

## Two Bronze Equestrian Statues from Syria and Arabia

*Norbert Franken, Thomas M. Weber-Karyotakis\**

### Abstract

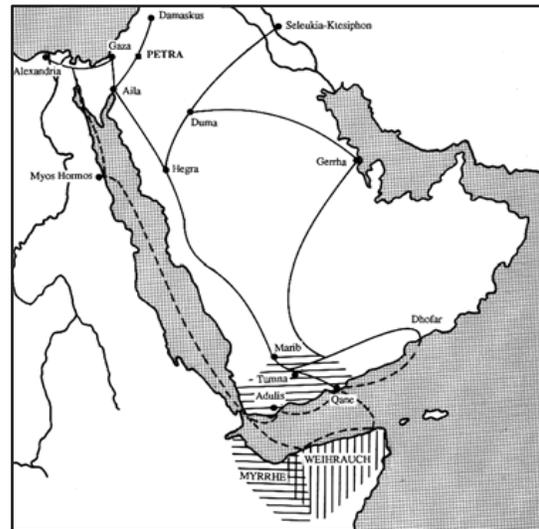
This article shows how even small fragments of large-format bronze statues that have been already published some time ago can provide new insights. This is demonstrated by two bronze fragments from Qaryat al-Faw (Saudi Arabia) and Palmyra (Syria). The arrangement of the cuirass leather straps (*pteryges*) indicates that the fragments belonged to equestrian statues. This observation can be supported by analogies of bronze equestrian statues from the central Greek-Roman areas of the Mediterranean. The two examples from Syria and Saudi Arabia show that the local Arab rulers in antiquity closely followed Greek-Roman models to document their claim to power.

**Keywords:** Bronze statues, Greek, Roman, Arabia, Qaryat al-Faw, Palmyra, Horsemen, Kindah.

### 1. Introduction

It is a worthwhile task of the archaeologist to look again and again through older publications of excavations and to re-examine carefully even smaller fragments with a trained eye. This often reveals unexpected scenarios that open up quite astonishing monuments, not only of metal sculpture in its cultural-historical context, with the comparison of iconographic parallels. This will be demonstrated here by two fragments that excavators and scholars have succinctly classified in earlier publications as parts of Greek and Roman bronze armored statues.

Both fragments are limited only to the display of the densely arranged leather straps (*pteryges*) ending in fringes. This military garment was attached to the lower edge of the breastplate in order to protect the lower body of the warrior. The military



*Fig. 1: Map of the Arabian Peninsula with the southern region of the Levant, indication of the finds spots of the equestrian bronze fragments at Qaryat al-Faw and Palmyra (after Grohmann 1963, 30 fig. 4).*

\* Institut für Altertumswissenschaften, Klassische Archäologie Philosophische Fakultät, Johannes Gutenberg, Universität, Mainz; and School of Architecture and Built Environment (SABE) German-Jordanian University, Amman. Received on 10/11/2019 and accepted for publication on 26/12/2019.

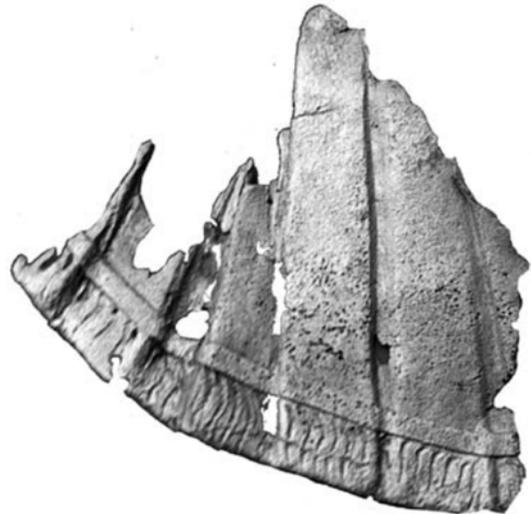
statuary types with the representation of *pteryges* are assigned *thorakophoroi* in Greek and *loricati* in Roman art. As a rule, the warriors cuirassed with these protective devices are depicted standing upright or advancing in the round sculpture. In this pose, the *pteryges* fall from the lower edge of the armor onto the thighs of the *thoracophoros* or *loricatus* up to the knees in vertical stripes running parallel to each other in little movement. However, the two bronze fragments from Qaryat al-Faw and Pamyra, which were again examined here, differ markedly in this detail. Hence, the authors argue that these fragments belong to armored soldiers mounted on horses of considerable size. The fact that these bronze statues are no longer preserved apart from small fragments is due to the value of the metal and its reusability through re-melting.

Both cities (**fig. 1**) are oases with rich water resources. In ancient times, both were important stations of the caravan trade at the intersections of transcontinental desert routes – the incense and the silk roads. Both developed a cultural life of great wealth, with influences from outside blending with oriental tradition. At the height of their power, both places reached the rank of capitals of tribal kingdoms.

## 2. Qaryat al-Faw (TMW-K)

The object under discussion here is a bronze fragment (**fig. 2**)<sup>(1)</sup> which is presently kept in the antiquities collection of the Archaeological Institute of King Sa'ud University in Riyadh, KSA. The estimated 2 cm thick fragment has the shape of a segment of a circle with a rounded lower edge and tapering upwards on both sides. In its preserved width the fragment measures 20 cm, in its height 15 cm. Its upper side was executed in flat relief upon the wax model. It is unfortunate that the ancient surface was reduced during the cleaning by aggressive chemical substances to such an extent that neither traces of the turquoise or olive brown patina nor of the “cold-work” (polishing and engraving) have survived. The fine pores visible in the central sector of the fragment can also be explained by this brutal restoration method, while fissure cracks and larger patches broken off were caused by the natural corrosion of the metal.

