

SOME PROBLEMS OF ROMANO-PARTHIAN SCULPTURE AT HATRA

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(Plates V-X)

A. TWO PORTRAIT-HEADS OF ROMANS FROM HATRA

In 1964 there was found in Temple C at Hatra a life-size marble head with clean-shaven face (Pl. V, 1 and 2), now in the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad. It was lying on the podium behind the altar at the south end of the temple, and would seem to have fallen there from the place in which it had been set. The head, of which the face is extremely well preserved, appears to have been deliberately cut from the body across the neck, just below the chin. But of the body no trace has as yet come to light in Temple C or elsewhere.²

The head, with its heavy, fleshy countenance, its lack of moustache and beard, its furrowed brow, facial folds, and full chin, is clearly the portrait of an elderly Roman. These features immediately distinguish it from the rather lean, smooth, flat-cheeked, moustached and bearded portraits of Hatrene kings, noblemen and so forth. Furthermore, it must be the portrait of a Roman prior to Hadrian's time, when, as is well known, thick curly hair and thick curly beards and moustaches came into fashion for men in the West. The coiffure, with its short, uncurled, slightly curving locks of hair, is that of Trajan's time. The laurel-wreath definitely indicates that the subject is a Roman emperor. It is, indeed, difficult to see whom the head was meant to represent if not Trajan himself.

That the sculptor was Hatrene, not Roman, is obvious on several counts. First, the face, which is just recognizable as Trajan, is fatter in the cheeks than are most of the emperor's authentic likenesses from the Roman world; and it has a higher and more lined brow than any of those portraits display. It must, however, be remembered that Roman portrait sculptors tended to idealize all emperors to some extent. When Trajan was in Mesopotamia he was 65 and nearing the end of his life; and he may then have been actually more lined and fleshy in the face than his official portraits represent him as being. In the second place, ear-rings are never worn by Roman emperors in the West; but they appear in Hatrene art on some male portraits as a mark, it would seem, of royalty and high-ranking office.³ A Hatrene artist might, then, very well have considered ear-rings to be appropriate adornment for a Roman emperor's portrait. In the third place, circles incised on the cheeks near the ears—here in each case a circle within a circle—are never found in western Roman portraits, but occur at Hatra, in the form of simple single rings, both on the second Roman head discussed below, and on the limestone portrait of a Hatrene nobleman with a purely Hatrene coiffure, a lean, flat face and a spade-like beard, in the Iraqi National Museum.⁴ Lastly, the plastic rendering of the irises of the eyes, almost ubiquitous on Hatrene portraits and other heads from the first century A.D. onwards, is not known in monumental portraits sculpture in the West before Hadrian's time.

It may, then, be concluded that the marble head of Trajan was by the hand of a Hatrene sculptor who had seen some Roman portrait or portraits of the emperor, possibly Trajan in the flesh, who imitated Roman physiognomy, technique, and style, but who does not seem to have copied any western portraits line for line and who added local, non-Roman details to his work.

There are three questions now to be asked. How and when would a Hatrene artist have had access to a Roman portrait or portraits of Trajan or even had sight of the emperor himself? When and why was a portrait of the emperor set up at Hatra? Why was the head eventually severed from its body and placed in Temple C? We can only guess at the answers.

¹ I should like to express my gratitude to the Directorate General of Antiquities and the British School of Archaeology in Baghdad, to whose generosity and hospitality I owe the opportunity of studying the Hatrene sculptures in March, 1969. My special thanks are due to Dr. Fuad Safar for his kind permission to me to republish in this *Journal*, in Part A of this paper, portions of an article on two Roman heads which has appeared in *Sumer*, xxvi, 1970, 231 ff. pls. 1-7. A few further observations, not included in that

article, have been added here. Part B is completely new.

² For measurements, a detailed description of the head, and a list of the small damages that it has sustained, see *Sumer*, xxvi, 1970, 231-2.

³ e.g. the marble portrait of King Uthal in the Mosul Museum: R. Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthians and Sassanians*, 1962, 91, fig. 102.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 90, fig. 101.

