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Gabrielle Kremer – Eduard Pollhammer – Julia Kopf – Franziska Beutler (Hrsg.)

## **ZEIT(EN) DES UMBRUCHS**

Akten des 17. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum provinzialrömischen  
Kunstschaffen  
Wien – Carnuntum, 16.–21. Mai 2022



Veröffentlichungen aus den Landessammlungen Niederösterreich  
Nr. 7

GABRIELLE KREMER – EDUARD POLLHAMMER – JULIA KOPF –  
FRANZISKA BEUTLER (HRSG.)

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MELISSA KAYS

## MONUMENTS OF AURELIA PAULINA AND HER PORTRAYAL OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN ROMAN ASIA MINOR<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Few women embody life during a period of social transition more than Aurelia Paulina of *Perge* in Asia Minor, a wealthy, non-senatorial woman, who was originally from *Syria*. Holding a unique position as an elite woman in the city at a time of a Syrian empress, Aurelia Paulina was well-placed to take advantage of fortuitous circumstances. A benefactress during the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, Aurelia Paulina donated a decorated nymphaeum which highlighted the links between herself, the gods, and the imperial family. Aurelia Paulina represented both her ethnic background and her cultural identity while aligning herself with the most powerful family in the Roman Empire. The building inscription highlights her as the sole benefactor of the fountain structure indicating a potential shift in attitudes towards elite female power and influence. This paper analyzes the assertion of power communicated by Aurelia Paulina's monuments and the unique dress choices conveying her Syrian ethnic identity.

### BACKGROUND

In researching elite benefactresses in the Roman Empire, one would be hard pressed to underestimate the contributions made by Aurelia Paulina in *Perge*, Anatolia. A native of *Syria*, Aurelia Paulina moved to *Perge* in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and was granted citizenship by emperor Commodus<sup>2</sup>. Embracing her new surroundings and identity, Aurelia Paulina took on roles as priestess of Artemis Pergaia, as well as priestess of the imperial cult<sup>3</sup>. Artemis Pergaia was the tutelary deity of *Perge*, and appears frequently in statuary depictions and inscriptions in Aurelia Paulina's structure and in numerous others. Aurelia Paulina's most notable donation to the city of *Perge* came in the form of a nymphaeum in the courtyard outside the city gates, built between AD 198 and 211<sup>4</sup>. Mimicking Plancia Magna, another notable local benefactress of the early second century who donated an extraordinary gate complex complete with status niches, Aurelia Paulina chose the *scaenae frons* design for the nymphaeum, filling her niches with intentionally chosen figures<sup>5</sup>.

### FEMALE BENEFACTION

Of course, women were not always able to commission massive gate complexes and fountains. This evolution of financial and social power grew over time, and was often reserved for the most elite and dynamic women who held connections with the political elites and historically were established within their local communities. There was no set path which every ancient benefactress followed, but there were hurdles which had to be overcome.

Emily Hemelrijk is a leading expert in the examination of women's roles in elite benefaction, having compiled extensive research and data to determine trends within the Latin West<sup>6</sup>. During

<sup>1</sup> This paper is part of the doctoral research project, »Exploring the social mobility and influence of women in Roman public life from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD«, University of York, under the supervision of Maureen Carroll, whom I thank for her support and feedback. All drawings are my own.

<sup>2</sup> McManus (web).

<sup>3</sup> Longfellow 2014/2015.

<sup>4</sup> Longfellow 2011.

<sup>5</sup> McManus (web).

<sup>6</sup> Hemelrijk 2004; Hemelrijk 2015; Hemelrijk – Woolf 2013.

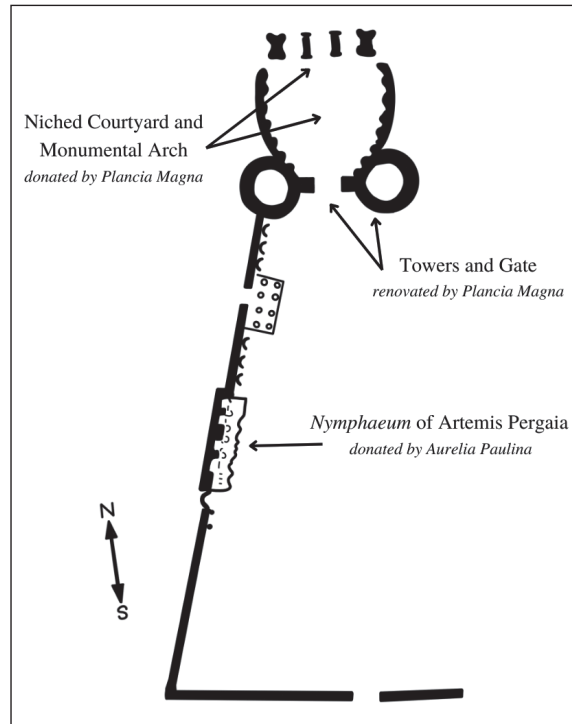
the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, female benefaction surged to new heights as women were encountering new legal and financial freedoms<sup>7</sup>. In researching elite female benefaction, archaeologists are able to gain information regarding a woman's wealth, status, and position within the local and broader societies along with her motivation to give public donations<sup>8</sup>. Women could also be found as patrons of festivals and games, but these leave behind less concrete evidence, and thus are not the focus of the expenditures in this paper<sup>9</sup>.

