

Prosopographia Palmyrena: Conception and Usage

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Abstract: This paper aims to present the process of establishing and using a database containing the prosopography gathered from the *Corpus of Palmyrene Inscriptions*. Therefore, a brief introduction to Palmyra and its epigraphic heritage will be given first. Then, the method of collecting and sorting the various data points will be explained. The problems of prosopographical identifications in Palmyra and the Palmyrene diaspora will then be discussed, including issues such as similar names, conflicting genealogies, missing provenance, inconsistent dating, and group affiliation. Finally, the essay proposes a method of mass-group analysis that aims to both reconstruct social groups of Palmyra and then compare those groups with other known Palmyrene groups.

Palmyra

Palmyra, known as ‘Tadmor’ (*tdmwr*) in Palmyrene, is a city located in the desert steppe of what is now southern Syria, once part of the Roman province of Syria. In historical accounts, Palmyra is most famous as the power base for Odaenathus’ defense of the Roman East and Zenobia’s bid for imperial glory. By the mid-270s AD, after these illustrious days, Palmyra was plundered, its trade networks collapsed, its epigraphic tradition faded, and much of the city was abandoned.¹

While the city itself is situated in an oasis, it once controlled a vast amount of territory, called the Palmyrena, that likely stretched all the way up to the Euphrates and was dotted with villages, extensively cultivated fields and pastures for Palmyrene pastoralists.² The rapid decline of the city preserved not only the magnificent ruins of Palmyra, but also a unique corpus of often bilingual inscriptions dating from the late years BCE to 274 AD. In addition to that, an extensive trading network and military service of Palmyrene soldiers in Roman auxiliary units led to an extensive Palmyrene Diaspora, preserved in Inscriptions found as far from Palmyra as Britain, North Africa or Rome itself.³

Since its ‘rediscovery’ in the 18th century, a substantial collection of Palmyrene inscriptions has been edited and is now accessible through three key publications. *The Palmyrene Aramaic Texts (PAT)*, edited by Delbert R. Hillers and Eleonora Cussini,⁴ includes 2,832 inscriptions, representing the majority of known Palmyrene inscriptions across Europe, Asia, and Africa, along with an extensive glossary and annex. This is complemented by Jean-Baptiste Yon’s *L’épigraphie palmyrénienne depuis PAT*, 1996–2011⁵ and his *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*. Palmyre. Tome XVII (IGLS

1 Sommer (2018), 164–175; Hartmann (2001), 375–423; Smith (2013), 175–184.

2 Meyer (2017), 24–57.

3 E.g. Britain: PAT 0246; Rome: PAT 0247–PAT 0250; Northern Africa: PAT 0252–PAT 0253.

4 Hillers / Cussini (1996), 24–331.

5 Yon (2013), 338–363.

XVII), which focuses on Greek, Latin, and bilingual inscriptions from Palmyra.⁶ Additional Latin inscriptions are scattered across the Italian peninsula, modern Algeria, Tunisia, and particularly the ancient Roman province of Dacia.

Altogether, the Palmyrene corpus consists of approximately 3,200 inscriptions written in Palmyrene Aramaic, Greek, and Latin. These inscriptions record the names of around 8,300 individuals, primarily found in funerary, honorific, or dedicatory contexts. The amount of personal information provided varies significantly; however, in the case of short funerary inscriptions, it is not uncommon for only the deceased's name to be mentioned, often followed by a patrilineal genealogy ranging from a single generation to more than eight. The first prosopography of the Palmyrenes was compiled by Palmira Piersimoni in 1995. It contains an alphabetical list of all known Palmyrenes to that date, including information about the Name, the family, the date of the inscription and the bibliographical information of the inscription itself. Piersimoni also painstakingly reconstructed the family trees for hundreds of Palmyrene clans and families.⁷

While the Database of the Prosopographia Palmyrena follows the basic approach of using names, families, and dates on an attestation-level, it does not attempt to replicate the family trees but rather tries to broaden the information for each entry and thus enable new approaches to different parts of the Palmyrene society.

How to Create a Database for the Palmyrene Prosopography?

The creation of this database relied heavily on the extensive work of the Palmyrene Aramaic Texts (PAT). Each inscription in the PAT includes a standardized header providing critical interpretive data. A typical header reads like this:

PAT 0052 **Ber '35 p 102 X** **A.D. 249**
 Prov: Palmyra, S-W Necropolis, Tomb of Malku.
 Loc: Palmyra, *in situ*. *Funerary: Cession. On*
doorjamb. Group: see Ber '35 p 91. Bib: *Ingholt*
'35 pl XLI, 1; MF Concession 21.

Fig. 1: Header of PAT 0052, Hillers / Cussini 1996, 31.

From the header, a large amount of information for the database could be gathered and divided in four main categories:

- I. Referential information: The number within the PAT and further references. It is therefore possible to filter for the information of all persons mentioned in a distinct inscription.
- II. Provenance: The inscription's provenance is typically provided, though its precision varies. Some locations are detailed down to a specific funerary tower or temple, while for many others, only "Palmyra" or "Palmyrena" is noted – if anything at all. Provenance data was used to map the approximate location of each entry. The modern location of the inscriptions was excluded from the database

⁶ Yon (2012), 13–419.

⁷ Piersimoni (1995).

since it rarely pertains to the individuals mentioned, and it may have changed since the PAT's publication, particularly due to the site's destruction by Daesh and widespread looting.⁸ If necessary, for example to verify whether a particular inscription was acquired by a specific collection during a particular excavation, locations can still be accessed via the PAT or other cited references.



Fig. 2: A characteristic Palmyrene funerary bust, representative of those housed in numerous collections and museums worldwide.⁹

III. Dating information: If a date is given within the inscription, it usually refers to the month and the year of the Seleucid or Macedonian era. The header of the PAT conveniently translates this into the

⁸ As an example: The large group from the Tomb of Male (PAT 0026-PAT0043) was marked as “*in situ*” by the PAT, but after extensive destruction and looting by various terrorist groups, their present location can not be taken for granted.

⁹ This particular example is displayed in the Louvre, cataloged under Inventory No. AO5004 = PAT 0735. Neither the Louvre nor the PAT provide precise provenance information. For the display at the Louvre: <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010127833> (consulted 21.04.2025).

Christian Era.¹⁰ Regrettably, there does not yet exist a reliable and widely applied method to date Palmyrene inscriptions via iconographic or paleographic criteria.¹¹

IV. Classification information: The PAT mainly classifies inscriptions based on their context as funerary, funerary foundation, funerary cession, honorific, dedicatory, *tessera* or graffito. In most cases the material or object on which the inscription was found is also mentioned, i.e. on relief, on column drum, on wall or on door lintel.¹² This information shall allow the database to be searched by different groups of inscriptions.¹³ Via the usage of these categories it should be possible to identify certain groups and subgroups, then search for their representation in other categories. As an example: How many people named *mlkw* are known from honorific inscriptions from 156 to 230 AD? From the texts themselves, several types of information were extracted and gathered for the database.

Of course, the largest category consists of names. These were always copied in the grammatical form found in the inscription. After extraction, the names were organized into several fields.

A) The name of any person in (if present) Palmyrene, Greek, and Latin.

B) The genealogy and / or family of any person in any language present (Palmyrene, Greek and Latin).

This was also divided into:

name, child of, grandchild of, great-grandchild of, descendant of, parent of, grandparent of, great-grandparent of, ancestor of, brother / sister of, uncle / aunt of, niece / nephew of, cousin of, child in law of, parent in law of, spouse of.

