

An Attic Grave Stele with Epigram

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AMONG THE RECENT acquisitions of ancient sculpture in the J. Paul Getty Museum, an Attic original, the stele of Mynnias from the early fourth century, deserves particular attention: it provides a good illustration of some general problems involved in funerary imagery and versification.¹

The stele (A71.53, ht. 1.23 m) is a slab of Pentelic marble broken into three fragments with some parts missing. The main fragment includes all three of the figures depicted (only the seated figure is partially chipped) and the major part of the inscription. The splinter broken off at the upper left contains the remainder of the inscription. The third fragment comprises only the uncarved lower part of the stele, broken off. It would not be correct to call the sculpted decoration a sunken panel relief even though the technique is very similar and even though the height of the relief is rather reduced. The two lateral pilasters remind one rather of a high relief stele, as does the fact that the right-hand figure overlaps the pilaster, which was probably the case on the other side also. The epistyle which carries the inscription corresponds to the width of the relief, and a large projecting unprofiled member which may have been painted constitutes the finial of the stele; the uppermost edge is not preserved.

Three figures are represented. On a simple seat on the left, her feet on a small stool, sits a matron in a chiton, her head covered with a mantle which she holds in her left hand. She shakes hands with another younger lady standing on the right, also in chiton and himation. The chiton has short sleeves fastened with round clasps; the mantle covers her left hand. Her hair is worn in a crown with a long braid on her nape. The seated companion, sunk in isolation, does not respond to her inquiring look. Between the two protagonists a small girl is kneeling, her right arm extended toward the seated lady in an effort to catch her attention. She wears a chiton with short broad

¹ The author's thanks are due to B. Fredericksen and to Ann Karlstrom for kind assistance. CONZE: A. Conze, *Attische Grabreliefs* (Berlin 1893–1922); KIRCHNER: J. Kirchner, *Prosopographia Attica* (Berlin 1901–03).

sleeves and the characteristic cross belt secured with a brooch. A kind of shawl has fallen from her shoulders and is draped around her thighs. Though a very young child, the figure is represented as a small adult.² The sculptor followed the traditional way of showing the heads in profile but employed a compromise in turning the bodies more or less to full view. Some other technical details of the relief will be mentioned when establishing the personality of the sculptor.

At first glance, the meaning of the scene seems clear: the deceased mother is already isolated from the two surviving female members of her family. The young woman tries to keep her among them by the traditional gesture of clasping her hand, which serves also to maintain the unity of the composition in spite of separation. The little child expresses longing. The whole scene belongs to the standard repertory of classical funerary imagery, and many examples could be mentioned.³

What is interesting is that the obvious interpretation of the scene does not correspond at all to the actual situation for which the stele was used and which is attested by the inscription. The break slightly damages the inscription so that two letters are missing from the first line and one from the second; nevertheless, restoration presents no difficulty. Two lines of slightly irregular but well-shaped letters suggest by their shape and disposition the same date as the carving of the relief. The first line contains a funerary epigram:

**Ενθα[δε] κείται Μυννία μητρὶ ποθεινῇ*

Here lies Mynnia to the sorrow of her mother.

The text consists almost entirely of standardized expressions. The introductory formula appears in many funerary epigrams. There are also numerous parallels for the concluding one.⁴ The line seems intended to be a hexameter, but it is incomplete, having only five feet: $\underline{\text{υυ}}|\underline{\text{υ}}|\underline{\text{υ}}|\underline{\text{υυ}}|\underline{\text{υ}}|\underline{\text{υ}}$.

² The little girl on the stele of Demoteles in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Acc. no. 11.100.2, G. Richter, *Catalogue* [Cambridge (Mass.) 1954] 56f, no.83, pls.67, 68 a-d; N. Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Studien zum Ilissos-Relief* [Munich 1956] 21ff, pls.1-5) is represented in the same way.

³ cf. e.g. the stele in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. no.65.11.11, and parallels quoted in its excellent publication by B. Cook (*Antike Plastik IX* [Berlin 1969] 65ff).

⁴ cf. W. Peek, *Griechische Grabgedichte* (Berlin 1960) index s.v. *πόθος*; C. Clairmont, *Gravestone and Epigram* (Mainz 1970) index s.v. *ποθεινός*.

