

The Pious Butcher and the Physicians. Palmyrene Professions in Context

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At the same time as the great events of history were about to hit Palmyra, sweeping away Zenobia's imperial project and leading to her defeat, individual stories and private or official circumstances in the lives of Palmyrene citizens followed their course, as the dated written sources indicate.¹ Among the latest examples, in AD 268, Zabda and his wife Ba'altega, offered an altar because their god had answered to their prayers (PAT 0399). A fragmentary inscription of AD 273, after the Roman conquest, honours a list of participants to the *marzeah* (PAT 2812). They are identified by their names and, in some cases, by their functions or positions. Inscriptions from the tomb of Maliku, dated between AD 267 (PAT 0053, PAT 0054) and AD 273 (PAT 0055), show that the practice of selling portions of the monumental tombs continued, on the brink of the destruction of the city walls, as a consequence of the AD 273 anti-Roman upheaval. These texts allow only a glimpse into individual stories of those mentioned. Regrettably, we do not know the profession nor the age of Zabda and that of Ba'altega, or that of Dadion, Ummu and the other sellers and buyers mentioned in inscriptions from the tomb of Maliku (PAT 0053, PAT 0054, PAT 0055). These significant pieces of information were in fact seldom recorded in the monumental inscriptions.

Overall, the surviving names of professions and

crafts are about fifteen. They are mentioned in the Tariff, in funerary, honorific and dedicatory inscriptions.² I would like to analyze here some of the data in their context, focusing on the individual stories of Palmyrenes whose professions are recorded by the

2. 'mn' 'craftsman' (see below, PAT 0005, AD 148; PAT 0614, AD 148; PAT 0617 and PAT 0618, AD 172); 'sy' 'physician' (see below, PAT 0094, AD 99; PAT 0048 and PAT 0050, AD 213; PAT 0049, AD 214; PAT 0874; PAT 1558, AD 213); *glwþ* 'scribe' (see below PAT 1941, AD 62; PAT 0320, AD 113; PAT 1113); *znyh*, 'lymh' 'prostitute' (Tariff, PAT 0259: 47, 126, AD 137); *hyt* 'taylor' (PAT 0259: 139); *hšd* 'reaper' (PAT 2730); *tbh* 'butcher' (see below, PAT 0415); *ktwb* 'scribe' (PAT 2743, AD 243); [*mzbn*]y *nhty* 'dy hþkyn bmdyt' 'hucksters' (PAT 0259: 57); *nhtwm* 'baker' (see below, PAT 1458); *sbr* 'teacher' (PAT 1349), *qyny* 'smith' (PAT 0291, AD 258); *tgr* 'merchant' (PAT 1376, AD 81; PAT 0259, AD 137 and other examples). See, in addition, 'banker' *ⲡⲣⲁⲛⲉⲩⲧⲏⲥ*, in an epitaph from Beth She'arim (Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974, no. 92), Cussini, forthcoming. For a study of Palmyrene professions and functions or positions, Bounni 1990. Some of those entries have been differently interpreted. For example: his *škp* 'cordonnier' (p. 80) is unattested; his '*sbr* *maitre appareilleur ou tailleur de pierre*' (p. 81) is rather interpreted as 'teacher' (PAT 1349: 2); his '*nmzgn*' chef de cuisine' (p. 82) is read in PAT *m'mzgn* 'the one who mixes (wine in symposia)' (PAT 2743: 9), *qšš* he considered a synonym of '*þkl*' or *kmr*' (p. 82) probably means 'the elder' (PAT 0862: 2), not necessarily with a religious function. As for his *mšy'n*, read *ms'n* 'helpers, assistants' (PAT 2743: 9). Furthermore, among his *Métiers d'ordre social* (p. 84) the terms *mþrnsny* (PAT 0095) and *mrbyn* or *mrbyh* (PAT 0839, PAT 2695, PAT 0840 and other examples) rather indicate the legal role of those mentioned (Cussini 2016a). On his *gld* 'garde du corps' (p. 84) see Ingholt 1970–71, 183, see below, note 7. Finally the exact meaning of *bny þtrt*, (interpreted 'necropolis' p. 85 after Milik 1972, 61), escapes us.

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texts. Direct evidence consists of inscriptions and iconographic elements, mostly from funerary reliefs. Additional evidence is indirect.

