

Analysis of Augustus Head

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Abstract: Augustus was a famous emperor in ancient Rome. As there are too many souvenirs for him, some people question whether Augustus was deified. In fact, in Rome and other places, Augustus was neither simply remembered as the first emperor nor worshipped as a deified figure. The head portrait created by ancient Romans for him is exquisite in workmanship, full of characteristics and of great research value.

Keywords: Greece, Augustus, Ancient Rome, Sculpture

1. History Background

After conquering Greece, ancient Rome became the conqueror of ancient Greek culture. It inherited ancient Greek art in sculpture, architecture and other aspects. Sculpture art should have a very high social status in ancient Rome, because many emperors or people with rights like to ask artisans to make statues or head portraits for themselves so that future generations can remember them. Archaeologists can still find a large number of statues or portraits of ancient Rome when ancient Rome's sculpture works reach the present day and send these works of art to various museums for collection and display after judging who these sculptures are commemorating. Augustus was a famous emperor in ancient Rome. As there are too many souvenirs for him, some people question whether Augustus was deified. In fact, in Rome and other places, Augustus was neither simply remembered as the first emperor nor worshipped as a deified figure. The head portrait created by ancient Romans for him is exquisite in workmanship, full of characteristics and of great research value. Therefore, some contemporary museums have collected some portraits of Augustus, which look similar but are still different in details.

There are many exquisite and well-preserved works of art in Kelsey Museum in Ann Arbor, and Head of Augustus is one of them. From the brief introduction beside the head portrait, we know Augustus was the first emperor of Rome, whose period was 27 BC to 14 AD. Augustus, originally named Octavian, is Julius Caesar's grandnephew and adopted son. Augustus was awarded the honorary title of Octavian by the Roman Senate in 27 BC. He was praised as the messenger of peace and prosperity after Rome experienced long-term civil strife and military conflicts. Subsequently, a new idealized portrait was created for Augustus. The head of Augustus preserved in Kelsey Museum is a replica of the new idealized portrait.

2. The Augustus's head in Kelsey Museum

By looking at Augustus's head, we can see that it is made of marble. It has short and neat hair, and its eyes are firmly looking at the front. It is very young and has no beard, and its corners of the mouth are slightly bent upward. The eyebrow bow in the right eye was smashed in half, the nose was smashed, only a small section of the bridge of the nose and a small part of the nose on the right side were visible, and the left chin was also smashed. There is a long scratch on the forehead and cheek of the right face. I don't know whether it is a wound or a scratch caused by later damage. From the left side of the head, it can be seen that Augustus' head should be hit hard on the hard object with his left face facing downwards and rubbed on the hard object for a certain distance, because the lips, cheekbones, eyebrow bow, forehead and hair of the left face are severely worn, by contrast, the right face is much smoother. The bottom of the head is also seriously worn and corroded. Maybe the head was soaked in water before it was found. The succinct and forceful features of Augustus's head and neat hair may be the comparison of Augustus to a Greek hero in the classical era.

In addition to Augustus' head preserved in Kelsey Museum, other museums have also collected works of art believed to be Augustus' head. For example, there is a portrait of Augustus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Fig.1) This is a little blue-green faience head, which is 6.8cm long. It is a colorful head

portrait, but the glaze has basically disappeared, leaving only faded green.

