

## Hellenistic-Imperial Animal Sculpture in South Syria: Between 'Foreign Influence' and 'Independence'

### 1. Introduction

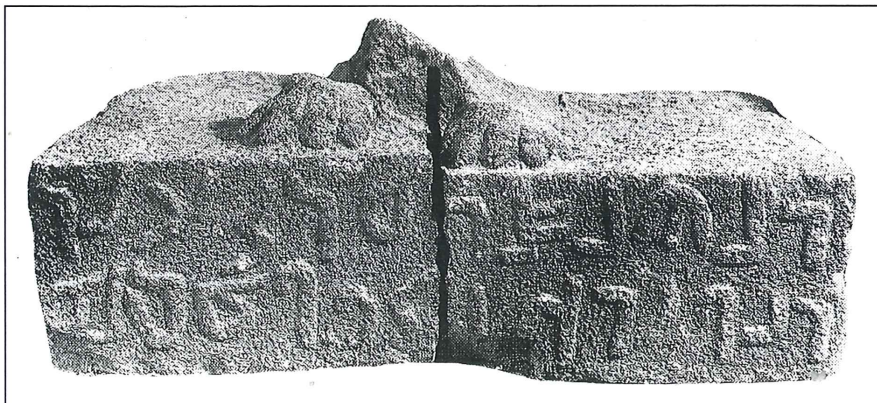
The subject of this study is the Hellenistic-Imperial animal sculpture in South Syria as an example of a change in artistic tradition. Artists, artisans and patrons who were familiar with a certain repertoire were confronted with new influences. The reasons for integrating these new influences are manifold and shall be studied on the basis of these animal sculptures.

This study is part of a larger project within a special research department in humanities at the University in Mainz/Germany whose subject is 'Cultural and Linguistic Contacts'. While other projects, located in South Syria (Qanawāt, Saḥr al-Lajja/Ledja), are concerned with the social and cultural importance of central and decentralized sacral buildings with their iconographically rich decor, the focus of this study is, however, a selected and rather limited iconographic field, namely animals, in particular lions and eagles, in the larger area of South Syria. The studied area is regarded as a complex unit in which the examined relations are understood as a manifold expression of interaction. The relation between the three constitutive ways of life — townspeople, peasants and nomads — can be grasped especially well in this area. Particular evidence for these relations arise from inscriptions written in local languages. To begin with, two

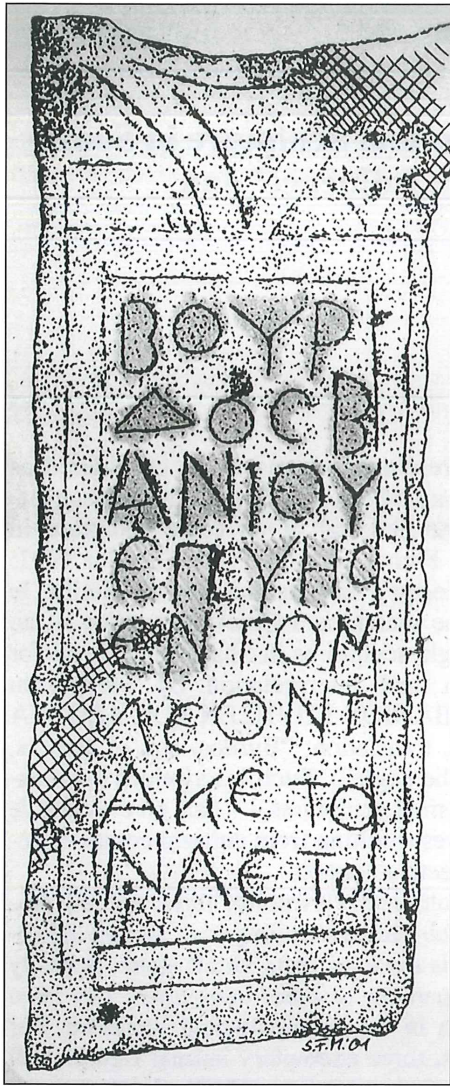
examples will be presented, which can be considered as representative of many others. The first is a Nabataean artist-inscription on the pedestal of an eagle sculpture in Ḥabrān (FIG. 1, cf. French translation by Teixidor 1991: 27, "Ceci est l'aigle qu'a fait Rabbu, fils de Halifu, le sculpteur") while the second is a Greek inscription of an artist of lion and eagle sculptures in Shaaf (FIG. 2, cf. for reading, translation and interpretation by Meynersen 2003: "ΒΟΥΡΔΟΣ ΒΑΝΙΟΥ ΕΠΙΥΗΣΕΝ ΤΟΝ ΛΕΟΝΤΑ ΚΕ ΤΟΝ ΑΕΤΟΝ", translation: "Burdos, son of Banios, made the lion and the eagle"). Such inscriptions — mentioning artists of animal sculptures — can give evidence of exchange processes resulting from cultural contacts, depending on the respective context.

