The Body Language of Palmyra and Rome

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This paper focuses on the poses and gestures used in the funerary relief sculpture (primarily portrait busts) of Palmyra in the light of some of my other work on body language as represented in Roman art.[1] I am very much indebted to Maura Heyn's study of the gestures used on Palmyrene reliefs, which was based on a much better knowledge of the material than mine, and which raised most of the questions considered here.[2] My aim is to build on Heyn's observations and analysis by considering further the difference between 'gesture' and 'body language', the ways in which gender is indicated by pose and gesture, and the use of body language to indicate superior and subordinate status (in relation to gender). The paper also investigates further the similarities and differences between the Palmyrene portraits and the portrait reliefs from late republican and early imperial funerary contexts in Rome and its environs (often referred to as 'freedman reliefs'):[3] what might the sig-

nificance of such affinities be, and should they be interpreted as indicating influence from Rome on the periphery of her empire? What implications might there be for the expression of ethnicity and Romanisation?

Gesture and body language

One of the most noticeable features of the Palmyrene portrait reliefs is that, although they do not usually represent full-length standing figures, they do include both arms with the hands prominently placed in front of the torso, which is shown from just above the waist up: they are not 'busts' in the usual sense of including only the shoulders and tops of the arms. This is a characteristic shared with the funerary reliefs from Rome, although there it is usually only one hand that is presented in this way, the other being hidden from sight. The arms and hands in both cases are held in a variety of ways which encourage the modern viewer to look for the 'meaning' of these 'gestures'. But, as Maura Heyn has shown in relation to the Palmyrene reliefs, there is no evidence for the existence of a detailed sign language, with each hand gesture having its own significance: rather, she suggests, the pointing gestures made by men, as seen in fig. 1,[4] were intended simply to draw the viewer's attention, either to the attribute held in the other hand, or to the figure as a whole.

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1. I am very grateful to Tracey Long, Annette Højen Sørensen and Prof. Rubina Raja for inviting me to take part in the workshop and contribute to this publication: I had not previously considered the Palmyrene reliefs in my study of body language in Roman art, and welcomed the opportunity to investigate them further. I would also like to acknowledge my debt to Prof. Malcolm Colledge, who taught me Roman Art many years ago – and inevitably included some Palmyrene art in his course.

2. Heyn 2010. Heyn created a database of 867 funerary portrait reliefs from which she is able to provide statistical information. My observations are based on a much smaller range of examples.

3. Heyn also suggests such a comparison. For comprehensive catalogues and illustrations of the Roman reliefs see Kleiner 1977 and Kockel 1993.

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4. BM ME 125022: limestone bust of an unknown man carrying a leaf, AD 150-200.

Fig. 1: Limestone relief from Palmyra with bust of an unknown man carrying a leaf, in the British Museum, ME 125022, AD 150-200. (© Trustees of the British Museum).

Fig. 2: Limestone relief from Palmyra with bust of a woman with raised right hand, palm facing the viewer, carrying a spindle and distaff in her left hand, named as Ala daughter of Iarhai in the inscription, British Museum, ME 125695, dated AD 113-4. (© Trustees of the British Museum).

Some of the hand postures used on both the Palmyrene and the Roman reliefs could reasonably be interpreted as gestures with a specific meaning: this applies for example to the gesture of the hand held raised and open with the palm facing the viewer (see fig. 2)[5] on Palmyrene reliefs, which Heyn identifies as a gesture of worship.[6] The *dextrarum iunctio*, or right hand clasp, used to unite male and female figures on the Roman reliefs also belongs in this category of meaningful gesture, as it seems to be a sign used to show that the two people in question identified themselves as a legitimately married couple. Both gestures would appear to be culture-specific: the palm-out gesture is not used on the Roman reliefs, or the *dextrarum iunctio* on the Palmyrene reliefs.

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5. Figure 2 represents one of two reliefs in the British Museum using this gesture: this is BM ME 125695, a limestone bust of a woman carrying a spindle and distaff in her left hand, named as Ala daughter of Iarhai in the inscription, dated AD 113-114. It is also illustrated in Colledge 1976, pl. 63. The other relief in the British Museum (BM ME 125203) appears as Heyn 2010, 633 fig. 1.

6. Heyn 2010, 632, 636-637. This interpretation is based on the use of disembodied hands, represented palm out, on a series of non-funerary reliefs (altars and votive reliefs) showing that hands were a part of the body which had a particular

importance in the religious sphere. (For the background to this gesture see Choksy 1990). Heyn suggests that when a single hand (the right) is held in this way on the funerary reliefs it is designed to draw attention to the subject's involvement in ritual activities. Of the 18 examples she has identified using this gesture, all are women except one.

Fig. 3: Full-figure relief from the Via Statilia, Rome, with the man wearing a toga (?) draped with an arm sling and a woman in the Pudicitia pose. Capitoline Museums/ Centrale Montemartini, inv. 2142, 75-50 BC. (© K. Anger DAIR 2001.2051).

Apart from these gestures, however, the arrangement of the arms and hands on both sets of monuments should be seen not so much as gestures with quite specific meanings as characteristic forms of body language with more generalised, and, indeed often multiple, connotations. I shall examine this concept in more detail in relation to two of the most com-

mon poses used on the Palmyrene reliefs: the hand supported by a sling of drapery for men, and the so-called Pudicitia pose used for women.

