

Anaglyptica Variana: Column capitals with sculptural relief, and associated fragments, related to the cult of Elagabal

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**Fascicle 1: Introduction; physical description of the artefacts;
preliminary classification of questions to be discussed; plates.**

Introduction:

This study addresses questions arising from the study of three ancient marble column capitals with sculptural relief, and four smaller fragments of sculpture, all possibly related, found in the Roman Forum over a century ago. Although they have been studied and discussed at some length, by a number of scholars, during the intervening lapse of time, and are alluded to by several more, many questions about them still remain unanswered. In addition to discussing these, and reconsidering others which are commonly thought to have been answered, this study raises further questions of its own. It also announces the presence of what may be a hitherto undiscovered inscription on one of the capitals.

While much about these artefacts remains unknown, there is broad consensus on a number of points. Since the iconography of one of these capitals probably links it to the cult of the Syrian sun god Elagabal, and that of the other two arguably links them to the first, they are thought likely to be relics of the reign of a Roman emperor who was, simultaneously, that deity's high priest. This ruler appears on coins and inscriptions under the style of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, but is better known, albeit erroneously, as Elagabalus or Heliogabalus. His original nomenclature may have included the names Varius, Avitus, and Bassianus, in some combination or other. For reasons discussed elsewhere,¹ he is referred to here as Varius.



Coins of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus = Elagabalus or Heliogabalus = Varius²

¹ In my forthcoming *Quaestiones Varianae: Existence, Identity, Nomenclature*.

² Thirion, Marcel, *Le Monnayage d'Elagabal*, (218-222), 1968.

The artefacts in question are three blocks of marble, here designated A, B, & C, decorated with relief sculptures, and three smaller sculptural fragments, designated D, E, & F, plus one missing fragment, designated G.³ Discovered in the late nineteenth century, during the excavation of the Forum,⁴ they are kept in Rome, at the *Museo del Foro Romano*, headquarters of the *Sovrintendenza Archeologica di Roma*.⁵



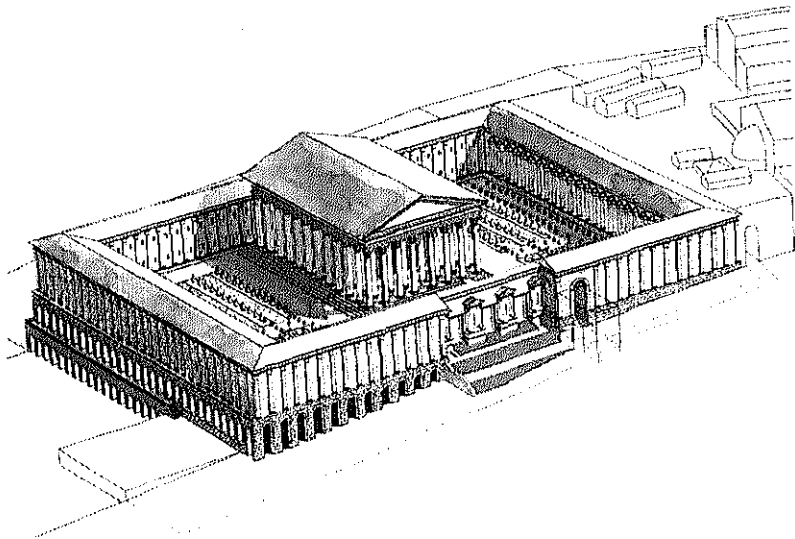
The three capitals in the Museo del Foro Romano

³ This designation follows, albeit substituting capital letters for his lower case, that of Mercklin, Eugen von, *Antike Figural kapitelle*, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1962, p. 154 ff.

⁴ Re dates and findspot(s): Jordan, Heinrich, *Die Resultate der Ausgrabungen auf dem Forum zu Rom*, *Hermes* 7, 1873, pp. 261-293, esp. pp. 267-268; Wissowa, Georg, *Monumenta ad religionem romanam spectantia tria*, *BICA* 1883, p. 164 ff.; Studniczka, Franz, *Ein Pfeilerkapitell auf dem Forum*, *MKDAIRA*, 16, 1901, p. 273 ff; Hülsen, Christian, *Ausgrabungen aus dem Forum Romanum*, *MKDAIRA* 17, 1902, pp. 66-67. For mention of the missing fragment, see Mercklin, op. cit. p. 155.

⁵ Catalogue Nos: A: 3318; B: 3319; C: 3320.

Two of these pieces, A and C, were shown in the exhibition “*Il giardino dei cesari*,” organised by *il Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma*, in collaboration with *l'École Française de Rome*, at *il Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano (Museo delle Terme)*, in the autumn and winter of 2001–2002. The purpose of that exhibition was to show the results of excavation by *l'École Française of the Palatine site known as the Vigna Barberini*. Although these artefacts were not discovered at that site, their almost certain relationship with Elagabal, and likely one with Varius, dictated their inclusion in the exhibition, since the *Vigna Barberini* is widely, though not quite universally, thought to be the location of a temple dedicated by this emperor to this god, and thus a possible original source of these artefacts.⁶

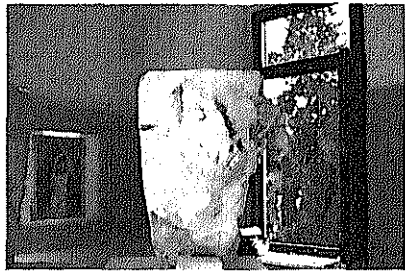


Artistic rendering of the Palatine Temple of Elagabal⁷

⁶ The question of the precise location of the Roman temple (or temples), dedicated to Elagabal by Varius, while clearly relevant to the present discussion of these artefacts, is not its principal concern, although it is discussed to some degree herein. For an account of the “*communis opinio*” placing the principal Roman temple of Elagabal at the site of the *Vigna Barberini*, see Chausson, François, *Le site de la Vigna Barberini de 191 à 455, La Vigna Barberini, Histoire d'un site: étude des sources et de la topographie, Roma Antica*, 3, Rome, 1997, pp. 31–85, esp. 65–69, reviewed below.

⁷ Patrizia Veltri, based on archaeological research carried out under the supervision of Françoise Villedieu, of *l'École Française de Rome*, during the excavation of the *Vigna Barberini*.

In the course of preparing an entry for that exhibition's catalogue,⁸ I was able, first to measure and photograph all three principal artefacts, **A**, **B**, and **C**, at their usual location on the floor of the second storey portico in the *Museo del Foro*, and later to photograph **A** and **C**, cleaned for the occasion, set on stands in a well-lit exhibition hall at the *Museo delle Terme*. It was in the latter conditions that I detected the presence of what seems to be a faint, minuscule inscription on **A**, hitherto unmentioned in the academic literature.



Capitals **A** and **C** in the exhibition "*Il Giardino dei Cesari*", *Museo delle Terme*, autumn/winter 2001-2.

This study forms part of a broader investigation into the life and reign of Varius.⁹ It therefore proposes to discuss these artefacts, not only in terms of their material and iconographic nature, but also to consider them in their likely historical context: that of this emperor's life and reign. Indeed it must be noted that their possible relationship to Varius, and in particular to his religious policy, often taken for granted by previous commentators, is the aspect of these artefacts that has heretofore been most discussed, at the expense of sculptural or art-historical concerns. This study perforce reflects that imbalance, insofar as it discusses previous comment on these artefacts, and questions arising therefrom; but it also ventures, in its concluding section, to begin to attempt to redress it, by considering at least the principal capital, **A**, as a work of art.

This study's participation in a broader enquiry into the life and reign of Varius entails yet another consequence. Since accounts of this emperor are often distorted by virulent prejudice against him, it is advisable, in seeking

⁸ *Il Giardino dei Cesari*, Edizioni Quasar, 2001. Relevant entry: Arrizabalaga y Prado, Leonardo de, *Capitelli con motivi figurati legati al culto di Elagabalus*, p. 105-6.

⁹ The present text belongs to *Documenta Variana*, a subdivision of *Studia Variana*, which also includes *Quaestiones Varianae*, and *Metamorphoses Varianae*.

a proper understanding of his life and reign, to adopt a cautious and discriminating approach to the literature. One must pick one's way through a hostile historiographical tradition, stopping at each step to consider, with respect to the text in hand, whether it constitutes evidence, or allegation; interpretation, or conjecture. Thus, in approaching the literature concerning these, or any other artefacts relating to Varius, one cannot just consult a given text, take it at face value, and expect necessarily to glean objective information from it. One must read all texts concerning Varius sceptically and critically, identifying their basic attitudes or agenda, covert or overt, with regard to him; for these, as shall be seen, may well affect the nature and value of a given text's descriptions and interpretations, even of materials such as these artefacts.



Bust in the Museo Capitolino, Rome, labelled "Eligabalo" = Varius

In view of the foregoing considerations, this study proceeds as follows:

First, before addressing any questions arising from these artefacts, it gives a physical description of them, including a brief summary of their iconography, on the basis of their recent direct examination, in terms of their material, shape and dimensions, and announces the possible inscription recently detected on one of them. Next, it provides a preliminary classification of the sorts of questions these artefacts may raise, such as those concerning their identity and nature, their origin, function, and location, or their political and religious significance. Then, it provides a critical review of the relevant academic literature to date, which occupies most of its length. In the light of this review it goes on to discuss the current state of questions already raised about these artefacts, whether resolved or outstanding, and raises further questions of its own. Finally, it considers A, the best preserved of these artefacts in terms of a question that has not previously been properly raised or explored: that of its nature and significance as a work of art.

Physical description of the artefacts: A (Plates 1–12):

Materials:

A, the largest and best preserved of these artefacts, is a block of marble decorated with relief sculpture. Creamy white, it is *marmoris Italici*, “of Italian marble,” according to the earliest published designation of its stone type,¹⁰ *von carrarischem Marmor*, “of Carraran marble,” according to a subsequent description,¹¹ and *marmor lunense*, “Luni marble,” according to the latest and most detailed description published so far.¹² These last two terms denote the same type of stone, Luni being a Roman settlement beneath and beside present day Carrara, while the term *marmor Italicum* obviously subsumes both these denominations, as well as including many other types.¹³ The question of coincidence or difference, between the marble type of A and that of the other two capitals plus three remaining fragments, and between that of these three capitals plus three remaining fragments, and that of other artefacts from various sites in Rome, is relevant to suggestions made later in this study, regarding the search for the possible provenance of these six artefacts, and the location of the building to which they may have belonged.¹⁴

Shape, identification and iconography:

A is composed of two hexahedral fragments, carved originally from a single prismatic block. At some stage it broke or was broken in two, splitting, from a point about a fifth of the way along the plane of one narrow side, diagonally across two of its broad sides, to the roughly corresponding point on the opposite narrow side, thus separating into two more or less symmetrical fragments, later identified as lower and upper. The resulting fragments were found separately, first the lower, between 1870 and 1872, then the upper, in 1899, at a site by or near the Temple of Castor in the Roman Forum.¹⁵ They are now reunited as a single block.

¹⁰ Wissowa, op. cit. p. 164.

¹¹ Studniczka, op. cit p. 273.

¹² Mercklin, op. cit p. 154.

¹³ For this explanation of marble nomenclature, and relevant technology, the author is grateful to Sig. Osvaldo Langkraer, marble consultant, of Querceta, Italy.

¹⁴ See section below entitled: “The state of the question in 2002.”

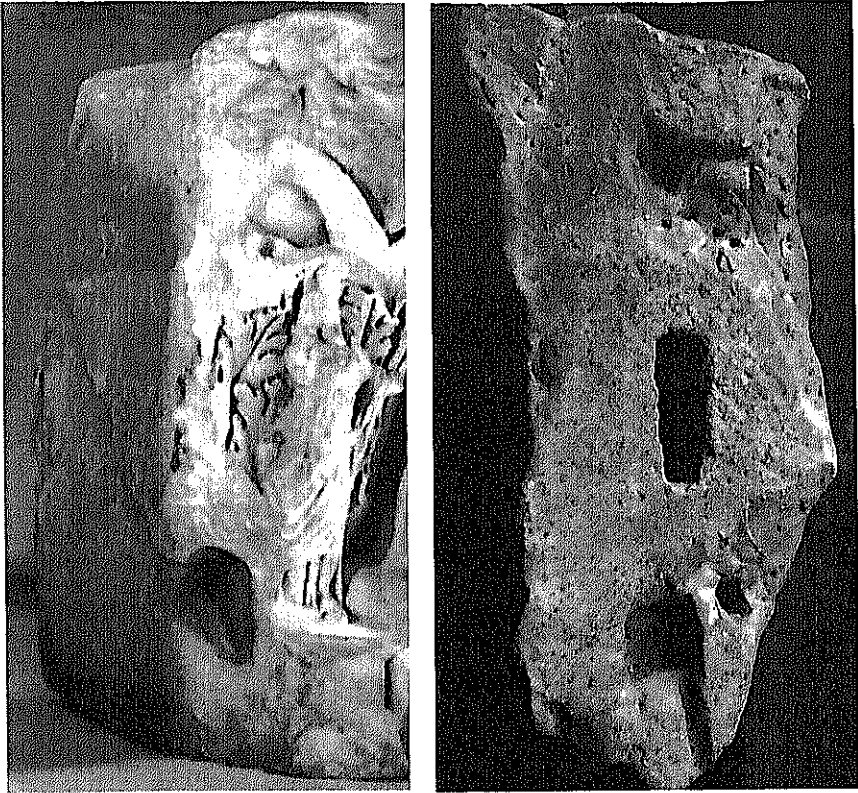
¹⁵ There is some variation among Studniczka’s, Hülsen’s, and Mercklin’s location of the findspot of the upper fragment. See the discussion of their relevant articles, below.

The correspondence of these fragments to each other, and the unity of the reconstituted block, are clearly established on the basis of the way the two surfaces of the split fit together, and on that of the continuity of the figures in the relief sculpture, with which they are decorated. Detailed discussion of the figures in this relief is left for later, when this study reviews the literature concerning them. Since, however, their continuity contributes to establishing the correspondence of the two fragments of A to each other, and thus the unity of the reconstituted block, it is appropriate here to point out that this relief occupies three sides of the reconstituted block: two narrow, α and γ ; and one broad, β ; leaving the remaining broad side, δ , unsculpted; and that it includes representations as follows:

(All directions are given from an observer's point of view.)

- Side α : centre, a female figure, standing on a plinth;
- Corner of α and β : a spread eagle standing before a rounded conical stone, resting on a tassel-fringed platform;
- Side β : left, a female figure, standing on a plinth;
- Side β , centre: a female figure, genuflecting, sacrificing a bull depicted kneeling below her bended knee;
- Side β , at base, extending rightward to the corner of side γ : a female figure, reclining, accompanied by an infant.

Side δ has two fairly large dowel holes, while side ζ has one large, and two smaller dowel holes, obviously intended for inserting joints to fix it to some other surface. This identifies the block as a constructional element. Relevant to the question of just how A broke, or was broken, is the fact that the split between its fragments runs directly between the two dowel holes on δ , suggesting that pressure on these points may have caused the break.



