



Summary :

One of the best known sculpture schools of the Roman period flourished in Aphrodisias. Works from the city's artistic workshops found themselves scattered in various parts of the Roman Empire. The most characteristic of these decorated the public buildings of the city such as the theatre, the porticoes of the agora and the Sebasteion. In the production of portrait busts, the school of Aphrodisias is distinguishable for its chronological continuation and duration, from the end of the 1st century BC to the end of the 5th century AD.

Date

Roman period

Geographical Location

Aphrodisias

1. History of research

Already since the beginning of the 1940s, the scientific community had begun to discern the particular characteristics and importance of the works of [Aphrodisias](#).¹ Systematic excavations, however, began in the 1960s. Earlier, in 1904-5 and in 1937, a short research project had been conducted. The large number of sculptures and other findings created the need for the establishment of a museum which was completed and inaugurated in the summer of 1979.

2. Material

The marble used in Aphrodisias' various local workshops came from an area just 2 kms. NE of the city, which meant that there were large quantities of raw material available at extremely low cost. The size of the quarry does not exceed 4 km² and is at an altitude of 600-800 m. above sea level, higher than the city itself which is at a height of 520 m.² Scientific analysis has shown that the oldest known use of the quarry occurred in the 7th/6th century BC.

3. Technical characteristics

The investigation of works from Aphrodisias has illuminated a special method of working the marble. With the employment of various tools and techniques artists achieved variability in the texture for the hair, the naked parts of the body and the clothing. Many statues bear a high finish on the face combined with the use of the **rasp** on the **tunic** or **himation**, which offers coarseness to the surface of the marble. The technique is better observed in unfinished works.³ Moreover, in Aphrodisias were also found small pieces of marble, the so-called "examples", which were used by sculptors and apprentices for practicing.⁴ On these they carved various parts of the human body, mainly hands and feet, in order to practice in detail the various parts of a statue. Their study enriches our knowledge concerning the organization and the methods of production of the local workshops as well as the training of striving sculptors. From the study of signed works it should be also understood that amongst the artists there was a tendency for specialization. Some of them were particularly capable in the creation of [portraits](#), others in the mass production of statues, mainly for the decoration of interior spaces or the gardens of private houses, while others concentrated on the creation of architectural or other types of [reliefs](#), such as [sarcophagi](#).

4. Stylistic characteristics

Hellenistic influences are very common in works produced by Aphrodisias' sculptors. Not only their subject matter but also many of their stylistic characteristics come, directly or indirectly, from the Hellenistic movements of Asia Minor, mainly represented by [the school of Pergamum](#). The similarities are so obvious that it has been widely supposed that artists from Pergamum settled in Aphrodisias during the Early Imperial period. Most of the works of the school of Aphrodisias, regardless their chronology or whether they are portraits or **idealized** forms, share a sense of liveliness, deriving by the expressiveness of the face. The plasticity of individual parts of the face, due to the skill and particular attention of many of the sculptors of this school has the same result. In many works the



strong and characteristically dramatic movements of the body are also emphasized by the local artists' Hellenistic influences. The sense of movement is intensified by the elaborate working of the pleating of garments which is achieved through a play between light and shadow and soft molding.

5. Known sculptors

Written sources from the Roman period contain little information on the sculptors of the Aphrodisias School. On the contrary, inscriptions on works in which the artist, apart from his name also refers to the name of his town, are fairly common. Some of these signed works have been found in Rome, its outskirts, other parts of Italy, Greece, various other parts of the Roman Empire and in Aphrodisias itself. In Hadrian's villa in Tivoli, east of Rome, two statues of centaurs were found which bear inscriptions with the names of the artists Papias and Aristreas. From Lanuvio, a few kms. SE of Rome, comes a relief work by the sculptor Antonianos from Aphrodisias which depicts Hadrian's favoured friend [Antinous](#), as Sylvanus. Finally, a seated male figure, now in the Museo Nazionale in Rome, is the work of a sculptor from Aphrodisias.⁵ Several dozen other sculptors from Aphrodisias are known, their names surviving on inscriptions, such as Flavius Andronicus, Polyneikes, Minodotos, Alexandros Zinonos and Apollonius Aster. It is possible for us to trace the artistic course of some of them, something extremely rare for sculptors of the Roman period who were usually considered copyists of classical works rather than artists on their own right.

