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*An Unpublished Marble Head of Serapis  
from the Oslo University Museum*

The head of Serapis today in the collections of the University of Oslo got its original registration with Ustinow Collection number 502, having sale no. R 39 in the auction catalogue, where the head was prized at 1200 Norwegian Crowns.<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth E. Jones<sup>2</sup> in his letter of recommendation addressed to the Norwegian buyers under number 46 states that the Serapis head was found on Mount Ephraim, without supplying any indication as to a specific site. This information, however, remains impossible to verify.

The head is produced in small crystalline glowing and transparent marble. In the process of production variously calibrated chisels and drills were used. The head was connected to the body by means of a bolt, rectangular in section, for which the hole is preserved. The face portion (**Fig. 1**) is mutilated as is the frontal portion of the hair, the beard and the moustache. Still it is possible to reconstruct the original appearance of the face. The modius on the top of the head is lacking, it was made separately, its original placement is, however, easy to restore thanks to the lower ring left on the sides and the back of the head (**Figs 2–3**) and subsidiarily a hole for the mounting of it, is still well preserved in the centre of the top of the head. A rectangular bolt-hole in the centre of the lower limit of the neck indicates that the head was made separately and placed on the torso apparently in antiquity, similarly to the case of the modius (*kalathos*).

In general the sides and back of the head (**Figs 2–3**) are well preserved compared with the frontal portion, which appears to have been mutilated on purpose (**Fig. 1**). On the head small sized discolorations are visible in places. They may be considered as possible traces left of gilding, analogously to the discolorations left on the colossal head of Serapis inv. no. 897 in the collections of the Archeological Museum of Thessaloniki, where reddish spots on the hair were interpreted as traces left after ancient gilding.<sup>3</sup>

## DESCRIPTION OF THE HEAD

The sculpture is 0.270m high and 0.199m wide; the height of the face being 0.122m and its width 0.088m.

The head shows a mature male with well proportioned trapezoid face, except for an oversized forehead, originally partially covered by the forelocks. The high, slightly concave forehead has prominent eyebrow arches and five highly and almost horizontally placed dots left after removal of forehead locks. The deity had a short nose, of which only traces of pierced nose-holes are left, low seated eyes, lips slightly apart, providing a certain pathetic

<sup>1</sup> Documentation stored in the archives of the University Museum of Cultural Heritage, Oslo.

<sup>2</sup> W. E. Jones, Exhibitioner and Oriental Prizeman, S.A.C. Associate College of Durham University, Reader British Museum; the document is now in the care of the British Museum. About the history of The Ustinow Collection, cf. I. SKUPIŃSKA-LØVSET, *The Ustinow Collection. The Palestinian Pottery*, Oslo-Bergen-Tromsø 1976, pp. 17–21.

<sup>3</sup> The spots have not been tested chemically.

1.-3. The head of Serapis, University Museum of Cultural Heritage, Oslo: 1) Front view; 2) Left profile view; 3) Three quarter back view from the left (Phot. Per G. Maurtvedt).



expression. The tear-ducts and the irises of the eyes are plastically marked. The hair is rich but rather flat, lightly curled and dressed symmetrically around the face.

Five loose locks were completely separated from the forehead, except for the extant fastening points. The hair on the sides is cut diagonally down to the back of the head where the hair is longer and dressed in five thick plaits reaching low on the neck. The hair on the back of the head are less voluminous and modelled only with chisels. His beard is rich and composed in its upper part of small curls; some of these are round and show traces of hollowing with a drill. The lower curls were longer and vertical, but are today mostly mutilated. The moustache is rather thin and ends in asymmetrical “S” curls. The hair is clearly undercut around the face which is giving an impression of big volume of the coiffure, usually interpreted as a wig.

This type of head is considered canonical of the statue of Serapis, a work by Bryaxis. According to late antique information by Clement of Alexandria,<sup>4</sup> who is referring to the philosopher Athenodoros of Tarsus who lived in the First century AD, the statue should have been created at the end of the reign of Ptolemaios I Soter. Clement of Alexandria also writes, that it was made of ground stone and a mix of all the precious stones and metals of Egypt and thus the bare portions of the statue had a grey-blue colour. This information fits badly with the statement that it was ‘robbed’ from Synope.