Hatra lay well to the south of the southern boundary of the Roman province of Mesopotamia created by Trajan in 115. But during the year 115 to 116/7—between Trajan's conquest of northern Mesopotamia in 115 and the great Parthian uprising, including Hatra (Dio lxviii, 31), against Rome in 116/7, when the emperor made his abortive attempt to take that strong-point—during that interval relations between Rome and Hatra could have been reasonably peaceful and even friendly.⁵ In the course of that year, Trajanic coin-portraits could have reached Hatra, and a Hatrene sculptor might possibly have penetrated into Roman territory, observed a portrait or portraits of Trajan in the round and perhaps have seen the emperor. Conceivably Trajan could have come to Hatra, although for such a visit no positive evidence exists. We can but conjecture that under such circumstances someone at Hatra wished to erect a portrait of the emperor and commissioned a Hatrene sculptor to carve one—probably from memory, since the use of Roman coin portraits as models would surely have produced a better likeness, at least in the profile view. There are, in fact, two bronze coins of Hatra on the obverses of which the rayed profile bust of the city's chief deity, the Sun-god, is given features quite closely resembling those of the rather fat-faced Trajan as presented on his Roman coinage of 115–117⁶ (Pl. VI, 1–3). Here the Hatrene die-engraver—or an eastern provincial (Syrian?) die-engraver employed at Hatra—could have used a Roman coin as his model. Could these coins have been minted at Hatra during the brief period in which Trajan was in favour there?

After Hatra's breach with Rome and Trajan's ignominious withdrawal from the siege, the Roman emperor would have been regarded by the citizens as a beaten public foe; and we may envisage his statue being decapitated, its body broken up, it may be, and in some way disposed of, and the head being set up as a trophy near the altar of Temple C. Standing against one wall of that temple, not far from the find-spot of the head, was an inscribed portrait-statue of Sanatruq II, king of Hatra in Trajan's time and his victorious opponent.

The second of the two heads of Romans that are the subject of the first part of this paper is in one of the stores at Hatra and is also life-size, but carved in limestone (Pl. VII, 1–2). It was found in 1962 deliberately separated from its body and buried under the steps of the entrance into the inner precinct of the Great Temple, opposite its south iwan.⁷ Here again the ears are fitted with small ear-rings; and there is a single incised circle on each cheek in front of the ear and another on the right cheek below the right eye. The features and plastic build of the head are clearly those of a middle-aged Roman. Moreover, the 'skull-cap' coiffure, summarily picked out, and the close-fitting, sheath-like beard, just visible on the stone itself and similarly worked, recall western Roman portraits of the second quarter of the third century. This was a time in which Rome and Hatra were on friendly terms in the face of the Sassanid threat and the city welcomed a garrison of Roman troops.⁸ The head bears no resemblance to any emperor of this period. But the ear-rings would appear to indicate that the subject is a Roman of considerable importance; and the most likely candidate would seem to be Gordian III's praetorian prefect, Gaius Furius Sabinus Aquila Timesitheus, who restored Rome's prestige and fortunes on the eastern frontier in 243.⁹ At any rate, we have here again the portrait of a Roman by a Hatrene sculptor, Roman in technique and in hair- and beard-style, but with added local details. As for the statue's decapitation and the burial of the head—that may well have been the work of the anti-Roman Sassanian capturers of Hatra.

It may be claimed that these two portraits of Romans by local artists have provided valuable fresh evidence for the influence of western art on Hatrene sculpture and for an interest among its practitioners in classical style, motifs, and subjects.

B. HATRENE DRESS-DESIGNERS AND THE GRAECO-ROMAN PATTERN-BOOK

One of the most fascinating aspects of Hatrene art is, indeed, the fusion of classical and oriental elements that it displays. The purpose of the second part of this paper is to call

⁵ I follow here the chronological conclusions arrived at in F. A. Lepper's *Trajan's Parthian War*, 1948, 95, 96.

⁶ *Numismatic Chronicle*, ser. 6, xviii, 1958, p. 168, nos. 1, 2; pl. 14, nos. 1, 2. On the reverses is a large Roman S C, inverted, in a wreath surmounted by the Sun-god's eagle. For the obverse busts, cf. H.

Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, iii, 1936, pls. 41–3.

⁷ For measurements and detailed description of the head, see *Sumer*, xxvi, 1970, 234.

⁸ D. Oates, *Sumer*, xi, 1955, 39–43; A. Maricq, *Syria*, xxxiv, 1957, 288–296; D. Oates, *Studies in the Ancient History of Northern Iraq*, 1968, 74, 75.

⁹ *CAH* xii, 1939, 87, 131.

attention to a few examples of that fusion in the male costume depicted on the stone and marble portrait-statues of Hatrene notables which were dedicated in the city's temples.

The typically Mesopotamian garments that compose this male costume are, of course, very familiar—the close-fitting, long-sleeved coat and the ankle-length trousers worn throughout that border territory between the Parthian and the Roman worlds of which Hatra, Dura-Europos, Palmyra, and Edessa were the leading urban centres. As in the art of Palmyra, so in that of Hatra, in the case of statues of kings and nobles, coat and trousers are often adorned with rich designs, some of them blatantly classical in derivation, as the instances described below will show.

The most obviously classical motif found on Hatrene clothes is the Greek key-pattern or meander, ubiquitous at all periods throughout the Roman world from the life-span of Pompeii onwards on mosaic pavements, in wall-painting, in architectural sculpture and in other media. An unpublished headless marble statue at Hatra, now in the south iwan of the Great Temple, has two stripes of key pattern down the front of the coat; and a rectangular limestone block, also unpublished and now in the north iwan of the Great Temple, has carved on one of its faces, in high relief, the lower part of a figure (the upper part has gone) with two stripes of key-pattern on the coat-front and one such stripe on each trouser (Pl. VIII, 3).

The Greek key-pattern did, indeed, penetrate to a more easterly area of Parthia, to Seistan, the ancient Sacastene, where it occurs on a decorated stucco panel, thought by some to be of first-century A.D. date, by others to be somewhat later, from Kuh-i Khwaja.¹⁰ There it is combined, not only with distinctively oriental crow-stepped merlons,¹¹ but also with another classical design particularly favoured by Roman mosaicists, consisting of series of intersecting circles that form series of adjacent quatrefoils. Appearing at an early stage in Roman art, at Pompeii, it was widely current throughout the Roman Empire at all periods of imperial history; and at Hatra it is found, with its outlines sewn with pearls, in two stripes down the front of the coat, and in one stripe on each trouser, of the first-century A.D. marble portrait-statue of King Sanatruq I in the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad¹² (Pl. VIII, 2). This pattern as found at Kuh-i Khwaja and at Hatra is much more likely to be of western origin than of the seventh-century B.C. oriental derivation that B. Goldman would suggest for it.¹³

The late-classical Greek and Hellenistic 'floral' or 'vegetable' scroll of flowers, leaves and fruit running on one continuous stem, or on two such stems intertwined, spread rapidly, both in its naturalistic and in its more stylized form, throughout the Roman world. From that world, the relatively stylized type of running scroll made its way to Hatra, as it did, on a more extensive scale, to more westerly Palmyra. The seated marble statue of a man, probably a prince or nobleman rather than a god, now in the Iraqi Museum, bears two stripes of stylized leaf-scroll down the coat-front, a band similarly adorned on each sleeve near the wrist, and down each trouser a stripe filled with a scroll of clusters of berries and pointed leaves¹⁴ (Pl. VIII, 3). Leaf-scrolls occupy two stripes down the coat of an unpublished headless limestone statue of a nobleman, now preserved in the south iwan of the Great Temple. On the coat of the statue of King Sanatruq II, also unpublished, and also in the south iwan, there are two lateral stripes of leaf-scroll; and in the same room of the iwan is a limestone block carved with the upper part of a man round whose neck hangs a V-shaped chain decorated with a classical ivy-scroll. The last recalls the similar ivy-scroll in a broad, pearl-edged stripe down the front of the oriental coat of the rigid stone statue of a god or prince from the great Kushâna temple at Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan, dating from the late-first or early-second century A.D.¹⁵

The stylized vine-scroll is another Graeco-Roman 'floral' motif adopted by the

¹⁰ Ghirshman, *op. cit.*, 40, fig. 54; M. A. R. Colledge, *The Parthians*, 1967, pl. 24; D. Schlumberger, *L'orient hellénisé*, 1970, 56, 59, fig. 25.

