

## THE ZEUS FROM GAZA RE-EXAMINED

BY

ASHER OVADIAH and SONIA MUCZNIK \*

Tel Aviv University

### RESUMEN

Se realiza un nuevo examen, a través de análisis iconográfico y estilístico, de la estatua monumental del Zeus hallado en Gaza, hoy en el Museo Arqueológico de Estambul. Sus paralelos en escultura monumental, estatuillas y otros objetos artísticos —pintura vascular, gemas y monedas—, indican que esta obra de arte tiene un carácter ecléctico con tendencias varias y distintos conceptos artísticos de tipo clásico-helenístico. Es plausible concluir que tenemos en el Zeus de Gaza una obra romana anónima fechable en el siglo II d.C.

### SUMMARY

The re-examination of the monumental statue of Zeus from Gaza, nowadays exhibited in the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, comprises an iconographical, as well as a stylistic comparative analysis. Comparisons with monumental sculpture (Jupiter Verospi, Jupiter Otricoli, Capitoline Jupiter from Carthage, and the Zeus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art), statuettes, and other artistic media (vase painting, gems, coins) indicate that this work of art shows an eclectic character of various artistic trends and concepts, based on Classical-Hellenistic features. It is plausible to conclude that the Zeus from Gaza is a Roman work of art, created by an anonymous artist and may be dated to the second century AD.

The colossal white marble statue discovered in 1879 or 1880<sup>1</sup> by the inhabitants of Tel-'Ajjul, south of Gaza, is currently on display at the Istanbul Archaeological Museums (figs. 1-2)<sup>2</sup>. It is probable that the statue comes originally from the city of Gaza but was transferred at some time by the local inhabitants to Tel-'Ajjul, where it was adapted for other purposes. Deacon Mark in the *Life of St. Porphyry* (the celebrated Bishop of Gaza), states that

\* We are grateful to Professor Gustavo Traversari of the University of Venice for his valuable suggestions. We also wish to thank Dr. Alpay Pasinli, Director of the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, who was kind enough to provide the photographs of the statue in the Museum to illustrate this article. Inv. n° 172 T; Cat. Mendel 611.

<sup>1</sup> The measurements are as follows: total height - 3,20 m approx.; height of head - 0,50 m; width of side at height of hips - 0,66 m; width of throne at bottom - 0,53 m (cf. Mendel 1966: 352).

<sup>2</sup> The statue is briefly mentioned by various scholars: Conder 1882: 147-148; Reinach 1897: 14.6; Mendel 1966: 352-354, cat. n° 611 (172).

the Zeus-Marnas<sup>3</sup> of Gaza was worshipped in the city. But, a hill to the east of the town called Aldioma, perhaps Jebel el Muntar, is mentioned by Deacon Mark<sup>4</sup>. The word Ἀλδίωμα might refer to the surnames Ἀλδήμιος and Ἄλδος, given to Zeus of Gaza by the lexicographer Methodios: Ἀλδήμιος ἢ Ἄλδος, ὁ Ζεὺς, [ὄς] ἐν Γάζῃ τῆς Συρίας τιμάται, παρὰ τὸ ἀλδαίνω, τὸ αὐξάνω· ὁ ἐπὶ τῆς αὐξήσεως τῶν καρπῶν<sup>5</sup>.

It is possible that the hill Aldioma, probably outside the city, was a place of cult where Zeus-Marnas of Gaza was worshipped, in addition to the worship held in the Marneion. If this assumption is correct, the cult of Ζεὺς Ἄλδος or Ζεὺς Ἀλδήμιος, existed in Gaza during the Roman period and seems to be unique among the pagan cults in Eretz Israel.

Signs of damage and mutilation are discernible on several parts of the statue, such as the nose, the right forearm and the entire left arm. The figure, which is seated on a throne, appears to have had its legs sawn off in front, together with part of the front and back of the throne. The throne is decorated with schematic rosettes on either side, and it is not clear whether it had a high back (figs. 2-4). The observation of the back of the statue reveals that the hair may have been left unfinished or that it was damaged. The right arm has been broken off slightly above the elbow and the left arm is totally missing and might have been sawn off. There is a rusted iron dowel in the left shoulder and another in the right arm, but these could have been later repairs, after the arms were broken off.

