

AKTI VIII. MEĐUNARODNOG KOLOKVIJA O PROBLEMIMA RIMSKOG PROVINCIJALNOG UMJETNIČKOG STVARALAŠTVA

AKTEN DES VIII. INTERNATIONALEN KOLLOQUIUMS ÜBER PROBLEME DES PROVINZIALRÖMISCHEN KUNSTSCHAFFENS

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 8TH INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON PROBLEMS OF ROMAN PROVINCIAL ART

LES ACTES DU VIII^{ÈME} COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL SUR LES PROBLÈMES DE L'ART PROVINCIAL ROMAIN

ZAGREB 5.-8. V. 2003.

RELIGIJA I MIT KAO POTICAJ RIMSKOJ PROVINCIJALNOJ PLASTICI

RELIGION UND MYTHOS ALS ANREGUNG FÜR DIE PROVINZIALRÖMISCHE PLASTIK

RELIGION AND MYTH AS AN IMPETUS FOR THE ROMAN PROVINCIAL SCULPTURE

LA RELIGION ET LE MYTHE COMME INSPIRATION POUR LA SCULPTURE ROMAINE PROVINCIALE

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PROVINCIALE

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OMNIPOTENS ET OMNIPARENS DEA SYRIA. ASPECTS OF HER ICONOGRAPHY

BY ILONA SKUPINSKA-LOVSET

In discussing the iconography of the cult group of the sanctuary in Hierapolis during the Roman period, the representations on the reverse of two issues of coins, one by Caracalla and the second by Alexander Severus, are of principal value. The coins were described and illustrated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The one issued by Caracalla is known from drawings, and the coin issued by Alexander Severus from drawings and photographs.¹ The sacral group is similar on both coins, different are supplementing animals placed below it, as well as the legend. On the coin of Alexander Severus, the legend directly identifies the group as it reads “θεοι Συριας Ιεροπολιτων“, while on the coin of Caracalla such explicit identification is lacking. Below the group, an eagle with outstretched wings was placed on the coin issued under Caracalla, while a lion is seen on the issue by Alexander Severus. The eagle may have alluded to the impersonation of Jupiter/Hadad, the lion to Dea Syria. One of the first versions describing the group in English was given by A.B. Cook² “...a god with kalathos and sceptre seated on or between two bulls and a goddess with the same attributes and a spindle (?) seated on or between lions. The two deities are grouped on either side of a small gabled structure, in which is an object resembling a military standard and on which rests a dove.”

In the light of existing literary sources the identification of the group on the coins as Dea Syria with her consort Hadad, separated by the “semeion” has not been contested. The interpretation of the attributes is also generally accepted.

The Hierapolitan Dea Syria was apparently in the Roman period called Atargatis, although this name is not mentioned by Lukian, who in his treatise entitled “Περὶ τῆς Συριας Θεοῦ” prefers to call her by traditional Greek names. However, two centuries earlier, the lady of Hierapolis was called Atargatis by Strabo (16.1. 27).

Several sculptural representations of this goddess have been recorded in Syria and Parthia, the best known are reliefs of Dea Syria and her consort hailing from Dura Europos and Hatra, and of the Hellenized goddess from Palmyra, where her temple is archaeologically documented. In the mentioned instances she lacks a spindle.

In the case of the reliefs from et Tannur, only the upper part of the chest (torso) of the Syrian goddess is carved, and possibly therefore the spindle is not included among her attributes.

The drawing of a statue of Dea Syria, once in the Vatican³ and of a relief of her placed on an altar, once in the Capitoline Museum⁴, were executed in the years 1550-1580 by Pirro Ligorio. Both were votive dedications to her, and thus her identity is outside of any doubt. In both cases the goddess is represented in full stature, seated on a throne flanked by lions. She is dressed in the Museo Vaticano case in tunic and palla, while the relief in the Capitoline Museum shows her dressed in a tunic with a decorated belt under her breasts and a pallium tossed around her hips. Her hair is parted in the middle and rolled upwards on the Capitoline altar, while on the Renaissance reproduction of her statue in the Vatican French locks additionally fall on her shoul-

¹ F. Imhoof-Blumer, *Griechische Muenzen*. Abhandlungen der k.bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Muenich 1880 no. 772 (the coin of Caracalla); no. 773 (the coin of Alexander Severus).

² A. B. Cook, *Zeus. A Study in Ancient Religion vol.1* (Cambridge 1914) 586.