The second line provides the names of the figures represented and the key to a problem presented by the wording of the inscription:

Εὐφροσύνη Ἀρτεμισίας Μυννία Εὐτέλο

which means “Euphrosyne,⁵ daughter of Artemisia,⁶ Mynnia,⁷ daughter of Euteles.”⁸ There are at first two evident problems, if not mistakes. The name of Mynnia’s father (much more probable than husband) is not written correctly. The missing *upsilon* corresponds to the contemporary Attic orthography, but there is no explanation for the missing final *sigma* other than misspelling or omission by the stonemason. The other problem is the apparent identification of Artemisia as mother of Euphrosyne. One can mention another instance where a proper name is followed by the mother’s name in the genitive (again, Artemisia),⁹ but such usage is contrary to general practice, where the proper name is followed by the patronymic. And a closer look at the inscription confirms the suspicion that the final *sigma* in Artemisias (which makes it genitive) is a later addition: it is literally wedged in. The evident explanation is that the stonemason was told that a *sigma* was missing in his inscription. He could not put it in the proper place (after Euteles), so he made another genitive. Assuming this to have been the case, we can now deduce that the three female names were meant to designate the three female figures; Euphrosyne is the seated matron, Artemisia the little girl, and Mynnia the standing young woman.

Now the second contradiction arises: the standard interpretation of the figured scene would identify the seated figure as the deceased. The first line states that Mynnia is deceased, yet the second line identifies her as the standing figure. The explanation is simple: the family of the deceased Mynnia bought a ready-made stele and had the inscription engraved, regardless of the meaning of the conventional representation that was there. Here is one more proof, if needed, that there is no obligatory correlation between the assumed reality of an

⁵ For the name in the fourth century B.C. cf. e.g. Kirchner 6116 a and c, 6117; IG II-III² 11509, 11514, 10376.

⁶ The name is common, cf. e.g. Kirchner 2274 c; IG II-III² 10840, 10841, 10842, 10843, 11514.

⁷ For this form, cf. only IG II-III² 12190; for the standard form *Μυννίων* cf. e.g. IG II-III² 4623, 12192, 12255, etc.

⁸ For the name cf. e.g. Kirchner 6000, 6001; IG II-III² 7262=Conze 167 (pl.53).

⁹ cf. Conze 1225 a.

artistic image and the facts of life for which it is used. And, of course there exists no correlation between the epigram on the one hand and the relief on the other, though both use well-established, traditional themes.¹⁰

The stylistic classification of Mynnia's stele can be specified when compared with another grave relief cut by the same hand. The second stele is now in a private collection in New York; in 1970 I examined it in a gallery there.¹¹ This stele has a pediment but no lateral pilasters. A youth is shaking hands with his seated mother. The lower part of her figure was recut in antiquity, most probably by the sculptor himself. Her right leg was originally in a more extended position, and a break in the marble or some other problem obliged the sculptor to recarve it. The vertical folds of the mantle have no real ending and the relation of the two legs and knees is awkward.

Comparison of the reliefs reveals both similarities and differences. Similarities are found in both the art and the technique. The inside of the elbow is in each case marked by gentle incisions and an indentation. The profiles are similar, and the treatment of the strands of hair is identical, as are the clasped hands and the long schematic forearms, which are slightly out of proportion considering the size of the figures. The affinities in technique lie in the treatment of the background and the planes of both background and drapery, the pattern of the overlapping folds, the relationship of the edge and head which touches it, and the fact that the backgrounds in both stelai are slightly 'dug in' to raise the relief. The same procedure is used in the relief itself for the delimitation of the overlapping planes, as for example, the free fold of the himation over the mantle itself, the breast over the arm behind it, or one figure overlapping the other. And finally there is the similarity between the irregularities of the ground lines of the reliefs, which in Mynnia's case are particularly marked in the right half.

The difference between the two reliefs can be explained by the fact that the uninscribed stele is earlier than Mynnia's. The former could be compared chronologically to the stele of Mynno¹² and dated about 390 B.C. Mynnia may be some ten to fifteen years later, pointing to

¹⁰ cf. K. Vierneisel, *AthMitt* 83 (1968) 111ff, and G. Daux, *BCH* 96 (1972) 503ff.

¹¹ 75 cm × 33.5 cm; my thanks are due to M. Komor, who made possible the study of the relief and procured a photograph.

¹² cf. Conze no.38 pl.17; C. Blümel, *Die klassisch griechischen Skulpturen der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin* (Berlin 1966) no.16, fig.24.

still later reliefs such as Timariste.¹³ The comparison also establishes a unity of style for the reliefs, both of which belong to the very classic trend in the first half of the fourth century, culminating in the personality of Kephisodotos. The uninscribed relief belongs to a rather plain phase; Mynnia makes one think of the revival of the 'florid style' as it appears in contemporary vase painting.

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¹³ cf. H. Diepolder, *Die attischen Grabreliefs* (Berlin 1931) pl.39.2.