<sup>3</sup> Grégoire and Kugener 1930: 16 (19.10): «... τὸν δὲ Μαρνᾶν λέγουσιν εἶναι τὸν Δία». Cf. also Drexler 1965: cols. 2379-2382.

<sup>4</sup> Grégoire and Kugener 1930: 63 (79.2-3): «... ἀπὸ λόφου τοῦ λεγομένου Ἀλδιώματος ἐξ ἀνατολῶν τῆς πόλεως...»; 133. Cf. also Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 435: he was inclined «to think that this holy hill was our Jebel-el-Muntar, with the fables attaching to it. The puzzling name Ἀλδίωμα if not mutilated by the copyists, may bear some relation to Ἀλδήμιος and Ἄλδος, surnames of Marnas. Here perhaps should also be located the place spoken of in the Talmud by the name *Yerid* or *Atliz*, *Atlutz*, situated outside Gaza, where an idol was worshipped».

<sup>5</sup> Gaisford 1967: 58.20-22.

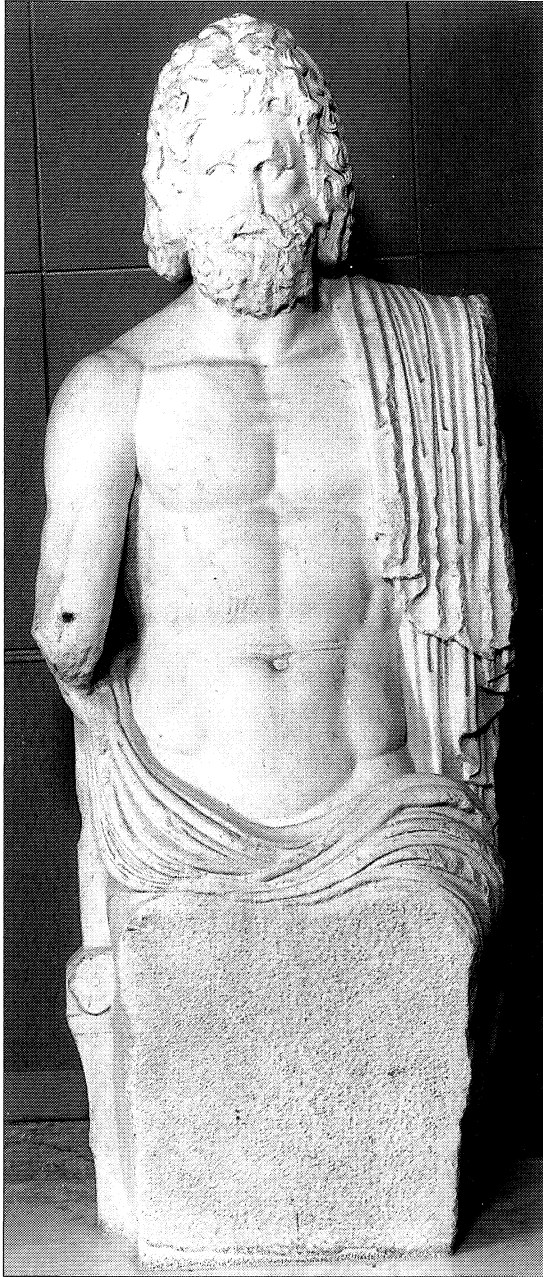


Fig. 1.—Statue of Zeus from Gaza, frontal view.

The head of the statue is frontal and rather large. The hair and beard are curly and disorderly, showing a 'baroque' tendency, but also appear to be slightly damaged. There is a textural contrast between the beard and the skin of the cheeks. The stiff down of the beard creates a gradual transition from smooth to rough. The long moustache is presented as a spiral giving it a stylized appearance, while a



Fig. 2.—Statue of Zeus from Gaza, three-quarters view.

lozenge form is shown under the nose. Three vertical curls, the right one defaced, fall onto the forehead. The facial features are characterized by a high, narrow forehead with horizontal wrinkles in its central part. The small, superficial eyes show lack of depth and are almond-shaped, with tiny wrinkles on each side; the pupil of the left eye still remains, while the partly effaced right one is visi-