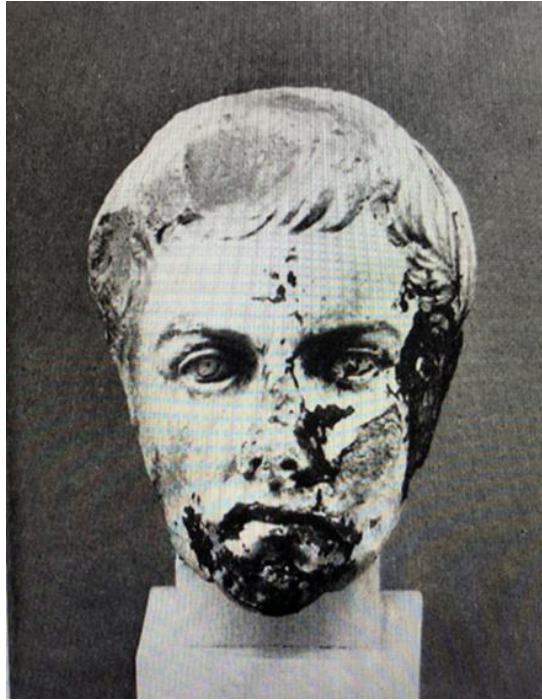


Fig.1 A portrait of Augustus

From the picture, we can see that this faience head has similar short and neat hair to Augustus's head in Kelsey Museum, except for a few damaged hairs. It looks more broken than Kelsey's. There is a line on its face extending from the top of the head to the chin, which makes people feel that it is almost divided into two halves. The eyes of the faience head of Augustus were not greatly damaged and could be clearly seen. It also can see the nose, but the bridge of the nose is missing, part of the chin is missing, the shape of the mouth can't be seen clearly, there is a deep wound on the right cheek, and part of the surface of the left cheek is damaged.

Although it looks dilapidated and small in size, it can still be seen that the faience head of Augustus is a portrait of Augustus in his later period, because it conforms to the characteristics of the portrait in his later period. It has two vertical lines on both sides of the nose where it is connected to the forehead. In this way, head of Augustus in Kelsey also has two vertical lines on both sides of the nose where it is connected to the forehead. Not only that, there is also a horizontal line on its forehead, which is also the characteristic of the portrait of Augustus in his later period. Therefore, in a comprehensive view, head of Augustus in Kelsey is also a portrait of Augustus in his later period, just like The faience head of Augustus. The biggest difference between faience head and Kelsey's head is that it is glazed and its volume is designed to be very small. You can imagine how delicate and small it is when it is still intact. This head should be decorated as an ornament in a room or pavilion. In brief, head of Augustus in Kelsey and faience head of Augustus, they should all be works of art from the late Augustus, but their uses are different. The former is a souvenir specially created for Augustus, while the latter is a mini exquisite ornament.

3. Another Augustus's head

Another head of Augustus was dug up by the University of Michigan expedition near the Byzantine church and is now in the museum in Constantinople. The head portrait has a maximum height of 0.35m, a maximum width of 0.25m and a maximum depth of 0.28m. Except for the 0.06m split in the nose, other parts are almost intact. (Fig.2)



Fig.2 Head of Augustus from Pisidian Antioch

The head portrait is also made of marble. Its hairstyle is almost the same as that of Augustus in Kelsey. No matter the direction of each lock of hair or the position of hair temples are almost the same, the mouth is slightly open, and the corners of the mouth are raised. The difference is that the head portrait of Augustus found near the Byzantine church is square, and part of its neck is also preserved. The muscles and Adam's apple on the neck can be clearly seen. Augustus' chin can be seen on the head of Augustus from Pisidian Antioch. Its chin is square and round. Because the head is well preserved, it shows good texture and excellent workmanship. Every muscle on the face and neck is obvious but not exaggerated. The hair is treated meticulously and perfectly. The surface of the face and neck is smooth, and the head is turned slightly to the right. Except for the flesh around the eyes and lips, the face is bulged, and the other surfaces of the cheek are flat, even some places are sunken, which can be explained because Augustus is in poor health. To sum up, If the head of Augustus in Kelsey Museum is an idealized portrait created to conform to the image given to him by the people and the Senate at that time, then this head of Augustus from Pisidian Antioch should be the real portrait of Augustus.

4. Conclusion

The head of Augustus in Kelsey Museum, the faience head of Augustus, and head of Augustus from Pisidian Antioch are all exquisite workmanship and exquisite works of art from the Augustus period. The first and third are commemorative sculptures made of larger marble for people to watch. However, the portrait of the first is idealized, and the first and third are all shaped as images of peace and compassion. Their eyes are gentle, and their corners of the mouth are raised. The second is small. Although it is broken, we can still see the characteristics of Augustus' head. The second is the glazed colored head. Although the glaze has faded, we can still imagine that it used to be a beautiful decoration. The three Augustus heads are typical and interesting ancient Roman works of art worthy of our collection and research.

In conclusion, the head of Augustus in Kelsey Museum is an idealized portrait created after Augustus was conferred the title of patriarch by the Senate. Although it has been damaged, it can still be seen its exquisite workmanship and elaborate design. Augustus' head is characterized by sharp, short and neat curls. Each lock of hair is carefully designed to have a fixed direction, with gentle eyes, smooth surface, slightly parted or relaxed lips, and always rising corners of the mouth, with square and thick chin. Augustus' head is generally used for people to watch and remember, and some Augustus' heads are made smaller and glazed to make decorations.

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