

HASMIK Z. MARKARYAN

Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography,
National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia
asmik.markaryan@mail.ru

MARBLE RELIEF 'NERO AND ARMENIA' FROM THE *SEBASTEION* AT APHRODISIAS IN CARIA (ASIA MINOR)

ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to an artistic and historical study of a marble relief with a symbolic scene of Nero's victory over Armenia from the *Sebasteion* sanctuary complex in the ancient town of Aphrodisias in Asia Minor. The temple complex was dedicated to the cult of the Julio-Claudian imperial dynasty. The artistic and stylistic analysis of the relief was performed in the context of the sculptural program and decoration of the whole complex, and took into consideration other images of Nero in the *Sebasteion*. Through a comparative analysis of the

figure personifying Armenia depicted on the marble relief in Aphrodisias, as well as a series of images on coins and small statuary samples, characteristic iconographic traits of Armenia in the Roman imperial art were revealed. Along with this, the paper presents an in-depth 'reading' of this scene within the context of specific episodes from the history of the Parthian-Roman conflict and the Roman struggle for Armenia during the period of 54–68 AD.

Keywords: Armenia, Roman Empire, Aphrodisias, *Sebasteion*, relief, personification, symbolism

The *Sebasteion* sanctuary complex: its architecture and sculptures

In 1979, excavations at the town of Aphrodisias in Caria, situated in the south-western Asia Minor, revealed a *Sebasteion*, a large temple of Aphrodite and a sanctuary complex dedicated to the cult of the Julio-Claudian imperial dynasty (Fig. 1).¹ In the *Sebasteion* in Aphrodisias, among a large number of sculptural reliefs, there was found a relief panel with figures of Emperor Nero and personified Armenia, symbolising the victory of Rome over Armenia in the course of the Roman-Armenian War of 54–62/63 AD, which culminated in the coronation of Armenian King Tiridates I in Rome.²

The *Sebasteion* in Aphrodisias is one of the most significant Roman monuments in Asia Minor from the 1st century AD, and it was dedicated to the worship of Roman emperors. The imperial cult was considered to

be an embodiment of the idea of unity of the Empire and one of the ways of unifying its various parts.³ It was conducted through the establishment of a certain ritual-procedural order and the erection of temples – *Sebasteia* or *Kaisareia* – with altars and statues in honour of the ruler and his dynasty.⁴

The town of Aphrodisias was known for its close relations with Imperial Rome, particularly during the reign of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.⁵ The town acquired free and allied status which made it independent from the Roman province of Asia (Fig. 2). This status provided Aphrodisias with a number of privileges: exemption from taxes and a special right of asylum granted to the main sanctuary of the town – the Temple of Aphrodite.⁶

During the reign of Tiberius, as a token of gratitude, as well as a proof of their loyalty and its victory in a civil rivalry between the towns in Asia Minor, the elite and the urban community of Aphrodisias founded

¹Erim 1986, 184–193; Ratté 2001; 2008, 7–10.

²Debevoise 1938, 179–196; Manandjan 1944, 326–356.

³Sventsitskaya 1981, 35; Millar 1984, 363–463; Price 1984, 1–2, 53–77; Sartre 1991, 109–116; Walbank 1992, 217–218.

⁴Tuchelt 1981, 170–171; Price 1984, 249–274.

⁵Brody 2001, 93–109.

⁶Erim 1986, 15–24; Smith 1987, 90; 2008, 10; Stevenson 2001, 103–113.



Fig. 1. General view of the South Portico of the *Sebasteion* (source: HolyLandPhotos'Blog-WorldPress.com, accessed 07.07.2016).

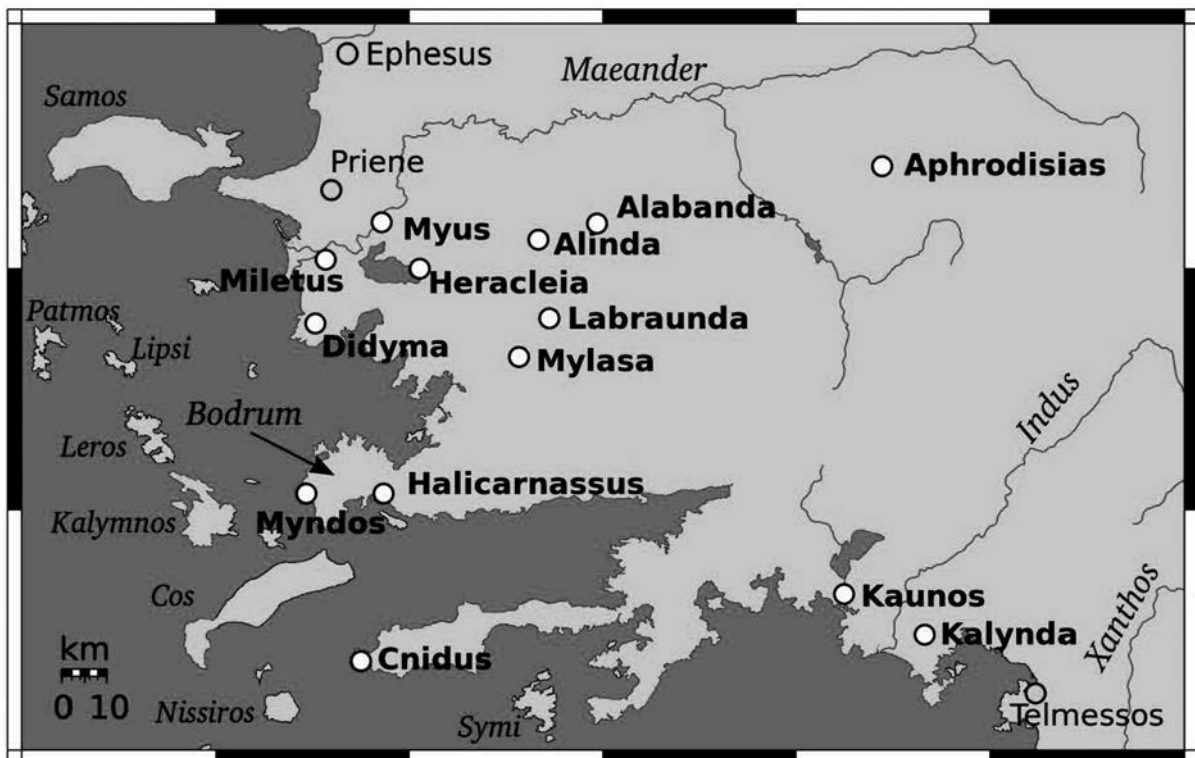


Fig. 2. Map of the south-western part of Asia Minor (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caria>, accessed 08.07.2019).

a number of buildings and monuments, including the *Sebasteion*. As evidenced by the inscribed dedications, the construction of the sanctuary complex began during the reign of Tiberius and was completed under Nero. Many buildings of the complex, in particular the North and the South Porticoes, suffered damage as a result of several powerful earthquakes and were rebuilt under Claudius (41–54 AD) and Nero (54–68 AD).⁷

The architecture and sculptural display of the *Sebasteion* aimed to propagate imperial ideas and illustrate the cult of the members of the Julio-Claudian imperial dynasty.⁸ According to the inscriptions in the *Propylea* and the temple building, the sanctuary was dedicated to Aphrodite, to *Theoi Sebastoi*, and to *Demos*.⁹

The *Sebasteion* complex is oriented from the east to the west and composed of four main buildings: a two-storey monumental gateway – a *propylon* with an arch and statues in the niches, two porticoes flanking together a paved processional road (14 m wide and 90 m long), and, finally, a prostyle Corinthian temple of Aphrodite with six columns on the façade.¹⁰

The *Sebasteion* in Aphrodisias holds a special place among the architecture of Asia Minor of the Roman Period. The layout of the *Sebasteion* complex in its principal elements bears similarity to the fora of Julius Caesar and Augustus in Rome.¹¹ The complex was built according to a well-known Roman practice – with axial layout and the temple placed on a podium inside a colonnaded courtyard at the end of a road and porticoes. Roman elements are expressed mainly in the spatial arrangement of the complex, while the Greco-Hellenistic are found in the architectural design and decoration. The *Sebasteion* has much in common with other architectural structures of this type and especially with the *Augusteum* in Antioch of Pisidia.¹² Its main distinguishing feature are the multi-tiered façades of porticoes with columns of different Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders in their first, second, and third storey,¹³ which is a clear testimony to the eclectic nature of the Roman Imperial architecture. The three-storeyed portico buildings seem to be a combination of a multi-stoa with a theatre-like façade.¹⁴ The gables of the façades are adorned with *acroteria* in the

form of acanthus leaves, indicative of the influence of the Asia Minor style of the Late Hellenistic Period (Figs 3–6).

All buildings and constructions of the sanctuary are richly decorated with local fine marble. Local Aphrodisian style features reflect the turgid spirit of the artistic school of Pergamon.¹⁵ The conscious use and combination of artistic traditions of the Roman and Hellenistic art traditions aimed at demonstrating the willingness of the province to serve the Roman Empire.

The *Sebasteion* sculptural gallery begins with portraits of the emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, their family members, and their divine ancestors – Aeneas and Aphrodite.¹⁶ The statues of gods and emperors displayed in the niches greeted everyone who entered. Throughout the sanctuary, ancient visitors were accompanied by figures of gods, other mythological heroes, and emperors placed on the two upper tiers of the porticoes. Originally, there were 190 slabs on both porticoes, of which only 70 have survived.

The gallery of marble panels with high-relief human figures was made with a high level of artistic performance. It is the largest gallery of sculptures of this kind within the territory of the Roman Empire. Three principal themes are represented there: the Roman Empire, the Greek world within it, and the imperial dynasty.¹⁷

The North Portico

On the third upper storey of the North Portico, a series of allegorical figures of time and space are placed, and on the second tier – personifications of nations. From the figures on the third upper tier, only the allegorical figures of the Day (*Hemera*) and the Ocean (*Okeanos*) have survived.¹⁸ The allegory of the Day is symbolised by a draped standing female figure, the allegory of the Ocean – by a naked bearded male figure.¹⁹ According to R.R.R. Smith, initially, next to these figures, there were also figures of the Night (*Nykt*) and the Earth (*Ge*) in a binary order, as well as other allegorical images symbolising time and space; these, however, have not survived.²⁰

From the second middle tier, 15 inscribed bases with names of nations (*ethne*) and six relief panels with the figures of these nations have been preserved.²¹ Originally,

⁷ Reynolds 1981, 314–320; Smith 1987, 88–90.

