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A Late Greek Relief

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A LATE GREEK RELIEF

THERE was a period in later Greek sculpture when the impulse towards invention, so strongly marked in the sixth, fifth and fourth centuries B.C. came to an end and when even the Hellenized centres of Pergamum and Rhodes had nothing new to offer. Though Athens' reputation as the centre of sculpture continued for awhile and though Greek workers in Rome were still proud to describe themselves as Athenian, there was an undeniable lack of creative power and a hesitation which attend the closing years of any great tradition. Sculptors and stone-cutters gave up creating new motives and were content to repeat the designs of earlier masters. One group, the Archaists, copied, with certain fashionable distortions, the brilliant works of the sixth century, while another, the Neo-Atticists, returned to the fifth and fourth centuries for their inspiration. It was an era of adaptation and copying; in some cases the pose and gestures of a well-known statue were made over to fit a new divinity, while there are other sculptures which are almost exact reproductions of earlier works.

As an illustration of this latter tendency towards replicas, we may take the interesting marble relief recently presented to the Classical Department through the generosity of Alfred E. Hamill and now on exhibition in Gallery 5. Here is a piece which puzzles the archæologist who attempts to place it correctly. Considered from the standpoint of design and spirit it belongs to about the middle of the fifth century, but its technique points to a period of execution some three or four hundred years later. There is no real clue to its provenance for it was dredged a few years ago, along with a companion relief,¹ from the harbor of Salamis where it had apparently lain for centuries.

But if we lack definite historical detail there is a further piece of important evidence. A sculptured relief in the Villa Albani in Rome, possibly representing the

slaying of Kapaneus by a thunderbolt, corresponds exactly in design with our piece. Though there has been much discussion regarding this relief, Winter,² Robert,³ and Helbig⁴ have agreed to call it a production of the middle of the fifth century B.C. and have connected it with such varied works as the Nereid monuments, the metopes from the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, a group of sarcophagi from Sidon, and certain Tarentine terra-cottas.⁵ Whether the subject is Kapaneus, dying on the walls of Thebes, or Salmoneus, the monarch who defied Zeus and was killed with his thunderbolt, is not clear. From his broad fillet he must be either a king or a priest. In both reliefs, the warrior, mortally wounded in the neck, sinks to the ground, his right knee bent, his left leg outstretched. Nude, save for a short himation flung over his left shoulder, he raises his right hand to the wound while his left hand still grasps a round shield. Our relief is the more fragmentary: the right arm and elbow, the fingers of the left hand, all of the right leg and foot, as well as part of the left leg are missing. Restorations on the Villa Albani relief include the nose, the right third of the background with part of the shield, the left leg and all of the base.

The relief in Rome is large and simple in modeling, representative of a period in Greek sculpture when the archaic conventions were giving way to a freer treatment. Survivals of the older style may be noted in the unrealistic folds of the himation, the conventionalization of the hair and beard, and in the smooth and generalized structure of the torso. Though dying of his wound, the warrior's features are not greatly contorted by the agony of the situation; his gestures are calm and dignified, and it is in this conception, as well as in the sculptor's handling of large curves and rounded

² *Archäologische Anzeiger*, Vol. IX (1894), p. 12, n. 11.

³ "Die Marathonschlacht in der Poikile" in *Hallisches Winkelmanns programm*, Vol. XVIII, p. 69.

⁴ *Führer durch die Sammlungen klassischer Altertümer in Rom.*, 1913, Vol. II, pp. 401-2.

⁵ *Jahreshefte d. österr. arch. Inst.*, Vol. VI (1903), *Anzeiger* p. 62, n. 2.

¹ Illustrated in *International Studio*, Vol. LXXXIV (December, 1926), p. 32.

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A LATE GREEK RELIEF OF KAPANEUS (?) GIFT OF ALFRED E. HAMILL

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planes, that the chief distinction of the piece lies.

Mr. Hamill's relief, a reproduction of the one in the Villa Albani and made at a much later period, agrees in design, but differs in essentials of technique from its prototype. The relief is less deeply carved, and the head, placed at a slightly different angle is less strongly modeled, particularly in the structure of the cheekbones and sockets of the eyes.

The hair and beard are somewhat more simplified but the greatest difference of all lies in the second sculptor's treatment of the torso which bears unmistakable signs of having been influenced by Pergamian realism. No longer are the forms generalized and slightly indicated; the muscles of the chest and abdomen are now depicted in detail. The surface of the relief has a polished quality unusual to early works which often reveal the marks of the tool. All these differences point to Hellenistic workmanship of the second or first century before Christ.

On both the reliefs discovered at Salamis, there are fragments of a curved moulding on the left side such as might have been used on metopes in combination with triglyphs. Single figures are unusual in metope decoration, however, and possibly the moulding is part of a deep frame into which the figures were set, a not infrequent device of the Hellenistic sculptor. One thing is of



RELIEF REPRESENTING KAPANEUS (?) IN THE VILLA ALBANI, ROME

particular interest in our relief: the right side of the figure, from the top of its head down is much more carefully finished than the left. This fact, together with the fore-shortening of the head, seems to mean that the relief was made to be elevated at quite a height, and probably placed in the left corner of some frieze.

The discovery of this new relief may easily throw further

light on the Kapaneus marble in the Villa Albani. The broken condition of the original has led to the general opinion that it is the surviving piece from a much larger composition, but lack of definite information as well as any other fragments to connect with it, have not permitted a restoration. Our relief would tend to strengthen Robert's contention⁶ that the marble may be complete in itself, for it seems unlikely that a Hellenistic sculptor would pick one figure out of a group to make a careful and exact replica.

The existence of the two reliefs, identical in design, but separated by several centuries, forms a most interesting commentary on the development of Greek art. The Classical Department is most fortunate to possess Mr. Hamill's gift, which is a very attractive and vigorous piece of work, quite without the unpleasant mechanical traits often associated with sculpture of this age.

⁶ *Op. cit.*

D. C. R.

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