The fragment shows six broad elongated stripes on its surface, which emanate from the irregular upper fracture line. They widen slightly towards the lower rounded edge and terminate in slightly s-shaped curved fringes at the border. This frayed border is set off plastically from the stiffeners by a smooth horizontal, slightly



*Fig. 2: Bronze fragment of an equestrian statue from Qaryat al-Faw, Riyadh, Archaeological Institute of the King Sa'ud University, inv. unknown (after Al-Ansari 1982, 113 fig. 8).*

<sup>(1)</sup> Al-Ansari 1982, 113 fig. 8; al-Senan 2009, 146; 156.

curved seam. The three stripes on the right half of the fragment fall parallel to each other. They are separated by flat channels and taper only slightly upwards. The remaining three straps on the left side are shorter overall and are more emphatically pointed upwards, giving the impression that they emerge under the longer ones on the right. The third flap from the left is also slightly waved lengthwise.

The interpretation of the fragment is evident: it shows a section of the pteryges belonging to a Greek-Roman cuirassed statue described in the introduction. In the common statuary types, which depict these *thorakophoroi* or *loricati* in an upright standing pose, the leather straps all around fall parallel over the hips and the shanks of the figure. The fan-shaped arrangement of the flaps with rounded lower edge, however, does not find any convincing parallel in these statues. Rather, this specific motif results from a series of armored soldiers riding on a horse. The same arrangement may convincingly paralleled on a *pteryges* fragment (**Fig. 3**) of an ancient bronze equestrian statue, which was found on the Arno island Renai near Signa (Toscana) already in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Further analogies of ancient equestrian bronze statues from the Greco-Roman realm will be discussed below.

Qaryat al-Faw was identified with Qaryat Dhāt Kāhil, the first capital of the tribal kingdom of the Kindat al-Mulūk.<sup>(2)</sup> The origin of this Arabian tribe lies in Yemen, from where the Kindat established a federal rule in central Arabia from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to late antiquity. The alliance with the centralized south Arabian kingdom of Himyar was so close that the Kindat territory temporarily extended as far as that of the rivaling monarchy of Hadramawat, annexed in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. This constellation was brought to an abrupt end by the invasion of the Christian Axumite forces against the Himyarites converted to Judaism under Du Nuwas in 525 AD. After the destruction of the dam of Marib, the Kindat migrated to northwestern Arabia in the course of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, where they formed one of the semi-autonomous Arab Vassal empires in the service of the Byzantines in battle against the Sassanids and the Lakhmids allied with them. A number of Kindat kings are known by name, among them as one of the last and most renowned poet Umru'u al-Qays.<sup>(3)</sup>

The bronze fragment was found in 1972 during the Saudi excavations in the market complex of Qaryat al-Faw. In spite of the lack of epigraphic information, nothing would prevent the assumption that the equestrian statue would be erected in this important public space, as seven firm dedications of such statues are known elsewhere in the South Arabian region. As an alternative, the presence of the equestrian statue as a merchandise object on staple at this location would have to be considered.

<sup>(2)</sup> Altheim – Stiehl 1961, 179; EI<sup>2</sup>, V. 1979, 118-120 s.v. Kinda (I. Shahid – A. F. L. Beeston).

<sup>(3)</sup> This Kinda king and poet Imru'u l-Qais (murdered by order of Justinian I around 540 AD, cf. Altheim-Stiehl 1961, 179, 6-7) must not be confused with the Imru'u l-Qais of the same name, son of the Lakhmid 'Amr ibn 'Adi of Hira (cf. Altheim - Stiehl 1961, 178, 4-5), who was celebrated in the Nabataean-proto-Arabic inscription of his tomb at Namara (southern Syria) as the "King of all Arabs", cf. Dussaud 1902, 409-421; Kropp 1991, 3-28; Kropp 1993, 63-93; Abulhab 2011, 87-156.

### 3. Palmyra (TMW-K)

Together with a fragment which, according to J.-Chr. Balty, depicts the back of a man's foot dressed in a soft Parthian shoe<sup>(4)</sup>, a small section of an armored statue (Fig. 4)<sup>(5)</sup> was found in the *agora* of Palmyra during the French excavations of 1940. Here, too, the *pteryges* are arranged in a very similar way to the fragment from Qaryat al-Faw treated above. Also here the lower edge of the fringes does not run horizontally, as it is to be assumed with standing cuirassed statues, but slightly rising to the left. The chisel work to indicate the alternating direction of the fringes is somehow dry and quite mechanical. Given the inclination of the fringes at the left side in comparison to the strictly vertical course of those on the right side, this fragment seems to belong rather to the lower right part of the breastplate, immediately above the tunic and the knee. With a total height of 12,7 cm, this fragment must be attributed to an equestrian statue of approximate life-size – if not bigger. Another fragment, identified by J.-Chr. Balty as a section of a *paludamentum* or *chlamys*, might also have belonged to the same statue.<sup>(6)</sup> By its gesture and the proportions of a bronze hand (holding separately cast bridles?)<sup>(7)</sup> probably stems from the same or a similar statuary context.

The context in which the fragment was found on the site of the *agora* makes the fragment from Palmyra comparable to that from Qaryat al-Faw. Apparently it was the equestrian statue of a local dignitary of the highest rank exhibited on this public space. However, it is difficult to decide whether this statue is the work of a local workshop or an import from the West. The Palmyrene customs tariff, preserved in a bilingual inscription, which



Fig. 3: Bronze fragment of an equestrian statue from the Arno island Renai near Signa (Toscana), Florence, Museo Archeologico, (after Rastrelli – Romualdi 1998, 10 fig. below).113 fig. 8).



Fig. 4: Bronze fragment of an equestrian statue from Palmyra, found on the *agora*, Tadmor, Archaeological Museum (after J. Chr. Balty, in: Delplace – Dentzer 2005, 339 no. 1 fig. 448).

<sup>(4)</sup> J. Chr. Balty, in: Delplace – Dentzer 2005, 339-340 no. 4 fig. 450.

