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## THE SECOND HELMETED HEAD FROM OLD NISA

By V.N. Pilipko\*

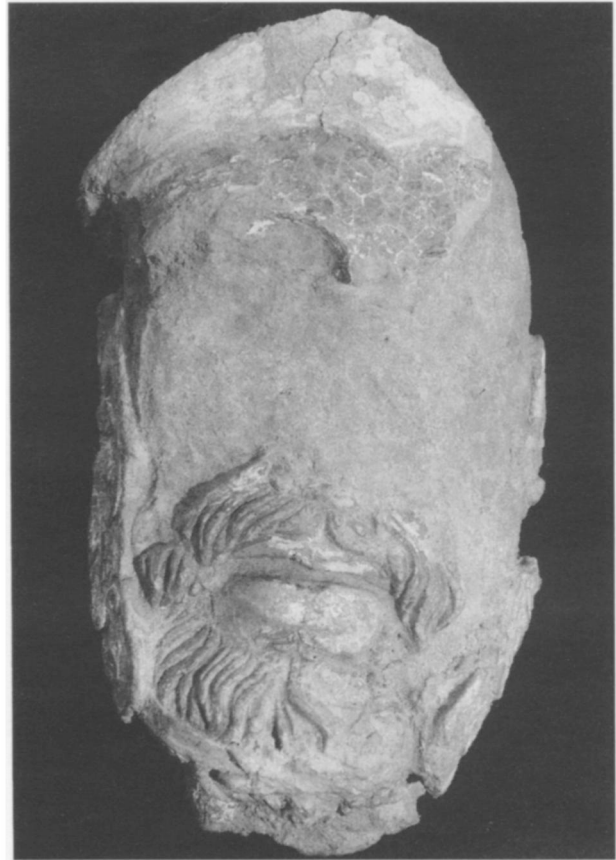
*Moscow*

Painted clay sculptures hold an important place amongst the finds from Nisa. The sizeable and stylistically homogenous sculptures were probably made by one artist, or one artistic school, and decorated the main buildings of the central complex of Old Nisa: the square hall, the round hall and the first floor of the tower-shaped structure. The highly representative collection of sculptures derives from the building with the square hall, where the largest and most important fragments were found (Pilipko 1988; 1996). During the last and final phase of excavation of this building, interesting new finds of sculptures were made, including a number of heads which were hardly identified before 1995.

The present report deals with the “second helmeted head”. It was found together with the remains of other sculptures in the so-called “white room” which occupies the northern part of the building. Based on archaeological observations, we may assume that the heavily damaged head was brought here from the square hall where originally all the pieces of sculpture were housed. The head then broke into many small fragments. As the statues decorating the square hall are homogeneous in style, manufacturing technique and size, the search for fragments belonging to one and the same statue or even one head, from a heap containing the remains of no less than five statues, proved a difficult task. In addition, some fragments were so broken that they could not be mended. These head fragments were restored by the conservator N.A. Kovaleva of the State Research Institute of Restoration, Moscow, and the author of this report.

Three large pieces made up of smaller fragments: the front part of the head, the left earflap of the helmet and a large section representing the right and lower parts of the face. The almost complete “first helmeted head” (Pilipko 1989) served as a model (Figs. 1, 2). The head could not be fully reconstructed, as the back was badly damaged.

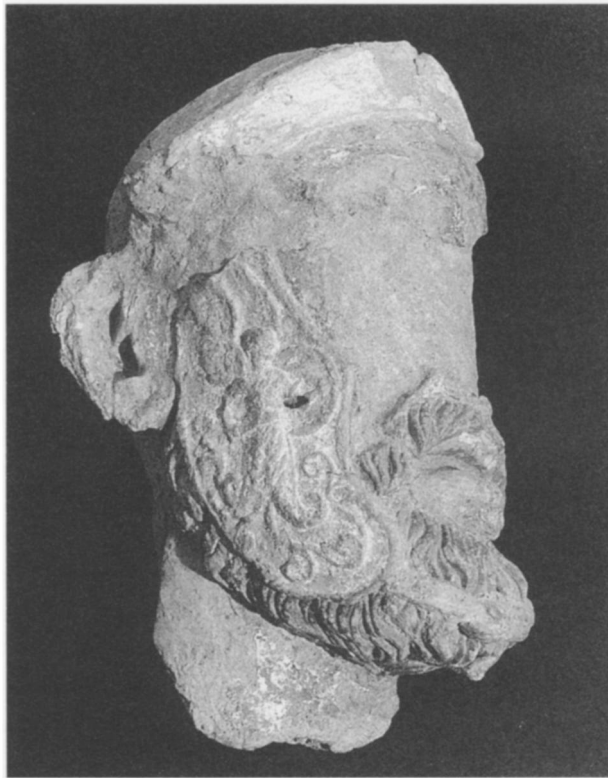
Due to the poor state of preservation the exact measurements of the head remain unknown. Its height



*Fig. 1. Head with the depiction of a fantastic creature on the earflaps.*

may have been approximately 30 cm., its width 16 cm. The statue was roughly one and a half times life size.