The arm-sling pose

Many of the men represented on the Palmyrene reliefs wear drapery (presumably the *himation/pallium* rather than a toga) arranged in such a way that it forms a sling in which the right arm, bent at the elbow, is held with just the hand emerging from the folds (see figs. 1 and 9).[7] The hand is usually held open and relaxed, with the fingers lightly curled and resting on the bunched folds which cross the chest diagonally to pass over the left shoulder. It is always the right arm and hand which are held in this way: an element of variation can be introduced by making the fingers grasp the drapery more firmly, or by extending the index finger or the first two fingers of the right hand, but it is usually the fingers of the left hand which are used to introduce variety by extending one or more fingers, or by holding an attribute.

A very similar use of the arm sling and the emerging right hand can be seen on most of the men on the Roman reliefs (such as illustrated here in figs. 3, 4 and 5).[8] It is difficult to tell what garment is being worn here, but it is generally assumed to be the toga,[9] worn

7. According to Heyn (2010, 634) 251 out of the 323 male portraits in her database have their right arm in a sling.
8. The gesture used on this type of relief was discussed in Brilliant 1963, 49-50, figs. 2.1-2.3. See also Kockel 1993 and Kleiner 1977 for further examples. Kleiner and Kleiner 1980-1 discusses the full-length versions of the Roman arm sling togate statue, including the relief from the Via Statilia, in the Capitoline Museum, previously Museo Conservatori Braccio Nuovo inv. 2142, now on display in the Centrale Montemartini museum (fig. 3): this also appears in Kleiner 1977, 201-202, no. 11 and Kockel 1993, 94 no. B1. For fig. 4 (relief with L. Ampudius Philomusus in the British Museum inv. 1920,02201, 15BC-AD 5) see Kleiner 1977, 229 no. 59 and Kockel 1993, 157-158 no. J3; for fig. 5 (relief of L. Vibius in the Vatican Museums, Museo Chiaramonti inv. 2109, 20-10 BC) see Kleiner 1977, 234-235 no. 69 and Kockel 1993, 180-181 no. L7.
9. Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 45 points to the uncertainty about which garment the man on the Via Statilia relief (fig. 3) is

Fig. 4: Marble relief from Rome (near Porta Capena) with three half-figures, two women and a man, in the British Museum inv. 1920,02201, 15 BC-AD 5. The inscription names the freedman L. Ampudius Philomusus. (© Trustees of the British Museum).

with a form of draping that appears to have been usual in the late Republic but which was replaced under Augustus by a more voluminous form of toga with more complex and looser draping round the body. This new form of draping allowed the right arm more freedom to gesture. From the time of Augustus onwards togate statues and togate figures on reliefs wear this imperial form of the toga and adopt typical poses that place the right arm either bent at the elbow with the forearm held out in front of the figure, or held to the side: holding the arm bent at the elbow with the forearm across the torso then becomes a rare pose for toga wearers.[10] Quintilian, in his handbook on oratorical practice, devotes a substantial part of book 11

to the gestures the orator should make with his hands.[11] The right hand should be the more active, with the left playing only a secondary role. Writing in the first century AD, Quintilian also comments on the restrictive nature of the toga worn in earlier times (when Cicero was practising oratory): this would appear to agree with the form of toga worn on the Roman funerary reliefs.[12]

By the time the Palmyrene reliefs started to be made (in the middle of the first century AD) the imperial-style toga, and the more expansive poses that went with it, was the norm in Rome (at least for statues of Roman men): the arm-sling style of drapery with its more restricted movement of the right arm was a short-lived fashion, seen mainly on funerary reliefs of the late Republic and Augustan period.[13] It may even, indeed, have been associated especially

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wearing: it is accepted as the toga by Goette 1990, 108 Ab 16 and Kockel 1993, 94-95 B1, who considers the question of this early style of toga on pp. 15-19. Kleiner 1977, 158-159 also identifies the garment worn in this and other reliefs as the toga, but points out it was 'based ultimately on a Greek statuary type'. Bieber 1959, 384-5 includes it without question in her discussion of Roman men in the *himation/palliati*; but in Bieber 1977, 132 she allows for the possibility some of these reliefs depict the toga, but still maintains most wear the *pallium*.

10. See Davies 2005 and 2010.

11. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* XI.3.85-107.
12. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* XI.3.143.
13. For the different styles of draping the toga depicted in art and their chronological development see Goette 1990: the statues and full-length figures in relief wearing the earlier arm-sling style of toga are in his catalogue as list Ab, with 119 examples and are discussed on pp. 26-27. He dates all to 1st century BC (the latest are 'early Augustan').

Fig. 5: Marble relief from Cesano (outside Rome) with half figures of L. Vibius and Vecilia Hila in the Vatican Museums, Museo Chiaramonti inv. 2109, c.20-10 BC. (© Faraglia DAIR 43.429).

with freedmen who celebrated their new status by wearing the toga, but wore it in the older style: as many of them were of Greek origin they may also have preferred a form of dress more familiar to them as *himation* wearers. It seems unlikely that Palmyrene men and their sculptors chose these old-fashioned Roman images as a model for their own behaviour and to express their identity.