<sup>(5)</sup> J. Chr. Balty, in: Delplace – Dentzer 2005, 339 no. 1 fig. 448.

<sup>(6)</sup> J. Chr. Balty, in: Delplace – Dentzer 2005, 339 no. 2 fig. 448.

<sup>(7)</sup> Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra* (1976) 90. 280 note 299 fig. 124; Lavagne 2001, 329 N0. 64 color illustration on p. 212 below; Balty 2005, 340-341 N0. 6.

sets the prices for imported bronze statues<sup>(8)</sup>, suggests that bronze works delivered from abroad were somehow on the daily agenda in the Central Syrian oasis. Unfortunately, the scarce antique bronze sculptures<sup>(9)</sup> which have survived from the ruins make a clear decision impossible. A small bust appliqué as well as a fragment of a wreath have been identified by M. Tabaczek<sup>(10)</sup> as parts belonging to a life-sized honorific statue displayed in the colonnaded street. On stylistic basis H. E. Mathiesen suggested a Palmyrene bronze workshop or an itinerant Palmyrene artist as the artistic creators of the bronze statue of a Sassanian bearded ruler from the Iranian Shami shrine.<sup>(11)</sup> Any archaeological traces of such a workshop, however, have not been found at Palmyra yet.

The history of the oasis city of Palmyra<sup>(12)</sup> developed similar to the Kindite capital of Qaryat al-Faw but with a more fatal and earlier end. Here, too, the beginnings of an aristocratic community dependent on foreign trade can be traced back to at least the late Hellenistic period. Since the visit of Hadrian during his oriental journey in 129 AD the city held the rank of a *civitas libera* under the Roman supremacy in the *Provincia Syria*. As a kind of buffer state between the Roman Empire in the West and the Persian Empire in the East, Palmyra gained such welfare and independence around the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. under the leadership of Odeinathus and Zenobia that the empire's territory extended as far as Egypt through an aggressive policy of expansion, including further areas of Asia Minor. Emperor Aurelian, however, brought this Syrian desert monarchy to an abrupt end in 272 AD with the military conquest of Palmyra. It seems probable that an honorific statue of one outstanding Palmyrene Sheikh has been displayed during the period of economic and political splendor on the public space of the *agora*.

Among all the statuary decorations, the equestrian statue was considered one of the highest honors ("*honus maius*") in the Roman Empire. According to its actual rarity, this statuary genus is rather scarcely preserved among the archaeological

<sup>(8)</sup> Brodersen 1987, 157 (translation of P 128).

<sup>(9)</sup> Only three bronze statuettes are known by the authors coming from Palmyra: 1) Statuette of nude Aphrodite from the type Capitolina, Geneve, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, inv. C. 158: RA 1909, 246 Nr. 1 Abb. 2; RA 1910, 411; Reinach, *RépStat.* IV 216, 2; RA 1912, 32; Deonna 1915/16, 57 no. 176 with ill.; 2) Statuette of a naked Apollo in the scheme of the Sauroctonos by Praxiteles (mirrorwise-inverted), Tadmor, Archaeological Museum, inv. 7895 / 112: published? 3) Statuette of Herakles type *bibax / dexiúmenos*, Tadmor, Archaeological Museum, inv. 7943 / 117: Weber-Karyotakis – Sultan, forthcoming.

<sup>(10)</sup> Head of a beardless youth with curly coiffure, formerly collection of Henri Seyrig, now private property Frankfurt /M: Kunstwerke der Antike – Auktion 60 der Münzen und Medaillen AG Basel, 21. 9, 1982, 70 no. 146 pl. 45; Parlasca 1992, 261 note. 43; Bust of priest, beardless, wearing a cylindrical cap, probably an applique, Damascus, National Museum, inv. 114/7944. Bibl.: Bounni – Salibi 1965, II 41-58 pl. IV above left; Parlasca 1992, 261 note 43; Tabaczek 2015, 427-430 fig. 1.

<sup>(11)</sup> Stein 1939, 234-236; Stein 1940, 130-132 figs. 46-47; Ghirshman 1954, pl. 31; Schlumberger 1970, 156-157; Mathiesen 1992, II, 166-167 with note 10 no. 80 (with further bibliography); Boardman 2015, 197 fig. 133.

<sup>(12)</sup> *RE* 36,2 (1949) 262-277 (C. Watzinger); Altheim – Stiehl 1961, 175-177; xxx.

heritage. For the display of equestrian statuary on a public space a decision of local political committees "in the name of the council and the people", in the present case by the Shekhs of the native tribes of Palmyra, in one case even by the ruling Roman governor of the Provincia Syria was necessary.

So far, only four equestrian statues in Palmyra can be firmly identified by epigraphic testimonies<sup>(13)</sup>: One of them stood in one of the public buildings of the *agora*, namely in the *kaisareion*.<sup>(14)</sup> The relevant information about this can be retrieved from a bilingual Greek and Aramaic inscription<sup>(15)</sup>, which before the recent demolition of the sanctuary by ISIS-terrorist militants was placed in front of the temple of Baalshamin. The name of the honored notable shown by the statue "on horse" (ἔφιππον ἀν[δριά]ντα) is unfortunately not preserved. The date communicated at the end of the Aramaic section ("month *Kanûn* of the year 483") corresponds to November 171 A.D. The public authorities obtained the endorsement by the responsible Roman governor Avidius Cassius (term of duty in Syria 166-171) for the tribute, which results in the four-year period as a chronological terminus *post quem non* for the erection of the equestrian statue on the *agora*. The Aramaic section further lists other honorific statues of the anonymous dignitary, all of which are explicitly referred to as bronze works. Whether this also applies the said equestrian statue is probable but not secure. The preserved section of the bronze fragment is much too small to make a reliable statement about the dating of the complete statue. *Grosso modo*, however, nothing of the stylistic properties argues against assuming its date of origin within the two decades between 150 and 170 A.D., i.e. the middle reign of the Roman Antonine emperors. In view of the extraordinary rarity of such honorific equestrian statues, it seems not only possible, but probable to a considerable degree that the bronze fragment from the *agora* goes together with the epigraphic testimony.