³ Codex Ursini = Cod.Vat.Lat. 3439 f.120 r, drawings by Pirro Ligorio and copies by Panvincus.

⁴ Ibid. 3439 f.120 v.

ders. On her head she wears a diadema with a drapery falling down, the headgear is topped by a crescent, in her right hand she hold a spindle with treads on it, in the left a mirror.⁵

This visualization stands close to the description of Dea Syria by Lukian. It is given in paragraph 32 in the above mentioned “De Syria Dea” and could be illuminating when we consider her attributes:

“η δε Ηρη σκοπεοντι σοι πολυειδια μορφην εκφνεει. και τα μεν ξυμπαντα απρεκει λογω Ηρη εστιν. εξει δε τι και Αθηναης και Αφροδιτης και Σεληνιαης και Ρηης και Αρτεμιδος και Νεμεσιος και Μοιρεων. χειρι δε τη μεν ετερη σκηπτρον εχει, τη ετερη δε ατρακτον, “...

and further.....

”και επι τη κεφαλη ακτινας τε φορει και πυργον και κεστον, τω μουνην την Ουρανην κοσμεουσιν..“⁶

The above fragment of the Greek text can be freely translated as follows: “As a whole, is certainly Hera, but she unites some aspects of Athena, Aphrodite, Selene, Rhea, Artemis, Nemesis and Moires. In one hand she holds a sceptre, in the other a spindle” and furthermore “and she bears upon her head rays and a picture of a tower, and she has a girdle.”....

The picture painted before our eyes may be described by the term “syncretism”, an effect of accumulation in the person of Dea Syria, the features representative of various Greek goddesses. It appears to be caused by the application of the “interpretatio graeca” and sounds as if taken from a liturgical prayer, a kind of litany, composed by enumeration of various sides of this one and all-uniting divine being.

Although some scholars believe, that the treatise “De Syria Dea” is not a work by Lukian, nobody denies its originality. It constitutes the most valuable document describing various aspects of her cult included that of self-castration. On this aspect of her cult concentrates satirical scriptures of an anonymous author entitled “Lucius or the Ass” and Apuleius “Metamorphoses”, where-

from a phrase was taken as a title for this paper (Metamorphosis 8.25). But only from the treatise of Lukian it is apparent that Syria Dea was the main goddess, almighty and omnipresent, invoked by many names.

In the following, a discussion of the possibility of usage of one of her attributes, the spindle whorl, in the sepulchral context of Roman Syria will be promoted. Such a practice is well known. From neighbouring Egypt it was documented that the deceased on their funerary portraits may carry cultic objects and divine attributes.⁷

From the syncretic character of her cult, it appears reasonable to expect the believers would turn to her for protection while passing the barrier of death.

The spindle in the antique word could be understood as an allusion to the passing of time, and to the broken tread of life. The question could then be posed whether in the context of visual arts, the women depicted on the funerary monuments intentionally identified themselves with Dea Syria by carrying a spindle, one of her main attributes, as the carrying of an attribute such as a sceptre would be indistinct as many deities carried such an attribute, and in the context of a mortal, improper.

The spindle whorl has varying connotations in antique literature, not necessarily confined to this goddess. Before discussing the sacral connotation of the spindle, this author has to consider still another possibility, i.e. the position of Syria as supplier to the Roman world in woven matters. A spindle could thus be carved as if showing back to the profession of the deceased. There exists, however, no documentation for female manpower in the textile industry in Antiquity. Besides, in sepulchral contexts possible professional tools are usually placed at the borders of a stele. Such instance will be described below. In the hands of the deceased are as the rule shown attributes pointing to social status, beliefs and aspirations.

The spindle could also symbolize the virtues of a woman, e.g. as a good daughter or an exemplary wife. Literary sources document that in the Roman period spinning was still constituted a part of the traditional education of women. Suetonius tells that Augustus gave severe education to his daughter and granddaughter by forcing them to spin and by controlling their lectures.⁸

⁵ The drawings are reproduced as frontispieces of the two volume publication by Paul-Louis van Berg, *Corpus Cultus Deae Syriae. Les sources litteraires* Leiden (Brill 1972), which is the most comprehensive editing of Greek and Latin sources on Dea Syria.

⁶ Luciani Samosatensis Opera, ex recognitione Caroli Iacobitz, vol. III sumptibus et typis B..G. Teubneri, Lipsiae MDCCCLIII, ΠΕΡΙ ΤΗΣ ΣΥΡΙΑΣ ΘΕΟΥ 32 p.356.