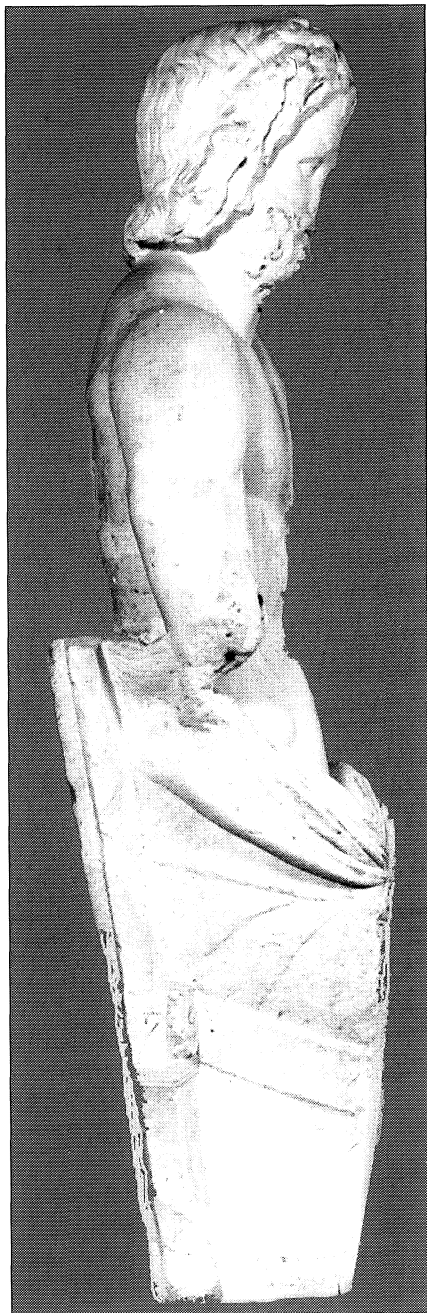


Fig. 3.—Statue of Zeus from Gaza, right lateral view.

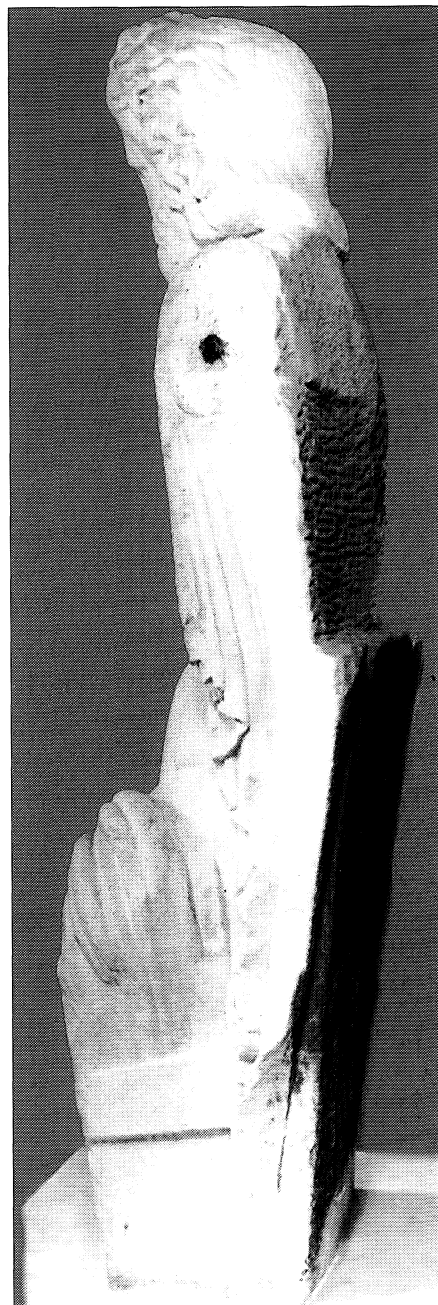


Fig. 4.—Statue of Zeus from Gaza, left lateral view, and throne.

ble. The upper eyelids, carved in a classical manner, are emphasized. The broken nose, perhaps of a Greek type, and the rather fleshy lips, slightly parted, showing the upper teeth, give a somewhat pathetic expression to the face (figs. 5-6).