A candidate for equestrian portraiture that could certainly be considered is Soados, son of the Boliades. As leader of the rich merchant class he had restored around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D the security of the caravan trade of Palmyra against "Abdallat the Ahitaea and the robbers that he assembled" with immense military power. Of him, a dozen statues are known in Palmyra dating to the 140s AD on the *agora*, in the Bel and Allat sanctuaries and elsewhere in the city only by inscriptions.<sup>(16)</sup> There is no question that such a dominant leader personality would hardly have tolerated such a high public distinction by a bronze horseman statue for anyone else other than himself or one of his closest descendants.

<sup>(13)</sup> *IGLS XVII*, 1, nos. 61-62 (two equestrian statues of the sons of Odeinathus, dated to 268-271 AD, identified by the shaper of the bases and the traces of horse feet on their surfaces, placed on the honorific arch at the main colonnaded street between the sanctuaries of Bel and Nabu); no. 307 (equestrian statue for Aelius Borâ in the sanctuary of the tribe of the Benê Komarê in the eastern part of the city, dated to February 25<sup>th</sup>, 198 AD).

<sup>(14)</sup> For the assumed location of the *kaisareion* / *caesareum* of Palmyra cf. Genequand 2013, 97-114.

<sup>(15)</sup> *IGLS XVII*,1 no. 149.

<sup>(16)</sup> Gawlikowski 2008, 404-405 with note 9.

#### 4. Equestrian Statues in Metal from the Greco-Roman Realm (NF)

Like all types of antique bronze statues, the important statues of horses mounted by armored riders are rarely well preserved. Frequently one finds only their inscribed stone bases, smaller fragments as well as figural appliqué, which can be assigned more or less surely to such equestrian monuments. Fragments of bronze horses may have belonged not only to equestrian statues but also to monumental carriages (*bigae* with two or *quadrigae* with four horses). Only to be mentioned are such statues which, like that of Augustus from the sea offshore Athens (**Fig. 5**)<sup>(17)</sup>, the better preserved of the two statues of Cartoceto di Pergola (**Fig. 6**)<sup>(18)</sup> or the famous Marc Aurel on the Capitol in Rome (**Fig. 7**)<sup>(19)</sup>, carry a rider dressed in a tunic with shoulder mantle (*paludamentum*) or shorter type of toga (*trabea*)<sup>(20)</sup>. As the Hellenistic statue of a racehorse in full gallop with a jockey boy (**Fig. 8**) from Cape Artemision (Greece)<sup>(21)</sup> shows unusual equestrian monuments of other kinds can also be reckoned with, apart from the statistically predominant portrait statues of Hellenistic rulers or Roman emperors and magistrates on horseback.



**Fig. 5:** Bronze fragment of an equestrian statue of Augustus, found off shore between Hagios Eustratios and Euboea, Athens, National Museum, inv. X 23 322 (photo by the authors).



**Fig. 6:** Bronze equestrian statue from Cartoceto di Pergola, Pergola, Museo dei Bronzi Dorati e della Città (after A. Salcuni, in: *Cat. Aalen – Bonn–Nijmegen 2014/2015*, 23 fig.14).

<sup>(17)</sup> Touloupa 1986.

<sup>(18)</sup> A. Salcuni, in: *Cat. Aalen – Bonn - Nijmegen 2014/2015*, 23 fig. 14; Most recently on these finds Andreae 2015.

<sup>(19)</sup> Parisi Presicce 1990.

<sup>(20)</sup> For the *trabea* as the dress reserved to the social class of the Roman *equites* see Gabelmann – Weber 1977; Wrede 1988.

<sup>(21)</sup> Hemingway 2004.



**Fig. 7:** Bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius (replica), Rome, Piazza di Capitooglio (photo by the authors).



**Fig. 8:** Bronze Statue of a horse with a jockey boy, from Cape Artemision (Euboea), Athens, National Museum, inv. X 15 177 (photo by the authors)

Unfortunately, archaeological literature lacks a systematic compilation of bronze equestrian statues and related fragments. But the important publication by Johannes Bergemann<sup>(22)</sup> presents at least a rich overview of marble equestrian statues, which can always be used for comparison due to their typological correspondence. The same applies to ordinary bronze statues of standing rulers and generals in breastplates, of which the armored statue of Germanicus from Amelia (Umbria/I) is the only one almost completely preserved (**Fig. 9**). It was already found in 1963 and published in detail only a few years ago.<sup>(23)</sup>

The best preserved antique bronze statue of an armored horseman is a monument from Misenum on the Gulf of Naples, originally depicting the Emperor Domitian (reigned 81 – 96 AD) and later reworked into a portrait of his successor Nerva (reigned 96 – 98 AD) by exchanging the face (**Fig. 10**). The equestrian statue, which was once erected in the *sacellum* of the Augustales and is now kept in the Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei in the Castello di Baia<sup>(24)</sup>, shows the Roman emperor in a



**Fig. 9:** Bronze cuirassed statue of Germanicus from Amelia (Umbria), Amelia, Museo Archeologico (after A. Salcuni, in: *Cat. Aalen – Bonn – Nijmegen 2014/2015*, 21 fig. 2).

<sup>(22)</sup> Bergemann 1990, passim.

<sup>(23)</sup> Cf. The most relevant publication by Rocco 2008; A. Salcuni, in: *Cat. Aalen – Bonn – Nijmegen 2014/2015*, 21 fig. 2; For cuirassed statues in general see Stemmer 1978; Laube 2006.

<sup>(24)</sup> Cf. *Cat. Naples 1987*.

dramatic pose fighting with his sword on a rising horse.