Dowel holes on sides δ and ζ of A; diagonal split on side δ ; canal on side ζ .

The vertical orientation of an acanthus leaf design, as well as that of the figures depicted in the relief, allows one to distinguish the two remaining sides of the block, ϵ and ζ as top and bottom respectively.

On the basis, therefore, of the block's identification as a constructional element, of its shape, and of the presence of an acanthus leaf design, usually associated with the Corinthian architectural order, it is established that A is a Corinthian column capital.¹⁶

¹⁶ By Jordan, Wissowa, Studniczka, Hülsen, and Mercklin, *op. cit.*

Dimensions:

A's dimensions have been the subject of some confusion, since several of the texts concerning it contradict each other, and themselves, in this regard. On the basis of its recent direct examination, it is possible to certify the following measurements (all in cm.) roughly agreeing with Mercklin's:¹⁷

Height (measured on each of the four vertical sides): 66

Width of each vertical side:

- Side α : measured along plane of

top:	35
middle:	30
bottom:	33

- Side β : measured along plane of

top:	63
middle:	58
bottom:	59

- Side γ : measured along plane of

top:	33
middle:	29
bottom:	33

- Side δ : measured along plane of

top:	48 (63)
middle:	54 (58)
bottom:	41 (59)

Size of dowel holes on side δ :

aperture:	8.5 x 8.5
depth:	7

In the measurement of width for side δ , the unbracketed numbers indicate the actual measurement of the flat, unsculpted surface of δ , along the relevant planes, while the bracketed numbers indicate the measurement of that surface, if squared off with reference to the outermost point of the relevant plane on sides ϵ , β and ζ .

¹⁷ Mercklin, op. cit., p. 154.

Inscription: (Plate 12.)

While detailed discussion of A's iconography is left for later, it is opportune here to describe the possible inscription detected on A. On face β , at lower left, from the observer's point of view, there is a relief representation of a plinth, upon which stands a female figure, variously identified. On the front face of that plinth, it is possible to see, in certain lights, faint traces of what may be an inscription. Various persons, as well as myself, including members of the curatorial staff of the *Museo delle Terme*, where it was recently exhibited, concur in perceiving what may be at least two Greek capital letters, possibly E and Y. I attempted to confirm this perception with the practical assistance of one of the curators, by making a calque with dentists' plaster, but the impression thus derived was not sufficiently fine or detailed, either to corroborate, or to contradict this perception. A further attempt at confirmation remains to be made, when the opportunity presents itself, using a technique involving the use of liquid graphite. This can only be done when it is possible to lay the capital on its back (side δ), and ensure that the face of the plinth in question is perfectly level.

Physical description of the artefacts: B and C (Plates 13-17):

Materials, shape, identification, iconography, and dimensions:

B and C are likewise column capitals, of material and dimensions similar to those of A, but shaped more like inverted truncated pyramids. Like A, B and C have remains of sculpture on three sides, with one side left blank. They are considered to be related to A, on the basis of the place and circumstances of their find, and on that of the iconography and style of their relief.¹⁸ They are more badly damaged than A, with many of their figures effaced. The extant figures depicted on them are, respectively:

- On B, side γ : a female figure, in a sacrificial pose similar to that of one on A;
- On C, side β : a male figure, frontally depicted as a charioteer, driving a chariot drawn by horses charging towards the viewer.

¹⁸ See below, this text's critical review of Mercklin, *op. cit.*

bottom: 20

- Side δ : measured along plane of

top:	56
middle:	43
bottom:	20

The difference in shape from **A** of **B** and **C** may be due to their coming from different structures, or to a difference of type, function or location, within a single structure to which they originally belonged, or to differing vicissitudes undergone in the process of their deterioration, which is more advanced than that of **A**.

Fragments **D**, **E**, **F**, & **G**:

D, **E**, and **F** are relatively small fragments of sculpted marble that have been associated, on the basis of alleged identity of findspot, and one scholar's plausible surmise,¹⁹ with the three larger blocks, **A**, **B**, and **C**. There was originally, kept in the same storeroom in the Forum, a fourth similar small fragment, here called **G**, that is missing since some time after 1924, but of which photographic evidence remains.²⁰ Further description of these fragments is deferred until review of Mercklin's text.

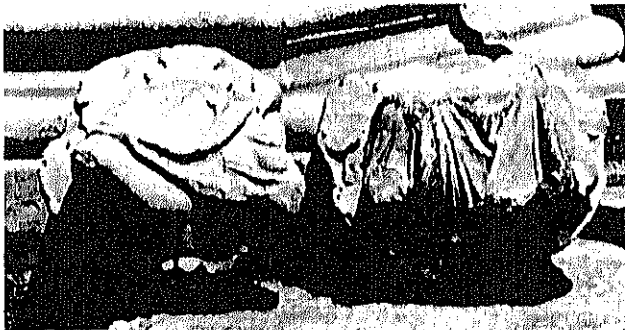


Abb. 732

383d e

Fragments **D** & **E**, as shown in Mercklin's illustrations.

¹⁹ Mercklin, *op. cit.*, p. 165

²⁰ Mercklin, *op. cit.*, p. 165 discussing (383) b, referring to Abb. 735. Recent enquiry (January, 2003) reveals that **D**, **E**, and **F** are also missing now.



Abb. 733

383f



Fragments F and G in Mercklin's illustrations (G shown propping up the base of B).

Preliminary classification of questions:

The discussion of these artefacts in the academic literature so far can be divided into three main categories of questions; those concerning:

- These artefacts themselves, their material identity and number, specific iconography, origin, chronology and purpose;
- The structure to which they may have belonged, its origin, function, and location;
- Their political and religious significance.

The first description of the reunited fragments of A, that by Studniczka, published in 1901, while identifying them as a Corinthian column capital, associates their iconography with the cult of the Syrian sun god Elagabal, and links it to an alleged religious policy of Varius, promoting or imposing the worship of that god at Rome. Studniczka's main thesis, his association of

A with the cult of Elagabal, has not been challenged, and is here regarded as substantially correct, although his methodology and presentation, as well as certain of his related hypotheses, are open to question, and are reconsidered in the present study. It should, in particular, be noted that the association of **A** with the cult of Elagabal, and its attribution to the reign of Varius, are two separate, though possibly related, matters, a distinction that Studniczka ignores. Most other scholars contributing to this discussion assent to both propositions, but at least one offers an alternative to **A**'s attribution to the reign of Varius.

Neither has Mercklin's main thesis, published in 1962, grouping together with **A** the other artefacts here under consideration, been challenged, though it has not received nearly so much attention as Studniczka's proposals. While this grouping is also regarded here as likely to be substantially correct, again, there are problems with the method of Mercklin's proposition of this thesis, on the basis of authority resting on hearsay. The present study proposes an alternative argument in favour of this grouping, on the basis of iconography.

The widespread acceptance of Studniczka's proposals, and the so far unchallenged authority of Mercklin's grouping, would together seem to answer those questions constituting the first category defined above: those concerning these artefacts themselves, their material identity and number, specific iconography, origin, chronology and purpose: What are they? What do they depict? Who commissioned them? Who sculpted them? When? For what purpose?

Despite this broad consensus – all of whose constituent elements are themselves open to examination – with regard to questions concerning these artefacts themselves, there remain open to discussion or debate certain other categories or sets of questions, regarding other matters, raised by study of **A**, as well as by that of the remaining two capitals and smaller fragments, assuming they are all related.

One set of such questions has to do with the structure to which these artefacts may have belonged: What kind of a structure was it, where did it stand, and when was it built? Furthermore: What function and location did these pieces have within that structure? What were the circumstances of its construction? Was it built from the ground up, or was an existing structure reconditioned? What was the time span within which either enterprise may

have been accomplished? These questions arise at an early date in the relevant academic literature, but despite extensive discussion, cannot be regarded as decisively answered so far.

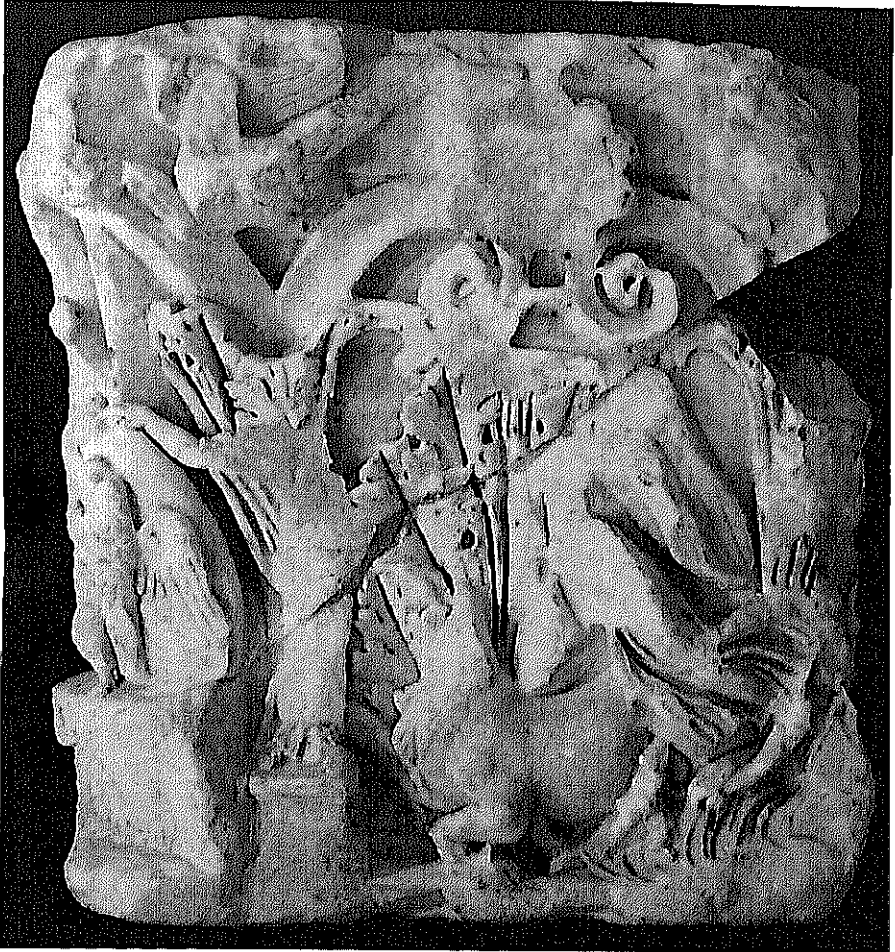
Another set of questions open for discussion relates to the religious and political significance of these artefacts. While the relationship of the iconography of **A**, in particular, to the cult of Elagabal is fairly certainly established, the iconographic relationship of **B** and **C** to **A**, and to that cult, in terms of their religious and political significance, bears discussion beyond that to be found in the scholarly literature so far. While **A**'s assignation to the reign of Varius, and its consequent relevance to understanding his religious policy, is admitted here as a likely, if unproven, hypothesis, how far do **B** and **C**, assuming they are related to **A**, tend to support that assignation? And, should it be considered that all three capitals are indeed related to one another, and may be assignable to the reign of Varius, then, depending on the specific identities assigned to each of the figures in their respective iconographies, what is the nature of their relationship to the cult of Elagabal, and the significance of that relationship for understanding the reign in which these artefacts were created, whether that of Varius or another emperor?

Finally, a set of questions, barely suggested in the existing literature, and certainly not developed in any of it, so far as I am aware, also relates to the iconography of **A**, not so much in terms of its political or religious significance, nor yet even in terms of its place in the chronology and repertory of styles, proper to the history of art, but rather in terms of its specific nature and significance as a work of art. A fuller analytical description than has been attempted before reveals **A** as a masterpiece of sculptural relief, one that depicts a complex scene with a mystical message, which, in turn, provides a clue to understanding the cosmology and theology of the religion of Elagabal.

Plate 1: Capital A, side α .

Idyll of Elagabal: Pallas Athene and the composite icon of Elagabal.

Plate 2: Capital A, side β .



Idyll of Elagabal: scene in a sacred grove.

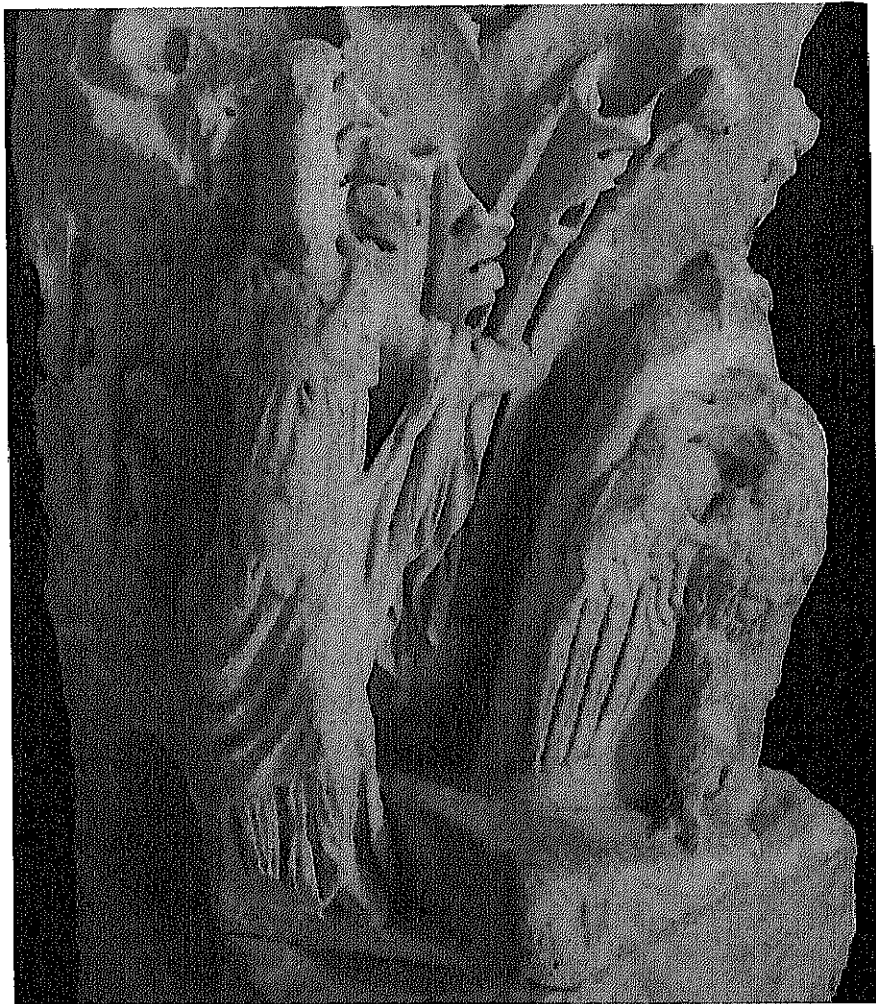
Plate 3: Capital A, side γ .

Acanthus foliage.

Plate 4: Capital A, sides α and β .



Panoramic view of the Idyll of Elagabal.

Plate 5: Capital A, side α .