¹¹ It is possible, but by no means certainly the case, that the borders of crow-stepped triangles that frequently feature on Roman mosaics were ultimately derived from oriental crow-stepped merlons: they could have been devised independently in the West.

¹² Ghirshman, *op. cit.*, 94, fig. 105; Colledge, *op. cit.*, pl. 65 (upper part only); *Berytus* xvii, 1967-8, pl. 2, fig. 1.

¹³ *Berytus* x, 1952-3, p. 16. Cf. A. T. Olmstead, *History of Assyria*, 1923, fig. 151: Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh.

¹⁴ Colledge, *op. cit.*, pl. 55.

¹⁵ *Proceedings of the British Academy* xlvi, 1961, pl. 19.



MARBLE HEAD OF TRAJAN (?). IRAQI NATIONAL MUSEUM, BAGHDAD (see p. 106 f.) 1. FULL FACE, 2. PROFILE VIEW
Photographs by courtesy of the Iraqi Directorate General of Antiquities
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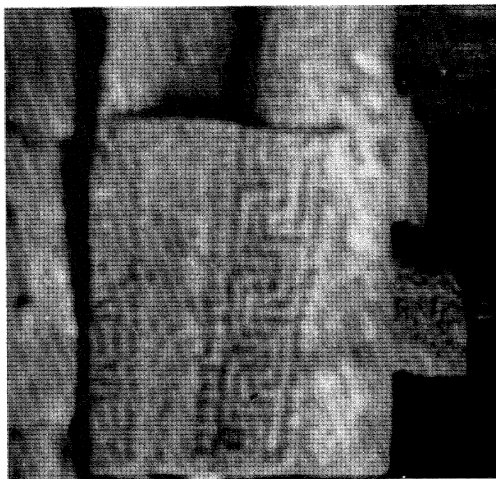


I. PORTRAIT OF TRAJAN ON ROMAN COINAGE, A.D. 115 AND 117 (see p. 107). 2, 3. OBVERSE AND REVERSE OF COIN OF HATRA (see p. 107)

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1, 2 LIMESTONE HEAD OF TIMESTITHEUS (?): IN STORE AT HATRA (see p. 107). 1. FULL FACE 2. PROFILE VIEW
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1. MARBLE STATUE OF HATRENE PRINCE OR NOBLEMAN: IRAQI NATIONAL MUSEUM, BAGHDAD (see p. 108). 2. MARBLE STATUE OF KING SANATRUQ I: IRAQI NATIONAL MUSEUM, BAGHDAD (see p. 108). 3. FRAGMENT OF LIMESTONE STATUE: THE GREAT TEMPLE AT HATRA (see p. 108)

