

THE THASIAN RELIEF DEDICATED TO THE NYMPHS AND TO APOLLON.

The relief discovered in 1864 by E. Miller in the island of Thasos, dedicated to the Nymphs with Apollon and to the Graces, at once obtained its fixed place in the history of Greek sculpture.¹ The importance of its inscriptions, too, for palaeography and dialectology as well as for mythology and certain details of worship, is generally acknowledged. On the other hand, no agreement has as yet been arrived at concerning the names to be assigned to the figures composing the relief.

It is well known that the relief consists of three blocks of marble, one of which is longer (2.10 m.), the other two showing a slight difference in length (0.92 and 0.83 m.) which originates in the wish not to divide a figure by the juncture of two slabs. The centre of the large block is occupied by a square niche framed like a doorway,² on the lintel of which runs the inscription Νύμφησιω καὶ πόλλωνι νυμφηγέτη θήλυ καὶ ἄρσεν ἄμ βο(ύ)λῃ προσέρδε(ι)ν· ὄν οὐ θέμις οὐδὲ χοῖρον· οὐ παιωνίζεται. To the left of the niche stands Apollon holding a kithara and being crowned by a female; on the right, three other females are advancing toward the doorway. On one of the smaller

¹ The only good reproductions are those in RAYET, *Monuments de l'art antique*, pl. 20, 21, and in BRUCKMANN and BRUNN, *Denkmäler griechischer Skulptur*, pl. 61. Other engravings may be found, *Revue archéol.*, 1865, pl. 24, 25; *Archaeolog. Zeitung*, 1867, pl. 217; OVERBECK, *Geschichte d. griech. Plastik*, I⁽²⁾, p. 167, and elsewhere.

² One may compare the doorway on the pedestal of the Amyklaean Apollon (PAÜS. III. 19. 3). A niche decorated in a later style, dedicated to the θεὰ Βασίλεια, with a deep ἐσχάρα within it, is still preserved in the antique temple of that goddess (ἄγ. Νικόλαος μαρμαρένιος) at Thera; see *Annali dell' Inst.*, 1864, p. 257, pl. R, 2.



blocks, three similar females are represented moving in the opposite direction, toward the right, thus forming a sequel to the female who is crowning the god. The other smaller block shows Hermes, easily recognized from his figure and attire, and behind him a female, both advancing toward the left; so that their place behind the three females of the main block is ascertained. On a listel at their feet a second inscription reads *Χάρισιν αἶγα οὐ θέμις οὐδὲ χοῖ[ρο]ν*. All the females are holding modest offerings in their hands.³

The discoverer himself without any hesitation gave the name of Muses to the eight females,⁴ a nomenclature contradicted by the inscriptions, according to which the chief figures must be the Nymphs with their leader Apollon, and a second place is assigned to the Graces. My own attempt at an interpretation, by taking the central niche as a point of separation and proposing to see, on the left of it, Apollon followed by four Nymphs, and, on the right, Hermes surrounded by four Graces,⁵ met with Fröhner's approval.⁶ Robert, accepting the principle of division, preferred to confine the name of the Graces to the group of three females nearest to the niche, and to call Artemis or Hekate the female who follows Hermes, an opinion suggested to him by the combined worship of Hermes, Artemis *πυρφόρος* or Hekate, and the Graces as *θεοὶ προπύλαιοι* at the entrance of the Athenian Akropolis.⁷ But there are two decisive reasons which prevent us from adopting these interpretations. In the first place, it would be very uncommon to give the precedence to the Graces and the second place to Hermes, while he usually serves as a guide and leader to similar groups of goddesses. Secondly, the inscription referring to the Graces begins

³ In the similar group of females on the Xanthian Harpy-Tomb, two are holding similar offerings, while the first is merely grasping her chiton and veil. This circumstance seems to show that a mother is followed by her daughters, and that this group is to represent the female members of the family, the male part of which is represented by the man, the youth, and the boy with his companions, on the three other sides of the monument.

⁴ E. MILLER, *Revue archéol.*, 1865, II, p. 439.

⁵ MICHAELIS, *Archaeolog. Zeitung*, 1867, pp. 7, 8. The eventual explanation, that all the eight females might be Nymphs, was founded on Miller's assertion, that the smaller inscription, being by a different hand than that on the main block, might be a later addition, in which case we should not be justified to search for the Graces in the relief. But there is no sufficient reason for supposing two different hands (*cf.* FRÖHNER, p. 36).