If applicable, this information was collected in all three languages present in the corpus. From the name and family information, the sex of the person in question could be derived and was entered as well (if applicable – sometimes it remains unclear).

Furthermore, each inscription was searched for:

type / name of office, social standing and / or employment (Butcher, *Symposiarch*, *Grammateus*, Slave, Freedman, Patron etc.), Roman citizenship (if visible through the name), worshiped gods, tribal affiliation (*bny mtbwl*, *bny kmr*² etc.).

If applicable, further information – such as the institution or person setting up an honorary inscription or locations mentioned – was noted under ‘further remarks’. Another charter indicates the likely identity of one person with a namesake from a different inscription, breaching the gap between attestation and full identification.

10 All the Christian dates given in the database are those from the editions. The dates corrected by Andrew G.K. Taylor are given in a field for other information. See Taylor (2001), 203–219.

11 The *Palmyrene Portrait Project* has come to the conclusion that a stylistic dating method can be applied (see Rubina Raja et al. [2021]). But the results are not all published yet, so they are not available for our project.

12 The dispersion of Palmyrene art through dozens of museums and collections means that the classification does often-times not correspond with knowledge about the provenance or the original location of the inscription. This affects relief inscriptions more than those on column drums or walls.

13 Other epigraphic collections, like the annotations to the PAT by Yon (2013), are not designed in the same manner, e.g. they do not display a classification and the provenance is not always provided. In those cases provenance had to be left open and a classification was attempted by the author.



Fig. 3: A Palmyrene funerary Inscription.¹⁴

Problems of Palmyrene Prosopography

After collecting the necessary or available details for each entry, using the Palmyrene prosopography presents several challenges, particularly in identifying individuals. This classic prosopographical difficulty is exacerbated by the nature of the evidence. This section identifies these issues and explores how – or if – they can be addressed.

¹⁴ Louvre Inventory No. AO 2205 = PAT 0460. It is known that the inscription came to the Louvre through the expedition of Bellon and Bequillard, but no further details about the exact provenance are published by either the Louvre or the PAT. See: <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010127815> (consulted 26.04.2025).

Since many identification approaches require substantial argumentation for each individual, the database takes a distinct approach. Every person mentioned in an inscription receives a unique entry, preserving the grammatical form used in the text.¹⁵ Where identification is deemed likely or certain – though this is rare – related inscriptions are linked under a “likely identical with namesake from” label. This leaves the final identification decision to the user, while clearly distinguishing information from separate inscriptions, such as location, worshiped gods, inscription type, date, and social details.

The Problem of Similarity

The Palmyrene corpus features a wide range of names, yet some, like *hyrn*, *yrhy*, *mlkw*, and *mqymw*, appear hundreds of times and often dominate short genealogies. Distinguishing between individuals with similar names is a significant challenge, especially when inscriptions lack additional details (e.g., date, genealogy, occupation) and precise provenance is unknown, rendering identification nearly impossible. However, the frequent recurrence of these names enables statistical approaches to group analysis. Since many Palmyrene families favored a limited set of names, their presence or absence in specific contexts may suggest cultural ties or family involvement. Examples of such group reconstructions are provided later.

The Problem of Changing Names

The majority of well-attested names in the Palmyrene corpus is always written in the same manner.¹⁶ For instance, in PAT 0057 and PAT 0058, the father of *ywlys ʾwrllys ydyʿbl* (Iulius Aurelius Idiabel) is named *ʿbdšmyʿ* (Abdischamaia)¹⁷ in one and *ʿbšmyʿ* (Abschamaia)¹⁸ in the other. This discrepancy is compounded by the Greek rendering in PAT 0057, Ἀβισαμαίας, which omits the Palmyrene Dalet and corresponds more closely to *ʿbšmyʿ* from PAT 0058. This name is also poorly attested: the only other occurrence is found on the famous Palmyrene prayer tablet in the Hoq-Cave on Socotra, which gives the reading *ʿbšmyʿ*.¹⁹ Such variations can hinder identification, as a search for *ʿbšmyʿ* misses *ʿbdšmyʿ*, despite referring to the same person in this case. Other names, like *lšmš*, *lšmšy*, and *lšmšw*, or *mqymw*, *mqym*, *mqymy*, and *mqymt*, show multiple variants from a common (often theophoric) root. Rare variants might reflect errors, abbreviations, or preferences, but individuals could also be known by different forms of their name. Without supporting evidence like genealogies, dates, provenance, or multilingual variants, identification becomes dubious when names deviate even slightly.

This sort of deviation gets even more puzzling when it only applies in one language, but for a major institution of Palmyra: The name of the tribe *bnv kmrʿ* is always spelled this way in their Palmyrene inscriptions, but until 182 AD, the Greek version usually gives a deviation of the form Χομαρήνων.²⁰ That practice changes in 182 AD, when a different version is encountered for the first time in a dedication for a benevolent woman, which mentions a tribe called the Χωνειτών.²¹ The tribe is then also known under the name Χωνει[τών] in the famous inscription that mentions it as part of the ‘four

15 Unlike in Greek, the Aramaic language does not change the consonants of the names due to grammatical forms. Since the vast majority of inscriptions is bilingual or in Aramaic, it was decided to follow this pattern for the Greek names and gather their forms as written within the inscription.

16 This is true for most well attested names like *ʿgʿ*, *mlkw*, *hyrn* or *yrhy*. For an overview see Hillers / Cussini (1996), 429–441.

17 PAT 0057.

18 PAT 0058.

19 Yon (2013) no 115; Gorea (2012), 453–454.

20 Like in PAT 1134 from 67 AD.

21 IGLS XVII 312.

tribes'.²² During the next section, one example of a possible, yet by no means certain, identification of a person with different written names shall be given.

Identifying a Roman *centurio* in Palmyra?

In the year 135 AD, a Roman *centurio* called *ywlys mksms* / Ἰούλιος Μάξιμος was honored with an inscription and a statue at the Agora of Palmyra, erected for him by a member of Palmyra's leading family of that time, *mrqs ʿlpys ʿbgr*, as well as the members of the caravan he evidently had helped in distress.²³

This Roman *centurio* might have been identical to a *centurio* named *gys ywlys mksyms* / Ἰούλιος Μάξιμος who, twenty years prior, set up a dedication at the Great Colonnade – the only such inscription from a *centurio* in Palmyra that is known to us.²⁴ Could he have been the same man? While the gap of twenty years is significant, it is not so great that an identity is impossible.²⁵ The spelling differences for *mksyms* / *mksms* might be explained by the fact that one inscription was set up by the man himself while the other was made to his honor. To push our luck even further, a third inscription of yet another Roman *centurio* with Palmyrene connections can be found, which refers to a *centurio* of a Palmyrene unit stationed in the province of Africa under the command of a man called *mksmws*.²⁶ Given that a career change from the legions into the auxiliaries would have been a strange career choice indeed,²⁷ the identity of *mksmws* with the centurions mentioned in Palmyra must be highly dubious at best.