6. Funerary monument of G. Julius Zoilos

Aphrodisias' privileged status can be discerned as early as the Late Republic period, from 82 BC in particular, when the Roman general [Sulla](#) established the worship of [Aphrodite](#) in the area. A temple dedicated to the goddess was completed at the end of the 1st century BC with the help of Emperor [Augustus](#) (27 BC – 14 AD), and the personal contribution of G. Julius Zoilos, one of the emperor's **freedmen** and of the town's most important figures, who returned to Aphrodisias from Rome at around 40 BC. The reliefs from his funerary monument (20-10 BC), are considered as the oldest and most representative works of the Aphrodisias school.⁶ The city's demos honoured him with at least two portrait statues, today lost, which were placed in the [theatre](#) and the [thermae of Hadrian](#), in the western section of the [agora](#).⁷

7. Sculptural works from the theatre

The production of idealized sculptures is represented in the best possible way by the numerous statues which adorned the façade of the stage and other parts of the city's theatre.⁸ There are over 40 works which span a long chronological period. The oldest, whose commission is connected to Zoilos, date from the period 38-28 BC, while the latter works date from as late as the 5th century AD. Among them are at least six statues of Nike and a headless statue of [Apollo](#) or [Dionysus](#), which belonged to a group with at least two other female statues each holding a mask. These must have both represented Melpomene, the muse of tragedy. The figures of the Muses and Apollo were among the most common in the decoration of Roman theatres. Also included is one of the most precise copies of the so-called Discus Thrower by Polycleitus and a veiled figure which also features the influences of her 5th century BC prototypes. The first is impressive for the artist's skill in analyzing with paramount precision and attributing an intensely naturalistic quality to the individual parts of the torso as well as the rest of the body. Of particular importance are also three naked, male, idealized statues, from the middle of the 1st century (the first) and from the beginning or the middle of the 2nd century AD (the other two). They wear a himation or paludamentum, which covers only the left shoulder and part of the back. They show the attempts by Aphrodisias' artists to adapt the idealized standards of the 5th century BC, as these are known from Attic works, to the values of their era. It is very plausible that these three statues did not bear idealized heads but portraits of individuals or members of imperial dynasties.⁹

8. Other architectural sculptures

Apart from the theatre statues, numerous other architectural sculptures from Aphrodisias were based on classical prototypes. These include **pediment** compositions, occasionally in a semi-circular arrangement, pilaster sculptural decoration, which combines floral motifs with figures of people and animals, and **friezes** with masks among garlands and bands. This type of frieze ornamented various



buildings in the city.¹⁰ The best known and most important of these regarding the quality of execution are also the oldest chronologically. They are the friezes which decorated the Ionic porticoes of Tiberius (14-37 AD), in the agora. Their construction was completed in 27 AD and they were dedicated to the deified Augustus, his wife Livia, [Tiberius](#) himself and the demos of the area's towns. They were discovered in 1937 by the Italian archaeological mission and are included amongst the oldest findings from Aphrodisias. The frieze depicts alternately masks representing gods and heroes, such as Hera, Hercules, Rome and Virtus, the personification of bravery. The most representative sculptures of the Julio-Claudian period (27 BC – 68 AD), are the apses with relief representations which ornamented the two stoas of the [Sebasteion](#) in the town's eastern section. These are slightly later than the friezes from the Ionic porticoes of the agora and date in the reigns of [Claudius](#) (41-54 AD), and [Nero](#) (54-68 AD). The small size of the figures and mainly the height at which these reliefs were placed justify the lack of attention to detail. The apses on the third floor of the southern stoa depict, apart from [Caligula](#) (37-41 AD), all other emperors of his dynasty together with other male and female members.¹¹ Particular preference has been given to idealized types, through which members of the imperial dynasty are connected to various gods or heroes. Because of the lack of precise depiction of particular characteristics, it is difficult for some of the figures to be connected to specific historical persons. The rest of the walls of the southern stoa are decorated by 45 mythological representations most of which have been preserved in good condition.¹² Thematically they cover a broad spectrum of Greek and Roman mythology. Some of the apses, which depict Aphrodite and [Aeneas](#), are directly linked with the third-floor representations of the emperors, for they belong to the Julian generation, which according to tradition were descendents of Aeneas and the goddess of love. Finally, the apses of the northern stoa depict personifications of the various nations of the Roman Empire. More recent are the apses with mythological subjects found in the area of the Agora Gate, which date from the 2nd half of the 2nd century AD (Antonine period, 138-193 AD).¹³ The type of building they originally adorned is not known, because they were found in a 5th century AD [nymphaion](#) in second use. They include depictions of an amazonomachy, a centauromachy and a gigantomachy which not only typologically but also stylistically are reminiscent to the statuary from the [Pergamum altar](#), and particularly to certain figures of giants. The expressiveness of the faces, with an intense element of anguish, the analytical and massive molding of the muscles on the bodies and the theatricality of the movements are amongst the elements borrowed from Pergamum. These compositions reflect a broad spectrum of influences, classical and Hellenistic, combined according to basic local preferences.

