



# BABESCH

*Eighteenth BABESCH Byvanck Lecture*



Elizabeth Marlowe

*Normalizing Loot: A Case Study  
of a Plundered Imperial Shrine*



Tuesday May 20<sup>th</sup> 2025

in collaboration with the National Museum of Antiquities at Leiden

The BABESCH Foundation



*Normalizing Loot*  
*A Case Study of a Plundered Imperial Shrine*

Eighteenth BABESCH Byvanck Lecture



*Normalizing Loot*  
*A Case Study of a Plundered Imperial Shrine*

**Elizabeth Marlowe**  
Colgate University, New York



The BABESCH Foundation

Leiden

2025

# Colophon

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The rise of BABESCH to an established forum for international scholarly exchange has been due in no small part to the tireless efforts of the late dr. Lili Byvanck-Quarles van Ufford (1907–2002). Her passionate involvement continues through the substantial endowment she made to Leiden University in the form of the Byvanck Fund (LUF), with the BABESCH Foundation explicitly labelled as one of the beneficiaries. This has enabled the Foundation to develop, aside from its scholarly publishing duties, various other activities geared to a wider community, of which the BABESCH Byvanck Lecture series is the best known. Another initiative perpetuating Lili's name is the BABESCH Byvanck Award for the best contribution of a young, debutant scholar in the BABESCH journal. A fairly recent addition is the publication of the annual BABESCH Byvanck Lecture in a booklet.

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Cover image: Imperial statue probably from Boubon, Türkiye, as it was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (© Steven Zucker, with permission).

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## *Normalizing Loot*

### *A Case Study of a Plundered Imperial Shrine*

*This talk will discuss a corpus of dozens of life-size bronze statues of Roman emperors and empresses that were looted in the 1960s at Bubon, an unexcavated site in southern Türkiye, and ended up in collections across the U.S. What was this site originally? What was lost in the process of their looting? Why – and how – are some museums resisting efforts to return these statues to Türkiye today?*

#### **BOUBON IN LYCIA**

The ancient city of Boubon is located on the slopes of a steep hill in southwestern Türkiye, in the interior highland region of the ancient province of Lycia. Built on terraces that follow the natural contours of the hill, the city is very small, about 10 hectares (equivalent to about 20 soccer fields). It has never been excavated, only surveyed by archaeologists. The city began as a fortified citadel at the top of the hill in the archaic period; by the Hellenistic era it extended all the way down the south side of the slope. Strabo mentions it as one of four cities in the Lycian Tetrapolis, along with Cibyra, Balbura and Oenoanda; an inscription from the Hellenistic period found at the site confirms this alliance. During the Roman period, the city, along with the other members of the Tetrapolis, joined the Lycian League. Despite its modest scale, it seems to have had the accoutrements of a proper ancient city, including city-walls, a 1500-seat theater, agora, and possibly a stadium. During the reign of Nero, a space dedicated to the imperial cult was installed in a portico to the east of the theater; inscriptions attest to the shrine's periodic updating for the next 200 years. The city reached its peak importance in 190 CE, when the Emperor Commodus granted it an additional vote in the Lycian League in recognition of its role protecting the region from bandits. The proud citizens of Boubon inscribed Commodus' letter in stone and installed it in their theater. At some point after the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the city was abandoned, probably due to the frequent earthquakes in this region.

Classicists travelling through the area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century identified the site as Boubon from inscriptions lying on the surface. In the 1950s, the local population at Ibeçik, a small agricultural village about a mile north of the ruins, began poking around the hill, known to them as Dikmen Tepe. Their explorations turned up a steady stream of marble and bronze pieces that they

sold to men who came periodically from Izmir to buy them. One scholar who visited the site first in 1952 and then again in 1966 wrote that on the second visit, he “found the scene completely changed. The entire slope of the hill had recently been dug from top to bottom by the villagers in search of loot; their pits left hardly a yard of space between them.” The pace of the looting accelerated in 1967, after the villagers began pulling numerous large bronze statues out of the ground from a spot near the theater. Before long, the villagers began fighting over these extremely valuable pieces among themselves, and the situation turned ugly – one of the later Turkish publications on these events even mentions a murder – and someone tipped off the regional police. When the authorities arrived at the village, they found a single bronze statue hidden away. A few days later, an archaeologist from the nearby museum at Burdur came to the site to conduct a rescue excavation. Digging at the spot indicated to him by the villagers, he found a room measuring 6.5 x 4.8 meters, outfitted with two long podiums with inscriptions naming multiple Roman emperors from Nero to Valerian, as well as two free-standing statue bases with additional imperial inscriptions. But he recovered no further statues. The one figure seized by the Turkish authorities in 1967 is today in the Burdur Archaeological Museum (fig. 1).