When it comes to the basic motivation for elite benefaction, and particularly benefaction by elite women, scholars have suggested a variety of interpretations. Diana Ng, for example, suggests two potential explanations, contrasting the desire to be commemorated with the societal pressure felt by the elite during the outpouring of public giving<sup>10</sup>. Some benefactresses may have been seeking imperial favour or continuing family tradition, though we must bear in mind that this explanation rescinds some of the agency of these elite women through placing their motivation on relatives who were likely men<sup>11</sup>.

Whether it was used to appeal for political influence or was decreed by local powers, benefaction led to increased independence and opportunities for elite women<sup>12</sup>. There were varying opinions on the practice though, as the emperor Antoninus Pius did not hesitate to celebrate structural donations while frowning upon the less fundamental public festivals<sup>13</sup>. Though the emperor may have preferred building donations, the non-elite public were to benefit regardless of the form of the donation. This elucidates why statues honoring benefactors were set up across Roman cities, as the non-elite citizens hoped to garner favor and hopefully benefit from additional donations<sup>14</sup>. These honorary statues provide excellent evidence for researchers about dress and the virtues and values of the benefactresses whom other women were hoping to emulate.

## BENEFACTRESSES IN PERGE

Before addressing Aurelia Paulina's nymphaeum and her statue (which was thought to have been placed centrally on the structure, below the relief pediment), it would be worthwhile to provide a brief background on the earlier benefactress Plancia Magna and the similarities Aurelia Paulina shared with her predecessor. Plancia Magna, an Italian native of senatorial status due to her family's prominence in Asia Minor and Rome, was an active benefactress earlier in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century



1 Perge gate and nymphaeum complexes (illustration by author, after B. F. McManus, VRoma Project)

<sup>7</sup> McCullough 2015, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Hemelrijk 2004, 217–219, 234–235.

<sup>9</sup> Ng 2015, 102; Zuiderhoek 2009, 86.

<sup>10</sup> Ng 2015, 102.

<sup>11</sup> Hemelrijk 2004, 217–218; Meyers 2012, 145; Ng 2015, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Pobjoy 2000, 79; Zuiderhoek 2009, 120–121.

<sup>13</sup> Ng 2015, 103.

<sup>14</sup> Hemelrijk – Woolf 2013, 483; Ng 2015, 104.

AD, 80–90 years prior to Aurelia Paulina, donating a monumental gate complex which permitted entrance to the southern side of the city of *Perge* (fig. 1)<sup>15</sup>.

While Aurelia Paulina's inscriptions are purely in Greek, Plancia Magna chose to inscribe her gate complex in both Greek and Latin<sup>16</sup>. This potentially indicates that during Plancia Magna's era of benefaction, it was seen as beneficial to link oneself to the Roman Empire through utilizing the Latin language in inscriptions, while utilizing *Perge*'s native Greek to be inclusive for local community members. Perhaps by the time that Aurelia Paulina was an active community member in *Perge*, there was less of an expectation to include Latin in local inscriptions. It is worth noting the inscription choices made by Plancia Magna, as they are unique in wording structure, and unseen in other statue bases commissioned by women. Rather than allowing herself to be defined by her relationship to her male relatives, Plancia Magna switches roles and names her father and brother by their relationship to her<sup>17</sup>. This centres Plancia Magna within the conversation, and subtly highlights her dominant role in the family and in the community.

κτίστ]ης  
Μ.] Π[λ]άνκιος Ουᾶρος  
πα]τὴρ Πλανκίας Μάγνης  
Περγαῖος<sup>18</sup>

»The Founder, Marcus Plancius Varus, father of Plancia Magna. A Pergean«<sup>19</sup>.

κτίστης  
Γ. Πλάνκιος Ουᾶρος  
ἀδελφὸς  
Πλανκίας Μάγνης  
Περγαῖος<sup>20</sup>

»The Founder, Gaius Plancius Varus, brother of Plancia Magna. A Pergean«<sup>21</sup>.

In terms of dress of their respective statues, Plancia Magna follows the standard Large Herculeum style, which makes the later Aurelia Paulina's dress choices even more interesting<sup>22</sup>. The Large Herculeum statue type was defined by a dropped hip, an arm across her chest grasping the mantle fabric, and was most often found veiled<sup>23</sup>. This style was popularized in the eastern Roman Empire and, according to Jane Fejfer, was used to symbolize marriage and motherhood (fig. 2)<sup>24</sup>. Christiane Vorster provides a contrasting view and states that the type is reminiscent of male statue types which were used to emphasize a strong education and self-assuredness<sup>25</sup>.

Both of these women were connected to elite family members, as Plancia Magna's father was M. Plancius Varus, and was distinguished as a founder of the city of *Perge* along with her brother C. Plancius Varus<sup>26</sup>. Plancia Magna's marriage to Roman senator C. Iulius Cornutus Tertullus would have sealed the deal in creating a powerful legacy within *Perge*<sup>27</sup>. Aurelia Paulina found

<sup>15</sup> Gatzke 2020, 385. 390; McManus (web).