As a first example, the noun ‘sculptor’ *glwṣ* is rarely attested in the inscriptions. In AD 113, Yarhay, whose name is written in smaller size characters and separated from the rest of a dedicatory inscription, signed his work of art, a bas-relief on a stone tablet (PAT 0320: 4).³ A reference to the one who produced the artefact is found in few other texts.⁴ An even rarer mention of painters is found in one inscription only, from Dura Europos (PAT 1091, AD 194).⁵ Despite the fact they are rarely cited in the inscriptions, sculptors and artists, or other specialized craftsmen operated in workshops around the city and were central figures in the framework of local professions. The Greek loanword ‘mosaic’ *ḥṣḥs*, alongside the personal name of a mosaicist, is a new addition to the epigraphic corpus (‘Diodotos made this mosaic’ *dydṭs ‘bd / ḥṣḥs d’*).⁶ The professional name ‘mosaic maker’ however, remains unattested in Palmyrene Aramaic. Mosaicists, who created the figured panels and the narrative scenes of this and other Palmyrene mosaics, were probably itinerant artists who completed their work with the help of locally trained skilled labour. In conclusion, the outcome of the efforts and craftsmanship of Palmyrene artists came down to us, while their personal names and professional designation, or other lexical items concerning their craft, are rarely or never re-

corded. The same is true for other professions. Although they are not mentioned in the inscriptions nor presented in iconography, a wide range of professionals and craftsmen were active in the city.

The funerary sculpture provides additional data to the scanty epigraphic references. In some cases the reliefs portray individuals alongside the distinctive tools of their craft. Regrettably, a study of the interplay of the visual representation of professions and the relevant lexical data is not always possible. In general, the attested names of professions are not accompanied by corresponding iconographic elements. Likewise, the funerary busts of professionals, identified as such by tools, items, or by the presence of animals (e.g. dromedaries) sculpted in the background do not mention professional names in the epitaphs. As an example, terms designating caravan leaders, caravan members and merchants, key-figures in Palmyrene economy are found in some inscriptions.⁷ Visual representations of individuals whose occupation dealt with caravans are also preserved: an inscribed funerary relief portrays a meharist or a caravan leader, with quiver and whip, and a dromedary in the background (PAT 1328, fig. 1).⁸ Or another inscribed funerary relief has two riders mounted on dromedaries (PAT 0988).⁹ In both cases, the surviving epitaphs do

3. See Long and Sørensen, this volume fig. 7 and Gnoli i this volume.

4. In honorific inscriptions: PAT 1941, AD 62; PAT 1410 (fragmentary), or in dedicatory texts: on altar, PAT 1719; on a stele from Dura Europos PAT 1113; from Berenike, Dijkstra and Verhoogt 1999.

5. Ll. 5-7: ‘... [Also], may commemoration be made of Elahshamash / son of Salat and [...] his son(s?) / who painted thi[s] picture ...’ On this inscription and its context, Cussini 2016 b.

6. Gawlikowski 2005. Note Syriac *ṣṣwḥ* ‘mosaicist’ in the mosaic of Orpheus taming wild animals from the vicinity of Edessa, Healey 2006. Here, as in the Palmyrene case, the artist’s signature is placed prominently beside Orpheus’ head. The mosaic, bought in 1999 by the Dallas Museum of Art, was returned to Turkey in 2012.

7. See the designations *rb ṣyrt* ‘caravan leader’ (in Greek *synodiarchai*, PAT 0197, or PAT 0294; later *archemporoi*, PAT 0282, or PAT 0288); *bny ṣyrt* ‘caravan members’ (PAT 1373, AD 161 and other examples), or *ṭgr* ‘merchant’ (PAT 0259, AD 137 etc.). The term *glydh* for Ingholt 1970-71, 193-199 ‘caravan leader’ (also Ingholt 1976, 103-105) is problematic. Found on a family banquet group from Maliku’s tomb, it identifies Shalman, portrayed behind the reclining Ba‘alai. Ingholt interprets it as Shalman’s professional designation, in connection to Ba‘alai’s commercial enterprises. Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995, 224, ‘highly uncertain’. For the inscription, not in PAT, Ingholt 1970-71, 183 (Yon 2013, no. 11a).

8. Palmyra Museum, A 202. A copy of this relief, made in the 1930s, is in Rome at the *Museo della Civiltà Romana*, Gaffiot et al., 2001, 254, no. 143.

9. Gaffiot et al., 2001, 292, no. 200. For other examples, Michalowski 1960, 145, no. 158 (Colledge 1976, no. 143); Yon 1998, fig. 2 (Palmyra Museum, 2093/7431), lower section of a funerary bed, with bas-relief of a man and his attendant,



Fig. 1: PAT 1328 (copy of the relief. © Gaffiot et al. 2001, pl. 143).

not make reference to their occupation. They record their names and patronyms only.¹⁰

The same lack of professional designations may be observed in other cases: funerary portraits of adult males associated with writing materials such as parch-

holding a dromedary at the halter. PAT 1632: funerary bust of a man and dromedary, damaged text *hbl* 'Alas,' Hvidberg-Hansen and Ploug 1993, 90, no. 47 = Hvidberg-Hansen 1998, no. 47. Also Michalowski 1960, 157, no. 172: fragmentary relief of a rider on dromedary (Palmyra Museum, CD 98). Colledge 1976, pl. 129: un-inscribed relief on monumental base of three seated dromedaries, Ingholt 1936, 83-125 (Sadurska and Bounni 1994, 186, figs. 33, 35, 80, 81). Dromedaries appear also on inscribed tesserae: e.g. PAT 2174 (Colledge 1976, 54, m); PAT 2176, PAT 2177, PAT 2178, PAT 2179, PAT 2239.