⁸ Reynolds 1982, 156–164; Smith 1987, 92; Welch 1998, 547–569; Friesen 2001, 81.

⁹ Smith 1987, 90.

¹⁰ Smith 1987, 93–94.

¹¹ Kuttner, 1995, 92–94.

¹² Boethius, Ward-Perkins 1970, 390; Ossi 2005, 9, 21, figs 1, 18.

¹³ We first see the design of the floors with columns of different orders in Rome in the three-tiered Theatre of Marcellus

(12 BC). Its façade is decorated with arches and Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian colonnades (Boethius, Ward-Perkins, 1970, 187).

¹⁴ Smith 1987, 93.

¹⁵ Grant, Dowden 1995, 11.

¹⁶ Friesen 2001, 81.

¹⁷ Smith 1988, 51, 55.

¹⁸ Reynolds 1981, 325; Smith 1987, 95.

¹⁹ Smith 1988, 53, pl. VII, 3, 4.

²⁰ Smith 1990, 92.

²¹ Smith 1988, pls I–IX.



Fig. 3. Part of the South Portico with the reliefs of the second and third tiers (source: ancient-anatolia.blogspot.am, accessed 08.07.2019).

the second storey of the portico was covered with a series of 50 such reliefs. The personifications of the nations on the slabs are presented by standing female draped figures – all easily-distinguishable by costumes, attributes, and postures.²² The bases of the stelae are composed of two parts: on the upper, there is an inscription in the Greek language with the name of the nation or the territory, while on the lower part, in the centre, a theatrical

mask is depicted with a garland enveloping it from above.²³ Names of different peoples are mentioned on them: Egyptians, Jews, Arabs, Bosporans, and others, as well as the people of three islands – Sicily, Crete, and Cyprus.²⁴ These pedestals are arranged from the west to the east, *i.e.* first the western nations are represented, then the eastern ones. The North Portico of the *Sebasteion* in Aphrodisias with its conception and composition replicates the Portico of *Nationes* of Augustus in Rome, which showcased figures personalising all nations of the Empire (*simulacra gentium omnium*) (Plin. *HN*XXXVI, 39; Serv. *Dan.* 8, 721).²⁵ They symbolised the place and rank of the countries and peoples within the Empire and its frontier areas.²⁶ The figures in Aphrodisias, like the figures in the Portico of *Nationes* of Augustus, represented the conquered nations listed by Augustus in his famous testament *Res Gestae*.²⁷

The custom of demonstrating the effigies of defeated nations during festivities and holidays had been practiced in Rome since the years of Pompeius. Fourteen statues of conquered peoples were displayed during the triumphal procession of Pompeius (Plin. *HN*XXXVI, 41; Suet. *Ner.* 46, 1).

The custom of depicting various peoples, cities, and countries in the form of human figures was already known in the Hellenistic art. In Rome, this custom became a part of the official art and was widely practiced in the Augustan time,²⁸ since it was during the reign of Augustus when the right to triumph was monopolised by the emperor and put to the service of the propaganda of the dynastic politics and imperial ideology in Rome and in the provinces.²⁹ According to Dio Cassius (LVI, 34, 2) and Tacitus (I, 8, 4), during the ceremonial procession at the funeral of Augustus, statues of the peoples conquered by him were exhibited. Fragments of small-sized images of various peoples have also survived on the inner frieze of the *Ara Pacis*.³⁰ Sixteen reliefs with the personifications of provinces have survived in the *Hadrianeum* in Rome (141 AD).³¹ Originally, 36 reliefs of this kind, *i.e.* with the figures of *provinciae fideles* (loyal provinces), were installed there.³² The statues of the provinces were later

²² Smith 1990, 95–96.

²³ Smith 1988, 54–60, pls VIII–IX.

²⁴ Smith 1990, 90–92; Walker 2004, 111–112.

²⁵ Smith 1988, 70–77.

²⁶ Reynolds 1981, 326–327; 1986, 115.

²⁷ According to Suetonius (*Aug.*, 101), Augustus ordered to carve the second of the three scrolls of the testament that contained the ‘list of deeds’ on bronze tablets at the entrance to his mausoleum in Rome. These tablets have not survived. Yet, they were copied into many temples dedicated to Augustus. The most famous ones are the preserved inscriptions on the

walls of the temple of Augustus and Roma in Ankara, fragments of inscriptions in Antioch in Pisidia, in Apollonia in Pisidia, and in Sardis. Probably all the nations conquered by Augustus were listed along with the text of the second scroll on the tablets on the walls of the mausoleum in Rome.

²⁸ Rose 1990, 453–467; 2005, 21–25; Kuttner 1995, 73–86.

²⁹ Balbuza 2015, 239–243, 256; 2017, 255–286.

³⁰ Kähler 1954, 67–100.

³¹ Platner 1929, 250; Hughes 2009, 9.

³² Sapelli 1999.



Fig. 4. Second tier of the South Portico (source: ancient-anatolia.blogspot.am, accessed 08.07.2019).

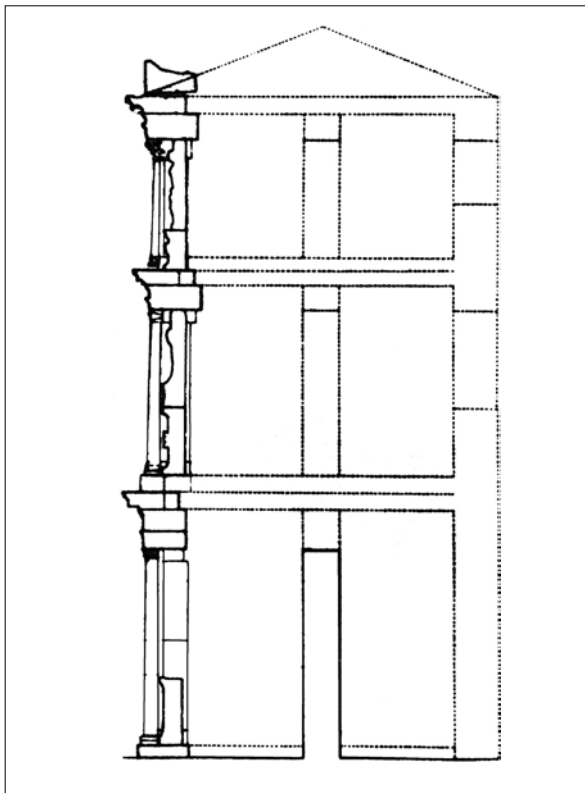


Fig. 5. Restored elevations and sections of Room 3 of the South Portico (after Smith 1987, fig. 2).

depicted on the 'provincial' series of coins of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius.³³

The idealised female figures of the conquered nations in the *Sebasteion* in Aphrodisias resemble purely Greek classical statues of standing goddesses. The allegorical figures of the conquered nations situated in the North Portico symbolised these nations' political status within the Empire. The nations of the islands of Crete, Cyprus, and Sicily, re-conquered from Gnaeus Pompeius by Augustus, were considered to be conquered. The nations like the Illyrians were considered to be subordinate. Finally, the third category included 'peaceful' nations, such as the Dacians, with whom peace was concluded (Vell. Pat. II, 39). All those nations and the places occupied by them in the North Portico of the *Sebasteion* demonstrated various victories of Augustus and the areas of the Empire that acted as "equal partners and neighbours"³⁴ and, at the same time, constituted a part of the whole (*pars pro toto*). The reliefs with the allegories of Space and Time situated right above the figures of the nations further enhanced the visual impression of the eternity of Time and of the geographical universalism of the Roman Empire and the Roman world – *orbis Romanus* and *orbis terrarum*.

The reliefs with personifications of the nations in the form of standing female figures in different clothing, with various attributes and inscriptions on the bases,

³³Toynbee 1934, 147.

³⁴Smith 1988, 57–59.

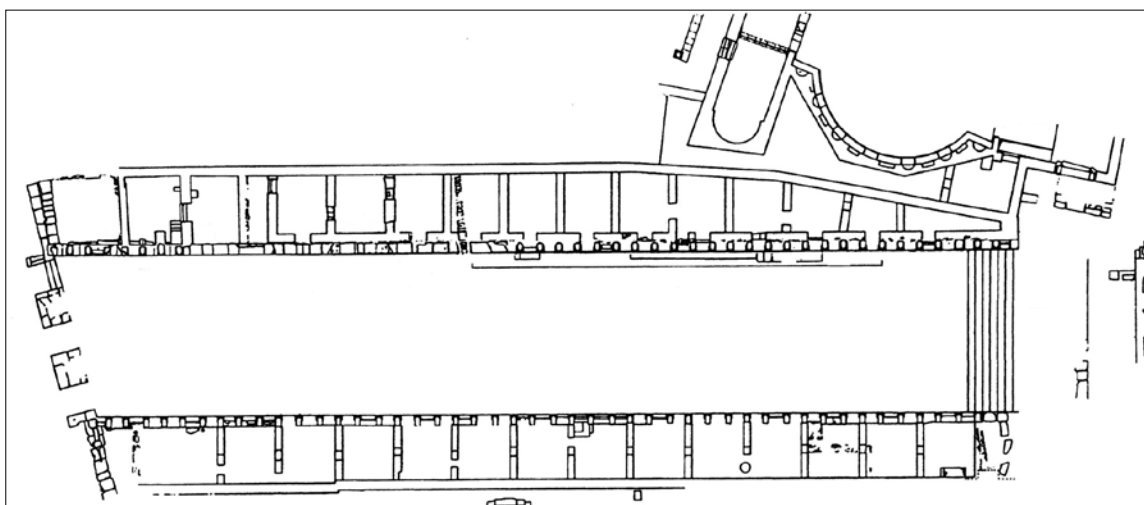


Fig. 6. Plan of the *Sebasteion* complex (after Smith 1987, fig. 1).

constitute a unique catalogue of Roman provinces. Their idealistic appearance contrasts with the figures of captives on the ‘imperial’ reliefs of the South Portico and, in particular, with the personifications of Britain and Armenia in the South Portico.