Two years later, in the April, 1969 issue of the *American Journal of Archaeology*, in her regular column on “Archaeology in Asia Minor,” the Bryn Mawr professor Machteld Mellink included a notice on these events:

Boubon. Mr. Mehmet Yilmaz, assistant in the Burdur Museum, investigated the site of ancient Boubon in the Lycian hinterland of Cabalis. Since the beginning of 1967, the site (theater, temple, agora, acropolis) has been the scene of ruinous digging by the local villagers.



*Fig. 1: Torso seized from the village of Ibeşik, Türkiye, May 12th 1967, bronze, now in the Burdur Archaeological Museum (© Gunes Tiriyaki, with permission).*

Mr. Yilmaz has recorded the remnants and inscriptions of a building of particular importance and is preparing the evidence for publication. The Burdur Museum acquired an over-life-size bronze male torso from this location in 1967; the remainder of the bronze statuary has been ruthlessly torn from its context by the exploders of archaeology.

## BOUBON ABROAD

Not coincidentally, in the 1960s and early 1970s, an extraordinary number of extremely rare, extremely high quality ancient bronze statues and Roman imperial portrait heads began showing up out of nowhere on the international art market. Many—possibly all—were handled by the notorious antiquities trafficker Robert Hecht, who was in and out of legal trouble in Italy and Türkiye for much of his life for smuggling antiquities. His trafficking efforts were aided by the eminent American scholar Cornelius Vermeule, who served as the curator of classical art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston for nearly 40 years, from 1957 to 1996.

Key events in the circulation of some of the statues associated with Boubon up to 1987 are the following:

- 1962: The Texan collectors John and Dominique De Menil buy a headless, life-sized bronze statue, whose right arm is raised and left hand is resting on his hip, from a dealer in Geneva (fig. 2). The following year, they donate the statue to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where it remains today.
- 1963: Cornelius Vermeule writes to the director at Houston to inform him that Robert Hecht is selling a head of the Young Caracalla which goes with their headless bronze body, urging the museum to acquire it (fig. 3). The Houston Museum declines to do so.
- 1966: The New York dealer Jerome Eisenberg acquires an over-life-sized, headless bronze torso from an unknown source (fig. 4).
- 1966: On Vermeule's recommendation, the Worcester Art Museum acquires a bronze, Antonine female portrait from Hecht (fig. 5).
- 1966: The collector Norbert Schimmel buys a portrait head of the adult Caracalla from Hecht (fig. 6). This piece, along with Schimmel's entire collection, is eventually donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 1967, May: Turkish police arrive at Boubon and seize a single bronze statue.
- 1967, June: Hecht consigns to Sotheby's the Young Caracalla head which Vermeule had urged Houston to acquire. It is bought by a young man from a coin-dealing family in Boston named Charles Lipson. Vermeule



*Fig. 2: "Heroic Figure," bronze, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 62.19 (© author).*



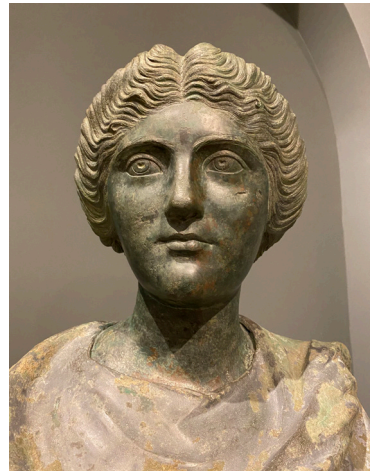
*Fig. 3: Head of the Young Caracalla, bronze, formerly in the Fordham Museum of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Art, now in the Antalya Archaeological Museum (© author).*



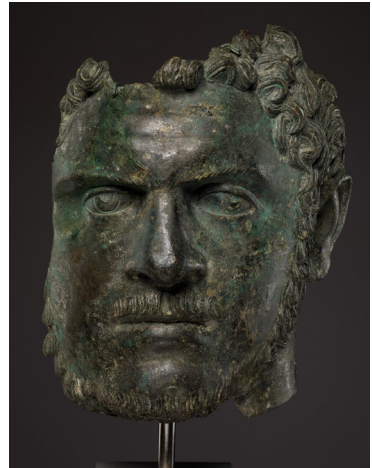
*Fig. 4: Statue in the possession of Jerome Eisenberg in 1966, bronze, after Vermeule 1980.*



*Fig. 7: Statue identified as Septimius Severus, bronze, acquired in Switzerland by Charles Lipson in 1967; by 2011 on long-term loan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art from an anonymous lender; now in the Antalya Archaeological Museum (© Steve Zucker, with permission).*



*Fig. 5: Female portrait head (bust separate), bronze, formerly in the Worcester Art Museum, now in the Antalya Archaeological Museum (© author).*



*Fig. 6: Portrait of Caracalla, bronze, formerly in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, now in the Antalya Archaeological Museum (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, open access/public domain).*





*Fig. 8: Statue identified as Marcus Aurelius, bronze, acquired in Switzerland by Charles Lipson in 1967; bought by the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1986; now in the Antalya Archaeological Museum (© author).*



*Fig. 9: Statue identified as Lucius Verus, bronze, acquired in Switzerland by Charles Lipson in 1967; formerly in the collection of Leon Levy and Shelby White; now in the Antalya Archaeological Museum, after Inan 1979.*



*Fig. 10: Statue, bronze, acquired in Switzerland by Charles Lipson in 1967, current location unknown, after Inan 1979.*

lavishes praise on this head in his book, *Roman Imperial Art from Greece and Asia Minor*, which appears in print the following year. Calling it “the masterpiece among Eastern Caracallas,” he notes that it goes with the headless bronze body in Houston, and also associates it with the Schimmel Caracalla, of “similar provenance.”