The arm-sling form of draping the *himation* (or *pallium* as it was known to the Romans) was, however, the norm in the eastern part of the Roman Empire and was already well-established as the usual dress of the Greek citizen in both honorary and funerary art.[14] The

right arm confined by the drapery folds with the left arm held by the side, also covered with the himation, was the dress and pose of the exemplary citizen in the Greek world: there it seems the reticence and modesty implied by the pose was seen as having a positive val-

4th century BC with statues of Aeschines and Sophocles, which were posed with the left hand on the hip, a more swaggering pose than the one which became more common, especially in funerary contexts, with the left arm hanging by the side: see Bieber 1959 and Bieber 1977 chapter 11. This was only one way in which the himation could be worn: Smith 1998, 65-66 identifies two broad unchanging types used for statuary in the Roman imperial period, one the arm-sling type and the other one in which the himation was draped in a thick roll diagonally across the body, leaving the right arm free to gesture.

14. The arm-sling statue type appears to have originated in the

ue for those who identified themselves as involved in civic activities.[15] Indeed, it is highly possible that the arm-sling way of draping the toga was adopted at Rome in the late Republic, and by freedmen in particular, as a Romanised version of the established Greek form of dress. But, once the new form of toga was introduced under Augustus as the standard dress for elite Roman men, forms of dress which confined the arms in drapery and so restricted movement were associated at Rome with women: thus Roman toga-wearing men were distinguished from women and foreigners (especially Greeks) not only by their dress but also by their more open poses and dominant body language.[16]

So what did the Palmyrene men intend to convey when they adopted the arm-sling pose on their funerary reliefs? In adopting this form of dress and pose they were aligning themselves with elite residents of the Eastern half of the Roman Empire, more specifically citizens of the various cities of Greece and Asia Minor, who identified themselves as Greek citizens rather than Romans.[17] The dress and pose were associated with the civilian good citizen. The Palmyrene version of the pose, however, was not quite the same as the traditional stance inherited from Classical and Hellenistic Greece – or, indeed the pose used for the figures on the Roman funerary reliefs – in that the left arm was not left hanging by the side, covered in drapery, but was made visible and active, raised to above waist level and performing a gesture or holding an object. The individual gestures and objects may not

in themselves have been especially meaningful, as Heyn argues,[18] but collectively they represent not only a form of body posture that is different from the Greek model but also one which is more assertive. By making the left hand more active and visible they negate or at least weaken the modest and reticent image.

Pudicitia

The usual pose used for women on the Palmyrene portrait reliefs is one where one arm is raised from the elbow and held to the side of the face or neck (see figs. 6, 7 and 8):[19] a similar pose can also be seen on the full-length Roman relief from the Via Statilia (fig. 3) and the relief of L. Vibius and his wife Vecilia Hila (fig. 5).[20] This is often referred to as the Pudicitia gesture,[21] but while this is a convenient shorthand label it is misleading for two reasons. First, the term is used for a wide range of variations of the pose, which should perhaps not be seen as a single motif with a single 'meaning'. Secondly, the label 'pudicitia' itself imposes a specific meaning and limits other possibilities: once we have identified the label and its meaning no more need be said.[22]

A statue type widely used for portraits of women

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15. For a discussion of this pose as a demonstration of modesty and self-control (*sophrosyne*) in Athenian society see Zanker 1995, 43-48.

16. Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 49-50 suggests that making Romans visibly distinct from Greeks was a major intention of the Augustan change in toga style: the new style also encouraged body postures which communicated dominance and command rather than modesty and reticence. For the concept of dominant body language see Collett 2004, 36-70: chapter 2 'Dominant Tells'.

17. Smith 1998 discusses a number of instances in which the subject as a Roman citizen with a Greek background chose to be represented in the Greek pallium rather than the toga.

18. Heyn 2010, 640-641.

19. According to Heyn's statistics, some 71% of the female figures on the Palmyrene reliefs adopted this pose (187 out of 262 images): Heyn 2010, 634-635.

20. Unlike the hand held in the arm sling used for the male figures either arm may be raised: this applies not only to the Palmyrene reliefs but also to the Roman reliefs and statues.

21. Heyn 2010, 635 refers to the pose adopted by Palmyrene women as 'similar to the *pudicitia* gesture in Rome': Colledge 1976 does not use this term for the gesture displayed by the Palmyrene relief busts.

22. Heyn 2010, 635 questions whether the Palmyrene gesture 'had similar connotations of modesty and fidelity' to the Roman, and quotes Aldrete 1999, 65 n. 48 who says the pose was 'the only approved gesture available to women' and 'emphasized their modesty and subordinate attachment to a male'. Heyn questions whether the motif would have had the same 'concomitant social baggage' when used at Palmyra, but as I shall argue below this interpretation of the Pudicitia pose in Roman contexts is far too simplistic.

in the early Roman Empire has been called Pudicitia for a long time.[23] The pose of this type is characterised

goes back at least to the mid-eighteenth century. Alexandridis 2004, 261 identifies the Pudicitia as one of the most popular statue formats for portraits of Roman women: in her appendix 2.2.23 she lists 127 statues under seven variant types. The statue format was especially popular in the western half of the Roman Empire in the early imperial period.