<sup>16</sup> McManus (web).

<sup>17</sup> Boatwright 1991, 255.

<sup>18</sup> I.Perge 108.

<sup>19</sup> Translated by Gatzke 2020, 387.

<sup>20</sup> I.Perge 109.

<sup>21</sup> Translated by Gatzke 2020, 388.

<sup>22</sup> Fejfer 2008, 367.

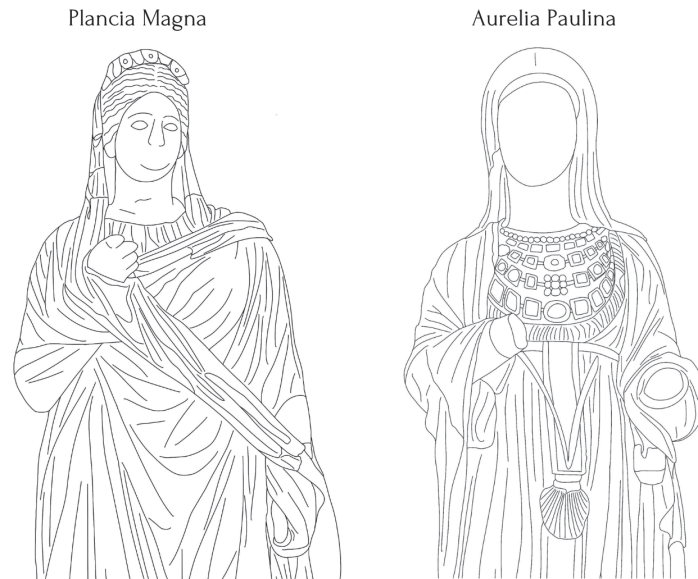
<sup>23</sup> Long 2014, 82–83.

<sup>24</sup> Fejfer 2008, 342.

<sup>25</sup> Vorster 2008, 120.

<sup>26</sup> Gatzke 2020, 387.

<sup>27</sup> Gatzke 2020, 390.



2 Plancia Magna and Aurelia Paulina, comparison (illustration by author)

herself in *Perge* following her marriage to Aquilus from *Sillyon*, who was also very wealthy and involved in the priesthood of the imperial cult in *Perge*<sup>28</sup>. These slight differences surely shaped their views and decisions when it came to donating the *Perge* gate complex and nearby nymphaeum.

Though there are plenty of instances where Plancia Magna and Aurelia Paulina differ, there are notable similarities between the two women as well. Spatially, it is worth noting that Plancia Magna's gate complex stands very close to Aurelia Paulina's nymphaeum (see fig. 1). The inspiration from the earlier benefactress is clear and the connection between the two structures could not be missed. Longfellow addresses similar fountains, and concludes that the placement of new water features near to earlier benefactions emphasized historical relevance while creating a contrast to the previous patron(s)<sup>29</sup>. Aurelia Paulina's decision to construct the nymphaeum in the *scaenae frons* design takes a direct note from Plancia Magna's book, as the gate complex also utilizes this format. In terms of the roles the women held in *Perge*, both of the benefactresses were also priestesses of Artemis and the imperial cult<sup>30</sup>. In fact, they both linked themselves to the reigning empress in their donations. Plancia Magna depicts herself in a nearly identical manner to the statue of the empress Sabina, wife of Hadrian, in her gate complex, while Aurelia Paulina creates links with the empress Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus, throughout the fountain complex.

## MOTIVATION

Following the background on earlier benefactress Plancia Magna, one is able to better understand Aurelia Paulina's direct motivations and connections within the city of *Perge* and throughout the larger Roman Empire by inspecting the statues and inscriptions in the monumental fountain complex. One of the best places to gain an understanding of her motivations is through the study of the inscriptions found on the nymphaeum. The inscription below is particularly championed, as it is one of the few examples where historians can determine that Aurelia Paulina was granted citizenship during her lifetime:

<sup>28</sup> McManus (web).

<sup>29</sup> Longfellow 2012, 133.

<sup>30</sup> McManus (web).

»Aurelia Paulina, priestess for life under asylum-granting Artemis Pergaia, daughter of Apellas the son of Dionysus and Aelia Tertulla, formerly the priestess of the imperial cult in the city of Sillyum alongside her deceased husband Aquilius the son of Kidramuas, was presented with Roman citizenship by Commodus. She built and inaugurated this hydreion and all its ornamentation at her own expense.«<sup>31</sup>

The following inscription was used to create links to the city of *Perge* through honouring their tutelary deity. It reveals that Aurelia Paulina dedicated the fountain structure to the goddess Artemis Pergaia and the presiding imperial family, which was led by Septimius Severus, his wife Julia Domna, and their two sons. The link to the imperial family was similarly included in order to elevate Aurelia Paulina's rank in the eyes of other local and distant elites. This kind of strategic dedication was common, as it meant that the apparent selfless giving of funds for a monumental building could yield benefits for the benefactor in a number of ways.