In general, ancient large bronzes and related fragments have recently attracted increasing interest from archaeologists, restorers and archaeo-metallurgists. An enormous increase in knowledge was recently achieved by detailed investigations of smaller bronze statue fragments as it is further exemplified by the two fragments from Qaryat al-Faw and Palmyra in the present study. Above all they allowed microscopic analyses of working traces and production techniques: There is, for example a depot of destroyed horse statues from Augst (Switzerland).<sup>(25)</sup> Similar finds from the Roman border (Limes) in Germany and the Netherlands<sup>(26)</sup> triggered a long-term research project funded over several years by the Volkswagen Foundation. Experience has shown that it is much easier to examine technical details on smaller fragments, the reverse interior sides of which are openly accessible to the observer, than on more completely preserved statues, the interior of which can in most cases only be seen by means of endoscopy.

If sufficiently well preserved, larger fragments of bronze statues in particular are relatively easily recognizable as parts of equestrian statues. A sure indication is not only the rider himself in a sitting pose with broad legs but also the typical posture of the legs hanging loosely on both sides of the saddle strap around the horse's belly. By that a horseman differs significantly from the usual posture of standing figures.<sup>(27)</sup> In addition remains of lead for fixing a bronze statue on the surface of a base can be found on the feet of standing figures. The arrangement of the leather flaps of the *pteryges*, which are decorated with fringes at the end, and which are spread out mainly in the back and above the rider's legs, as can be seen, for example, in the fragment of a larger-than-life statue in Florence (**Fig. 3**)<sup>(28)</sup>, also makes it possible to attribute smaller fragments with certainty to an equestrian statue. Of particular importance for our understanding are several torsi and other associated fragments of Hellenistic bronze statues of armored riders<sup>(29)</sup>, which have appeared since the 1990s mainly in the Aegean Sea off the island of Kalymnos. Unfortunately only a few preliminary reports have not yet been published them in an appropriate form. The right knee, a piece of the hem of the tunic and the overlying flaps of the breastplate also contain the fragment of an apparently very high-quality bronze equestrian statue (**Fig. 11**) found in the sea in 1981 on the island of Agios Efstratios (Ai Stratos) south of Lemnos.<sup>(30)</sup>

<sup>(25)</sup> Janietz Schwarz – Rouiller 1996.

<sup>(26)</sup> Cf. S. Heckmann, in: *Cat. Aalen – Bonn - Nijmegen 2014/2015*, 44-48 (bronze horseman fragments from Kempten); G. Rasbach, in: loc. cit. 40-43 (fragment of bronze head of horse from Waldgirmes); M. Hahn, in: loc. cit. 49-51 (bronze head of horse from Augsburg); In summary on these finds most recently Kemkes 2017 (with many further bibliographical references).

<sup>(27)</sup> Cf., for instance, Koutsouflakis – Simosi 2015, 78–79 figs. 5.5–5.6.

<sup>(28)</sup> Cf. Rastrelli – Romualdi 1998, 10 fig. below. see above page 122 fig. 3.

<sup>(29)</sup> Koutsouflakis – Simosi 2015, 75 – 77 figs. 5.3 – 5.4.

<sup>(30)</sup> Koutsouflakis 2017, 31 – 32 fig. 3.3.



**Fig. 10:** Fragments of a bronze equestrian statue of Domitian, reworked as Nerva, Baia (Castello) Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei (after *Cat. Naples 1987*).



**Fig. 11:** Fragment of from Hagios Eustratios (Ai Stratos) island south of Lemnos (after Koutsouflakis 2017, 31 – 32 fig. 3.3).

But even isolated feet can sometimes be attributed to a rider, as an example in the Museum of Bologna (**Fig. 12**).<sup>(31)</sup> On closer inspection, the heel of a foot dressed in a detailed sandal shows the tip of a spur.<sup>(32)</sup> Fragments and separately cast details of saddle cloths<sup>(33)</sup> belonging to monumental riding horses are also indicative and easy to be recognized even by a non-specialist. The hems of the fabrics, which are mostly cut according to oriental models in the shape of crenels and sometimes additionally patterned in an inlaid technique, are hardly being confused with other sorts of drapery. The same is true for the chest straps (*baltei*) of the horse bridles, often decorated with appliqué or relief decoration, some of which are particularly beautiful examples from Aosta and Brescia in Northern Italy.<sup>(34)</sup>



**Fig. 12:** Foot of a horseman, part of an equestrian statue, Bologna, Museo civico, inv. Br. 1835 (after Morigi Govi - Vitali 1982, 205 fig. above left).

Other fragments, on the other hand, can often only be recognized by an experienced specialist, but nevertheless firmly as fragments of riding or carriage horses. This also includes, for example, separately worked tufts of hair which are riveted and

<sup>(31)</sup> Morigi Govi – Vitali 1982, 205 fig. above left. See also the right bronze foot of a rider from the Amphiareion of Oropos (Greece): Lagogianni-Georgakarakos 2018, 229 fig. 22. Further examples are mentioned by Baitinger 2004, 370.

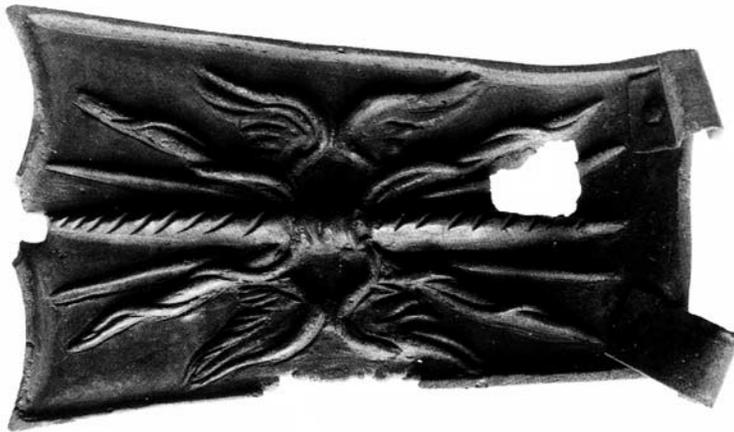
<sup>(32)</sup> For the arrival of the stirrups in Europe in the 6<sup>th</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> century AD as an in origin Chinese invention see [https://web.archive.org/web/20081203175410/http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en\\_madeinchina/2005-07/21/content\\_70825.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20081203175410/http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_madeinchina/2005-07/21/content_70825.htm) (last consulted on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019).

