CHAPTER 27

ART IN THE ROMAN PERIOD, 168 BC–337 AD

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From the Roman conquest to the end of Constantine's reign, the finds in Macedon allow us to examine mainly two categories of large-scale art: sculpture and mosaic floors. The surviving monuments are numerous, whereas wall-paintings are not, but they differ in their chronological duration and, up to a point, in their function. The production is of high quality and builds on traditions of the earlier age of the kings. Macedon has always been exceptionally open to foreign artistic influences, but it is striking how slowly its art becomes “Romanised,” if we take “Romanisation” to mean the acceptance of new elements of Western origin.

The Late Hellenistic Period and the Transition to the Imperial Period

It is difficult to trace elements in Macedon’s art which connect to the first great political changes in Macedonia after the Roman conquest. However, a porous architectural sculpture, an Atlas from the Roman Agora of Thessaloniki (no. 39, fig. 67), probably comes from a public monument of this period. It was created in a local workshop a little after the mid-second century BC, and with other similar figures, it would have supported the upper structure of a public building, perhaps in the Agora or a sanctuary of the city. Its type is undoubtedly Western, and had a long-standing tradition in Italy that can be traced back to the gigantic figures of the

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The numbers that are placed in parenthesis in the text above are the numbers of the corpus of the sculptures in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, where a great number of sculptures from the whole of Macedonia are kept, see G. Despinis—Th. Stefanidou-Tiveriou—Em. Voutiras, *Catalogue of Sculpture in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki I* (Thessaloniki 1997) and G. Despinis—Th. Stefanidou-Tiveriou—Em. Voutiras, eds., *Κατάλογος γλυπτών του Αρχαιολογικού Μουσείου Θεσσαλονίκης* II, III (Thessaloniki 2003, 2011).


temple of Zeus in Agrigento of the early fifth century BC. However, the powerful physique of the male torso also connects it with the relief frieze of the Great Altar at Pergamon. As it is a sculpture from a public building soon after the Roman conquest, it is plainly connected with the Roman victory in Macedonia. The power of the new regime, symbolically implied through the Atlantes, was propagandised in Thessaloniki, capital of the province of Macedonia and seat of the Roman proconsul from 148 BC.

The setting up of honorary portrait statues in Macedonian cities is confirmed by written sources and archaeological finds. The Thessalonians honoured the victor of Andriskos, Quintus Caecilius Metellus, first governor (proconsul) of Macedonia, with the erection of an honorary portrait statue (IG X 2,1 no. 134) between 148 and 146 BC. Perhaps he was depicted by the type of cuirassed portrait statue which was used in the East for the representation of kings and generals. An unpublished, headless statue of this period from Amphipolis may give us a clue to the style of the lost statue of Metellus. More common were portrait statues of males wearing a himation, mostly to honour members of the local elite. From the end of the second century BC a headless statue from Thessaloniki (no. 160) depicts a mature man whose belly protrudes slightly beneath the himation. There are also examples of a female presence in public spaces too, such as the statue from the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Derveni (ancient Lete) (no. 36). The body is wrapped in a transparent himation, according to the fashion of the period, and the head has portrait features, albeit idealised ones.

By the mid-first century BC at the latest, portraits with a particular emphasis on the facial features appear in Macedonia too and are influenced, without a doubt, by similar Roman creations. A relief portrait, of excellent quality, from the area of the Agora of Thessaloniki (no. 66) probably comes from a clipeata imago, a circular monument in the shape of a shield which depicted the head and chest of a male. The bony face and the sharp cheek bones, the forehead with the deep wrinkles and the beginning of baldness, the small eyes and the protruding upper lip compose the individual facial features of a man of mature age with strong character. The general facial similarity with the portrait-type of Julius

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