θεᾷ Ἀρτέμιδι Περγαία  
 ἀσύλῳ· καὶ  
 Αὐτοκράτορσι Καίσαρσι  
 Λ. Σεπτίμῳ Σεουήρῳ Περ-  
 τίνακι Σεβαστῶι· καὶ Μάρκῳ  
 Αὐρ. Ἀντωνίνῳ Σεβ. [[καὶ]]  
 [[Π. Σεπτίμῳ Γέτῳ Καίσαρ]]  
 καὶ Ἰουλίᾳ Δόμνῃ· Σεβ.  
 μητρὶ Κάστρων  
 καὶ τῶι σύμπαντι οἴκῳ  
 τῶν Σεβαστῶν  
 καὶ τῇ γλυκυτάτῃ πατρίδι<sup>32</sup>

»To the goddess Artemis Pergaia  
 and the Emperors Caesars Lucius Septimius Severus Pertinax Augustus  
 and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus  
 and [Publius Septimius Geta Caesar]  
 and Julia Domna Augusta, mother of the Camps  
 and to the entire house of the Augusti  
 and to the sweetest fatherland.«<sup>33</sup>

As much of this behaviour fits the standard expectations for elite benefactresses, one may wonder what was unique about Aurelia Paulina's actions. This is where the statue of Aurelia Paulina found in the nymphaeum plays a major role in understanding her access to social power and elite connections. Archaeologists have been examining this self-representation in her fountain complex since its discovery in 1968, and have commented on the benefactress' choice of dress<sup>34</sup>. While Plancia Magna (who donated between AD 119 and 122), chose to depict herself in the traditional garb of a Roman matron, appearing respectable and virtuous, Aurelia Paulina went against this standard Roman depiction in favour of non-traditional and non-Roman garments. A number of questions arise from this choice of dress, which this paper hopes to address in new ways.

<sup>31</sup> Translation by Longfellow 2011, 186.

<sup>32</sup> I.Perge 196.

<sup>33</sup> Translation by Longfellow 2011, 168.

<sup>34</sup> Aristodemou 2013.

## DRESS AS A SYMBOL

Currently the research on understanding dress as a nonverbal communication of identity, status, and motivation is led by researchers such as Maureen Carroll, Ursula Rothe, and Jane Fejfer. The status of ›others‹ in the Roman Empire is examined through a variety of methods, not limited to dress representation, ancient texts, inscriptions, or community groups<sup>35</sup>. Before discussing the items of dress chosen by the benefactress Aurelia Paulina, it is worthwhile to investigate what dress could indicate for a woman of status in the Roman Empire. We discuss later how each choice made by the benefactress would have been intentional, and how this would have been true for many Romans at the time. Dress was crucial to defining oneself as an individual in cities where there were already plenty of unique identities<sup>36</sup>. Beyond categorizing oneself as a singular entity, dress would also provide the opportunity to establish a connection to a group. This could be a religious, ethnic, or communal group, and even the smallest accessory could be used to formulate connections and motivations within the local society<sup>37</sup>.

During the expansion of the Roman Empire, communities on the fringe of the Empire were forced to reckon with how to retain their cultural identities while making lifestyle adjustments to display their newfound Roman identities as well. Facing loss of their culture, Roman ›others‹ strived to innovate and realign with their ethnic origins to preserve their history and identities. Often depicted as inferior and barbaric to the Roman citizens, the indigenous peoples were battling on multiple fronts to be both heard and seen<sup>38</sup>.

In a way, the non-native Romans were seen, but often in untoward positions. If the Roman values were humbleness and virtuosity (at least for Roman women), then witnessing a prisoner or captive in indigenous dress would have emphasized a notion of otherness<sup>39</sup>. While Romans were taught not to display self-indulgent decadence, the traditional Persian dress was luxurious, threatening the morals of the Empire<sup>40</sup>. As time progressed, these views became less relevant as the non-Roman conquered peoples were increasingly integrated into Roman society.

An example of attitudes toward the integration of foreigners in the Roman Empire is depicted by Jane Fejfer's analysis of the ever changing status of the Roman toga. Fejfer explains that the clothing was used to emphasize citizenship, an exclusive status reserved for free Roman citizens<sup>41</sup>. Over the first two decades AD, Roman citizenship was estimated to have grown from 6 million to potentially 60 million people, diluting the need for a pride in this no longer exclusive status<sup>42</sup>. As the toga became a mainstream article of clothing due to the increase in Roman citizenship, high-ranking officials sought to find new means to separate themselves out as elite members of society, and invented a new banded toga which is found sparsely within statue depictions<sup>43</sup>. This evolution indicates that while foreigners were increasingly integrated into Roman society through gaining Roman citizenship, there were lasting prejudices that led native Romans to separate themselves out from the masses.

While Ursula Rothe agrees that this narrative was true during the Roman Imperial period, she points out that the toga actually began as the default garment for all Romans (men, women, and children), and it was not until the late Republic that draping pieces such as the *stola* (smock, for married women) and the *palla* (women's cloak) came into use and the toga took on masculine attributes<sup>44</sup>. This is important to keep in mind, as researchers continue to interpret the ways that the symbolism around the toga changed over time.