The figure, presented in a frontal stance, appears rigid, and on the whole is far from presenting an

idealistic conception such as shown by the statues of Pheidias. The anatomical characteristics of the body, particularly emphasized on the chest and the abdominal muscles, are athletic and naturalistic. The collarbones and two ribs on the chest are marked as horizontal ridges. The right arm is massive, muscular and with visible veins. The shoulder is rigid and at-

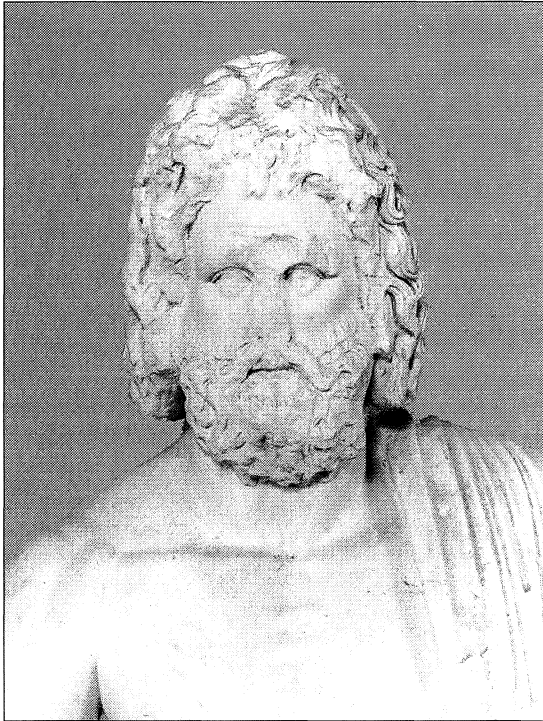


Fig. 5.—Statue of Zeus from Gaza, head and upper part of body, frontal view.



Fig. 6.—Statue of Zeus from Gaza, head and upper part of chest, three-quarter view.

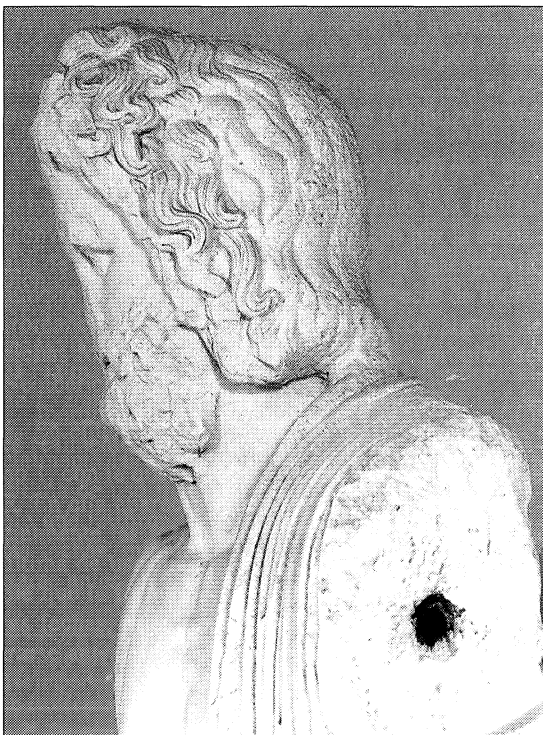


Fig. 7.—Statue of Zeus from Gaza, head and upper part of chest, left lateral view.

tached to the arm rather artificially, in a stylized schematic manner, while the muscles are unnaturally emphasized by three rounded masses. The line of the break, especially the right angle, indicates that the forearm was free, either placed somewhat above the drapery and in front of the abdomen, or with part of the forearm lightly touching the folds of the drapery, suggesting that the figure might have originally held a thunderbolt or a sphere or possibly an eagle (figs. 1, 3)<sup>6</sup>. Based on comparative examples, such as the Jupiter Verospi, the Zeus of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (figs. 10-11), and the Capitoline Jupiter from Carthage<sup>7</sup>, the left arm seems to have been raised, probably holding the sceptre<sup>8</sup>.

The figure wears an *himation*, which falls freely and naturally over the left shoulder and down the left side, and along the back to cover the thighs. The sawn-off frontal part of the throne originally consisted of the legs of the figure covered by the *himation*<sup>9</sup>. The folds of the *himation*, as well as the dra-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Cook 1964-1965: 753-761, figs. 693-694, 696, 700-702, 704-707, pls. XXXIV-XXXV.