10. As an exception: Shalman, but as seen above, note 7, interpretation of the epithet *glyd* is problematic.

ment rolls, *schedulae*¹¹ and folding wax tablets could represent scribes, preceptors, judges (or other professionals who dealt with writing). That, however, is not confirmed by the accompanying epitaphs. A relief in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek shows a man with a *schedula* in his hand, while an unnamed youth, his servant or a pupil, holds a book-roll case and a polyptychon.¹² The epitaph records his name and genealogy and does not mention his profession (PAT 0679):

'Ala[s!]/Yarhay / son of Yarhay / son of Yarhay / (son of) Yadi'bel / (son of) Ya'ut.'

A comparable example may be observed in the relief of Zabda'ateh son of Dionys, which records a Palmyrene and Greek epitaph, with no reference to his profession (PAT 1826):

GREEK 'Zenobios / son of Dionysos.' ARAMAIC 'Alas! / Zabda'ateh / son of Dionys / (son of) Zabda'ateh.'¹³

The noun *ktwb* 'the scribe' (or secretary) is found twice: in an honorific (PAT 2743: 7, AD 243)¹⁴ and in a

11. The term indicates objects associated with male funerary portraits only. They have been interpreted as folded documents, perhaps legal documents, regarding the tombs, as some of them present a brief inscription reading *lbt 'lm* 'For the house of eternity (i.e. the tomb)'. For a new example of inscribed *schedula*, to be added to the *corpus*, al-As'ad et al. 2012, no. 33. For an inscribed bust of a man holding rolls not in PAT, Desreumaux and Briquel-Chatonnet 1997, no. 1, see below.

12. Colledge 1976, pl. 75. Other examples portray pupils and not professional scribes: Colledge 1976, pl. 82 (Dentzer-Feydy and Teixidor 1993, no. 221), epitaph lost, shows a writing youth, holding stylus and tablet. On the tablet: the last five letters of the Greek alphabet, in the reverse order, from ω to ν . For a new acquisition to the *corpus* see the funerary stela of a standing youth with polyptychon and the epitaph 'dynt / brh / [h]bl 'Odainat, his son, alas!' al-As'ad et al. 2012, no. 28.

13. For an image of this and of another relief, PAT 1822, belonging to the same family group, with no further discussion, Bounni 1989, 261, pl. 41 b.

14. Ll. 6-7: 'Remembered and blessed be ... 'Ogailu the secretary.' In addition, the text contains mentions of other officials: 'Zabbay, son of Shu'ada, who was in charge of the

dedicatory text (PAT 1712). The professional designation ‘the preceptor (?),’ *sbr*’, occurs once in an honorific Greek and Palmyrene inscription (PAT 1349):

ARAMAIC ‘Commemorated be Attiocha / the teacher. Commemorated be Elahsha / son of Dionys’ (with Aramaic *sbr*’ corresponding to Greek καθιγητής).

A visual representation of the pious butcher is not known. His existence would have entirely escaped us, were it not for a dedicatory inscription (PAT 0415) he offered to the so-called Anonymous God, whose cult developed during the second and third century AD.¹⁵ The deity was worshipped at the source ‘Afqa and in the Diocletian Camp area, as shown by hundreds of altars found in both places. As we reconstruct from his dedication, Makkay the butcher, his name only partly preserved, offered an altar to that god invoked, as usual, by the euphemism ‘BlessedBeHisNameForever’. The text is partly damaged and the date formula is not preserved. As in numerous comparable texts of this type, a third century dating seems probable.

1 [lbryk] šmh l’lm’ ṭb’

2 [’]bd [w]mwd’ m[gy] ṭbh’

3 [’]lhywh w[hy]’ ‘tth

4 [wb]nwh [...]

‘[For Blessed-Be-]His-Name-Forever, the Good / Ma[kkay], the butcher [ma]de [in th]anksgiving / [fo]r his life and [the life of] his [wi]fe / [and] his [ch]ildren [...].’

Although damaged, brief and to some extent stereotypical, the inscription offers some insights into Makkay’s life. He was married and had children, although how many he had, their names and ages are not known. Makkay’s devoutness to the Anonymous God included his family: when he offered the altar, he mentioned his wife and children. Following his name, recorded without a patronym, is the professional des-

ignation, *ṭbh*’ ‘butcher,’ found in this inscription only.¹⁶ No information regarding butchers and their trade or, in more general terms, the issue of meat consumption are preserved in the Palmyrene epigraphic corpus. As we know from the inscriptions, at Palmyra meat was eaten in the *marzeah* and certainly in private meals as well. However, references to its preparation or consumption are not recorded. The only occurrence of the noun ‘meat’ *bšr*, is partly reconstructed in a fragmentary text of difficult interpretation, which probably involved the organization of the *marzeah* and also mentions bread and water.¹⁷ Nothing else is known with regard to Makkay and his professional or private life, apart from the fact he had the necessary means to dedicate an altar to his god. His offering was perhaps an ex-voto, as the wording ‘he made, in thanksgiving’ may indicate.