<sup>35</sup> Carroll 2020, 169.

<sup>36</sup> Carroll 2020, 169.

<sup>37</sup> Carroll 2020, 169.

<sup>38</sup> Carroll 2020, 171.

<sup>39</sup> Carroll 2020, 175.

<sup>40</sup> Carroll 2020, 175.

<sup>41</sup> Fejfer 2008, 190.

<sup>42</sup> Fejfer 2008, 190.

<sup>43</sup> Fejfer 2008, 192.

<sup>44</sup> Rothe 2019, 37–41. 163–164.

When it comes to gendered differences within ethnic dress display in the Empire, men tended to display Roman military uniforms on their funerary monuments, reflecting their contribution to the Empire<sup>45</sup>. As women did not hold these military roles, they were able to be more creative in deciding which cultural identity they wanted to display on monuments erected before and after their deaths. Maureen Carroll emphasizes the importance of women's roles in carrying on the traditional values communicated by indigenous dress throughout the Roman Empire<sup>46</sup>. Ursula Rothe shares examples from further afield in the Roman Empire (Africa and Asia) which suggest that men were more in touch with the westernizing world, while women would often be found occupying domestic spaces<sup>47</sup>. Due to men and women's existence in these separate spaces, it was expected that women would continue indigenous traditions in the private spaces and perhaps branch out when in public<sup>48</sup>. Rothe debates whether it was women's choice to ›protect‹ their heritage and culture, or if there was an expectation placed upon them to uphold traditional values during waves of Romanization<sup>49</sup>.

A really interesting point is made by David Noy, who discusses the impact of indigenous Romans (particularly freedpeople) assimilating Roman dress in funerary contexts in the city of Rome<sup>50</sup>. While the focus of the current paper is not on either freedpeople or funerary reliefs, a relevant point that Noy makes is that those who sought to display themselves as Romans rather than ›others‹ through the dress on their reliefs lost their native identities and became invisible as foreigners in the Roman Empire<sup>51</sup>. With this knowledge in mind, we can even better appreciate examples such as Aurelia Paulina's, as her iconography aids in analyzing the impact of Roman expansion on peripheral regions. Of course, Aurelia Paulina held a social status where her foreign origins would not render her shameful of her background, whereas freedpersons may have associated their ethnic origin with their slave status, leading to a very clear understanding of their motivations for blending into Roman society.

Depictions such as Aurelia Paulina's aid in the understanding of how identity politics evolved between the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. Since Syrian natives were often looked down upon for their non-Roman traditions, evidence of indigenous people holding steadfast in celebrating their traditions and identity indicates a progression in attitudes toward others in the Roman world. Aurelia Paulina is an example of this in the way that she displays Syrian clothing, jewelry, and symbols alongside Greek inscriptions and also celebrates the imperial family.

## ANALYSIS OF AURELIA PAULINA'S STATUE

### Description of the statue

To begin the analysis of Aurelia Paulina's dress, it would be beneficial to describe the chosen garb without making comparisons to similarly ranked local women. This allows for a non-biased understanding of the dress which Aurelia Paulina chose in which to depict herself. Following this outline, some comparisons will be drawn to aid in interpreting the proposed motivations for Aurelia Paulina's dress choices.

Aurelia Paulina's statue displays a heavy fabric tunic which falls to the floor, barely revealing simple footwear. This base layer is covered by a stole which is situated around Aurelia Paulina's shoulders, and then supported by placement over her forearms, creating a dignified display of draped fabrics. There is no evidence of her bodily shape, suggesting that Aurelia Paulina sought to be seen as youthful but chaste in this depiction. There is a fabric piece which consists of a

<sup>45</sup> Carroll 2020, 172.

<sup>46</sup> Carroll 2020, 172.

<sup>47</sup> Rothe 2009, 70–71.

<sup>48</sup> Rothe 2009, 70–71; Schoss 1996.

<sup>49</sup> Rothe 2009, 71.

<sup>50</sup> Noy 2000.

<sup>51</sup> Noy 2000, 157.



3 Statue of Aurelia Paulina (illustration by author)

belt which is placed on Aurelia Paulina's waist, and a vertical segment of fabric which appears to have a fringed threading at the bottom. She dons a head covering, accessorized with at least one band above her forehead. The layers of the head covering continue past her shoulders, and extend to knee length at the rear of the statue. There are cracks within the statue which briefly interrupt the garment, but the folds of the fabric are consistent on both sides of the crack to ensure that viewers can confidently determine that this garment is made up of one piece of material. Her facial features are youthful but serious; the representation is of Aurelia Paulina in younger years.

The jewelry worn in this statue is large and varied, extending to cover most of her chest (fig. 3). A number of unique beads are used to make up each strand on Aurelia Paulina's necklace, and it appears that there is a rope-like necklace falling at the bottom of the layered jewelry. This rope piece could potentially

be separate from the jewelry entirely, and part of the fabric of her apparel. There is a unique shell necklace which falls to Aurelia Paulina's waist, lying upon the piece of fabric mentioned above.

