MARBLE STATUE OF APHRODITE

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THE APHRODITE FROM CYRENE.

[PLATES IX., X.]

THE sculptures recently discovered by the Italian excavators at Cyrene were described and discussed by Signor Bagnani at a general meeting of the Hellenic Society on 9th November, 1920. It is hoped that Signor Bagnani's paper, together with full illustrations of all the sculptures referred to, will appear in the next number of this *Journal*. Meanwhile our readers will probably be glad to have a reproduction of the Aphrodite, which is the finest of them, but is not yet so well-known or so accessible as it should be on its merits.

Most of the statues found at Cyrene decorated a kind of hall, which served as a gallery of sculpture. They are by no means homogeneous, though most of them clearly belong to the Hellenistic age. There is, therefore, little external evidence to guide us to the period or school to which any of them belongs; and we are left mainly to internal evidence, derived from a study of the statue itself.

The type is a familiar one, that of Aphrodite arising from the sea (Anadyomene), and the action of her arms must be restored as squeezing the moisture from her hair; a point projecting on the front of the left arm shows where a tress was probably attached. The classical example of this type, celebrated by numerous epigrams, was the famous picture by Apelles, set up in the Asclepieum at Cos, and subsequently transferred to Rome by Nero. No example of the type in sculpture is known to me earlier than this; but it becomes very common in later Greek art, especially in statuettes both of marble and of bronze. It offers the same opportunities for the display of a beautiful figure that are supplied by another favourite type, the young athlete placing a fillet round his head (Diadumenos) or the maiden binding up her hair. The chief difference is that in the Anadyomene type the arms are not raised so high, as the hands do not touch the head but hold out the tresses of hair about level with the shoulders. An example of the type is here reproduced from a little statuette bought in Alexandria (Fig. 1). The two sides of the figure are reversed, but the action is similar; and it is even

possible to see the position of the lock of hair which has left its trace in the point on the left arm of the Aphrodite from Cyrene.

The Anadyomene type offers the greatest possible contrast in position and motive to the Cnidian and its many derivatives. The self-conscious shrinking from observation, shown not only in the position of the arms but in the whole poise of the body, is here entirely absent. The Cyrene Aphrodite stands straight up—the outline of the figure on her left side even exaggeratedly straight. The motive of the bath gives a human touch to the Cnidia, who drops her garment over a large vase. In the Cyrene figure the support at the side, in the form of a dolphin, is clearly an allusion to the rising of the goddess from the sea. This dolphin is sometimes transferred to a variation of the Cnidian type like the Venus dei Medici. The presence of the dolphin, in an unnatural position, may well be transferred from the picture by Apelles, where it would be in place in the sea that appears to have partly covered the goddess. Its presence suffices to indicate a Hellenistic date, and the shawl-like garment with a fringe placed over it seems to be borrowed from the Cnidian type; a precisely similar garment appears in the Capitoline Aphrodite, to which Dickens¹ assigns, with good reason, an Alexandrian origin, the fringed cloak being characteristic of Isis.

FIG. 1.—BRONZE
STATUETTE FROM
ALEXANDRIA.

Any final decision as to the school and period of the Cyrene statue must, however, depend on considerations of style. The extraordinary beauty of the figure has been generally recognised, but it also shows a remarkable degree of individuality. The wonderful softness of surface modelling recalls the tradition of the Sons of Praxiteles, as recorded both at Pergamon and in Alexandria. But the forms of the body are strong and massive, unlike those of such a variant as the Aphrodite with Triton.² The shoulders and breast are very broad and firm; the lower ribs, just above the waist, on the other hand, are somewhat slight and weak in contrast. This may well be the result, in a model, of the Hellenistic fashion of wearing a very high and tight girdle. But the lower part of the body and legs are abnormally plump. It is this combination of inconsistent parts that gives its peculiar character to the statue as a whole. It is difficult to find any exact parallel. The well-known 'Esquiline Venus' is indeed similar in the great plumpness of the lower part of the body and legs in contrast to a much slighter waist and chest; but that statue has in its upper part an archaic character far removed from the style of the Cyrene statue. It is greatly to be hoped that the head of this statue may be found in further excavations. But perhaps, after so long an interval (the Aphrodite was discovered in December, 1913), this is

¹ *Hellenistic Sculpture*, p. 25.

² Dickens, *op. cit.* Fig. 25.

hardly probable. It would be rash indeed, among the puzzles and contradictions already noticed, to conjecture as to its probable type.

From the comparisons already made it seems clear that, in the Cyrene statue, we have a masterpiece of early Hellenistic art. And the characteristics of style, as well as other indications, seem all to point to the school of Alexandria as its probable origin. Such an attribution has every probability in its favour on geographical grounds. How far it is confirmed by the other statues found in the Italian excavations must remain undecided for the present. Alexandrian art is as yet but little known to us, though the influence of Alexandria on Rome and the rest of the ancient world must have been very great in art as well as in literature. An original masterpiece from this source is therefore a great gain to our knowledge of the Hellenistic world.

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