If one accepts the assumption of the identity of the different Iulii Maximii mentioned in the two inscriptions set up in Palmyra itself as fact, the reconstruction of his military career would read somewhat like this: Given that Gaius Iulius Maximus was already a *centurio* in 115 AD, we can assume that he joined the legions at least some time before that. Since 'our' Maximus enjoyed a career of more than 20 years as a *centurio*, I would argue that he very likely started his career either as a *centurio* or in another somewhat elevated position.²⁸

The fact that his dedication was bilingual in Greek and Aramaic shows that he was already familiar with local customs, making it likely that he originated from Roman Syria, but since no genealogy is mentioned he was very likely not a Palmyrene by birth. He could, however, have acquired a sense of cultural belonging to the broader sphere of Palmyra while serving as a local commander on the river-border, a position that at least one other Roman *centurio* was honored for.²⁹ Having (re-)joined one of the legions in Syria, he would have been a very useful asset whenever the legions had to deal with Palmyrene warriors. The fact that he was personally honored for a very specific deed towards a spe-

22 PAT 1063.

23 PAT 1397.

24 PAT 1548: Ἰούλιος Μάξιμος.

25 Yon (2012), 202 argues in that favour: "vraisemblablement du meme". LeBohec (2015), 47 notes a centurion who served for a total of 40 years.

26 PAT 0253.

27 The renowned inscription from Philippi (00522 = IDRE-02, 363), associated with yet another Tiberius Claudius Maximus, demonstrates that transitioning from legions to auxiliary units was generally feasible. However, this Tiberius Claudius Maximus never achieved the rank of *centurio*. It is doubtful that a legionary *centurio* would have accepted a posting in an auxiliary unit, as a *centurio cohortis* earned approximately 5,000 *sestertii* annually, while a legionary *centurio* commanded around 18,000 *sestertii*. This significant pay disparity underscores the unlikelihood of such a transfer. For a reconstructed pay scale of the Roman army: Speidel (2009), 378.

28 For Roman soldiers who began their careers as centurions: LeBohec (2015), 47.

29 ILGS XVII 00207 and 208 mention a *centurio* called Celestico as the *curator ripae superioris et inferioris*, most likely referring to a position at the Euphrates.

cific Palmyrene caravan would then indicate that he was put in charge of a *vexillation* that either manned a garrison somewhere along the track or guarded the caravan itself. This, however, raises another problem: Why would a *centurio* of a legion serve as a caravan-guard in the fringes of the desert?³⁰ Surely the Roman army had learned its lesson at Carrhae: Heavy, unsupported legionary infantry was unsuited to desert warfare. Several solutions come to mind. First of all, Maximus could have been in command of the cavalry contingent of a legion, but since those cavalymen were vital for scouting and communications it seems unlikely that a whole unit of them would have been delegated to such a task. Another solution might be that Maximus was a supernumerary officer who was specifically detailed for duty in Palmyra.³¹

There is, however, a third solution, which hinges on the exact meaning of the Palmyrene phrase *lgywn*. Apart from PAT 1548 and PAT 1397, this term can be found in several other inscriptions: One inscription where it is used to specifically identify a *centurio* of the Fourth legion,³² one very late inscription where one of the deeds of the honorand is that he “brought the legions to Palmyra”,³³ and an even later dedication that a Roman soldier “from the Legion in Bosra” set up to honor Odaenathus.³⁴ Only two of those cases refer to specific units, whereas the usage in PAT 0278 is more general: ‘Legion’ is used as a synonym for ‘Roman army’. If Maximus used *lgywn* in this way, he might very well have been ‘only’ a *centurio* of the auxiliaries.

This concise study highlights key challenges in identifying individuals across Palmyrene inscriptions. Variations in names within Palmyrene texts, coupled with significant temporal and geographical gaps – such as those observed in Numidia – complicate the process, though these obstacles are not insurmountable. While the name in question is exceedingly rare within the Corpus of Palmyrene Inscriptions, it is relatively common across the broader Roman Empire. This prompts a compelling question: were multiple men named Maximus commanding centuries of Palmyrene soldiers between 100 and 135 CE, or was there a single individual? The answer may remain elusive.

Genealogy, Ancestor or What?

Another problem of Palmyrene prosopography is that, while most names in genealogies are connected with expressions like *br* (son), *brt* (daughter), *bnt* (children), or *bny* (sons, children, member), this does not always convey the same meaning, as can be shown by the usage of *bny*: *bny* can identify three different social relations. That of brothers to their father: “*ʔlhbl wmʿny wšky wmlkw bny whblt*”³⁵ – “*ʔlhbl* and *mʿny* and *šky* and *mlkw*, sons of *whblt*”³⁶. That of a member of a tribe: “N.N. (*mn*) *bny mʿzyn*”³⁷ – “N.N. (from) the sons of *mʿzyn*” or that of membership in a temporary or recurring group, like a caravan: “Sons of the caravan, *bny šyrt*”³⁸ or “sons of the symposium, *bny mrzḥ*”³⁹.

Likewise, the *br* connecting father and son is sometimes omitted – often before the last name in a genealogy, indicating that this last name might be that of a more distant ancestor. This is, however no

30 Yon (2012), 202, argues that Maximus was most likely a *centurio* of the *III Gallica*, stationed to the east of Palmyra.

31 For supernumerary officers: LeBohec (2015), 46–47.

32 PAT 0308, Latin-Aramaic.

33 PAT 0278, dated to 242 AD.

34 PAT 0290, dated to 251 AD.

35 PAT 0486.

36 Note that the *w* (“and”) is the connecting particle that is affixed to the beginning of a word in Palmyrene Aramaic to connect it to the previous word or sentence. Other such particles are *b* (“in”) *l* (for) or *m* (of).

37 PAT 2772, PAT 0179.

38 PAT 0197, 0262, 0309, 1397, 1412, 1419, IGLS XVII 127.

39 PAT 0177, PAT 0178, PAT 0326.

general rule, since sometimes *br* is omitted entirely⁴⁰ or in the middle of a genealogy.⁴¹ Therefore, if a *br* at the end of an inscription is missing, the database has added these personal names as if a *br* had been written, i.e. as the father of the last person connected with a “*br*”. “*mqymw br mlkw br lšmš mlkw*” gets “*mqymw*, son of *mlkw*, son of *lšmš* (son of) *mlkw*”.

Another difficulty can be found with rare words attached to a genealogy without a *br*. Such an expression might be a name, but it could also describe a role in the tribe or clan such as ‘chief’ or ‘elder’.⁴² Other descriptions refer to a connection to the family like ‘foster mother’.⁴³ Very rarely there is even a job description to be found, like ‘baker’ or ‘butcher’.⁴⁴ In other cases the job description itself might have become hereditary: Three funerary cession documents emphasize the role of one party’s family as ‘physicians’.⁴⁵

The usage of distant ancestors mentioned in several inscriptions is often used as the basis for reconstructing family relations. This, however, is also prone to difficulties as shall be demonstrated for the so called Firmon family.

The house of Firmon is a well documented family that was chosen as one of the studied groups for the kinship network analysis of Palmyrene genealogies.⁴⁶ In PAT 0260 from 175 AD the name *prmwn* / Φίρμωνος is attached at the end of a long genealogy: “*yrhbwłʿ*, son of *hdwdn*, son of *zdbbwł*, son of *hdwdn* (son of) *prmwn*”. Here, *prmwn* is not connected with any word or particle, marking him most likely as a distant ancestor. Since the Aramaic name is found in the next line of the inscription without any apparent connection to the genealogy, it was at first falsely omitted from the database entirely.

