

AN EXAMPLE OF LOCAL SCULPTURE AT JERASH*

by
Maria Cristina Bitti

In June 1984, a limestone head that appears to be an interesting addition to the current stock of knowledge of local Middle-East sculpture was found at Jerash during the clearing of the area in front of the temple of Artemis (Pl. XXXI, 1). It had been reused in the construction of a channel running from North to South, which was probably part of a new drainage layout for the Artemis cult complex installed under the Umayyads. Had the face not been turned towards the inside of the channel, the piece might not have been discovered, because the back of the head was in no way different in its appearance from the blocks of stone among which it was embedded. This is not a piece of sculpture executed in the round, but rather an high-relief stripped from its original location, as can readily be seen in the side views (Pls. XXXI, 2 & XXXII, 1). The locks of hair, face and neck have been preserved. The overall height is 30 cm. Though slightly less than natural size, the dimensions of the piece are none the less reasonable if one assumes that it was not part of a dedicatory or cult statue.

The head is sculpted in the soft Malki limestone used to build the city's monuments. The features have been executed with particular care. The wavy hair-style,

with no central parting, displays a motif that, as far as official Roman portraiture is concerned, can only be compared with that of a female head of Flavian age¹. Here, since there is no reason to suppose that a portrait is intended, type is determined by two plaits falling down the two sides of the neck and by the laurel wreath around the head. The simple features express a deep pathos. The large eyes sunk on their sockets and the curl of the fleshy lips are in line with the local Hellenistic work most strikingly represented by the head of Alexander the Great from Beth-Shan². The massive neck, too, is consistent with the impression of power the artist has set out to convey. These, indeed, are features that must be borne in mind in the by no means easy task of identifying the subject thus portrayed.

Another consideration, of course, is that the casual nature of this find means that the objective data on which an initial chronological assessment can be made are lacking. Since one can only rely on the style of the piece and its iconographic similarities, the question is complicated by the fact that this is the first example of a local work to emerge from the excavations at Jerash.

Very few examples of Jerashine sculp-

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ues Seigne, a discerning connoisseur of Middle East art; Hans Günter Martin, who gave me much of his time at the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Rome, in the search for iconographic forms representative of the Eastern sector of the Roman Empire.

1. The subject is Domitilla. This head is a copy of an original in the Torlonia Museum (Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek, n. 3186, in M. Wegner, *Das Römische Herrscherbild - Die Flavii*, Berlin, 1966, pp. 120-121, figs. 51-52.)
2. This is to be found in the room devoted to the Hellenistic period in the Jerusalem Museum. It is assigned to the 2nd cent. B.C.

ture are known at present, specially in the case of figurative pieces, which were more prone to destruction than any other media of decoration. Besides the better-known examples, such as a head of Zeus and another of Marcus Aurelius, there are large numbers of terracotta figurines which have been produced on large scale at Jerash from the beginning of the Christian era³. These are all linked by a thread of Hellenism that spread throughout the area and remained a strong influence even during the process of its Romanisation. This is a feature that regularly reappears in the finds from the public areas of the city which have been systematically excavated⁴.

Here, however, we are faced with something different. Loyalty to the Hellenistic tradition is not so total, nor can one discern any precise references to the Nabatean tradition, the other mainspring of this area⁵.

The very fact that this head is in a material of much less worth than the white marble used for the other sculptures in our possession suggests the activity at Jerash itself of workshops engaged in the creation of autonomous figurative models. Or better still, the fact that our fragment comes from a high-relief may indicate that these local craftsmen were entrusted with all the architectural decorations, whereas the rich statues which adorned the city's buildings were the work of sculptors steeped in the Hellenised artistic *koine* current in the Eastern regions of the Roman Empire. Hellenism persists here as an acquired her-

itage in the superficial rendering of the iconographic features; it is present in the shading, the soft touches of the scalpel, and in the search for a certain solemnity of expression. Yet this heritage is clearly not understood in its deepest essence: the frontal presentation deprives the image of that intensity and immediacy which were obtained with external devices in Hellenistic sculpture and seemed to spring forth from the interior of the figure. Here there is a type of treatment of the surface which recalls the decorative motifs of the *temenos* in the sanctuary of Zeus, rather than the elaborated and sharply defined outlines of the temple of Artemis.

The piece may well have been originally located near the place where it was found and can thus be referred to some part of the sanctuary itself. It is certain, in fact, that the channel was built with stones taken from adjacent monuments. This is shown by the presence of some perfectly squared blocks from the original stairway leading to the temple. This view is equally supported by a certain interpretation of the iconographic features. As we have said, this is far from being a portrait piece, as can be understood from its rapt, almost supernatural expression. The hair style, with its plaits and the crown of laurel, tells us who the subject is: Apollo, in his best-known image. The local touch has undoubtedly wandered away from the classical idea. Even so, the workmanship is not such as to mask the choice of subject.

3. The head of Zeus is on display in the Amman Archaeological Museum, as are the terracottas that tell us so much of what we know of the iconography of this period (in J.H. Iliffe, 'Imperial Art in Transjordan. Figurines and Lamps from a Potter's Store at Jerash', *QDAP* XI, 1944, pp. 1-24). The head of Marcus Aurelius is at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem (*Das Römische Herrscherbild* II.4, fig. 33). The statuettes date from the first two centuries A.D. The head of Zeus must come from the 1st cent. A.D., whereas that of Marcus Aurelius clearly belongs to the great rebirth of Jerash under the Antioines.