<sup>(33)</sup> Cf. Knauer 1992.

<sup>(34)</sup> Most recently on these Salcuni – Formigli 2011, 37 – 42 nos. B3 – B4 figs. 112 – 137.

inserted into the horse's head at the top. As isolated finds they are often misunderstood as flames of a torch or parts of a thunderbolt.<sup>(35)</sup> In fact, even in more recent literature one repeatedly encounters astonishing mistakes and misunderstandings. Mistakenly interpreted as epaulettes are two bronze statue fragments from Dodona (**Fig. 13**), which in fact must be identified as decorative plates sitting directly in front of the saddle. To them the chest strap (*balteus*) was attached, which was drawn around the chest of the horse.<sup>(36)</sup> The comparison with a marble horse statue clearly confirms the correctness of this placement.

Less clear is the attribution to an equestrian statue in other fragments. This is the case, for instance, with a loosely closed right human hand with finger ring in the Roman-Germanic Museum of the City of Cologne (**Fig. 14**). Between the fingers, the author observed the rest of a narrow band and decoration<sup>(37)</sup> or inlays, interpreted this as a possible rest of reins.<sup>(38)</sup> But it is not possible to achieve certainty on this point, since a similar hand posture may also occur in other



**Fig.13:** Bronze decorative plate from the bridles of an equestrian statue, from Dodona, Athens, National Museum, Karapanos Collection inv. 814 b (after *Cat. Athens 2016*, 135 fig. 3).



**Fig.14 a-c:** Bronze hand of a life-sized horse man, Cologne, Roman-Germanic Museum, inv. (after *Franken 1996*, 16–17 no. 1 figs. 3–5).

<sup>(35)</sup> On such erroneous interpretations see Franken 2017, 119 note. 25.

<sup>(36)</sup> Cf. Franken 2017, 119 note 25.

<sup>(37)</sup> For bronze applications with historical reliefs, which are only in part hangers for horse bridles (*baltei*), see Kreilinger 1996. For leaf-shaped hangers as represented on the horses in the Arab sanctuary of Sahr al-Leja (Syria), see Weber 2009, 67-68 figs. 107-113.

<sup>(38)</sup> Franken 1996, 16 – 17 no. 1 figs. 3 - 5.

iconographic contexts.<sup>(39)</sup> Nor is it possible to decide whether individual *pteryges* and armored straps, some of them adorned with relief originally belonged to ordinary statues or to equestrian monuments.<sup>(40)</sup>

Another general guideline for the attribution of smaller fragments to bronze statues or architectural decoration includes the necessary thickness of the cast metal up to several millimeters. A further argument is the relatively rare surface gilding on body fragments and smaller sized bust-shaped appliqués or the historical reliefs in contrast to devices of other functional purposes such as attachments on furniture, plates, weaponry etc. which normally lack a plating of leaf gold.

## 5. Equestrian Statues in the Arab World (TMW-K)

Bronze equestrian statues were reserved in the pre-Islamic Arab Kingdoms for the highest dignitaries after the model of the Hellenistic rulers and Roman emperors. Such works of imperial Roman art contained a specifically military triumphal message to the native addressees. The Byzantine chronicler John Malalas (ca. 491 - 578 AD), for instance, mentions in his *Chronographia*<sup>(41)</sup> that Octavianus after his triumph over Marcus Antonius erected on a tetrapylon in the Syrian Laodiceia "a bronze statue with four horses" - without doubt a *quadriga* (30 BC). The triumphal aspect is particularly evident in the example of the equestrian statue of Emperor Hadrian, which he had erected on the ruins of the central Jewish sanctuary at Jerusalem (destroyed by Titus in 71 AD) after the suppression of the second Jewish uprising. According to a notice of the early Christian Bible commentator Saint Jerome (Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus, ca. 347–30<sup>th</sup> September 420 AD), who lived in neighboring Bethlehem, this *equus Hadriani* dominated together with a statue of Zeus (Olympios ?) until his days on the Temple Mount: "Adriani equestri statua quae in ipso sancto sanctorum loco usque in praesentem diem stetit."<sup>(42)</sup>

The fact that these triumphal Roman equestrian monuments were adopted by local Oriental dynasts is shown by the groups of statues made exclusively of basalt in Arabic sanctuaries (Fig. 15). These shrines can be located in the southern Syrian Hauran mountains (mons Alsadamus in Roman geography, today called Djebel 'Arab or Djebel Druz) and the fertile low land regions extending to the west until

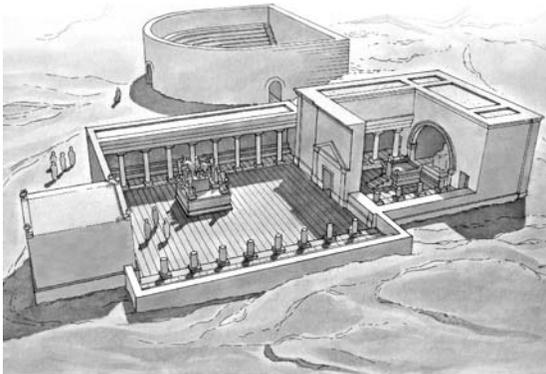
<sup>(39)</sup> Cf., for instance, Treister 1988, 152-153 fig. 3.

<sup>(40)</sup> Cf. for this Franken 1996, 21 – 23 no. 7 fig. 13.