⁶ FRÖHNER, *Notice de la sculpture ant. du Louvre*, I (1869), p. 38.

⁷ ROBERT, *Commentationes philologicae in honorem Theod. Mommseni scr.*, 1877, p. 147.

only on the smaller block, below the figure of Hermes, and it seems but natural that the chief inscription, occupying the centre of the main block, should belong to all the figures represented on this part of the monument. These two reasons against the common distribution of the names were rightly urged by Rayet (p. 5), who moreover inferred from the *Χάριτες* of the inscription that one Grace could not possibly be sufficient.

All the former interpreters, most of whom had had no opportunity of examining the original marbles, thought the reliefs to be complete, with the exception that Fröhner had expressed a slight doubt in this respect, without insisting on it, however, or drawing any conclusion from it.⁸ Rayet first suggested that the one Grace should be completed by some companions now lost, and at once he pointed out that the three blocks could never have been placed on one line.⁹ In this case, he thought, the difference in length of the two smaller blocks would scarcely allow a plausible explanation, or at least would disturb the symmetry; besides, the listel beneath the feet of the figures on the main block runs on to the very ends of the block, while on the two smaller blocks it is cut off at one end at a little distance (0.05 m.) from the edge of the stone—any reproduction will make this clear. Supposing that a similar kind of ending had originally existed also in the main part of the representation, Rayet arrived at the conclusion that the remaining main block had once been joined to two lateral blocks, these three slabs forming one of the longer sides of a rectangle, to the shorter sides of which the two smaller blocks belonged so as to begin the return of the angles.¹⁰ Thus a kind of basement would be formed, covered with reliefs, which Rayet compares with the basement of the large altar of Pergamon. A slight sketch, in which I have assigned to the two smaller blocks the two possible positions which can be given to them, will at once show the impossibility of realizing this scheme (see *Figure 37*). Either the ends of the smaller blocks, which are mere joints, without reliefs or even a smooth surface, would be visible at the end of the longer side, as in *a*; or, as in *b*, the projecting listel would end at too great a distance from the

⁸ FRÖHNER, p. 38: *Admettons que rien ne manque à ces bas-reliefs.*

⁹ Also OVERBECK—*Gesch. d. griech. Plastik*, 1⁽²⁾ (1869), p. 153 (=1⁽³⁾ p. 168)—had spoken of a “broader front” and “two adjoining sides”.

¹⁰ RAYET, p. 6: *les deux petits bas-reliefs étaient placés en retour d'angle, par rapport à la ligne des trois premiers, et formaient le départ des faces latérales d'un rectangle dont les trois autres constituaient l'un des grands côtés.*

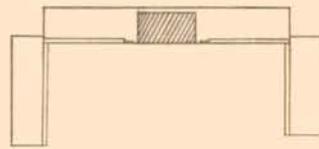
corner of the supposed basement. It is clear, then, that neither of these positions could have been adopted by the ancient artist.

It is strange that Rayet should not have succeeded in making a right use of his correct observation. The abrupt ending of the listel at some distance from the end of the block does not imply the end of the relief, but, on the contrary, it indicates that this block was joined to another block, at a right angle, in the manner shown in *Figure 38*. It agrees with this view, that also in the field of the relief a narrow strip at the end of the block is left without sculpture. The solution of the difficulty is so obvious that no doubt it will have been found by most of those who have had an opportunity of examining either the original blocks, or one of those casts which the Direction of the Louvre Museum, on the instance of Mr. Sidney Colvin, has had the great kindness to have made and placed on sale. At Berlin, for instance, I have seen the casts arranged in the same way as proposed above; so that the three



10 2 1 m

FIG. 37.



10 2 1 m

FIG. 38.

blocks did not form the border of a basement but rather the walls of a small courtyard in the background of which the niche formed, as it were, the centre of the sanctuary.