The South Portico

The South Portico, similarly to the North Portico, is lavishly decorated with reliefs. The second tier used to be decorated with 45 stelae with the images of traditional Olympian gods and heroes, as well as scenes from the Greek and Roman mythology and religion: Leda and the Swan, Demeter and Triptolemus, Bellerophon with Pegasus, Meleager and Atalanta, Achilles and Penthesilea, Apollo and the Muses, Hercules, Aphrodite, Dionysus, Romulus and Remus, Aeneas and Anchises, Julius Ascanius, and others. The third tier used to be decorated with figures of Roman emperors and gods. The order of the arrangement of the myth panels was strictly planned in accordance with the entire sculptural program, with its ideological orientation aimed at promoting close ties between the Greeks and the Romans within the Roman world. First, a visitor, presumably a Greek, saw the scenes from the Greek mythology. Further towards the western end of the Portico, closer to the Temple of Aphrodite, the images from the Roman mythology would begin: Aphrodite and Eros, Aeneas and his family fleeing Troy, *etc.* (Fig. 7). The relief of Poseidon with a ship, a dolphin, and a standing male figure should be seen in the context

of Aeneas’s triumph over the land and the sea.³⁵ The inclusion of Aeneas in the theme of the town of Aphrodisias aimed at connecting the ancestor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty with the patroness of the town, Aphrodite. The presence of another goddess, Nike-Victoria, very common across the mythological imagery, further emphasises the theme of triumph and imperial victory. Several reliefs with Nike-Victoria’s figure have survived: “Victoria” written on the armour, Victoria with an inscription of Nike *Sebaston*, as well as two panels with Victoria and a trophy.

On the third upper tier, there are panels with scenes of imperial content – deified representatives of the Julio-Claudian dynasty with their family members and with gods, as well as various allegories of triumphal celebrations. There is no specific difficulty in identifying these figures as all the images are attributed by inscriptions in Greek and portraits of emperors. The aim of this sculptural program is clear: to present the deified emperors and their family members to the Greek visitors, to illustrate their victorious wars and triumphs, as well as peace and prosperity of the town of Aphrodisias within the Roman world.

On most of the above-mentioned reliefs, scenes of peaceful victory and triumph are depicted. These are multi-figure compositions of Augustus with Nike-Victoria, Claudius by the Land and the Sea, Nero with a captive,³⁶ Tiberius with a captive, the two young princes Gaius and Lucius Caesars, Emperor with the Roman Senate or the People, Claudius and Agrippina, Nero and Agrippina, Nero with a sceptre and a globe

³⁵ Smith 1990, 95–97.

³⁶ In the latest literature, the attribution of several Imperial portraits has changed. Earlier Claudius’s portrait with allegories of the Earth and the Sea was considered to be a portrait

of Augustus, whereas Nero’s figure standing with a captive and a trophy used to be attributed to his father Germanicus. See Smith 1987, 104–106, 110–112; 2008, 23–24.



Fig. 7. Second tier of the South Portico with the relief 'Aeneas Fleeing Troy' (source: ancient-anatolia.blogspot.am, accessed 08.07.2019).

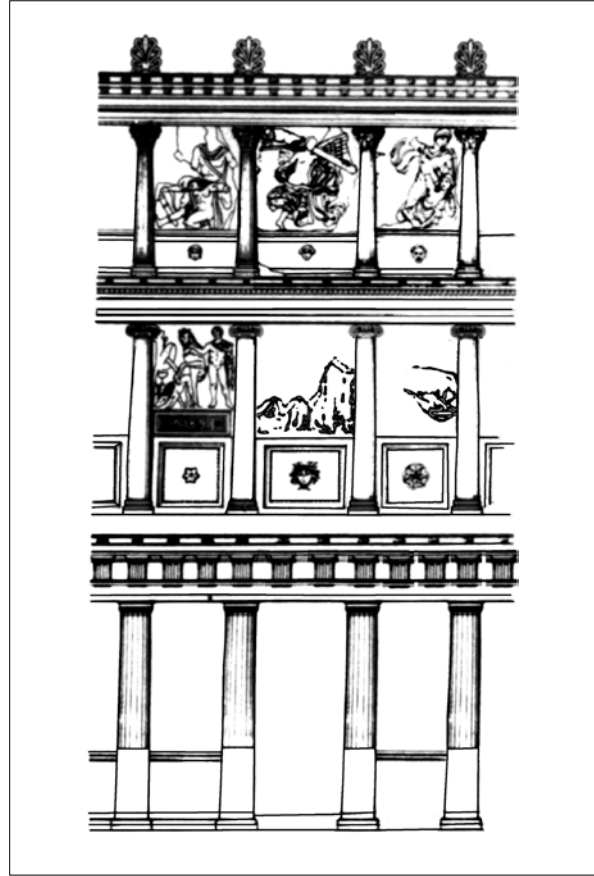


Fig. 8. Restored elevations and sections of Room 3 of the South Portico: the range of the reliefs from left to right: 'Claudius and Britannia', 'Nike with the Trophy', 'Nero and Armenia' (after Smith 1987, fig. 2).

in his hands and with a figure of a captive. They also symbolised the idea of *concordia* between the society and the imperial power, the ideas of peace and prosperity. On the third tier, on both sides of the relief with the figure of goddess Victoria with a trophy on her shoulder, the reliefs 'Claudius and Britannia' and 'Nero and Armenia', both depicting fight scenes, are placed (Fig. 8).³⁷ They also advocate the idea of invincibility and universality of the Roman world, as they illustrate a complete triumph of the Roman emperor.

The Imperial Relief 'Nero and Armenia': its iconography and symbolism

The relief panel with the figures of Emperor Nero and Armenia (160 cm high, 113 cm broad) was found

in front of the third chamber, and its inscribed base was found in the area between the second and third rooms.³⁸ The above-mentioned panel was placed on the third tier in the second niche.³⁹ There is a Greek inscription on the panel base which is composed of two columns: the left column is captioned "ARMENIA", whereas on the right there is an inscription composed of six lines. It includes a full list of Nero's titles and the dynasty name, in which the name 'Nero' is scratched-out.⁴⁰ Between the left and right parts, there is a relief mask of a female head in the early classical style (Fig. 9). The inscriptions of these two parts differ from each other in the form of their letters, which indicates that the two columns with inscriptions were carved at different times. According to R.R.R. Smith, the stela itself was carved in the initial period of the construction of the *Sebasteion*. Originally,

³⁷ Smith 1987, 116–121, pls XIV–XVII.

³⁸ Erim 1986, fig. 180; Smith 1987, 119–121, pls XVI–XVII; Smith 2008, 23–24.

³⁹ Presently, the relief with the two fragments glued together is exhibited in the Aphrodisias Museum.

⁴⁰ Reynolds 1981, 24; Smith 1987, 117.



Fig. 9. Greek-inscribed base from the relief 'Nero and Armenia' (after Varner 2004, fig. 92.c).

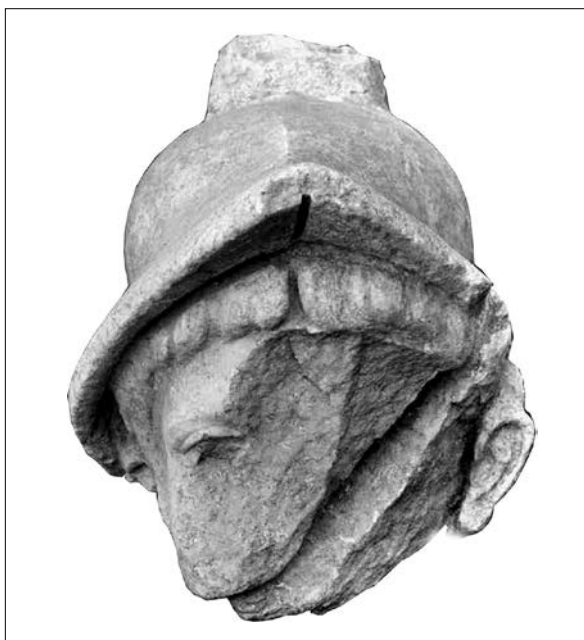


Fig. 10. Nero's helmeted head from the relief 'Nero and Armenia' (after Varner 2004, fig. 92.b).

the figure of the emperor depicted on it did not belong to a particular person, and the whole composition was made in the style of the Augustan triumphal art. Later, after the triumphs of Nero in Armenia, in the period of 54–68 AD, the figure of the emperor on the stela was transformed into a portrait of Nero, and the inscription with his name and titles was added.⁴¹

Nero's head from the Aphrodisian stela was found separately, at a significant distance from it. The emperor has a Corinthian type helmet on his head.⁴² His face

is completely smashed, with the exception of the right eyebrow and a part of the right cheek and eye (Fig. 10). The head of the statue was broken and the name erased in accordance with the Roman law on *damnatio memoriae* – oblivion of memory – requiring the destruction of statues and portraits of 'bad' Roman emperors and statesmen.⁴³ By demolishing the statue of Nero after his removal, the citizens of Aphrodisias expressed their support for the dynastic and political changes occurring in Rome.⁴⁴

The figure of Nero on the stela in the *Sebasteion* belongs to the type of honorary statues of the emperor. The naked torso of Nero is depicted with well-modelled muscles and a helmeted head resembling a classical Greek hero. He wears a short military cloak fastened with a round *fibula* on the left shoulder, a baldric across the chest, and carries an empty scabbard (Fig. 11). According to the Roman tradition, emperors were usually represented as naked only in post-mortem statues or in statues with historical narrative compositions, where they appear acting in a 'real' context. However, the nudity of this statue was a sign of special honours bestowed on the emperor as a divine ruler, as well as of all the benefits he had brought to the provinces, such as peace, concord, stability, and prosperity.

Armenia is represented in the image by a naked young girl with a helplessly drooped head and slumping on the ground. She is supported from behind by standing Nero. Unlike the earlier realistic personifications, Armenia is depicted in an idealist spirit, as a classical Greek heroine.⁴⁵ Her oriental origin is identified by the costume and attributes: a short cloak fastened on her left shoulder, short boots with ribbon-like ties, as well as a soft Phrygian cap with the top bent forward on her long, freely scattered strands of hair. Her left leg is bent

⁴¹ Smith 1987, 117–118.

