

## New statue finds in Roman Gerasa

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In Gerasa, an important city of the Decapolis and the Provincia Arabia, the German-Jordanian University Amman, in collaboration with the Jordanian Department of Antiquities and the Mission Française Archéologique de Jerash, excavated the eastern Roman baths from 2016 to 2018. The three-year research program had been funded by the Gerda Henkel-Foundation (Düsseldorf) and the ministère des affaires étrangères et du développement international (MAEDI – Paris).

This monumental bathing complex - one of the largest and best preserved in the entire Orient - was built in the second half of the 2nd century A.D. in the valley of the Chrysorrhoeas brook, and then enlarged towards the end of that century or at the beginning of the following one under the Severan emperors. The construction work carried out in Severan period mainly concerned a pillared hall with exedrae, which was built attached to the north of the original core of the bathing complex. This hall, reminiscent of the "imperial halls" of Asia Minor, was decorated with sculptures according to numerous statue bases, most of which had Greek inscriptions. In the three excavation campaigns aforementioned, it was aimed to clarify the architectural connection between the bathing complex and the pillared hall and to find out more about the sculptural decoration scheme.

Between the hall and the bath, the archaeologists uncovered a rectangular water basin (Piscina), which was filled with lavishly decorated blocks from the entablature of the hall to the north, fallen as a result of the earthquake of 749 AD. Beneath this architectural collapse, a 50 cm thick earth package above the Roman pavement of the water basin came to light, which contained many fragments of marble sculptures, some of them in very good condition (Fig. 1). It turned out that these figures had not fallen into the basin during the earthquake, but had been deposited there by human hand, presumably with the intention of burning them to produce lime.

The statues represent almost exclusively Greek-Roman gods. Worth mentioning is the colossal figure of Aphrodite (Fig. 2) made of pentelic marble. It has a five-line Greek inscription on the plinth. According to this, the figure was donated by a local priest named Demetrios, stepson of Asklepiodoros, together with the base, the altar and the niche. The inscription also indicates the unusually exact date of dedication, around 20 March 154 AD.

Among the statues retrieved there was an almost completely preserved statue of naked standing Zeus, as well as figures of Apollo, Dionysus, Asclepius and Cybele sitting on a throne. Six statuettes of Muses sitting on rocks deserve mention, of which Melpomene (tragedy), Klio (historiography), Polyhymia (music) and Urania (astronomy) were identified. Two of the six muses are still unnamed. The plinth of a dancing muse (Terpsichore), found before the new excavations in the thermal baths, bears the signature of an Alexandrian sculptor named Antoneinos, son of Antiochos. Due to the similarities of this fragment in terms of dimensions and style, there is no question that the newly found museum statuettes also originate from his workshop. Fortunately, the statue base of the Terpsichore is preserved, whose Greek inscription suggests the year 118/19 AD as the time of dedication of the group of muses. The new finds of the marble sculptures from Gerasa thus enrich our previous knowledge of the Alexandrian sculpture of the late 1st or early 2nd century AD. They provide information about a hitherto unknown artist personality and his workshop. In addition, they provide two fixed chronological terms that will allow the Roman marble sculpture of the eastern Mediterranean to be better stylistically understood.