<sup>7</sup> Yacoub 1993: fig. 76.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Cook 1964-1965: 693-697, 699, 704-705, 707, pl. XXXIV.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Cook 1964-1965: figs. 697-698, pls. XXXIV-XXXV.



pery over the thighs are deep and reveal a certain plasticity<sup>10</sup>. There is a textural contrast between the three-dimensional folds of the drapery and the smooth body. The lack of muscle tonicity suggests that the figure represents a middle-aged man. It is difficult to know whether the feet were originally placed on a footstool, but according to other examples of statues of a seated Zeus, this seems possible<sup>11</sup>.

Is this statue of Zeus from Gaza an adaptation of the Pheidias design and features, characterized by the general posture of the seated figure, its physiognomy, hair and beard, the drapery, the way of wearing the himation over the left shoulder, and the pose of the hands? All these components are indeed reminiscent of Pheidias' *chryselephantine* colossal Zeus at Olympia<sup>12</sup>. It seems that the Zeus of Gaza could have been inspired iconographically also from the sculpture of the Parthenon, especially of the Poseidon in the Council of the Gods on the east Panathenaic frieze, dated to the second half of the fifth century BC, attributed to Pheidias<sup>13</sup>. Similar representations appear on Roman copies<sup>14</sup>.

Despite the fact that the lower part of our statue is missing, it appears possible to reconstruct it on the basis of the movement of the remaining drapery, and by comparing it with a seated statuette of Zeus discovered in Aydin in 1900, currently on display at the Istanbul Archaeological Museums<sup>15</sup>. If this reconstruction of the statue of Zeus from Gaza is correct, the lower part of its body would appear to be much freer than the upper body, hence accentuating the difference between the two parts.

The Gazan Zeus is not a Roman copy of a Classical or Hellenistic work of art, but a Roman creation by an anonymous artist, who has combined various artistic trends and concepts, in a process typical of Roman art, especially of the second century AD. The statue shows an eclectic character of various artistic trends, based on the Classical (Pheidias and Lysippan) and Hellenistic characteristics which appear in its general concept. A certain contrast can be observed between the Classical-Hellenistic features of the head on the one hand, and the realistic treatment of the body on the other.

The Jupiter Verospi (fig. 10), of which only the head and the torso are antique, and the colossal stat-

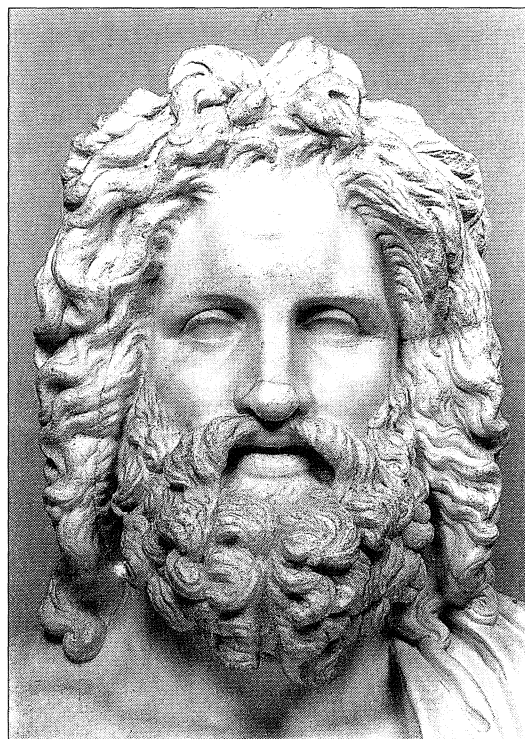


Fig. 8.—Head of Jupiter Otricoli (Farinella 1985: n° 21).