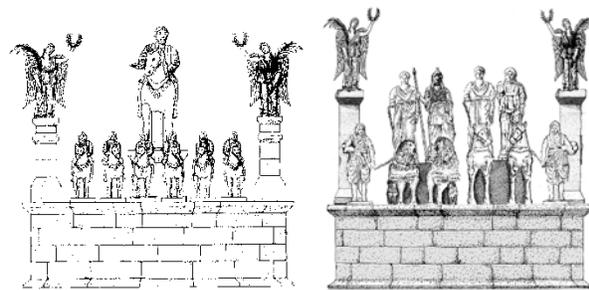
<sup>(41)</sup> Malalas, *Chronographia* 223 (Transl.: Jeffreys – Scott 1986, 118: "Setting out from there, Augustus (scil.: Octavianus) came to Laodicea (223), a city in Syria. He built a very large theatre in the city; and set up there a marble statue of himself. He decorated it with columns, rebuilt it in marble and added mosaics, and then held a triumph at it for his victory. He set upon this (\*\*\*) tetrapylon a bronze statue with four horses"). For further references to statuary in the work by Malalas see Saliou 2006, 69-95.

<sup>(42)</sup> Hieronymus, in Matth. 4, 24:15, CorpChristLat 77, 226. "Regarding the statue of Hadrian on a horse, which stands till this present day in the very place of the holy of the holies", cf. Eliav 2008, 606 with note 5. For the tetrapylon of Laodiceia / Ladhakiya see Kader 1996.

the Djolan Heights and to the southeast until the Transjordan Badya desert. The most completely preserved of these figural monuments is that of the tribal sanctuary of Sahr in the remote basalt desert of the Leja.<sup>(43)</sup> Interestingly, groups of horsemen seem to represent the ruling head of the tribe or Nabataean and/or Herodian kings<sup>(44)</sup> temporarily ruling the region with their cavalry guards on horseback. Associated groups, however, represent indigenous Arab gods, especially the war goddess Allat in the attitude of the Greek-Roman Athena. These deities stand upright on two-wheeled standing carriages, each drawn by two horses or other draught animals (*bigae*). The triumphal character of both types of statuary groups is illustrated by gliding victories mounted on high pillars on both sides, which hold wreaths of triumph over the heads of the depicted gods and rulers (Figs. 16 a–b). The high popularity of these monuments in the Arabic realm manifests itself in the fact that until today almost 40 such equestrian groups are known in the southern Syrian area<sup>(45)</sup>, which date predominantly into the period of the oriental Client Kings (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.).



**Fig.15:** Reconstruction of the Arab tribal sanctuary at Sahr al-Leja, Syria: In the forecourt is the cubic base with the representation of the horsemen group (drawing courtesy of Dr. Pauline Piraud-Fournet, Amman)



**Fig. 16 a-b:** Reconstruction of the statuary groups on the podium in the Arab tribal sanctuary at Sahr al-Leja, a: eastern face: horsemen group, b: western face: chariot groups with Arab deities (drawings by Fayez 'Atiyeh, courtesy by Th. M. Weber-Karyotakis)

The authors of the present article propose the hypothesis that through the immediate contact of ancient Arab caravan traders with the sanctuaries in southern Syria, knowledge of such equestrian groups has penetrated down into the

<sup>(43)</sup> Weber 2009, *passim*.

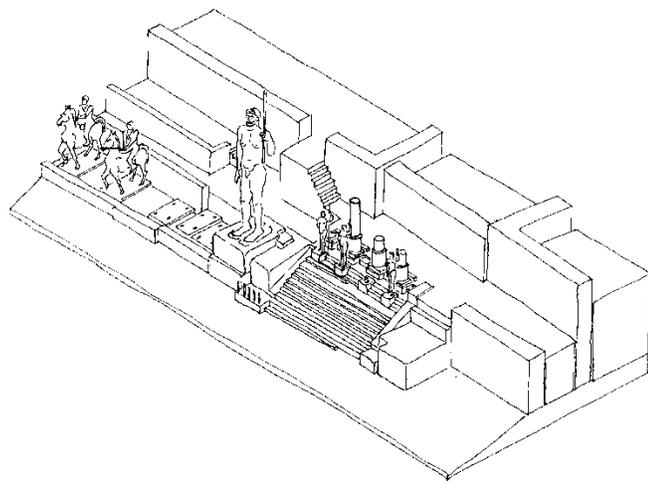
<sup>(44)</sup> A. Kropp (2013, 261-262) proposed another interpretation of the group as local rider gods. His assumption is, however, based on the erroneous attribution of a bearded head fragment which belongs to the enthroned male cult statue in the *adyton* of the sanctuary, cf. Weber 2009, 90-91 with figs 167-169.

<sup>(45)</sup> Weber 2009, 97-172. Other significant fragments of such groups have been identified since 2009 in the sanctuary of Baalshamin at Seeia/Si' (a cuirassed deity, probably Athena / Allat, seated on a four-wheeled carriage), see Dentzer – Weber 2017, 351-352 figs. 33, 1-4), a torso of Athena / Allat at Mtounch (Dentzer – Weber 2017, 354 fig. 33. 7) and various sculptural fragments from Umm al-Jimal, among them a Victory pillar with a bilingual Nabataean-Greek dedication inscription to Dushara, Weber-Karyotakis – al-Khdair 2018.

peninsula to Arabia Felix. Such a "transfer of ideas and images" can be understood methodically by comparing the modern media as the internet transmission of pictures in the present days. The communication tracks of ancient times, however, were much more humble, controllable, and therefore slower to transmit information, ideals and visual values over longer distances. We can no longer judge whether such a transfer of imagery and related visually based propaganda happened through (now lost) oral descriptions, (now lost) sketchbooks or through small-format imitations of such groups in clay, plaster or metal. The presentation of equestrian parades in honor of a prominent local Arab ruler can be concluded from the arrangement of statue bases on a terrace next to the entrance to the palace of Sabota / Shabwa (**Fig. 18**), the capital of the ancient Arab kingdom of Hadramaut. The preserved stone stand plates for bronze statues lined up close to each other suggest a parade of several bronze horses in the move of "en passage" due to the preserved dowel holes. Since there is no space for a carriage to be set up at the rear, it can be definitively be excluded that Sabota is bronze group represented a royal triumphal carriage. It is more probable to reconstitute a series of bronze riders at Sabota in analogy to those stone ones in the Arabic temple of Sahr al-Leja.<sup>(46)</sup>



**Fig.17:** Life-sized fragmentary basalt statue of a horseman from the Arab tribal sanctuary at Sahr al-Leja, Der'a, Archaeological Museum (garden) (photo by the authors).