Within PAT 1571, a dedicatory inscription likely from the first century AD, *prmwn* / ΦΙΡΜΩΝΟΣ is again placed as the last (fourth) name of the genealogy. The name in the Aramaic version is again used without *br*, but this time the Greek version⁴⁷ connects it with the rest of the genealogy by using ΤΟΥ: Should this be interpreted as ΦΙΡΜΩΝΟΣ being a more distant ancestor or as him being the direct grandfather of preceding person?

A third inscription, Schuol 25 from 159 AD, however, being only in Aramaic, gives “*hdwdn*, son of *hdwdn prmwn*”, placing him as either the grandfather or an ancestor, and matching neither the number nor the practice nor the placement of either PAT 0260 or PAT 1571.

While it still remains entirely possible that the persons mentioned in all three inscriptions were related to each other, such discrepancies should be a warning sign against the hope of reconstructing seemingly flawless family trees.

40 This is most common on *tesserae*. As an example, the reverse of PAT 2811 provides four names but no indication if those names are from the genealogy of the first person or if all four persons were invitees or if only two persons were named and had the customary patronym added to their name.

41 This can be seen in PAT 0115: One genealogy provided goes as follows: “*yrhy br ʿgylw br tymhʿ br ʿydʿn ʿsry, br zdbbwł, br ʿydʿn*”. Is *ʿydʿn ʿsry* one name? Does it refer to an ancestor, since *ʿydʿn* is the name of the last ancestor mentioned? Or was the *br* omitted by accident and two different persons are meant?

42 Most commonly referred to as *rb* or *rbʿ* – “*leader, elder, head*”. Examples for the practice of adding this word to a genealogy can be found in PAT 1760, PAT 1871, PAT 1901, PAT 2302, PAT 1660, PAT 1167, PAT 2768, PAT 2227, PAT 1019, PAT 1043.

43 PAT 1954.

44 Baker: *nhtwm*, PAT 1458, Tailor: *tbhʿ*, PAT 0415. A detailed analysis of Palmyrene occupations can be found in Cussini (2017), 84–96. For their usage in funerary inscriptions see also Yon (2021), 132.

45 *syʿ* / *ʿsyʿ* is mentioned in the cession texts PAT 0044, PAT 0048, PAT 0049. Two other occurrences are in PAT 0094 and PAT 1558.

46 Brughmans et al. (2021), 41–84. For the reconstruction of the family tree see Piersimoni (1995), 563.

47 PAT 1571: [Διὶ ὧ]ΨΙΣΤΩ ΚΑΙ ΕΠΗΚΟΩ ΜΑΝΝΑΙΟΣ ΑΜΜΑΘΟΥ 2 [τοῦ Αδδ]ΟΥΔΑΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΦΙΡΜΟΝΟΣ ΥΠΕΡ ΣΤΩΗ 3 [ρίας αὐτοῦ] καὶ τῶ]Ν ΤΕΚΝΩΝ ΜΗΝΙ ΠΕΡΕΙΤΙΩ 4 [...].

Dating of Palmyrene Inscriptions

The vast majority of inscriptions from Palmyra are undated, and in many cases, the exact provenance is unknown. Therefore, dating evidence is crucial for any attempt to securely identify individuals. The span during which a secure identification can be made shall be estimated as one generation, so roughly 25–30 years. A prime example of this can be found in the person of *mrqs ʾlpys yrhy*, son of *hyrn* / Μάρκος Οὔλπιος Ἰαραῖος, son of Αἰρανῆς: His Roman name and genealogy are mentioned in seven entries of the database, all except two of which can be securely dated between 156 and 159 AD.⁴⁸

In this case, the genealogy and the name allow the identification of *mrqs ʾlpys yrhy* in the undated inscriptions of PAT 1403 and PAT 1422, although there is confusion about the Greek version of his name in PAT 1422, where the name Μάρκος Οὔλπιος Αἰρανῆς, of the tribe Sergia, son of Ἰαραῖος, likely refers not to the *mrqs ʾlpys yrhy* mentioned in the Aramaic text but to another person entirely.

But even dated evidence from Palmyra is not entirely unproblematic: The date itself often only provides the year. Sometimes the month is mentioned by name, and very rarely the day is also mentioned using Palmyrene number symbols that are already transcribed into Arabic numerals in the publications of the inscriptions.⁴⁹

To avoid confusion and ease the search for dates, the database only mentions the year, mostly using the modern dating formula and not the ancient Seleucid calendar. It overwhelmingly relies on the dates provided by the editors.⁵⁰ Having established a date for an inscription, the next question is: What precisely, does the date in an inscription actually date? There are several possibilities for this, depending on the nature of the inscription.

For dedicatory inscriptions on religious objects, like altars, one can be quite certain that any date provided would be at least roughly coherent with the date on which the dedication itself took place.⁵¹

Funerary foundations, on the other hand might date one of several occasions: They could mark the ‘opening’ of the monument, but they might also indicate the date when construction was begun or when the facade was finished.⁵² Since almost no Palmyrene funerary inscription gives any indication of the age or date of birth of the deceased,⁵³ we can only assume that funerary foundations were, at most times, undertaken while the owner was not only alive but also both economically and physically well-off.⁵⁴

48 PAT 1396, PAT 1397, PAT 1403, PAT 1409, PAT 1411, PAT 1422.

49 There are some carefully dated relief-inscriptions like PAT 0005, PAT 0009.2 and PAT 0902, as well as the door-lintel funerary inscription PAT 0510.

50 There are several instances where the dating formula was not translated into the modern calendar by the editors (PAT 0094, PAT 0095, PAT 0525, PAT 1364, PAT 1684). For these inscriptions the date of the Seleucid Era was used, and they are marked as “S.E.” in the database. A correction of the dates used by the PAT was subsequently published by David Taylor (Taylor [2001]).

51 Examples for that might be found in PAT 1677, 2632, 0257, 0179, 0360. PAT 0340 and PAT 0341 even provide the exact day of the dedication itself.

52 Palmyrene tomb towers were built in a continuous process over a longer period of time, as shown by several surviving texts that document extensions and subdivisions within larger tomb complexes. For example, the foundational inscription of the Tomb of Male (PAT 0026) dates to 109 AD whereas the last cession text from this complex, PAT 0043, dates to 237 AD. For the construction process: Henning (2013), 41–47.

53 Notable exceptions to this are PAT 0923 and the diasporic inscription PAT 0253.

54 The prime example for this is *hyrn*, son of *bwn*², son of *rbʿl*, who’s funerary foundation is dated to 52 AD (PAT 2801). He is then honored by the priests of Bel in 56 AD, indicating that he was not only alive but retained a powerful presence in the Palmyrene society.

Since some funerary inscription supply us with information about brothers and mothers of the founder who were mentioned as beneficiaries of the foundation,⁵⁵ but fathers are not mentioned in this manner, we can further claim that most builders of funerary monuments only took to the task after their fathers had already died. Funerary cessions are another matter entirely, as those documents seem to have been largely based on the actual sales contract, sometimes even copying specific details like witnesses or the name of the scribe who set up the contract.⁵⁶ Therefore, it can be assumed that the date in the cession inscription matches the date of the original contract.