⁴² Varner 2004, 74, fig. 92b.

⁴³ Varner 2004, 1–12.

⁴⁴ Smith 1987, 115–117.

⁴⁵ Ostrowski 1990, 106.



Fig. 11. Relief 'Nero and Armenia' (source: www.flickr.com/photos/damianos/5685228003/, accessed 15.01.2016).

at the knee and placed under her falling body, while her right leg is stretched out on the ground. On her right, there is a bow and a quiver indicating her eastern origin (Fig. 12). According to Smith, the theme of the relief is indicated by the 'oriental iconography' of the defeated character and by the inscription on the base.⁴⁶

Standing behind the back of Armenia, Nero demonstrates his total dominance. However, his supporting pose and the empty scabbard hanging above the girl's head symbolise the idea of compassion and nobility of the emperor, his readiness to support, to bring the conquered nation back to its feet and to accept it as a part of the Empire. Armenia is depicted as a classical image of a beautiful eastern heroine – Amazon Penthesilea. She represents the ideal image of an eastern country resisting hero's actions which are motivated by aggressive yet noble purposes. Nero is the new Achilles who defends the western world and its constructive role from the eastern chaos. Nero has conquered Armenia, but in doing



Fig. 12. Lower part of the relief 'Nero and Armenia' with the figure of Armenia (source: www.livius.org/category/roman-empire/, accessed 08.07.2019).

so he supports it, at the same time demonstrating nobility and compassion (*clementia*). The symbolic meaning of the motif of struggle and victory is expressed in the idea of patronage (*patrocinium*) over the conquered country.

The panel with Nero and Armenia is similar in its pyramidal composition, the motif used, and the classical image of figures to the relief 'Achilles and Penthesilea' found at the same South Portico (Fig. 13). On the relief at the *Sebasteion*, the helmeted Greek hero Achilles supports with his hands and with one knee the body of dying Penthesilea, the Amazon, with a cloak draped over her shoulders and naked body, and with a Phrygian cap on her long strands of hair.⁴⁷ The head of the heroine has helplessly drooped, and the battle axe falls out from her exhausted hands. Achilles represents an archetype of a Greek hero and Penthesilea – that of eastern barbarians. This scene illustrates cultural and military superiority of the western over the eastern world in the context of the sculptural program of the *Sebasteion*.

Next to the slab of 'Nero and Armenia', there is another two-figured panel with a scene of a fierce fight depicting Emperor Claudius's victory over Britain (Fig. 14). Both of these reliefs are in general very similar in motif and, in particular, in the interpretation of the figures of Nero and Claudius. In its composition, it is one of the variants of the Hellenistic Amazonomachy.⁴⁸ Yet the characters of these two Amazon heroines are different. Britannia dressed in a short tunic and boots and completely thrown to the ground is depicted as a fiercely resisting barbarian. She has long tangled hair, and her face is distorted with pain and despair. The mask of

⁴⁶ Smith 1987, 118.

⁴⁷ Smith 1987, 119; 1990, 97.

⁴⁸ Smith 1987.



Fig. 13. Relief 'Achilles and Penthesilea' (source: www.flickr.com/photos/kjfnjy/6856235070/, accessed 02.12.2016).



Fig. 14. Relief 'Claudius and Britannia' (source: timesonline.typepad.com/donslife/, accessed 02.12.2016).

a woodland satyr on the base of the slab somewhat accentuates the 'wild' image and character of the heroine. Claudius depicted as a noble Greek hero grabs his victim by the hair. Britannia dying of the last blow of the emperor symbolises the idea of *severitas* – final victory and conquest of the country by the Roman Empire.

The aim of the sculptural program of the pair of the stelae of 'Nero and Armenia' and 'Claudius and Britannia' placed on both sides of the slab with Victoria is quite clear. It is an illustration of the geography of the Julio-Claudian Empire. The panel with Britannia symbolises the western border of the Empire, the conquest of the country by Claudius in 43 AD, and its final subjection by Nero in 61 AD. The stela of 'Nero and Armenia', on the other hand, certainly points to the eastern border of the Empire. Even in the *Aeneid* by Virgil, the literary description of the territories along the Rhine, Euphrates, and Arax provides an example of the very image of the peoples conquered by Augustus (Verg. *Aen.* 8, 726–727).

The comparison of the East and the West became a typical feature of the early Imperial art.⁴⁹ The artistic illustration of the eastern and western borders, more frequently in the image of the figures of Germania and

Armenia, can be seen among the monuments of the early period of the Empire. The arch dedicated to the victory of Tiberius in the East and the West located in the town of Carpentras, France (Gaul of Narbonne), is decorated with relief images of triumphal-symbolic content: the relief represents two figures of standing captive warriors with their hands tied behind their backs, while between the figures there is a trophy of piled-up weapons.⁵⁰ The left figure represents Armenia in the traditional triumphal iconography: a beardless young person wears a typical eastern costume – a high-belted tunic reaching the knees, a short cloak on the shoulders, and a Phrygian cap on the head. The figure of Armenia depicts a specific image of the inhabitant of the country.⁵¹ The figure of Germania is represented by the typical image of a northern 'barbarian' – a mature, bearded man, bare-headed and dressed in clothes made of animal skin.

The symbolism of territorial landmarks pointing to the borders of the Empire can be found not only on architectural monuments but also on expensive items and utensils, such as, for instance, a number of terra sigillata cups from Puteoli and Orbetello, as well as on other fragments of ceramics which replicate gold and silver items.

⁴⁹ Megow 1987, 202–207.

⁵⁰ Turcan 1984, 810–819; Shoppa 1957, pls 12–13.

⁵¹ Ostrowski 1990, 51.

They bear depictions of paired figures of Armenia and Germania with accompanying inscriptions.⁵²

The iconography and symbolism of the image of Armenia, as well as of other nations and regions subjugated by Rome, in the triumphal art of the Imperial Period were very responsive to all the changes occurring in the political relations between Rome and its provinces or neighbours. At different stages of the Roman-Armenian confrontation, personification and symbolism of Armenia in the Roman triumphal art changed quite frequently and gained characteristic features depending on the political status of the country.

It is known that in the Roman triumphal art, conquered or subjugated countries (*nationes captae, gentes devictae*)⁵³ were usually personified by feminine figures, such as Judea.⁵⁴ These figures indicated a complete dependence and inclusion of the conquered territories into the structure of the Empire as provinces. Starting from the Augustan Age, the defeated Armenia was personified only by masculine figures.⁵⁵ The only exception is the historical-allegorical image of Armenia on the *Sebasteion* relief, interpreted in an idealist-classical spirit and strongly influenced by the local Asia Minor and Hellenistic styles.⁵⁶ The personification of Armenia as a naked feminine figure certainly reflected the essence of the loyalist aspirations and the gratitude of the Aphrodisians in response to the benefits brought to them by the 'Roman world'. Such interpretation was more than in line with the turgid spirit of the whole cultural programme of the *Sebasteion*, and Nero's political aspirations to see Armenia completely dependent were, of course, reflected in this image.

On the Great Cameo of France, which illustrates the story of the glorification of Germanicus in honour of the conquests of Tiberius in the East and the West, captive Germans in the lower register represent the western borders and Germania, whereas a sitting male figure wearing typical eastern clothing and a cap in the middle 'family' register represents Armenia and the eastern borders of the Roman Empire (Fig. 15).⁵⁷

Under Augustus, Armenia maintained a foreign policy of Parthian orientation, actively resisted the aggression of Rome, and struggled for its own independence. The country played an important role in the relations

between Rome and Parthia.⁵⁸ Emperor Augustus issued a series of triumphal coins with the inscriptions "ARMENIA CAPTA" and "ARMENIA RECEPTA" (20–18 BC). On one of these coins, issued to commemorate the suppression of an anti-Roman uprising in Armenia led by King Artaxias, Armenia is symbolised by a standing warrior in Parthian clothes and with a lowered weapon. This is not an allegorical figure, but a figure of a specific inhabitant of the country, and a very special one.⁵⁹ Comparison of the facial features of the warrior from the Augustan coins with the portraits of Artashes II (30–20 BC) on the coins issued by Artashes himself allows us to notice that the warrior is the very same Armenian king who led the uprising and was killed by the Romans.

On the reverses of another series of coins issued to commemorate the treaty with Parthia in 20–18 BC and the conquest of Armenia, we see a kneeling figure of a king wearing an Armenian tiara. It also depicts a specific person – Tigran III (20–8 BC), who was put on the throne by the Romans after the murder of Artashes.⁶⁰ Thus, the figures and personifications of Armenia in the early Roman triumphal art almost documentarily reflected specific events and their chronological order.

After the fall of the Artaxiad dynasty at the beginning of the 1st century AD, the kingdom of Great Armenia fell into the Roman area of influence. Roman puppet rulers were put on the Armenian throne. A different image of Armenia formed in the Roman triumphal art: it was a figure of a young man sitting on the ground dressed in 'regional' clothes. This figure to some extent became archetypal for 'territorial' personifications of Armenia throughout the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, including the allegorical figure from the *Sebasteion* under consideration in the present paper.

The main theme of the aforementioned cameo of Tiberius is the glorification of Tiberius's stepson, Germanicus, who waged successful wars with the Germans and in the East,⁶¹ in the aftermath of which Zeno-Artaxias was put on the throne of Armenia. On this cameo, Armenia is depicted in the middle 'family' register, personified by a male profile figure in characteristic eastern clothes with trousers, in a high-belted long tunic reaching the knees, and with a Phrygian-Parthian cap on his head:

⁵² Markaryan 2015a, 77–78.

⁵³ Smith 1988, 72.

⁵⁴ Gambash *et al.* 2013, 83–104.

⁵⁵ In works on numismatics, the figure of Armenia (dressed in oriental clothes and tiara) on coins and medals of Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and Lucius Verus is interpreted as a female (here, Figs 16–17), such as the youthfully feminine figure typical of Hellenistic iconography of young eastern gods – Mithra, Attis, Ganymede, Orpheus, and others. This 'territorial' image

in the Roman art of the Imperial Period often symbolises both Armenia and the entire Euphrates region.

⁵⁶ Ostrowski 1990, 106.

⁵⁷ Markaryan 2015c, 78.

⁵⁸ Debevoise 1938, 129–132; Manandyan 1944, 285–296.

