

A RECENT STONE STATUE FRAGMENT FROM THE TERRITORY OF THE 2ND–3RD CENTURY LEGIONARY FORTRESS OF AQUINCUM

The rescue excavations in the course of the reconstruction of the traffic junction at Flórián tér, Budapest District III during the busy year¹ of 1981 yielded numerous finds and observations for the Budapest Historical Museum and also for the various branches of historical sciences (numismatics, history of architecture and technology, religious history and last but not least art history). Not all of these finds² and observations have been published as yet.

We had the opportunity in the course of rescue excavations³ to work for a shorter period under the tram rails at the western rampart of the Árpád bridge. (Fig. 1) This point was close to the south-eastern corner of the partly already unearthed legionary fortress and the pillars of the new flyover would have been set up in the research area. During the short-term rescue excavations the fragment of the head⁴ of a man carved from stone (Fig. 2–4) was found, among others, in the uppermost layer of the *via sagularis* mixed with *tegula* rubble in the southern side of the east to west directed research trench.

The fragment depicts the head and the neck fragment of a young man. Its measurements: Height of the head: 180 mm, total height: 253 mm.

The raw material is compact limestone with inclusions. The face is triangular, framed from above by cropped hair. The forehead is high without the trace of frowning. The almond-shaped eyes are finely cut. He has sharp eyelids and brows. The pupil and the iris are not clearly visible in the eyes. The sharp nose is injured at the lower part. Only the right shell-shaped large ear has survived, the left one has worn off. The lips are finely arched. The upper lip is narrow, the lower one is thicker. The chin is rounded. No trace of beard can be seen on the chin. The frontal part of the neck is smooth, the back side is rough and ends in a rounded bolster. The hair is indicated with short chisel incisions.

The head is raised, the face is austere and stately, the eyes stare upwards into the distance. The elaboration is somewhat rough but reflects the work of a skilled carver.

There are three possibilities to be considered at the reconstruction of the total of the three-dimensional statue from which our fragment came:

a) According to the first theory it could have belonged to a grave monument where the head was three-dimensional. In this respect, the depictions in the tondo⁵ grave reliefs offer analogues where one or two portraits appear in the form of a bust either in three dimensions and/or in a relief form. The chest is often depict-

ed in a relief form, while the head is three-dimensional. This can be seen for example in a tondo from Graz,⁶ from Wels,⁷ from St Michael, from Friesach (Fig. 5).⁸

Our fragment might have come from such a tondo. It is implied by the fact that wear and erosion can be observed in the place of the left ear and not breakage. This would mean that the man on the left side of the tondo turned toward his companion exposing his left side and also left ear to the deteriorating effect of the weather and the millennia. This approach, however, is disturbed by the fact that a bolster was carved at the nape of the head fragment which would have no role if the head were continued in a relief-shaped chest part in the tondo.

b) The next theory seems to be more probable. Accordingly it was a grave monument regarding its original function, a statue inserted into the monument.⁹

The most prominent example of this solution is the reconstructed grave monument of Prisciana from Sempeter,¹⁰ where the three-dimensional sculptures of three seated figures can be seen in the *aedicula* of the grave construction (Fig. 6) Another three dimensional sculpture we can see in a grave monument in Graz.¹¹ This supposition is supported by the bolster.

In this case, the bolster at the necks of the grave statues in the niche could be the point where the statues were abutted on the back wall of the *aedicula*.

The existence of a bolster has been observed on several statue fragments,¹² from Aquincum, and from Dunapentele (Intercisa) its function, however, is not clear. It is highly probably that similar supports were used on statues inserted in niches and not on ones which are free from all the sides.

In the above examples we dealt with grave monuments where the eyes are not directed on the viewer but look beyond him into philosophic distances.