Honorary inscriptions are presumably also straightforward, but it must be kept in mind that they indicate the date when the inscription was either ordered (by the *boule* or the person who set the inscription up) or the date when the inscription was completed. The action or deed of the honorand lies always in the past and may have taken place several years ago, as indicated in the inscription of 'gylw, son of mgy, son of 'gylw, son of šwyr', who in 199 AD was, amongst other things, honored for several campaigns he undertook, indicating years or perhaps even decades worth of service.⁵⁷

Other inscriptions may allude to more recent, specific events, a pattern most strikingly observed in the so-called 'caravan inscriptions.' These texts, tied to the grand annual caravan, pay tribute to the benefactor who supported each expedition.⁵⁸

But even there a certain delay has to be anticipated. Formulas such as 'by the sons of the caravan' indicate that the decision to honor an individual was taken while the caravan was still gathered as a distinct social community. We do not know how long it took each caravan to set the inscription up, but there are several hurdles to consider: First, the location for the inscription and the statue had to be identified and, if it was to be placed in a temple, the priesthood had to grant permission. Then the statue and the inscription had to be commissioned, completed, and finally unveiled – presumably in some sort of celebratory fashion, especially if the council was involved.⁵⁹ All of this required not only time but also quite considerable amounts of financial investments, especially if the statues were made of bronze.⁶⁰ The *Tariff Law* states that, when imported, bronze images should be taxed as half a camel-load of metal, suggesting that import of heavy bronze images was common enough to warrant special taxes.⁶¹ If bronze images had to be commissioned, cast and then transported to Palmyra from abroad, this would add considerable delay to honorific actions. Additionally, the funds needed for all of this could only be collected after at least some of the goods had been sold. Also, not all caravans honored deeds that were performed for homecoming caravans,⁶² adding what could potentially be a years-long delay between the deed and the finished inscription. We have no secure way of knowing how long each individual delay lasted, but the possibility of a delay should be kept in mind when one attempts to

55 In PAT 1134, the funerary founder alleges that his monument should also benefit his brother, half-brothers and his mother. PAT 2816 mentions the brother and the mother of the founder, while PAT 1051 mentions not the erection of a whole monument, but of a funerary *stela* by a son for his deceased mother.

56 PAT 1624, for a detailed analysis of the legal aspect of funerary cessions: Cussini (2016), 42–52; Cussini (2010), 337–355.

57 PAT 1378.

58 Seland (2016), 58–61.

59 The process of erecting inscriptions in Palmyra reveals nuanced social and administrative practices. Certain honorary inscriptions, such as PAT 1364 and PAT 1372, were commissioned by the honorees' family members, reflecting personal initiative and familial devotion. In contrast, others, like PAT 1062, required a formal decree from the council, which not only authorized the statue's erection but also stipulated that its costs be covered by public funds, underscoring the role of civic approval and communal resources in such undertakings.

60 Citing the structural strength of the columns on which they were originally placed, Gawlikowski (2021), 95 argues convincingly that the honorary statues must have been made as hollow-bronze castings.

61 PAT 0259.

62 Outgoing caravans are found in PAT 1419, PAT 1411, PAT 0279.

cross-reference certain honorary inscriptions with known dates for Roman-Parthian wars or other known events from outside Palmyra.

Provenance

Next to the date the provenance of an inscription provides an indication that people of the same name and similar genealogy are identical or at least related to each other. This is most obvious when large distances are involved.

However, the information regarding the original location of an inscription given in the PAT is often necessarily vague, providing locations such as ‘Palmyra’. In other instances, the specific funerary monument is known, but not the exact location of the inscription within the often vast structures. Even if the provenance from the same monument is secure, matters are further complicated by the fact that some names have hundreds of occurrences within the corpus and that many Palmyrene families tended to name their sons after either their grandfathers or their fathers.

This complicates the identification of individuals buried within the same funerary monument: People might be mentioned multiple times in different contexts within the same monument – or some of those mentions might belong to another person belonging to a different branch or generation of the same family, bearing the same name. They may very well be related, but there might also have been a century between them: Provenance from the same funerary monument indicates relation (be it by blood or, when sales contracts come into play, by business association of different families) but in and of itself is insufficient to prove a match of identity.

The type of inscription is also of importance: One person may be mentioned in several dedications, honorific inscriptions, funerary foundations and funerary cessions, but it is very unlikely that he or she was buried in different funerary towers. But even there a caveat applies: Archaeological research indicates that sometimes, funerary towers displayed reliefs of persons who were not buried in them. This was likely done for reasons of prestige and lineage.⁶³

Other applications of provenance in contemporary research include the identification of distinct groups, such as the Palmyrene residents of Dura-Europos, the inhabitants of the Palmyrena region, and the benefactors associated with specific temples.

Rarity

While some names like *mlkw* (more than 400 attestations) occur hundreds of times, certain names only occur very rarely in the Palmyrene inscriptions, and if such a person is also of prominence, it is very likely that multiple occurrences refer to the same man or woman.

A prime example is *blyd^c*, the father of the famed *š^cdw*, son of *blyd^c*, son of *š^cdw*, son of *tymšmš*: There are fifteen entries for the unabridged form of *blyd^c* in the database.⁶⁴ Three of those entries can be securely traced back to the father of *š^cdw* by date (144, 145 and 147 AD) and genealogy.⁶⁵ Others can be discarded because the genealogy is clearly off.⁶⁶ Only five entries are undated,⁶⁷ and only four remain without a genealogy.⁶⁸

63 Henning (2013), 98.

64 PAT 0341 (twice), PAT 1919, Yon (2013) no 55, Yon (2013) no 54, PAT 0800, Yon (2013) no 58, PAT 1062, Pat 1373, PAT 0316, PAT 0115, Yon (2013) no 134, PAT 2549, PAT 2405 and PAT 1552.

65 PAT 1062, PAT 0115, Yon (2013) no 58.

66 PAT 0870, 0341 (2x), 0800, 1919, Yon (2013) no 54.

67 PAT 0800, Yon (2013) no 134, PAT 2549, PAT 2405 and PAT 1552.

68 Yon (2013) no 134, PAT 2549, PAT 2405, Yon (2013) no 55.

The one dated entry without genealogy can be dismissed because it is likely too late (220 AD).⁶⁹ This leaves us with three mentions that are undated and without genealogy, meaning they might refer to *blyd*^ε, father of *š^εdw*: two *tesserae* (PAT 2549, PAT 2405) and a ceramic fragment (Yon 2013 no 134).

Roman Citizenship

Another very useful indicator to differentiate between individuals is Roman citizenship. This observation holds true in most cases provided the inscription predates the Constitutio Antoniniana. Before that pivotal moment, the *tria nomina* was exceedingly rare in Palmyra, its presence offering a refined hint as to when citizenship was granted to a specific family.⁷⁰

The presence of Roman names in later Palmyrene inscriptions also allows for some insight into the worth attached to it: There are several Palmyrene inscriptions where only one or two parties from a contract (mostly funerary sessions) are represented as Roman citizens, whereas other parties are merely mentioned with their traditional Palmyrene names.⁷¹ In many cases it can be noticed that those who chose to display their Roman citizenship were freedmen and women, thus not displaying their gratitude for being ‘Roman’ but rather their status as freedmen.⁷² Another example of the usefulness of Roman names is their absence: Roman citizenship is almost never mentioned in inscriptions from the Palmyrene hinterland, and not at all in the extensive record represented by the corpus of *tesserae* from Palmyra.

Establishment of Groups

Depending on the topic or question of the research, distinct groups can be established based on different categories that persons from different entries have in common. This might be name, dating, location, type and / or material of inscription, employment, worshiped gods, sex, visited temples and / or locations, held offices, kinship-networks like tribes or families, citizenship or even the usage of certain formulas within an inscription. Note that those groups may or may not be based on actual or perceived groups from the Palmyrene society.