From an archaeological viewpoint, three special features characterize the Hellenistic-Imperial animal sculpture. The sculpture is made of local basalt stone, is easily found, and in comparison to other sculptures, has been given little attention in the archaeological literature. For orientation purposes, three exemplary animal figures will be referred to: the eagle, the lion (FIGS. 3, 4) and the horse. A topographical map of present-day Syria shows the referred region discussed, Ḥawrān lies in the south (FIG. 5).

The title of the study 'Hellenistic-Imperial Animal



1. Nabataean inscription on the pedestal of an eagle sculpture, Ḥabrān. After Teixidor 1991: Pl. 24, Fig. 196.



2. Greek inscription, Shaaf. Drafted by S.F. Meynersen.



3. Lion in the middle of the so-called Asad place, Qanawāt. Photo: S.F. Meynersen.



4. Lion in Qanawāt. Photo: S.F. Meynersen.

Sculpture in Ḥawrān: Between foreign influence and independence' is, to be exact, a little premature. On the one hand, the analysis and registration of the material is still in progress as the project started only one year ago. Therefore, the following is only a theoretical excursus into the subject. On the other hand, the study is not based on outstanding new findings since the work is not directly connected to an excavation. Rather, it is a reconsideration of 'old findings' which are now, for the first time, arranged as a group and which have not yet been published in this context. Architectural fragments are included only in rare cases and exclusively for the purpose of establishing a chronology. Moreover, many of the items studied cannot always be immediately identified as free-standing or architectural sculpture due to their fragmentary condition.

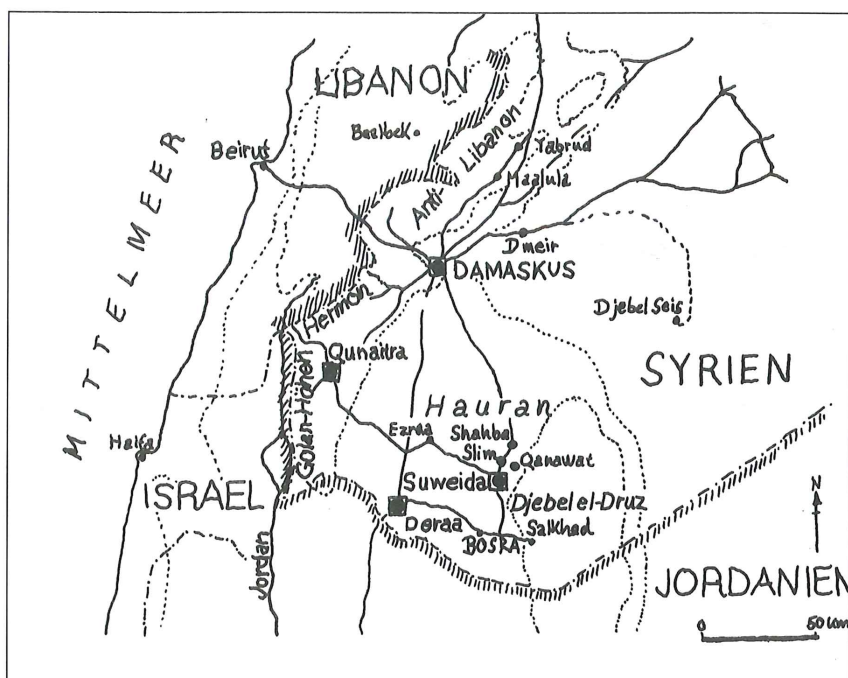
The selection of the subject was initiated subsequent to

personal association within the sculpture project at Sahr al-Lajja/Ledja in cooperation between the SFB Mainz and the IFAPO Damascus. While contributing to the catalogue of the sculptures, I became aware that there are, apart from Nikes, respectively Victorias, many fragments of animal sculptures present in the repertoire of the sanctuary. This phenomenon has not yet been explicitly recognized for in the Ḥawrān sculpture.