Athena / Minerva / Allath.

Plate 6: Capital A, side α .

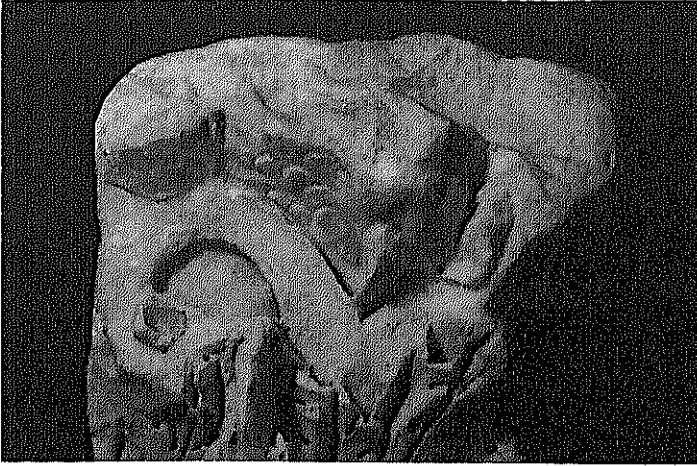
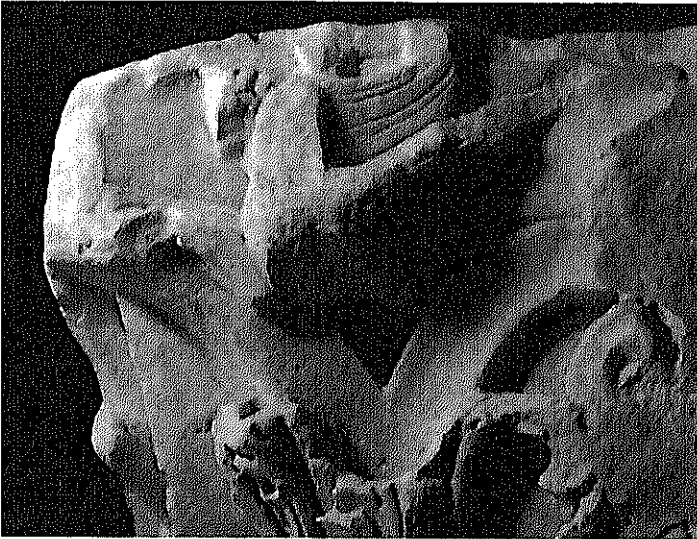


Plate 7: Capital A, side β .



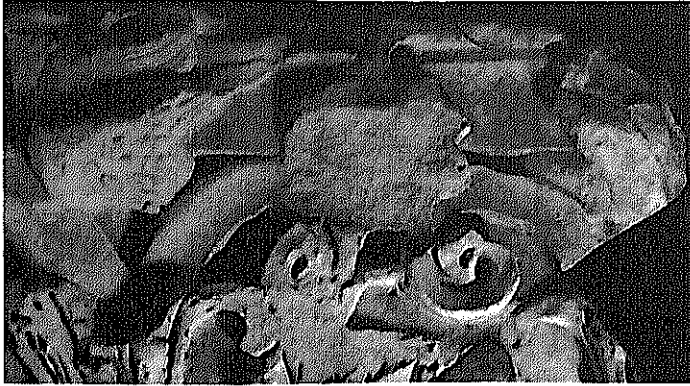
Griffins.

Plate 8: Capital A, side β .Goddess on plinth: "*wie liebkosend*".

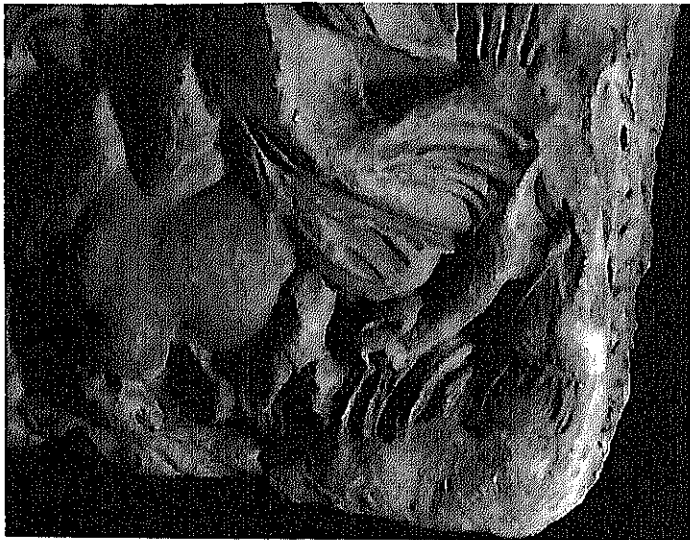
Plate 9: Capital A, side β .



Victoria sacrificing a bull.

Plate 10: Capital A, side β .

Stamp of flower, garland or wreath.

Plate 11: Capital A, side β .

Tellus with infant.

Plate 12: Capital A, side β .



Plinth with possible inscription.

Plate 13: Capital B, sides β and γ .

Effaced relief and Victoria.

Plate 14: Capital B, side γ .

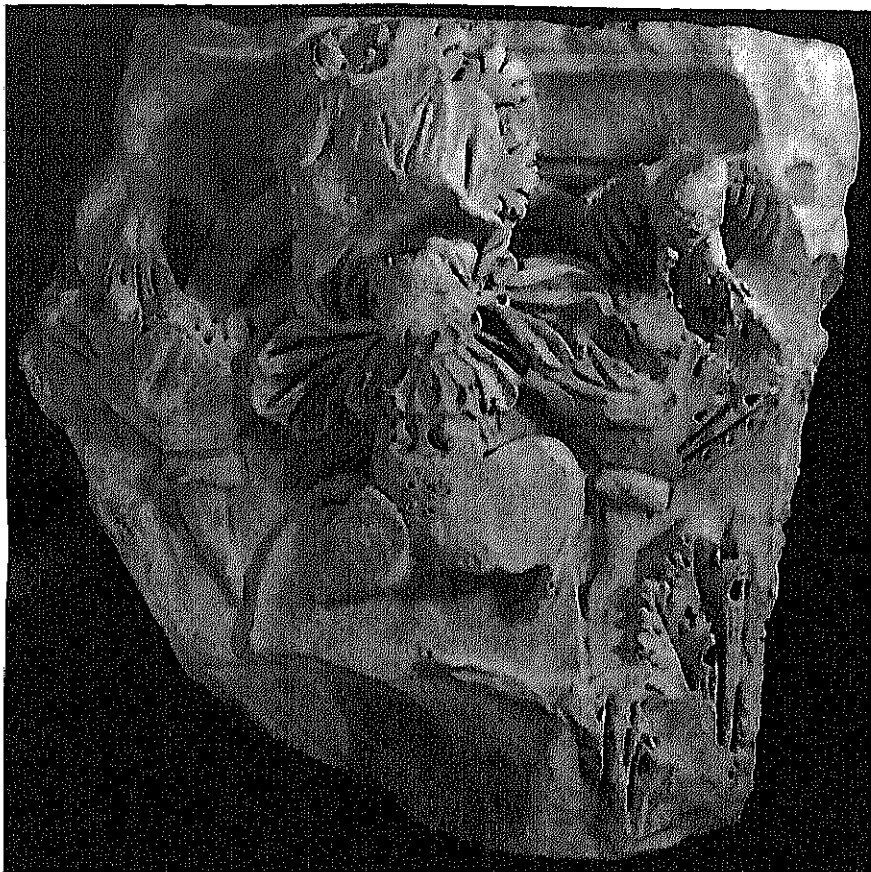


Victoria.

Plate 15: Capital C, side α .

Caulis and helix.

Plate 16: Capital C, side β .



Helios as charioteer.

Plate 17: Capital C, side γ .



Acanthus leaf design with helices.

Fascicle 2: Critical review of the academic literature to date; First stage of the discussion, 1873–1902; State of the question in 1902.

Critical review of the academic literature to date:

It is obvious, from the foregoing introduction, that the clearest and most orderly way to present and consider all these questions, both old and new, will be first, before raising any new ones, critically to review the existing academic literature, constituting the discussion of these artefacts till now, and to consider afresh, in the light of present understanding, the questions raised and discussed therein. This is a procedure especially well-suited to present a subject with which widespread familiarity, even among classical scholars, cannot be assumed. Since these column capitals were never properly exhibited in public for any length of time, until the recent exhibition that provided an occasion for their detailed study, and led to the composition of this monograph, they are relatively little known, except to those scholars who have written about them in the past. A review of what they have said will serve to acquaint the reader of this monograph with the full array of questions that have been discussed so far, in relation to these artefacts, and will thus allow me more easily and effectively to consider the state of the question concerning them at the date of this writing.

Such a review will, moreover, not merely record without comment what has been said by other scholars, but is undertaken in a critical spirit, since this monograph belongs to a group of works whose aim is radically to reconsider every aspect of Varian studies. In particular, in the course of reviewing the scholarly literature concerning these artefacts, I shall have occasion to take issue with certain of the texts reviewed, concerning points of information or of methodology. I have decided to do this in the context of the review itself, rather than saving all my critical comments till the summary and discussion that follows it, because it is more practical to deal with such issues when and as they arise, rather than having to remind the reader of their context later.

What follows is, therefore, the record of an ongoing discussion, with occasional critical interjections, followed by a summary, considering the most important questions raised so far, and finally by my own contribution, which will raise some new questions.

There are three stages in that discussion so far:

- The first, comprising four articles published in scholarly journals between 1873 and 1902, documents the discovery of the two fragments of A, and proposes the relationship of its iconography to Elagabal, and hence, supposedly, to Varius.
- The second stage, comprising a number of texts published between 1902 and 1962, develops some of the questions, categorised above, deriving from that identification. Most, but not all, of the texts contributing to this second stage of the discussion are included in the bibliography of Mercklin's *Antike Figuralkapitelle*, 1962. That text alters the terms of the discussion, by introducing and describing for the first time six more artefacts, allegedly related to each other, and to A.
- A third stage of discussion involving these artefacts continues after 1962, mainly in the form of allusion to them in support of assertions or arguments about related subjects. But they have received no further direct, detailed and inclusive treatment, as a subject in their own right, since then till now; at least none that is recorded in the relevant available bibliographical sources.²¹

While it is not claimed that the list of texts discussing these artefacts, critically reviewed here, is complete, since it is always possible that something relevant may have been missed, it is as full as I have been able to make it.

²¹ *L'Année Philologique*, and the bibliographies of works published since 1962, alluding to these artefacts, or to texts discussing them.

First stage of the discussion, 1873-1902:

The first stage of this discussion, taking place between 1873 and 1902, is conducted entirely by four German and Austro-Hungarian archaeologists, involved in the excavation of the Roman Forum during those years. As well as to published texts, they sometimes refer to conversations and opinions unrecorded in print.

1. Jordan, Heinrich, *Die Resultate der Ausgrabungen auf dem Forum zu Rom*, in *Hermes*, 7, 1873, p. 261-293, esp. p. 267-268.

The relevant section, pp. 267-268, of this wide-ranging report on the excavations of 1870-1872, notes the find, in the immediate proximity of the Temple of Castor, amidst badly damaged pieces of architectural remains, ascribable, on the basis of style, to the reign of Domitian, of a relief sculpture, perhaps from a frieze, of a winged and clothed Victoria. She is set among plant ornamentation, as if growing out of it, in such a manner that her lower drapery rests on the ornament, while her left hand holds out her draped over garment, and her right hand rests on the curve of the ornament. Reference is made to a text discussing human images similarly growing out of plant ornamentation.²² This Victoria is compared to similar *Victoriae* or *Minervae* set in the midst of ornamentation on imperial armour.

It is tempting to identify this Victoria with the one on the capital Mercklin denominates as **B**,²³ but **B**'s Victoria, both in Mercklin's photograph and now, is broken off just above the waist, so it is impossible to tell if it is that described by Jordan. **B**'s Victoria's lower drapery might well have rested on plant ornamentation, but that too is missing. The fact that **B**'s Victoria has a bare midriff (usually indicative of a sacrificial pose, as is her genuflection)²⁴ would seem to argue against any correspondence to Jordan's Victoria, which is described as clothed, with her left hand holding out a draped overgarment, and her right resting on ornament. But Jordan's descriptions are not necessarily always entirely accurate, as can be seen in comparing that of a certain figure on the lower fragment of **A** with Wissowa's subsequent de-

²² Benndorf, Otto, & Schöne, Richard, *Die Antiken Bildwerke des Lateranischen Museums*, p. 40 f. See discussion of this motif in **A** considered as a work of art, below.

²³ Mercklin, op. cit., p. 155, item (383) b.

²⁴ Cf. Goethert, Friedrich Wilhelm, Trajanische Friese, in *JDAL*, 51, 1936, p. 72-81, reviewed below.

scription of it, then with Mercklin's and finally with **A** itself.²⁵



Capital B, side γ : Victoria

It is to **A** that Jordan's account now turns (though he does not call it so). He goes on to describe, as even more noteworthy, a relief on what looks like a fragment of what was once a cuboid block of marble. At its left corner, on a small plinth, stands a headless idol clothed in long drapery. To its right, atop a kneeling headless bull, genuflects a figure, possibly female, cut off at hip level. At the corner to the right of the bull lies a female figure, holding a cornucopia in her right hand. On her feet sits a child. (This is the figure that Wissowa later describes differently, and somewhat more accurately, though not completely so.) Jordan remarks that someone in Rome, possibly Helbig, likened this recumbent female figure to Tellus. Behind the bull, traces of acanthus leaves remain, particularly so towards the right corner of the face of the fragment (β), and most clearly so round its narrow side (γ), at a right

²⁵ See the reviews of Wissowa's and of Mercklin's relevant articles, below.

angle to the figural relief. Their presence suggests to Jordan that the fragment may be the remains of a Corinthian column capital. It is, of course, the piece identified here as the lower fragment of A, as the subsequent literature makes clear. Jordan goes on to describe a number of other artefacts, and, presumably referring back to these two as well, says that they are all to be found lying on the ground, at the site of the Temple of Castor.

2. Wissowa, Georg, *Monumenta ad Religionem Romanam Spectantia Tria*, *Bullettino dell' Instituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica per l' Anno 1883*, p. 156-167, esp. p. 164-167; & Eichler, Ernestus, *ibid.*, *tabula M*.



Eichler's drawing of the lower half of A.

Wissowa's description, accompanied by Eichler's drawing, of the fragment in question, gives its measurements: 56cm (breadth) x 46cm (maximum height) x 31cm (depth). It will be noted that these differ from those later given by Mercklin (and confirmed by my direct examination) for breadth and depth (66cm x 37cm).

Wissowa, writing, presumably from memory, in Bratislava (though clearly with reference to Eichler's drawing, which he cites at the outset), adds to Jordan's description, which he also cites, some observations of his own. Of

Jordan's idol, whom he calls a goddess, standing on the plinth to the left, he notes that only the feet remain, draped by a long tunic. He further remarks that the female figure atop the kneeling bull is winged, and has long, flowing garments. He points out that the female figure reclining on the lower right wears a tunic stretching to her feet, and that the child on her lap (rather than, according to Jordan, on her feet) is nude, and (rather than sitting) seems to be crawling towards her breast. Wissowa's description of this child corresponds somewhat more closely to **A** than does Jordan's, though it is not as accurate as that of Mercklin, regarding that infant's location.