⁵⁹ Ostrowski 1990, 52.

⁶⁰ Markaryan 2015c, 134–161.

⁶¹ Jucker 1976, 211–250; Vollenwieder, Avisseau-Brustet 2003, N275, 270–274.



Fig. 15. Fragment from the cameo of Emperor Tiberius with the figure of Zeno-Artaxias sitting on the ground (source: www.panoramadelart.com/grand-camee-de-france, accessed 06.06.2015).

he is sitting on the ground near the throne of Livia, with his right leg stretched out and head lowered (Fig. 15). This posture and the position in the imperial ‘family’ register illustrate a semi-dependent state of the country.⁶²

Later, this type of a female-like young man dressed in eastern ‘regional’ clothes with a little pointed or conical cap on the head appears on the triumphal coins of Trajan issued in honour of his oriental military expeditions in 114–118 AD, as well as on the coins of Lucius Verus (161–169 AD) and Marcus Aurelius (161–180 AD).⁶³ On these coins, the personification of Armenia is seen with one of his hands supporting his chin, while the other is resting on the symbols of the country – a bow and a quiver (Figs 16–17). The bow and quiver with arrows as symbols and attributes of the Kingdom of Greater Armenia and the legend “ARMENIA DEVICTA” first appeared on the silver *denarii* of Marcus Antonius from 37–34 BC.⁶⁴

In 54 AD, immediately after Nero had come to power in Rome, Tiridates, a brother of a Parthian king, Vologases, ascended the Armenian throne. After a decade of Roman control, Armenia restored its pro-Parthian policy.⁶⁵ A war broke out between Rome and Parthia,

which lasted more than nine years. According to Tacitus, during 55–56 AD the war was “developing slowly”: both sides constantly entered negotiations and exchanged envoys. In 57 AD, the war accelerated again. The Roman army commanded by Corbulo prepared to invade Artashat, the capital of Armenia. In the spring of 58 AD, Roman troops destroyed the town and set it on fire (Tac. *Ann.* XIII, 41).⁶⁶

The siege of Artashat sparked incredible rejoicing in Rome. According to Tacitus, Nero was loudly greeted as Emperor. The Senate passed a resolution to build triumphal arches in Rome and provinces and to erect statues of the princeps (Tac. *Ann.* XIII, 41).⁶⁷ In the spring of 59 AD, Corbulo headed for the second capital of Armenia, Tigranakert, from the Ararat valley, where the Hellenized population consisting of Armenians, Syrians, and Greeks was awaiting him. According to Tacitus, at the entrance of the town he was met by its delegates, who informed him that the gates were open, and Corbulo was presented with a golden wreath of victory. In honour of this triumph, Nero began to build the Parthian arch on Capitoline Hill (Tac. *Ann.* XIV, 24; XV, 18).

⁶² Markaryan 2015a, 68–75, figs 1–3.

⁶³ Bedukyan 1971, figs 24–27, 29, 30, 35, 38, 90, 108, 508, 600.

⁶⁴ Bedukyan 1971, 32–34; Markaryan 2015c, 132.

⁶⁵ Chaumont 1987, 425–426; Olbrycht 1998, 131–133; Olbrycht 2016, 605–633.

⁶⁶ Manandyan 1944, 336.

⁶⁷ Tacitus sneers at the fact that the celebration of this event surpassed all measure.



Fig. 16. Coin of Lucius Verus. On the reverse: the figure of Armenia sitting on the ground (source: www.peopleofar.com/2012/07/11/armenia-images-in-roman-coins, accessed 02.12.2016).



Fig. 17. Coin of Trajan. On the reverse: the figure of Armenia sitting on the ground (source: www.peopleofar.com/2012/07/11/armenia-images-in-roman-coins, accessed 02.12.2016).

Armenia was already considered conquered after the capturing of Artashat and Tigranakert. Yet, behind the splendour of the triumphs, there was a hidden weakness of the Empire which proved unable to turn Armenia into a province. The only way to maintain its influence in Armenia was to appoint a dependent king.⁶⁸ A former Roman hostage, Tigran VI (60–61 AD), a great-grandson of Herod the Great, a son of Alexander – brother of the Armenian king, Tigran V, who was a very distant relative of the Artaxiads – was put on the Armenian throne.

The feminine image of Armenia – exhausted and thrown to the ground – and the emphatically masculine image of Nero in an imperial cloak on the *Sebasteion* relief illustrate the defeat of Armenia in 58–59 AD: the capture of the capitals – Artashat and Tigranakert – as well as the appointment of Tigran VI who, according to Tacitus, “had sunk into servile submissiveness” (*Ann.* XIV, 26). The Parthian commander’s short, leather military cloak on the figure of Armenia, the Parthian-Phrygian cap, the bow and arrows, all act as signs of the ‘regional’ clothing

⁶⁸ Kudryavtsev 1949, 61.



Fig. 18. Base from the relief with the name “Nero-Helios” from the South Portico (after Smith 1987, XVII, 3).

and attributes characteristic of both the Armenians and the Parthians.

In the *Sebasteion* of Aphrodisias, a base from a relief with an inscription has survived (Fig. 18).⁶⁹ The name of Nero was erased. In the centre, between the title of Nero on the right and the inscription “HELIOS” on the left, a classic mask of a young man resembling the images of Roman Sol is depicted. This inscription is certainly also related to Nero’s policy in Armenia. Judging by the epithet ‘helios’, it can be assumed that the figure of Nero was portrayed on the stela as Helios. The image of Nero-Helios in the radiant crown of the sun god is known from the images on coins and glyptic samples. Two monumental statues are depicted on them. One of them is a 30-meter gilded bronze statue of standing Nero, the so-called Colossus in the lobby of the ‘Golden House’ in Rome. The other one portrays Nero-Helios standing on a quadriga.⁷⁰

The portraits of Nero as Helios (Roman Sol) obviously appeared during the coronation ceremony of the Armenian king Tiridates in Rome (66 AD). The above-mentioned portraits were connected with Nero’s political and diplomatic success in the East and especially with the strengthening of political control over Armenia.⁷¹

By the early 60s, there was a breakthrough in the foreign policy of Rome. Nero had to abandon the nominally dependent Armenia. The Parthians crowned Tiridates (Tac. *Ann.* XV, 2,5) in the town of Nisibis after Vologases had invaded the territory of Armenia to force out Tigran VI from besieged Tigranakert. The Roman legate of Syria, Corbulo, turned to Nero with a request to appoint a new commander for the war with Armenia.

Corbulo, in the hope of delaying military operations, tried to maintain peace negotiations independently. Vologases abstained from military clashes in order to resolve the issue of Armenia peacefully (Tac. *Ann.* XV, 5; Dio Cass. XX, 3). He agreed to conclude a peace treaty on condition of the withdrawal of Roman troops from Armenia, the restoration of the former territory, and the enthronement of Tiridates in Armenia as “an ally and friend of the Roman Emperor and people”. Yet, Nero resisted the agreement between Corbulo and Vologases. In 61 AD, he sent Caesennius Paetus, Legate of Cappadocia, to Armenia, but the Roman troops were defeated. In 64 AD, a humiliating peace treaty was concluded in Rhandaia. According to it, Paetus with his troops were to be handed to the Parthians. This treaty became a crucial point in Roman dealings with the issue of Armenia.⁷² Henceforth, Rome was obliged to reckon with the Armenian-Parthian alliance, abstain from the plan to turn Armenia into a province, and seek compromise. Vologases demanded Armenia for Tiridates. Nero agreed on condition that Tiridates personally would go to Rome and receive the crown from the hands of the emperor himself. The Tiridates’s journey to Rome and the lavish celebrations in the ‘Golden House’ of Nero took place in the summer of 66 AD. During the coronation ceremony, Tiridates received the crown from the hands of Nero and addressed the latter with a speech calling him the god of the sun, Mithra (Dio Cass. LXIII, 5, 4; Suet. *Ner.* 13).

The stela with the assumed portrait of Nero-Helios in the *Sebasteion* was also evidently referring to the political events occurring during the last five years of Nero’s reign: the Parthian-Armenian alliance as well as the

⁶⁹ Reynolds 1981, 324, no. 9; Rose 1997, 48, 165, no. 105.

⁷⁰ Neverov 1976, 31.

⁷¹ Shotter 2003, 189; 2005, 57–58; Varner 2004, 71.

⁷² Stepanyan 1976, 176.



Fig. 19. Relief 'Nero and Agrippina' (source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibexes/388735424>, accessed 02.12.2016).

political compromise reached between Rome and Parthia, which resulted in the Armenian throne being given to Tiridates.

The other portraits of Nero in the *Sebasteion* also sequentially illustrate episodes from the emperor's career. On the panel 'Aeneas fleeing Troy' at the South Portico, the Roman ancestor, Aeneas, is endowed with the portrait features of Nero himself (Figs 3–4).⁷³ The relief 'Nero and Agrippina' represents Agrippina the Younger crowning her son, Nero, with a laurel wreath (54 AD) (Fig. 19). Agrippina carries a cornucopia in her left hand. She is depicted as the goddess Roma and Concordia and at the same time represents the guarantor of the Empire (*garantix imperium*) ensuring peace and prosperity.⁷⁴ Nero is depicted in a military costume and *paludamentum* holding a spear in his right hand and an orb or globe in his left hand.⁷⁵

The ceremonial scene of coronation was first introduced in the art of the Augustan Age,⁷⁶ and it became a popular motif in the official art of its later stage. A similar composition is depicted on the reverses of two silver coins of Germanicus issued in 18 AD in honour of the coronation of the Armenian king Zeno-Artaxias: Germanicus in military clothes and an anatomical cuirass (*lorica anatomica*), holding a spear in his left hand, puts the Armenian tiara on the head of frontally-standing Zeno-Artaxias (Fig. 20). Artaxias is portrayed



Fig. 20. Reverse of the silver didrachma with the scene of coronation of Zeno-Artaxias by Germanicus (after Bedukyan 1971, pl. 1, fig. 3).

⁷³ Smith 1990, 97, fig. 9; Rose 1997, 167.

⁷⁴ Erim 1986, 4, 30, 122.

⁷⁵ Smith 1987, 127–132, pls XXIV–XXVI; Rose 1997, 164–167.