In addition, the interaction of type, style and motif turned out to be differentiated, so that the question arises as to whether several workshops must be assumed for South Syria; workshops whose artisans ('occidental', 'oriental', 'indigenous') were most probably in contact with one another.

## 2. The Animal Sculpture

My research on these animal sculptures was structured by



5. Map of Hawrān area. Drafted by S.F. Meynersen, following Odenthal 1988.

three questions:

- What is the current state of research? What are the new and old approaches taken?
- Where are the respective sculptures located today? Is the secondary context of the sculptures part of the history of reception?
- And finally, the selected animal examples — eagle, lion, and wolf — must be discussed with regard to the differing degrees of ‘independence’ and ‘foreign influence’.

### 2.1. The Current State of Research

Since earlier publications, which provided an overview of the South Syrian sculptures, there has been almost no further research work done in this field. Only sporadically has this subject been addressed in a publication (Dunand 1934; Abdul-Hak 1951; Al-Ush *et al.* 1969). The basic reason for this most likely was that locations were in the most part unknown or the location was incorrectly identified. No archaeological context could be found. Another possibility is that the ‘craftsman’s-like’ nature of the sculptures, as opposed to artistic quality, created a further obstacle for academic studies. Apart from this, the attention given to certain research questions fluctuates due to individual interests, fashions or trends. All the more important is the recent interest in the freestanding sculptures of this region, discussed in, for instance, works of I. Skupinska-Løvset (1999) and J. Bouzek (1999) as well as in different projects carried through by DAI Damascus (Laxander 2000), the IFAPO, as well as the SFB Mainz at Saḥr (Meynersen 2002; 2003; Weber 2003) or Qanawāt (Bolelli 1985/86).

The only existing comprehensive documentation of the Hawrān round sculptures are in the little known doctoral thesis of J.A. Sabeh from 1950. Artistic relations of the genre of freestanding sculptures in the region of Hawrān were initially discussed and classified in a paper of E. Will in 1965. Subsequently, Will considered sculptural artefacts to be either Hellenic-Roman imports or local products. The latter either influenced by the Hellenic-Roman art or simply viewed as “autochthonous” (Will 1965: 512-517). In this approach, the formal design of the art was analyzed through a Western point of view (Hauser 2001: 83-104).

The complexity of the problems of freestanding sculptures from Hawrān becomes evident in a publication of selected sculptures by G. Bolelli (1985/86). Special chapters with regard to technique and style of the Hawrān sculpture, its iconography, the establishment of dates, the cultural surroundings, its predecessors and, eventually, the range of its use. The contact area, postulated by G. Bolelli, which influenced the Hawrān eagles, lions, horses and *mischwesen* stretches from the Commagene to Phoenicia and from Mesopotamia to South Arabia. According to Bolelli, these animal sculptures also draw on “ancient oriental image traditions” (Bolelli 1985/86: 311-353).

Already R.A. Stucky’s (1990) and S. Diebner’s (1982) assessment of the cultural situation in the Syrian *hinterland* is opposite to that in the Phoenician metropolises, with their strong occidental influence. Stucky remains undecided as to how the few tangible external influences, i.e. some closed oil lamps and some Attic dishes as the only occidental luxury goods, eventually af-

fect the self-image of the pre-Hellenistic community (Stucky 1990: 28). Diebner, in contrast, went one step further. For a later time period, the second and third centuries AD, she assumes that the sculptures of Ḥawrān “maintained a remarkable independence” as compared to other Roman regions (Diebner 1982: 55). G. Bolelli (1985/86), followed by J. Bouzek (1999: 7), mainly described the neglect of anatomy and body structure as well as the lacking muscle and bone details as characteristics of the Ḥawrān sculptures (Diebner 1982: 56). This is how she defines the term “independence”. That means, her definition is carried through mainly by way of elimination.

According to J. Bouzek (1999), Roman types can be found in the repertoire from the beginning of the second century AD. The relation of the so-called “pre-provinciale”, “indigène” or “regional”, on the one hand; and the “provincial” or so-called Graeco-Roman influences on the other hand, and their effect remains unclear. According to preliminary stock-taking, there is growing evidence that the only positive characteristics of the “indigenous” group, namely their symmetry and frontality, apply only at a first glance; indeed, deviating tendencies can also be observed, for instance, the latent expression of movement via asymmetrical features in the eagle sculptures themselves or the staggered placement at the basis.

