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**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). 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.

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. 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.

The town of Aphrodisias was known for its close relations with Imperial Rome, particularly during the reign of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. 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.

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...
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 Demo.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. According to R.R.R. Smith, initially, next to these figures, there were also figures of the Night (Nyke) and the Earth (Ge) in a binary order, as well as other allegorical images symbolising time and space; these, however, have not survived.19

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.20 Originally,
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 Sebastion 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 (\textit{simulacra gentium omnium}) (Plin. \textit{HN} XXXVI, 39; Serv. \textit{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 \textit{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. \textit{HN} XXXVI, 41; Suet. \textit{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 \textit{Ara Pacis}.\(^{30}\) Sixteen reliefs with the personifications of provinces have survived in the \textit{Hadrianeum} in Rome (141 AD).\(^{31}\) Originally, 36 reliefs of this kind, i.e. with the figures of\textit{ provinciae fideles} (loyal provinces), were installed there.\(^{32}\) The statues of the provinces were later

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\(^{22}\) Smith 1990, 95-96.
\(^{23}\) Smith 1988, 54–60, pls VIII–IX.
\(^{25}\) Smith 1988, 70–77.
\(^{27}\) According to Suetonius (\textit{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.
\(^{30}\) Kähler 1954, 67–100.
\(^{31}\) Platter 1929, 250; Hughes 2009, 9.
\(^{32}\) Sapelli 1999.
Marble Relief ‘Nero and Armenia’ from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias in Caria (Asia Minor)

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” 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,

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).

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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 Penhesilea, 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. 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, 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

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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.
Marble Relief ‘Nero and Armenia’ from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias in Caria (Asia Minor)

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,

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\(^{37}\) Smith 1987, 116–121, pls XIV–XVII.


\(^{39}\) Presently, the relief with the two fragments glued together is exhibited in the Aphrodisias Museum.

\(^{40}\) Reynolds 1981, 24; Smith 1987, 117.
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

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41 Smith 1987, 117–118.
42 Varner 2004, 74, fig. 92b.
44 Smith 1987, 115–117.
45 Ostrowski 1990, 106.
Marble Relief ‘Nero and Armenia’ from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias in Caria (Asia Minor)

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

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).

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 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.
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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. 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. 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. 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.
51 Ostrowski 1990, 51.
They bear depictions of paired figures of Armenia and Germany 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 symbolisation 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 (nations capta, gentes devicta)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 Germany, 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:

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

60 Markaryan 2015c, 78.
62 Ostrowski 1990, 52.
63 Markaryan 2015c, 134–161.
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).68

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62 Markaryan 2015a, 68–75, figs 1–3.
64 Bedukyan 1971, 32–34; Markaryan 2015c, 132.
66 Manandyan 1944, 336.
67 Tacitus sneers at the fact that the celebration of this event surpassed all measure.
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. 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.
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). 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.

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.

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 Caessenius Paetus, Legate of Cappadocia, to Armenia, but the Roman troops were defeated. In 64 AD, a humiliating peace treaty was concluded in Rhandeia. 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. Henceforth, Rome was obliged to reckon with the Armenian-Parthian alliance, abstain from the plan to turn Armenia into a province, and seek compromise. Vologeses 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

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69 Reynolds 1981, 324, no. 9; Rose 1997, 48, 165, no. 105.
70 Neverov 1976, 31.
72 Stepanyan 1976, 176.
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). 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. 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.

The ceremonial scene of coronation was first introduced in the art of the Augustan Age, 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

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73 Smith 1990, 97, fig. 9; Rose 1997, 167.
74 Erim 1986, 4, 30, 122.
76 Sutherland 1970, 102–104.
in a Roman military costume and an anatomical cuirass, while his right hand is raised towards the tiara. With this solemn gesture, the Armenian king gives an oath of allegiance to the Roman emperor and to his people.

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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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). We suppose that the relief panel dates back to the initial period of the construction of the Sebasteion.

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78 Markaryan 2015a, 70, fig. 5.
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.
83 Varner 2004, 48, figs 82a–c.
84 Heisinger 1975, 118.
Marble Relief ‘Nero and Armenia’ from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias in Caria (Asia Minor)

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 his 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 Rhandeia 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

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86 Bedoukyan 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.
A symbolic figure of Victoria with the inscription “VICTORIA AUGUSTI” is found also on a coin of 63–68 AD. 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 series 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.

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

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.

Varner 2004, 58, fig. 60.a–c.
Varner 2004, 58, fig. 61.b.

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,
based on the Hellenistic motif with Nike in front of the palladium of Athena.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{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 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.\textsuperscript{100} It depicts the young emperor cuirassed and seated. He extends his right arm in a gesture of \textit{clementia}.\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{97} Markaryan 2015b, 128–130.
\textsuperscript{98} Varner 2004, 71, fig. 88.
\textsuperscript{99} Markaryan 2015b, 137, 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.
\textsuperscript{100} Sperti 1990, 24–28; Varner 2004, 71.
\textsuperscript{101} Brilliant 1963, 41; Vahl 2007, 16, fig. 1.2.
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.

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


104 Henig 1984, 60.


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