- 1967, September: Lipson takes out a sizeable bank loan and travels to Switzerland, where he acquires four life-sized bronze statues (figs. 7-10). He has them shipped to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
- 1967, December: Vermeule presents two of Lipson’s statues in a talk at the annual conference of the Archaeological Institute of America. In a final addendum to his book on Roman Imperial Art, as a footnote to his discussion of the Young Caracalla head, he notes that “seven more bronze statues are now known, including Lucius Verus, Septimius Severus, and a noble as Sophocles.”



- 1969: Machteld Mellink's note about the looting at Boubon and the disappearance of a large corpus of Roman imperial bronze statuary is published in the *American Journal of Archaeology*.
- 1970: The Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen purchases a bronze portrait head of Septimius Severus from Hecht (fig. 11).
- 1971: Lipson's four statues as well as his head of the Young Caracalla are transferred from the Museum of Fine Arts Boston to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, where an illustrated catalog is published; the statues remain there until 1974.
- 1975: In a letter preserved in the Getty archives, Lipson offers his four statues to the Museum for \$4 million (many thanks to Judith Barr for this information). The offer is refused.
- 1976: Lipson's statues are displayed at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, where they remain until 1979.
- 1977: The Turkish archaeologist Jale Inan publishes a lengthy scholarly article in the *Istanbul Mitteilungen* recounting the story of the looting at Boubon and attempting to match up Lipson's four statues, the Houston statue, and the statue seized by the Turkish police with bronze portrait heads that had also recently surfaced on the market and with the inscriptions on the pedestals at the site.
- 1977: Vermeule finishes a long article about the "amazing group" of Roman imperial statues from "southwest Asia Minor." He associates nine male torsos, one female torso, five male portrait heads and one female head with the group. He suggests that they might have originated either at Boubon (referencing Mellink's 1969 article) or at Cremna, a different site in the same region of Türkiye that had also been extensively looted in recent years. The article is published in 1980.
- 1981: The New York collectors Leon Levy and Shelby White buy the Lucius Verus statue from Lipson.
- 1981: Lipson's three remaining statues and the head of the Young Caracalla go on display at the Rutgers University Art Gallery. They remain there until 1985.



Fig. 11: Portrait of Septimius Severus, bronze, formerly in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, now in the Antalya Archaeological Museum (© author).

- 1985: The New York dealer Edward Merrin acquires the three torsos from Lipson.
- 1986: Merrin sells the togate figure to the Cleveland Museum of Art.
- 1987: Merrin sells the nude figure identified by Vermeule as Septimius Severus to the collectors Wendell and Dorothy Cherry, and the other nude figure to the collector Asher Edelman.
- 1987: The Cleveland Museum curator Arielle Kozloff travels to Boubon to learn more about the origins of her museum's new acquisition. When the statue goes on display, other works from Boubon in other American museums are borrowed for the occasion, and photos of additional pieces from the site are displayed on the gallery walls.

A few points are worth emphasizing from this chronology, starting with the deep involvement of Cornelius Vermeule. He is clearly getting information about the pieces directly from Hecht (for example, about the connections between the Young Caracalla head and the Houston body and between the Septimius Severus head and one of Lipson's torsos). Vermeule was also almost certainly responsible for Lipson's involvement in the story. Vermeule had been buying coins from Lipson for the Museum for about six months when Lipson, aged 30, decided to branch out from coins and begin trading ancient sculpture. One of his first acquisitions was the Young Caracalla head which Vermeule, inexplicably, praised to the skies in his manuscript. Did the two men have some sort of agreement? Was Lipson meant to donate the head to the MFA, perhaps with an inflated valuation (for tax purposes) based on Vermeule's flattering discussion of the piece in his book? Lipson, in turn, who did not have a physical gallery, must have been grateful to Vermeule for allowing him to park his statues at the Museum while he began his hunt for a buyer. Perhaps the hope was that their presence there would attract not only a buyer but one who would donate them to the Museum.