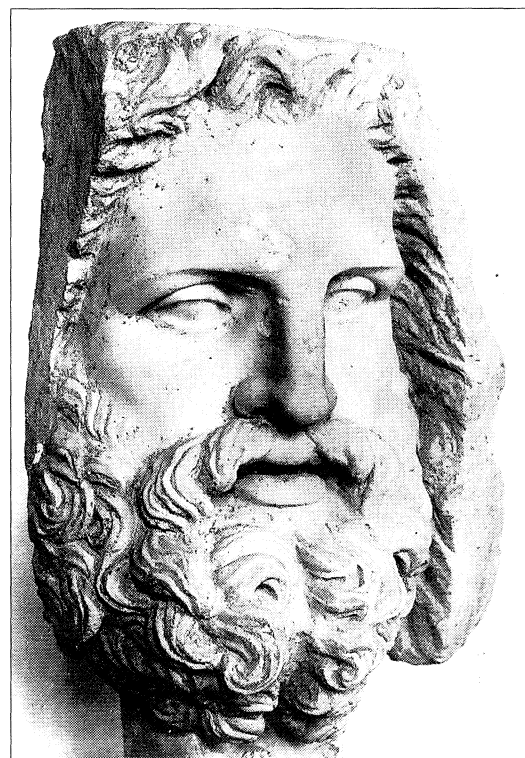


Fig. 9.—Head of Jupiter Otricoli (Von Hülsen 1967: Pl.32).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Cook 1964-1965: figs. 692, 693-699, 704-707, pls. XXXIV-XXXV.

<sup>11</sup> Cook 1964-1965: figs. 692, 707, pl. XXXV; Von Hülsen 1967: Ills. 33, 36a, 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Cook 1964-1965: 758, 761.

<sup>13</sup> Lullies and Hirmer 1960: pl. 156.

<sup>14</sup> Becatti 1981: figs. 21, 33-35.

<sup>15</sup> Mendel 1966: 248, n° 535.



Fig. 10.—Statue of Jupiter Verospi (Farinella 1985: n° 14)

ue of the Capitoline Jupiter from Carthage<sup>16</sup> present also similar characteristics to those of Zeus from Gaza<sup>17</sup>.

The head of Zeus appears frequently on gems and in sculpture. On Hellenistic and Roman gems the bearded head of Zeus is depicted in profile or in three-quarters view, resembling the iconography of other gods, such as Poseidon<sup>18</sup>. Other divinities also resemble the head of Zeus, as for example, Asklepios<sup>19</sup>. The heads of Zeus of Otricoli (figs. 8-9), Jupiter Verospi (fig. 10), and the Capitoline Jupiter from Carthage<sup>20</sup>, resemble the head of Zeus from Gaza.

<sup>16</sup> Yacoub 1993: fig. 76.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that the two protruding bones on the chest of the Zeus from Gaza are exactly like those on the chest of Jupiter Verospi. Amelung 1908: 519-520, n° 326, pl. 3; Farinella 1985: 32, n° 14.

<sup>18</sup> Henig 1994: n°s 171, 173; Boardman 1978: n°s 329, 351; Homann-Wedeking 1975: pl. 75 (fig. d).

<sup>19</sup> Andreae 1990: pls. 20-37, 48-79.

<sup>20</sup> Yacoub 1993: fig. 76.

The 'baroque' treatment of the head of Zeus from Gaza, mainly of the curly hair and beard, enables a comparison with the head of the Zeus of Otricoli, and that of the Capitoline Jupiter from Carthage. Another feature which emphasizes the resemblance between the head of the Gazan Zeus and that of Otricoli is the narrow forehead with the horizontal wrinkles, and the manner in which the hair falls. Curly 'baroque' locks falling onto the shoulders are featured on the head of Zeus of Otricoli, but these are more stylized and schematized on the head of Zeus from Gaza and of the Capitoline Jupiter from Carthage, and seem almost as if they had been cut short angularly at the shoulders. The same features appear in the beard and the moustache. The form of the lips and the open mouth are similar in the three heads, though the head of Otricoli is a more elaborate work of art and its artistic qualities excel those of the Zeus from Gaza, and of the Capitoline Jupiter from Carthage. Although in principle the three heads present the same textural contrast between the cheeks and the beard, the transition from the smooth cheeks to the curly beard is gradual and marked by stiff hairs in the Zeus from Gaza, albeit more natural than that of the Zeus of Otricoli, where the transition is sharp. The two 'baroque' curls above the middle of the forehead on the head of Zeus of Otricoli, as well as the knot-like gathering of hair on the crown, have been simplified and schematized by the sculptor of the statue from Gaza. The heads of the Zeus of Otricoli, of Jupiter Verospi and those depicted on gems might have provided a source of inspiration for the artist of the Zeus from Gaza, despite the more summary execution<sup>21</sup>. It is unclear whether the statue of the Gazan Zeus was brought to the city roughed out and then finished by a local artist, or whether it was imported as a completed sculpture for the cult of Zeus-Marnas, which was practiced in Gaza. The city-cult of these two deities appears to have been common in Gaza in Antiquity, especially that of Marnas, later substituted by Zeus, and the two were identified, unified and revered together during the Roman period.