The find circumstances should also be considered. As it has been described we stand at the south-eastern corner of the legionary fortress from the 2nd and 3rd centuries where the late Roman fort built in the second half of the 4th century was adjusted to the corner of the earlier fort.¹³ At this point, the stones of grave monuments found in the neighbourhood were used for the construction of the late Roman wall across ditch No. 1. of the earlier defence system. Several stone slabs of grave monuments with relief depictions were used for the wall of the ditch and the foundation of the new fort wall. One of these slabs might have belonged to our grave statue fragment. The building material of secondary use was probably transported to the scene of the construction along the *via sagularis*, still in use at

that time. A fragment of the dissembled grave monument, the head was found at this point during the excavation of the road.

c) According to the third possibility the fragment could be identified as a monument of the emperor cult. The relative closeness of the *principia* and the neighbouring *tribunus laticlavus* palace may support this idea as the original site of the statue.

The stylistic analysis of the statue fragment delineated a relatively well defined chronological period for the creation of the statue. It is the late Severus period and the 2nd third of the 3rd century. The short military style hair combed back, the almond-shaped eyes, the depiction of the iris and the pupil together with the shape of the eyelids became dominant in stone statues in this period.

Considering the possibilities, we may identify a portrait of one of the three young and teenager emperors in the head fragment.

The first, less probable is Septimus Alexander who was deified in 238 after his violent death, but on the statuettes he is bearded.¹⁴

The most probable is the portrait of emperor Gordianus III, who died after a few days of ruling in 244 and was soon deified.¹⁵ (Fig. 7–8)

The third, less probable possibility is Philippus Minor who died a violent death in 249 after a few years spent on the throne. In his case the hair style is always asymmetrical on the survived portraits. On the left, the hair is combed over the forehead.¹⁶

On our statue the hair is nearly totally symmetrical on the forehead.

As we can see there are several possibilities for the interpretation of the statue head. Both a grave monument and a statue of the emperor cult could be accepted. We do not have enough information as yet to make an ultimate choice between either of the solutions.

NOTES

1. Az 1981 es év régészeti kutatásai. (Excavations of the Year 1981). RégFüz 35. 1982. 30–38.
2. Special thanks to Krisztina Szirmai to call my attention to this artefact.
3. RégFüz 35. 1982. 69.3. 31.
4. SZIRMAI 1999. 54., Kat. Nr. 34.
5. ERDÉLYI 1974. 57.
6. SCHOBBER 1927. 149., 171/338 Abb.
7. CSIR III. 3. 53., 39/68.
8. SCHOBBER 1927. 145–146., 166/331 Abb; CSIR II. 2. 11., 2/107. Taf., 15., 6/114. Taf.
9. ERDÉLYI 1974. 101.
10. KLEMENC–KOLŠEK–PETRU 1982. 14.
11. SCHOBBER 1927. 194–195., 203 Abb.
12. In collection of Budapest Historical Museum (BTM) we can find a marble had inv. No.: BTM 69.1.3 and a limestone had inv. No.: BTM 99.1.2, both from Aquincum. In the collection of the Hungarian National Museum a limestone had inv. No.: MNM 18.1904.1 and a marble had inv. No.: MNM 62.116.1. from Intercisa.
13. RégFüz 35. 1982. 69/3, 69/17.
14. AUSSTELLUNG 1983. Alexander Severus (222–235) Paris, Louvre 53., 17. Abb.
15. WEGNER 1979. 13.p., Taf.:1–9.
16. WEGNER 1979. 42., Taf.: 17–20.

