During the archaeological investigation of the villa with peristyle in Mediana in 2001, an exquisite marble head of small dimensions\(^1\) stands out among other discovered material. It was first attributed to the goddess Artemis.\(^2\) Together with other significant findings from the Mediana site, the head is, nowadays, exhibited at The National museum of Niš, with some other fragmentary and unidentified sculptures. The question of its identification was since raised only once, on the occasion of the publication of the catalogue of the Niš museum collection, where she was associated with the goddess Isis–Fortuna.\(^3\) Having in mind that this head is preserved just in fragments and being just part of a sculptural representation with no reliable attributes, the question of its identification is a difficult task. It was possible to determine, using stylistic traits’ analysis that the statuette was made under the influence of Hellenistic cult sculpture, namely that it followed the rules of the school of Praxiteles. On the other hand, the iconographic elements, in particular that of the hairstyle, lead us to the conclusion that this statuette could represent one of two Roman goddesses, either Venus or Diana.

Key words. – Artemis/Diana, Aphrodite/Venus, Mediana, iconography, Roman sculpture.

Abstract. – During the archaeological excavations in Mediana in 2001, the head of a marble statuette of exceptional beauty and craftsmanship was discovered. It was an isolated discovery, the sculpture probably having been imported from some Greek artistic centre or an eastern Mediterranean workshop, presenting a part of a larger ensemble of sculptures that had adorned an imperial villa with peristyle. Since the head was found in pieces and being just part of a sculptural representation with no reliable attributes, the question of its identification is a difficult task. It was possible to determine, using stylistic traits’ analysis that the statuette was made under the influence of Hellenistic cult sculpture, namely that it followed the rules of the school of Praxiteles. On the other hand, the iconographic elements, in particular that of the hairstyle, lead us to the conclusion that this statuette could represent one of two Roman goddesses, either Venus or Diana.

The head is 8 cm long; it was found in sondage 10/2001, layer A, on the inner side of the western perimeter wall of the villa (inv. n. C–67, coordinates X = 9.35, Y = 6.70, h. 198.16). On this occasion I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dr Miloje Vasic, for giving me the information from the field documentation, as well as other useful suggestions regarding the problems I have researched here.

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2 Vasić 2004, 292.

3 Дрча 2004, 54, no. 87.

4 The present territory of Serbia, including its southern area that we discuss here, mostly belonged to the Roman province Upper Moesia.


The article results from the project: Romanization, urbanization and transformation of urban centres of civil, military and residential character in Roman provinces on territory of Serbia (no 177007) funded by Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.
Bojana PLEMić, The marble head of a statuette from Mediana (237–243)

on the possibility of its identification by analyzing the stylistic and iconographic characteristics and, thus, possibly expand the diversity of Mediana’s sculptural repertoire.6

The head, being 8 cm in height, must have belonged to a statuette. It is made of fine-grained white marble, nicely smoothed and polished and treated with auger in some places, which is especially visible in the hair details. The head is partially fractured in the chin area, but the rest is in pretty good condition (Fig. 1). Its rounded and rather oblong face shows youthful features without wrinkles, while the forehead is flat and tall, the nose straight and long, with a small mouth and full, slightly parted, lips. Big, almond-shape eyes have well-formed upper eyelids and no iris. The hair is combed away from the forehead to the back and gathered at the top in a knot made of curls, forming a so called krobylos (crobylus). At the temples, and rising towards the krobylos, there are two thick woven locks of hair that actually form the krobylos, while the rest of the hair is collected in a low bun on the nape. Behind the left ear there can be seen a fragment of an object carved from the same piece of stone, with a massive border at the top and a minor dent in the middle (Fig. 2–3).

This statuette was most probably imported from a significant Greek artistic centre or eastern Mediterranean workshop. The layer in which it was found belongs to the youngest archaeological horizon in Mediana (380–441 AD), during which time the settlement built on the ruins of the imperial villa complex was destroyed by the Goths in 378 AD, after the Huns had finally destroyed Hadrianopolis. According to the opinion of Dr Miloje Vasić, who managed the Mediana excavations in 2001, based on the exact location of the find and the fact that it was an isolated finding, the statuette adorned a villa with peristyle (before 378 AD) and was probably just a part of a larger sculpture ensemble made in different periods and procured from all over the Roman empire.