⁷ K. Parlasca, *Mumienportraits und verwandte Denkmaler* (Wiesbaden 1966) 69 sq.

⁸ Suetonius, *Divus Augustus*, 64.

But to my knowledge, the women in Rome were represented on their funerary monuments neither with a spindle nor with a distaff.

In Syria, on the contrary, the funerary monuments such as steles, banquet scenes and loculi covers are often decorated with portraits of women holding a spindle and a distaff, or a spindle with spun treads on alone. As a rule they are held in the left hand and the women are dressed in Syrian fashion, either in full Syrian dress or, more seldom, as *velata* with a turban, but in tunic and pallium. The spread of such monuments appears concentrated to non-coastal Phoenicia and the inland territory around the ancient Hierapolis/Bambyce/Menbij/Mabog (fig. 5). Memorials with such representations were recorded for Emesa and the valley of the Orontes, Seleukeia on the Euphrates, Beroea, North-Syrian localities close to Hierapolis, the city of Hierapolis itself, and in large quantities in Palmyra. The fact that we have comparatively few items with secure Hierapolitan provenience and many from Palmyra can be explained by state of preservation and research.

To visualize the problem few monuments with a woman holding a spindle and distaff or spindle alone will be described. The cases are chosen to illustrate variations within the type.

An early example (ca. 100 A.D.) constitutes stele no. 3098 (fig. 1) from the courtyard of the Syrian National Museum in Damascus. It was bought in 1936, its provenience is given as Homs, ancient Emesa. The Emesene monument is carved in basalt. The stele has an irregularly ovoid shape; rounded at the top, as to the sides it is broadest at the height of the hips. The woman stands frontally with a serious expression on her face. She carries Syrian attire, jewellery, like a brooch, fastening her cloak on the left side of the chest, along with necklaces, ear-rings, bracelets. Her hairstyle includes long French locks falling on her breast while a portion of the hair is brushed up at the side of the temples. On her head rests

a large loose turban-like hood, which is multiple folded and reaches to her shoulders. It is covered by a long veil falling down along her sides and tossed around her left underarm, its other end is held in her right palm. In her left lowered palm she holds a spindle and a distaff.⁹

Most likely from the first part of the second century hails a memorial in Damascus, bought in 1947 and also with Emesene provenience, which has the shape of an elaborate stele.¹⁰

In its final a shell may be recognized, on both sides of her head the lady's name, in Greek, is incised (Διοδορα Διφίλου). She carries a Syrian costume, but no jewelry, her pose and gesture is an adaptation of the Greek statue of the *Pudicitia* type. Her hair is dressed without shoulder locks but she wears a hair band and a turban which are covered by a veil. In her left hand, in front of her belly she holds a spindle and a distaff.

In the Municipal Museum of Aleppo, a series of portraits carved on loculi covers shows women holding a spindle and a distaff. Although their provenience cannot be reconstructed with certainty, they may come from Roman Beroea or Hierapolis. The women, such as the one with inventory number 3175, are clad in a Syrian way and for the most carry Syrian names.¹¹ Probably from Hierapolis hails a funerary portrait from RGM in Mayence (inv. no. 39766, dated AD 65 - 100) showing in a round aedicula a woman dressed in a Syrian manner, with a sad expression on her face, right hand supporting her cheek, in the left she is holding a spindle and a distaff.

Among the many funerary monuments of women holding spindle and distaff with provenience Seleukeia-on-the-Euphrates, one kept in the Gaziantep Museum should be mentioned.¹² The young woman, wearing a variant of the hairstyle worn by Faustina Major, is shown to the waist in a variant of the *Pudicitia* pose, in a kind of round topped aedicula. She is veiled, but dressed in the Hellenized way, an uncommon case. In

⁹ Syrian National Museum no. 3098 H: 158 cm (base of 6 cm included), W: 50 cm, D: 38 cm. Cf. I. Skupinska-Lovset, *Roman portrait sculpture in Syria. Regionalization and social stratification*. In: Proceedings of the XVth International Congress of Classical Archaeology, Amsterdam, July 12–17 1998. Allard Pierson Series–Volume 12 (Amsterdam 1999) 381 fig. 33d. – Id, *Portraiture in Roman Syria* (Lodz 1999) 180.