A comparable example of devotion to the same god is shown by a baker (PAT 1458). The inscription contains his patronym, while his name is lost. As in the previous case, sometime in the third century, this baker, the son of Bassa, offered a small altar to the Anonymous God:

1 bryk šmh

2 l’lm[’] ṭl[’]

3 dnh ‘bd

4 [.]lm[...]

5 brbs’ nḥtwm’

6 ‘lhy[why why]’

7 bnyhy

‘Blessed-Be-His-Name- / Foreve[r.] [.]ln[...] / son of Bassa, the baker / made / this [al]tar / for [his] life [and the life] / of his children.’

The designation ‘the baker’ *nḥtwm*’, a loanword from Akkadian *nihatimmu*, is found in this inscription only. Differently from Makkay, the baker does not mention

kitchen and Yarhibola, the cupbearer, the one who mixed the wine and all the assistants.’ See above, note 2.

15. An aspect of the cult of Baalshamin or of Yarhibol, perhaps inspired by Jewish monotheism, du Mesnil du Buisson 1978; Teixidor 2005, 211.

16. Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995, 419, citing Widengren 1971, 224 who considers it a loan from Akkadian; differently Kaufman 1974 does not list it as such. In fact, the term is found in Old Aramaic in the Tel Dan bowl, Avigad 1968 and in Official Aramaic, in an ostrakon from Arad, Naveh 1981.

17. PAT 2775: [... b]šr wllhm wm[n ...] ‘[me]at and bread and wa[ter ...].’ Milik 1972, 184–185, 300–303.



Fig. 2: Pie or leavened bread with almonds or pine-nuts, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek IN 1084 (© Palmyra Portrait Project. By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).

his wife, but his children only. As in the previous case, it is not possible to recover additional information concerning this baker and his work. The only extant references to bread are preserved in the just mentioned text of difficult interpretation (PAT 2775: '[... me]at and bread and wa[ter ...]'), and in a curse accompanying an inscription of foundation of a tomb (PAT 0574): 'And may he not have enough bread and water,' an example of the so-called 'futility curse' of the earlier Aramaic tradition.¹⁸

Some funerary reliefs have preserved a representation of what could possibly be a baked product, per-

haps a small pie or leavened bread, with a dome-shaped top decorated by lozenges, probably indicating almonds or pine-nuts (fig. 2). This food appears inside a small container in the hand of women who accompany and comfort the dead, who are also portrayed in the same reliefs.¹⁹ The pie or bread could be interpreted as a symbolic food to be consumed in connection to burial rites or during the period of mourning.²⁰ It is impossible to say whether it represented a home-made preparation, or involved a professional, such as a baker.

As mentioned above, there are no extant funerary portraits of individuals referred to as butchers and bakers. On the other hand, a person designated as 'the master craftsman' 'mn' is known thanks to the lower section of a relief, which originally belonged to a family banquet scene.²¹ The portraits of Mokimu the craftsman and of his wife Tadmor are carved side by side, underneath a banquet bed (PAT 0005, AD 148):

RIGHT OF MALE BUST 'Alas! / Mokimu / the master craftsman / son of Nurbel / son of Zabda.' RIGHT OF FEMALE BUST 'Alas! / Tadmor / wife of / Mokimu / son of Nurbel / son of Zabda / the master craftsman.' LEFT OF FEMALE BUST 'Died / the 29th day / of Siwan, / year 459.'

In addition to this double portrait, the individual relief bust of Tadmor has survived. It records her AD 148 epitaph, with mention of her husband's profes-

19. E.g., PAT 0021: a mother embracing her son and a small container of this food in her hands, Colledge 1976, pl. 65; or PAT 2813, two children with their mother and another woman, both women hold a cup with this food. Fig. 2: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek IN. 1084, a woman with a cup showing this food, with detail of almonds.

20. It could represent a dish made of boiled wheat, almonds and raisins consumed after the funeral by the participants, Seyrig 1951, 35, with reference to modern parallels of dish prepared with similar ingredients, documented in the Arab world (*slyqā*) and in Greece (*kollyva*). In this last case with precise reference to consumption after the funeral. Ploug 1995, 107.

21. Sabeh 1953, 19, pl. I, 2. The relief was purchased by the Damascus Museum from a resident of Palmyra and information on its findspot is not available.

