ELEPHANT ICONOGRAPHY IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD FROM THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD TO THE END OF THE ROMAN PERIOD

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Abstract
According to ancient writers, the elephant was a docile and intelligent animal that was easy to control, so it was fit to use as a war machine. Elephants are not part of the Mediterranean wildlife. Elephants came to the region with the wars. Elephants became an iconographic symbol during the Hellenistic and Roman Periods in Anatolia. In our study, we discuss how the elephant became an iconographic element in the light of this information obtained from ancient and modern sources. The Hellenes first encountered elephants in the Battle of Hydaspes. The Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties, the successors of Alexander the Great, essentially included elephants in their armies. The Romans first encountered elephants in Pyrrhos' army. Apart from the use of elephants as "war machines," the use of elephants began to differ in the Roman Imperial Period. Before becoming emperor, Elagabalus was one of the priests of Helios-Sun worship in Emesa. He had elephant depictions on his coins during his reign. The elephants raise their heads to the sun when the sun rises. Thus, ancient people related sun worship to elephants. Cultural artifacts featuring elephant iconography have been examined and interpreted in the context of this military and administrative influence. Production of artifacts bearing images of elephant symbolism increased as a means of propaganda to announce heroism and the superiority established over the enemy. The fact that ordinary citizens can easily access these works enables them to remember the power of the kingdom or empire and not to forget this power. The development of elephant iconography was to be revealed by following the traces of the artistic and cultural development of the period in the works.

Keywords: Elephant Iconography, Diadochi, Helios Cult, Alexander the Great, War Tactics, Power Symbol

1. INTRODUCTION

The present study aims to elucidate the symbolic value of elephants in the Ancient Mediterranean region from the Hellenistic Period to the end of the Roman Period. Elephants are not part of the Mediterranean wildlife. Elephants are enormous, docile, and intelligent animals that are easy to control, so in battles, they were fit to use as a war machine. During the wars of Hellenistic and Roman armies, they came to Anatolia and the Mediterranean basin. The Hellenes first encountered elephants in the Battle of Hydaspes. The Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties, the successors of Alexander the Great, essentially included elephants in their armies. The Romans first encountered elephants in Pyrrhos' army. Production of artifacts bearing images of elephant symbolism increased as a means of propaganda to announce heroism and the superiority established over the enemy. The present paper examines cultural artifacts featuring elephant iconography and evaluates them within the context of military and administrative influence. Conclusively, the study relates the evolution of elephant iconography in parallel with its becoming a signifier of power due to its use in battles as "war machines."

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Ancient sources are the primary sources of the present study. Elephants are the most mentioned animals in the narratives of the ancient writers. Moreover, modern research sources provide historical information about the iconographic development of the elephant. We worked on the artifacts that represented the elephant iconography and interpreted the artifacts of art as artistic and historical.

3. ELEPHANT

There are two species of elephants, the Asian (Elephas maximus) and African (Loxodonta Africana) elephants (Howatson 2013: 323). The African elephant has large, floppy ears, a concave back, and impressive tusks. The Asian species have relatively small ears, a convex back, and smaller teeth. It lives in today's India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and Sumatra. Almost all ancient writers agree that Indian elephants are bigger and stronger than African or Libyan elephants.

Elephants took part in the Roman army in units just like human soldiers. For example, the leader of a single elephant was the zoarchos (animal commander), the leader of two elephants was therarchos (animal commander), and his command was therarchia (animal unit). The leader of a unit consisting of four elephants was an epitherarchos (an upper elephant commander). His commander was a superior elephant unit (epitherarchia), the leader of a unit consisting of eight elephants (ilarches), the leader of a unit of sixteen elephants is called elephantarches, the leader of a unit of thirty-two elephants (kerarches) and this phalangarches (phalanx commander) to the leader of the unit consisting of twice the number of elephants; Thus, elephant commanders took names corresponding to the status of their unit (Asclepiodotus VII. 10- IX.1).