Other late antique writers such as Eusebius and Kirilos of Alexandria also mention the statue of Serapis, without adding new information as to its origin and appearance.

Still it is not clear, whether this important statue was originally standing in Memphis or in Alexandria.

The creation was extremely popular throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods, numerous reproductions in all materials and all sizes have been recorded to the present. In the Museum of Alexandria, for instance, there may be found a colossal statue of Serapis, marble torsos and heads of him of various sizes, as well as many minuscule reproductions in materials such as terracotta, glass and the similar – but his cult and his images were widespread over the Mediterranean.

## ICONOGRAPHY AND STYLE

Research on the activity of Bryaxis has to the present left broad opportunities for interpretation, and many questions in the discussion on his statue of Serapis for Alexandria, or as Picard is correcting it, for Memphis, are still open. Taking as a departure point the information provided by Tacitus<sup>5</sup> and Plutarch<sup>6</sup> Ptolemy I Soter captured the cult statue from Sinope on the Black Sea and brought it to Alexandria; accordingly it was considered originally a creation foreign to Alexandria. Concurrent interpretation, however, is

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<sup>4</sup> *Clementis Alexandrini Protrepticus*, 4.48.1-3 (Ed. M. Marcovich, Suppl. to *Vigiliae Christianae*, Leiden 1995).

<sup>5</sup> *Tacitus, Hist.*, IV, 84.

<sup>6</sup> *Plut., De Is.*, 27–28.

stating that instead of reading *Sinope* we should interpret the text as *Sinopeion*, a name given to the site of the already existing *Serapeum* at Memphis. The above cited Tacitus is stating that Serapis was originally the god of the village of *Rakothis*. In Alexandria it was pronounced to be Serapis by two high ranking authorities, a priest of the *Eumolpidae* family, connected with the organisation of the *Eleusinian Mysteries* and the well known Egyptian priest and scholar *Manetho*.

In the *Plutarch's* story *Ptolemy I Soter* had a dream in which an unnamed god appeared to him, instructing him in how to get the statue for Alexandria, a motive similar to other stories connected with reactivation or promotion of a cult, known also from for instance *Lukian Samosatiensis 'De Dea Syria'*. Leaning on the above material most scholars agree that the statue of Serapis must have been created in the years 285–282 BC.

The original was most probably inspired by *Olympian Zeus* by *Phidias*, but characterized as the *Master of the underworld*, with his right hand resting on the middle head of *Kerberos*. The original *Bryaxian* version of the face of Serapis shows him wearing a rich hairdo with forelock of five separated strands on the high forehead. This canonical type with five locks on the forehead was alternatively proposed bound with the restoration of *Serapeion* in the Roman period.<sup>7</sup> However this theory had to be abandoned as the article by *Hans Jucker*<sup>8</sup> provides numismatic evidence for the *Augustan* reproductions of the canonical type of Serapis.

Description of the cult statue in the *Alexandrian Serapeum* in late Antiquity was given by *Clement of Alexandria*,<sup>9</sup> Serapis clad in *chiton* and *himation* was seated on a throne, his legs on a footstool, he had a rich hairdo, beard and moustache. Five strands of hair had fallen on his forehead. On his head he had a *modius (kalathos)* – symbol of fertility, in his left hand a sceptre, and his right hand rested on the middle head of *Kerberos* seated on the right side of the throne. It was a multi-material work, constructed as in the case of *chryselephantine* technique. The skeleton was made of wood and covered by sheet gold, the details were made of other precious sheet metals and decorated with precious stones. The uncovered portions of the body were of blue shade.