Wissowa goes on to corroborate Jordan's identification of this last, reclining, female figure with Tellus, or Terra, the Earth, citing numerous examples of images of that same goddess, with the same attributes of cornucopia and child, to be found reclining on sarcophagi and other monuments. He identifies the female figure atop the bull as Victoria, performing a sacrifice (presumably, though he does not say so, slaying the bull itself), and goes on to cite various examples of this image in Greek and Roman iconography, both sculptural and numismatic.

He notes that, in this image, Victoria performs the sacrifice *veluti deorum maiorum famula*, "as if she were the slave (or servant) of greater gods." He then remarks that it is dangerous to speculate as to which (greater) goddess Victoria is sacrificing to, but hazards a guess at Minerva, with whom she is closely connected. Against this, however, he notes that the statue on the plinth (thereby presumably implying it to represent the goddess to whom the sacrifice is offered) seems, if his reading of the remains of her drapery is correct, to be clothed only in a tunic, and lacks a *pallium* (which would presumably identify her as Minerva).

He turns then to what, he says, cannot escape the notice of anyone who carefully examines this fragment: that it is part of an ornament from some building; indeed – and in this he notes that his opinion concurs with that of Jordan – that it is a Corinthian column capital. This is supported by its dimensions, by its caulicular decoration, and by a square perforation on its back side (δ), clearly intended to fix it to some part of a wall.

Following on this, he draws attention to a peculiarity of this artefact: there is a respect in which it is unlike most other Corinthian column capitals (such, indeed, as that described by Jordan immediately before his descrip-

tion of A, a passage which Wissowa may have had in mind in making this point). In most such capitals, the individual figures are subordinate to the architectonic ornament, to such an extent that they seem to grow out of the foliage (as, indeed, does one in Jordan's description of the other capital), and never seem to be anything other than a part of the whole. But the figures in this relief lack any connection to their background ornament. They seem rather to be stuck onto the surface of the capital. It is therefore to be feared that they may be attributable to a late and decadent period, one whose style is degenerate. (It is worth taking note of this remark, since it is relevant to the discussion of A, considered as a work of art, with which the present study concludes.)

Penultimately, Wissowa speculates as to whether another column capital must not have existed, corresponding symmetrically to this, on which the reclining Tellus might have been balanced by a similarly recumbent Oceanus, or by some river God, as is often the case in the decoration of sarcophagi.

Finally, he says, though we know nothing of that building itself (by this, presumably, he means the suppositious building to which the column originally belonged, of whose ornamental capital this fragment is supposedly a part) he thinks it likely that it was an *aedicula*, that is, a small structure: a dwelling, a chapel or a shrine. By this final statement he implies, rather than states, that the building in question is not the Temple of Castor, a fairly large building, next to whose ruins, as he told us at the outset, the fragment lies.

It will be noted that, in reviewing Wissowa's text, and conveying its gist to the readers of this, it has been considered advisable to articulate certain interpretations, regarding assumptions and associations that Wissowa seems to take for granted. Such explicit articulation, in the present study's interpretation of Wissowa's sometimes inexplicit text, is desirable, if only because it serves to demarcate direct paraphrase of Wissowa's text from interpretation thereof, and thereby permits or invites alternative interpretation. It also serves to bring into the open notions latent in Wissowa's sometimes elliptical mode of presentation, on whose clear identification and articulation depends the possibility of comparing Wissowa's text with others in the relevant literature.

3. Studniczka, Franz, *Ein Pfeilercapitell auf dem Forum, Mitteilungen*

des Kaiserlich Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts, Roemische Abteilung, 16, 1901, p. 273-282, & Plate XII.

Studniczka's is the first published account of both the reunited fragments constituting **A**. He does not say when or by whom they were put back together, nor with what bonding agent. Referring at the outset to four views of the capital provided in the plates accompanying his text, he gives measurements for the reconstituted block: 56cm x 56cm x 37cm. These differ significantly from the greatest of those taken by myself (66 x 63 x 35), measuring width and depth near the top end of the capital. Studniczka's measurements coincide in width with those of Wissowa, but not in depth, where Wissowa gives 31cm, perhaps as a result of measuring side α near the bottom. Studniczka's depth does, however, coincide with that of Mercklin, but not his other two dimensions, where Mercklin gives 66cm for both, and ascribes Studniczka's figure of 56 to a typographical error. This is indeed possible, since at a later point in his text (p.280), Studniczka refers to a bulk (*Hauptmasse*) of 66 cm.

Studniczka cites both Jordan's and Wissowa's articles concerning the lower fragment, and states that the upper was found in 1899, during the excavation of the Regia. (Hülse disputes this findspot, citing Boni. Mercklin says, without citing any source, that Studniczka's location of this fragment is mistaken, and that it too was found at the Temple of Castor.) Reconstituted, **A** lies, in Studniczka's account, at a spot on the Forum floor, which he designates as "on the foundations of the Arch of Augustus." This differs from the findspot cited by Jordan, some eighteen years previously: "before the steps of the Temple of Castor." The difference could be purely one of nomenclature, given the contiguity of the two sites, or it could indicate that **A** was relocated from one spot to the other, after being reunited.

Studniczka acknowledges that Hülse kindly drew his attention to the reconstituted block. (Strangely, Hülse's logically prior report of the upper fragment's find was not to be published till after Studniczka's far longer and more detailed essay on its iconography.²⁶) Studniczka recalls that, despite its outstanding beauty, he immediately ascribed it to the Severan period. Though he says that he lacks both knowledge and materials for comparison with which to confirm that surmise on stylistic grounds, he is able to do so

²⁶ Hülse, Christian, *MKDAIRA*, 17, 1902, p. 66-67.

on iconographic grounds. For it clearly, together with certain coins, and some more or less doubtful sculpture portraits, bears iconographic witness to the remarkable years 219-222 when, he says, a shameless rascal from Syria, dishonouring the name and throne of the Antonines, was allowed to coerce the Gods of Rome, "*wie Bürger in den Dienst seiner Kaaba.*"

Studniczka's simile can be rendered either: "like town dwellers - that is, like commoners, or even slaves and freedmen, as opposed to higher forms of human life - into the service of his Kaaba;" or alternatively: "like burghers - that is, like mortals, rather than gods - into the worship of his Kaaba." *Dienst* on its own means "service;" but in the clearly religious context of this sentence it could well stand for *Gottesdienst*: "service," in the sense of "act of worship."

Let us pause here to consider this irate rhetorical outburst, first, with respect to the alleged historical events and circumstances to which it refers, and secondly, in terms of the authorial attitudes it displays. Studniczka's hostile account of the character and deeds of the emperor to whom he alludes cannot have been wholly based on contemplation of coins or sculpture portraits, such as those he cites immediately before. It is not in the nature of such artefacts to provide the detailed description, narrative or commentary, which might give rise to such an emotional reaction as Studniczka's. Rather, his account must derive from a reading of historiographical sources, most likely ancient, since the indignation he reflects in his own text seems more appropriate as a reaction to current or recent events, than to those long past. Concerning the emperor in question, there are three main ancient texts available: the Histories of Dio and Herodian, and the *Vita Heliogabali* in the *Historia Augusta*.

As well as condemnation of this emperor's character, the first two of these texts - both by authors who lived during his reign - offer, with respect to his deeds, and in particular to his religious policy, differing views, together with a number of specific allegations. Dio's view of this emperor, both of his alleged character, and of the deeds ascribed to him, is uniformly hostile, and, with particular regard to his religious policy, evinces a mixture of horror and contempt, not unlike that shown by Studniczka. Herodian's view, however, specifically with respect to the religious aspects of this emperor's reign, is more one of curiosity, or wonder, than of horror or contempt, though he concurs (albeit much less passionately) with Dio, in censure of his character.

Though he does not acknowledge any sources at this point, Studniczka may here be alluding to Herodian's description of religious ceremonies officiated by the emperor in question at Rome, during which military prefects and important officials allegedly served as acolytes in rituals dedicated to the Syrian sun god Elagabal. These officials could well be the *Bürger* of Studniczka's simile. But rather than of coercion, Herodian speaks of the honour considered to be done to anyone given a part in the service.²⁷ Dio states explicitly that this emperor's offence in "the matter of Elagabal" consisted "not in introducing a foreign god into Rome, or in his exalting him in very strange ways, but in his placing him even before Jupiter himself and causing himself to be voted his priest."²⁸

Thus, neither Dio nor Herodian, both, though of different generations, contemporary with the reign in question, precisely support Studniczka's allegation regarding this emperor's religious policy. Both, however, particularly Dio, are critical of this emperor's character; such as their own sources (for neither is a first hand account) presumably report it to have been. Those sources are, alas, unknown to us.

This emperor's alleged depravity provides the central theme of the *Vita Antonini Heliogabali* in the *Historia Augusta*, a much later text. This potential source for Studniczka's account does indeed speak of coercion of the people in matters of religion, and of subjugation of the Roman gods as servants to Elagabal.²⁹ But this is a text whose accuracy, with regard to facts in general, and in particular to such otherwise unverifiable alleged events, long past in relation to itself, is doubtful, to say the least; as indeed is the degree of its real, as opposed to feigned, intended reference to this emperor.

Scholars of this text now consider it more probable, given the likely period and circumstances of its composition – the late fourth or early fifth century A.D. – that the *Historia Augusta's* accusations of religious coercion and intolerance are aimed at Christian emperors, such as Constantine or Theodosius, and that the name of Heliogabalus, and the accounts of his alleged misdeeds and circumstances, are merely used as camouflage by that text's

²⁷ Herodian 5.5.9-10.

²⁸ Dio 80.11.1.

²⁹ *HA/AH*, 3.4-5 & 6.6-9.

pagan writer, disguised behind a fictitious plural authorship, in order to attack with impunity the reigning Christian emperor, or one or another of his predecessors.³⁰ In fairness to Studniczka, however, it must be said that this view of the *Historia Augusta* did not yet prevail in his time, though that text's authorship and period, as well as its general accuracy, had already been cast into doubt.³¹

Now there is something troubling about a mode of argument and presentation that relies so uncritically on unacknowledged reference to ancient historiographical accounts, texts which must, at very least, be considered prejudiced and hostile to their subject, especially when the scholar quoting them has made so very clear his assent to, nay, his participation in their prejudice and hostility. For independently of the question of which texts of ancient historiography Studniczka's account of this emperor's religious policy may derive from, and of whether any of those texts is a reliable source, his irate rhetorical outburst reveals the existence of a curious set of attitudes, informing his otherwise sober and scholarly presentation of the artefact here under consideration.

These attitudes include: apparent self-identification with the prestige of the Roman principate, with the dignity of one of its dynasties, and with the sanctity of the gods of its official religion; indignant scorn for the allegedly shameless behaviour of the young Syrian emperor who dared to introduce innovations into that religion, and contempt for that emperor's own native cult, here ridiculed with terminology drawn from the lexicon of Islam (this last an exercise in anachronism).

It is not immediately apparent why Studniczka should feel so partisan with regard to alleged religious strife between the cult of Elagabal, on the one hand, and the official Roman state religion, on the other, both of which had, when he wrote, been defunct for many centuries. It must be noted, however, that similar attitudes are shared, in greater or lesser degree, with differing details of emphasis and nuance, with Studniczka by many other scholars, earlier, contemporary, and later.

³⁰ Among others: Chastagnol, A., *Le Problème de l'Histoire Auguste: état de la question*, *BHAC*, 2, 1964, p. 43-71, esp. p. 64; Chastagnol, A., *Zosime II, 38 et l'Histoire Auguste*, *BHAC*, 3, 1966, p. 43-78, esp. p. 45; Turcan, Robert, *Héliogabale précurseur de Constantin?*, *BAGB*, 1, 1988, p. 38-52.

³¹ By Dessau, H., *Über Zeit und Persönlichkeit der Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Hermes*, 24, 1880, p. 337-392.

Far from being isolated in his contemptuous hostility to the emperor in question, Studniczka provides an example of a prejudice widespread among historiographers, both ancient and modern.³² Its significance, for our understanding of the historiographical tradition relating to this emperor, is a subject to be discussed elsewhere in the group of studies to which this belongs.³³ Suffice it for now to remark that the "rascal" referred to by Studniczka, whose name he withholds for the moment, perhaps for rhetorical effect, is clearly the emperor who reigned between the dates he cites (in fact from a year earlier, from June, A.D. 218, rather than 219, to March, 222) as Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, commonly, but erroneously, known as Elagabalus or Heliogabalus, and here referred to as Varius.

In support of this identification, Studniczka draws attention to the figure at the left hand corner of [sides α and β of] the capital. Interestingly, he does not describe its various elements in the order in which they spontaneously appear, specifically, as they are depicted in the unnumbered photograph in his Plate XII, published together with his text, to which he presumably refers here.

This shows, face on and centred, the figure of an eagle with outstretched wings, standing before a conical or egg-shaped object, slightly taller than the eagle. Both stand upon a platform draped with a tassel-fringed cloth, set at the foremost corner of a block of sculpted marble, whose other details fade, in this photograph, into the background. (In other photographs on the same plate, however, these other details are shown frontally.) Studniczka, speaking first of the object behind the eagle, rather than of the eagle itself (which is, however, much more prominent), identifies that object as the conical or beehive-shaped stone of the Jupiter or Sol of Emesa, citing as evidence passages describing that stone, from Herodian and the *Historia Augusta*.³⁴

³² Among the modern: Gibbon, Edward, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776, vol.1, Ch. vi, p. 173-182; Herzog, Ernst, *Geschichte und System der Römischen Staatsverfassung*, 1887, vol. 2, p. 483-487; Bartoli, Alfonso, *Tracce di Culti Orientali sul Palatino Imperiale*, in *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, Serie III: *Rendiconti*, Vol. 29, Fasc 1-4, Anno Accademico 1956-1957, p. 13-49, esp. p. 30-31, (this last reviewed below).

³³ Ancient historiographical texts about Varius are to be discussed in *Quaestiones Varianae*, a study dedicated to investigation of the life and reign of this emperor. The post-antique historiographical tradition concerning him will be the subject of a section in *Metamorphoses Varianae*, a study dedicated to examination of the posthumous evolution of his legend.

³⁴ Herodian 5.3.5; *HA/AH* 1.5; 17.8.



Photograph of Capital A, side α : from Studniczka's Plate XII

Having thus at last cited ancient historiographical sources, in support of his identification of what he clearly considers to be the most important object in this composite figure, the stone, Studniczka then goes on to present numismatic evidence in support of that same identification. This forces him to pay some attention to the eagle, if only to validate his thesis regarding the stone. He remarks that the eagle standing before the stone, even in its posture and the inclination of its head, is reminiscent of that on coins depicting that stone, some of which he goes on to cite or describe.