9. Statues and portrait busts of emperors and private individuals

In the field of [portraiture](#), the Aphrodisias School was exceptional for its chronological continuance, something not observed in the artistic workshops of other regions.¹⁴ Most works are characterized by a contrast between the smooth surface of the skin on the face and the sculptural rendering of the hair and beard. The effect is enhanced by the play of light and shadow through the intense use of the drill. There are at least 50 portraits of emperors and private individuals from Aphrodisias included in the overall lists of Roman portraits from Asia Minor published from 1966 to 1979. Since then, thanks to the systematic excavations by American but also Turkish archaeologists, their number has been almost doubled.¹⁵ Many of them are portraits, free-standing statues of figures in relief, from the Julio-Claudian period (27 BC – 68 AD). Most relief portrait statues depict private individuals as priests, while they usually appear on sarcophagi, funerary steles or other types of funerary monuments, such as that of Zoilos. Representations of emperors and other members of their dynasties come mainly from the apses of the southern stoa of the Sebasteion, where, it must be noted, there survives the most thorough presentation of an imperial family in relief. Recently, in the same area, were uncovered two unpublished portrait busts from the 1st half of the 1st century AD, which depict Germanicus (15 BC – 19 AD), the brother of the emperor Claudius, and a private individual whose name is inscribed on the base of the work.¹⁶ The period of the Flavians (69-96 AD), is represented by a statue of [Domitian](#) (81 – 96 AD), of the [togatus](#) type which was found in the town's theatre. This work is impressive for the soft texture of the [toga](#) and the tunica and the play of light and shadow between the pleats of the garments.¹⁷ These same characteristics are also attested in two slightly later female statues of the period of [Trajan](#) (98 – 117 AD), housed in the Museum of Constantinople.¹⁸ These sculptural forms are based on classical works of the 5th century BC which possibly represented the goddesses Hera and [Demeter](#). Their type of hairstyle, however, with its characteristically large volume and successive layers of spiral curls mounted on the top of the head, appears for the first time in the portraits of the female members of the Flavian dynasty. The intense shading created by this elaborate hair style contrasts the smooth surface of the forehead and the rest of the face. Portraits from the 2nd and 3rd century AD are fewer. They are characterized by precision of execution and from the continuation of the tradition which had been established during the previous century. During the 4th and 5th centuries AD, there is an impressive increase in the



production of all types of sculpture. This particular observation contrasts with what was happening in other centres of production not only in Asia Minor but also in the rest of the provinces of the Roman Empire, where both artistic quality and production were in steep decline.¹⁹ Also important are three male statues which were found during excavations in the city's theatre and [odeum](#). The two older ones depict priests of the same sculptural type, with tunic, imation and diadems decorated with small scale portraits.²⁰ Chronologically they must be placed in the period of Constantine the Great (307 – 337 AD), although earlier dates have been suggested.²¹ In relation to older works, the use of the drill is more extensive and intense both in the rendering of the hair and the garments. Also from the theatre comes one of the more recent works of the Aphrodisias School, the portrait of Flavius Palmatus, which dates from the end of the 5th century AD.²² He is depicted with a [mappa](#) in the right hand, tunica and toga, which according to the fashion of the day is wrapped around the body, forming a [contabulatio](#) around the chest and a [sinus](#) in the legs area, while its end reaches the forearm. The use of the drill, mainly in the rendering of the hair is more intense than ever, creating several levels of depth and a particularly large sculptural volume. At the same time, the characteristics of the face are particularly schematic, rendered with linearity.

10. Imagines clipeatae

A large number of portraits belong to the *imagines clipeatae* category. These are portraits enclosed within a circular medallion, which is often itself included in a square frame.²³ Eleven of these were placed in the apse of a building B in the Sebasteion. These particular *imagines clipeatae* depict Greek philosophers ([Pythagoras](#), Socrates), poets (Pindarus), politicians ([Alcibiades](#)), military men ([Alexander the Great](#)), and other, unknown historical figures.

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Glossary :

	contabulatio, the
	the folding of the toga in front of the chest.
	freedman, the
	a slave that was set free.
	frieze (1. architecture), (2. painting)
	1. The part of the entablature resting on the architrave and below the cornice. In the Doric order the frieze is decorated with two alternative motives, namely the triglyph and metope, while in the Ionic order the frieze is a decoratively carved band. 2. Decorative horizontal band that sweeps parts of a vessel or the highest part of the walls in a room.
	himation, the
	Rectangular woolen (mainly) cloth that was worn over the <i>chiton</i> (cloak). It could be wrapped around the shoulders and the body in different ways and was fastened with a belt or with brooches.
	idealized form, the
	The depiction of an emperor or a citizen bearing the characteristics of a god.
	mappa, the
	kind of mantle that the emperor holds folded. He is usually depicted holding the mappa in hippodrome scenes.
	pediment, the
	The triangular structure, over a building façade, between the horizontal entablature and the sloping roof, often decorated with sculptures, reliefs or painted figures.
	rasp, the
	wide tool bearing a surface. It was used to polish marble.
	sebasteion, the
	A temple or another type of building dedicated to the cult of the roman emperors and their families.
	sinus, the
	An overfold which extended down from the diagonal roll of the cloth of the toga. It ran from beneath the right arm to the left shoulder



	toga, the
Type of roman clothing. Gown without seams. It is wrapped around the body and is reminiscent of the greek himation.	
	togatus type, the
Statue of a man that wears toga and tunica.	
	tunic, the
The Roman chiton	