Once such a ‘research-group’ is established it can be studied for details: Are there connections between group members other than the selected group-criteria? Can connections between several groups be established? Are there onomastic similarities? How does this group compare to another group? Depending on the observations made during the analysis, the shape of the group can then be altered, other groups can be constructed, or the question asked to the group can be changed.

Problems of Religious Groups

Many surviving honorary inscriptions were found on the premises of Palmyrene temples, yet it is not always clear whether the people honored in the said temple actually worshiped the deity associated with it, or whether they were ‘just’ honored there for social reasons. For example, the individuals honored by the elusive ‘four tribes’ of Palmyra were honored with statues in four temples, yet they were

69 Yon (2013) no 55.

70 E.g. *mrqs ʔlpys yrhy* (PAT 1399, 1409, 1403, 1396), who received his citizenship under Traian, the same happened to *mrqs wlpys ʔlhbl*, one of the ‘four brothers’ of the Tomb of *ʔlhbl* (IGLS XVII 181, PAT 0486). For the usage of the *tria nomina*, as a status symbol to indicate Roman citizenship in Palmyra see Smith (2013), 95–104; Sommer (2018), 162.

71 This can be seen in PAT 0048, PAT 0051, PAT 0052, and PAT 0054, a series of funerary sessions were one party consequently does not use the *tria nomina* although other sellers and / or buyers are very fond of its usage. Presumably they were freedmen who wanted to display their new status.

72 A prime example for this can be found in PAT 0072, PAT 0073, PAT 0075, where a freedman is first just known as *wrnd*, freedman of *ʔntyks* in 186 AD and then as *ʔwrls wrnd* when he sells part of his property in 228 AD. His patron is never mentioned with such a *nomen gentile* and only ever appears as *ʔntyks*.

not honored for accomplishments in the religious sphere but served in a military, civic and economic capacity.⁷³ The same is true for the Statues of *ḥšš*, son of *nšʔ* and his brother *mlkw*, son of *nšʔ*: Both were honored in the temple of Bel, yet for accomplishments that were either political or economic in nature.⁷⁴

Therefore, people mentioned in honorific inscriptions found in temples are not listed as ‘worshippers’ of the said god – this only applies to inscriptions where the god or goddess himself / herself is mentioned. In this case, normally all people mentioned in the inscriptions are listed as devotees of the cult, even if only one person dedicated the altar or inscription in question. This decision was made because a) one can presume a certain degree of continuity of religious alignment within a family, b) many altars were devoted not only in the name of the persons dedicating them but also in the names of spouses, children and sometimes even household members and c) if genealogies are presented, the benefactors clearly wanted the names of their ancestors displayed in a religious setting.

Example: The Worshipers of Abgal

Question: Are there connections between the Worshipers of Abgal and the Palmyrene elite? By using the gods mentioned in several inscriptions, groups of worshipers of certain deities can be reconstructed. In this case, there are a couple dozen persons that can be associated with the god Abgal.⁷⁵ The vast majority of the inscriptions mentioning this god was found not in Palmyra itself but in the rural village of Khirbet-es-Semerin where a temple was dedicated to this god.⁷⁶ There are only very few inscriptions dedicated to this god outside of Khirbet-es-Semerin: one in El-Mekeimle⁷⁷ and three in other locations, presumably in other parts of the Palmyrena.⁷⁸ Therefore, most worshipers of the god Abgal seem to have been men of the steppe, which make several connecting observations all the more interesting.

Two of the inscriptions from Palmyra were set up by the same man: *nbwzʔ*, son of *kptwt*,⁷⁹ servant (*tlyʔ*) of *ʔdynt* (Oadaenathus).⁸⁰ *ʔdynt* was in turn also honored in the temple of Abgal in Khirbet-es-Semerin.⁸¹ It seems that the worshipers of Abgal were well connected even before *ʔdynt* came to power:

73 PAT 2769 (171 AD) mentions a civil career, PAT 1063 (198 AD) service as a *strategos* (with mentioning of a God in the Greek version), PAT 1378 (199 AD) service as a *strategos* and action against the nomads as well as service to a caravan.

74 PAT 0261 reads: “Statue of *ḥšš*, Son of *nšʔ*, Son of *bwlhʔ*, (son of) *ḥšš*, / erected for him by the sons of *kmrʔ* and the sons of *mtbwl* for he was / a leader for them and built the peace between them and he helped them, / in everything, large and small, / to his honor, in the month Kanwan, Year 333”. PAT 1352 gives: (g) “Malikou, (Son of) Nesa, son of Bola, who was called Asasou from the Phyle of the Komarens, / (honored) by the Palmyrenes of the Demos, for his devotion (*pal*) in the month *knwn* of the year 336, a statue of *mlkw*, / son of *nšʔ*, grandson of *bwlhʔ*, who was called *ḥšš*, / who is from the sons of *kmrʔ*, erected for him by all / the merchants who are in the city of Babylon, for he did good to them / in everything and he aided the construction of the Temple of Bel and he gave from his own purse, what nobody ever did, / for this reason, he received this statue for him, in his honor.”

75 PAT 1697, Yon 2013 no 61 (3x), Yon (2013) no 174 (3x), PAT 1678 (2x), 1676 (2x), 1675, 1673, 166 (3x), 1669, 1668 (2x), 1684 (3x), 1683 (2x), 1665 (2x), 1664 (3x), 1680 (2x) 1671 (7x), 1670 (2x), 1680 (2x).

76 PAT 1678 (2x), 1676 (2x), 1675, 1673, 166 (3x), 1669, 1668 (2x), 1684 (3x), 1683 (2x), 1665 (2x), 1664 (3x), 1680 (2x) 1671 (7x), 1670 (2x), 1680 (2x).

77 PAT 1697.

78 Yon (2013) no 61, Yon (2013) no 157, Yon (2013) no 174. Gorea (2002), 162–164 places the location of Yon (2013) no 61 somewhere in the North-West of Palmyra.

79 This man may be identical to a *kptwt* who functioned as lieutenant to a *strategos* operating in the area around Aleppo, as mentioned in PAT 2757.

80 Yon (2013) no 61, Yon (2013) no 157.

81 PAT 1684.

In 199 AD a man called *ʔbgl*, son of *šʕdw*, is mentioned on an altar in Khirbet-es-Semerin.⁸² Given the short genealogies and all the caveats already explained we can of course not be certain, yet it seems plausible that this man was the son of the famous *šʕdw*, son of *blydʕ*, who led a party of warriors against enemy raiders.⁸³ Such family connections make it likely that the temple of Abgal served as a gathering point for steppe warriors for generations.

This theory can be somewhat strengthened by another onomastic gem: The very rarely attested name *ʔsry*, mentioned as the name of the father and grandfather of men honored in the temple of Abgal,⁸⁴ is also mentioned in an inscription from the year 147 AD. It was set up in the temple of Bel in honor of *šʕdw*, son of *blydʕ*, by his friend *yrhy*, son of *ʕgylw*, son of *tymhʔ*, son of *ʔydʕn ʔsry*.⁸⁵ All of this suggests that the temple of Abgal in Khirbet-es-Semerin served as a gathering place for warriors from the Palmyrene steppe who had pledged allegiance to various high-ranking Palmyrene nobles.