His first numismatic reference at this point is in a footnote (p. 274 n° 4), to a coin depicted in Cohen's catalogue;³⁵ one which is not, however, reproduced in Plate XII. Its image is, however, provided here for the reader's examination.



267. ANTONINVS FEL. PIVS. AVG. Son buste lauré, drapé et cuirassé à droite..... P.A.R. 25

Coin with reverse legend *Sanct Deo Soli Elagabal* from Cohen's catalogue

Two coins whose images that plate does reproduce, numbered 1 and 2, which Studniczka refers to in the main body of his text, show the stone and eagle, in the same relative positions, on a cart drawn by four horses. Both these coins are catalogued, by the sources to which Studniczka refers in the relevant footnote (p. 274 n° 5), as pertaining to the reign of Elagabalus.

This is the form of misnomer for Varius preferred by most numismatists, perhaps because it corresponds to the Latinised form of the name of the eponymous sun god on that emperor's Roman coinage, as can be seen in the reverse legend of the coin from Cohen's catalogue: *Sancto Deo Soli Elagabal[o]*. (It is a misnomer, because it is, of course, the name of the god Varius worshipped, rather than that of the emperor himself. The collection of studies to which this study belongs normally refers to this emperor as Varius, when considering him as an object of historical enquiry. When referring to his coinage, however, it acquiesces, albeit reluctantly, in the established convention of numismatists, and refers to the reign and coinage of Elagabalus. This is done for a purely practical reason: in order to make matters easier for the reader motivated to consult the relevant numismatic catalogues; for it is under the name of Elagabalus, not that of Varius, that the relevant coins are to be found in all the standard works.)

³⁵ Cohen, Henry, *Description Historique des Monnaies frappées sous l'Empire Romain, communément appellées Médailles Imperiales*, 2nd ed., 1884, vol. 4, p. 349, no. 267.



1



2

Coins of Elagabalus (Varius) with beatyl drawn by quadriga: Studniczka's Plate XII, Nos. 1 & 2.

Both these coins bear the reverse legend *Conservator Aug[usti]*, one that reappears in the coinage of the pretender Sulpicius Uranius, who briefly held sway at Emesa, in Syria - the hometown of Varius, as well as of the sacred stone itself - more than twenty years after Varius' reign. It is reproduced in Studniczka's Plate XII as item N° 3.

Referring again to a passage in Herodian, Studniczka identifies the four-in-hand, depicted on coins 1 & 2 of Plate XII, as the vehicle which, at the summer solstice, transported this sacred stone, flanked by what he calls four parasols, from its Palatine temple to another in the suburbs. (Herodian, however, in this passage, 5. 6. 7, cites six horses, rather than four.) Studniczka draws attention to the fact that on Emesene coins, not only of Elagabalus and Uranius, but also of Caracalla, such as that reproduced as N° 5 in Plate XII, the stone and eagle are not normally depicted as resting on the ground.



Coin of Uranian Antoninus: Studniczka's Plate XII, No. 3.

Rather, the temple columns part (following an iconographic convention peculiar to coins, which Studniczka does not explain) revealing its massive occupant, likewise surrounded by 'parasols,' atop a multipodal platform, apparently round, presumably like the contours of the base of its monolithic burden. It does not occur to Studniczka to wonder why, if the items surrounding the stone are indeed parasols, they are open indoors. Subsequent enquiry reveals a far more likely possibility: that they are *vexilla*, or some other form of standards.³⁵

³⁵ See: Rostovtzeff, M.I., *Vexillum and Victory*, in *JRS*, 32, 1942, p. 102 ff.; Klimowsky, E.W., *Sonnenschirm und Baldachin, Zwei Sinnbilder der irdischen und himmlischen Würde insbesondere auf antiken Münzen*, in *Schweizer Münzblätter*, Jahrgang 13/14, Heft 55, 1964, p. 121-134, & Abb. 4-8; Downey, Susan B., *A preliminary corpus of the standards of Hatra*, in *Sumer*, 26, 1970, p. 197 ff.



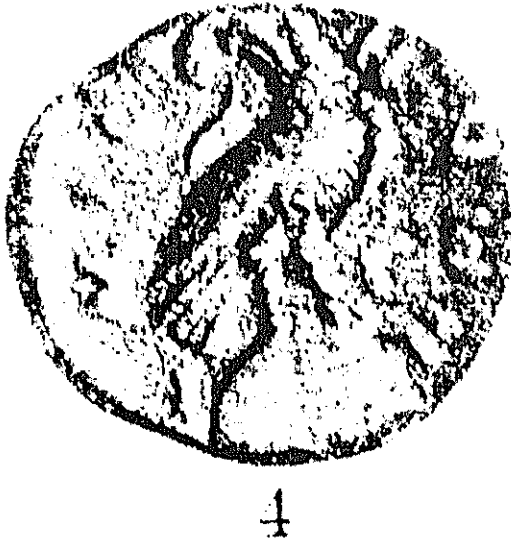
5

Coin of Caracalla showing the sacred stone of Emesa in its Syrian temple: Studniczka's Plate XII, No 5.

More closely reminiscent of the draped platform on A (which, however, Studniczka omits to remind us, is rectangular) is the depiction of the stone on the coin of Uranius, Plate XII, N° 3. Here the stone itself is draped, and seems to sit on a throne or platform with a crown-shaped backrest or reredos.

Unlike this Uranian image, all other relevant coins, like the relief on A, depict the stone of Emesa half-concealed behind an eagle. This eagle (here at last receiving Studniczka's full attention) is not depicted (on coins or in the relief on A) as a flat pictorial representation, say, an embroidery on cloth, as some have erroneously thought,³⁷ but rather three-dimensionally. Indeed, on the oldest such depictions, on coins of Antoninus (Pius), reproduced in plate XII as N° 4, this eagle may even be shown as live, perched above the stone, not at all as a flat representation. (Note should be taken of this observation, since it is relevant in the discussion of A as a work of art, to be undertaken later in this study.)

³⁷ Froehner, in an article discussed below, in the context of the present review of Studniczka's.



Coin of Antoninus Pius with live eagle: Studniczka's Plate XII, No. 4.

Studniczka then draws attention to the garland with fluttering ribbons, often to be found on Eastern numismatic representations of this eagle. He finds traces of such a garland and ribbons in the beak and on the breast of the bird in this relief.

Returning to the stone, another commonality, between all but one such numismatic depictions of it, and that on this relief, is that the stone is shown as smooth, rather than bearing the "small projecting pieces and markings" to which Herodian refers in his description of it.³⁸ Studniczka alludes *en passant*, in a footnote (p. 276 n° 5), to Dieterich's attempt (later to be challenged), in his *Grabschrift des Aberkios*, to relate the grave-inscription of his title to this stone, and to the reign of the emperor associated with it.³⁹

³⁸ Herodian 5.3.5. The sole exception is a coin from Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem).

³⁹ Dieterich, A., *Die Grabschrift des Aberkios*, 1896. Contra: Guarducci, M., *Epigrafia Greca*, 4, 1978.

Only that scepticism proper to a scholar of antiquity (strangely absent from his previous unacknowledged allusion to unidentified sources in ancient historiography) forces Studniczka to consider whether this relief might not represent some sacred stone other than that of Emesa. He cites a number of examples from Oriental coins. But all these lack the characteristic link with an eagle. Only one other possible analogue exists, but this involves two eagles. So there can be no doubt of the identification of the stone on this relief with that of Elagabal. Likewise, its presence as part of an obviously magnificent structure in the city of Rome cannot be ascribed to any period other than the brief reign of that god's eponymous priest-emperor. That "young fanatic's" religious policy therefore also clarifies the iconographic context in which the "fetish" is placed. Thus contemptuously does Studniczka refer to the composite icon, a compound of eagle and stone, depicted on this capital, and to the high priest of the god it represents.

It is flanked by two idols standing on plinths, who nevertheless (despite, that is, their depiction as idols, hence, presumably, as inert pieces of statuary) seem, like live women, their outstretched hands poised over the crown of the stone, to be caressing it (*wie liebkosend*).

(This striking observation, which, however, Studniczka fails to develop any further, will, together with his earlier comment, previously noted, regarding the possible depiction on a coin of the eagle as live, be found relevant to the discussion, with which this study concludes, of A considered as a work of art.)

Studniczka proceeds to discuss these flanking idols. On the left (from the onlooker's point of view), identified by her aegis and helmet, is Pallas. The figure to the right, its upper body draped, is too badly damaged to provide any clue as to its identity. Again, Studniczka relies on historiography for enlightenment, this time showing more of that scholarly scepticism he has just invoked. He cites Herodian's "anecdotally distorted" account of how the thrice-wedded boy emperor also sought brides for his god: first, "wickedly" wresting the image of Pallas from the inner sanctum of the temple of Vesta in the Roman Forum; then, when this weapon-bearing maiden (allegedly) proved too warlike for his idol's taste, sending to Carthage for the image of Urania, a moon goddess more suited to wed the sun god Elagabal.⁴⁰ Studniczka notes that, unlike this emperor, who (by Roman law) would have had to divorce in

⁴⁰ Herodian 5.6.3

order to remarry, no such step was required of his god.

The question of whether Herodian's characterisation of these alleged events is accurate, or even plausible, is one that will be taken up later in the discussion of this capital. Though Studniczka calls it "anecdotally distorted," he does not question Herodian's account in its particulars, whereas certain later scholars do.⁴¹

By this point in Studniczka's text, the reader begins to suspect that its author is building a case in support of a thesis, one distinct from his linking **A** to Elagabal and to Varius. It is not yet clear what this second thesis will turn out to be, but it becomes increasingly apparent that Studniczka is not here merely describing the iconography of **A**, identifying one by one the figures on it, and leaving it at that, but that he is framing an argument, one whose goal he does not identify, whose steps he does not make explicit, and whose methodological assumptions he does not reveal. Like Wissowa, Studniczka often proceeds elliptically, leaving out important elements in his argument, which it is considered advisable here to identify and explain. The following is therefore a somewhat fuller version of his argument than Studniczka himself supplies, rendering explicit its underlying methodological assumptions, unacknowledged associations, and missing logical steps.

The next stage of Studniczka's argument is based on the theory of syncretism, also called *interpretatio*: that notion, widespread in the ancient world, and much used by modern scholars of antiquity, whereby the gods and goddesses of one city or nation are considered equivalent, on an individual basis, each according to his or her own particular characteristics, with those of other cities and nations. Taking for granted his readership's assent to the use of *interpretatio* in argument, Studniczka invokes a chain of equivalences, some of whose links are left tacit, leading finally to the proposition of his secondary thesis.

The aforementioned Urania, the second wife of Elagabal, is the Carthaginian equivalent of Syrian Astarte, who is in turn equivalent to Greek Aphrodite and to Roman Juno.⁴² Pallas, the first, and still undivorced wife of Ela-

⁴¹ Turcan and Frey, both discussed below.

⁴² This particular link in the chain, between Aphrodite and Juno, is contested by Seyrig, Henri, in *Le Culte du Soleil en Syrie à l'époque romaine, Antiquités Syriennes*, 95, in *Syria*, 48, 1971, p. 337-373, critically reviewed below. It is, however, sustained by Hiller von Gaertringen et al., in *ARW* 22, 1922, also reviewed below.

gabal, is an alternative name for Greek Athena, who is equivalent to Roman Minerva. Juno and Minerva, together with Jupiter, the sovereign of the Roman gods, make up the Capitoline triad, the "group of patron deities of the city of Rome".⁴³ Thus the "fetish" of Elagabal, placed in this sculptural relief between Juno and Minerva, is equivalent to Jupiter. If Elagabal is Jupiter, then Elagabal is sovereign of the Roman gods, capable of forcing them to serve and worship him, *wie Bürger in den Dienst seiner Kaaba*: precisely the result that the "wicked" priest-emperor's religious policy allegedly sought to bring about.

Studniczka's secondary thesis can therefore be summarised as stating that, by virtue of Elagabal's placement on A, in the position normally occupied by Jupiter, between Juno and Minerva, A constitutes an *interpretatio* of the Capitoline triad, replacing Jupiter with Elagabal, and provides evidence of Varius' campaign to overthrow the rule of Jupiter over the Roman gods, and put Elagabal in his place. The argument supporting this thesis depends, therefore, on correct identification of the goddesses to either side of Elagabal; an identification dependent in turn on correct use of the procedures of syncretistic *interpretatio*.

Studniczka argues that it should not be held against his use of this specific combination of iconographic and historiographical traditions, in his identification of the figures in this sculptural relief, that the goddesses there depicted do not necessarily conform to Herodian's description of their idols. Perhaps, he says, such versions did not fit into the sculptor's composition.

This excuse reveals a curious order of methodological priorities, with regard to evidence, on Studniczka's part. The highly dubious accounts of ancient historiographers, based on hearsay, slanted by factional prejudice, coloured by fanciful invention, and potentially distorted in the course of their transmission through the manuscript tradition, are taken to be the primary elements of information, to which all other artefacts, such as sculpture, must relate and conform. If not, these artefacts' disconformity with those ancient texts must be explained and excused, rather than vice-versa. Beyond the general - and somewhat lame - excuse, that images conforming to Herodian's account may not have fitted into the sculptor's composition, Studniczka offers more specific explanations for the disconformity of each of these

⁴³ *OCD*, Jupiter, p. 801 b.

two figures with Herodian's account of the goddesses Studniczka maintains they represent.

With respect to Pallas, Studniczka explains why her image in this relief is not that of the archaic idol of that goddess, said by Herodian to have been wrested from the Temple of Vesta, in order to be wedded to Elagabal, but rather a far more common classical and Hellenistic depiction of Pallas-Athena-Minerva, found throughout Graeco-Roman iconography.

The archaic idol in question was a primitive woodcarving known in Greek as the Παλλάδιον, Latinised as Palladium, allegedly brought by Aeneas from Troy to Italy. It somehow ended up in Rome, where it was kept as a pledge of that city's fate, in the innermost sanctum of the Temple of Vesta. Thence the young Syrian emperor and high priest of Elagabal wrested it (according to Herodian) in order to wed it to his god. It might therefore reasonably be presumed, so Studniczka tacitly assumes, that for his identification of this goddess on this column capital as Pallas to be correct, she ought to be depicted in the form of the archaic idol, that mentioned by Herodian, rather than in that of the later, more familiar Hellenistic image of Pallas-Athena-Minerva, clad in aegis and helmet, holding a spear, in whose form she is actually depicted on A.

But, Studniczka explains, the image of that ancient wooden idol of Pallas (the original of which is lost), an image appearing on certain Roman coins, showing that idol held in the hand of another deity, often Minerva, is small and indistinct, and does not allow one to make out its features. Thus the image chosen by the sculptor of this relief to represent Pallas is not that of the archaic idol, but rather the more common Hellenistic one, available to him from numerous examples throughout the Graeco-Roman world. The obvious flaw in this explanation is that there is no reason to suppose that the archaic image of Pallas was as obscure to the sculptor of A as it was to Studniczka. Indeed it was not only represented on coins, but in sculpture, both in relief, and in the round.