**Fig.18:** Terrace with the representation of horsemen groups at the entrance to the palace at Sabota / Shabwa, the capital of the south-Arabian kingdom of Hadramawt (drawing by Chr. Darles, Weber 2009, 173-178 figs. 497-498).

The list of epigraphic evidence compiled recently by Chr. Robin<sup>(47)</sup> proves that other ancient royal palaces and temples in the southern Arabian region must also have been adorned with equestrian sculptures of the local elites. In addition,

<sup>(46)</sup> Breton – Weber 2009, 223-241; Weber 2009, 173-178 figs. 497-498.

<sup>(47)</sup> Robin – Antonini de Maigret 2018, 45-59.

archaeological findings from residence cities such as large-sized fragments of bronze horse legs such as those from Nakhlal al-Hamra and Ghaiman, which are currently kept in the Yemeni National Museum of San'a'.<sup>(48)</sup>



*Fig.19: Bronze equestrian statuette showing Alexander on horseback, found during the Bourbon excavation at Her- culaneum by the end of 1761, Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 4996 (after <http://www.getty.edu/publications/artistryinbronze/conservation-and-analysis/44-siano/>)*

## 6. Conclusions (NF & TMW-K)

According to the testimony of Eratosthenes of Cyrene, transmitted by a quotation in the geography of Strabo (16.4.2), the domesticated horse seems to

<sup>(48)</sup> Aqil – Antonini 2007, 174 no. I.B.b.5-6.

have been unknown as a zoological species<sup>(49)</sup> in southern Arabia in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.<sup>(50)</sup> This information is supported by the negative epigraphic evidence concerning horses from the ancient South Arab kingdoms. It was only shortly before the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. that literary references to the import of horses as a royal prestige symbol and for the outfitting of limited units of their armies increased. The old south Arabian inscriptions referring to equestrian statues of kings, their direct relatives and members of the local high nobility belong to time after. The bronze fragment from Qaryat al-Faw, which is debated here, thus seems to be to be understood in this historical context, which can only be represented in a blurred way. To what extent the South Arabian equestrian bronzes played a role by depictions of Alexander the Great on horseback in a retrospective manner, or whether the equestrian groups widespread in South Syria determined the trend, cannot be decided at present. Certainly, S. Antonini de Maigret is correct in her observation that in late antiquity the Parthian-Sassanid influence increased with the military success of the heavily armored Persian cataphract cavalry also in South Arabia.

The situation in Palmyra is somewhat more differentiated. Here the direct influence of Rome since the establishment of the *Provincia Syria* in 64 B.C. was palpable. The statues of Tiberius, Drusus and Germanicus, other *honorifications* of members of the imperial family and of Emperor Hadrian erected in the Bel sanctuary gain a tantalizingly clear evidence for this.<sup>(51)</sup> Hence, the local population was confronted with the visual media of imperial representation and propaganda long before the independence as an oasis state under Odeinathus. So it is all too understandable that early Palmyrene dynasts also made use of the iconographic language of the dominating power to depict their own claims on local supremacy within the indigenous tribal society.

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<sup>(49)</sup> For the discussion of faunal remains on the Arabian peninsula see Schiettecatte – Zouache 2017, 22-27.

<sup>(50)</sup> Robin – Antonini de Maigret 2018; cf. Schiettecatte – Zouache 2017, 28.

<sup>(51)</sup> *IGLS* XVII, 1, 14-19 nos. 3-5

## تمثالين برونزيين للفروسية من سوريا والجزيرة العربية

نوربرت فرنكن و توماس فيبر - كريوتاكيس\*

### ملخص

تمهد هذه المقالة لمنهج جديد يطبق الاساليب الفنية في دراسة بقايا كسر صغيرة من تماثيل برونزية ضخمة نشرت بالسابق يمكن من اتباعها الوصول لتصور جديد عنها، و قد طبقت هذه الدراسة على كسرتين برونزيتين، اكتشفت احداها في قرية الفاو (المملكة العربية السعودية) والآخرى في تدمر (سوريا).

تبين من دراسة ثنيات الاحزمة الجلدية الى ان الكسرتين تنتميان لتمثالين الفرسان. و يؤكد ذلك تشابهها الواضح مع تماثيل الفرسان البرونزية من المناطق المركزية اليونانية الرومانية في البحر الابيض المتوسط، ويتضح من خلال هذه الدراسة ان التمثالان ان الحكام العرب المحليين في العصور الكلاسيكية اقتبسوا النماذج اليونانية الرومانية لتمثيلهم لتوثيق احييتهم في السلطه. الكلمات الدالة: تماثيل برونزية، يونانية، رومانية، عربية، قرية الفاو، تدمر، فرسان، كنده.

\* معهد الدراسات الكلاسيكية ، كلية الآثار في الفلسفة ، يوهانس غوتنبيرغ ، جامعة ماينز، ألمانيا؛ وكلية العمارة والبيئة العمرانية (SABE)، الجامعة الألمانية الأردنية، الأردن. تاريخ استلام البحث 2019/11/10م، وتاريخ قبوله للنشر 2019/12/26م.

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