Each of the items described above were very intentionally chosen. The *nymphaeum* was strategically placed near to one of the main entrances to the city of *Perge*, and thus would have received a great deal of attention from citizens of *Perge* as well as any visitors entering the city from this direction. With this exposure in mind, Aurelia Paulina would have utilized the opportunity to elevate her social standing, make connections with her local elite neighbors, and display herself and her familial links in a manner which commanded respect and honor.

### Tunic

The first piece to investigate on this statue of Aurelia Paulina is the tunic worn by the benefactress. It does not appear to be anything out of the ordinary, as it is floor-length and appears to be a single piece of fabric. There is a break in the statue which could lead to interpretations of a break in the tunic, or an additional layering technique, but upon further examination the fabric does appear to be in one piece. It is worth noting that this style does not closely match Palmyrene statues of women, as they often have another layer which is fastened on the shoulder<sup>52</sup>. It could be said that Aurelia Paulina's tunic is reflective of the Roman style, but it is also possible to interpret the layering in other ways once the smaller friezes from Aurelia Paulina's *nymphaeum* are discussed.

### Fringed fabric

The next piece of Aurelia Paulina's garb to be discussed is the fabric which lies beneath the shell pendant discussed above. This fabric appears to be cinched around Aurelia Paulina's waist, with a singular section falling to the benefactress' knees. At first glance, this accessory does not appear to be an important accessory, but there is a detail of this fabric which requires further analysis. At the bottom of this band of fabric, there is a clear fringe, which could be used to link the benefactress again to her Syrian roots. Syrian portraiture often displayed fringed fabric and it would not be a surprise that Aurelia Paulina chose to connect to her cultural beginnings in this way. In the illustration of the relief from *Palmyra*, the fringe can be found on the ends of the sleeves near the wrists of the woman on the right (fig. 4). If this was the intention behind the fringed piece, it would provide conclusive evidence that Aurelia Paulina was aware of the significance of using Syrian dress for her statue and that it was intentionally chosen.

<sup>52</sup> Heyn 2010, 638.



4 Palmyrene funerary relief displaying fringed sleeve (illustration by author, depicting Palmyrene funerary relief)

### Head covering

When analyzing her head covering, one may make note of the bands around her head which could be symbols of virtue and chastity if they are supposed to represent the *infulae* worn by the Vestal Virgins<sup>53</sup>. There is no visibility into Aurelia Paulina's hairstyle, which suggests that this section of the statue was not meant to draw attention, potentially adding to the idea that Aurelia Paulina sought to be seen as respectable and chaste.

Elaine Fantham discusses *infulae* in her paper »Covering the Head at Rome: Ritual and Gender«, addressing the expectations around head coverings for both men and women in pagan Rome<sup>54</sup>. Fantham discusses how priestesses outside of the city of Rome were less politicized, and thus were occasionally able to lead religious acts without the typical head coverings<sup>55</sup>. Further into this paper, Fantham outlines cases where women seen without a head covering could be considered ostentatious and attention-seeking, noting a particular instance where Sulpicius Gallus called for a divorce after he heard of his wife walking about in public without her head covered<sup>56</sup>. In defining *vittae* headbands, Fantham concludes that *vittae* carried a moral protection similar to a young boy's *bulla*, which corresponds with Aurelia Paulina's desire to portray herself as chaste and morally pure<sup>57</sup>. If *vittae* were to convey morality, the ritualistic *infulae* would be a step beyond this as they were likely uncommonly used as accessories and more often used to adorn valued altars and tombs (reflecting Greek ritual use of the similar *stemmata*)<sup>58</sup>. It seems logical that the Vestal Virgins would don these ceremonial ribbons as headbands, as representatives of chastity and devotion.

An interesting point is made by Michele George, who points out that freedwomen sporting *vittae* valued the headband as a symbol of their new free status and discordant with their previously enslaved positions<sup>59</sup>. At this point in time, the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the empress Livia had discontinued her usage of the *vittae* and it's likely that elite benefactresses like Aurelia Paulina would have followed her example, reinforcing the thought that the bands on her statue must be more sacred and ritualistic than the standard *vittae*, and were presumably *infulae*<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Fantham 2009.

<sup>54</sup> Fantham 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Fantham 2009, 159.

<sup>56</sup> Fantham 2009, 160.

<sup>57</sup> Fantham 2009, 163.

<sup>58</sup> Fantham 2009, 163.

<sup>59</sup> George 2005, 44. 49–50.

<sup>60</sup> Fantham 2009, 168.

It is possible that Aurelia Paulina is wearing the woolen *vittae* around her head, but this would mean that she missed an opportunity to convey a message, which seems unlikely. Fantham's work researching the ancient authors' usage of these two terms denotes that wearing *vittae* was so common that it would not be mentioned as anything notable within texts while *infulae* indicated ritual significance<sup>61</sup>. As Aurelia Paulina's statue was a central and symbolic piece of her benefaction, it seems highly improbable that she would choose a standard and common headpiece. Similarly ranked benefactresses within the region such as Plancia Magna are depicted without a head covering, so it would seem that Aurelia Paulina chose to depict herself with her head concealed to convey a point.