But whatever grand plan for these bronzes Vermeule might have harbored between 1963 and 1969 was thwarted, I believe, by the publication of Machteld Mellink's notice about the looting at Boubon. What is perhaps most remarkable about these extraordinary bronzes is that they took such a long time to sell. And when they did finally find homes, it wasn't with the major museums we might have expected to be most eager to get their hands on them. Despite both the extreme rarity and extraordinary beauty of Lipson's life-sized classical bronzes, neither the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, nor the Metropolitan Museum, nor even the famously acquisitive Getty was willing to bite. Why not? Could the statues' illicit origins have had something to do with it? Of course, U. S. museums are notorious for the complete disregard they showed during

the 1960s, 70s and 80s for other countries' cultural patrimony laws. Indeed, it is their disregard during this period that prompted multilateral anti-looting efforts such as the 1970 UNESCO Convention on preventing the illicit trade, and that also nearly brought down the Getty Museum some years later, when some of the stories from that era came to light. But there is one key difference between Lipson's bronzes and the other looted antiquities American museums were happily buying during this period: the looters at Boubon failed to keep their sordid actions secret. Between the time of Mellink's notice in 1969 and Arielle Kozloff's article about the Cleveland statue in 1987, no fewer than twenty publications mentioned the fact that this large group of bronzes came from a single site in southwest Türkiye. What is actually surprising is that despite the unusually well-documented illicit origins of the statues, the Cleveland Museum was willing to take a gamble and buy one of them anyway long after the story was firmly established in the field. By contrast, most of the other museums that acquired Boubon pieces did so early on, in the 1960s or early 1970s, before the unsavory events surrounding their origins were widely known. The exceptions to this rule are museums that acquired Boubon pieces as part of larger bequests, as was the case for the Met, whose head of the adult Caracalla arrived with the Schimmel gift in 1989, and Fordham University's Museum of Greek, Etruscan, and Roman Art, which received the head of the Young Caracalla as part of the Walsh bequest in 2006. Otherwise, after the early 1970s, the only parties willing to buy works associated with Boubon were private collectors.

## BOUBON AS A PROBLEM OF ETHICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY

What happened next was a slow, collective forgetting of the Boubon story. Jale Inan publishes a short monograph in Turkish on the group in 1994. Seven of the pieces are included among the 55 works that featured in the exhibition *The Fire of Hephaistos: Large Classical Bronzes from North American Collections*, which originated at the Harvard University Art Museum in 1997 and traveled to the Toledo Museum of Art and the Tampa Museum of Art. Ten of the bronzes are included in Götz Lahusen and Edilberto Formigli's enormous catalog, *Römische Bildnisse aus Bronze: Kunst und Technik* from 2001. Otherwise, the Boubon group *qua* group fades from view. There is no mention of the statues in any of the standard Roman art handbooks, including Diana Kleiner's influential volume, *Roman Sculpture*, published in 1992, and no more museum loan shows (after the one in 1987 at Cleveland) explicitly devoted to this dispersed ensemble. Relative to its potential historical significance, the dearth of scholarship on this exceedingly rare, monumental group in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s is striking. Was there a gentlemanly, or perhaps unconscious, aversion

to these tainted statues? The danger of the Boubon story was that it made the conventional fiction of great works originating in “old Swiss collections” harder to maintain. Too much talk about this corpus and the poison could spread, exposing the sordid underbelly of the whole field of antiquities collecting. Instead, a tacit consensus seems to have emerged to let sleeping dogs lie.

I first learned about the Boubon group not in my studies of Roman art (the subject of my 2004 Ph.D) but rather from one of the rare, early articles about looting, written by David Gill and Christopher Chippindale in 2000 with the title, “Material Consequences of Contemporary Classical Collecting.” Later, I became interested in the Boubon works as an epistemological problem for the museums that owned them. What were they saying about them? Were they sharing with the public the very interesting and important information about their origins at a remote provincial shrine in Türkiye, where the emperor was worshipped as a god? Were they admitting how they know that? This question was particularly urgent in the mid-2010s, when Türkiye was stepping up its efforts to reclaim its plundered cultural heritage.

What I found was that some museums, such as the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, were happy to tell visitors that their statue “was probably made for an imperial cult temple in Asia Minor, where the emperor was worshipped,” without giving any indication of how they know that, even though on their website, they acknowledged quite openly that the piece was “found in Boubon, Turkey, Asia Minor.” At the Cleveland Museum of Art, the gallery label explained that the reason we think their statue is an imperial portrait is due to its “extremely high quality and monumental scale.” No mention here of the imperial shrine; although like Houston, Cleveland did acknowledge the origins at Boubon on their website, albeit with a question mark.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art took a more aggressive approach to the epistemological problems in its label of the so-called Septimius Severus statue which, by 2011, was on loan to the museum from a private collector. The label read:

*Bronze statue of a nude male figure  
Greek or Roman, Hellenistic or Imperial.  
ca. 200 BC – ca. AD 200  
Anonymous loan, 2011 (L.2011.4)*

*This monumental figure has long been associated with a head in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, of the Roman emperor Septimius Severus,*

*believed to have come from a building devoted to the imperial cult at the small city of Boubon, in Asia Minor. Recently, however, it has been shown that the two pieces do not belong together. Consequently, the date and identification of this figure are open to reconsideration.*

*Few large-scale bronzes of the Hellenistic and Roman period survive. This statue is remarkably well preserved except for the loss of the head and the attributes once held in each hand. The body is idealized and the proportions conform closely to Hellenistic trends, making it difficult to determine if the statue is an actual Hellenistic creation or a fine Roman adaptation in the Hellenistic style. It may depict a god, a hero, a Hellenistic ruler, or a Roman emperor.*

Rather than telling us anything we know about the statue, the Met's label is all about how much we *don't know* about it. But the claim that the statue was only ever associated with Boubon because of its alleged connection to the Copenhagen head is completely false, as is the assertion that we have absolutely no idea what it is ("Greek or Roman, Hellenistic or Imperial" from any time between 200 BC - 200 CE).