Thus, it becomes evident how important it is to expand the study with regard to space and time in order to understand the Ḥawrān animal sculptures. Therefore, the geographic borders of the Ḥawrān shall be exceeded and sculptures from the Golan and Jordan shall be included into the study (Peled 1976: 51-53, Pl. 9, Figs. 1-6). Moreover, apart from the Roman Empire, the Hellenistic and late Graeco-Roman epoch shall also be taken into consideration.

A central analysis of style cannot be carried through without a framework of existing and relatively established dates supported by examples, which are determined by inscriptions or other external indicators. The establishing of data with regard to the animal sculptures is, in principle, more difficult due to the lack of a generally coherent chronology of Syrian-Imperial freestanding sculptures.

For a comparison of styles within Syria, an examination of the three-dimensional ornaments of the buildings of the temple complex at Si' is necessary. The complex can be probably dated through the inscription in honour of the Maleichat, approximately between 33/32 to 2/1 BC (Freyberger 1998: 46-47). Here basalt blocks with eagle representations in high relief and a lion protome can be found, both originating from the temple of Ba'al Shamīn.

Such observations shall be completed by a comparison of the three-dimensional animals with representations

of the same motifs on tomb reliefs with a fixed inscribed date and on altars and pedestals of statues with absolutely established dates. Further ‘dated’ complexes of sculptures could hardly be found in Syria because the published data on buildings does not necessarily include reference to its sculptures. This is the reason why the style of monuments outside of Syria must be included in the comparison. Attention must be paid to special aspects of methodology. The architectural sculpture in the form of animals at the Qaṣr al-‘Abd in ‘Irāq al-Amīr serves as an example. This construction corresponds, according to E. Will’s analysis, to the castle as described by Flavius Josephus and built by the Tobiad Hyrkan in the first quarter of the second century BC (Will 1991: 31). On top of the four corners of the building there are lion families in addition to the eagles.

A general survey of the research revealed problems connected with the analysis of style and semantics of these basalt sculptures, which cannot exclusively be solved by the so-called oriental-occidental-question. Rather, there are also basic problems of interpretation regarding the manifold influences.

## 2.2. *The Secondary Context of the Sculptures as a Part of the History of Reception?*

Most of the animal sculptures can no longer be found *in situ*. Exceptions are some examples at the sanctuaries of Si' and Saḥr. Thus, a possible range of use is already described, specifically a religious one. This assumption is confirmed by the example of a pair of lions from Miṣ'ad. Due to a Greek votive formula on the pedestal of the sculpture, indicated as female, both are considered as votives (Suwayda, arch. museum inv. 124, Dunand 1934: 64, Pl. 27, no. 124). These representations of lions are made of limestone (not basalt). On the basis of style these sculptures should be considered as belonging to the Hellenistic type. In contrast, a large part of the basalt stone animal sculptures are accidental findings. Today, for instance, they are in collections at Damascus, Suwayda, Buṣrā as well as Paris and Princeton. They are scattered in various private collections in America; they can be found in art trade or recently at Dayr 'Atiah. Moreover, J. Bouzek (1999) recently reported on the Hrozny Collection in the Oriental Department of the National Gallery in Prague.

Other sculptures can be found throughout Syria. The following excursus describes a chapter of a so far unnoted history of reception. Publicly visible are, for example, a range of unpublished animal sculptures in provincial towns with a Roman past such as at Qanawāt (FIGS. 3, 4, cf. Laxander 2000) or at Suwayda. These sculptures are placed at the centres of crossroads. Often they are in direct proximity of barracks or military buildings such as at Izra' or at Suwayda. Some of these sculptures are certainly of Roman origin, others are probably modern and made

use of Roman sculptures. Thus, the problem of their original placement remains. A solution might be found through an analysis of established pieces.

Conclusions with regard to the placement of a sculpture could possibly also be drawn from their technical trimming. For example, the preparation of the back or the form of the plinths. There are significant variations between the different sculptures. An example is an eagle in the garden of the National Museum of Damascus with simply smoothed back view and traces of cramps at the pedestal. Its use is probably different from that of an eagle sculpture in the museum of Dayr 'Atiah, which is — as can be seen — prepared like a round sculpture.