18. On treaty curses, Hillers 1964. On this curse in PAT 0574, Cussini, 2016 b.

sion. While the banquet scene was placed in a wider area such as an exedra, or in a recess in a hallway, the individual relief of Tadmor sealed her burial niche and it is therefore earlier than the complete banquet group celebrating her son.²² Her epitaph (PAT 0614) reads:

ON RIGHT 'Alas! Tadmor / wife of / Mokimu, son of / Nurbel / the craftsman. / Died the / 29th day' ON LEFT 'of Siwan, / year 4.[100] / +40+10+5+2[+2].'

On the basis of the available evidence, it is not possible to say what was Mokimu's area of expertise, or further investigate the role and position of professionals of this type. Although few examples only of Palmyrene professional names survive, it seems likely that workers associated in guilds. Therefore, Mokimu the 'master craftsman' probably belonged to one such association. The existence of guilds is hinted to by a Greek and Palmyrene inscription of 258 CE (PAT 0291) and by a Greek epitaph from Beth She'arim.²³ The difficult Aramaic *qny* 'association (?)' and the Greek loanword *tgm* (ταγμα) are found in PAT 0291.²⁴ It originally accompanied a statue of Septimius Odainat, Zenobia's husband, and was offered by 'the

association of metal-workers in gold and silver' (*tgm' dy qyny* 'bd' dhh' wksp'). A possible representation of a jeweller, or perhaps of a smith, wielding a hammer, with the inscription 'the treasury of Bel' is found on a tessera (PAT 2042).²⁵

Professionals referred to as physicians are known as well. The first instance is found in a group of funerary inscriptions from the same tomb: a physician is the grandfather of Maliku, who built and dedicated the tomb, known as the Hypogeum of Maliku, in AD 120 (PAT 1218):

'This hypogeum was built by Maliku, son of / Maliku, son of Nurbel, the physician, for himself / and for his children and for his grandchildren, in their honour / forever. In the month of Nisan, year 432.'

Three AD 213 cession texts from that tomb record the sale of burial spaces. Nurbel 'the doctor' is the two sellers' great-great-grandfather (PAT 0048 and PAT 0050, AD 213; PAT 0049, AD 214).²⁶ In two instances, PAT 0050 and PAT 0049, the noun 'sy', a loanword from Akkadian *asû*, is introduced by the expression *dy mtqr* 'sy' therefore, 'who is called 'the doctor'.' This specification could also be explained as the nickname of the sellers' ancestor. On the basis of these texts, it is hard to ascertain whether Nurbel was really a physician. However, the occurrence of this professional name referred to him without the specification *dymtqr*' (PAT 0048), alongside other attestations, including perhaps his funerary stele (see below), point to a real professional designation.²⁷

22. The upper portion of this relief, today in New York, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, portrays their son Zabdibol and his children: (PAT 0615) 'Zabdibol, son of Mokimu, son of Nurbel, son of Zabda, [so]n of 'Abdai, (son of) [Zabdi]bol. Tadmor, his daughter. Mokimu, his son. 'Alayyat, his daughter.' Mention of Mokimu the craftsman is found in two funerary reliefs of Shu'adel, another son of Zabdibol, PAT 0617 and PAT 0618, AD 172: 'Alas! Shu'adel son of Zabdibol son of Mokimu the craftsman. Died the 3rd day of Kanun, the year 484.' These last epitaphs present the same text with a slightly different layout. It may well be that PAT 0617 was originally part of the family banquet group PAT 0615. PAT 0618 is at The Metropolitan Museum of Art; present location of PAT 0617 is unknown to me.

23. Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974,² no. 61: Μημοίων Λεο / ντίου πατρὸς / του ῥίββι Παρ / ηγορίου καὶ / Ἰυλιανὸν παλ. / ατίνου ἀπὸ χροῦ / οἰχόν. For a discussion of this and other inscriptions mentioning Palmyrene Jews, Cussini, forthcoming.

24. PAT, Glossary, 406; Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995, 1016–1017, uncertain meaning 'association,' with reference to the discussion by Milik 1972, 160–162. Yon 2002, 99.

25. For a mention of this tessera, RTP 36, Colledge 1976, 55.

26. PAT 0048: 'Julius Aurelius Nurbel and Male, children of Maliku the elder son of Maliku (son of) Maliku (son of) Nurbel, the physician'; PAT 0050 'Julius Aurelius Nurbel and Male children of Maliku the elder son of Maliku son of Maliku son of Nurbel, who is called the physician,' and PAT 0049 'Julius Aurelius Nurbel and Male [children of] Maliku the elder son of Maliku son of Maliku son of Nurbel, who is called the physician.' Two earlier cession texts (PAT 0044 and PAT 0045, AD 186) by the same Julius Aurelius Nurbel, mention the ancestor Nurbel, without his professional designation.