Appalled, I began giving public talks about the Boubon labels in 2018. In 2022, I published an article about them in the online arts magazine *Hyperallergic*, with the provocative title, "When Will Museums Tell the Whole Truth About their Antiquities?" Though brief and written for a general audience, this was the first publication about Boubon to appear in the internet era, with hyperlinks to all the museums that owned the pieces. For that reason, it drew the attention of both the Turkish Ministry of Culture and the Antiquities Trafficking Unit of the Manhattan District Attorney's office. Things moved quickly from there. Facing pressure from the District Attorney's office, most of the institutions and private owners of the Boubon bronzes surrendered them between 2023 and 2024.

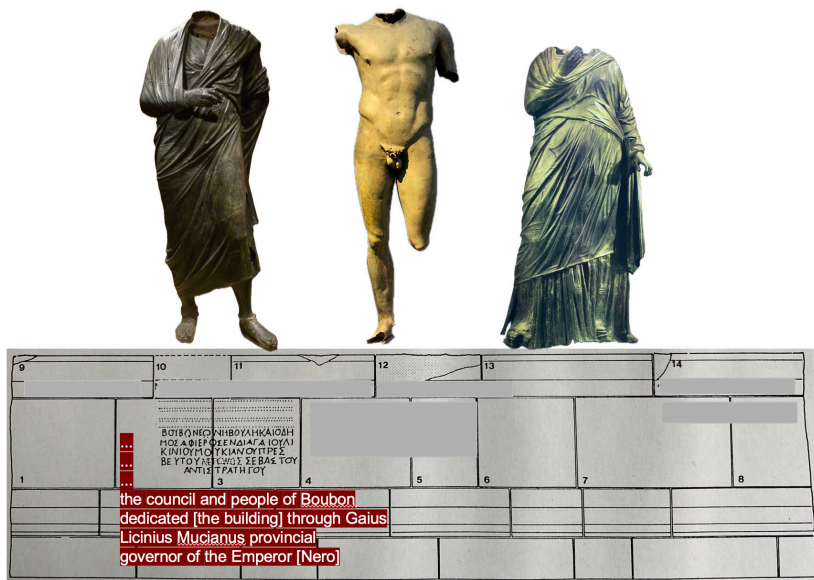
Once again, the Cleveland Museum of Art is the exception. Cleveland's first response was to avoid facing facts by erasing them. In the days following the initial contact from the District Attorney's office, the museum changed the title of the statue on their website from "The Emperor as Philosopher, probably Marcus Aurelius" to simply, "Draped Male Figure." The date, formerly the two decades immediately following Marcus' death, was replaced by an enormous range, 150 BCE to 200 CE. And the provenance information about Türkiye and Boubon that was previously given was simply deleted. The museum literally chose to erase historical information rather than admit that their statue came from the looted imperial shrine at Boubon. The Museum's next response was to file a lawsuit

against the District Attorney, based on the premise that the work's origins at the site weren't *proven*. They offered no alternative account of the statue's origins, and no explanation for why they were now changing the story that they themselves had been telling for 38 years. Eventually, a deal was worked out between Cleveland and the District Attorney's office to conduct scientific tests, allowing the museum to save face. The tests proved definitively that the statue came from the Boubon, but the Museum was able to claim that their resistance was all for the sake of scientific inquiry. The statue was finally surrendered in April, 2025.

The repatriated Boubon bronzes are slowly being reunited at the Antalya Archaeological Museum; hopefully they will one day rejoin the piece seized in 1967, which has remained at the Burdur Archaeological Museum all these years. The reunification of the group will allow the pieces to be studied in relation to one another—their style, manufacture, alloys, relative sizes, head and body joins, positions on the pedestals, etc. For now, I'll use the remainder of my time to offer you one hypothesis about how the shrine might have been arranged and rearranged over time. The reader should note that I have not been able to analyze the traces of the footprints, dowels and clamps on the podiums themselves, as the site has been closed to visitors since the investigations of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Manhattan District Attorney began. The necessarily hypothetical account that follows attempts only to reconcile the twelve surviving statues with the very peculiar evidence of the fifteen surviving inscriptions on the denuded podiums.