### Jewelry

The next major section of Aurelia Paulina's statue that deserves detailed analysis is the jewelry donned by the benefactress. This portion of the paper will review the heavy jewelry which lays on Paulina's chest (fig. 3), and will save a focus on the shell pendant for later examination. We first can compare Aurelia Paulina's jewelry with the jewelry, or lack of jewelry, shown in Plancia Magna's statue (fig. 2). Since she would have had similar motivations to Aurelia Paulina, Plancia Magna's statue is an excellent source of comparison in this study.



5 Palmyrene funerary relief (photo The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

These similarities only make it more interesting when one views their statue depictions next to each other, as Plancia Magna opted for a very traditional Roman representation. There is no similarity in terms of jewelry between these women, which leads one to question where Aurelia Paulina received the inspiration for the ornamentation which covers much of her upper chest. This can be answered by looking at examples of elite women from *Syria* (Aurelia Paulina's birthplace).

After establishing that Aurelia Paulina's jewelry is not representative of typical Roman women's jewelry in statuary depictions, we must look elsewhere to find comparable accessories. Much of the evidence of Syrian dress is found in *Palmyra*, due to the wealth of this region, but we must appreciate that these examples are not representative of all of *Syria*. In looking at the Palmyrene funerary relief, which is held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, one may recognise the luxurious and chunky jewelry worn by the women (fig. 5). Though their necklaces seem to be worn as one piece, the variety and intricate geometric shapes seem to match the stacked necklaces worn by Aurelia Paulina.

### Shell pendant

While most of the jewelry shown on this statue can be compared to the jewelry on Syrian statues, there is one piece which stands out from the rest. The shell pendant which falls to Aurelia

<sup>61</sup> Fantham 2009, 164.

Paulina's waist is spatially separate from the rest of the jewelry, highlighting it as an individual symbol. While there is a trend of crescent-shaped amulets found on Syrian statues, the shell worn by Aurelia Paulina is significantly different from these in shape and design<sup>62</sup>. It has been suggested that the shell is utilized to create a link to Artemis Pergaia, the tutelary deity of *Perge*<sup>63</sup>. Fejfer notes that Artemis Pergaia is known to don shell pendants, and this conclusion has been cited by a number of additional researchers<sup>64</sup>.

In preparation for this paper, the conclusion linking the shell pendant and Artemis Pergaia worked perfectly when trying to understand the symbolism highlighted by Aurelia Paulina. Upon further research, it seemed quite difficult to find depictions of Artemis Pergaia with any kind of shell symbols. Artemis could be found with a quiver and bow, moon, or various animals, but it is Aphrodite who is known to have been linked with a scalloped shell<sup>65</sup>. This was unanticipated, as Aphrodite had not been a major part of the conversation around Aurelia Paulina's shell pendant previously, but upon further research into Aphrodite (and her Egyptian counterpart Isis) in Asia Minor, the connection between the goddess and Aurelia Paulina is not as far-reaching as one may think. Aphrodite is in fact featured within the very nymphaeum which Aurelia Paulina commissioned. Additionally, as mentioned above, Aurelia Paulina sought to link herself with the empress Julia Domna, who was worshiped in Asia Minor as both Artemis or Aphrodite<sup>66</sup>.

If we are to believe that this pendant links Aurelia Paulina and Aphrodite, then there is work to be done in understanding her motivations. It is possible that Aphrodite or Isis had a larger impact on the elite women of *Perge* than previously thought. This will be investigated further in the coming years of my research, as I hope to uncover previously unnoticed links between the goddess and Aurelia Paulina.

It is worth noting that there was also the goddess Atargatis who was prominent in North Syria and is mentioned by Andreas Schmidt-Colinet<sup>67</sup>. Atargatis is linked to the sea, vegetation, and fertility while being associated with symbols such as the crescent moon, lion, and various sea life<sup>68</sup>. The Yale-French Excavations at a sanctuary in *Dura-Europos* (present-day Syria) in the early 1930s unearthed a temple dedicated to the goddess Atargatis, revealing that she had been worshiped as Artemis Azzanathkona. This would explain the similarities between the goddesses Artemis and Atargatis, though does not exactly clarify the shell pendant worn by Aurelia Paulina<sup>69</sup>. Archaeologists in *Palmyra* are often quick to link sea creatures to the goddess Atargatis, but there does not seem to be evidence of shell jewelry being associated with a connection to Atargatis. Because of this absence of the shell necklace link, which is present in depictions of Aphrodite from the Rock Sanctuary near *Sagalassos*, the author feels that there is stronger evidence that Aurelia Paulina was symbolizing a connection with Aphrodite rather than any other suggested goddess by wearing the shell pendant.

### Fringed fabric

The next piece of Aurelia Paulina's garb to be discussed is the fabric which lies beneath the shell pendant discussed above. This fabric appears to be cinched around Aurelia Paulina's waist, with a singular section falling to the benefactress' knees. At first glance, this accessory does not appear to be important, but there is a detail of this fabric which requires further analysis. At the bottom of this band of fabric, there is a clear fringe, which could be used to link the benefactress again to her Syrian roots. Syrian portraiture often displayed fringed fabric and it would not be a surprise

<sup>62</sup> Tatiana 2021.