27. Makowski 1985, 77 considered it a real professional

Three undated epitaphs from the same tomb mentioning Nurbel in two cases, and Maliku in another, confirm that medicine was a profession within this family.²⁸ The first is an archaic funerary stela portraying a standing man before a *dorsalium*. His epitaph mentions his profession: 'sy' 'the physician.'²⁹ The others are two later funerary busts: one portrays Maliku, possibly the son of the previous one,³⁰ while the last one his son, also named Maliku.³¹ The available data on Nurbel and his family from the tomb of Maliku, do not offer more information about their lives and professions. Despite the lack of additional evidence, it seems likely that those referred to as 'sy', or *dy mtqr* 'sy' were actually physicians.

Earlier, in AD 99, a man called 'Abda'astor, son of Nurbel, the physician, built a tomb (PAT 0094). In this case Nurbel's genealogy is preserved as well. Although it occurs in this inscription and not in the previous ones from the tomb of Maliku, he could be the same Nurbel.³²

designation: 'le grand père de Malikhô, fondateur de l'hypogée fouillé par H. Ingholt, était médecin.'

28. It is sometimes unclear whether the professional designation refers to the first one in the genealogical sequence, or to that person's father, since it is placed right after the patronym. Other inscriptions (e.g. PAT 0094) indicate that epithets are referred to the first name, even if they immediately follow the patronym. On this issue, Ingholt 1966, 460.

29. Ingholt 1966, 460: 'Alas! / Nurbel / son / of Maliku / the physician,' not in PAT. Yon 2013, no. 6, suggests to read *ydy'bl* 'Yadi'bel' instead of *nrbel*, with reference to al-As'ad and Yon 2007, 102, n° 1, upon collation of the inscription. However, on the basis of other inscriptions (below) and the reconstructed genealogy, their reading is not entirely convincing.

30. Ingholt 1966, 464: '[M]aliku / [son of Nur]bel / the physician,' not in PAT. Yon 2013, no. 7.

31. Ingholt 1966, 465: not in PAT. Yon 2013, no. 8 'Maliku son of / Maliku, son of / Nurbel / the physician,' the builder of the tomb (PAT 1218) and the grandfather of the two sellers (PAT 0048 and PAT 0050, AD 213; PAT 0049. For an image, Tanabe 1986, pl. 280.

32. In other words, 'Abda'astor would be another son of Nurbel, the brother of the above mentioned Maliku, who built his own family tomb in AD 120 (PAT 1218).

'This eternal home was made by 'Abda'astor, son of Nurbel / the physician, son of Kohelu, son of 'Atenur, (son of) Asulay, for himself and for his children. / In the month of Nisan, 410.'

Αβδαασθω[ρο]ν Νουρβηλου
ο [ια]τρος

Here the professional name 'sy', which follows the patronym, should be attributed to 'Abda'astor. This is confirmed by the two-line Greek inscription which records the builder's name and, partly restored, the professional name *iatros* in agreement with 'Abda'astor's name.³³ Therefore, the profession would refer to 'Abda'astor and not to Nurbel. From the same tomb is the funerary bust 'Abd'astor's son Buna. In his genealogy, the professional name 'the physician' appears after Nurbel's name, and it could be referred to him or rather to 'Abd'astor, as in the previous inscription:

RIGHT 'Buna, son of / 'Abd'astor, son of / Nurbel / the physician. / Alas!' LEFT 'Shu'at / Shu'at / and Mezabata / his daughters. / Alas!'³⁴

Another mention is found in the undated epitaph of Habba, the daughter of Male 'the physician' (PAT 0874), from an unidentified tomb. Although data concerning the original whereabouts of her relief are not known, it is likely that she was buried in her husband's family tomb, or in a row of niches belonging to her acquired family. There, traces of her family of origin were not preserved, apart from her father's name and his prestigious professional identity, mentioned in her epitaph. The funerary relief of 'Male the physician' is not known and probably was placed in a different tomb. In regards his portrait, one wonders whether it would have shown any professional tools. The lack of additional genealogical elements makes it impossible to connect Habba's epitaph to other inscriptions mentioning individuals called Male, which was quite a common name in Palmyrene onomastics. Likewise, it is also impossible to set her relief in the

33. Ingholt 1966, 460 n. 15.

34. Desreumaux and Briquel-Chatonnet 1997, no. 1.

context of a known tomb and to connect her to her husband's family, since his name is not mentioned.

Finally, the professional designation 'sy' is found in an inscription of different kind: an AD 243 dedicatory text, which records the offer of a banquet hall to the Anonymous God (PAT 1558):

'This banquet hall³⁵ [...] / for Blessed-Be-His-Name-Fo[re]ver, the Merciful / the Good, and for the group(?) of elected ones of the temple / o[f] Bel: Malak, the private (?) physician / son of Mokimu, son of 'Akiba, for him / and for his children and for his children's children and for the satisfaction (?)³⁶ / of the group, forever. In the month of 8 Nisan, the year 554. / May be remembered before the Merciful, Sa'id / son of Nabuzabad son of Sa'id, his patron/friend.'

