

Press Release

## **The Road to Palmyra – Exhibition: 20.09.2019 - 01.03.2020**

**Presenting the largest collection of ancient Palmyrene tomb sculptures outside of Syria, *The Road to Palmyra* at The Glyptotek is the first exhibition in Denmark devoted to the culture of Palmyra: an ancient oasis city located in present-day Syria.**

At a time where globalisation, migration and cultural conflict permeate the agenda, Palmyra attracts attention with its fascinating history as one of the ancient world's most sophisticated and multicultural societies and the current conflicts in Syria have brought about a renewed focus on the value of its unique cultural heritage. *The Road to Palmyra* features a broad presentation of the area's special history and marks the return of the Palmyrene tomb sculptures from Los Angeles, where they have been on loan to The J. Paul Getty Museum since 2018.

Christine Buhl Andersen, Director of The Glyptotek, says: *"It is with great pleasure that we will be able to welcome our collection home again and to present the visitors to the Glyptotek a unique insight into the fascinating history of the oasis city Palmyra. With our unique collection of sculptures we can offer an insight not only into the life lived in ancient Palmyra but also into how the city's history has been interpreted through the ages."*

Located at the Efqa Spring in the Syrian Desert - halfway between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean - this oasis city was the easternmost bastion of the Roman Empire and a natural nodal point between trade and caravan routes. It was thus a centre for the exchange of both goods and culture between East and West and a vibrant meeting point for various civilisations. The caravans that travelled through Palmyra brought silk from China; cotton, spices, jewellery and dyestuffs from India; ivory from Africa; myrrh and incense from Arabia, and wine, metals and glass from the West. It is also in Palmyra that we encounter the story of the legendary queen, Zenobia.

Organised by Anne Marie Nielsen, curator of Greek and Roman art at the Glyptotek, and focussing on the first three centuries CE, when Palmyra played an important role locally, regionally and globally, this exhibition takes the Glyptotek's own unparalleled collection of ancient tomb sculptures from the city as its point of departure. The more than 100 portraits included in the exhibition constitute an important and specific aspect of the ancient city's cultural monuments; they are supplemented by sculptures and other items from the Roman Empire, photographs from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, paintings, and much more. One special installation will take the form of a Palmyrene burial chamber where visitors will experience a sense of how it must have felt to enter one of Palmyra's tombs whilst they still had an active function.

The Glyptotek's collection of Palmyrene portrait sculptures has in recent years been the focus of comprehensive research by way of the "Palmyra Portrait Project" at Aarhus University. *The Road to Palmyra* has been based partly on knowledge gained from this research and Professor Rubina Raja - the leader of the project - has acted as consultant in the creation of this exhibition. In connection with the exhibition, the

Glyptotek's own research team has examined the lost colours of one of the most famous pieces in the museum's collection, "The Beauty of Palmyra". Based on the results of these examinations, the researchers have for the first time created a digital reconstruction of the portrait, giving an idea of how the beauty might have looked in her time.

Over time, Palmyra has been described in Jewish, Arabic and ancient texts, often focusing on the city's famous Queen Zenobia. In modern times, Zenobia has also been described and interpreted in literature, visual arts, music and film. The Glyptotek will present a number of different representations of Zenobia, which also constitute examples of the Western view of the "East" and have characterised the story of Palmyra since the city was 'rediscovered' in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by two Englishmen, James Dawkins and Robert Wood.

The story of how the portraits ended up in the Glyptotek will also be told, for example, through the extensive correspondence between the founder of the Glyptotek, Carl Jacobsen, and the Danish Consul in Beirut, Julius Løytved, who were close friends in the 1880s and 1890s when the greater part of the collection was acquired.

The exhibition is designed by the renowned Danish designer and scenographer Anne Schnettler, while the award-winning sound designer Peter Albrechtsen and film director Sun Lee Engelstoff have produced a soundscape, bringing the sounds of the oasis into the Glyptotek.

A comprehensive catalogue to mark the "**The Road to Palmyra**", which features contributions from several Danish and international researchers, will be published to coincide with the exhibition.

The research project, "Palmyra Portrait Project" and the polychromy research are supported by the Carlsberg Foundation.

**Our sincere thanks for generous support for the exhibition from:**

Augustinus Fonden  
Aage og Johanne Louis-Hansens Fond  
Bekett-fonden  
C.L. Davids Fond

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