<sup>63</sup> Fejfer 2008, 362.

<sup>64</sup> Fejfer 2008, 362.

<sup>65</sup> Bąkowska-Czerner – Czerner 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Aristodemou 2013, 2.

<sup>67</sup> Schmidt-Colinet 1991.

<sup>68</sup> Rostovtzeff 1933, 58.

<sup>69</sup> Rostovtzeff 1933, 58.

that Aurelia Paulina chose to connect to her cultural beginnings in this way. In figure 4 from *Palmyra*, the fringe can be found on the ends of the sleeves near the wrists of the woman on the right. If this was the intention behind the fringed piece, it would provide conclusive evidence that Aurelia Paulina was aware of the significance of using Syrian dress for her statue and that it was intentionally chosen.

### Frieze depictions

While this paper focuses primarily on the large statue of Aurelia Paulina found centrally in her monumental fountain complex, it is worth noting the smaller friezes of the benefactress accompanied by gods and goddesses found elsewhere in the nymphaeum. Small details which do not feature in the large statue can be explored in a different way, which may lead to more conclusive analysis.

As one can see from the smaller frieze drawings (fig. 6), Aurelia Paulina's dress choices slightly differ throughout the nymphaeum. In the drawing on the left, Aurelia Paulina is shown wearing two tunic layers, and the cloak is more visible than on the main statue. She holds a bouquet of leaves in her right hand, and an orb shaped item in her left hand. The shell pendant is visible, but it is placed higher on her body, and does not compete with the larger necklaces present on the main statue depiction. The frieze drawing on the right also shows two layers of clothing on Aurelia Paulina's body, though the cloak is difficult to determine due to the poor condition of this part of the relief. The shell pendant is visible again, matching the larger statue in placement on the benefactress' waist. There is the fabric piece which falls to Aurelia Paulina's knees, which was not visible on the frieze depiction on the left. All depictions that we have of Aurelia Paulina show her head covered, and two of them show the band of fabric around her forehead clearly.

While it is worthwhile noting what pieces are present on the frieze depictions, it is fascinating to see which items did not appear on all three images of Aurelia Paulina. It seems as though she dramatically emphasizes her Syrian jewelry in the large statue, but it is not present in the smaller depictions. The piece of fabric which cinches her waist and falls to her lower body is present in two of the depictions, but not the third – why would that be? Is it possible that the statues were carved by different artists and they left details off or were given varying instructions? This seems unlikely knowing that the building commission was quite large for the region. The differences in the tunic are also worth noting: why would Aurelia Paulina choose to be dressed in different ways throughout the fountain complex? It seems as though if she were trying to convey the strength of major relationships, she would not have herself depicted haphazardly throughout the nymphaeum.

Researchers can conclude from these three depictions that the most important symbols are the shell pendant and head covering. There are no other symbols which are on all three images which stand out as clearly as these two do. The head covering is partially a piece of the standard garb, so conveys less symbolism, but it is worth noting that Aurelia Paulina was consistent in being depicted with her head covered. This makes the shell pendant the most important and symbolic piece. There is much to be uncovered about the shell pendant, but in understanding the current literature,

Aurelia Paulina Relief 1

Aurelia Paulina Relief 2



6 Depictions of Aurelia Paulina found on reliefs at the nymphaeum (illustrations by author)

it is essential that the link between the shell pendant and Artemis Pergaia is removed in order to expose more information and conclusions about the connections between the shell pendant and Aphrodite or potentially the Near Eastern goddess Atargatis.

## CONCLUSIONS

Aurelia Paulina was a woman born in *Syria* without Roman citizenship, but she utilized her newly acquired citizenship under Commodus to draw connections between Rome and the outer provinces. She links herself to the Roman Empire directly through explicitly mentioning her citizenship in inscriptions, her roles as a priestess of Artemis and the imperial cult, and her honoring of the imperial family with the donation of the nymphaeum in their name. Aurelia Paulina's Syrian roots shine through when one takes the clothing, jewelry trends and fringed fabric featured on her statue into account. Finally, she created a beautiful and intentional connection with both regions when creating links with Julia Domna, another native Syrian who rose to prominence as empress of the Roman Empire. While the shell pendant remains somewhat a mystery in a few ways, there is evidence of shell pendants on statues from sites in *Syria* as well as Roman Egypt which demonstrates that this accessory cannot be attributed to one region, again indicating that it could be seen as a symbol of unity in the Roman Empire.

In terms of dress, the statue of Aurelia Paulina provides fascinating insight for culture in the eastern Roman Empire. Though she emphasizes her newly granted citizenship within inscriptions at the nymphaeum she donated, she links herself to her homeland through clothing and jewelry. Inspired by her ethnic connection to the Syrian empress Julia Domna and by the benefaction by earlier *Perge* benefactress Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina sought to carve out a unique and powerful name for herself and her heritage in the new Roman setting. These signs of converging cultures lead to further questions around the acceptance of foreigners within the Roman world, the impact of conveying ethnic origins publicly, and the effect that the expansion of the Empire had on acceptance and individuality within the central and the more marginal regions of the Roman world.

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