In this case the profession of the dedicator is further specified by the adjective *gwy*' a problematic term found here and in another instance only, in a funerary epitaph (PAT 0595). In that case the adjective referred to another professional, a secretary.³⁷ Therefore, the expression *gwy*' 'sy' could be understood as 'the *personal* physician,' or 'the *private* physician.'³⁸ Interpretation of this adjective remains open. Whatever his role was in the framework of Palmyrene society, or which type of physician he was, Malak was undoubtedly a wealthy man, who could afford the construction of a banquet hall.

The epigraphic corpus has not preserved additional information concerning Palmyrene physicians. Examples of sets of Roman age bronze and copper medical and pharmaceutical tools excavated in Syria, illustrate the kits used for ancient pharmacopeia preparations (or cosmetic) and medications: forceps, scalpels, spoon and spatula probes, the last ones used

for applying medicaments and cauterizing.³⁹ While other medical tool-kits are known from Syria, none have survived from Palmyra.

Palaeopathological analysis conducted on skeletal remains from Tombs A, C and F, excavated by the Japanese Mission as of 1990, have shown evidence of bone and dental pathologies.⁴⁰ The majority of adult males showed signs of polyarticular inflammatory arthritis, while deformation caused by bone fractures and resulting from the healing process were observed as well.⁴¹ A consistent deformation, explained as a serious femur fracture and the result of a rather complex and painful healing process (Sarcophagus-Upper, Pl. 72),⁴² could be an indication of a different pathology, an osteosarcoma. A case of what seems to be an osteoma or a benign tumor of the right humerus may be observed in an adult male (M2-2C, Pl. 74).⁴³ The skull of an elderly man shows traces of a depressed fracture, resulting from a violent blow (L4-oB, Pl. 87). As the palaeopathologists have concluded, it seems likely that he survived his injury.⁴⁴ It is impossible to say whether these patients were assisted by a physician, although the malunited fractures show they were treated and had to be immobilized in the healing process.

The surviving archaeological data do not offer any information about the professional life of Palmyrene physicians or where and how they practiced. The epigraphic evidence, which records the dedication of a banquet hall, or the problematic designation *gwy*', seem to indicate that Palmyrene physicians enjoyed a relevant social status and had a considerable personal wealth. The same applies to members of the families mentioned earlier, who built monumental tombs.

35. The noun *smk'* is not entirely readable.

36. Naveh 1982: *wlbny bnwhtw lsb't'* 'and for the sons of their sons for the seven ones.'

37. PAT 0595: a man who is called 'the trusted counsellor.' On this Cussini 2000. In addition, see PAT 0043: 5, where *gwy*' is a technical term indicating *internal* burial niches.

38. This Malak, a truncated name, could be the father of Amata, known from a funerary bust (PAT 1039: 'Amata / daughter of / Malakel, (son of) / Mokimu. / Alas!').

39. For images, Gaffiot et al. 2001, 333, pl. 88, 89.

40. Nakahashi et al., 2001, esp. 158-161.

41. Nakahashi 1994, 107.

42. For Nakahashi, 1994, 107, the bone broke in two points and it healed in a bent position.

43. Analysis of the other bones did not show other signs of the same pathology, therefore this individual probably suffered from a localized benign tumor.

44. Nakahashi et al. 2001, 160. The internal portion of the skull depression shows it was not opened, and that man died later on, probably of different causes.



Fig. 3: House of Achilles, peristyle court (© Stern 1977).

In this context, reflecting upon the issue of wealth and status, I would like to connect the professional figure of an unknown physician to a richly decorated mansion located in a residential area east of the temple of Bel, excavated between 1939 and 1941. It is generally assumed that the lavish Palmyrene private mansions were the dwellings of the rich mercantile *aristocracy*. However, a striking decorative motif from that domestic context, has led me to think that a different owner, perhaps a physician, could be considered. In terms of comparison, worth noting is the fact that in the second century AD a surgeon or a physician lived in a richly decorated *domus* with mosaic pavements and frescoed rooms (fig. 3).⁴⁵ The *domus*,

45. Ortalli 2007 with previous bibliography. On the mosaics Stoppioni 1993, the narrative scene depicts Orpheus taming animals. The building was destroyed by a fire around the half of the 3rd century AD.

excavated in Italy, in Rimini, ancient *Ariminum* in 1989, has yielded an exceptional collection of about 150 surgical tools and pharmaceutical vessels indicating that, at least in its last phase, it was the house and the *taberna medica* of Eutyches, a skilled surgeon of probable Greek origin.⁴⁶

The Palmyrene domestic structure known as ‘House of Achilles’, takes its name after the main narrative panel of the peristyle court, showing Achilles among the daughters of Lycomedes.⁴⁷ Remnants of the pavement on another side of the same court display an octagonal panel with an enthroned beardless

46. For a study of the surgical and pharmaceutical tools, Jackson 2003.

47. For a monograph on this and the mosaic of Cassiopeia, Stern 1977. See also Colledge 1976, 106; Frézouls 1976, 40. More recently, Balty 2014, unavailable to me as I wrote and submitted this paper.