An examination of the casts goes, further, to prove that the joints of the three blocks on *both* ends are not smoothed but worked so as to require additional blocks. A sketch of the two ends which are usually considered to form the ends of the monument will show that this is not the case (see *Figure 39*). This circumstance fully proves Rayet's supposition, that behind the one Grace some similar figures are missing. Should we suppose that the missing blocks followed the same direction as the existing smaller ones, it would be impossible to determine the number of missing figures. But such an arrangement is not likely to have been adopted, for two reasons. If a longer row of blocks were to be formed, why should the single blocks have been made so small,

the main block showing that the nature of the material allowed the preparation of slabs of greater length? Moreover, the courtyard, measuring only 2.10 m. in width, would have formed a very narrow passage, and the niche at the bottom of the passage would have been of very difficult access to the worshippers, if the side walls of the courtyard had been of greater length.

I am therefore inclined to think that the original arrangement of the sanctuary was about as represented in *Figure 40*. Supposing the width of the two missing blocks which were to serve as corner stones to be a little greater than that of the three existing slabs, about 0.60–0.70 m., we shall get the necessary space to add to the one remaining Grace her two usual companions. On the opposite part, two additional females would bring the Nymphs to the number of nine. Such a number,

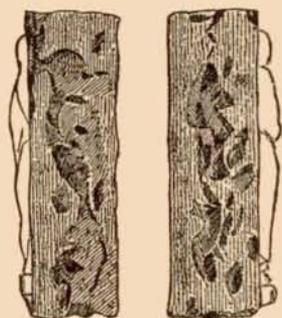


FIG. 39.

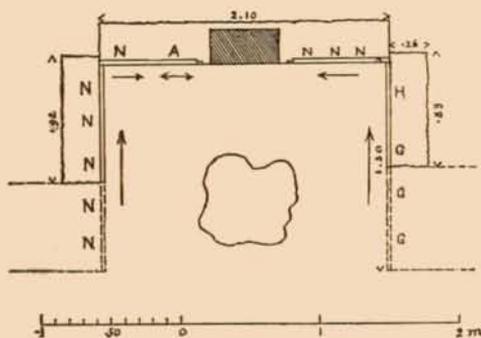


FIG. 40.

being three times the common number of grouped Nymphs, would appear the more suitable considering the near relations which exist between the Nymphs and the Muses, equally presided over by Apollon. Whether the front sides of the corner blocks also were adorned with figures, it may be a matter of doubt; suffice it to say, that the Nymphs and the Graces, also from a mythological point of view, form a well-harmonizing group which does not need any addition.¹¹

If the blocks, as Rayet felt persuaded (p. 2), had been arranged immediately on the ground, the niche which had to receive the simple offerings of the worshippers, like those held by the Nymphs and the Graces, would have been of rather difficult access, and the inscription

¹¹ Cf. O. JAHN, *Denkschr. d. Wiener Akademie*, XIX, p. 33.

on the listel at the feet of Hermes and the first Grace would have been entirely illegible. A modest socle, about one meter high, would have placed the niche, the reliefs, and the inscriptions at a convenient level, and a cornice¹² would have completed the architectural adornment of

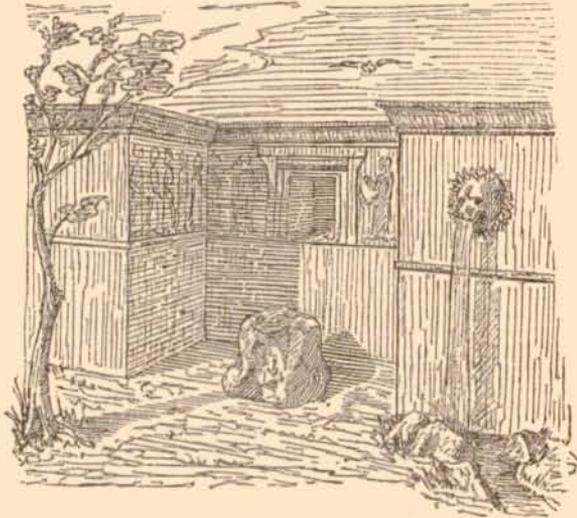


FIG. 41.

the little sanctuary, in the midst of which a simple altar, perhaps a square block or a *βωμὸς ἐπικεχωσμένος*, like those to be seen in the reliefs dedicated to Pan and the Nymphs,¹³ may have had its place. Finally, we may imagine a fresh spring in the neighborhood of the little Nymphaion (see *Figure 41*).

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¹² The upper surface of the blocks is not smoothed but prepared so as to receive another course of stones.

¹³ MICHAELIS, *Annali dell' Inst.*, 1863, p. 311; POTTIER, *Bulletin de corresp. hellén.*, 1881, p. 349.