4. ELEPHANT IN ANCIENT SOURCES

Herodotus, one of the ancient writers, mentions the elephants of Africa, especially Ethiopia, in his book Historia (Hdt. 3.114; 4.191) (Lindell & Scott 1961: 533). On the other hand, Pausanias mentions the use of ivory in arts and crafts and that the Macedonians had never seen these animals before moving to Asia (Paus. 1.12.4); (Lindell & Scott 1961: 533). Apart from this, Pliny the Elder talks about how and where elephants were used in ancient times, from the past to his period, in a chapter called "Wars of the Elephants" in his book Natural History. He also explains step by step how the elephant hunt took place (Plin. (the Elder) 8.7.7); (Plin. (the Elder) 8.8.8) (Lindell & Scott 1961 p. 533). Diodorus describes the depiction of war elephants on the funeral elephants in Alexander the Great's hearse (Diod. 18, 27). Plutarch suggests that Porus's elephant at the battle of the Hydaspes was the giant elephant by its physical characteristics (Plut. 60.6). Asclepiodotus, on the other hand, stated in detail the names of the positions and units of the elephants in the army (Asclepiodotus VII. 10- IX.1). Aristotle noted that while other animals deal with many different diseases, the elephant has no health problems other than bloating (Arist. VIII, XXII, 227). Aristotle talks in detail about the illnesses of elephants and how they should be treated (Arist. VIII, XXV; 224). Polybios stated that elephants were in the army of the Carthaginians (Polyb. I-19, I-20), Appianus recorded that they were in the military under the command of Metellus Scipio in the battle of Thapsus, where Caesar was victorious (App. 2.14-96). Titus Livius also recorded that the elephants appeared in a line like a castle during the Carthaginian wars and that some of the elephants carried a crenelated tower on their backs, from which four or more soldiers placed on top to throw javelins. Such elephant towers were represented in terracotta figures or painted objects (Liv. 28.14-5).

5. HISTORY OF THE ELEPHANT IN THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Western Civilizations first encountered elephants during the Period of Alexander the Great (4th century BCE) (Howatson 2013: 323). Alexander the Great's first encounter with elephants was the battle of Gaugamela with the Persian ruler Darius III between 380 and 330 BCE. In the Hydaspes war between the Paurava king Poros and Alexander the Great in 326 BCE, two hundred elephants accompanied the crowded army (Smith 1919: 63). Alexander the Great probably had the Poros medallions minted after his victory. Alexander the Great did not use elephants in his wars. However, their successors, the Ptolemies and Seleucids, used elephants extensively in wars. It results from Alexander the Great's expedition to India (Howatson 2013: 322). Between Eumenes and Antigonus Monophthalmus, the successors of Alexander the Great, elephant troops were included in the armies of both sides, in Paraitakene in 317 BCE and Gabiene in 316 BCE (Nossov 2008: 20).

Antigonus and his son Demetrius in Ipsus in 301 BCE; He confronted Seleucus I (r. 305-281 BCE) and Lysimachus (r. 306/305-281). In this war, elephants were again included in the army (Nossov 2008: 20). Elephants became the symbol of the Seleucids after this war. Coins struck depicting Seleucus in a chariot pulled by elephants. In addition, Seleucus received the title of 'lord of elephants' or 'elephant king'

(Nossov 2008: 22). Elephants also contributed significantly to the victory of Antiochus I (281-261 BCE) against the Galatians in 276 BC (Nossov 2008: 22).

The Battle of Raphia, which took place in 217 BCE, took place between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies over the domination of the Syria region (Nossov 2008: 20). According to Polybius, the Ptolemies participated in the war with African forest elephants and the Seleucids with Asian elephants. In the Battle of Raphia, which took place between Antiochus III and Ptolemy IV, Antiochus left his army behind and chased after the enemy, thus losing the war. Antiochus III repeated the same mistake against the Romans in the Battle of Magnesia in 190 BCE. After this defeat, Antiochus III gave up his war elephants and had to make a peace agreement stating that he would never repurchase new ones. However, the kings of Syria still needed to comply thoroughly with this part of the agreement. Antiochus VII used War elephants last against the Parthians in 130 BCE. By the end of the 2nd century BCE, no elephants were left in the Seleucid army (Nossov 2008: 23).

6. DEPICTION OF THE ELEPHANT ON THE MATERIAL CULTURE IN THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

After the depiction of an elephant began to appear on Alexander the Great's coins, his successors, the diadochi, who succeeded him, also used the image of an elephant on the coins they minted in their names for a long time.

The elephant head cap (exuvia elephantis) on the head of the bronze figure of Alexander the Great **(Fig. 1)** found in Egypt represents Alexander's victory against Porus (Van Oppen de Ruiter 2019: 23). Plutarch describes the war elephants of Antigonos I as covered with purple helmets and bearing carrying towers. He mentions that the war elephants of Antigonos I had towers covered with purple spreads (Plut. Eumenes 14). Polybius says that in the battle of Raphia, Ptolemy's elephants carried towers with warriors armed with sarissa (long spears) (Polyb. 5.84). Livius, on the other hand, states that Antiochus III's elephants wore feathered armor on their foreheads, that there were four men in the tower, and that the crew consisted of five people, including the driver (Liv. 37.40.4). Judging by the surviving works of art, the team usually consists of a rider and two warriors in the tower carrying bows, spears, or javelins. Perhaps the artists show fewer people because they did not know how to accommodate more warriors on small coins and figurines (Nossov 2008: 23). In the Seleucid king's struggle against the invading Galatians, Antiochus deployed war elephants in battle (c. 275/4 BCE). Objects of art, such as the terracotta elephant figurine found at Myrina, emphasize the critical role elephants played in wars **(Fig. 2)**. It shows an ornate war elephant with a rider and a wooden turret with a metal shield attacking a Gaul, recognizable by his Celtic shield. (Van Oppen de Ruiter 2019: 13).

