

Marcus Crassus

Marcus Crassus sweltered at the rear of eight legions
astride a donkey
sweating, cursing in the Syrian sun

it was the third day before he saw the stone hand himself
gnarled fingers twisting up from the dunes, massive, towering
each nail the size of a man's head
every tributary vein detailed in convincing relief
obsidian blacker and smoother than deep water

a monument -- that much was clear
an ancient monument to some forgotten god, chiseled by forgotten people
long swallowed by the desert

the legions teemed around the hand like ants around a twig
peering, craning, gaping

we must destroy it, said his generals
fearful of blaspheming
but Crassus chastised them

reaching into his purse, he threw
a handful of gold coins at the megalith's base

we have enough enemies, he said.

Three days later the legions were in battle
and the coins enveloped by sand.

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