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A Marble Relief from the African Tripolis

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A MARBLE RELIEF FROM THE AFRICAN TRIPOLIS.

(PLATE XIV.)

THE sculptured slab represented on Pl. XIV. was found recently somewhere in the hills about Tarhuna, namely, in the eastern section of the line of high ground which lies about a day's journey from the sea behind the coast desert between Oea (Tripoli) and Leptis Magna (Khoms or Lebda). It was seen in private possession at Khoms in 1896 by Mr. H. Swainson Cowper, has since been acquired by him, and is now in his house, Yew Field Castle, Outgate, Ambleside. He has figured and briefly described it already in his recent account of his journeys in the province of Tripoli; * but has kindly permitted the reproduction of it here, from a fresh photograph, and with a rather fuller commentary, in the preparation of which a number of valuable references and suggestions have been very kindly placed at the disposal of the writer by M. P. Perdrizet, Member of the French School of Archæology in Athens.

The slab measures 3 ft. by 2 ft. 4 in., and is practically perfect. The upper and lower margins have an unornamented projecting band, which frames the relief; but the lateral margins, which are both entire, are free, making it probable that the figures represented upon this slab formed part of a larger scheme. There is indeed a small clear space between the extremities of the figures and the lateral edges of the slab, but the first and third figures clearly look away at something beyond its limits.

The group consists of three fully draped female figures, who advance to the left with a dancing step. The second and third grasp tightly

* *The Hill of the Graces*. London (Methuen), 1897, pp. 217, 218, Fig. 62.

with their left hands a fold of the mantle of the preceding figure, drawn tightly back over the left arms. The first figure looks straight before her, and her face is consequently in profile. Her wavy hair is confined closely to her head by a double band. Her right hand is raised almost to her chin, and is wholly enveloped in her mantle, one fold of which is drawn across the lower part of her face, barely leaving the lips exposed. Her left hand escapes from the mantle, and droops with the elbow somewhat bent, and the fingers loosely extended. Her left foot is in advance, and her right is almost wholly concealed by elaborate flowing drapery.

The second figure looks somewhat downwards and to her left: her head is represented in half-front, and her body in half-back view, with the right foot in advance, and the left almost off the ground. A handkerchief is tied over her head and behind her neck, but a loose stream of dishevelled hair escapes from it behind. Her left hand is posed like that of the first figure, whose mantle she grasps with her left, which is exposed.

The third figure looks downwards and backwards over her left shoulder, so that her face is turned almost fully to the front. Her wavy hair emerges, above her forehead, from a hood, perhaps formed of a fold of her mantle, which is seen again behind her neck on both sides. The upper part of her body is turned nearly half-front, with the right foot leading and the right hand enveloped, as in the second figure. A long fold of the mantle thrown over the left arm, and corresponding with that which in the other figures is grasped from behind, floats freely in deep folds below her waist.

Thus the group is a typical and most graceful example of a well-known Attic motive,* and reproduces with great detail the pose of the earliest-known example of it; namely, the small marble *ex-voto* from Eleusis, published by M. Pottier.† In this the three figures dance in a grotto, while Pan plays before them on his pipes, and, as M. Pottier has shown, there can be little doubt that the motive was originally appropriate to the Nymphs, who are expressly named in the later examples of this and closely allied schemes; rather than to the Charites or the Horae, whose claims M. Pottier has rightly dismissed

* Hauser, *Die Neu-attischen Reliefs*, Pl. III., No. 46.

† *B. C. H.* v. (1881), Pl. VII., pp. 349-57. Hauser, p. 140.

as unfounded, at all events for the period of the Eleusis relief. Whether at a later period this particular motive was transferred to other goddesses, is a question which in this instance rather needs further discussion.

Mr. Cowper remarks of the figures on this relief, that "it is possible that they are the three Graces,"* and brings this attribution into connection with the *Χαρίτων λόφος* of the Tripolis, the site of which he has endeavoured to identify. It would be interesting if, on an example from the same neighbourhood, the identity of the figures could be established in this sense; but at present the evidence seems to tend the other way.

It is true that the familiar and early motive appropriate to the Charites, best known from the Chiaramonti relief,† and, in highly archaistic guise, from the Borghese altar,‡ and traced back by Bendorff§ with great probability to the celebrated example by the younger Sokrates, is frequently used to represent the Nymphs in grotto scenes which in other respects resemble the relief from Eleusis: || even the male figure who heads the procession of the Charites,¶ and who originally represents Hermes, being sometimes reproduced, though without distinctive attribute, as in the *ex-voto* of Telephanes.**

But in every detail of pose and gesture the three *Charites* of the Chiaramonti or Sokratic motive differ throughout their career from the *Nymphs* of the motive of the relief from Eleusis; as the following principal examples of the latter will show.