## THE IMPERIAL SHRINE AT BOUBON

The earliest inscription at the Sebasteion is located on the long north podium facing the open side of one of the rooms in the portico running to the east of the Boubon theater. The text acknowledges the role of the provincial governor Gaius Licinius Mucianus, who served under Nero, in approving the dedication of the shrine. The first three lines have been erased; what remains states, "The council and people of Boubon dedicated [this building] through Gaius Licinius Mucianus, provincial governor of the Emperor [Nero]" (Nero's name has been chiseled out). The inscription is off-center on the pedestal, located to the left of the space where we would expect the main text to be found. That central space now features a later inscription that must have replaced the original one. I propose that a statue of Mucianus or perhaps the local patron of the shrine stood over the surviving dedicatory inscription while a statue of Nero stood to its right in the center of the pedestal. A third figure, depicting Nero's wife Poppaea, would have balanced the group on Nero's right (fig. 12). (The presence of Poppaea Sabina at the shrine is attested by an inscription located elsewhere



*Fig. 12: Reconstruction of the north podium of the Sebasteion at Boubon ca. 62-65 CE (© author).*

on the pedestal, reflecting, I believe, a later configuration of the statues, as will be discussed.) Two female figures, both wearing a heavy mantle over a crinkly underdress, with their left arm at their side wrapped in drapery and their right arm folded across their chest, have been associated with the Boubon group; one of these could have represented Poppaea. Nero could have been represented by any one of the now-headless nude male figures recovered at the site, most of which adopt the pose of the “Alexander with the Lance” statue type, with their right arm raised and their left hand resting on their hip. It is plausible that the citizens of Boubon opted to represent the local figure not with a monumental nude but rather with a reused Hellenistic figure relocated from somewhere else in the city of Boubon; this himation-clad figure will later be repurposed a second time as Marcus Aurelius. I believe this was the configuration of the Boubon Sebasteion, with the Cleveland statue representing a local figure, one of the heroic nudes as Nero, and one of the female figures representing Poppaea set up on the room’s single platform along the north wall, at the time of the shrine’s initial dedication, probably between 62 and 65 CE. We do not know enough about the history of Boubon to know what prompted the creation of the shrine.



Fig. 13: Reconstruction of the north podium of the Sebasteion at Boubon ca. 96-98 CE (© author).

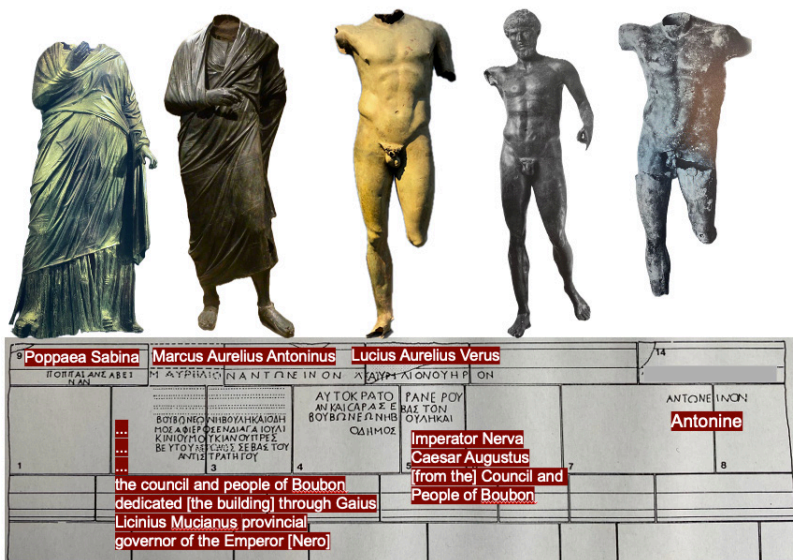


Fig. 14: Reconstruction of the north podium of the Sebasteion at Boubon ca. 190 CE (© author).



The shrine seems to have stood like this until the time of Nerva; there are no inscriptions and no associated portraits from the Flavian dynasty. During the reign of Nerva, whatever inscription once adorned the central position of the pedestal was replaced with the one we see there today, which reads, “Imperator Nerva Caesar Augustus [from the] Council and People of Boubon” (fig. 13). This new inscription must have accompanied a portrait statue of Nerva. It is possible that the statue of Nero was retained for this purpose and was outfitted with a new portrait head. This may also have been the moment when the first three lines of the Mucianus inscription were erased, along with Nero’s name in the final line.