As a whole the description tells about a statue made principally in Greek convention, but on the other side the strongly stylised forelock, characterising the canonical picture of Serapis, finds no direct analogue in Greek art. The tendency to separate the hair strands and comb them on the forehead is, however, often recorded from the late Fourth century on, especially with relation to the *Lysipian* school as eg. in his works such as *Alexandros*, *Poseidon*, *Euripides* or *Aristoteles*. Such styling may indicate the possibility for developing of the coiffure such as that of Serapis in Greece. Typical for Greek patronal gods such as

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<sup>7</sup> L. CASTIGLIONE, *Bull. Mus. Hongr.*, d. B.A.12, 1958, p. 349. A substantial bibliography on the typology of Serapis until the year 1968 was given by Ch. Picard and A. Adriani, cf.: CH. PICARD, *Manuel d'archéologie grecque IV. La sculpture, II partie*, Paris 1963, pp. 871–872; A. ADRIANI, *Repertoria d'arte dell'Egitto Greco-Romano, Serie A, vol. II*, Palermo 1961 [= *Repertorio*], pp. 42–43 and 70).

<sup>8</sup> H. JUCKER, *Schweizer Münzblätter* 19/1969, Heft 76, pp. 78–94.

<sup>9</sup> *Clementis Alexandrini Protrepticus* 4.48, p. 42. (Ed. M. Marcovich, *Suppl. to Vigiliae Christianae*, Leiden 1995).

Zeus, Poseidon, Hades is, however, the richness of hair and the deities are often shown seated, which is supplying them with gravity.

The head from the Ustinow collection has an analogue in the Alexandrian Museum statue of ‘Serapis from Via Sherif Pascia’.<sup>10</sup> Hornbostel calls this more than life-size statue the ‘Hauptrepresentation’ of the deity.<sup>11</sup> The same author stresses also the quality of a basalt tondo with representation of Helioserapis in the British Museum<sup>12</sup> and the head of Serapis made of white, fine grained marble in the collections of the Museum in Thessaloniki Mus. inv. no. 897, (H. 0.53m).<sup>13</sup> This head has been dated to 150–200 AD by the owners and exhibits similarities in the modelling of the upper portion of the beard in fairly small round curls to the beard of the second variant, characterized below. All these sculptures were executed without puntelli.

– The *first variant* is characterized by massiveness and accentuation of ‘blocky appearance’. In the sculpting of the face prominent cheek-bones and eye-brow arch, deep setting of the eyes, the accentuating of the trapezoid shape of the forehead may be observed. The beard is almost square in shape, voluminous strands of hair are placed more centrally, and thinner locks, strongly twined (drill hole in the middle) are placed on the sides. In this way the middle portion of the face is more expressive. Here the pathetic expressiveness is concentrated in all its static energy, which may explode anytime.

– Compared with the above, *variant two*, represented by the green basalt head in the collections of Villa Albani, Rome, is far less expressive, as the face is divided into small areas, ordered horizontally, and the dominating beard is built of voluminous fairly small curls, which gives to the face a more quiet expression.

– The *third variant* is presented in the colossal head no. 27432 from the Cairo Museum,<sup>14</sup> dated chiefly on technical reasons to the Second century AD (Antonine period). The features typical for the original creation, as the research imagines today, included the curls limiting the moustache, on the right side turning down, on the left turning up, are retained but reproduced as if stiffened in a stylization; so the face rather expresses meditation than energy and power. As to formal differences the proportions appear visually shortened by the fastening of the forelocks low on the forehead, the hair is more flatly adhering to the head.

– The *fourth variant* of the canonical type has many features in common with the *third* as described above on the example of the colossal head in the Cairo Museum no. 27432. Different is the forelock, as it is not parted in five strands of hair, but has a more continuous appearance. The mass of hair, however, is more voluminous and the hair is longest of all variants, as the locks are resting on the shoulders. The beard is also rich, following the contour of the face. Such styling makes the face appear very serious, detached from the problems of daily life. This variant is illustrated at the best by bust no. 549 in the Vatican Museums.

<sup>10</sup> Museo di Alessandria no. 3916, cf. ADRIANI, Repertorio, no. 154, Tav. 75 and pp. 249–251.

<sup>11</sup> W. HORNBOSTEL, Serapis, Leiden 1973, Fig. 60.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 165, Pl. XCVII.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Pl. 171.

<sup>14</sup> M.C.C. EDGAR, Greek Sculpture, CGC Nos 27425–27630, Le Caire 1903, p. 4, Pl. II.