### 2.3. *The Eagle, the Lion, and the Wolf, and the Different Degrees of 'Independence' and 'Foreign Influence'*

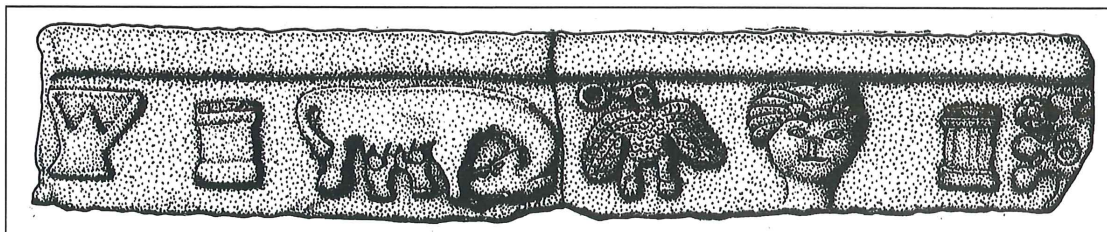
The subject of the eagle was extraordinarily popular in the area of South Syria. G. Bolelli (1985/86: 351-352) alone knows of 23 types of eagles. It is improbable that these statues always served as acroteria. The type of the eagle could be modified without effort. By adding certain characteristics, the message could be varied and could thus make the statue available for a different use. This is evident by monuments such as an eagle with a snake (cf. for example: Suwayda, arch. museum inv. 270 (129); Bolelli 1991: 70 and Pl. 6, no. 270.); or of a larger than life-size eagle with bust statues placed underneath, which have *torques* around their necks and carry grapes (cf. for example: Suwayda, arch. museum inv. 38bis; Bolelli 1991: Pl. 11, no. 49, from Miş'ad); or of an eagle with statues enthroned underneath, which carry a snake and a baton (cf. for example: Damascus, national museum inv. 4192); and last, a boy clinging to an eagle (FIGS. 6, 7, cf. for example: Suwayda arch. museum inv. 63; Bolelli 1991: 315 and Pl. 12, no. 50). So far, there are very few publications which define the different shapes of eagles in South Syria from case to case. However, the individual variations raise interesting questions. Especially the rare representation of an eagle carrying a small boy on top of his wing, is unusual. This is a variation that has not yet been examined for its meaning. The eagle at Imtān, which was set up in modern times, is a good example because it offers almost complete proof of this motif. Its interpretation is rather difficult. At a first glance such sculptures might remind us of Zeus-Ganymed representations (cf. Sichtermann 1988: 154). But the 'boy' is not, as usu-

al, held in the claws of the bird of prey but is transported on top of the wing. For this reason, possibly ideas of apotheosis (glorification) should be included into the consideration (cf. Artemidorus, *Oneirocriticus* 2, 20). Thus means that without thorough analysis, neither the one or the other possibility can be excluded *a priori*. The attributes of the statues — grape, snake, baton or torques — might provide preliminary indications derived from their range of meaning (a slightly longer version of this paper will appear elsewhere in German).

Moreover, traditional motifs existed in Syria since ancient times. They were most likely also influenced by the Hellenistic or Roman era with different shades of intensity. This includes, of course, the subject of the lion (Braun-Holzinger 1987-90: 88-97). The representation of the already mentioned lion sculpture at Qanawāt possibly allows one to conclude that there were ancient oriental role models in existence (FIG. 4). I refer in particular to the ornamental stylisation of the muzzle, which I will further discuss in future papers.

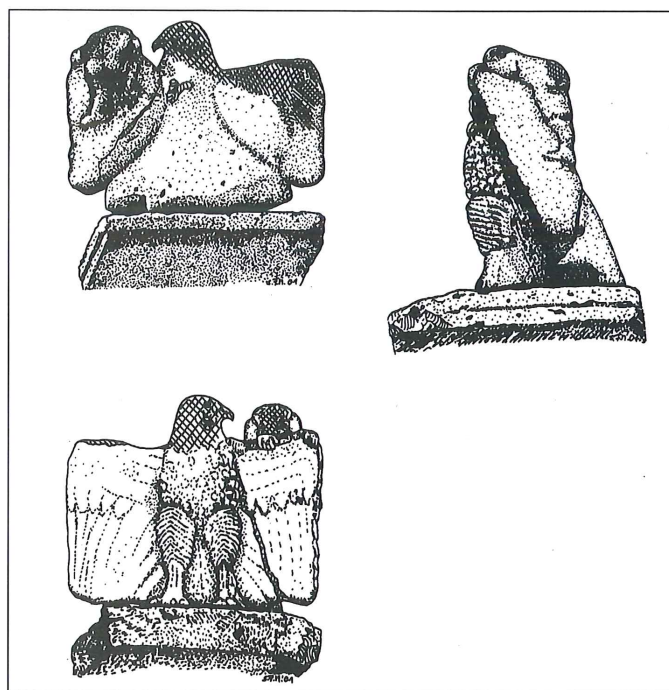
The features of other images of animals, however, remind of more modern, i.e. Hellenistic types. This applies, for instance, to the earlier mentioned pair of lions sitting upright, one of which is still carrying the last three letters of the Greek votive formula on its pedestal: ἀνέθηκεν (Bolelli 1985/86: 352, no. 64). I want to refer briefly to the similar comparable arrangement of the short, shaggy mane, which, according to preliminary assessments, shows parallels in the Hellenistic area. Certainty can only be reached by further individual studies of this example as well.