Despite the presence of inscriptions to Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, I believe that the Nervan configuration of the shrine was preserved unchanged for nearly 100 years, until 190 CE, when Boubon had its glorious moment in the sun under the Emperor Commodus (who, as noted earlier, awarded the city an extra vote in the Lycian league in recognition of its role in ridding the region of bandits). The citizens at Boubon were so proud of this honor that they inscribed Commodus’ letter in the theater. The letter dwells on Commodus’ dynastic lineage, mentioning Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius in its opening lines. I propose that the citizens of Boubon, perhaps taking their cue from that text, also undertook at this moment a drastic rearrangement of the statue podium in their imperial shrine, adding a whole Antonine layer to the ensemble (fig. 14). As an Antonine ancestor, Nerva was allowed to stay. The statue of the local notable also remained in place, but was furnished with a new portrait head depicting Marcus Aurelius and a new inscription with Marcus’ name squeezed in just below the molding and above the original inscription to Mucianus. The figure of Poppaea was relocated from its original position on the right of Nero/Nerva to the far left side of the pedestal, where her name also appears in an unusual location just below the molding, adjacent to the inscription naming Marcus Aurelius. Where she had previously stood, a new statue of Lucius Verus was installed, and his name too was etched in below the molding. To the right of Lucius, on the far right side of the pedestal, a new statue of Commodus (perhaps the torso that surfaced with Jerome Eisenberg in 1966, apparently the largest statue in the group) was installed, directly over the word “Antonine” inscribed on the orthostat. Despite its many surprising elements (such as the largest and presumably most important statue in the group being located at the far end of the podium) and unresolved problems (such as the strange, single-word inscription “Antonine” and the preservation of Poppaea’s name and statue), I believe this account of the Antonine intervention into the pedestal makes the most sense of the very puzzling evidence.

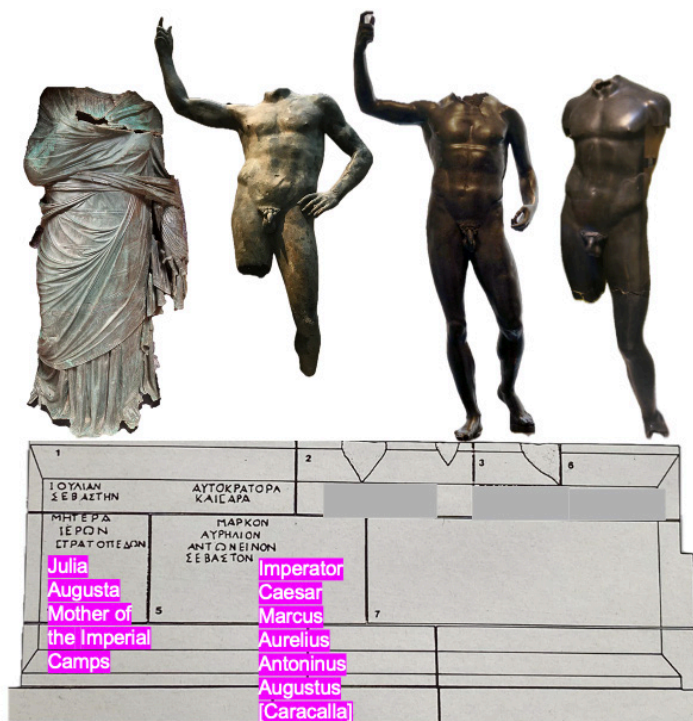


Fig. 15: Reconstruction of the east podium of the Sebasteion at Boubon ca. 193-211 (© author).

The next intervention at the shrine occurred only a short time later, during the reign of Septimius Severus (193 - 211 CE). At this moment, a whole new podium was added to the room along the east wall, presumably featuring four statues: Julia Domna, Caracalla (as Caesar), Septimius Severus, and Geta (fig. 15). The inscriptions for only the first two of these figures remain, reading “Julia Augusta Mother of the Camps” and “Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus.” Both inscriptions are unusual, consisting of only a single word on each line, and beginning up under the molding and continuing down to the orthostat. The Severan inscriptions to the right of these, which must have named the other two members of the dynasty, have vanished without a trace. The statues that stood atop this platform must have included the other of the two female figures that have been associated with Boubon; the statue now in Houston, topped by the portrait head of the Young Caracalla so beloved of Cornelius Vermeule; the statue that was formerly on loan to the Met that was thought to go with the head of Septimius Severus in Copenhagen; and one of the other now-headless torsos.



*Fig. 16: Reconstruction of the freestanding pedestals along the west wall of the Sebasteion at Boubon, erected in 211-217 and 238-244 CE (© author).*

After Caracalla succeeded his father to the throne, the citizens of Boubon honored him with his own free-standing statue on a base set up along the west wall of the shrine. It is inscribed, “Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus Pius Felix Augustus.” There is, again, currently no way to know which of the nude male bodies associated with Boubon stood atop this base, although the portrait head was likely the one that ended up in the Met’s collection via the Schimmel donation. A generation later, another free-standing statue was set up along the west wall, honoring the emperor Gordian (238-44) (“Emperor Caesar Marcus Antoninus Gordian”) (fig. 16).