Fig. 4: House of Achilles, mosaic depicting Asklepios (© Ted Kaizer. By permission of the Museum of Palmyra).



Asklepios, identified in Greek (fig. 4). He holds the snake-encircled staff in his left hand and pours wine on a small altar.⁴⁸ The pavement has other octagonal, round and square panels: one with Dionysos and another with the head of Medusa.⁴⁹ The figures in the remaining panels are too damaged to be identified. This mosaic is the only surviving Palmyrene representation of Asklepios. At Palmyra, the snake-encircled staff is the attribute of the Canaanite god Shadrafa, portrayed on a relief accompanied by a dedicatory in-

scription (PAT 0318).⁵⁰ The scorpion and the two-headed serpent symbolize his capabilities to heal and protection from poison. His name contains by the root *ῥῥ'* 'to heal' and in this sense could be compared to Asklepios.⁵¹

It is impossible to reconstruct the complete decorative project of this mosaic pavement, which surrounded the peristyle court adjoining a reception hall. The choice of Asklepios as the subject of one of the figured panels was a meaningful one and perhaps could be linked to the patron's profession. This is ob-

48. H. 1.59 m; W. 1.66 m. For images: Colledge 1976, pl. 141; Stern 1977, 22, figs. 3, 16; Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, pl. II (ph. Ted Kaizer). For a late second-early third century AD mosaic of Asklepios from domestic context in Kos, Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 26-29.

49. Stern 1977, 23-25. Each is surrounded by eight smaller panels decorated by alternated Solomon knot, chain and geometric and floral motifs.

50. British Museum, inv. 125206, Colledge 1976, pl. 27. Shadrafa is mentioned on tesserae: PAT 2292; PAT 2294; PAT 2296; PAT 2297. Other tesserae display his image or symbols: the snake and the scorpion: PAT 2293, or un-inscribed examples: Ingholt et al. 1955, RTP 320, RTP 323, RTP 324, RTP 327.

51. du Mesnil du Buisson 1962; Dupont-Sommer 1976; Gawlikowski, 1990, 2646-2647.

viously a mere hypothesis, since most of the figured panels which contained other significant representations are no longer identifiable. I would not rule out the possibility that one of them could have displayed the patron himself. This was probably the case of another early third century AD mosaic from an unknown Edesean domestic context, inspired by the *Iliad* and combining Homeric characters to real ones, including the owner of the house.⁵²

The prominence given to the panel of Asklepios in the Palmyrene domestic mosaic indicates that the house owner held that god in great consideration. The mosaic pavement, conceived for the reception area of the house, open to guests, conveyed an indication of the owner's wealth. It was also a meaningful representation which contained elements illustrating his education, his visual culture and interests, including the portrait of Asklepios, perhaps his protector and maybe, a reference to his profession.

No visual representation of Palmyrene butchers or bakers have reached us. The only exceptions known so far is the funerary bust of a physician,⁵³ and that of Mokimu, the 'master craftsman' (PAT 0005). Mokimu's relief, however, did not have the function to seal his burial niche. It was part of a banqueting group celebrating the whole family, commissioned by his son, portrayed reclining on the banquet couch. In both cases, there are no peculiar tools associated to the portraits of the physician and of the master craftsman.

The surviving mentions of names of profession in the largest section of Palmyrene Aramaic sources, the funerary content are limited. It derives that it was not felt necessary to represent nor to state one's occupation in the funerary portraits and in the relevant epitaphs. At least three of the extant references to physicians come from cession texts. Those, as we know, were monumentalized extracts from legal documents and they originally contained different types of information, not recorded in the funerary epitaphs. With

few exceptions, names of professions are seldom recorded. In other words, within the context of his family tomb, a person did not feel necessary to be qualified in terms of what he did for living. Different is the case of the Tariff, where references to professions are functional to the indication of taxation imposed on different types of workers. In honorific inscriptions one finds mostly reference to positions, rather than professions, with exceptions represented by merchants, caravan leaders and the like. With regard to dedicatory texts and, specifically, religious dedications, the examples examined may indicate that those offering felt the need to be identified in terms of their mundane role, to mark their individuality and specificity, among hundreds of other devotees. Perhaps this is why Makkay the butcher, or the unnamed baker, or Malak, the *private* physician stated their professions.

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52. Drijvers and Healey 1999, Cm 3, 211, pl. 66 and Cm 4a-b, pl. 67, Jerusalem, Bible Land Museum. For an image and epigraphic discussion, Drijvers and Healey 1999, 213.

53. Nurbel, or Yadi'bel, see above, note 29.

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