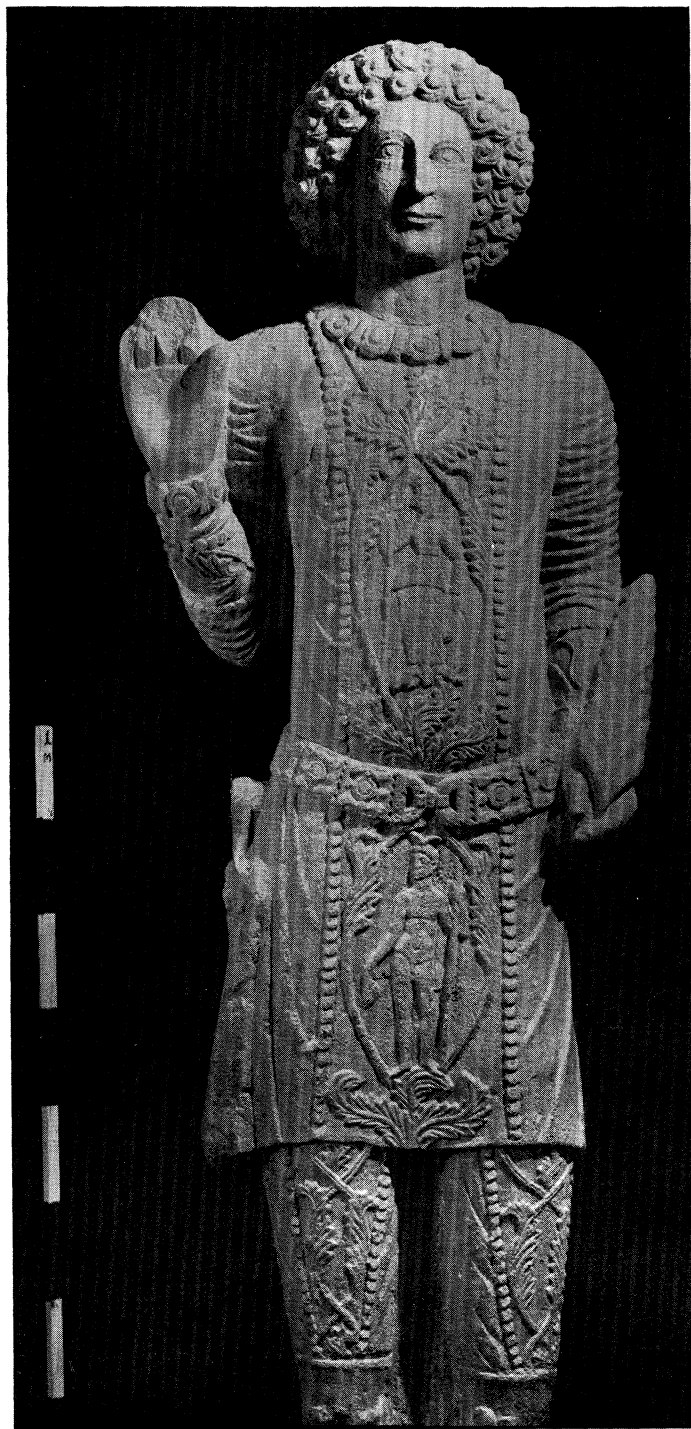
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1. LIMESTONE STATUE OF NOBLEMAN: MOSUL MUSEUM (see p. 109). 2. FRAGMENT OF LIMESTONE FOREARM: IN STORE AT HATRA (see p. 109). 3. PILASTER FROM THE TOMB OF THE HATERII: ROME (LATERAN COLLECTION) (see p. 109)

Photographs (1) from 'Berytus' vol 17, pl. 2, fig. 2, (2) by David Oates, (3) the Mansell Collection

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LIMESTONE STATUE OF PRINCE ABD-SAMYA: IRAQI NATIONAL MUSEUM, BAGHDAD (see p. 109). I. GENERAL VIEW,
2, 3. DETAILS OF ORNAMENT

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Hatrene embroiderers. In the south iwan of the Great Temple is an unpublished male torso with two stripes of vine-scroll down the coat front and a band of vine-scroll round each forearm. More spectacular are the vine-scrolls, two down the coat and one down each trouser, on the very well preserved limestone statue of a nobleman, now in the Mosul Museum, each of whose coat-sleeves has a band of leaf-scroll at the wrist¹⁶ (Pl. IX, 1). Somewhat more elaborate still is the 'floral' decoration on the dress of Nayhara, one of the two sons of Sanatruq I, whose statue forms part of an unpublished group of limestone statues in the Iraqi Museum, comprising the head of Sanatruq I and the complete figures of Abbu, daughter of Daimon and presumably Sanatruq's queen, and of the two princes. Nayhara has two vine-scroll stripes on his coat, a vine-scroll stripe on each trouser, and a narrow leaf-scroll round his coat's lower hem, while another leaf-scroll forms the border of a rectangular bib-like feature, whether originally of stuff or metal it is difficult to say, just below the boy's collar.