The treatment of the garment in the front section of the statue of Zeus from Gaza is exceptional: it falls down the side of his upper body to his abdomen; whereas other images of Zeus, whether in sculpture or on coins, usually depict a shorter garment hanging over the shoulder and ending above the chest.

<sup>21</sup> For Zeus of Otricoli, see Helbig 1963: 27-28 (n° 33); Von Hülsen 1967: 88-89, n° 32; Farinella 1985: 37, n° 21. Cf. also the head of Zeus from Seljuk in the Museum of Ephesus: Strocka 1989: Abb. 6-7.

Undoubtedly, the images of both the Jupiter Verospi and the Zeus of Otricoli might have inspired iconographically and formally the execution of the Zeus from Gaza by the anonymous artist, who may have been a local, an imported or an itinerant sculptor.

The reconstruction of the forearm of the Jupiter Verospi could serve as an example for the reconstruction of the same forearm of Zeus from Gaza, in which the forearm appears to have been resting lightly together with the hand and the object it held (thunderbolt, eagle or sphere), on the folds of the garment on its right thigh. The same could also be true for the left arm and hand, which was possibly raised like that of Jupiter Verospi, holding a sceptre.

A certain resemblance is also noticeable between the Gazan Zeus and the two seated statues from the Roman period (Hadrianic era) in Caesarea Maritima, one of which is in white marble and the other in porphyry. The closest similarity is with the seated white marble statue, whose upper body is nude while its lower part is draped in a *toga*<sup>22</sup>. This statue is identified as an emperor in the image of Zeus or *Demos*, the personification of the people of Caesarea, seated in a pose typical of the Zeus of Olympia.

The seated porphyry statue in Caesarea Maritima, identified by Avi-Yonah as the statue of the Emperor Hadrian, and according to his opinion, could be reconstructed holding a sceptre in its right hand and a sphere in its left. This statue is completely draped in a *tunica* and a *toga*, thereby differing utterly from the statue of the Gazan Zeus and the other statues of its type. In this case, the Emperor appears in the guise of Jupiter, based on the image of the Olympian Zeus, as adopted by the Romans<sup>23</sup>.

Seated gods appear frequently in Greek and Roman art, such as in sculpture<sup>24</sup>, vase-painting<sup>25</sup> and gems<sup>26</sup>, representing a variety of images such as



Fig. 11.—Statue of Zeus, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (von Hülsen 1967: Pl.41)

Serapis, Zeus, Hades, and Apollo. Another example of a seated statue similar to that of Zeus from Gaza is that of the god exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum of New York (fig. 11)<sup>27</sup>. On some Roman city coins of ancient Palestine, Zeus appears as a god seated on a throne<sup>28</sup>.

The seated images of Zeus in the various artistic media appear in different poses, namely frontal, three-quarters view, profile, and sometimes the body is in three-quarters view and the head in profile. They can perhaps be attributed to at least to three types.

All these images of Zeus are depicted in the same general manner, with some slight variations. Some of these statues have a frontal pose similar to

<sup>22</sup> Vermeule and Anderson 1981: 11, fig. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Avi-Yonah 1970: 203-208, pls. 44-46; Vermeule and Anderson 1981: 12, fig. 22.

<sup>24</sup> For example, the images of Serapis, Zeus and Hades, see Reinach 1987: 13-15, 19; see also the works of art in the important study of Bonanome 1995: 120-160.

<sup>25</sup> One can compare the seated Apollo on a volute krater in Ferrara and on a bell-krater in Agrigento by the Kleophon Painter (440-430 BC), where the god sits on a throne within a temple holding a laurel staff. In the Agrigento vase the god is depicted in a frontal view, while his head is in profile and turns to the right. In Ferrara he is represented in a three-quarters view and his head is in profile. Both pictures have been interpreted as a sacrifice in the Delphic sanctuary and the figures represented as cult statues. See De Miro 1968: 238, 240, pls. LXXXV, LXXXIX.