Moreover, there are some types of animals that were included in statuary sculptures and in the reliefs of the region only during the Roman era. The *Lupa Romana* serves as an example. A section of a frieze in the National Museum of Damascus shows a female wolf with two sucking boys (FIG. 8). The lintel also represents two Roman altars, an eagle with a wreath, definitively Roman subjects. Therefore, the female wolf can be interpreted as *Lupa Romana* (Dulière 1979: 47). Presumably its representation is not an isolated finding. Remarkable in this connection are several fragments with *Lupa Romana*, such as a bracelet in Paris (FIG. 9, Mus. du Louvre, inv. 1347 from Tartus; Dulière 1979: 63, no. 170, Fig. 299) or a *cippus* in Palmyra (Bel Temple; Dulière 1979: 46-47, no. 120, Fig. 297). Remarkable is the head and neck-fragment of a



8. *Lupa Romana*, section of a frieze. National Museum, Damascus. Drafted by H. Wolf v. Goddenthow.

antique. FIGS. 3, 4, 6 and 7 illustrate examples of lions and eagles found at Qanawāt and Imtān, a city in the south of Ḥawrān: The sculpture of an eagle with a boy, on the capital of a column composed of different ancient drums. Although a modern construction, it could stem from a tradition of column monuments, and as such of interest. The Roman origin of these two animals at Qanawāt and Imtān is indicated, apart from the style, by the simple supplements, which are probably made of cement (FIG. 4). Another indication for the ancient origin is the fact that the posture of the animals is not correctly adjusted. This becomes evident if one looks at the lion (FIG. 4; for example, his back should be further elevated as is the Hellenistic lion of Ekbatana). When assessing such findings one has to take into consideration the problem of imitations that exist in the field of the basalt reliefs but also applies to the freestanding sculptures as proven by K. Parlasca (1980; cf. Bol 1983: 340, no. 124-126): A lion sculpture in the garden of the museum of Suwayda has an Arabian inscription which names Marouf Anis Shair al-Gharya as the stonemason and the year 1984 as date of origin. This imitation represents another kind of reception.