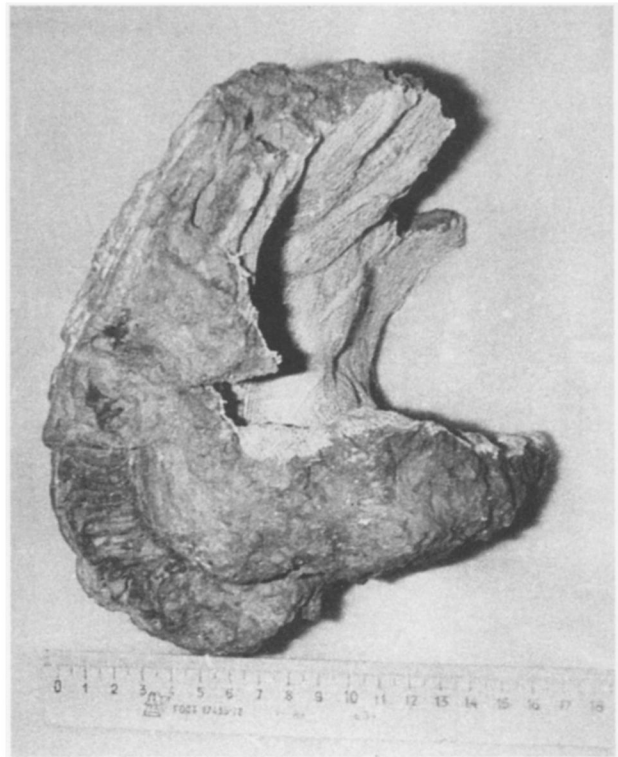
The head was hollow around the mouth and a large dent is visible from the inside (Fig. 3). This suggests that the head was made in a mould. Two different types of clay were used: a well prepared light brown clay for the outside, reinforced from the inside with a coating of grey-green clay. Around the throat the clay is 2–2.5 cm. thick. The difference in thickness suggests that these parts were made separately; the joint was then covered on the outside by the curls of the beard. Details such as



*Fig. 2. Head with the depiction of a fantastic creature on the earflaps.*

the brim of the helmet, the ears, etc., were added later. Finally, the head was painted. All the facial parts were covered with a reddish-brown colour, but the skin colour was made lighter with a white foundation. The helmet was painted white and the “leather” straps of the earflaps bright red.

This head is clearly of the same type as the “first helmeted head” although a large part is missing. It has a similar hair-do, identical moustache and beard, as well as the same type of helmet. The shape of the earflaps and the rim framing the forehead are identical. Traces of red paint appear on the base of the helmet. Each earflap is decorated with a fantastic winged creature armed with a short sword and a shield. (Figs. 4, 5). The short hair cut and bellicose look suggests a male character. The head is in profile, the shoulders are almost en face. Faint traces of clothing, in the shape of a triangular cut on the chest, are noticeable. Behind the shoulders two wings pointing upwards are shown. The legs of the figures end in volutes. From between the volutes rise two vegetable shoots which fill the remaining space on the earflaps. This figure represents one of the polymorphous



*Fig. 3. Fragment of the lower part of the head in the process of restoration. View from above. Notice, the wide interior space.*

“sprouting” and “snake-legged” creatures, characteristic of Greek mythology. They reflect a mixture of mythological themes, the idea of the tree of life and, in this context, the concept of world unity and its continuous transformation.

It is difficult to identify the character depicted here. It could perhaps represent one of the people grown from the teeth of the dragon killed by Kadmos (Graves 1992, 153–55), or it could also be the depiction of a snake-legged giant or a Triton, who in Greek art was sometimes shown with weapons. The piece is most probably of Hellenistic date.

Unfired clay sculptures decorated most official rooms of the central complex in Old Nisa. An attempt to interpret the sculptures from Nisa is difficult and would go beyond the objectives of this short report. Instead, we shall try to examine any characteristically Parthian features, as would be expected of locally produced statues found at a Parthian religious centre.

A suggestion that the helmeted head represented the head of a Parthian king seems far from certain; the same would apply to any sculpture from the square hall