23. Haskell and Penny 1981, 300-301 in discussing the statue in the Vatican known as 'Pudicity' suggest this identification

Fig. 7: Limestone relief from Palmyra with bust of a woman with her left hand raised to her cheek, named in the inscription as Aqme daughter of Habazi, British Museum, ME 125024, third century AD. (© Trustees of the British Museum).
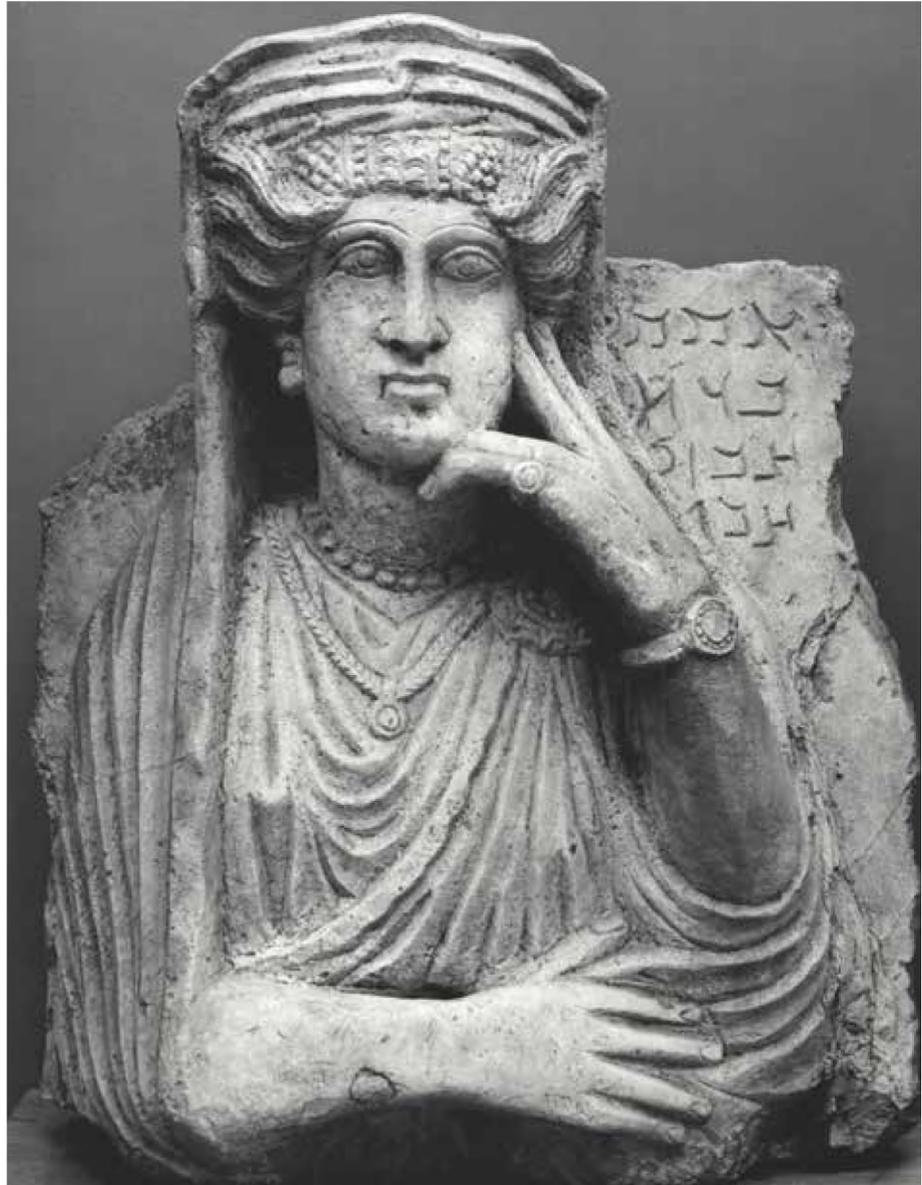
by a standing figure with one arm held horizontally across her torso at waist level and the other bent up at the elbow, which rests on the hand of the lower arm: the hand of the raised arm is held close to or touching the edge of her veil near her face or neck (see the female figure in fig. 3 and the woman on the right of fig. 5). There is in fact no positive evidence to identify this pose with the personification or concept of Pudicitia.[24]

Like the men's arm-sling pose its use for sculpted images of women originated in the Greek world and it was used in the Hellenistic Greek east for both honorific and funerary images of women.[25] It was adopted at

24. See *LIMC* VII, 589-592: the earliest identifiable image of

the personification of Pudicitia is the seated figure holding out her veil on the frieze of the Forum Transitorium in Rome (c. AD 90). Pudicitia also appears on Roman coins of the mid empire, but there is no consistency in the pose adopted.
25. For the early development of the type see Dillon 2007, 74.

Rome and in parts of the western empire especially for funerary statues, with the characteristic pose of the arms adapted also for seated figures. Its heyday was in the earlier imperial period, but unlike other standard statue types used for women it was not much used for empresses.[26] Although the statues all adopt a stance which is recognisably the same type, the placing of the raised hand and the carriage of the body can be varied in ways which give very different impressions of the woman portrayed, from glumly resigned to flirtatious. It is not simply an indicator of moral rectitude. The arm gestures of many Palmyrene women represented on the reliefs approximate to this pose, although here too there are several variations on the position of the raised hand, and the lower arm is often not held as far across the body at the waist: this means that the other hand is usually visible and may hold an object or a piece of the cloth of the mantle (as is the case with figs. 6 and 8).