Minerva 270



Minerva 233

Roman coins and sculptures showing Minerva holding the archaic idol of Pallas (from LIMC: Minerva)

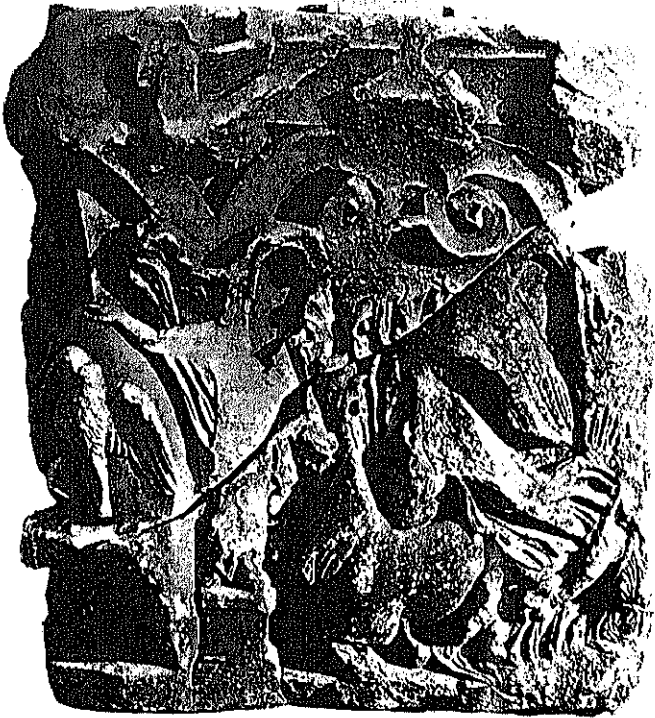


Minerva 247



Minerva 249

Studniczka refers now to the goddess to the left (viewer's right) of the composite icon of eagle and stone as *Caelestis*, without explaining that this is yet another name for Juno-Aphrodite-Astarte-Urania, the second bride of Elagabal. Even less, he believes, should the absence from her image on this capital of two golden lions, described by Herodian as part of the dowry she brought with her from Carthage, be allowed to count against his argument. For she can be identified quite adequately by her other attributes, such as her turreted crown and lightning bolt.



Capital A, side β : from Studniczka's Plate XII.

He omits, however, to mention now (though he has earlier admitted that the relevant figure on A is too badly damaged to provide any clue to its identity), that the goddess in question, as depicted on this column capital, lacks these attributes also. He seems by this omission – sly if intentional – to try to evade the fact that his identification of this figure as Juno-Aphrodite-Astarte-Urania-Caelestis rests entirely on its position vis-à-vis the other two figures so far described, and is predicated on the premises that these three figures, taken as a group, correspond syncretistically to the Capitoline triad.

Studniczka's logic here is faulty, since it uses an hypothesis – that the group on this relief represents the Capitoline triad – as a premise whereby to identify one of that group's members, and thereby to prove his thesis: that the group on this relief represents the Capitoline triad. Rather, the affirmation that this group constitutes that particular triad ought properly to result from a conclusion, reached on the basis of independent identification of each of its members, without reference to their position vis-à-vis the rest. His case is not helped, moreover, by the impression of slyness caused by the real omission, and seeming evasion, just noted.

Against these and other flaws in Studniczka's methodology and presentation, it must in fairness be said that there are nevertheless certain points to be considered in favour of his argument, not all of which he makes himself. The composite idol of eagle and stone on this relief does indeed correspond to known images of Elagabal on coins. The goddess to that idol's right (on-looker's left) is clearly Pallas-Athena-Minerva, on the basis of visible, if somewhat damaged attributes. But there is also an elementary argument that can be made, potentially supportive of his thesis, which is implicit in Studniczka's text, but which he does not bother to make himself: the fact that the three figures in question are all placed on a platform or plinths, not only means that they are depicted as statues, but that they form a triad, as distinct from the other figures depicted in the sculptural relief, who are not thus elevated.

It is to these other figures that Studniczka now turns his attention.

Before following him there, it is illuminating to pause to consider what support Studniczka's argument would need, in order to sustain its thesis, for, as

shall later be seen, it has not gone unchallenged.⁴⁴ A bridge, from the acknowledgement that the three figures on platforms or plinths form a triad, to their collective identification as an *interpretatio* of the Capitoline triad in particular, should properly be built by identifying each of them independently, and by comparing their relationship, once thus identified, to that of the components of that triad, to see if they match.

It is fortunate for such an enterprise that Minerva is so clearly identifiable in this relief, despite her somewhat deteriorated state. It also helps Studniczka's case that the only attested Roman triad of which she is known to form a part is the Capitoline. In another of her avatars, as the Syrian mother goddess Atargatis, she is known to form part of another, parallel triad, together with the love goddess Astarte (sometimes interpreted as Juno Caelestis) and the sky and sun god Elagabal.⁴⁵

This Oriental parallel would, on the face of it, seem to support Studniczka's argument, since it provides a Syrian example for the Syrian emperor, to whose religious policy this Roman sculpture is attributed, to have followed. But Seyrig, contesting Studniczka's assertion that this capital represents an *interpretatio* of the Capitoline triad, uses the existence of this Syrian triad to argue the contrary. Detailed consideration of this controversy is left for the critical review of Seyrig's text, later. Let it merely be remarked for now that this controversy provides an example of the methodological pitfalls involved in the use of syncretistic *interpretatio* for the purpose of argument.

Once Minerva's presence on this capital is firmly established, and the existence of her Syrian avatar's presence in a parallel triad noted, the next step, in building a bridge from this group of figures to their identification as the Capitoline triad, would be to equate the central idol of this group with Jupiter; not only, as does Studniczka, on the basis of that idol's relative position between the two goddesses (only one of whom can be definitely identified), but independently, on that of its own attributes. These happen to be miraculously well preserved, considering their position on a corner, and the state of the other figures in the sculpture. Both in the form of an eagle holding a be-ribboned garland in its beak, and as a stone fallen from the sky - that is, as

⁴⁴ By Seyrig, Henri, reviewed below.

⁴⁵ See Hiller, reviewed below; also Altheim, Franz, *Die Krise der Alten Welt*, 3, 1943, p. 33-36; and Milik, in *Syria* 43, 1968, both reviewed below.

a meteorite, known in religious parlance as a baetyl – Elagabal, as depicted on A, possesses or embodies attributes arguably equivalent, again through *interpretatio*, to those of Zeus and Jupiter, gods of the sky and the heavens.⁴⁶ Again, Seyrig will argue against this equivalence.⁴⁷

Since, as Studniczka has already admitted, it is impossible definitively to establish the other goddess's identity on the basis of her attributes, because these are so badly damaged, it must be accepted that the bridge from description of the group on this relief to its identification as the Capitoline triad must, if it may only properly be built on the basis of independent identification of each figure, remain, like that of Avignon, forever unfinished. Yet even in such an unfinished state, the argument for Studniczka's *interpretatio* cannot necessarily be dismissed, for reasons that are discussed when reviewing Seyrig's argument against it.

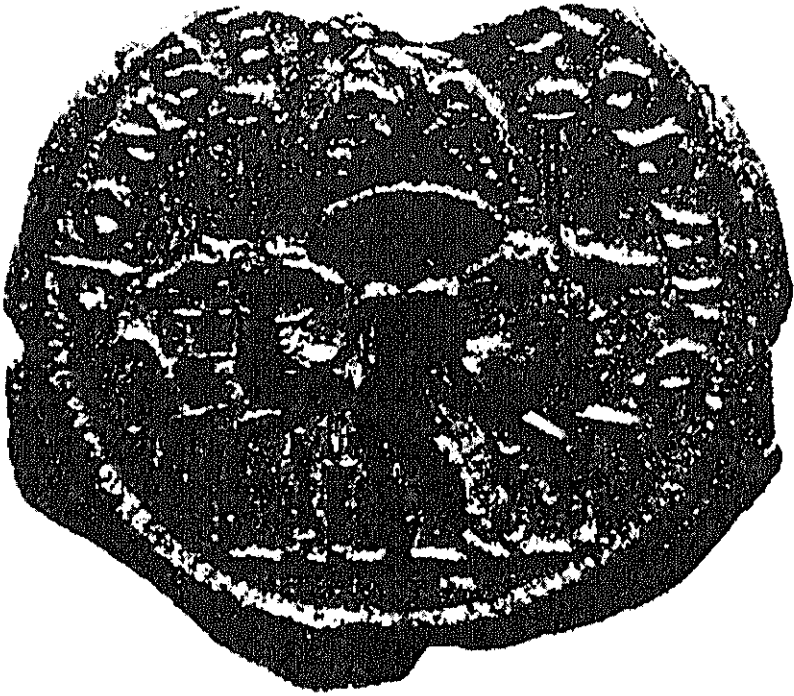
Studniczka now goes on to consider the remaining figures on the relief, to the left (onlooker's right) of the goddess on the plinth whom he identifies as Juno. He asserts that the sacrifice of a bull by Victoria is dedicated to the central figure of the triad: *deus invictus Sol*, in other words Elagabal, as he is referred to in inscriptions from the reign of Varius, cited in the relevant footnote. Enlarging on Wissowa's remark that Victoria performs, *veluti deorum maiorum famula*, a sacrifice that "in truth," according to Herodian, whom Studniczka cites (and whose veracity he takes again uncritically for granted)⁴⁸ was performed by the young priest-emperor himself, Studniczka notes that this goddess can also be observed (on Phoenician coins) to serve Oriental deities. He reminds us that (again according to Herodian)⁴⁹ "our Princeps" had a painting of himself with his "fetish" hung over the statue of Victoria in the Curia, or Senate house.

⁴⁶ Cumont, Franz, *Elagabalus*. 1), in *Pauly's Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Neue Bearbeitung, 5er Band, 10er Halbband, Metzler, Stuttgart, 1905, col. 2219-2222, reviewed below.

⁴⁷ Seyrig, op. cit., p. 344: "Aucun document actuellement connu ne donne au dieu d'Émèse le nom de Zeus ou de Jupiter, ni ne lui donne les traits d'un Zeus solaire."

⁴⁸ Herodian 5.5.8

⁴⁹ Herodian 5.5.7



Coin of Elagabalus (Varius) possibly representing the painting hung in the Curia⁶⁰

It is not clear quite what Studniczka's intention is here. Apart from providing an anecdotal link between "our Princeps" and Victoria, and an iconographic one between that goddess and Oriental versions of Wissowa's "greater gods and goddesses," these last two observations do not seem to

⁶⁰ Baldus, H.R., Das "Vorstellungsgemälde" des Heliogabal: Ein bislang unerkanntes numismatisches Zeugnis, *Chiron*, 19, 1989, pp. 467-476.

serve any argumental purpose. They exist, however, in the atmosphere of Studniczka's thesis that the deities on plinths in this relief represent the Capitoline triad, and that the central one of these is Elagabal, usurping the place of Jupiter.

Usurpation, and its psychological and moral counterpart, presumption, would seem to be the underlying notions here. For, just as Studniczka's article began with an indignant outburst against the Syrian "rascal" who sought to force the gods of Rome to serve or worship Elagabal, and went on to use the figures on this sculptural relief to show how that "wicked" priest-emperor sought to usurp the place of Jupiter as sovereign of the gods on behalf of Elagabal, so this section of that article concludes with a closely related argument, accusing that same priest-emperor of aspiring, again on behalf of his god, to world domination (*Weltherrschaft*). In Studniczka's opinion, a clear indication of this outrageous presumption can be deduced from the presence of child-nursing Tellus at the edge of this relief, observing Victoria sacrifice the bull, just as, on the armour of the statue of Augustus, she observes the return of the standards.

Here Studniczka's vast scholarship seems to have failed him. His argument at this point, comparing the figure of Tellus on A with one of the same goddess on the armour of "the statue of Augustus," seems, from mere rhetorical association with the context (rather than from any explicit statement of its purpose), designed to further his accusation against Varius that he sought to usurp, on behalf of Elagabal, the proper place of Jupiter as sovereign of the gods. But it contains a category mistake, and, as often with Studniczka, an unstated assumption in its argument, as well as an imprecise reference.

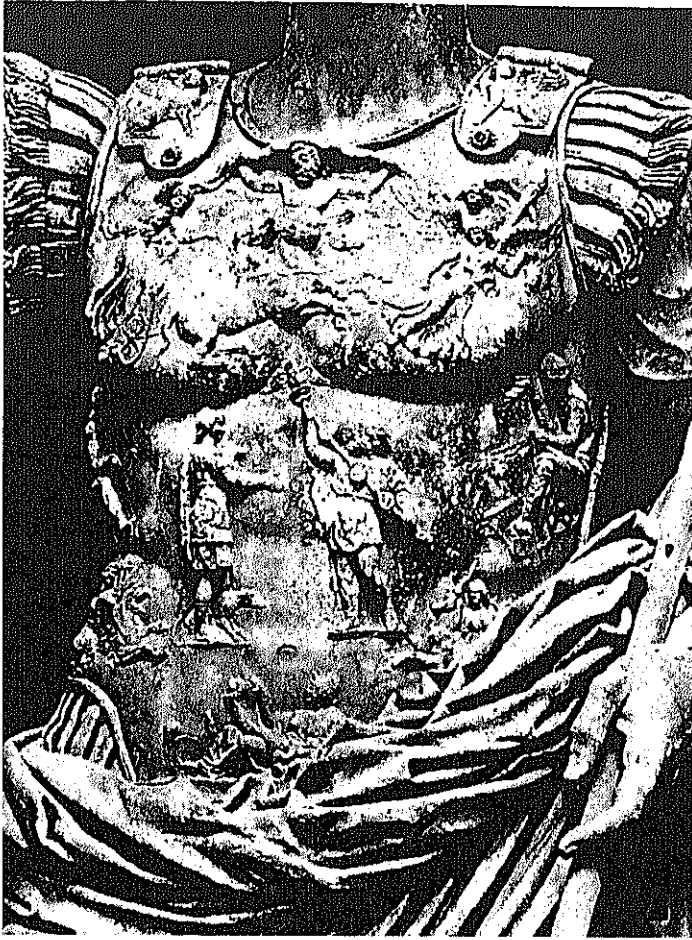
The imprecise reference is to "the statue of Augustus," of which there were of course many. The relevant one here is that known as the Primaporta statue, which depicts Augustus wearing a breastplate adorned with images cast in relief. It is not the only such statue in existence, but is clearly, on the basis of its iconography, the one Studniczka means here.



Prima porta statue of Augustus in the Vatican Museum

The unstated assumption is that, if a given element of this capital's relief sculpture is iconographically comparable to a similar element on "the statue of Augustus," this capital's relief somehow refers to that statue, and claims, on behalf of one or other of its own iconographic elements – in this case the icon of Elagabal – a degree of *Weltherrschaft* comparable to that of Augustus.