7. HISTORY OF THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

The Romans encountered an army that included elephants for the first time when they faced Pyrrhos, the king of the Hellenistic city of Epiros, in 280 BCE, they. The Battle of Pyrrhus took place near the town of Herakleia in Lucania, located in the west of the Gulf of Tarentum (Atlan 2018: 65). During the First Punic War (264-241 BCE), the Carthaginian commander raided Herbesos and surrounded the city, resulting food and water shortage, which exhausted the Romans with starvation and epidemic. The Carthaginian troops fought against the Romans, and nearly fifty elephants accompanied the army (Polyb I-18, I-19). During the Second Punic War (218-201 BCE), when the Carthaginian commander Hannibal set out for Italian territory, he had an army of ninety thousand infantry, twelve thousand cavalry, and thirty-seven elephants. However, at the end of the six-month march, Hannibal had fewer than a quarter of the army.

Furthermore, three elephants are left (Healy 1999: 12; Diakov and Kovalev 2015: 78). Another encounter of the Romans with elephants was the Battle of Zama in 202 BCE. In this war, the Romans learned to open the ranks and pass through without harming the elephants (Howatson 2013: 323). The Battle of Cynoscephalae, also called the Second Macedonian War, took place in 197 BCE under Macedonian commander Philip V and Roman commander Titus Quinctius Flamininius (Polyb. 18. 19-27). While advancing on the Macedonians in the Manipulus tactic, the troops on the right took elephants in front of them, and the Macedonians were torn to pieces by the elephants (Polyb. 18. 23, 25). Another

war in which the Romans used elephants was in the 3rd-2nd centuries BCE. The Battle of Pydna ended the wars between the Romans and Macedonians between centuries (Davis 1999: 51). Elephants among Roman soldiers were used in the civil war of Pharsalus in 48 BCE. The Battle of Pharsalus took place in Farsala, Greece, between Gaius Julius Caesar and Pompey (Gilliver 1999: 107). Gaius Julius Caesar's previous training of his soldiers against elephants was also practical in the Battle of Thapsus in Tunisia in 46 BCE (Nossov 2008: 31).

Then, during the Roman Imperial Period, Roman Emperor Claudius (41-54 CE) brought several elephants to Britain to suppress an uprising in 44 CE. The last person who tried introducing elephants to the battlefield was Didius Julianus (193 CE), who fought with the Roman Emperor Septimus Severus (193-211 CE) for the imperial title. However, he tried to strengthen Julianus's ineffective army with elephants raised in the circus (Nossov 2008: 31). Apart from this, the Roman Emperor Elagabalus is known to have used elephants not on the battlefield but for religious and entertainment purposes. As understood from the records of his chariot races with camels and elephants in the Vatican and its tombs, Elagabalus used chariots drawn by these animals with great courage (Hay 1911: 263). Elephants are related to Helios, in other words, sun worship, since they raise their heads to the sun when the sun rises, surmised as the engagement of elephants in sun worship in the Late Antique period (Tülek 1998: 17). In the city of Emesa, there is intense worship of a sun god called El-Gabal, Elagabalus, Alagabalus, Eliogabalus and Heliogabalus (Lenormant 1877: 310). Additionally, one of the prominent priests of the sun god was Varius Avitus Bassianus (Halsberghe 1972: 62; Turcan 1985: 15), known as the future Roman Emperor Elagabalus.

There is epigraphic and numismatic evidence for the worship of Sol Invictus among the Roman emperors during the reigns of Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus, Commodus, and Septimus Severus. However, the official cult of the god occurred during the reign of Elagabalus (Halsberghe 1972: 35, 45-50) in the 3rd century AD. The military continued to gain importance during the reign of emperors (Farnell 1909: 420; Hoffmann 1963: 117).

8. DEPICTION OF THE ELEPHANT ON THE MATERIAL CULTURE IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

During the Kingdom, Republic, and Empire periods of Rome, many rulers used elephant depictions for different purposes on the coins they minted during their reign.