The pose is often said to express female modesty, by which is meant sexual fidelity rather than self-effacing qualities. Even if the label Pudicitia was correctly applied to the pose, this term is rather more complex in meaning than the trite translation 'modesty' implies. Pudicitia was not merely a matter of remaining physically faithful to your husband: it also involved moral standing and public reputation, which were displayed by behaving in an appropriate way for a re-

spectable matron.[27] The label is only useful if the complexity of its connotations is appreciated. A deeper understanding of these connotations can be gained by analysing the body language of the pose and its variants. Holding the arms close into and across the body is seen in modern body language terms as defensive, expressing a desire to place a barrier between the self and the outside world represented by the viewer, and is a pose still today adopted more often by women than men.[28] The raised arm often touches, fingers or even grasps the edge of the veil worn over the head, suggesting a veiling gesture (see fig. 6 for a figure who looks as if she might be in the act of veiling,[29] also the seated female figure on fig. 10: the women represented in figs. 3 and 5 hold the veil but do not seem to be manipulating the drapery). It was this implication the figure was veiling herself that lent credence to the idea that the gesture alludes to female modesty, as the modest woman covers herself up when confronted by strangers, but it should also be pointed out that veil manipulation was not always performed as a gesture of modesty.[30] The raised hand, however, does not always touch and draw attention to the veil: it may rather rest on the cheek (as in fig. 7 – see also Vecilia Hila's index finger on fig. 5), which

Dillon suggests that the Pudicitia was the most common format for portrait statues of women in the Hellenistic period and for women on Hellenistic grave reliefs from the mid-2nd century BC onwards: she also discusses two well-known Hellenistic statues Diodora (Dillon 2010, 87-89 fig. 38) and Kleopatra, whose statue stood alongside that of her husband Dioskourides on Delos (Dillon 2010, 89-90, figs. 39-41). The development of the type is also discussed in Bieber 1977 chapter 11.

26. Davies 2013 argues that the statue types used for women of the imperial court in the western part of the Roman Empire at least adopted statue types with more open postures: the only certain representation of an empress in the Pudicitia type is a statue of Sabina in Vaison. It is interesting that the type does not seem to have been considered appropriate for statues of Livia, despite (or perhaps because of) its popularity at the time for statues of other women.

27. Langlands 2006, 23, 37, 72-74. Much of this book involves discussion of the various ramifications of the term Pudicitia and the concept of modesty: she suggests that Pudicitia's meaning is not consistent. Although primarily associated with women it could also be seen as a positive quality for men.
28. Wex 1979, 74 and 76, 128 and 132 reproduces photographs of women seated and standing adopting arm poses very like the Pudicitia stance. See also Collett 2004, 71-103: chapter 3 'Submissive Tells'.
29. Figure 6 is a limestone relief in the British Museum (ME 125023) representing Malkat daughter of Aid'an, dating AD 150-200.
30. For a discussion of veiling and the veiling gesture see Llewellyn-Jones 2003: the Roman use of the Pudicitia pose is discussed on pp. 172-173. A notorious example of veiling being used for reasons other than modesty is Poppaea, wife of Nero, who according to Tacitus would partly veil her face so as to tantalise the viewer – or because she thought it suited her to wear the veil that way.

Fig. 8: Limestone relief from Palmyra with the bust of an unknown young woman with her right hand raised to her neck. British Museum, ME 125016, AD 150-200. (© Trustees of the British Museum).
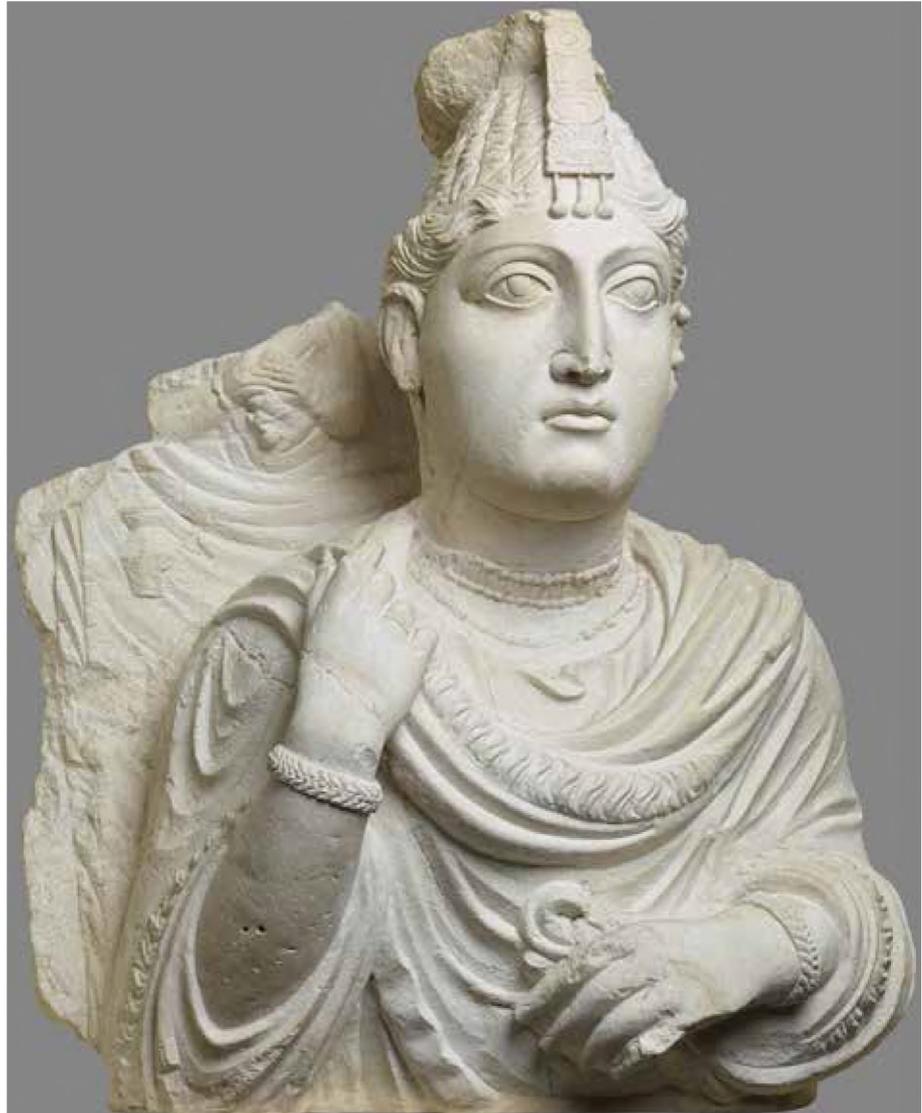
has been interpreted as an allusion to mourning,[31] or it may rest near the neck or collarbone (see fig. 8, where no veil was worn but the hand rests on the drapery round the shoulders).[32] The raised hand is often held in an ostentatiously elegant way which also serves to show off bracelets on the wrist as well as drawing the eye to the necklaces worn by the figure: this can result in an almost flirtatious effect, at least to modern eyes, as this is a pose used in modern glamour photography to draw attention to the delicate skin at the base of the