The category mistake is that Augustus' *Weltherrschaft* existed, as the compound noun itself implies, in the secular sphere (*Welt*), whereas Studniczka's accusation against Varius is that he sought to usurp, on behalf of Elagabal, Jupiter's place in the sphere of the divine. Studniczka's adduction of this purported evidence in support of that accusation is all the more curious, since, by virtue of his position as Roman emperor, Varius already possessed ample *Weltherrschaft*.



Armour of Prima Porta statue showing Tellus (below navel) watching the return of the standards.

With regard to Studniczka's unstated assumption, it must be said that there is no reason to suppose that the presence in this sculpture of a similar, or even identical goddess, watching, however, a very different ceremony, from a previous era, proves any connection at all between the iconography of A and that of "the statue of Augustus". The image of reclining Tellus, often, as observed by Wissowa, juxtaposed with that of Oceanus, or with some river god, is a commonplace of Roman relief sculpture. Its presence here in no way

proves that the sculptor of this relief necessarily knew any particular "statue of Augustus," nor that he sought, by imitating one of its elements, to draw a parallel between the secular, indeed military status of the emperor depicted there, and the divine status of the "fetish" depicted here.

It seems as if, in thrall to his righteous indignation at the monstrousness of Varius' alleged politico-religious presumption, Studniczka has cast aside all methodological restraint, and is indulging here in a form of free-associative invective that would not be out of place in the *Historia Augusta*. Taking as its premises the emperor's alleged wickedness, compounded with fanaticism, this "argument from monstrousness" allows its wielder to entertain the most far-fetched hypotheses. For what is there, however improbable, however senseless, however overweening, of which such a wicked fanatic might not be capable?

Bringing to a close this opening section of his article, by pronouncing the relationship of the column capital to Elagabal established, Studniczka now goes on to consider the question of the structure to which it may have belonged.

Referring to two separate temples, mentioned earlier in his article, allegedly built by Varius to Elagabal in Rome, one on the Palatine, another somewhere in the suburbs, he remarks that the former remained in existence for some time after that emperor's fall, and the return of the sacred stone to Emesa. He regards it as likelier that a piece of ornament from the Palatine temple may, after that temple's destruction, have found its way (downhill) to a neighbouring part of the Forum (where the capital was found) than that it belonged to some hypothetical third Elagabaline temple, or to some chapel dedicated to that god within another deity's temple, erected at the site of the capital's find. He does not, however, rule out such a "third temple" or "inserted chapel" theory, particularly because of the findspot's proximity to the Temple of Vesta, which Varius (allegedly) repeatedly profaned.

First, in reviewing this convoluted argument, it should be noted that Studniczka refers to a "third temple" or "inserted chapel" theory as if it had already been introduced into his discussion of **A**. While Wissowa does suppose the lower half of **A** may have come from an *aedicula*, Studniczka does not refer to Wissowa's supposition. Neither does he refer to Hülsen's article concerning **A** and related artefacts, whose contents, though as yet unpublished at the time of Studniczka's writing, were likely to be known to him, since it

was Hülsen who first drew Studniczka's attention to the capital. Hülsen thinks it likely that A and its related artefacts come from a small *sacellum* or chapel in the Forum itself, rather than from a temple on the Palatine. But Studniczka does not here allude to any such ongoing discussion, nor relate his own text to any existing "third temple" or "inserted chapel" theory. Rather, he seems to seek to introduce such a theory by stealth.

Secondly, it seems that in support of this theory, a form of the "argument from monstrosity" is used: if Varius repeatedly, as claimed by certain ancient historiographers (notably the author of the *Historia Augusta*), profaned the Temple of Vesta (by abducting and marrying a Vestal Virgin, and removing the Palladium from its inner sanctum to wed that idol to his god) then, Studniczka implies, was he not capable of having built a third temple to Elagabal within its precincts, or of having inserted a chapel to his god into its very structure?

Never mind, Studniczka seems to say, that no trace of foundations for any such "third temple" in the precincts of the Temple of Vesta, or of any "chapel" inserted into its structure, or into that of any other nearby temple, has ever been detected. Such a supposition is (this much he says outright) "not contradicted" by the modest dimensions of the capital. For "the Syrian" cannot, in the brief span of his reign, possibly have completed the construction in Rome of such imposing temples, modelled on that of Emesa, as those described by the "*phrasenhafte*" – trite or cliché-ridden – Herodian. (It is worth noting that Herodian's estimation in Studniczka's opinion rises or falls in relation to the support Herodian seems to lend to Studniczka's argument at any given point.) The Palatine temple must therefore not have been such an imposing one, particularly since it stood on the site of the *aedes Orci*, a temple otherwise unknown, hence unlikely to be large. (Studniczka again takes for granted the veracity and meaning of his source, the *Vita Hellogabali* in the *Historia Augusta*, here cited in a footnote.) The capital need not, moreover, necessarily have belonged to the main temple itself, but possibly to some lobby, foyer, or hall attached to it.

The problem of the meaning of the phrase *aedes Orci*, of whether it refers to an otherwise unknown Temple of Orcus, or whether it is just a textual corruption, possibly of *Adonidis horti*, or of some other phrase, is the subject of ongoing scholarly debate, initiated after Studniczka wrote this article.⁵¹ For-

⁵¹ That debate is discussed in detail in an article by Coarelli, *La Tombe d'Antinoüs à Rome*, *MEFRA*, 98, 1986-1, p. 230-253, esp. p. 243-5, another passage of which is reviewed below in the present text.

tunately for his argument, he does not allow too much to hang on the putative designation of the site of the Palatine temple of Elagabal as that of the *aedes Orci*, going on, instead, to affirm, on the basis of quite other evidence, that such a temple did indeed exist.

That other evidence consists of two bronze coins, one from the reign of Varius, another from that of his cousin and successor, Alexander Severus, reproduced in Plate XII as N^os 6 and 7. (There is a misprint in the body of Studniczka's text, p. 281, referring to N^o 7 of Plate XII as N^o 8, a number which does not appear on that plate.) Both show a similar, but not quite identical, building complex, which Studniczka identifies as the "Elagabalium." In so doing, he introduces (again without acknowledging his source) a term not found in any of the ancient texts so far cited in his article, but rather in the unmentioned chronicles of Hieronymus (St. Jerome) and Eusebius.⁵² He need not, however, necessarily have taken this term directly from its ancient sources, since it is cited (indeed more accurately so, with regard to the spelling of the originals, as "Eliogaballium") in the modern source providing the evidence for this next stage of his argument: an article by Froehner, which he goes on to cite.



6



7

Coin of Elagabalus (Varius) and of Alexander Severus: Studniczka's Plate XII, Nos. 6 & 7.

⁵² Mommsen, Theodor, (Ed.), *Chronica Minora* I, p. 147, l. 18, & n. 6.

The relevant coin of Elagabalus is the subject of an article by Froehner, cited here by Studniczka, in which “the published (*veröffentlichte*) drawing of the unfortunately imperfectly preserved image leaves something to be desired.”⁶³ Studniczka goes on to state: “its publisher (*Herausgeber*) then gave it a very complicated interpretation.” *Herausgeber* here clearly refers to Froehner, in his capacity as “publisher” of the coin itself; still a recent find in 1890, when his article was published by the French Numismatic Society, in its Annual for that year. That “complicated interpretation,” Studniczka goes on to say, may, however, safely be ignored, because he himself (meaning Froehner) eliminates it now, “through comparison with the better preserved, as well as more complete and more clearly depicted representation of a similar, if not quite identical building complex” on the coin of Alexander Severus, designated by its legend as dedicated to Jupiter Ultor.



Froehner's drawing of the coin of Elagabalus (Varius)

Studniczka's allegation regarding Froehner's self-correction is problematic, because Studniczka provides no clue as to where or in what context or venue Froehner performs it. He refers in a footnote (p.281 n.1) to published sources for the coin of Alexander Severus, but does not quote any published or unpublished textual source, nor any conversation, either with Froehner, or with any third party about him, to substantiate this allegation of Froehner's self-correction. Neither does he describe, summarise, or perform for his reader that comparison of one coin to another, on which that self-correction

⁶³ Froehner, W., *Variétés Numismatiques*, IV, *Annuaire de la Société Française de Numismatique*, XIV, 1890, p. 469-71.

is allegedly based. (This last shortcoming, at least, will presently be remedied here.)

As for Froehner's original interpretation, it is not so much "complicated," as erroneous in one of its basic assumptions: that the temple depicted on the reverse of the coin of Elagabalus in question is that of Jupiter Capitolinus. From this assumption stems Froehner's equally erroneous interpretation of this coin. The structure depicted on the coin does not correspond to the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, which lacked the attached flanking buildings shown on the coin. To square this absence with his assumption, Froehner interprets only the temple in the middle of the coin as that of Jupiter Capitolinus, and the two flanking buildings as quite separate temples: those ascribed to Elagabal by ancient historiography, located in separate parts of Rome. They are, in Froehner's view, placed together on this coin for purely iconographic reasons. From this error flow a series of increasingly far-fetched hypotheses, relating to the way in which the artist effected this iconographic transposition, which it is unnecessary here to recite in detail.

The potentially valuable aspect of Froehner's article lies not in his erroneous speculations as to the identity and location of the temple(s) in question, but in his detailed description of the structures and figures depicted on this coin. There are some important differences, unrelated to his error and its consequences, between his description of the coin, and that of Studniczka, to which the latter does not draw attention. It is relevant here that Froehner's description refers to a drawing, based on a plaster cast of the coin of Elagabalus, whereas Studniczka's refers to a photograph of a plaster cast of the same coin, probably the very same, since Studniczka thanks Froehner for his kindness in providing it. (Perhaps in his concern to maintain such an amicable personal relationship as this acknowledgement implies lies the key to Studniczka's reluctance to point out the differences between his description of the details of the coin and Froehner's, as well as his calling a clearly erroneous interpretation merely "complicated.")

Froehner, unlike Studniczka, devotes some attention to the obverse of the coin of Elagabalus, remarking on the emperor's youthful appearance, and the growth of down on his jaw. He points out that the legend gives the emperor's full official nomenclature, as always found on bronze, but rarely, due to the exiguity of their flans, on gold or silver coins. The relatively large size of this coin is obviously (though neither Froehner nor Studniczka says so)

what allows for such a wealth of detail on its reverse. Froehner dates it, on the basis of its reverse legend, to A.D. 222, remarking that the emperor depicted on the obverse was murdered in March of that year.

Concentrating now on the reverse of the coin of Elagabalus, where the temple in question can be seen, it is helpful for one's understanding of their texts, and of the image they discuss, to realise that both Froehner and Studniczka describe (though neither clearly says so) a quasi-perspectival view. It is quasi, rather than truly perspectival, because it does not strictly follow the laws of perspective – not unknown to the Romans. Rather, those laws are (literally) bent to accommodate the view to the shape of the coin, and transgressed in order to emphasize the iconographic importance of certain figures depicted upon it.

The view engraved on the coin extends over three unequal, horizontally demarcated bands: top, middle, and bottom. These bands correspond respectively, according to their position on the vertical axis of the coin, and in terms of pictorial representation, to background, middle distance, and foreground. A temple with some figures set before it is placed in the centre of the background, which occupies almost half the total area of the coin. A little empty space, corresponding to the sky, is left to either side of the temple, beneath the curve of the rim of the coin and the letters of its legend. The middle distance is completely filled by a tripartite structure, taking up most of the remaining area of the coin. It consists of a central gateway constructed with columns and lintel, supporting a superstructure, and two flanking buildings, made of cuboid blocks, with steeply gabled roofs. In the relatively little space allotted to the foreground, broad steps lead up to the gateway, and before them, nearest to the viewer, is depicted what looks like a fence or railing.

On the coin of Elagabalus, the line of sight implied by the perspective is that of a viewer standing on the same level as, or even slightly below, the steps leading up to the gateway. The temple in the background looms above, as if set on an elevated platform. Perhaps it was this impression of relative altitude and steepness that led Froehner to see in this temple that of Jupiter Capitolinus, also known as Jupiter Optimus Maximus, as viewed from the Forum. (It occupied the site of the present-day Capitoline Museum.) But if one looks, as Studniczka claims Froehner did, at the coin of Alexander Severus, one quickly sees the error in that identification.

The first step in achieving a correct understanding of the matter is to realise that the building complex depicted on both coins is the same. Despite certain minor differences of detail, such as the number of columns in the temple (five on the coin of Elagabalus, six on that of Alexander) and the precise arrangement of columns in the gateway, the overall likeness is so very great as to be quite persuasive on its own. The disposition and appearance of the two flanking buildings, to either side of the gateway, and the relationship between that tripartite structure and the temple, are so similar on each, that it seems highly likely that the same building complex is depicted on both. If, in addition to acknowledging their pictorial likeness, one considers that no similar arrangement of such like buildings is shown on any other known Roman coin, and considers also the uninterrupted contiguity of the reigns in which these coins were minted, one's persuasion turns into conviction.

The next step, both in understanding and eliminating Froehner's error, is, having acknowledged that the building complex depicted on both coins is identical, to account for the difference in perspective between the one and the other. Whereas, as said above, the line of sight implied by the coin of Elagabalus is that of a viewer standing on the same level as, or even slightly below, that of the steps in the foreground, the coin of Alexander shows the complex from a bird's eye view, or at least from a terrestrial vantage point set well above the level of the tripartite structure in the middle distance; a structure which is thereby revealed as the outward façade of a portico surrounding a large quadrangular courtyard, with the temple in its middle. This clearly excludes the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus from consideration, since it is known that it had no such surrounding portico.

The question that immediately arises, however, once one has noticed this difference in perspective between the two coins, and corrected Froehner's error, is this: Where, on the Palatine hill, was there, in the Severan period, a flat space, not otherwise occupied, large enough to accommodate such a huge building complex as that depicted on these coins of Elagabalus and Alexander? This will immediately be followed by a closely related question: Where, on the Palatine hill, is there a vantage point from which such a building complex could have been observed at the precise angle implied by each of these coins? These questions, which neither Studniczka nor Froehner ask, are central to determining the site of that complex, as shall later be discussed, in the part of this study devoted to discussing the state of the ques-

tion in 2002.

Having understood, by looking at the coin of Alexander, and comparing it to that of Elagabalus, the nature of the building complex shown on both, it is easier to understand the discrepancies between Studniczka's and Froehner's descriptions of the details of the coin of Elagabalus. Froehner's description was written and published before effecting any such comparison, and thereby lacks understanding of the quadrangular and porticoed nature of that complex, whereas Studniczka writes in the light of that understanding, whose component elements he does not, however, deign to share with his reader.

Knowing this, it is possible more closely to consider the details of the coin of Elagabalus. We begin with the structure depicted at its top. (The top is identified as such by the orientation of the buildings there depicted). This structure, as can more easily be seen with reference to the coin of Alexander, occupies the most distant part of the background. It is described by both Studniczka and Froehner as a temple, with columns supporting a triangular tympanum. Froehner mentions statues to each side of this tympanum, and cites the number of the temple's columns, five, a fact that he goes on blithely to disregard, in designating this as the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, which, he admits, has six.

