

Two Masterpieces of Athenian Sculpture

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*Stele of a Youth, Greek, dated about 380 B.C. Marble, 32 inches high. Gift of the Silvain and Arma Wyler Foundation. (two views)*

## TWO MASTERPIECES OF ATHENIAN SCULPTURE

The small but choice Greek and Roman collection of the Art Institute has been recently enriched by addition of two important examples of Greek sculpture. The first, a section of an Athenian grave stele of about 380 B.C., takes the form of a standing youth.<sup>1</sup> The second is the head of a young lady, who is to be identified here as Constantia, half-sister of Constantine the Great, daughter of the Emperor Constantius I and wife of Constantine's rival, Licinius I. The portrait, found years ago in Athens, was executed between Constantia's marriage to Licinius in March of 313 A.D. and his defeats by Constantine the Great in October of the following year.<sup>2</sup>

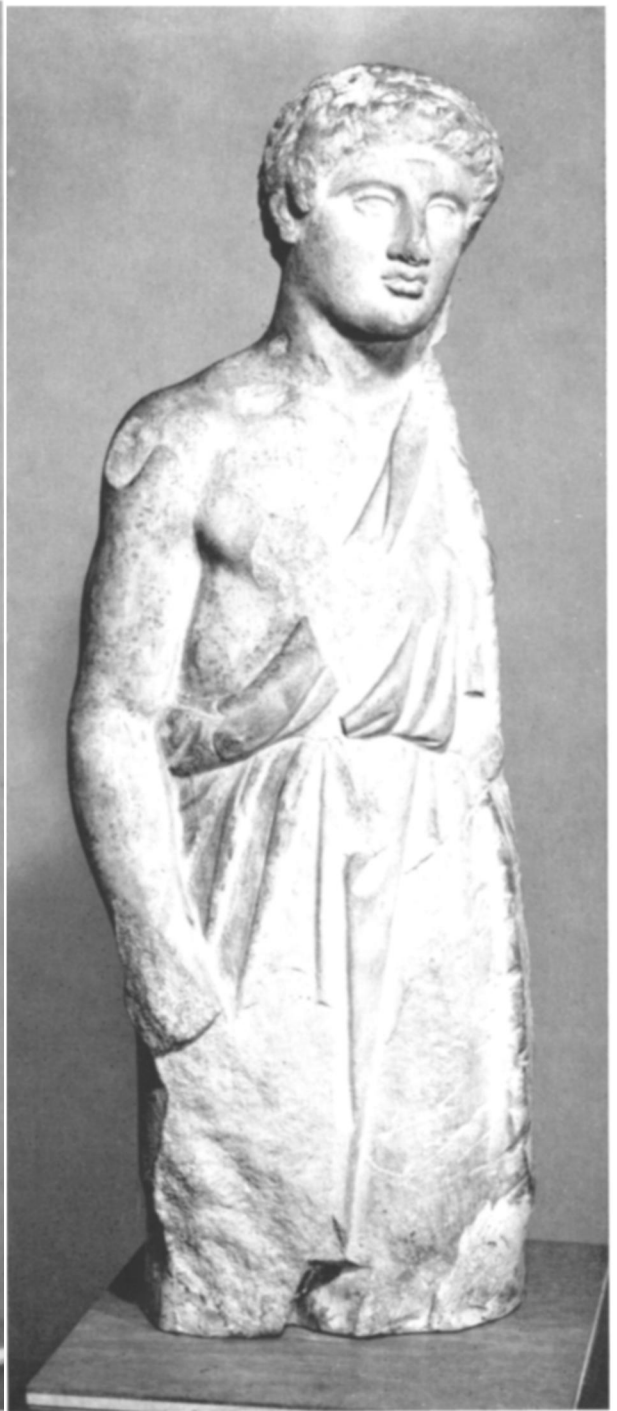
The youth of the Attic grave stele is the very embodiment of the classical ideal in the three generations following Phidias and the Athenian Parthenon. This ideal is achieved by a twofold combination of simple, clear restraint in composition and high quality of carving, especially in finishing the surfaces of the skin and the drapery. The youth wears a man's short chiton, a costume worn frequently on grave and mythological reliefs of the period from 440 to 330 B.C. This costume is favored by the god Hermes (god of travelers and Olympian messenger), by Attic warriors and by young men represented as hunters.