31. Figure 7 represents a relief in the British Museum (ME 125024), representing Aqme daughter of Habazi, dating to the third century AD. For the mourning interpretation of the motif see Dillon 2007, 74 who suggests this may have been the implication of some (but not all) of the earliest Greek representations of the pose, and Heyn 2010, 637; Colledge 1976, 139. A similar interpretation has been given for seated Roman funerary statues with the chin resting on the hand, but there is little to support this as the usual or universal meaning of the gesture.

32. Figure 8 represents a limestone relief with the bust of an unknown young woman in the British Museum, ME 125016, AD 150-200.

neck and the elegance of the hand gesture.[33] This perhaps is the implication of the hand gesture seen on the Palmyrene portrait of a young woman illustrated in fig. 8: she does not wear a veil but nevertheless holds her right hand up to the side of her neck, seemingly grasping the drapery round her shoulders and drawing attention to both the bracelet round her raised arm and the necklace round her neck. A similar gesture can be seen in the right hand figure on the Roman relief in the British Museum (fig. 4): although she is not veiled she raises the fabric draped round her shoulders with her right hand, which is completely covered so that only its outline can be discerned. The female figure on the full-figure relief from the Via Statilia (fig. 3) in fact displays elements of all three aspects of the raised arm: although she is grasping her veil in her raised hand her hand is held close to her neck in a way that emphasises her feminine grace and her forefinger nearly touches her chin.

The raised-arm pose (whether we call it Pudicitia or not) is gender-specific both in Rome and Palmyra: it is only used in Roman art for men who are categorised with the feminine other, such as defeated barbarians.[34] Here the defensiveness of the Pudicitia arm gesture is used to emphasise the submissiveness of the defeated enemies, but it also equates the vanquished with the female gender. As a posture it ex-

presses something to do with femininity, presumably seen as a good quality for women though not for adult men. Heyn suggests that on the Palmyrene reliefs the gesture takes over from the attribute of the spindle and distaff, a symbol of domesticity and female industry, but there is little to suggest that the gesture referred specifically to this aspect of the female ideal.[35] Rather, the gesture suggests behaviour appropriate to women of elite status and wealth in much the same way as the arm-sling pose adopted by men suggested the good citizen. The male arm-sling and female Pudicitia poses go together in both Palmyra and Rome (see figs. 3 and 5 for explicit pairings on the Roman reliefs where they provide an image of the exemplary citizen and his well-behaved wife).[36] But is there any indication in the body language of the Pudicitia pose with its more closed posture and the hint at veiling that the woman represented accepted her subordinate role as a woman and acknowledged her submission to her husband? Or was the gendered difference in pose neutral?

Although two instances of the Pudicitia pose on the Roman reliefs are illustrated here (figs. 3 and 5) this pose is in fact not at all usual on the funerary reliefs with half figures: the pose adopted by Vecilia Hila, Vibius' wife, is an exception. The pose is never used for men but it is not used as such a strong gender identifier as it is at Palmyra. On the relief of Ampudius (fig. 4) the wife on the right adopts a pose that has something in common with the Pudicitia pose, but the daughter on the left grasps her drapery in a manner similar to that of the male figures, albeit with the

33. Wex 1979, 70-71: 'another frequently observed position in women: the hand used as an ornament, almost like a brooch across the breast. A position of humility that strongly signals the lower part of the sex oriented hierarchy'. Goffman 1979, 31 in relation to the modern images he illustrates in his figs. 29-36 describes self-touching (all by women) as 'conveying a sense of one's body being a delicate and precious thing'.

34. The pose was used for one of the captives on the column bases of the arch of Septimius Severus in Rome, and a statue of a barbarian in Naples Archaeological Museum; it was also used for a funerary relief of a Gallus (eunuch priest of Cybele). Colledge 1976, pl. 71 illustrates a Palmyrene relief of a standing young male figure in the Pudicitia pose (in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, inv. 822): the pose may have been adopted to express the modest demeanour expected of the young. The figure Colledge illustrates in pl. 91 as possibly representing a eunuch in fact has been convincingly shown to be a young woman (Cussini 2000).

35. Heyn 2010, 632 and 636 suggests the changeover happened at the end of the 2nd century. Cussini 2005 argues for some Palmyrene women having a more public profile than was previously supposed (as they were honoured with statues and inscriptions) and also owning and managing property, and points to other attributes associated with them in the portrait imagery apart from spindles and distaffs such as keys and jewellery boxes, which hint at the management of wealth and household management which went beyond the traditional domestic task of wool working.