⁷⁶ Sutherland 1970, 102–104.

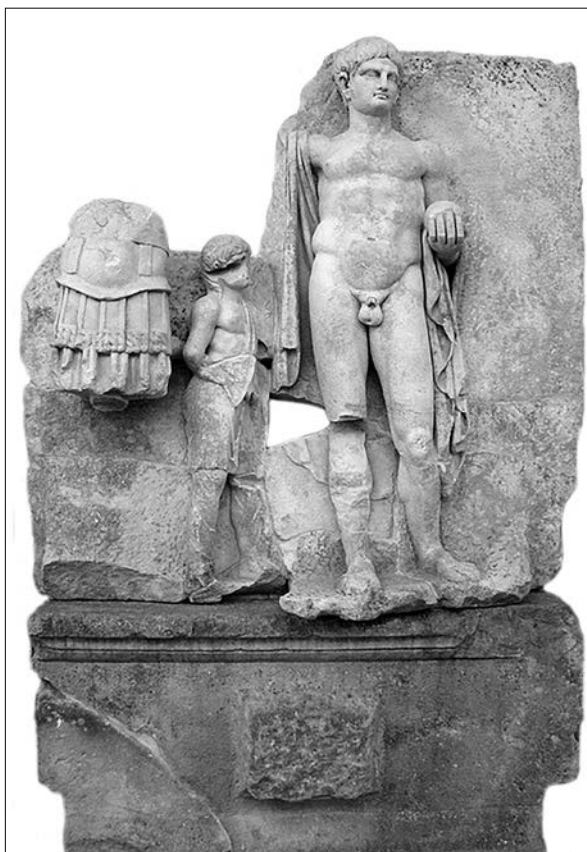


Fig. 21. Relief 'Nero with a Captive' (source: www.panoramio.com/photo/122551351, accessed 02.02.2017).

in a Roman military costume and an anatomical cuirass, while his right hand is raised towards the tiara.⁷⁷ With this solemn gesture, the Armenian king gives an oath of allegiance to the Roman emperor and to his people.⁷⁸

On the next imperial relief, Nero's frontally-standing figure in heroic nakedness is depicted as almighty (Fig. 21): with a globe and a mantle over his left hand, and with a spear in his right hand.⁷⁹ On the ground, next to him, there is an anatomic trophy with pterygia, while between the emperor and the trophy a small barbarian figure, probably a captive Briton, is depicted.⁸⁰ Presumably, the composition symbolises the suppression of the uprising in Britannia in 61 AD and its final subjection.

The portraits of Nero, like all the other imperial portraits in the *Sebasteion*, follow a classicistic and idealistic style with some features of dynastic similarities typical

of the members of the Julio-Claudian family.⁸¹ They replicate the already known types of official portraits. All the *Sebasteion* portraits of Nero are in general linked to a series of the second type of portraits of the young emperor (54 AD). The portrait features of Nero, known to us from the long series of sculptures and from smaller works, are clearly reflected on the three well-preserved sculptural portraits in the *Sebasteion* (the reliefs 'Nero and Agrippina', 'Aeneas fleeing Troy', and 'Nero with a Captive'). In these reliefs, the physiognomic and portrait features of Nero are accentuated by short straight strands of hair on his forehead, a short curly beard, as well as side-whiskers and protruding ears. Despite the idealised and generalised interpretation of the image, the portrait features of Nero correspond mainly with his official portraits of the second type from 54–59 AD (Cagliari type). Along with this, signs of the third type depicting Nero in adulthood (59–64 AD) can be found in these portraits.⁸² He is characterised by his wavy hairstyle – with rows of strands on his head. The locks grow long on the nape of the neck and are swept forward. The long curly strands are also in front of his ears, a slightly curly beard is visible on his chin. The strands arranged symmetrically on his forehead are aligned in a correct row, and their ends are directed from right to left, while the ends of the side coins accurately coincide with the outer corners of his eyes. The most famous example of this sculptural type is the marble head (59 AD) from the Museo Palatino.⁸³ The wavy hair arranged in even rows on the top of his head coincides with Nero's hairstyle described by Suetonius – "*comam semper in gradus formata*" – as well as with his physiognomic features (*Nero*, 51).

The sculptural head of the emperor from the relief 'Nero and Armenia' is severely damaged: actually only the upper part with a helmet, a forelock on his forehead, and a part of the right eye are preserved (Fig. 11). Therefore, its identification with Nero is very difficult. The face of Nero from this relief is generally thin, and the forelock is depicted with a short relief curling and separated in the centre strands on his forehead. This 'family' hairstyle of the Julio-Claudians is characteristic for the *Sebasteion* portraits of Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, or the step-son of Tiberius – Germanicus. This form of forelock significantly differs from its representation in the second portrait type, where it forms a row of thin, short, and pointed strands (Figs 22–23).⁸⁴ We suppose that the relief panel dates back to the initial period of the construction of the

⁷⁷ Bedukyan 1971, 25–27, figs 3–4.

⁷⁸ Markaryan 2015a, 70, fig. 5.

⁷⁹ Smith 1987, 109–112; 2008, 20–25.

⁸⁰ R.R.R. Smith believes that the above-mentioned relief depicts Nero's father, commander Germanicus (Smith 1987, 110–112),

but the imperial regalia – globe and scepter – indicate that the emperor is depicted.

⁸¹ Smith 1987, 100.

⁸² Heisinger 1975, 113–124; Bergman, Zanker 1981, 321–322.

⁸³ Varner 2004, 48, figs 82a–c.

⁸⁴ Heisinger 1975, 118.

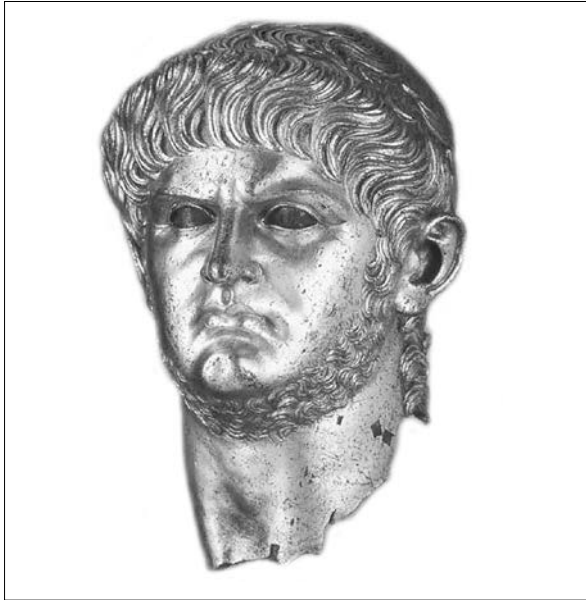


Fig. 22. Bronze portrait of Nero in New York Private Collection (after Varner 2004, fig. 87a).

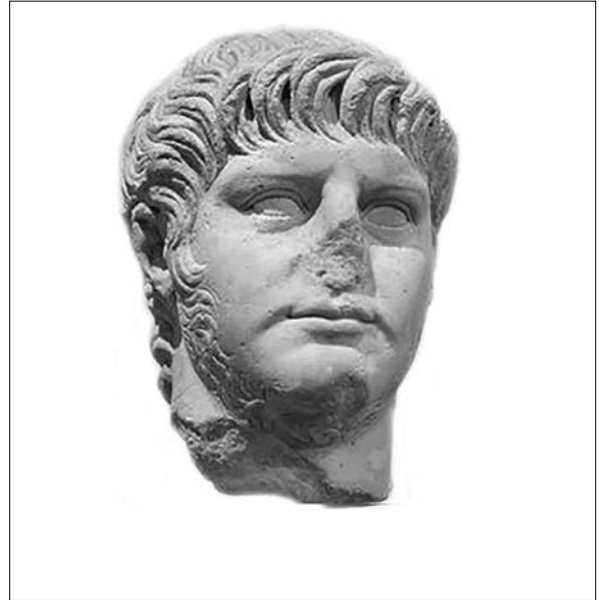


Fig. 23. Marble head of Nero in the Museo Palatino in Rome (after Varner 2004, fig. 82a).

temple. The figure of the emperor depicted on it, crafted in the classicistic style of the Augustan art, originally portrayed one of the predecessors of Nero – Augustus, Tiberius, or his step-son, Germanicus, well-known for his victories over Armenia. This is evidenced not only by the graphic inscriptions mentioned by Smith and Reynolds⁸⁵ but also by the type of the figure of Armenia represented as a girl with a lowered head and one of the legs stretched out on the ground, which is similar to the figure of Armenia on the cameo of Tiberius.

Three portraits of Nero are preserved in the *Sebasteion*: in the first, he is depicted as Aeneas; in the second, on a stela with a coronation scene; and in the third, with a spear and a globe. They are comparable also with his numismatic portraits on the coins commemorating the victories over Armenia (after 59 AD). A didrachma and hemidrachma minted in 59 AD in Cappadocian Caesarea, after the siege of Tigranakert, symbolise Corbulo's victories.⁸⁶ On their obverses, Nero's head turned towards right is depicted in a laurel wreath, and around it there is an inscription: "NERO CLAVD DIVI CLAVD F AESAR AVG GERMANI"; on the reverse, there is a figure of Victoria walking towards the right, holding a laurel wreath in her right hand and a palm branch in the left. There is an inscription "ARME-NIAC",

divided in the middle with the figure of Victoria (Fig. 24). According to Mattingly, the inscription "ARME-NIAC" should be read "ARMENIACA", *i.e.* *Victoria Armeniaca* – Armenian victory.⁸⁷ The above-mentioned numismatic portraits of Nero suggest that they were not minted immediately in 59 AD, but rather were issued somewhat later, in the period pre-dating 64 AD. Nevertheless, the brief inscription "ARMENIAC(A)", restrained in form and content, references the events of the period when the Roman-Parthian conflict ended and the peace treaty of Rhandaia was signed in 64 AD (Tac. *Ann.* XV, 27, 28, 29; Dio Cass. LXII, 23, 2).⁸⁸

On Nero's gems of 64–68 AD we see the emperor in a laurel wreath of a triumphant winner or in the *corona civica* on his head. They are similar to the above-mentioned numismatic portraits of Nero in regard to the pose of the head as well as the laurel wreath with a ribbon tied on the nape of the muscular neck,⁸⁹ which was obviously copied from a specific sculptural sample. After *damnatio memoriae*, the majority of portraits of Nero were transformed into portraits of Domitianus, Trajan, Galba, and Antinous.⁹⁰ A particularly close similarity can be observed with the carnelian intaglio in the Metropolitan Museum.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Reynolds 1981, 24; Smith 1987, 117–118.