¹⁰ Syrian National Museum no. 5346, basalt H: 158 cm (included 12 cm base), W: 43 cm, D: 19 cm. I. Skupinska-Lovset, *Roman portrait sculpture in Syria. Regionalization and social stratification*. In: Proceedings of the XVth International Congress of Classical Archaeology, Amsterdam, July 12–17 1998. Allard Pierson Series–Volume 12 (Amsterdam 1999) 381. – Id, *Portraiture in Roman Syria* (Lodz 1999) 181 Pl. 25c.

¹¹ I. Skupinska-Lovset, *Portraiture in Roman Syria* (Lodz 1999) 160–161. E.g. Aleppo Mus. no. 669. Bought. Soft, whitish limestone, brownish patina. H: 60 cm, W: 45 cm, D: 19 cm. The name of the woman is given as Kamath; Aleppo Mus. no. 669. Bought, soft, whitish limestone. H: 60 cm, W: 36 cm, D: 19 cm. The name of the woman is Abboitha; Aleppo Mus. no. 670. Confiscated by the police. Soft, whitish limestone, brownish patina. H: 64 cm, W: 48 cm, D: 14 cm. The name is fragmentary; Aleppo Mus. no. 674. Confiscated by the police. Soft, whitish limestone with brownish patina. H: 69 cm, W: 53 cm, D: 13 cm. The reading of the name is uncertain.

¹² Without number, yellowish limestone. Size: H: 62 cm, W: 41 cm, D: 9.5 cm. I. Skupinska-Lovset, *Funerary Portraiture of Seleukeia-on-the-Euphrates*. Acta Arch. (København) 56, 1985 (1987) 108 f. fig. 7



FIG. 1 STELE NO. 3098 H: 158 CM., SYRIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM, DAMASCUS. BASALT. PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1992.



FIG. 2 STELE NO. 1468 H: 174 CM., MUNICIPAL MUSEUM, ADANA. BASALT. PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1982.



FIG. 3 ROCK CUT DECORATION OF A CHAMBER TOMB IN SELEUKEIA-ON-THE-EUPHRATES. LIMESTONE. PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1982.

her left palm she holds a spindle and a distaff. The inscription gives her name as Preima.

In Palmyra, wherefrom the material is most abundant, the spindle and the distaff are particularly typical of the period between A.D. 50 and A.D. 150.¹³ Two examples from Palmyra, stele inv. no 2023/7200, dated to ca. A.D. 110, on which a woman dressed similar to the women carved on the above described steles from Emesa, is shown seated and holding the spindle and distaff in her right hand, and a loculus cover inv. no. 1727/6398 dated to ca. A.D. 90, on which a young

woman, in Syrian dress and with locks on her shoulders holds the spindle and distaff in her left hand, while her right is lifted, palm forwards, in a gesture of prayer.

Sadurska, interpreting these attributes as typical of homely virtues, believes that at the time they were commonly shown on the funerary monuments, the housework was the pride of every housewife, but later on it was taken over by the servant girl and became no subject of pride, neither among the living nor the dead.¹⁴ As a matter of fact, the pose and the costume change in Palmyra in the third century. With the change of the

¹³ Ingholt (1928) PS 31–33, 35, 41, 45, 46 (of these PS 45 and PS 46 are dated to the second part of the second century A.D.).

¹⁴ A. Sadurska, *Le modèle de la semaine dans l'imagerie Palmyrienne*, in: *Etudes et travaux XII*, Warsaw 1980 p. 156; Cf also: Id, *Le portrait officiel romain et la diffusion du portrait funéraire dans les provinces orientales*, in: *Quaderni del la Ricerca Scientifica* 116, *Ritratto Ufficiale e Ritratto Privato. Atti della II Conferenza Internazionale sul Ritratto Romano*, Roma 26–30 Settembre 1984 (N. Bonacasa, G. Rizza, edd) pp. 77, 85.



FIG. 4 ISTANBUL. ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM INV. NO. 5. PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1983.

pose the hand once holding a spindle is now lifted to the height of the chin and engaged in lifting the veil.