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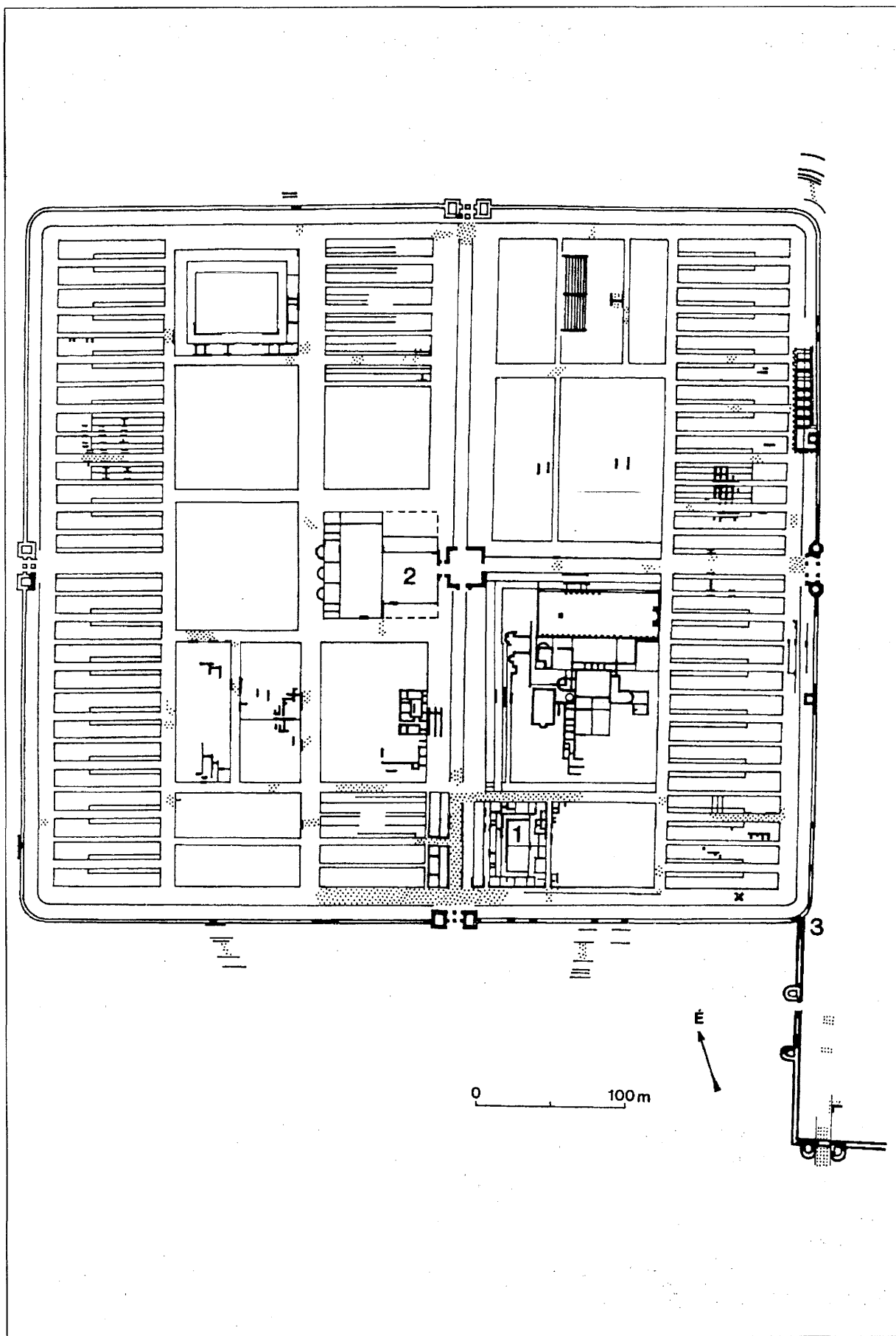


Fig. 1. The legionary fortress of Aquincum: 1. House of tribunus, 2. Principia, X site of the head, 3. Place of 1981