– The *fifth variant* may be illustrated by bust no. 23836 in the Alexandria Museum,<sup>15</sup> dated by Achille Adriani to the end of the First century AD. Adriani is of the opinion, that the bust must have been found in the ruins of ancient Athribis (today Benha) as it was confiscated on the 3rd of September 1931 from thieves local to the area. The bust is very well preserved. This is a classicising creation, the head is slightly raised, the face shows regular features, long forehead, short nose, well proportioned, deep seated eyes. The lips are pressed together. The hair is ornamentally treated; long regularly wavy hair falls in strands reaching the shoulders, five strands on the forehead are arranged circularly, strands of hair forming the beard are sharply waved, ending in circular curls, holes drilled in the centres. The row of such small, round, with drillhole-in-the-middle curls frame the upper ridge of the beard, from the ends of the moustache to each ear. On the back of the head the hair is less carefully formed, but still each strand of hair ends with two sharp curls, and all the curls form together a nice curved line. Symmetry and decorativeness is dominating in this creation.

The dating problems are not easy to solve in the case of the reproductions of the head of Serapis. It appears that the only securely dated head is variant one, to the reproduction of this variant belongs the here discussed one. The modelling of the head is more holistic and retains more of the Hellenistic features. A certain pathos, typical of the Third century Hellenistic sculpture may be observed in the modelling of the facial features, eyes, nose and lips.

Of technical features the use of a drill may be observed in the modelling of the hair around the face, the beard and the “S” shaped ends of the moustache, the limits of the lips, nose holes, but the eyes are still modelled delicately by the use of a chisel only. The back of the head is less carefully modelled and an archaistic tendency is seen in the regularity and flatness of the slightly wavy strands of hair.

## SYRO-PALESTINIAN STATUES OF SERAPIS

The cases of finding of remnants of statues of Serapis in Syria and Palestina are relatively numerous. Thomas Weber, while introducing the fragmentary statue of Hades/Serapis found in Bosra recently, has summed up the information about the finding places of similar statues in the eastern Mediterranean except for Egypt.<sup>16</sup> The torso, he is discussing was found in 1999 in the palestra of the Central Thermae of Bosra and is preliminarily dated to the Second century AD, a period abundant in similar sculpture. The sculptor’s material according to the author was dark bluish schist, there were found holes for fastening of the head, legs and arms; the author points to analogies and suggests that these parts were

<sup>15</sup> ADRIANI, *Annuario I* (1932–1933), pp. 47–48, Tav. XXIV.

<sup>16</sup> T.M. WEBER, *Eine zweifarbige Statue des Serapis aus Bosra*, [in:] I. Skupińska-Løvset (Ed.), *Papers on values and interrelations between Europe and the Near East in Antiquity*, *Folia Archaeologica* 26, 2009, pp. 121–133.

made of white marble.<sup>17</sup> The here discussed head might per analogiam constitute a part of a similar bichrome statue – but equally well it could be placed on a marble torso.

Of comparative value in this respect is the torso of Hades/Serapis found in Seleukeia Pieria and stored in the Hatay Archaeological Museum in Antakya with the inventory number 10 7999. This colossal marble torso is dated to the Hellenistic period and may be considered canonical to Syro-Palestine. Unfortunately the head of the deity is not preserved.<sup>18</sup>

Of marble heads of cosmopolitan character representing Serapis found in the area we may after Weber<sup>19</sup> enumerate the following cases: two heads found in Byblos/Jbail,<sup>20</sup> one found in Antarados/Tartus.<sup>21</sup> The head from the Ustinow collection is thus adding an important element towards elucidation of the question of spread of quality marble sculpture of this Alexandrian deity in inland Palestine.

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<sup>17</sup> WEBER, *Zweifarbige Statue*, pp. 122–123.

<sup>18</sup> J. MEISCHNER, *Die Skulpturen des Hatay Museum von Antakya*, *Jh. DAI* 118, 2003, pp. 292ff. n. 4, Pls 6 and 7.1-2 (with older bibliography). Cf. also WEBER, *op. cit.*, pp. 125–126, Pl. 3A.

<sup>19</sup> WEBER, *op. cit.*, pp. 127–128.

<sup>20</sup> G.J.F. KATER-SIBBES, *Preliminary Catalogue of Sarapis Monuments*, *EPRO* 36, Leiden 1973, p. 76 nos 436–437.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 77 no. 438.