Although it is roughly dated to the period around 320 AD,8 the stylistic and technical characteristics of the head indicate that the statuette might have been created earlier. This is suggested by the extremely soft modelling, which reflects the Hellenistic-style tendencies of the 2nd century Roman sculpture. On the other hand, the use of auger as a modelling tool, which became intensive as of the Severian epoch, including the light hair style, so different from Hellenistic exuberance, opens the possibility of moving the date-line for this statuette to the second half of the 3rd century.

7 I wish to thank to Slobodan Đrač, senior curator from National museum in Niš, for the permission to publish the photographs of the find.
8 Đrač 2004, 165, no. 87.
9 Aphrodite of Cnidus is a prototype for the iconography of Roman sculptures known as the Venus Pudica type. Although the original statue hasn’t been preserved, it is known by the numerous replicas, such as Colonna Venus (Kahil et al. 1984, no. 391), Capi-toline Venus (Haskell, Penny 1981, 84), Medici Venus (Mansuelli 1958–1961, 71–73), Venus of Arl (Kleiner 1973, 387) etc.
10 This sculpture is best known by its Roman copy, the so called Diana of Gabi (Stewart 1990, 179, T. 505–508; Boardman 1995, 76, fig. 86).
impacts on Roman sculpture (as we can witness on its widespread replicas) comes from the so called Praxiteles’ school – and those are the features that adorn the head of the Mediana statuette. The round face and refined eye-expression, revealing a pensive look, together with the certain charm of the small full lips in contrast to the straight and elongated nose, are indications of the possible influence of the famous statues of Praxiteles, namely Aphrodite of Cnidus or Artemis Brauronia. These features represent the general tendency in Roman sculpture, especially from the time of Hadrian, towards an expression of devotion to classical traditions. These characteristic only bring us closer to a safer definition of the Mediana statuette belonging to stylistic traits of the Hellenistic art applied during the Roman imperial period, while its iconographic features lead us towards the possible choice of deity in question.

A detail that brought about our initial assumptions was the krobylos, as well as the entire hairstyle arrangement. The krobylos, which is mostly known as the knot of hair that forms a shape resembling a hair bow, sometimes gathering the entire hair and sometimes in combination with a bun at the nape, was often used in the late classical period, mainly in the iconography of Aphrodite, Apollo and Artemis. Having in mind that Apollo is generally represented with hair falling loosely over the shoulders, and the fact that the Mediana head is showing predominantly female characteristics, we believe it could belong to one of the two mentioned goddesses, either Aphrodite/Venus or Artemis/Diana.

The loveliness of the face and the sensuality of the plump lips point to Venus, the goddess of love and beauty. Her representations are among the most numerous finds in our territories. On this occasion, we shall focus on three small marble heads similar to the one we examine here, especially in terms of the hairstyle. These marble heads are most likely associations with the iconographic type of Venus pudica: one is from the fortification Diana near Karata and two heads are from Viminacium.

All three are modelled from an extremely high quality marble, originally from Asia Minor and Greek quarries, but their common stylistic features link them to a local workshop from Viminacium. The close similarity of the heads’ facial features and hairstyles indicates the possibility of them having been done using the same model, as they bear a popular iconographic pattern from the second half of the 2nd century or the first decades of the 3rd century, i.e. the period to which these heads are dated.
The heads are slightly leaning to the left, with harmoniously shaped facial features, nicely shaped eyes with accentuated eyelids, a flat and not very long nose and plump lips curved downwards at the ends. Lush hair is combed in massive locks toward the krobylos and the nape, its rich volume framing the face almost like some sort of high-profile head cover. The krobylos at the top is made in a thick knot and is tied in such a way as to form the closed part of a bow. The ideallisation of their characteristics clearly reveals the artistic influence of the sculptures made using Hellenistic models originating from the Praxiteles school, first established by his Aphrodites from Cnides. However, despite the fact that they were broken off in the neck area, two of the three mentioned Venus heads distinctly show fragments of loose hair falling from the nape over the left shoulder. Since Aphrodite from Cnides, as well as her numerous replicas, did not have released hair and a krobylos, this kind of iconography treatment is only typical for the Roman interpretation of the Venus pudica type, mostly from the 2nd century AD.

