The Spoils of Peace: Hadrian's Private Leisure and Its Public Message in the Hunting Tondi

More than any previous emperor, Hadrian portrayed himself pursuing the life of a private citizen. In his sculptural program, he displayed himself in the roles of hunter and lover, representatives of two aspects of aristocratic *otium*. How, one wonders, would an audience of the time have interpreted this new twist on imperial self-representation? When taken with the rest of Hadrian’s image, what would it have said about his reign in relation to those that preceded it?

It is clear that diplomacy, peace, and imperial stability played a major role in Hadrian’s public image and subsequent legacy: these are themes that emerge repeatedly from a reading of Hadrianic coins, the Hadrianic Pantheon, the Antonine Temple to Divine Hadrian, and the *Life of Hadrian* in the *Historia Augusta*. This paper argues that Hadrianic representations of the emperor at leisure are best read in this context and focuses on the hunting tondi as an instance of such representation. When one views the tondi in this light, they appear to recycle a connection between *pax* and *otium* that was part of Augustan elegiac discourse, but that had never become part of the tradition of imperial representation. I examine ways in which the tondi draw on the tradition of military representation—notably Trajan’s Column and the Great Trajanic Frieze—to mark hunting as a peacetime alternative to war for the demonstration of virtue. (The military cast of the hunting tondi has not gone unnoticed: cf. Boatwright 1987, Kleiner 1992, Turcan 1999.) These techniques bear striking similarities to those employed by the Augustan elegists, who used the traditional language of military conquest to make amatory pursuits into a new form of “soldiering,” a novel way of performing manhood in a changed, more peaceful era. But in the tondi, this elegiac revaluation of *otium* is extended to include the emperor himself. The implicit argument is that Hadrian’s empire is one of unprecedented *pax*. Augustan stability has returned, only stronger: Hadrian’s empire is so stable that even the emperor must demonstrate his virtue in *otium* more than in *negotium*; even he has no choice but to enjoy the spoils of peace.

If one considers that the tondi’s representation of *otium* contributes to a contemporary conversation about Hadrianic *pax*, one is also better able to explain the prevalence of Hadrian’s depiction as a lover. I argue that this amatory aspect of Hadrian’s image appears in the tondi themselves, and it is certainly present in the Alexandrian Lion Hunt Poem, which I touch on for its parallels with the tondi.

Works Cited

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