4. These come from the North Theatre and were

shown to me by Julian Bowsher, director of the British expedition. They are fragments of lower limbs and heads with different hair styles in white marble. Other fragments are at present in the garden of the Antiquities Department of Jerash and come from the excavations conducted by Mrs. Aida Naghawi near the Eastern Baths. These are part of headless, draped statues of exquisite, classical style.

5. Thought was initially given to the possibility that this head could be a Nabatean piece in view of the markedly local character of its style. Reference to the literature, however, readily shows that different influences are at work (see e.g. N. Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, Cassell, 1966).

Now it is no cause for surprise to find a portrayal of Apollo in a cult scenario dominated by his sister Artemis. The association of these two divinities is common enough under the Empire and in this area, where an example is offered by a coin found at Gaza⁶. Yet it is also true that Apollo enjoyed a place in his own right at Jerash. This is made plain by many of the terracotta statuettes in the Amman Museum, where the god is portrayed in graceful Hellenistic forms. Stronger evidence, too, is provided by a 2nd cent. A.D. inscription found in the Northern part of the city, which speaks of a place of worship dedicated to Apollo only⁷.

The cult data thus suggest that our head dates from the period when the city was at the peak of its vitality and may even go back to the Hellenistic stage. Closer dating, however, can be attempted in the light of its style.

This, however, is by no means an easy task. The scholars we have consulted were puzzled by certain aspects of the workmanship. Besides, there is the more objective consideration that there are virtually no reports of similar works in the whole of the Middle East; while the museums prefer to put on display more "classical" pieces and hence tend to attach no more than secondary importance to these undoubtedly significant local forms.

From what has been said so far, one can make a reasonable guess that this head was sculpted in connection with a local revival of Hellenistic sculpture started in Flavian times. The conquest of Palestine may well have led to the introduction of an iconographical heritage, followed by its spread to the neighbouring territories. A head from Qanawat assigned to the end of the 2nd cent. A.D. can be said to mark the end of this revival, since it shows how the path opened by our Apollo led to a Hellenism devoid of all meaning⁸ (Pl. XXXII, 2).

Lastly, a few more words must be said about the original location of this piece. Nothing is known about the roofing — if any⁹ — over the temple of Artemis. As matters now stand, the only structure for which a high-relief can be postulated is the altar. This, however, has only been excavated on the South and West sides and its architectural features have not yet been established¹⁰. It is already clear, on the other hand, that it does not lie on the same axis as the temple, but is shifted to the North. This unusual position may have been rendered necessary by the existence in the courtyard of other structures when the great reconstruction promoted by Trajan and Hadrian began. It may be that these structures were incorporated in the new layout of the temple area and were rendered exploitable when the Umayyads built their kilns on the site. If so, some of

6. Hill, *BMC: Palestine*, pp. IXXV-IXXVI. This coin portrays a nude Apollo with a goddess thought to be Artemis in a temple roughly represented by two columns supporting an architrave.

7. C.B. Welles, "The Inscriptions", n.38, p.392, in C.H. Kraeling, *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis*, New Haven, 1938, pp.355-493.

8. This head and many others are housed in the store-rooms of the Flagellation Museum, Jerusalem (inv. SF204). I am extremely grateful to Michele Piccirillo for his readiness to help me and the great trouble to which he went in the hard job of finding pieces that might be of assistance. I must also thank him for permission to publish this piece for the first time and for supplying me with the necessary chronological and background information, as well as several pho-

tos of the head.

9. With regard to the question of how the temple was covered, the view generally accepted is that expressed by Dr. Parapetti ("The Sanctuary of Artemis at Jerash", *ADAJ* XXIV (1980), p. 145f.). From his examination of the blocks found on the ground and the architecture still standing, he suggests that the roof was never installed because the temple itself was never finished.

10. The altar was partly uncovered during the 1984 season by Dr. Fontana and Dr. Pierobon. Unfortunately, however, the restoration programme has made it necessary to suspend all digs not directly aimed at the work of restoration. The Italian mission has now shifted its attention to the front of the Sanctuary along the *cardo*. It is hoped that the altar and other parts of the terrace will be investigated in the near future.

their material might have been dismantled to build the channel. Our head could thus have been part of their decoration and suffered the same fate.

It is well to remember, of course, that the terrace of the temple of Artemis, like all the rest of the city, still requires extensive clearing and excavations before the work of restoration envisaged by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities can begin. If, indeed, the head proves to have been connected with the temple and its vicinity, it will serve to illustrate the presence side by side of different cultures equally

concerned with efficient transmission of the message to be conveyed by works of art: for the Roman imperialistic attitude, the need to exploit a source of political propaganda; for the pre-existent local craftsmen, the need to survive this foreign presence and still retain their vigour.

Maria Cristina Bitti
Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e
Scavi per il Medio Oriente e l'Asia
via S. Ottavio, 20
10124 TORINO
Italy