Since the Mediana’s head is parted from the body just above the neck line, it’s difficult to say whether some locks of hair were descending from the bun at the nape down to the shoulders, which could additionally confirm the assumption that the head was from a Venus statuette. Also, unlike the aforementioned heads of Venus (from Viminacium and fortification Diana near Karataš), the hair on this head is quite poorly treated in simply combed strands with shallow notches, by which the master tried to achieve the impression of realism and thus failed to achieve the luxurious effect of playfulness common in hairstyles of Aphrodite/Venus. It seems that his intention in the Mediana statuette was to accomplish a more practical hairstyle rather than to highlight the sensuality and beauty of the goddess. Also, this head has a somewhat colder expression and significantly outlined, almond shaped eyes, a straight elongated nose and slightly less prominent lips. Therefore, we shouldn’t exclude the possibility that it represented the goddess Artemis/Diana.

Considering that the goddess Artemis/Diana was famous as the hunting patroness and that her representation often required the display of dynamic motion, the stringent hairstyle, with neat hair collected in a krobylos and the low bun at the nape, could just be a feature of such artistic expressions. This iconographic type is based on a Hellenistic canon depicting the goddesses’ epithet Agrotera (Ἀγρότερη), which means “the one who hunts its prey.” It is considered that the artistic prototype of the hunting goddess is a sculpture attributed to the famous Leochares, which is only known by its Roman copy, Diana of Versailles. Generally speaking, in the art of the Roman period, the iconographic representation of Diana hunting was certainly the most frequent visual representation of this goddess.

In addition, the simple and reduced hair modelling on the head from Mediana, with the distinguished height of the side locks and the specific manner in which they are folded, suggests that the prototype of this statuette could have been made of bronze, which is also indicated by the certain hardness of the features modelled in bronze sculptures when transferred to marble. An analogous treatment of the head is also noted in one bronze figurine of Diana, from an unknown site in Serbia, which indicates her origin to be from some provincial workshop or local master.

Diana’s marble head, found in the village of Putinci near Ruma, and which belonged to the life-size statue of hunting goddess, can also be considered as a close iconographic analogy of the head from Mediana, except for its hair, modelled using shallow schematic linear notches. The Diana from Putinci is characterised by her distant eyes, as well as the expressionless facial features, typical for the classic style of Greek sculpture from the 4th century BC. A similarly focused eye expression, possibly looking at some invisible prey, another recognisable attribute of the hunting goddess, can be seen on the Mediana head, rather than the melancholic and...
absent expression that is characteristic of representations of Aphrodite/Venus.

At the end of this iconographic and stylistic analysis of the head from Mediana, we will focus on one controversial detail which, despite its possible contribution to determining her identification, creates a certain amount of doubt. We have already mentioned the existence of a fragment of an unidentified object behind the left ear, on the neck. Since it is modelled from the same piece of stone as the head itself and is positioned in a specific way next to the ear, we can conclude that it is an integral part of the statuette.

Among the Roman sculptures of Venus we were not able to find an analogous example, i.e. a statue which could confirm that this kind of a supplement could be part of the standard iconography. On the other hand, having in mind the characteristic of the hunting Diana iconography, the mentioned detail shows some similarities with the top of the quiver of arrows, usually worn diagonally across the back by the goddess. The quiver is suggested by the shape of the fragment, ending in the form of a massive hem, recessed in the middle, which could possibly serve as a slot for the arrows. However, what confuses us is the fact that it is placed on the left shoulder, despite the fact that the goddess usually wore her quiver on the right side. Also, we are familiar with only three known examples of bronze statuettes where the quiver is similarly placed close to head, but on the right side. This fact is consistent with the above assumption that the prototype of the Mediana head could be of bronze, having in mind the fact that the bronze casting process was more likely to produce similarly merged iconographic parts.