He stands in relaxed, contemplative pose, with his right hand at his side. The left hand is also lowered. Despite some surface damage, loss of most of the back of the relief, and the absence of the youth's legs and feet, the resolute handling of anatomy combined with careful bunching and flattening of the chiton's folds show forth very well. In contrast to the face, body, and drapery, the hair has been left in an almost roughened state. The line of finishing runs sharply around the forehead, takes in the lower half of the

right ear, and moves to the back of the neck. This is no doubt explained by the fact that the youth's hair was painted, perhaps a golden hue or a pleasing reddish brown.

The stele was completed by addition of at least one more standing or seated figure. The additional figure is needed to tell us whether the youth was the donor of the stele, that is, the one bidding the deceased farewell, or whether he was the person in memory of whom the relief was ordered. A young Athenian, a hunter with a dog at his feet, very like the man standing here, occurs on a stele in Athens. Here the youth is faced by an old man who holds the youth's oil bottle, thus combining the suggestion of athletics with that of the hunt. Costumed as a hunter, the young Athenian newly arrived in Chicago certainly possesses the physique of an athlete, and like his contemporaries he was no doubt ready at a moment's notice to down sporting equipment and hasten off to war with lance or spear, shield and helmet.

The date of this funerary monument is reached by comparison with other such reliefs scattered throughout the museums of the world. Enough of these stelae from Attica survive to give a continual chronology from about 450 to 325 B.C. The chronological precursor of the young man in Chicago is the stele inscribed with the names of Theodoros and Praxiteles, now in the National Museum in Athens. This relief is generally dated about 400 to 390 B.C. The sculptor who carved Chicago's new stele produced the grave monument of a warrior, once in Count Tyszkiewicz's collection and now in the Moscow Museum of Fine Arts. He carved the Tyszkiewicz stele about five years after the one in Chicago: that is, about 375 B.C. The connection is immediately evident. All the stylistic and





technical criteria applied to Chicago's young Athenian fit perfectly in a description of the warrior in Moscow.

The size, evident beauty, and obvious expense of Attic grave reliefs such as these indicate they could hardly have been carved by any one except the foremost sculptors of the period. The best stelae of 440 B.C. are on a qualitative par with the Parthenon frieze, and similar parallels can be made in succeeding generations. It is not difficult to suggest the name of the sculptor of the stele now in Chicago and the grave relief in Moscow. He was Kephisodotos, the father or uncle of the great Praxiteles, whom we remember for his Hermes with the infant Dionysos, at Olympia, and for his beautiful renderings of Aphrodite, particularly the Aphrodite made for the city of Cnidus in Western Asia Minor about 350 B.C.<sup>3</sup>

In or soon after 375 B.C., Kephisodotos was commissioned by the city of Athens to make an allegorical statue, "Peace bearing the child Wealth in her arms." This statue, symbolic of the benefits of a recent

Athenian victory over the Spartans, was set up on the Areopagus, the Hill of Ares, where St. Paul was to preach just over four hundred years later. Although the statue of "Peace with the child Wealth" has long since disappeared, the work is well known from copies made in Roman times: that is, in the time of St. Paul or slightly earlier, from Kephisodotos's original. The group presents a woman wearing an ample Doric chiton and holding an infant on her left arm. The contrast between volume and flatness in the drapery, the athletic solidity of the woman, and the heavy eyelids and prominent lips of the child are all characteristics occurring in the figure in Chicago and the warrior in Moscow. Although only copies survive, the group of Eirene (Peace) and Plutos (Wealth) was obviously one of great sculptural quality. Such quality, the hallmark of a major sculptor like Kephisodotos, is present in the relief in Moscow and especially in the Athenian youth published here for the first time.

