

# Grave Secrets: The Influence of Hellenistic and Eastern Cultures on the Funeral Art and Architecture of Palmyra

*Regina Head, UAH Department of Art and Art History*



## Overview

This study examines the funeral art and architecture dating to the first three centuries C.E. in the prosperous trade city of Palmyra, located in what is now Syria. A buffer state of the Roman Empire, the city's location on an oasis placed it into a position to absorb influences from the different cultures, customs, peoples, and religions that passed through the region. This contact led to a distinct form of art that combined Hellenistic and Eastern cultures and merged it with local traditions. The tombs and funeral art of Palmyra offer a wealth of information on the local inhabitants and the changing, multicultural society in which they lived.

## Conclusions

Palmyra wished to identify with both Rome and their Eastern neighbors. They included both Hellenistic and Eastern attire, accessories, gestures, and symbols in portraits and reliefs of the deceased.

Hellenistic underground tombs took the place of Eastern tower tombs as Rome's influence in the area increased.



## Impact

By studying the tombs and funeral art of ancient Palmyra we gain a better understanding of the inhabitants and their changing culture. Traditional studies from the Western perspective place a greater influence on Greco-Roman influences on the art. Closer inspection reveals considerable influence from Persia and other Eastern cultures.

Due to the current conflict in Syria, the ruins of Palmyra are in danger of being damaged and research at the site is difficult. By studying the funeral art and architecture of ancient Palmyra we gain a better understanding of the inhabitants and their changing culture. This perspective allows us to obtain a wealth of information on a transforming, multicultural society.

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