

# The Ludovisi “Suicidal Gaul” and his wife: bronze or marble original, Hellenistic or Roman?

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From 1981 to 2002, in various lectures and writings, I presented my suggestion about the “Roman” conception of the Ludovisi Suicidal Gaul, without eliciting positive responses. What has prompted me to re-open this issue after the passing of so many years? Perhaps the catalyst was a major exhibition — *Pergamon and the Hellenistic Kingdoms of the Ancient World* — held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York from April 18 to July 17, 2016, together with its impressive catalogue. There, an essay by M. Papini reviewed present knowledge about the victory dedications of the Attalids and the stone bases for them erected at Pergamon within the precinct of Athena Nikephoros. Although admitting that certainty was impossible and that serious difficulties existed about previously attempted reconstructions, he reproduced two drawings that showed the Ludovisi Gaul atop the large cylindrical monument as well as on the long rectangular pedestal “leaving aside [other] improbable attempts ... and even more the interpretation of the marble pieces as Roman works evoking Pergamon ‘in the grand manner’.”<sup>1</sup> The Ludovisi Gaul was not part of the New York exhibition. Its companion piece, the Dying Gaul collapsing on a broken trumpet, did receive a catalogue entry (by E. Polito) that reiterated the difficulty of visualizing the original placement. Yet these two Gauls (the “Trumpeter” and the Ludovisi Gaul) have joined the sculptures from the Pergamon Great Altar as virtual touchstones for our understanding of Pergamene style even though they may not be “Greek” at all, let alone Pergamene.<sup>2</sup>

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*Frequently cited works:*

· *Pergamon MMA* = C. A. Picon and S. Hemingway (edd.), *Pergamon and the Hellenistic kingdoms of the ancient world* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2016).

· Queyrel, *Sc. hell.* = F. Queyrel, *La sculpture hellénistique*, vol. I. *Formes, thèmes et fonctions* (Paris 2016).

- 1 M. Papini, “Commemorations of victory: Attalid monuments to the defeat of the Galatians,” in *Pergamon MMA* 40-43, figs. 50-51 (quote at 42). See also V. Kästner (ibid. 34) placing the Ludovisi and the Dying Gaul on the long base: “... although preserved only in Roman copies. The most famous depictions of Celts from antiquity, they document the distinctive style of this major votive gift of Attalos”.
- 2 E. Polito, “Dying Gaul,” *ibid.*, entry no. 97, pp. 176-77 and n.6, on the difficulty of placing the original bronze on a Pergamene base. Because of the extensive existing discussion of all the sculptures involved in the argument, I avoid mentioning the history of research or giving a detailed description, which can be found in the works already cited, as well as in Queyrel, *Sc. hell.*, and, most recently, in F. Herbin and F. Queyrel, “Les monuments attalides du Dromos à Délos (I): la “base des Galates”,” *BCH* 139-40 (2015-16) 267-319, especially 312, on which see more below (nn. 16 and 21). The alleged bronze “originals” are attributed by Pliny (*NH* 34.84) to several masters — including an Isigonos (*sic*) whose name has been emended to read Epigonos, to conform to a later passage (*NH* 34.88). They would have been taken to Rome by Nero, although Pliny’s mention is vague: *atque ex omnibus quae rettuli clarissima quaeque iam sunt dicata a Vespasiano principe in templo Pacis aliisque eius operibus, violentia Neronis in urbem convecta et in sellariis domus aurea disposta*. “Ex omnibus quae rettuli” include (without further description) “the battles of Attalos and Eumenes against the Gauls ...” by several artists, but also the “Boy Strangling the Goose” by Boethos (although out of sequence, since the master was better known as a silversmith). A long list in chronological/alphabetical order of other famous artists and their works from different periods (*NH* 34.83) precedes both these references; it includes an