But the spindle as an attribute did not disappear completely, and in places such as Seleukeia-on-the-Euphrates we still register its presence in the first part of the third century A.D.¹⁵

The grave of a man and a woman could in Syria also be marked symbolically. In such case a man was represented by an eagle, a woman by a basket of yarn. Few steles, like no. 1315 from the Municipal Museum of Adana, show both the portrait of the deceased and the eagle. The eagle and the basket have in such cases the value of a substitute, and occasionally have been called in German as “Emblem”.¹⁶

In one of the tombs at Seleukeia-on-the-Euphrates (fig. 2) two eagles with two baskets in between, each in an aedicula with a separate funerary inscription, are carved directly on the sidewalls of a funerary chamber. Reliefs of women with a basket are rare. Among them the unpublished relief from Palmyra showing a woman seated in front of an altar, with a basket at her feet and a dove? near the altar, can be signalized.¹⁷

On one of two basalt steles from northern Syria, found in Koserin Koy, close to present-day Gaziantep in Turkey, we see two women safely under an eagle’s wings. Each of the two is holding a spindle and a distaff. On the second stele (fig. 3) the wings of the eagle protect a man and his child, but in the register below we recognize his wife holding a distaff and a spindle. These two steles are well dated by inscriptions respectively to the years 492 and 491 of the Seleukid era (years A.D. 180 and 179).¹⁸

Usual in the region are also group portraits, often of couples. In the case of a relief from Seleukeia-on-the-Euphrates (inv. no 1379, Adana Municipal Museum) the man is dressed in a Hellenised way, the woman is veiled and holds a spindle and a distaff in her left hand.

Most interesting is a marble stele (fig. 4) found farther north, in modern Turkey, at Altitas (ancient Soa) near Kutakye.¹⁹ It has a long inscription in Greek,

¹⁵ Skupinska-Lovset (note 12) 106.

¹⁶ K. Parlasca, *Syrische Grabportraeten* p. 16, uebliche Atribute: Spule und Spindel,..note 131, eagle as a symbol for men, note 133, “Wollkoerben – Emblem fuer Frauen”.

¹⁷ Palmyra Museum, storerooms, no number.

¹⁸ Adana Municipal Museum inv. nos. 1467 (two women, H: 174 cm) and 1468. Parlasca op.cit. pp.15f Pl. 18.1–4. – I. Skupinska-Lovset, *Portraiture in Roman Syria. A Study in Social and Regional Differentiation within the Art of Portraiture*, Lodz 1999 pp. 166f.

¹⁹ Istanbul, Archaeological Museum inv. no.5, exposed on the XVIIIth European Art Exhibition of the Council of Europe, 22 May – 30 Octobre 1983, Istanbul, Turkey, catalogue Sehnazat Karagoez, *Anatolian Steles. Archaic-Greek/Persian-Hellenistic-Roman-Byzantium Periods*, Istanbul 1984, fig. 25. The inscriptions cited after this author...” Hekate, the liberator took Apson and his wife Gaeios to the underworld. Their grandchildren Apellas and Gaeios had this stele made to their memory.” “engraver, Teimeas Mourmateanos...”