*Portrait Head, identified as Constantia, wife of the Emperor Licinius. Marble, 8 7/8 inches high, dated about A.D. 313–314. Edward E. Ayer Fund*

From Athens in the days of Plato it is no small jump to Athens on the threshold of the Middle Ages, the city steeped in a glorious past on one hand and on the other shaken to the core by the ravages of Herulian Huns less than two generations in the past. To a still-vital Athens in the early fourth century, Constantia came as a bride, thrice-blessed in her connections with imperial power. She was the daughter of one emperor, the sister of another, and the bride of a third. Fortune's wheel spun very rapidly for Constantia's husband, the Emperor Licinius. They were married at Milan in March 313. In the following month Licinius secured control of the Roman Empire in the East, but in October 314 his rival Constantine

the Great twice defeated his armies and reduced his brother-in-law's share of the Empire to Thrace, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt. Athens, therefore, was lost to Licinius after scarcely a year and a half of power. The aftermath does not make an attractive story of family affection. Constantine the Great wished to be sole ruler, and after less than a decade he hounded Licinius from battlefield to battlefield, and ultimately to execution in 324. Constantia, sister to the victor and wife to the vanquished, lived on in goodly esteem until her death in 330.

The likeness of Constantia recently acquired by the Art Institute could only have been carved in those few months when Licinius ruled Athens. A date of

A.D. 313 to 314 suits the style of the portrait and the age of the sitter. The identification—for, after all, the head bears no inscription—derives from commemorative coins struck after her death. She was then, admittedly, fifteen years older, but portrait head and numismatic profile speak of the same person.

The precisely carved marble head, probably originally designed for a statue, presents a lady of about eighteen to twenty-five years of age. Her large eyes and delicately determined mouth are set off by the severe but elaborate arrangement of her hair. This is arranged in symmetrical groups of strands around her forehead and is held in place by a rolled fillet and triple headband tucked under at the top of the head. The effect must have been something of long, elaborately braided pigtailed wrapped around the head, ends carefully hidden for the sake of neatness.

Portraits of the Roman period, whether from Italy, Greece or Asia Minor are often difficult to date because older fashions of representation were always being revived. This is especially true in portraits of women, where fashions of wearing the hair could also revive long-forgotten styles. We have many analogies for this in ladies' fashions of the present, which can bring back Empire dresses and nineteen-twenties' skirts over a span of one or two years. During the rule of Constantine the Great (A.D. 306 to 337), the spirit of revival was strong in portrait sculpture, and the head of Constantia presented here is no exception to this trend. The whole concept, from hair style to the manner of drilling and incising the pupils of the eyes, goes back to Graeco-Roman portraiture of the early Antonine period, the two decades from A.D. 135. There were political undertones in this revival, for Constantine the Great was bent on restoring the peace and prosperity of the Roman Empire of the second century A.D. It is natural that his ambitious ideals should be reflected in some measure in this court portrait of his half-sister.<sup>4</sup>

These two masterpieces of Athenian sculpture, the grave stele and the portrait of an empress, span seven hundred years of Greek and Roman civilization. In their power to evoke senses of qualitative beauty they pay tribute to the city of Athens as the center where the arts which form the basis of our civilization were established. The two works sum up what is meant by the classic ideal of Greek art.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Stele of a Youth. Dated about 380 B.C. Pentelic marble, height: 32 inches. Gift of the Silvain and Arma Wyler Foundation.

<sup>2</sup>Portrait of Constantia. Dated about A.D. 313-314. Greek island marble, height: 8 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches. Edward E. Ayer Fund Income.

<sup>3</sup>The Attic grave stelae mentioned here as comparisons are studied in detail and illustrated in H. Diepolder, *Die attischen Grabreliefs des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.*, Berlin, 1931. The career and works of Kephisodotos are outlined by G. M. A. Richter, in *The Sculpture and Sculptors of the Greeks*, New Haven, 1950, pp. 257ff. Her *Handbook of Greek Art*, London, 1959, gives an up-to-date bibliography of Attic grave reliefs, as well as related Greek works of art.

<sup>4</sup>The literature on Roman portraits and discussions of those from Greece are best surveyed in E. B. Harrison's book on the portraits found by the excavations of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens: *The Athenian Agora, I, Portrait Sculpture*, Princeton, 1953. R. Delbrueck, *Spätantike Kaiserporträts*, Berlin-Leipzig, 1933, pl. 11 shows (among others) the coin portrait of Constantia.