A plate depicting an Elephant is on display in Villa Giulia, Rome. It shows the Roman Victory over Pyhrrus of Epirus with Beneventum in 274 BCE **(Fig. 3)**. As we see on the plate, the elephant is an Asian elephant. It was the first time the Roman army saw an elephant. At the same time, we can observe the equipment of Hellenistic kings' war elephants from a plate found here (Van Oppen de Ruiter 2019: 9). Another elephant depiction is the Cleopatra Selene Plate **(Fig. 4)**. This is a gilded silver emblema plate with a presumed allegorical portrait of Cleopatra Selene surrounded by a plethora of numerous religious symbols and attributes in a garland of myrtle berries and laurel leaves. She wears the exuvia elephantis, the elephant cap, indicating that the elephant remained a powerful image even in the post-Hellenistic age (Van Oppen de Ruiter 2019: 11). Another work of art is an elephant, similar to that of the Myrina object, surmounted with a tower and an African rider who holds the trunk of the animal **(Fig. 5)**. The elephant figure is executed similar to those of the war elephants. The ears and shape of its back suggest it is an African elephant. It even has two "fingers" at the top and bottom at the end of its trunk. It is a distinctive feature of the African elephant; Asian elephants have only one "toe" at the top (Gowers 1950: 282).

Another work of art referring to the 2nd Punic War is an African elephant carved in local stone **(Fig. 6)** in Alba Fucens in Italy, dated to the 2nd century CE. Fernand De Visscher claims that the craftsman who carved the work was inspired by the 2nd Punic War when Hannibal crossed to Italy with his elephants (De Visscher 1960: 54-56). The monument known as the Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki, built in 300 CE as part of the palace complex, bears scenes in relief of Rome's military campaign against the Persians, showing that the Arch of Galerius commemorates a victory on the Eastern frontier during the Tetrarchy. The relief scene is a sculptural document of Galerius' most notable achievement, the high

point in the military history of the Late Roman Empire (Pond Rothman 1977: 429, 432). We can see this historical moment in these examples: Victoria Orientis Relief, The Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki **(Fig. 7)**, and Cortege of Gift-bearing Persians' Relief, The Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki **(Fig. 8).**

9. CONCLUSION

The rulers of the Hellenistic and Roman periods employed elephants as war weapons; however, it is possible to encounter works made of ivory in works of art due to the wild animal trade created by ancient people. Thus, the rulers, emperors, or diadochi conquered new lands while consolidating their territory. The elephant has become a symbol of power. A king or emperor must choose good propaganda material to promote his victories and achievements to his people and even people from different regions.
Elephant depictions are also the most important figures of this propaganda. Owning this animal, which does not grow in the lands of the West, and winning the war with it is a great show of power. The type of elephant refers to the war period it alludes to.

An Asian type of elephant primarily refers to the wars of Alexander and his successors. If we see a depiction of an African elephant, it represents the elephants of Hannibal, the commander of Carthage, Rome's long-time enemy. Elephant riders also provide us with the necessary information. Because the Romans brought African riders and elephants to Roman lands, Alexander and his successors generally kept elephants in their conquered lands. For example, Alexander the Great, who never used elephants in his wars, deployed his elephants in the Babylonian lands. The iconographic development of elephants also changes in parallel with historical development. Hellenic and Roman rulers learned the military equipment fitted to elephants from their eastern and Asian enemies and imitated them.

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FIGURES

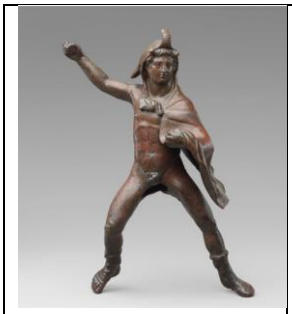


Fig.1: Alexander As Rider (3rd BCE) Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
(Van Oppen de Ruiter 2019: 24)



Fig. 2: Elephant Trampling Gaul
3rd century BCE (275/4 BCE)
Louvre Museum, Paris
(Van Oppen de Ruiter 2019: 14)



Fig. 3: Elephant Plate 275-270 BCE.
National Etruscan Museum in Rome
(Van Oppen de Ruiter 2019: 9)



Fig. 4: Cleopatra Selene Plate (25 BCE).
Louvre Museum, Paris (Van Oppen de Ruiter 2019: 11)



Fig. 5: Elephant with a tower on its back and an African rider
2nd -1st centuries CE
National Archaeologival Museum Naples, Campania, Italy.



Fig. 6: Carved elephant on the stone
2nd century CE
Alba Fucens, Italy
(De Visscher 1960: 51)



Fig. 7: Cortege of Gift-bearing Persians's Relief
The Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki
4rd century CE
(Pon Rothman 1977: 442)



Fig. 8: Victoria Orientis Relief
The Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki
4rd century CE
(Pon Rothman 1977: 445)