(1.) The Eleusis relief, already cited†† clearly points to a distinct motive already in vogue at the end of the fifth century, and not improbably in existence even before the masterpiece of Sokrates. The absence of Hermes, the presence of Pan, and the indications of the Grotto all go to show, as M. Pottier has observed, that Nymphs are here clearly intended.

(2.) The Tarhuna relief agrees in detail with No. 1, and cannot be separated from it by more than a century, to judge by the great delicacy

* *I. c.*, p. 218 n.

† *Arch. Zeit.*, 1869, Pl. 22.

‡ Müller-Wieseler, *Denkmäler d. a. Kunst*, i. 43.

§ *Arch. Zeit.*, l. c.

|| Furtwängler, *Coll. Sabouroff*, Pl. XXVIII. Millin, *M. G.*, 326, 328.

¶ *z. g.*, on the "Corinthian Puteal." *J. H. S.*, vi. p. 48.

** *Ann. d' Inst.*, 1863, Tav. d' Agg., L. 3 = 'Εθν. Μουσ. 1448, cf. *ibid.* 1447.

†† *B. C. H.* v., Pl. VII. = 'Εθν. Μουσ. 1445.

and freshness of the work, and by its vivid suggestion of the modelling of the presumably contemporary figurines.

(3.) The Albani altar* presents, as Hauser has remarked, even closer analogies of detail than the drawing of Zoega would suggest to Nos. 1 and 2 above. It is true that, as in No. 2, the cave is absent, and the motive of the three figures is here transferred to another context. The motives, however, with which it is associated on the Albani altar† are themselves of very uncertain interpretation, and very unskilfully and loosely correlated. In particular there is nothing either in the composition as a whole or in the minute variations of detail in the motive of the three figures, to justify the assumption that anything but Nymphs is intended.

(4.) The Verona altar‡ shows again the same group, preceded by Pan, a slight variation being introduced by making the first of the three figures seize with her free left-hand a corner of his cloak of skin; emphasising however, even so, the essential distinction between the Eleusinian motive and the Sokratic motive, that in the former the garment is seized of a figure which precedes; in the latter the figures stand in echelon,§ or as in the Telephanes relief|| almost abreast, and extend, not left hand to left, but right to left in direct series.

(5.) The Megalopolis relief¶ gives the same three figures dancing in the reverse direction, to the right; and the pose of all the figures is slightly modified. The first figure has borrowed, from the third of the normal arrangement, the carriage of her head, and her right hand the gesture of the left hand, in Nos. 1, 2, and 4. The second looks up, instead of down; and the third has taken over the intent forward gaze of the first figure of Nos. 1—4, and holds a pomegranate and three ears of corn in her disengaged left hand. But the Pan and Grotto are both represented, and Hermes is absent; and there is no more reason for doubting the attribution to the Nymphs in this instance than in the preceding.

* Zoega, *Bassi-rilievi*, Pl. 96 = Hauser, p. 32, and Pl. III., No. 44-6 = Helbig, *Führer*, ii. p. 4.

† Hauser's No. 44, 45.

‡ Hauser, *l. c.*, p. 21.

§ e.g., the two examples from the *Coll. Sabouroff*, Pl. XXVIII. already quoted; cf. 'Εθν. Μουσ. 1446-7.

|| v. note †† on p. 172.

¶ *Ann. d' Inst.*, 1863, Tav. d'Agg., L. 2 = 'Εθν. Μουσ. 1449.

It results, therefore, that in no clear instance is the Eleusinian motive explicitly ascribed to the Charites, or even probably attributable to them: whereas in later Greek and Graeco-Roman art the Sokratic motive, which is originally appropriate to the Charites, is repeatedly used to represent the Nymphs. And this is exactly what is to be expected; namely, that the motive appropriate to the superior and more specialised of two ranks of deities would impose itself upon the inferior; but that the intrusion of the lower motive into the province of the higher would not readily suggest itself, or be tolerated in practice.

JOHN L. MYRES.

RELIEF FROM THE AFRICAN TRIPOLIS.

(In the possession of Mr. H. Swainson Cooper.)