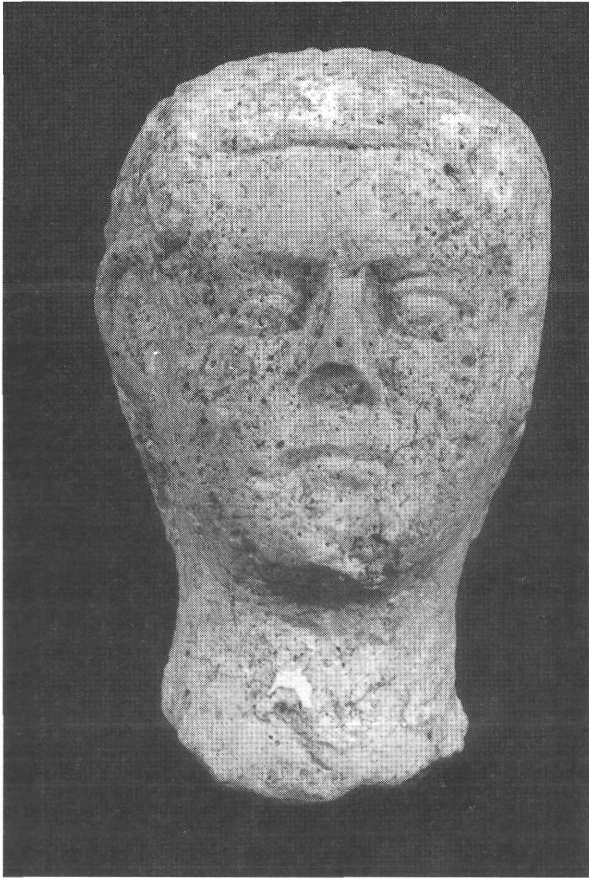


Fig. 2. Stone statue head fragment, front side

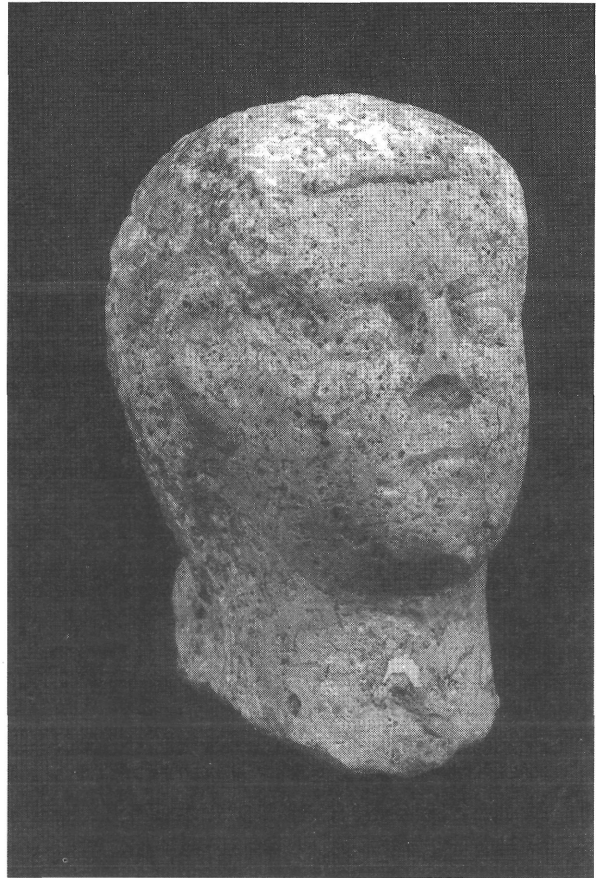


Fig. 3. Stone statue head fragment, left side

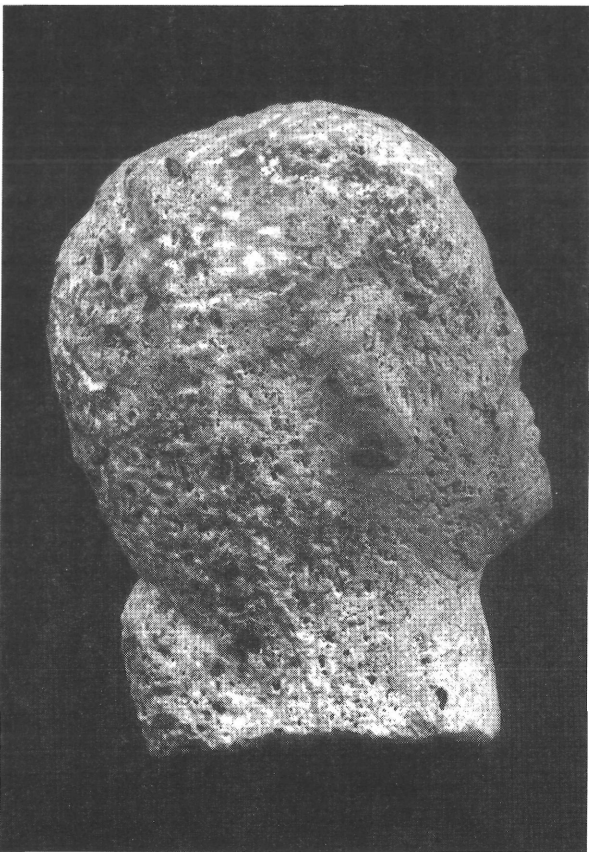


Fig. 4. Stone statue head fragment, right side