7. Boy clinging to an eagle, Imtān. Drafted by S.F. Meynersen.

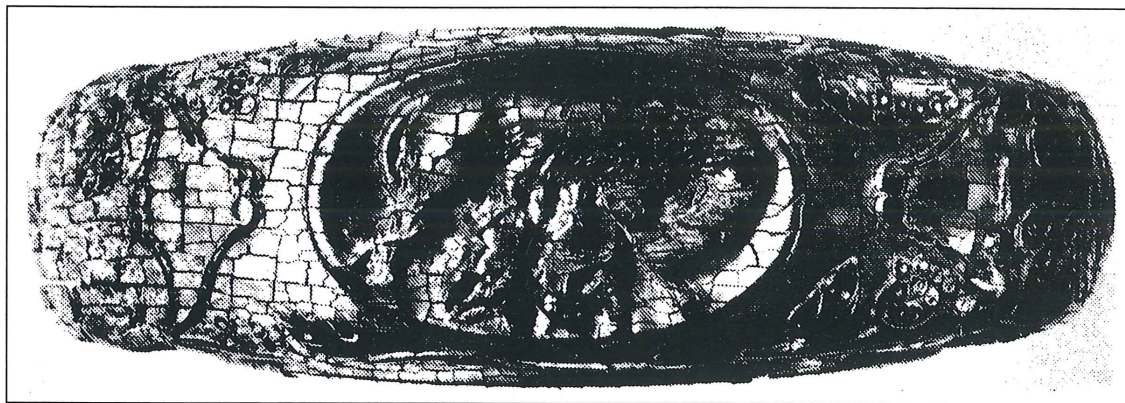


6. Eagle in the middle of a street crossing, Imtān. Photo: S.F. Meynersen.

Further Roman animal sculptures can be found for decorative and representative purposes, but in a private surrounding. There is, for example, the fragment of a horse sculpture at Suwayda hidden in a front garden between shrubs; or an eagle sculpture in the private collection of a Shaykh at Amrawah. In 1889, the explorer G. Schumacher (1889: 17) describes the prominent place of the statue as follows: "And in front of his menzul (probably a guesthouse) the Sheikh had set up a fine Roman eagle".

A third group of sculptures, however, in a poor condition, ended up eventually on the dumping ground. But this group is important for the study of animal sculptures, not only for statistical, but also for stylistic reasons.

The starting point of the study outlined here, shows many problems to be true. It quickly becomes evident that the other studies, which so far are considered to be finished, must be reassessed. Moreover, local observations suggest that Roman animal sculptures are still appreciated in recent times. Probably there is even some kind of 'antique awareness', which can be seen in the collection activity of Shaykhs or in the modern design of public places. It can be assumed that in this connection, the eagle and the lion have, at the same time, an abstract as well as an actual meaning. It would be interesting to continue research as to whether and why the eagle and the lion, both national emblems, are presented to such an extensive public and private domain, in the modern and classical world. Certainly, the aforementioned secondary use does not allow one to draw conclusions with regard to the original



9. *Lupa Romana*, bracelet in Paris. Mus. du Louvre, inv. 347. Following Dulière 1979: Fig. 299.

sculpture which is in the garden of the museum of Dayr 'Atiah (cf. Meynersen 2003). One should pay attention to the physiognomy of the animal head with its pointed muzzle, the fur stylised as a scale pattern, whose crescent-shaped hair forms a narrow wreath towards the face. This physiognomy can best be compared with that of wolves, as for instance a physiognomic comparison with the famous Capitoline *Lupa Romana* (Presicce 2000), which has definitely been identified as a wolf. This comparison illustrates that the animal head belonged to a wolf. With this comparison no intentions were associated with regard to time and style, but explicitly only with regard to physiognomic intentions. It remains unclear whether the peculiar fragment in Dayr 'Atiah was intended to represent a *Lupa Romana*, also recent observation of the head and neck-fragment suggested doubts about its authenticity. For a positive clarification of this question further parallels with reliable image contexts are required.

As supported by established literature, the representations of *Lupa Romana* are comparably rare in the eastern provinces — in contrast to the Balkan and Danube provinces (Schauenburg 1966: 307). Also, the stylistic composition of this example — the frieze in Damascus (FIG. 8) — seems to confirm this rather small influence. It is evidently confined locally. In this case it has to be clarified where the individual models were found and what kind of circumstances determined their representation.

### 3. Outlook

Finally, against this background, it seems justified to assume a particular complexity of the pictorial representations of animals in the area of South Syria. It will be important to study the chronological aspect, meaning, the question as to whether the different types and stylistic characteristics occurred simultaneously or in succession. This includes the question as to whether there exists an interrelation between the type of change and certain social and cultural constellations. It will be decisive to attach the same importance to original characteristics on the

one hand, and foreign influences on the other hand, and to refrain from a consideration which puts too much emphasis on either Greek or Roman influences. For the Ḥawrān sculptures, this has not yet been explicitly formulated.

It is true that the situation is disparate. But the clarification of basics possibly provides a solution in so far as the material shall be collected and classified according to significant criteria. This will also provide a clear formulation of the questions concerning the material. This approach requires the establishment of a definite chronology. Only then can conclusions be drawn as to whether it is a diachronic or a synchronous phenomenon and how the results have to be assessed against the general historical background: namely, the economic, religious and structural background. Here one should avoid a polarisation into 'dependent' and 'independent' style of forms as it is implicated in the term 'independence'. Rather, the aim is to draw conclusions from the material with regard to the characteristics of the Ḥawrān animal sculpture. Perhaps it is a special characteristic of the Ḥawrān, that a first impression integrates 'foreign elements' individually and confidently and uses them to articulate its 'own demands'.

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