36. Bieber 1977, chapter 11 also treats them together, as male and female equivalents often used together.

other hand. Many of the women on the Roman reliefs have one hand emerging from a sling of drapery, and it is often the right hand, identical to the pose adopted by men (though unlike the men they may instead hold the left hand in a drapery sling).

Body language and relationships

The fact that some of the women on the Roman reliefs adopt poses similar to those of the men may suggest that within this social group at Rome there was less concern to differentiate the body language of men and women than there was at Palmyra. Roman reliefs indeed sometimes use similar gestures to indicate a connection between two figures, both when only two figures are shown and to distinguish a couple from the others when several figures are represented in a row.[37] The use of virtually identical hand gestures emphasises the accord between the two figures and their unity as a couple. This 'mirroring' phenomenon has been observed in the modern world: two people who feel in harmony with each other will adopt the same pose, and will change pose at the same time. Although the Roman examples usually involve married couples, the same gestures may also be used for two people who are related in other ways, such as two sisters.[38] The relationship which appears to have mattered most on the Roman funerary reliefs, however, was marriage. The close connection of a male and female figure could be indicated in one of three main ways, by turning the otherwise frontally placed figures slightly towards one another, by using the *dextrarum iunctio* (right handclasp) gesture to link them,[39] and

the use of similar poses, especially the placing of the hands, so the two figures appear to echo one another.

As the majority of the Palmyrene funerary reliefs depict a single figure, and their arrangement in their respective tombs is for the most part unknown, it is impossible now to rediscover or reconstruct similar connections between images of spouses or other related figures. There are however a smaller number of reliefs which show a pair of figures, and on one of these (fig. 9)[40] there appears at first sight to be complete equality between the male and female figures: she adopts the arm-sling pose of the male figures and like the male figure beside her both hands are held in front of her, clenched in a similar manner. But on closer inspection the male figure slightly overlaps the female, who is therefore behind him; she is veiled and holds a spindle and distaff in her left hand, whereas he holds a scroll. Their seemingly 'equal' partnership is subtly undermined. Heyn concludes from her study of the Palmyrene reliefs with two adult figures that they did not routinely use similar or echo gestures to identify family members or married couples.[41] It is perhaps significant that the relief illustrated in fig. 9 has a Greek inscription giving the names of the pair represented as Viria Phoebe and C. Virius Alcimus: the names are Roman rather than Palmyrene, and their shared *nomen* suggests they may be brother and sister or *coliberti* (i.e. freed slaves). They were not necessarily a married couple.

Although there is no sign of the *dextrarum iunctio* on the Palmyrene reliefs, a few reliefs do use another gesture to indicate a close connection between two family members: one puts one arm round the shoulders of the other with the hand resting on the shoulder furthest away. Heyn lists eight instances of this motif, four of them representing a 'mourning woman' with

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37. See Kockel 1993 catalogue nos. A6, B3, B4, E2, G4, G6 and G13 for male-female pairs.

38. The assumption is that these are married couples, although this is not explicitly stated in the accompanying inscriptions. The woman normally adopts the 'male' pose with the right arm in a sling of drapery. For an example with two women adopting this pose, see Kockel 1993, K16: both women are called Calpurnia, and their faces as well as poses are almost identical: they are thought to be sisters.

39. For the use of the *dextrarum iunctio* gesture to link a pair of figures on the Roman reliefs see Kockel 1993 nos. A7, E5, G7,

G9, K3, L1, L20, N15, O4 and O68. For the motif on other Roman monuments see Davies 1985.

40. Limestone relief in the British Museum (ME 125036) with two half-figures in the same pose, the woman on the left and man on the right. See Colledge 1976, pl. 76 (AD 100-150). This is listed in Heyn 2010 in appendix 3, no.3. Heyn lists double busts in her appendices 2 and 3, a total of 33 reliefs.

41. Heyn 2010, 639.

Fig. 9: Limestone relief from Palmyra with two half-figures in the same pose, the woman on the left and man on the right, named in the Greek inscription Viria Phoebe and C. Virius Alcimus in the British Museum, ME 125036, AD 50-150. (© Trustees of the British Museum).

her arm round her son in one instance, a daughter in two instances, and an unknown other woman in the fourth.[42] The other four instances represent a woman putting her arm round another woman, a woman with a man (in both cases the relationship is unknown), a brother with a sister, and an uncle with a nephew.[43] She also cites one relief on which a woman extends her arm to touch her husband on the elbow.[44] Touching gestures at Palmyra therefore were used to emphasise familial relationships, but although touch could be used between married couples it was more likely to be used to link other blood relations, especially between two generations.[45] The arm round or hand resting on the shoulder of a companion is a gesture also used at Rome, sometimes in conjunction with the *dextrarum*

42. The relief with a mourning mother putting her arm round her son is in the American University Museum, Beirut: see Colledge 1976, pl. 65; Heyn 2010, 638-639 fig. 6, app. 2 no. 1. The other three reliefs are listed as Heyn 2010 app. 2 nos. 3, 4, and 6.
43. Heyn 2010, 639 and app. 3 nos.5, 17, 1, and 24 respectively: this last example (with uncle and nephew) is also illustrated on p. 634, fig. 3. In addition Heyn 2010, 639 mentions a relief where a father may have had his arm round his daughter (app. 3 no. 25).