⁸⁶ Bedoukian 1971, 64, no. 20; RIC, I, 616, BMC, 406.

⁸⁷ Mattingly 1965, I, pls 40, 16, 17.

⁸⁸ Manandyan 1944, 348.

⁸⁹ Richter 1971, 109, fig. 525.

⁹⁰ Varner 2004, figs 69, 60; figs 74, 63; figs 75, 63, and figs 76, 64.

⁹¹ Varner 2004, figs 95, 77.



Fig. 24. Coin of Nero commemorating the conquest of Armenia. On the reverse: Nike with a palm branch and wreath walking towards the right (after Bedukyan 1971, pl. 3, fig. 20).

A symbolic figure of Victoria with the inscription “VICTORIA AUGUSTI” is found also on a coin of 63–68 AD.⁹² This specimen differs from the coins with the inscription “ARMENIAC” only in regard to the posture of the figure, details of the clothes, *etc.* Obviously, all the above-mentioned coins belong to the triumphal series⁹³ marking Nero’s military and diplomatic successes in the East. These events were the main, if not the only, large-scale events in his military ‘career’, except for the quickly suppressed uprising in Britain in 61 AD.

The inscriptions “VICTORIA AUGUSTI” refer to the events of the Augustan Age: the return of the Roman standards, the treaty with Parthia, the establishment of control over Armenia, *etc.* These images and inscriptions drew a sort of parallel between Nero’s own successes and the victories of Augustus in the East.⁹⁴

The motif of walking Victoria with a laurel wreath and a palm branch in her hands can be also seen on the cuirasses of marble and bronze ‘military’ statues of Nero. Judging by the symbols on the cuirasses, these statues were installed to commemorate the victory over Armenia and were evidently related to the sieges of Artashat and Tigranakert.

A paired heraldic composition is depicted in the centre of the front piece of the cuirass of the statue of Nero (transformed into the statue of Domitianus) in the museum in the town of Vaison-la-Romaine in the south of France.⁹⁵ Images of winged Victoria in a chiton and with

a palm branch and a wreath are depicted on both sides of the palladium of Athena-Minerva. The figure of Victoria proceeding to the right depicted on the reverses of the triumphal coins with the inscription “ARMENIAC(A)” completely coincides with the figure of the goddess depicted on the right part of the cuirass. However, the walk of Victoria carrying the wreath and the branch to the goal depicted on the cuirass is ‘justified’, while on the coins it seems to be incomplete and ‘unaddressed’. It becomes clear that these two coin images replicate only the right part of the composition on the cuirass, despite the fact that the stamp cutter tries to balance the figure of the goddess with the inscription “ARME-NIAC” divided in the centre by the figure.

On the cuirass of another military statue of Nero (Domitianus) of 64–68 AD held by the Museum of Parma, the figures of the goddess are depicted standing on both sides of the sacred candelabrum or *thymiaterium* (Fig. 25).⁹⁶ According to Varner, the combination with two figures of winged Victoria at the palladium appears for the first time in the period of Nero’s reign. However, versions of the triumphal motif with two figures of Victoria are already observed on the monuments of the Augustan Age: sculpture, architectural relief, engraved gems, items of military equipment, *etc.* This motif symbolised the universal power of Rome through the image of Victoria Romana and Victoria Augusta. They are

⁹² Mattingly 1965, I, CLXXX, pl. 44, 2–4, 46, 8.

⁹³ Apparently, the lack of concrete inscriptions on these coins – like on the two examined samples – marking the victory over Armenia made M. Abramzon conclude that “military type” is almost absent in the coinage of Nero. However, quite the contrary seems to be true instead, as suggested by the coins with the image of the temple of Janus with closed doors and the inscription: “Delivering peace on land and at sea to Roman people, he closed the Temple of Janus”. However, at the same time,

the author notes that these coins were minted after the investiture of Tiridates in Rome (Abramzon 1995).

⁹⁴ The erection of the Parthian Arch by Nero seemingly symbolised equality between Nero and Augustus and Augustus’s Parthian Arch in the Roman Forum (here, Fig. 27). The Parthian Arch of Nero was preserved on a number of his series of coins. See Mattingly 1965, I, CLXXVIII, pls 44, 5; 46, 5; 48, 4; Kleiner 2007, 116, figs 8–22.

⁹⁵ Varner 2004, 58, fig. 60.a–c.

⁹⁶ Varner 2004, 58, fig. 61.b.



Fig. 25. Fragment of the cuirassed statue of Nero in the Parma Museum (after Varner 2004, fig. 60d).

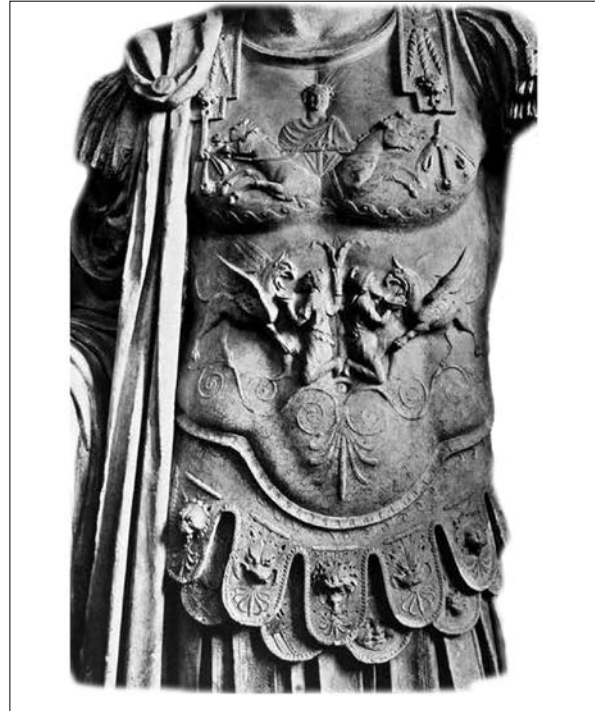


Fig. 26. Fragment of the cuirassed statue of Nero in the Vatican Museums (after Varner 2004, fig. 88).

based on the Hellenistic motif with Nike in front of the palladium of Athena.⁹⁷

Another honorary cuirassed statue of Nero, held by the Vatican Museums (from Caere), should also be attributed to the events of that period and the coronation of Tiridates in 66 AD (Fig. 26).⁹⁸ Nero presented as Helios is depicted in the centre on the front piece of the cuirass. He has a radiant crown on his head while wearing an imperial toga and standing on a quadriga. Under the quadriga, a paired composition of two male kneeling figures with eastern appearance offering bowls to winged griffins is depicted. The right male figure is a mature man with thick wavy hair and a thick bushy beard. He wears Parthian military clothes with a short leather cloak and a sword belt, and holds with both hands a bowl from which he feeds the griffin. The left beardless young man wears a short shirt reaching down to his knees and with sleeves, which resembles the upper part of a Greek chiton. The small round cap fits tightly around the head. With his free right hand, the young man holds a sceptre protruding from a palmette in the centre of the composition. He holds the bowl in his left hand.

The attributes, the oriental iconography of the figures, and the 'mythological' associations (Apollo-Helios-Mithra, griffins) establish a reference to the East. In the Greek myth, Apollo-Helios harnessed griffins instead of horses to his heavenly chariot. Nemesis, the goddess of retribution, also rode in a similar chariot drawn by griffins. Nemesis helped Nero defeat Parthia and Armenia.

The bearded figure feeding the griffin on the right symbolises Parthia, whereas the left figure of the young man personalises Armenia in accordance with the traditional standards of the Roman triumphal symbolism.⁹⁹

The series of artefacts with the image of triumphant Nero is quite large. The small bronze statuette of Nero at the museum in Venice is among the number of images associated with the events of the coronation of Tiridates.¹⁰⁰ It depicts the young emperor cuirassed and seated. He extends his right arm in a gesture of *clementia*.¹⁰¹ The portrait features correspond to the second type of 54–59 AD; hence, the statuette may date back to the second half of the 50s – the period when the above-mentioned military actions were occurring on the territory of Armenia.

⁹⁷ Markaryan 2015b, 128–130.

⁹⁸ Varner 2004, 71, fig. 88.

⁹⁹ Markaryan 2015b, 137, 141, 143–154, tab. VII, figs 2–3, tab. IX, figs 1–2; according to E.R.Varner, these two kneeling figures depict Arimaspes (Varner 2004, 71), but the specific 'ethnic'

iconography allows for identifying them as personifications of Parthia and Armenia.

¹⁰⁰ Sperti 1990, 24–28; Varner 2004, 71.

¹⁰¹ Brilliant 1963, 41; Vahl 2007, 16, fig. 1.2.



Fig. 27. Sesterce of Nero. On the obverse: a portrait of Nero. On the reverse: an image of the Parthian Arch (source: www.coin-world.com/news/world-coins/2015/, accessed 02.02.2017).

This small bronze may reflect the large images of Nero, particularly the statue of Nero in Armenia to which Tiridates lay down his royal diadem in 66 AD: “It was then agreed that Tiridates should lay down his royal crown before Caesar’s image, and resume it only from the hand of Nero. The interview then ended with a kiss. After an interval of a few days there was a grand display on both sides; on the one, cavalry ranged in squadrons with their national ensigns; on the other, stood the columns of our legions with glittering eagles and standards and images of deities, after the appearance of a temple. In the midst, on a tribunal, was a chair of state, and on the chair a statue of Nero. To this Tiridates advanced, and having slain the customary victims, he removed the crown from his head, and set it at the foot of the statue” (Tac. *Ann.* XV, 29, translated by A.J. Church, W. Jackson Brodribb).