However, if we accept that this object is a quiver, then we must notice that it lies quite artificially on the neck, almost as though it is preventing it from turning. This is so untypical for the goddess Diana whose entire iconography, from her clothing to her hair and spatial setting, should allow for dynamic movement related to the action of hunting. Also, it’s not logical that, in making the quiver an important iconographic detail and an attribute of the goddess, there occurred an omission or clumsiness in the compositional modelling, while the rest of the head is produced in such a high quality manner. Due to all of the above, together with its fragmentary state of preservation, we can only claim that the object placed behind the left ear of the head is an integral part of statuette from Mediana. However, what it actually represents unfortunately remains a mystery.

The observations set forth in this paper gave us an opportunity to see how some of the characteristics of the marble head from Mediana give the impression that it belongs to the goddess Aphrodite/Venus, while some other features of the same head suggest Artemis/Diana. Since the characteristics described show similarities with the iconography of both of the goddesses, on this occasion we have not been able to genuinely decide which particular deity is represented by this statuette, but only to narrow our choice to the two mentioned goddesses. However, the problem with which we have been dealing here is a common one in the studies of Roman cult sculpture, especially as it refers to syncretism and the wide spread use of popular prototypes from earlier epochs. Sometimes, those models were changed by adding some specific attributes to different deities, thus changing the purpose of the deity itself. Such changes, the lack of a distinctive attribute, along with the fragmentary state of the finding that we have discussed here, represent the main obstacles to the definite identification of the goddess in question.

26 Delivorrias et al. 1984.
27 The representation of Artemis with quiver on the left shoulder is very rare and known only from the few examples of vase painting (Kahil et al. 1984, no. 680, 1433).
28 Kahil et al. 1984, nos. 26c, 75, 105.
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Током археолошких ископавања Медијане 2001. године, откривена је женска глава мермерне статуете, која је, судећи према стилско-ikonографским одликама, припадала фигури боганства. Ради се о изолованом налазу, највероватније импротованом из неког грчког уметничког центра, односно атељеа источно-меритеранског краја, као дела већег ансамбла статути које су украшавале вилу са перистилом. Израшава мека моделовања, рефлектира хеленистичке тенденције римске скулптуре II века, док коришћење сврдла, које је интензивно од епохи Севера, односно сумарна обрада косе, не типична за хеленистичку разиграност, упућује на могућност хронолошког опредељења ове статуете у период од средине другој половини III века.

Будући да је представа фрагментарно очувана, њена идентификација је била доста отежана. Анализа стилских особина је указала на то да је она настала под утицајем хеленистичке скулптуре, односно узора тзв. Праксителове школе, пре свега чувених статуа Афродите Киндске или Артемиде Брауоније. Међутим, нашу општиност ка евентуалном избору боганства првенствено су усмериле иконографске карактеристике. Начин на који је решена фигурата, односно присуство препознатљивог кробилоса на темену, који од доба касног класицизма одликује иконографију Антолона, Афродите и Артемиде, уплули су нас на претпоставку да се ради о не поједном од две могућности. Љушкост и сензуалност лика, као и аналогије са статуетама типа Venus pudica, указале су на могућност да је реч о Венери. Са друге стране, нешто хладнији израз лица и поглед који асоциира усмерену за гледаност ка невидаљном плена, упућују нас на Дијану у лову. Таквог идентификативног у прilog говори и остатак нејасног додатка из левог уха богине, који обликом подсећа на врх тобола са стрелама. Међутим, његова недовољна очуваност, као и неуобичајен положај са леве стране, неприродно прибијен уз главу, спречи нас да у понаоси се конечног суда о томе шта је заправо она представљала. Сходно томе да поједне карактеристике главе статуете из Медијане више одговарају богини Венери, док друге пре указују на Дијану, уз недостатак одговарајућих атрибута, овом приликом нисмо били у могућности да и конечно укажемо о којој је богини овде реч, већ само да аргументовано сведемо избор на неку од њих две.