44. Heyn 2010, app. 3 no. 10: in the Louvre.
45. Colledge 1976, pl. 72 illustrates a full-figure relief which includes a standing woman placing her arm round the shoulders of a standing male figure beside her, Colledge identifies the scene as a nurse with three children, in which case the relationship is a close one between an adult and children, but it is not a relationship by blood.

Fig. 10: Limestone relief from Palmyra with a 'funerary banquet' scene, British Museum ME 132614, AD 200-273. (© Trustees of the British Museum).

iunctio, although this is not common on the half-figures reliefs, and, as at Palmyra, parents sometimes put their arms round their children.[46]

One other type of Palmyrene relief on which contrasting gendered body language can be seen is the banquet scene, seen here in fig. 10.[47] These scenes display a clear distinction between dominant male and subordinate female postures: men recline and women sit, often performing a veiling gesture. Their seated position signals their subordinate position in relation to the male, and their veiling gesture suggests their fidelity to him. This kind of funerary banquet scene, with reclining male and seated female figures, was also well-known in early imperial funerary art at Rome, but it did not originate there: like the armsling and the Pudicitia poses it came to Rome from the Greek world. The complicated question of the implications of such scenes for our understanding of actual dining practices in Rome have been investigated by Roller, who concludes that the Romans observed a posture hierarchy when it came to dining, with the

46. The representation of the *dextrarum iunctio* with one partner placing their left hand on the other's shoulder appears on other monuments such as ash chests and grave altars, but it is not usual on the half-figure reliefs (an exception is Kockel 1993, no. L19, and one unusual relief, no. F12 shows a wife reaching across to touch her husband): parents have their arms round children on two reliefs, Kockel 1993 nos. M1 and M2. For this use of touch as a gesture between husband and wife and parents and children in Roman art see Kampen 2009, 104-122.

47. This example is in the British Museum (ME 132614), AD 200-273. Other examples are illustrated in Colledge 1976, pl. 61 and 62: both are in the Louvre and show the woman frontally, but adopting the same pose as on the British

Museum example; also pl. 98, where she sits more in side view and raises her right hand rather than her left to her veil, and pl. 100 with children standing in the background.

most important/highest status people reclining, less important sitting, and the lowest status (servants) standing, but that despite their secondary status in Roman society women did routinely dine reclining beside their husbands.[48] As far as Rome was concerned the funerary banquet scenes reflect an outmoded morality, possibly inherited from Greece. Normal practice may have been different elsewhere in the empire: was it also considered correct for women to dine reclining in the eastern provinces of the empire, and what was the practice at Palmyra? Women could be shown reclining on their own (or only accompanied by servants and children) on funerary reliefs both at Palmyra and at Rome, but they may not be represented as actually dining when they are shown in this position, and they are not usually accompanied by men.[49]

Conclusion

A comparison of the body language represented on the Palmyrene funerary reliefs with those from Rome raises a number of questions. Do these images reflect the body language used in everyday life, or do they use artistic models taken over from elsewhere without them having much to do with the lived experience of the people represented? If the latter, did the various body postures retain the same meanings, or were they understood differently? Both the Romans of the late Republic and the Palmyrenes of the mid-imperial period appear to have adopted certain artistic models (such as the Pudicitia statue type) from the Hellenistic Greek world,[50] but to what extent did they re-inter-

pret them to suit their own circumstances? I would suggest that there are sufficient differences between the Roman, Palmyrene and original Greek versions of the gestures and body postures considered in this article to suggest that the reliefs did reflect to some extent actual body-language practice in these three cultures, and that what we can see is differences, in Bourdieu's terms, in the *habitus* of the three groups expressed through their bodily *hexis*:[51] thus the choice of pose and the precise details may not be particularly meaningful in each individual instance, but collectively they reveal something of the attitudes and the behaviours of a social group. Thus at Palmyra there was felt a need to emphasise gender differences through pose, while at Rome (on the so-called 'freedman' reliefs) gender differences in pose were not so important, but marital relationships were considered significant. Within the socially acceptable repertoire of poses and gestures available each individual had a small degree of choice, just as they did in opting for the costume they were to be depicted wearing: the clearest example of this is the double relief illustrated in fig. 9 with the same hand gestures adopted by both the figures, Greek inscription and Roman names. Costume, however, is likely to have been more a matter of conscious choice made to express the subject's cultural and ethnic identity: the same degree of awareness may not have applied to the choice of pose, but that does not make it any the less revealing. Finally, it should be borne in mind that the Roman reliefs considered here were made over a comparatively short time-span, albeit at a time when Roman society was changing rapidly, whereas the Palmyrene reliefs were made over a period of more than two centuries.

48. Roller 2003 and 2006.

49. For Palmyra see Colledge 1976, pl. 107 – although this figure reclines she does not have a cup or other objects that would suggest dining; Roman examples can be found on ash chests and grave altars: e.g. altar of Julia Capriola in the Museo Nazionale Romano: she reclines holding a cup in one hand and has a small table with more items on it in front of her.

50. For an honorific portrait statue (full-length, in the round, but unfortunately now headless) found at Palmyra see Colledge 1976, pl. 126.

51. See Bourdieu 1990, 52-70, and for bodily behaviour and gender in particular also Bourdieu 2001. The social groups in question do not comprise the whole of the population at Rome or Palmyra, but classes within them: the affluent but sub-elite class at Rome which was largely composed of freedmen and their families, and the leading families at Palmyra who had sufficient wealth and status to build monumental tombs.

Changes over time in the body language represented on the Palmyrene funerary reliefs is an aspect not considered here: that is a subject for future research.

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