Finally, the Hatrene artists took from the classical repertory the double leaf-scroll with its two stems interlaced. This motif is found between the two key-pattern stripes on the coat of the headless limestone statue already cited (above, p. 107) and on the central part of the coat on an unpublished headless marble statue now in the south iwan of the Great Temple. Most remarkable of all is the discovery at Hatra of the 'peopled' type of interlaced scroll, an originally Hellenistic motif that enjoyed, along with the single peopled scroll, enormous popularity throughout the Graeco-Roman world.¹⁷ In one of the stores at Hatra is the unpublished fragment of a limestone forearm on which, near the wrist, is a broad, pearl-edged band filled with a double scroll of stylized acanthus that encloses in a species of 'medallion' the slender, naked form of a winged Cupid (Pl. IX, 2).

The most striking instance, however, of a Hatrene double peopled scroll is on the statue of Abd-Samya, the other of the two princes in the limestone royal group described above (Pl. X, 1-3). Here, on the trousers and wristbands, is a design of double interlaced acanthus-scrolls, unpeopled. But on an exceptionally broad stripe down the centre of the coat-front, another double interlaced acanthus-scroll, drawn on a larger scale, forms two 'medallions', one above, the other below, the belt, in each of which stands the full-length figure of a Graeco-Roman deity—Athena/Minerva above, Hermes/Mercury below. Athena wears a long robe with overfold and waistbelt and there are faint traces of an aegis on her breast. She has a crested helmet and holds a spear in her right hand, while her left hand rests on the rim of a shield, with a prominent boss, at her side. Identified with the Arabian goddess Allat, Athena appears with similar dress and attributes in other contexts in Hatrene art—for example, in a limestone group in the Iraqi Museum, where she stands above a lion and is flanked by two female figures, probably worshippers.¹⁸ Hermes, who is completely naked, has wings sprouting from his hair, and holds a purse in his right hand and in his left hand a thick *caduceus*. He is also found elsewhere in Hatrene sculpture—for instance, in the form of a copper figurine in the Iraqi Museum.¹⁹ With what local Hatrene god Hermes was identified, we do not at present know. To the general design of this Hatrene peopled scroll one of the closest parallels is on a late first-century pilaster from the Tomb of the Haterii in Rome, which is carved in relief with a vertical interlaced vine-scroll, in each of whose superimposed 'medallions' a Bacchic figure stands²⁰ (Pl. IX, 3).

Presumably the stone and marble statues from Hatra reproduce faithfully the actual costumes worn by the personages portrayed; and there can be little doubt that both the sculptors and the dress-designers, whose work the former copied, were local artists, not immigrants from the Roman Empire who carried in their heads the classical motifs described above. It is, moreover, rather unlikely that Hatrene dress-designers, visiting Rome's eastern provinces, drew from memory on their return the designs and figures that they had studied there. It is difficult to see from what sources they could have obtained these motifs if not from sketches in imported Graeco-Roman pattern-books—compiled either by themselves when abroad (if they did go abroad) or, much more probably, by draughtsmen within

¹⁶ *Berytus* xvii, 1967-8, pl. 2, fig. 2.

¹⁷ *PBSR* xviii, 1950, 1-43, pls. 1-26.

¹⁸ Ghirshman, *op. cit.* 92, fig. 103; Colledge, *op. cit.*, pl. 60.

¹⁹ D. Homès-Fredericq, *Hatra et ses sculptures parthes*, 1963, pl. 1, fig. 3.

²⁰ *PBSR* xviii, 1950, pl. 13.

the Roman Empire, who traded them into Parthia. Hatrene portrait-sculpture would, indeed, appear to furnish strong support for the belief that such pattern-books did, in fact, exist and that they were in circulation, not only within the Graeco-Roman world itself, but in some, at least, of the lands that lay only just inside,²¹ or beyond, its frontiers.

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²¹ The marble portrait-bust of Jarhai from Palmyra, now in the Louvre, has a coat with two broad stripes of 'peopled' vine-scroll down the front (Ghirshman, *op. cit.*, 77, fig. 89). Again at Palmyra the over-all designs, intersecting circles and contiguous hexagons,

painted on the ceiling of the Hypogeum of the Three Brothers were obviously borrowed from the Roman mosaicists' repertory (Schlumberger, *op. cit.*, colour-plates on pp. 92-4).