Froehner can be forgiven for disregarding the difference in the number of columns. The same disregard has been adopted here, in affirming the identity of the temple on the coin of Elagabalus with that on the coin of Alexander Severus. The exercise of a certain discretion in the depiction of given numbers of columns, and in their arrangement, is just one of many forms of iconographic license available to numismatic engravers in antiquity, as is bending or transgressing the laws of perspective, observable on both these coins. It is no more surprising that engravers should have availed themselves of such iconographic license, in order to signify (rather than exhaustively depict) the image of a given object in the limited space of a coin, than that they used abbreviations in the legends.

In the case of the coin of Alexander here under discussion, the angles of the sides of the courtyard stretching back from the buildings at the front, forming the portico enclosing the temple, are more or less correct, so far as the lines of the rooftops go, tending as they do towards the vanishing point. But

the columns of the portico itself, supporting those rooftops, are set at an acute angle to the perpendicular, rather than being vertically aligned with it, as should strictly be the case. This effect skews one's view of the portico, as if one were looking at it from inside and beneath, rather than from outside and above. The former is of course the view a visitor to the inside of its precincts would have had.

Again, still with reference to the coin of Alexander, the line of sight of the viewer towards the temple, and the temple's position in relation to that of the gateway before or below it, is essentially the same as that on the coin of Elagabalus, despite the vast difference of vantage point between them. This difference is most marked with respect to the tripartite structure, composed of gateway and flanking buildings, that constitutes the middle distance, and, in the case of the coin of Alexander, comprises the porticos delimiting the quadrangle, thus showing the depth of the background. This is probably because the temple is conceived, on the coin of Alexander, as the single most important element of the iconography, and is therefore viewed face on, emblematically, like the elevation in an architect's plan, rather than realistically, in proper perspective, even though it is set in a fairly realistically depicted porticoed courtyard. Thus the importance of the temple is equally emphasised on both coins, lifting it, as it were, out of the background to which it properly belongs, according to the laws of perspective, and thrusting it into the forefront of the viewer's attention.

A different form of license, also involving transgression of the laws of perspective, can be seen in operation on the coin of Elagabalus. Both Froehner and Studniczka describe a group of figures set before the temple: the emperor and his attendants, performing a sacrifice in the Graeco-Roman manner. These figures are all depicted as considerably larger than they would be, were the engraver to have followed strictly the laws of perspective. Not only that, but the boy emperor is shown as much larger than his attendants. Holding a patera in his outstretched right hand, he pours a libation over what Froehner calls a tripod, and Studniczka an altar or similar object. They differ as to the number of attendants: Froehner mentions three, of which one plays the double flute; Studniczka cites only two, one to each side of the emperor. (Turcan, decades later, will see quite different characters in these figures.⁵⁴)

⁵⁴ Turcan, Robert, *Les dieux de l'Orient dans l'Histoire Auguste*, *Journal des Savants (JS)*, 1993, p. 21-62, esp. p. 39, n. 103, reviewed below.

While Froehner begins at this point of his text to develop his peculiar theory that the temple in the background is that of Jupiter Capitolinus, and to venture far-fetched speculations on its basis, Studniczka describes the tripartite structure in the middle distance. Referring presumably to the central section of that structure, a monumental gateway, he says that it lies beneath the figures' feet. Close examination of the photographic reproduction of the coin on Plate XII, N° 6 suggests, however, that the figures' feet are hidden behind the ornamental superstructure set on top of the gateway, and that we see these figures only from the ankles up. In Froehner's drawing, on the other hand, while what has just been said here is true of the attendants, the "emperor's" left foot - if that is who is depicted on the coin - seems poised on the outer edge of the lintel, his outer toes slightly overhanging, or even gripping it, while his right leg is hidden behind the ornamental superstructure, which is no higher than his knee, as if he were straddling it, thus perhaps securing his stability on top of the gateway.

The gateway, as is obvious on the coin of Alexander, but less so on that of Elagabalus, provides access to the temple precinct, or courtyard. On the coin of Elagabalus, as distinct from that of Alexander, this is an imaginary space; imaginary because invisible, hidden behind the gateway and its two flanking buildings. But it must exist, at least in theory, even on the coin of Elagabalus. For it must be in that space, between the gateway and the temple in the background, where an altar would, in such a complex, normally be placed, and where, therefore, the "emperor," accompanied by his "attendants," would stand to sacrifice. That is, unless we are expected to suppose, as suggested by Froehner's drawing, that they are all perched on top of the gateway, an unlikely place for sacrifice (in which case they may not depict the "emperor" and his "attendants" at all, but rather statues).

Supported by four pairs of columns, on the coin of Elagabalus, or by what looks like three arches, on that of Alexander, the gateway's lintel is crowned by the aforementioned ornamental superstructure. This Studniczka describes as a statuary group representing a team of four horses. In Froehner's drawing, it looks more like a row of smaller arches, set above the arches of the gateway, in the manner of an aqueduct or bridge.

The two flanking structures, maintained by Froehner to be individual temples, Studniczka describes instead as buildings contiguous to the monumental gateway. They are matching wings, constituting part of the perimeter defining the precinct of the temple, as is obvious on the coin of Alexander.

Their outer walls are made of cuboid blocks. Their gabled fronts, shaped like those of temples with triangular tympana, but, as Froehner points out, lacking columns, face each other, on both coins, across a vacant space before the monumental gateway. Both writers draw attention to the "eagles," (later identified as "doves" by Turcan⁶⁶) perched on the peaks of these buildings' facing gables. Froehner thinks that they are beating their wings.

What Studniczka describes in the foreground as steps, leading up to this monumental gate, and before them a railing or fence, enclosing a space with a podium or an altar, Froehner, developing his error, describes as the river Tiber, not far from whose banks one of the laterally depicted "temples" allegedly stood. (He does not cite the source for this last "allegation," otherwise unattested. Indeed, Froehner does not cite any ancient sources at all.)

With this recital of the differences between Froehner's description, and that of Studniczka, as well as of the details of this coin of Elagabalus, in the light of my own observation of a picture of the coin of Alexander, the relevance of Froehner's article to this review of the literature concerning the related column capitals is exhausted. Only close examination of the coins themselves, rather than of photographs or drawings of plaster casts thereof, would make it possible to choose between Froehner's description and Studniczka's (or those of later writers), where they differ on points of detail. As for interpretation, particularly as it relates to the identity and real location of the structure(s) depicted on the coin, Froehner is clearly wrong, which does not necessarily mean that Studniczka is right.

Not that Studniczka advances any further propositions, regarding the location of the temple to which the column capital in question may once have belonged, beyond those he has already espoused: that it occupied the site of the *aedes Orci*, a relatively unimpressive temple, somewhere on the Palatine. Rather, by way of leading towards the conclusion of his article, he turns his attention to that aspect of A, whereof to speak he claimed initially to lack sufficient knowledge and materials for the purpose of comparison: its style.

Referring to the structure depicted on the coins just discussed, he says it is not in the least difficult to place this column capital in the context of such a

⁶⁶ Turcan, Robert, *Héliogabale et le sacre du Soleil*, 1985, p. 123, reviewed below.

temple. It splendidly fits Herodian's descriptions of the beauty and magnificence of that built by this *spendthrift prince* (meaning Varius), for it is indisputably one of the most elaborate and charming examples of its type, precisely in the outrageous, bold asymmetry of its rich pictorial decoration, in the interests of which effect, its Corinthian ornament, deriving from strict ancient models, is developed with sovereign freedom.

This is an astounding endorsement, in the context of the history of art, of precisely those characteristics of effrontery and innovation that Studniczka finds so monstrous, when attributed, in that of religion, to the sovereign in question; the same to whose patronage and taste he credits the production of this sculpture. Studniczka goes on to recall Wissowa's surmise that there must have been another, corresponding capital, atop another column, flanking, together with this, an entrance. Its complementary presence would eliminate "this dissonance" – precisely that "bold asymmetry" which he has just admired.

It should be noted that, by invoking with implied assent Herodian's descriptions of the Palatine temple's magnificence and splendour, this passage contradicts its author's earlier characterisation of precisely such descriptions by Herodian as "*phrasenhaft*" – cliché-ridden, empty, or trite – and militates against his thesis elsewhere: that the temple in question, located on the site of the obscure, therefore small and insignificant, *aedes Orci*, cannot have been so splendid or magnificent.

It is also worth remarking that Studniczka's conflicting attitudes towards certain characteristics associated with Varius – on the one hand, in art, on the other, in religion – revealed by the passage just examined, is, again, hardly unique to that author. Indeed ambivalence is an abiding characteristic of most of the ancient and modern historiography regarding this emperor. This important fact will form the subject of a separate enquiry.⁵⁶

Studniczka concludes his article by comparing the sculptural quality of A quite favourably with that of certain other column capitals, found in the course of excavating the Baths of Caracalla, still under construction in the reign of Varius, while noting certain topical and stylistic similarities among them. He draws particular attention to the common presence of "lion-

⁵⁶ *Metamorphoses Varianae*, a collaborative endeavour undertaken under my direction, is dedicated to investigation of this emperor's posthumous legend.

griffins," identifying as such the traces of feathered beasts depicted on A, on either side of the corner volutes. These he likens to those on the smaller Propylæum in Eleusis. He also sees a similarity in the sculpture of the acanthus leaves on both, while those on A look to him more like the work of goldsmiths.



Capital A, side γ , Acanthus leaves: from Studniczka's Plate XII

He looks forward to a more thorough comparative study of these artefacts, once the copious products of the last decade's (the 1890s') archaeological investigations are classified in terms of their chronology, and studied in the light of a deeper understanding of the *terra incognita* of Roman art. One question, in his opinion, to be considered, is whether the sculptor of this monument learned his skill in that same country (Syria) whence his client and that client's god came, an assumption that Roman constructions in the

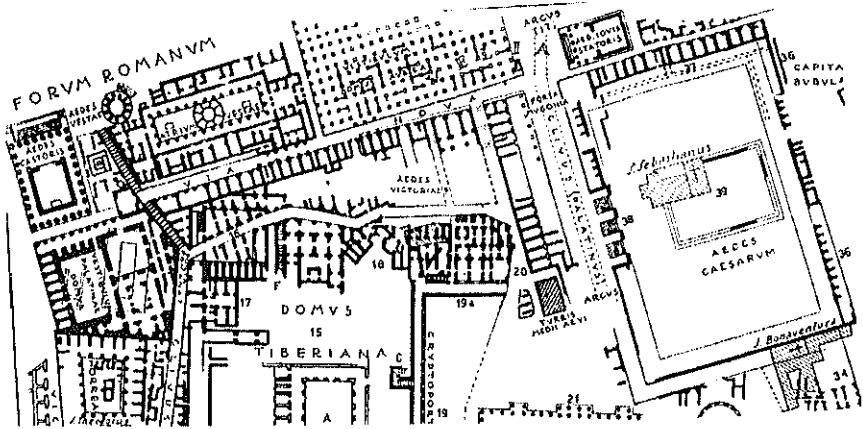
area of Emesa, Heliopolis, and Palmyra do not seem particularly to support.

4. Hülsen, Christian, *Ausgrabungen aus dem Forum Romanum*, in *Mitteilungen des Kaiserlich Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts, Roemische Abteilung*, 17, 1902, p. 66-67.

Hülsen's brief mention of **A** is set, like Jordan's in the context of a wide-ranging account of recent excavations in the Roman Forum. It reads as if it were intended to announce for the first time the discovery of the upper half of **A**, among other artefacts, and therefore ought to have been published before Studniczka's much lengthier and more detailed monographic article. It cites the find, beneath the middle of a row of upright columns on the eastern side of the Temple of Castor, of the upper half of a beautiful sculpted capital whose lower half was found at the same site in the 1870s, and, says Hülsen, was published by Wissowa. Hülsen does not mention Jordan's previous publication of the lower fragment. He does, however, say, in a footnote, that Studniczka's ascription of its findspot to the excavation of the Regia was considered erroneous by Boni.

The new find is particularly interesting, according to Hülsen, on account of the figure on its corner: a lion-footed stool, bedecked with a fringed cloth, supporting a conical stone with an eagle before it. Hülsen remarks that Studniczka identifies it on the basis of numismatic and historiographical evidence as the sacred stone of *Deus Elagabalus* from Emesa, and believes it possible that the capital was carried off from the temple built to that god on the Palatine by the emperor whom Hülsen calls *Elagabal*. Whoever looks at the photographs provided with Studniczka's article, says Hülsen, will probably think that this work is from a much earlier period.

But assuming Studniczka's chronology is right, Hülsen thinks it likelier, as indeed, he says, Studniczka himself suggests at one point, that it comes from a small *sacellum* or chapel in the Forum itself, rather than from the Palatine. (In fact, it will be remembered, Studniczka, though considering this possibility, rejects it in favour of a Palatine provenance.) In support of this theory, Hülsen mentions, in a footnote, the fact, relayed to him verbally by Boni, that several fragments of similar workmanship were found in the same vicinity. Their publication is to be awaited.



Map of part of the Roman Forum and the Palatine hill showing the Temple of Castor (upper left, below the word "FORVM") and the Vigna Barberini (at right, the site here designated "AEDS CAESARVM").⁶⁷ The findspot of the capitals is said to have been on the east side of the Temple of Castor, facing the Temple of Vesta (the round structure to the right of the Temple of Castor). The Vigna Barberini and the Domus Tiberiana, both on the Palatine hill, are at a considerably higher elevation than the Temple of Castor and the other buildings in the Forum.

The State of the Question in 1902:

With Hülsen's article of 1902, the initial phase of scholarly discussion of **A** comes to an end. Little could Hülsen have imagined that the expected publication of his last-mentioned "fragments of similar workmanship" would continue to be awaited for six decades. Not until 1962, with the entry in Mercklin's *Antike Figural kapitelle* devoted to **A**, together with various other artefacts purportedly related to it, does any substantial and directly focused discussion of this column capital, or of any of its companion pieces, take place, with a view either to affirming or denying any of the main hypotheses regarding it, established in this initial phase.

Though there are certain differences among them regarding minor details of the iconography, and no firm consensus yet as to the location of the structure to which it may originally have pertained, there is broad agreement

⁶⁸ Lugli, *Fontes Topographiae Romae*, Liber XIX, Tab. A.

among all the scholars to have discussed this artefact till 1902, on the following points:

- Its generic identification as a Corinthian column capital, most likely once part of a temple or other religious building.
- Its chronological assignation to the Severan period, on the basis of iconography and style (though Hülsen thinks its style looks earlier).
- Its iconographic identification with the cult of Elagabal.
- Therefore, its association with the reign of Varius, who promoted the cult of Elagabal.
- Identification of the figures represented on it as, from left to right (from α to β): Minerva, Elagabal, and, possibly, Juno, with Elagabal represented as a composite icon of eagle and baetyl atop a draped platform, and the two goddesses standing on plinths; continuing, from left to right on β : Victoria, genuflecting, sacrificing a bull; Tellus, reclining, with a cornucopia in her hand, and an infant on her feet or lap; griffins on both α and β .