How to Identify a Palmyrene in the Palmyrene Diaspora

For the purpose of the database it was necessary to define certain characteristics to distinguish ‘Palmyrenes’ from ‘others’ when living abroad. Most of these characteristics are based on culture and language: For the purposes of the database, each person mentioned in a Palmyrene inscription was treated as a Palmyrene, even if said person clearly was not – be it a Roman emperor like Hadrian, a Roman proconsul like Mucianus or the hellenistic king Seleucus Nicator.⁸⁶

While it is clear that not all persons mentioned in those inscriptions could be called ‘Palmyrene’ by any standard (ethnicity, religion, language, culture etc.) or would ever have dreamed of calling themselves Palmyrene, they still belong to the world of the Palmyrene diaspora – be it as the founder of a city in which the Palmyrenes lived, as was the case for Seleucus, or as the reigning emperor or proconsul of their day. Others might be Roman officers who commanded Palmyrene auxiliaries or spouses married by Palmyrene merchants and veterans settling abroad.

The concept of the ‘world of the diaspora’ also includes soldiers and veterans of Roman auxiliary units who were originally levied in Palmyra: While some of them clearly originated from Palmyra, others might not have – but their connection to the ‘Palmyrene World’ still would have been strong since they would have served alongside Palmyrenes for decades, presumably using Palmyrene style weapons and tactics and perhaps also adopting some cultural and religious habits from their Palmyrene comrades.

An intriguing example of a possible identity can be made for a certain *šʕdw*, son of *lšmšy*, who is mentioned in a dedicatory inscription from Rome (PAT 0249) and might be identical with a man of the same name who in 127 AD dedicated a statue to his father *lšmšy* in the temple of Bel in Palmyra (PAT 0266).

A different example is from Dura Europos: The name *nšwr* is very common in Dura Europos, with four to five inscriptions (out of 55) mentioning that name.⁸⁷ In Palmyra, the name is only mentioned thrice: Two times it is the grandfather of Septimius Odaenathus⁸⁸ and once the ancestor of a man

82 PAT 1667.

83 IGLS XVII 128.

84 PAT 1664, 1665.

85 PAT 0115.

86 Hadrian’s most famous reference in Palmyrene epigraphy is in PAT 0259, the *Tariff Law*, where Mucianus is also mentioned. Seleucus Nicator is mentioned in an inscription from Dura Europos, PAT 1095.

87 PAT 1094, 1096, 1097 and 1104. The Palmyrene Inscriptions of Dura Europos are PAT 1067–1221.

88 PAT 0558, 2815.

whose funerary relief was found in the area of the Diocletian Camp,⁸⁹ meaning that if any onomastic connection between the *nšwr*-family in Dura and Palmyra is to be drawn, one of these two would most likely be the link.

Statistical Approach

Analyzing Palmyrene inscriptions ‘in bulk’ can yield statistical results, e.g. it can be determined that, generally, the same names were popular both in the Palmyrena and on small clay tiles called *tesserae* found in Palmyra itself, indicating that the inhabitants of Palmyrena were well connected to the city dwellers. This result is not surprising and affirms the notion of Palmyra as a polymorphic society.⁹⁰ Such results are not limited to onomastics, but can also provide insights into the particular behavior of certain Palmyrene groups.

One such example is the marriage pattern of Palmyrenes residing outside of Palmyra: There are only scarce examples for married Palmyrenes in the Western part of the empire and – with one difficult to explain exception⁹¹ – there is no example that Palmyrenes abroad married Palmyrene women. In fact, two inscriptions can even be interpreted in such a way that their commissioners deliberately tried to hide their marriage with foreign women from countrymen, since the marriages mentioned in the Latin parts of the inscriptions are not displayed in their Palmyrene counterparts.⁹² Also, comparisons about the ‘marriage patterns’ of larger groups might reveal similar lifestyles: The Palmyrene diaspora in the Euphrates-fortress of Dura Europos seems to have been almost exclusively male, with neither a marriage nor a Palmyrene woman being mentioned at all. This can be pared with the observation that the women from the Palmyrena are exclusively found within fixed settlements and not out and about in the steppe itself,⁹³ indicating that Dura Europos was perhaps frequented by Palmyrene nomads from the Palmyrena who were accustomed to leaving their wives behind.

If groups are large enough, the occurrence of names within that group can be counted and then compared to the occurrence of the same names in other groups. As a very small example: There are several Palmyrene names in the *Tariff Law*, the largest surviving Palmyrene inscription which mentions a bunch of magistrates in the first few lines.⁹⁴ The names in question are: *bwn*² (2x), *hryn*, *ʔksdrs* (2x), *ʔlly*, *mlkw*, *mqymw*, *nš*², *plpṭr* and *zbyd*².

89 PAT 1950.

90 The polymorphic character of Palmyra is especially affirmed by Sommer (2018), 145–226.

91 PAT 0252.

92 PAT 0246, PAT 0248.

93 PAT 1791 (Bazuriyyeh), PAT 0317 (el Karasi), PAT 1705 (Khirbet Fauran) PAT 0555 (Qaryatein), PAT 0716 (Qaryatein) PAT 0257 (Qaryatein).

94 PAT 0259. The leading editions of the *Tariff Law* are Matthews (1984), 157–180 as well as Shifman (2014). A search for the families of the persons themselves has (with one possible exception, *bwn*², *son of bwn*²) remained inconclusive. This is due to the difficulty in dating Palmyrene inscriptions. As an example: The name Ἀλέξανδρος is found in two undated inscriptions (IGLS XVII 557, IGLS XVII 37). The only instances where the name is mentioned in inscriptions 40 years prior or after the *Tariff Law* from 137 AD are PAT 0300 from 179 AD and Yon (2013) no 132 from 99 AD, and the other securely dated occurrence (PAT1135) from the second century dates to 191 AD – two generations removed.

Palmyrene name	Occurrence in general corpus	Occurrence in <i>Tariff Law</i>	Percentage
<i>bwn</i> ⁹⁵	51	2	3.9%
<i>hyrn</i>	233	1	0.4%
<i>ʔlksdrs</i> ⁹⁵	3	2	66.6%
<i>ʕlly</i>	5	1	20%
<i>mlkw</i>	419	1	0.2%
<i>mqymw</i>	243	1	0.4%
<i>nš</i> ⁹⁶	62	1	1.6%
<i>plpṭr</i>	1	1	100%
<i>zbyd</i> ⁹⁶	132	1	0.7%

Tab.1: Palmyrene names in occurrence on the *Tariff Law*.

This, in turn raises the question: Why do the members of the Palmyrene elite mentioned in the *Tariff Law* use either extremely common names like *mlkw*, *hyrn*, or *mqymw*, or extremely uncommon names like *plpṭr*, *ʔlksdrs*, or *ʕlly*?

If we reverse the perspective and examine the Greek versions, we obtain the following results:

Greek name	Occurrence in general corpus	Occurrence in <i>Tariff Law</i>	Percentage
Βωννέους	3	2	66.6%
Αἰράνου	33	1	3,03%
Ἀλεξάνδρου	8 ⁹⁶	2	25%
Ὀλαιοῦς	1	1	100%
Φιλοπάτωρος	1	1	100%
Μαλίχου	9	1	11.1%
Ζεβεΐδου	6	1	16.6%
Νεσᾶ	16	1	6.25%

Tab. 2: Greek names in occurrence on the *Tariff Law*.