<sup>26</sup> The seated Zeus appears on gems, see Boardman 1978: n° 227; Henig 1994: n°s 251-256, 875.

<sup>27</sup> Von Hülsen 1967: pl. 41.

<sup>28</sup> Hill 1965: pls. IV.15 (Caesarea), VIII.16 (Aelia Capitolina), IX.10,19 (Aelia Capitolina).

that presented by Zeus from Gaza<sup>29</sup>. In spite of similar characteristics, none of these figures are quite identical to the statue under discussion.

<sup>29</sup> Reinach 1897: 13: 5. Lake of Alba, Campania, now in the Ermitage; 7. Lyons; 8. from Naples. 14: 1. Solunte; 2.B. Vienne; 7. Igstadt, Wiesbaden. 15: 1. Schloss Dyck; 4. Triers; 5. Triers.

#### ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AMELUNG 1908: AMELUNG, W., *Die Skulpturen des Vaticanischen Museums II*, Berlin.
- ANDREAE 1990: ANDREAE, B., *Römische Mitteilungen, Ergänzungsheft* 31.
- AVI-YONAH 1970: AVI-YONAH, M., "The Caesarea Porphyry Statue", *Israel Exploration Journal* 20, 203-208, pls.44-46.
- BECATTI 1951: BECATTI, G., *Problema Fidiaci*, Milano, Firenze.
- BOARDMAN 1978: BOARDMAN, J. and WOLLENWEIDER, Marie-Louise, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Finger Rings of the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford.
- BONANOME 1995: BONANOME, D., *Il Rilievo da Mondragone nel Museo Nazionale di Napoli*, Accademia di Archeologia Lettere e Belle Arti, Monumenti X, Napoli.
- CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1896: CLERMONT-GANNEAU, Ch., *Archaeological Researches in Palestine*, II, London.
- CONDER 1882: CONDER, C.R., "Notes from Constantinople", *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, 147-148.
- COOK 1964/65: COOK, A. B., *Zeus, a Study in Ancient Religion*, II, New York.
- DE MIRO 1968: DE MIRO, E. "Nuovi contributi sul Pitture di Kleophon", *Archeologia Classica* 20.
- DREXLER 1965: DREXLER, W., "Marnas", in: Roscher, W. H. (ed), *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, II/2, Hildesheim, cols. 2379-2382.
- FARINELLA 1985: FARINELLA, V., *Vatican Museums, Classical Art*, Florence.
- GAISFORD 1967: GAISFORD, Th. (ed.), *Etymologicon Magnum*, Amsterdam 1967 (reprint of the edition Oxford 1848).
- GRÉGOIRE and KUGENER 1930: GRÉGOIRE, H. and KUGENER, M.A. (eds.), *Marc le Diacre, Vie de Porphyre évêque de Gaza*, Paris.
- HELBIG 1963: HELBIG, W., *Führer durch die öffentlichen Sammlungen klassischer Altertümer in Rom, Die Päpstlichen Sammlungen im Vatikan und Lateran*, Tübingen.
- HENIG 1994: HENIG, M., *Classical Gems, Ancient and Modern Intaglios and Cameos in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge*, Cambridge.
- HILL 1965: *A Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Palestine in the British Museum*, Bologna.
- HOMANN-WEDEKING 1975: HOMANN-WEDEKING, E., *Wandlungen - Studien zur antiken und neueren Kunst*.
- MENDEL 1966: MENDEL, G., *Catalogue des sculptures grecques, romaines et byzantines. Musées Impériaux Ottomans*, II, Rome.
- REINACH 1897: REINACH, S., *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine*, II, Paris.
- STROCKA 1989: STROCKA, V. M., "Zeus, Marnas und Klasea Ephesische Brunnenfiguren von 93 N.CHR.", in: *Festschrift J. Inan*, I, Istanbul, 77-92.
- VERMEULE and ANDERSON 1981: VERMEULE, C. C. and ANDERSON, K., "Greek and Roman Sculpture in the Holy Land", *Burlington Magazine* 123, 7-19.
- VON HÜLSEN 1967: VON HÜLSEN, H., *Zeus*, Mainz.
- YACOUB 1993: YACOUB, Mohamed, *Le Musée du Bardo*, Tunis.