerary portraiture constitutes the largest Roman-period portrait group outside of Rome. Loculus reliefs, sarcophagi and stelae depicting males, females, children and priests raise questions regarding identity, status and gender. Over the past year, several investigations have been undertaken to address these issues; however, less research has been done on the production economy of the portraits.

The focus of this paper is the loculus reliefs that are produced in the local limestone. By looking at the reliefs in detail and by exploring tool traces, we can reconstruct the development of techniques over time and the influence of technical knowledge on the interaction or correlation with costumers' wishes in terms of the final product. I will try to answer the question of how we are able to connect production processes to these investigations. Which tools were used over time, and are changes detectable by studying the traces that are still visible today? Why did carvers change the techniques, and is this connected with a change in style or rather with a rise in the production of portraits? Further, I will address the question of value and examine the connection between techniques, chronology and work input relative to quality and elaboration of the portraits.

The local production of sculpture in Roman North Syria and the agency of the stone material

Michael Blömer (Aarhus University)

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When the sculptural habit was resumed in the Commagene and Cyrrhestice around 100 CE, local masons and sculptors relied on the stone that was locally available. To a large extent, this was a chalky soft limestone, which was easy to quarry and to work. The region is riddled with quarries that testify to the large volume of stone material extracted. However, the softness of the stone was a major disadvantage, too. There was little scope for delicate and three-dimensional forms. The production of free-standing statues, for example, required additions such as neck supports, which make the statues look clumsy. Moreover, the range of tools that could be used was limited.

In other parts of North Syria, basalt was used for the production of sculpture, and it seems that the craftsmen who worked with basalt were different from those working with limestone, and that the range of tools that could be used was also limited.

In my talk, I will briefly discuss the processes of production of the limestone and basalt sculptures. I will also consider the impact of the properties of the stone on working organisation, the appearance of the sculpture and the formation of local styles.

PRODUCTION ECONOMY
BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Conference venue:
Jens Chr. Skous Vej 5, 8000 Aarhus C
Bldg. 1461, room 516

Studenterhus Aarhus
Nordre Ringgade 3, 8000 Aarhus C
Canteen (lunch): Stakladen

Speakers' Dinner:
Restaurant Mefisto
Volden 28, 8000 Aarhus C

Aarhus Central Station
Banegårdspladsen 1
8000 Aarhus C



Venues



Organisers



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Loculus relief depicting a male. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (IN 1048).



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Back cover: The Beauty of Palmyra (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek IN 2795)

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