95 This only applies for one Palmyrene rendering style of the name. When the variations *ʔlksndrws* (PAT 0286, PAT 0278, PAT 2754) and *ʔlksndrys* (PAT 1135) are added into the equation, two out of eight Palmyrenes of that name were mentioned in the *Tariff Law*.

96 IGLS XVII 37, IGLS XVII 557, PAT 0259 (2x), PAT 1412, PAT 1135 (2x) PAT 0286, PAT 0278 is in honor of a Roman emperor, PAT 0300 and Yon (2013) no 132.

Curiously, *mqymw*, father of *ʿlly*, grandfather of *mlkw*, is not mentioned in the Greek text. Apart from that, the comparison of the percentages looks like this:

Palmyrene name	Percentage of occurrences in the general Corpus	Greek Name	Percentage of occurrences in the general Corpus
<i>bwn</i> ²	3.9%	Βοννέους	66.6%
<i>hryn</i>	0.4%	Αἰράνου	3.03%
<i>ʾlksdrs</i>	66.6%	Ἀλεξάνδρου	25%
<i>ʿlly</i>	20%	Ὀλαιοῦς	100%
<i>mlkw</i>	0.2%	Μαλίχου	11.1%
<i>mqymw</i>	0.4%	—	—
<i>nš</i> ²	1.6%	Νεσᾶ	6.25%
<i>plpṭr</i>	100%	Φιλοπάτωρος	100%
<i>zbyd</i> ²	0.7%	Ζεβεΐδου	16.6%

Tab. 3: Palmyrene and Greek names in comparison.

Due to the smaller sample-base, all Greek percentages are higher, but certain names correspond very well to each other, especially *plpṭr* – Φιλοπάτωρ and *ʾlksdrs* – λέξανδρος. Since in the following text all three names are attached to the same person, *ʾlksdrs br ʾlksdrs br plpṭr*, the ‘secretary of the *boule*’, this might be explained in several ways.

First of all, he might be of Greek rather than Palmyrene heritage – a theory that would indicate that the secretary had technical or administrative duties that required specialist skills only found outside of Palmyra, i.e. knowledge of Greek language, law and proceedings. This seems unlikely, since Palmyra had already managed such tasks for over a century when the new *Tariff Law* was established, and other known secretaries of the *boule* often had distinctly Palmyrene names.⁹⁷ Moreover, even highly wealthy or influential foreigners were not normally introduced with a genealogy.⁹⁸

Secondly, the name could be made up to make Palmyra’s institutions look even more Greek. This is unlikely as well: Some of the other names used are very traditional Palmyrene and one – *bwn*², son of *bwn*², – can in fact be traced back.⁹⁹

This leaves a third option: The deliberate adoption of Greek-sounding names. The use of Greek nicknames is documented in Palmyra, particularly among high-ranking circles.¹⁰⁰ It seems plausible that at least some of the magistrates mentioned in the *Tariff Law* chose to be known by their nicknames to better fit into the picture of a Greek-style *polis* constitution the *Tariff Law* paints. This practice – sometimes even applied to ancestors – was continued in inscriptions from the mid-3rd century.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ PAT 1375, PAT 1370, PAT 0305.

⁹⁸ An example for this is the funerary foundation inscription of Lucius Spedidus Chrysanthus (PAT 0591), who, although offering variations of his inscription in three languages, did not offer a genealogy in any version, which is highly unusual for Palmyrene funerary foundations.

⁹⁹ Piersimoni (1995), 570.

¹⁰⁰ PAT 0280, PAT 0305, PAT 2754, Yon (2013) no 132.

¹⁰¹ The prime example is PAT 0286, where the grandfather of a Roman knight Ἰούλιος Αὐρήλιος Σεπτίμιος Ἰαδῆς is called Ἡρώδης in Greek and *srykw* in Palmyrene.

The Case for a Digital Palmyrene Prosopography

A Palmyrene prosopography by Palmira Piersimoni is already available. It not only contains an alphabetical list of all known Palmyrenes based on the edited inscriptions available in 1995, but also reconstructed family trees for hundreds of Palmyrene clans and families.¹⁰² This digital prosopography project, however, can offer several advantages, as there are:

- **Accessibility:** A digital prosopography can be accessed by a wide range of researchers on all levels, making access to the field of Palmyra easier for students.
- **Breadth of information:** Piersimoni's paper-based prosopography was naturally limited by the availability of space and therefore only provided the name, date, family and bibliographical references for each entry. As has been shown, a digital database can go much beyond that.
- **Correctability:** The inevitable faults of the data set (typos, misunderstandings, misreadings, omissions etc.) can be corrected with (relative) ease.
- **Updating:** In case of new findings, the database can be updated with new information.
- **Ease of use:** The database can be used to search for people in rapid succession and under multiple angles. Further search options are to be added as work on the database progresses.
- **Group identification:** The database shall allow researchers to easily identify specific groups within the Palmyrene society.
- **Expandability:** New search and filtering options can be added over time.

Lessons Learned

The Prosopographia Palmyrena database, while valuable, offers room for improvement, as the author of this essay has discerned through its use and the insightful feedback from workshop participants and the editors of Digital Classics Online. The following observations have emerged from this experience:

- A) Engaging technical experts at the outset of a project is crucial to prevent the need for extensive data restructuring later.
- B) In keeping with the tradition of Palmyrene stonemasons, Greek names should be entered in a dedicated field, in uppercase letters without diacritics and in the grammatical form used in the inscription. This approach streamlines search functionality and simplifies the design and use of a virtual keyboard.
- C) Incorporating a field for transliteration would significantly enhance the database's usability – provided the name already has a known and established transliteration.
- D) While the database follows Piersimoni's practice of recording names in the grammatical form found in the relevant inscription, including both the nominative and the genitive form of Greek names, would greatly simplify user search patterns.
- E) For reasons of clarity and consistency, the different dates in the texts should also be given uniformly converted to the Common Era (CE).

¹⁰² Piersimoni (1995).

- F) The project would have benefited considerably from broadening its scope to encompass not only individuals but also the inscriptions themselves, including – whenever feasible – photographs of the inscriptions alongside their complete texts.
- G) Names of Palmyrene deities should be recorded more consistently to facilitate the reconstruction of Palmyrene religious groups.
- H) Although markers of profession and social standing are increasingly scarce in Palmyrene inscriptions, dividing the search field into subsections would have been advantageous: social (e.g., Euergetes, heads of Symposia), religious (e.g., priests), political (e.g., magistrates, Governors), military (e.g., ranks), while maintaining a separate section for civilian professions (e.g., physicians, writers, stonemasons).

List of Abbreviations

- CIL: G. Wilmanns / J. Schmidt / R. Cagnat, *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, vol. 8, *Inscriptiones Africae Latinae*, Berlin 1881.
- PAT: Hillers / Cussini (1996): D.R. Hillers / E. Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, Baltimore / London 1996.
- IGLS XVII: J.-B. Yon, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie. Palmyre. Tome XVII – Fascicule 1*, Beirut 2012.
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Sources

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- Prosopographia Palmyrena: <https://www.palmyra.uni-oldenburg.de/> (consulted 30.10.2024).
- Louvre Collection: <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010127833> (consulted 21.04.2025);
<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010127815> (consulted 26.04.2025)

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Figures

Fig. 1. Header of PAT 052, Hillers / Cussini 1996, 31.

Fig. 2: Louvre. No. AO 5004 = PAT 0735. <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010127833>.

Fig. 3: Louvre. No AO 2205 = PAT 0460. <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010127815>.

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