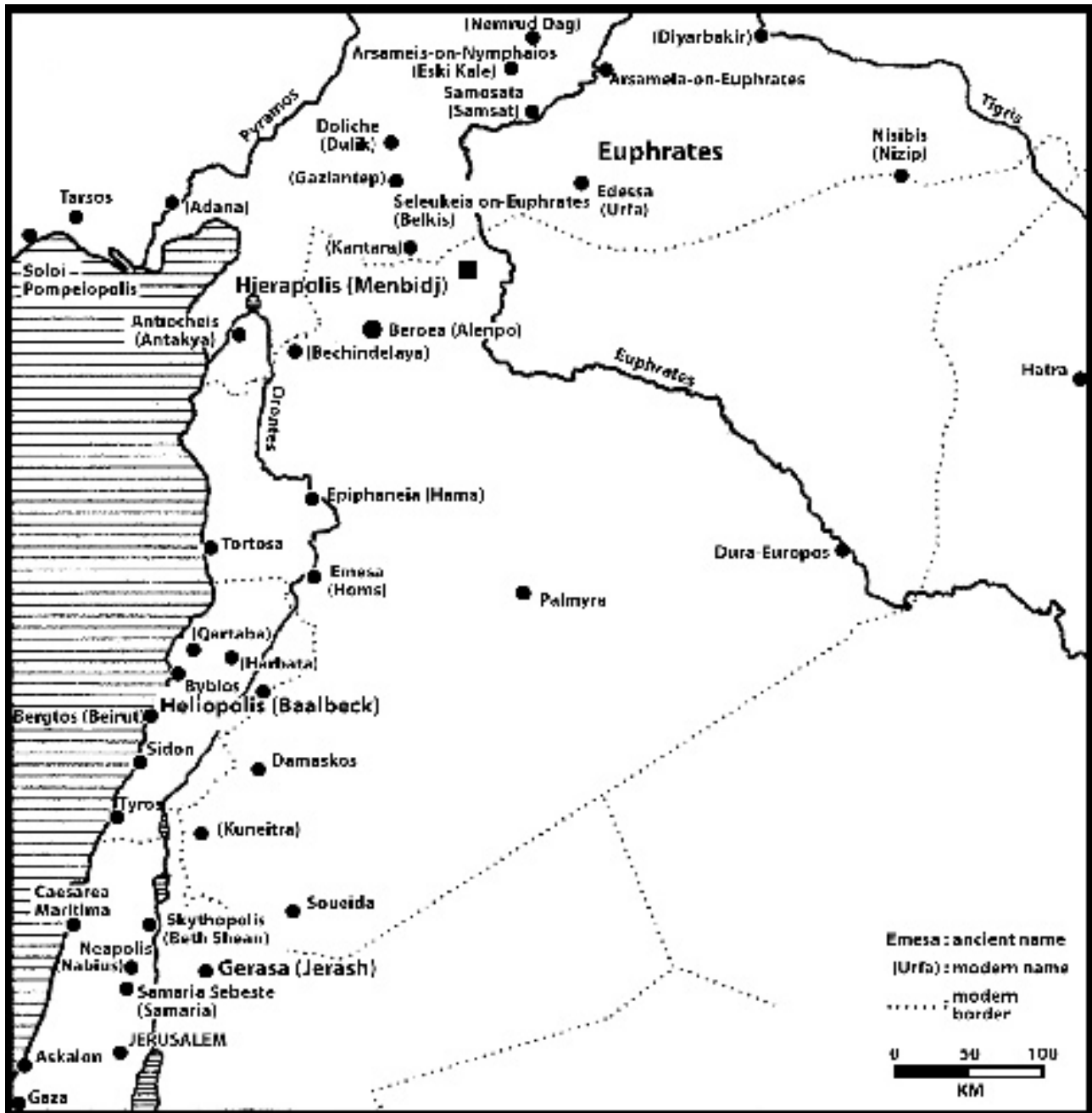


FIG. 5 A MAP WITH FINDPLACES OF THE FUNERARY MONUMENTS WITH WOMAN HOLDING A SPINDLE.

which gives the names of the deceased, their grandchildren, who raised the stele, as well as the name of the engraver.

It is a gabled stele with pictorial representations in two registers, while in the gable is a relief of an eagle flanked by two phialae. In the upper register is repre-

sented Tergemina Hekate, to whom the dedication is directed. Hekate is seldom a heroine in art or in mythology. According to Pausanias (2. 30.2) her statue composed of three Siamese bodies was first created in the time of Pheidias. She was called Epipyrgida, and her statue was placed at the Temple of Nike Apteros on the

Athenian Acropolis. Hecate Tergemina according to the description in Eneis (Vergil, Eneis 4. 509 ff) represented three faces of the virginal Diana. As such she also appears in cultic practices in Greece. Through the assimilation with Selene in the sky, Artemis on the Earth and Hecate in the Underworld, the entire universe was included in the prayers to her. Hecate is also connected with Hades, and according to Teocrit she is wandering among the tombs and all the dogs shiver with fear.²⁰ To her every month dog meat was offered. In her epiphany she is shown with a whip in one hand and in the other a torch. As Hecate Trioditis, she was controlling destiny.

On the relief in question, on the three heads of Hecate rests in a lunula a bust of a goddess with locks falling on her shoulder, probably Dea Syria. On her sides are placed various attributes.

Below are carved the portraits of a couple, that of the woman with a spindle in her right hand. Under the portraits, on the border, is pictured a plough, probably showing back to the man's occupation.

In concluding, to the present no direct indication as to the connection of the spindle in the funerary context with the attributes of Dea Syria, can be pointed to. The spread of the sepulchral portraits speaks, however, strongly in favour of this hypothesis. Although the spinning and weaving constituted virtues of women from Greece and Rome and probably in general from the entire Mediterranean world, only in the area close to Hierapolis, where in her temple Dea Syria was shown with a sceptre and a spindle, this attribute is commonly used in a funerary context.

Illustrations:

With the kind permission of The Department of Antiquities and Museum of The Republic of Turkey (figs. 2, 3, 4) and The Department of Antiquities and Museum of The Arab Republic of Syria (fig. 1).

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²⁰ Teocrit, *Pharmakeutria*, vers 10–14.