Trajan’s cuirassed image in the *sella curulis*, with the right arm outstretched in the gesture of *clementia* and *submissio*, is known from a number of sculptural reliefs and numismatic images on the coins of Trajan from the

series REX PARTHIS DATUS, issued to commemorate his victory over Parthia and the conversion of Armenia into a Roman province.¹⁰²

According to L. Sperti, the bronze cult statuette of Emperor Nero was used during the ceremonies dedicated to the coronation of Tiridates in 66 AD. The statuette could have belonged among personal items kept in a small home sanctuary, or it could have been a part of decorations, such as of a horse harness, *etc.*¹⁰³ The famous bronze figure of Nero as Alexander the Great,¹⁰⁴ armoured and with a spear, is also evidently ranked among the cult statuettes of Nero.

Thus, the artistic-historical ‘reading’ of the theme of Nero’s victory over Armenia depicted on the marble relief from the temple complex of the *Sebasteion* in Asia Minor reveals specific features of the symbolism of Armenia in the Roman triumphal art of Nero’s period, reflecting the character and essence of these foreign political events occurring in the East during the reign of the last representative of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

Bibliography:

- Abramzon M.G. 1995 *Monety kak sredstvo propagandy oficialnoj polityki Rima*, online: <http://www.roman-glory.com/abramzon-vneshnyaya-politika>, accessed 09.07.2019.
- Balbuza K. 2015 The semiotics of triumph and social communication in Roman Empire during the Prinzipat Era, (in:) K. Jędraszczyk (ed.), *Explicit and Implicit Meanings of Cultural Communications*, Vol. 2, Gniezno, 237–259.
- Balbuza K. 2017 Der Triumph in Dienste dynastischer Politik, (in:) F. Goldbeck, J. Wienand (eds), *Der Römische Triumph in Prinzipat und Spätantike*, Berlin, 255–283.
- Bedykjan P.-Z. 1971 *Rimskije monety i medaliony ob Armenii*, Vena.

¹⁰² Bedukyan 1971, 69–74, fig. 22; RIC, 667, 669, BMC, 1046.

¹⁰³ Sperti 1990, 22–30.

¹⁰⁴ Henig 1984, 60.

- Bergmann M., Zanker P. 1981 Umgearbeitet Nero- und Domizianporträts. Zur Ikonographie der flavischen Kaiser und Nerva, *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 96, 317–412.
- Bieber M. 1961 *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*, New York.
- Boethius A., Ward-Perkins J.B. 1970 *Etruscan and Roman Architecture*, Harmondsworth.
- Brilliant R. 1963 *Rank and Gesture in Roman Art*, New Haven.
- Brody L.R. 2001 The cult of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias in Caria, *Kernos* 14, 93–103.
- Chaumont M.-L. 1987 Armenia and Iran II. The Pre-Islamic Period, (in:) *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 2, 418–438.
- Debevoise N. 1938 *A Political History of Parthia*, Chicago.
- Erim K.T. 1967 The School of Aphrodisias, *Archaeology* 20, 18–20.
- Erim K.T. 1986 *Aphrodisias. City of Venus Aphrodite*, New York.
- Friesen S.L. 2001 *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins*, Oxford.
- Gambash G., Gitler H., Cotton H.M. 2013 *Judea Recepta, Israel Numismatic Research* 8, 83–104.
- Grant M., Dowden K. 1995 *Art in Roman Empire*, London–New York.
- Gros P. 1996 *L'architecture romaine du début du III siècle av.J.-C. à la fin du Haut Empire*, Vol. 1, Paris.
- Henig M. 1984 *Religion in Roman Britain*, London.
- Hiesinger U. 1975 The portraits of emperor Nero, *American Journal of Archaeology* 79(2), 113–124.
- Kleiner F.S. 1985 *The Arch of Nero in Rome: A Study of the Roman Honorary Arch before and under Nero*, Rome.
- Kleiner F.S. 2007 *A History of Roman Art, Enhanced Edition*, Wadsworth.
- Kudrjavcev O.V. 1948 Rimskaja politika v Armenii i Parfii v pervoj polovine pravljenja Nerona, *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 25(3), 52–66.
- Kudrjavcev O.V. 1949 Rim, Armenija i Parfija vo vtoroj polovine Nerona, *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 29(3), 36–46.
- Kuttner A.L. 1995 *Dynasty and Empire in the Age of Augustus: the Case of Boscoreale Cups*, Berkeley–Los Angeles.
- Manandjan A. 1945 *Kritičeskij obzor istorii armjanskogo naroda*, Vol. 1, Erevan.
- Markarjan A.Z. 2015a Personifikacija Velikoj Armenii na kamee Tiberija, (in:) A.S. Maslov, A.V. Mahlajuk (eds), *V teni Mnemoziny. Kommemorativnyje praktiki v obščestvah prozlogo*, Nižnij Novgorod, 62–80.
- Markarjan A.Z. 2015b Simbolika i personifikacija na triumfalnyh monetach Avgusta, (in:) E.G. Margarjan (ed.), *Transformacionnyje procesy v epohu Principata. Vključenije Rima v osevoje vremja*, Erevan, 121–170.
- Mattingly H. 1965 *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, Vol. 1, London.
- Megow M.R. 1987 *Kameen von Augustus bis Alexander Severus*, Berlin.
- Meyer H. 2000 *Prunkkameen und Staatsdenkmäler römischer Kaiser. Neue Perspektiven zur Kunst der frühen Prinzipatszeit*, München.
- Millar F. 1984 State and subject: The impact of monarchy, (in:) F. Millar, E. Segal (eds), *Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects*, Oxford, 37–60.
- Neverov O.Ja. 1976 *Antičnyje intalii v sobranii Ermitaža*, Leningrad.
- Nicolet C. 1991 *Space, Geography and Politics in the Early Roman Empire*, Ann Arbor.
- Olbrycht M.J. 1998 Das Arsakidenreich zwischen der mediterranen Welt und Innerasien. Bemerkungen zur politischen Strategie der Arsakiden von Vologases I. bis zum Herrschaftsantritt des Vologases III. (50–147 n. Chr.), (in:) E. Dąbrowa (ed.), *Ancient Iran and the Mediterranean World. Studies in Ancient History. Proceedings of an International Conference in Honour of Professor Józef Wolski, Held at the Jagiellonian University, Cracow, in September 1996*, Electrum 2, Kraków, 113–159.
- Olbrycht M.J. 2016 Germanicus, Artabanos II of Parthia, and Zeno Artaxias in Armenia, *Klio* 98(2), 605–633.
- Ostrowski J. 1990 *Les personnifications des provinces dans l'art romain*, Varsovie.
- Öztürk Ö. 2011 *A digital reconstruction of visual experience and the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias*, unpublished MA thesis, Middle East Technical University in Ankara, online: <https://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12613463/index.pdf>, accessed 09.07.2019.

- Platner S.B.A., Ashby Th. 1929 *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, London.
- Price S.R. 1984 *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*, Cambridge.
- Ratté Ch. 2008 The founding of Aphrodisias, (in:) Ch. Ratté, R.R.R. Smith (eds), *Aphrodisias Papers 4. New Research of the City and its Monuments*, Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 70, Portsmouth, 7–37.
- Reynolds J. 1981 New evidence for the imperial cult in Julio-Claudian Aphrodisias, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 43, 317–327.
- Richter M.G.A. 1971 *Engraved Gems of the Romans*, London.
- Rose C.B. 1990 “Princes” and barbarians on the *Ara Pacis*, *American Journal of Archaeology* 94(3), 453–467.
- Rose C.B. 1997 *Dynastic Commemoration and Imperial Portraiture in the Julio-Claudian Period*, Cambridge.
- Rose C.B. 2005 The Parthians in Augustan Rome, *American Journal of Archaeology* 109(1), 21–75.
- Sapelli M. 1999 *Provinciae Fideles. Il fregio del tempo di Adriano in Campo Marzio*, Milano.
- Shoppa H. 1957 *Die Kunst der Römerzeit in Gallien, Germanien und Britannien*, München–Berlin.
- Shotter D. 2003 *Rome and her Empire*, New York.
- Shotter D. 2005 *Nero*, New York.
- Smith R.R.R. 1987 The imperial reliefs from the *Sebasteion* at Aphrodisias, *Journal of Roman Studies* 77, 88–138.
- Smith R.R.R. 1988 *Simulacra Gentium: The Ethne from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias*, *Journal of Roman Studies* 78, 50–77.
- Smith R.R.R. 1990 Myth and Allegory in the *Sebasteion*, (in:) C. Roueché, K.T. Erim (eds), *Aphrodisias Papers: Recent Work on Architecture and Sculpture*, Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 1, Ann Arbor, 89–100.
- Smith R.R.R. 2006 *Aphrodisias II: Roman Portrait Sculpture from Aphrodisias*, Mainz.
- Smith R.R.R., Ertug A. 2009 *Aphrodisias. City and Sculpture in Roman Asia*, Istanbul.
- Sperti L. 1990 *Nerone e la “sottomissione” di Tiridate in un bronzo da Opitergium*, Supplementi alla Rivista di Archeologia VIII, Roma.
- Stepanjan A.A. 1976 Randejskij dogovor i koronacija Tiridata Arsakida v Rime, *Istoriko-filologičeskij Žurnal* 3, 171–183.
- Stevenson G. 2001 *Power and Place. Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation*, Berlin–New York.
- Svencickaja I.S. 1981 Polis i imperija: evoljucija imperatorskvo kulta i rol „vozrastnyh sojuзов” v gorodah maloazijskih provincij I–II vv., *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 158, 4.
- Toynbee J.M.C. 1934 *The Hadrianic School: A Chapter in the History of Greek Art*, Cambridge.
- Tuchelt K. 1981 Problem Kaisareion-Sebasteion. Eine Frage zu den Anfängen des römischen Kaiser-Kults, *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 31, 167–186.
- Turcan R. 1984 L’arc de Carpentras: problem de datation et d’histoire, (in:) H. Walter (ed.), *Hommage à L. Lerat 2*, Annales littéraires de l’Université de Besançon, Paris, 810–819.
- Vahl J. 2007 *Imperial Representations of Clementia: from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius*, Ontario.
- Varner E.R. 2004 *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture*, Monumenta Graeca et Romana X, Leiden–Boston.
- Vollenweider M.-L., Avisseau-Brustet M. 2003 *Camées et intailles*, Paris.
- Welch K. 1998 The stadium at Aphrodisias, *American Journal of Archaeology* 102(3), 547–569.
- Zanker P. 1988 *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, Ann Arbor.