Fig. 5. Grave relief with tondo form St. Michael from Friesach



Fig. 6. Reconstructed grave monument of Prisciana from Šempeter

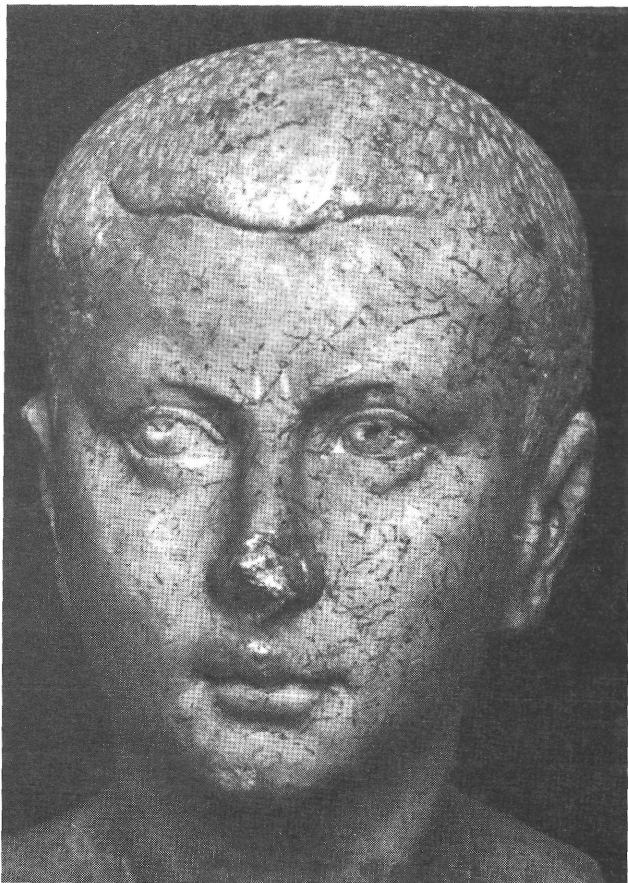
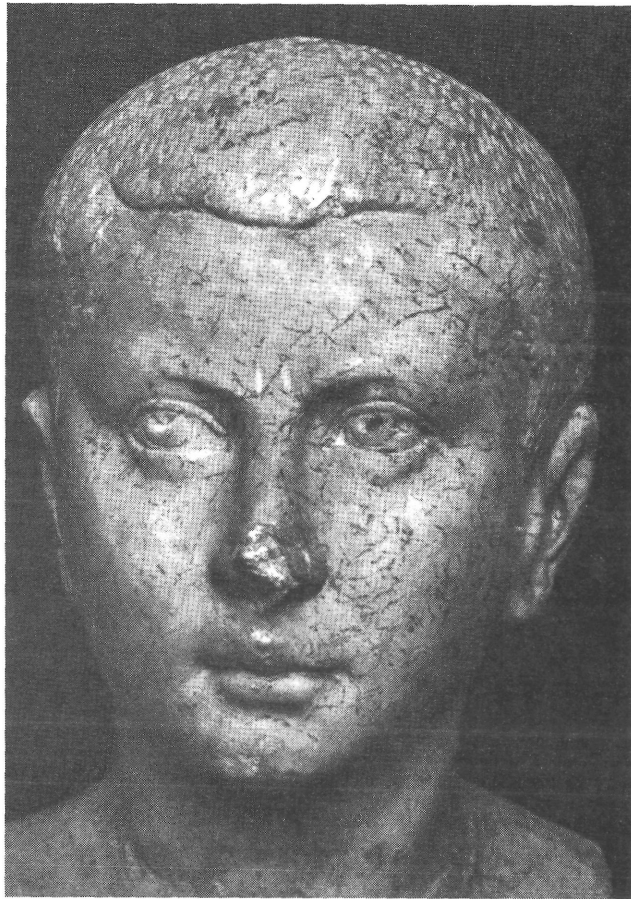


Fig. 7.- 8. The portrait of emperor Gordianus III, Rom Palazzo dei Conservatori Nr. 995.