The final intervention at the imperial shrine of Boubon occurred between 260 and 268, when a dedication to Gallienus, his wife Cornelia and his father Valerian was inserted onto the East podium (fig. 17). Surprisingly, the name of Cornelia Salonina Augusta occupies platform’s central position, albeit etched under the molding and not on the orthostat. As for the statue that stood atop it,

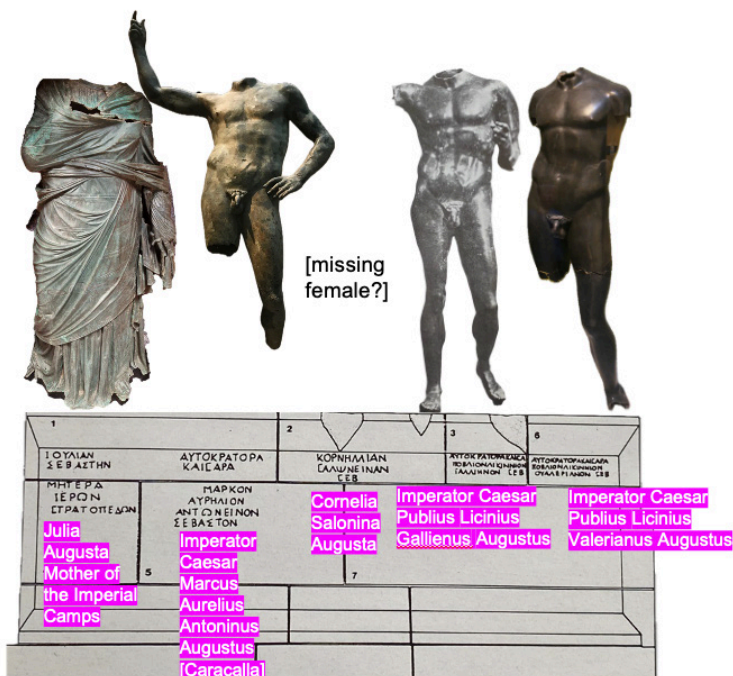


Fig. 17: Reconstruction of the east podium of the Sebasteion at Boubon ca. 260-268 (© author).

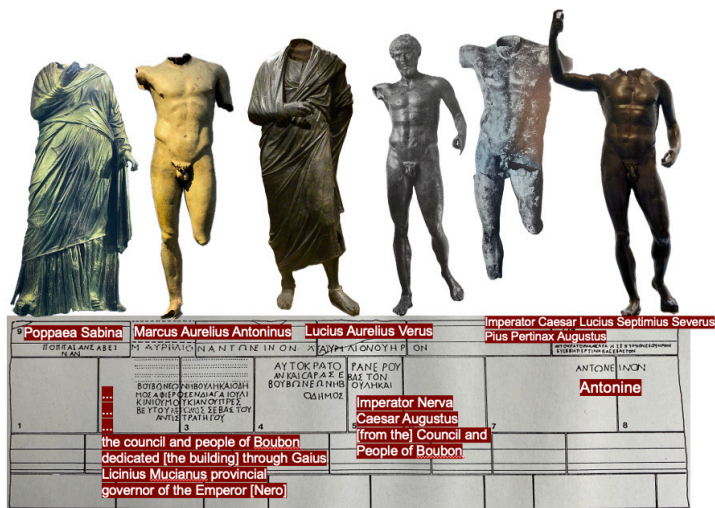


Fig. 18: Reconstruction of the north podium of the Sebasteion at Boubon ca. 260-268 (© author).

I am aware of only two female figures that have been associated with Boubon. Either a third statue is still out there somewhere, or else perhaps the statue of Julia Domna was repurposed for this figure. It also seems plausible that one of the two male Gallienic additions to the east pedestal was a repurposing of the former Geta statue. If so, it would mean that all the male statues and inscriptions associated with the Boubon shrine have been accounted for (i.e. there is a statue for every inscription and at least one inscription for every statue).

The reconfiguration of the shrine under Gallienus included one more move. Perhaps in order to make room for the new Gallienic figures, the statue of Septimius Severus was relocated from the east podium to the far right end of the north podium, next to the figure of Commodus (fig. 18). A tiny inscription to “Imperator Caesar Lucius Septimius Severus Pius Pertinax Augustus,” half the font size of any other inscription at the shrine, is squeezed in under the molding, right above the large “Antoninus” inscription on the orthostat.

If this reconstruction is correct, by 268, the Boubon Sebasteion featured six statues atop its north platform, four or five (depending on whether the Julia Domna remained in place when Cornelia Salonina was added or was repurposed to represent her) on the east platform, and two on the free-standing bases along the west wall, for a total of either twelve or thirteen statues. By this date, there is little doubt that the room would have been noticeably crowded. This was, perhaps, the point. Cumulatively, the statues functioned as a kind of visual index of Boubon’s long engagement with Roman imperial power, and thus a claim for the city’s enduring importance over time.

But as is clear, my reconstruction of the history of the Boubon Sebasteion remains quite hypothetical. The eventual reunification of the statues at or near the site, where their relative sizes and forms can be analyzed in conjunction with each other and with the statue bases, is the only way we will ever gain greater certainty. The looting at Boubon, spurred by the insatiable market for classical art in Europe and the U.S., should be remembered as one of the greatest tragedies of twentieth-century archaeology. We should be doing everything we can now to begin mitigating the damage.

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