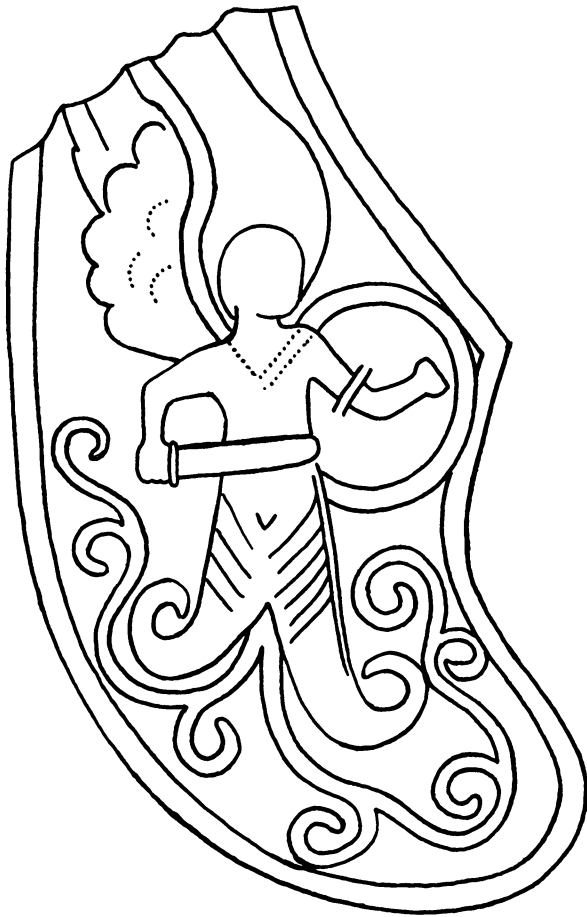


Fig. 4. The right earflap.

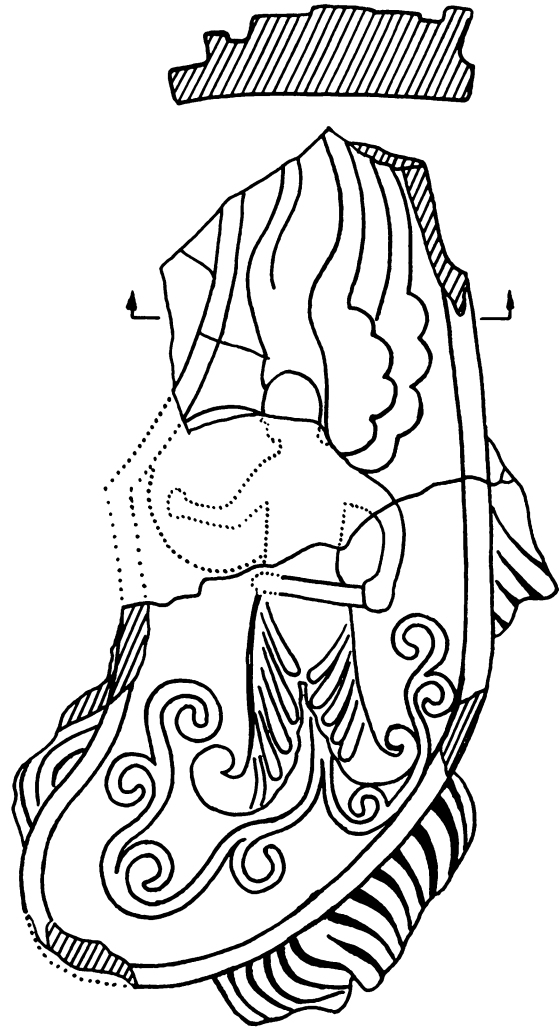


Fig. 5. The left earflap.

building at Nisa (Pugachenkova 1958, 92–93; 1978, 21). For example, the diadem, the Parthian royal emblem, and its long ties, are missing from this head and also from the other heads found at Nisa. Furthermore, the absence of earrings, characteristic for Parthian noblemen, must be noted. We should also consider a link between the male helmeted heads from Nisa and torsos dressed in Greek armour with bare legs. A Parthian king would not be depicted in such a manner.

The helmeted head seems entirely Greek and if it had been found at a Hellenistic site in the Near East or the Mediterranean, there would be no reason to assume a Parthian origin for it (Bieber 1955, Richter 1965, Smith 1991). Depictions of “sprouting” and “snake-legged” deities are known in Greek art and mythology (Boardman 1994, 269–70, fig. 7.47). At Nisa, such a depiction appears on the earflap of a Greek-type helmet. Such fantastic creatures were fairly widespread in the Near East in the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic period.

A Triton is seen on a bronze coin of the Greco-Indian ruler Hippostrates (Bopearachchi 1991, pl. 66, serie 12, no. 10); a similar image decorates golden plates from the cemetery of Tillya-Tepe (Sarianidi 1985, 147, ill. 86) and the belt buckles of the statue of the Saka satrap Chastana (Rosenfield 1967, 181–83). A gem with the depiction of a Triton showing stylistic similarities with the emblem on the earflap was published by P. Callieri (1995, 304, fig. 19). Tritons appear also in the architectural decoration of India (Ingholt 1957, fig. 390; Czuma 1986, N 8, 43); and at Butkara, the relief of a Triton was found on the pediment of a monumental building (Faccenna 1964, pl. CDXCV). Finally, similar characters appear on the so-called palettes from Gandhara alongside scenes, which obviously illustrate Greek legends, such as Apollo and Daphne, Paris and

Aphrodite, Artemis and Actaeon, etc. (Francfort 1979). We may conclude that Greek myths were well known in Gandhara, Bactria and, probably, in the whole of the Middle East. The motifs on the earflaps from Nisa appear to be the earliest examples from Central Asia. The clay sculpture from the square hall dates from the second to the beginning of the first century B.C.

In conclusion, the helmeted head from Nisa followed Greek artistic traditions and should not be seen as a depiction of a Parthian king or a Parthian in general; it is probably a representation of a divine figure.

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