

ON
A BRONZE STATUETTE OF HERCULES
FOUND IN CUMBERLAND.

COMMUNICATED TO THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES

BY

A. S. MURRAY, ESQ., LL.D., F.S.A.



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On a Bronze Statuette of Hercules. By A. S. MURRAY, Esq., LL.D., F.S.A.

Read March 14th, 1895.

THE bronze statuette of Hercules which Lord Carlisle exhibits to-night at the desire of the President is said to have been "dug out of the Roman wall." But the precise spot appears to be now unknown. One statement gives Northumberland; another, his lordship's property of Naworth, in Cumberland, which is no great distance from the Roman station of *Amboglanna* (Birdoswald). One could suppose that the bronze had been brought to this country by some officer attached to that camp. That would mean in the time of Hadrian, by whom this station on the Roman wall was established. And were the figure of pure classical workmanship there would not be much more to be said on that point. But you will see that the bronze cannot be of classical origin, and this suggests an alternative that it may have been brought to this country by a devotee of the Tyrian Hercules established at Corbridge, in Northumberland, where an altar to him has been found.

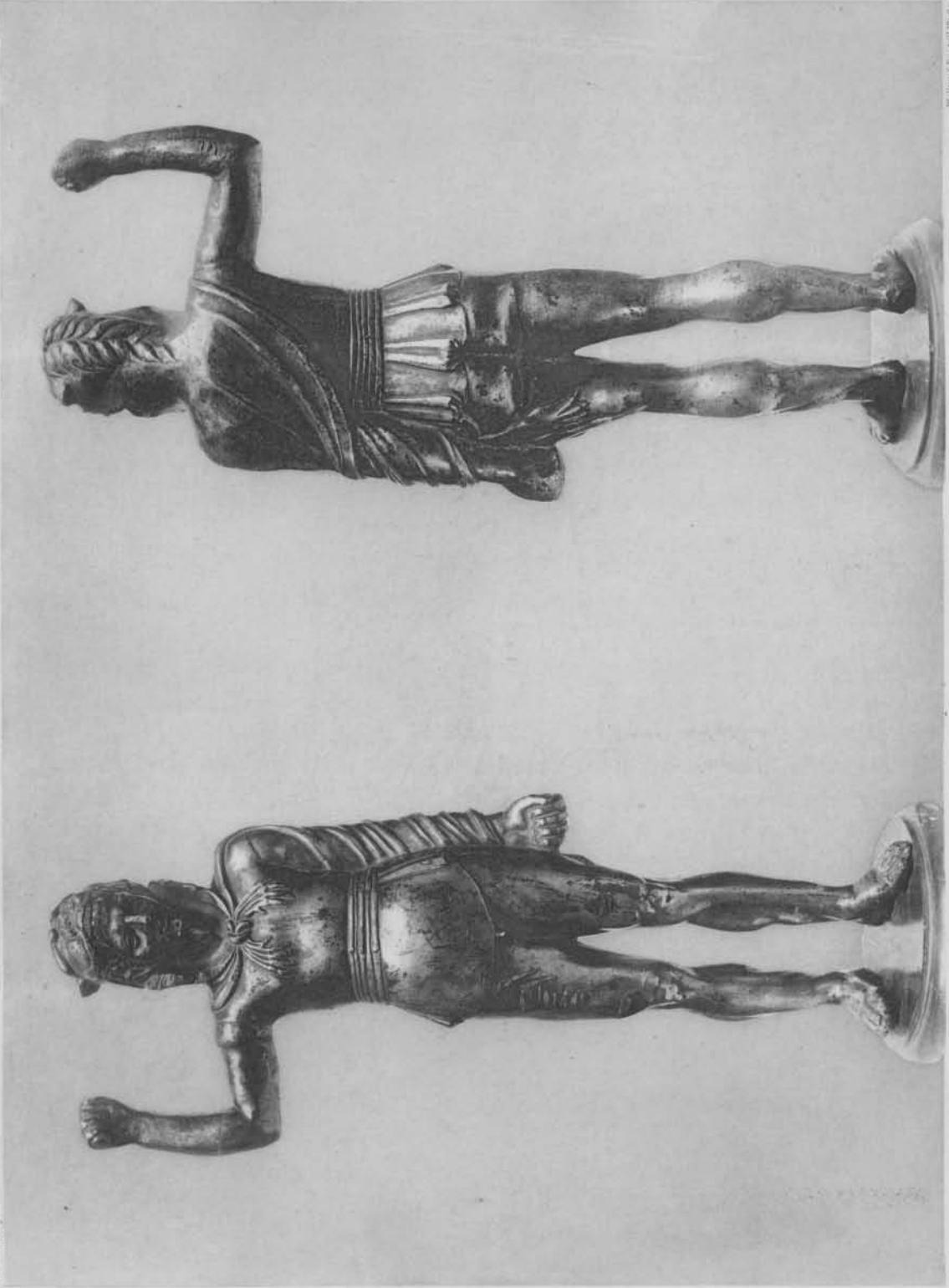
Among the non-classical elements in the bronze may be noticed the action of the left arm with the clenched fist turned out to the front. It is a forcible but rude effort to express in the left hand an energy corresponding to that of the right hand, which has held the club raised to strike. In an archaic bronze statuette of Hercules in the British Museum, with the right hand similarly raised, the left finds nothing better to do than to hold the tail of the lion's skin, and it is not impossible that this may also have been the action of the Carlisle bronze. Again, the girdle worn round the waist with its three clasps fastened in front resembles nothing so much as certain archaic bronze girdles which we possess in the Museum, while the short skirt falling on the hips finds its best parallel in Greek sculpture of the sixth century B.C., and on the contemporary vases. To that period also belong the short body, massive legs, and the habit of

standing with both feet flat on the ground. The manner of wearing the lion's skin is no less characteristic of archaic Greek art, though not exclusively so, than are the other features just mentioned. It is a manner of wearing the lion's skin which is conspicuous also on those coins of Macedonia which we see rudely copied by the Gaulish mints.

And this brings me to the observation that the face of Hercules is very pronouncedly of the Macedonian type, and grandly rendered in its way. There is no element of archaism there. On the contrary, the face is in all essential points exactly the face of Hercules which was introduced into Greek art shortly before the time of Alexander the Great. It may be roughly executed, but there is no mistaking the source of this face. If these observations are correct we are landed in this difficulty, that the sculptor of this bronze has availed himself of two different periods of Greek art, taking the head from the Macedonian period, and the body from nearly two centuries earlier. No classical artist would have done that, not at least to the extent of retaining the two different elements so clearly and distinctly apart.

The question arises as to where such work could have been executed. I am inclined to think somewhere in Gaul. We hear from Pliny^a of a Greek sculptor Zenodorus, who worked for ten years on a colossal bronze statue of Mercury in a town in Gaul, and we can imagine that during this period he may well have attracted round him a certain number of natives with artistic gifts. Subsequently he was summoned to Rome by Nero and there worked for him. We know Nero's taste for statues of gilded bronze, and we are told in the passage I am referring to that Nero was prepared to allow Zenodorus any amount of gold and silver for the statue he was making for him in Rome. That seems to fit in with the gilding on Lord Carlisle's bronze. So does also the statement which Pliny here adds, viz. that the statue of Nero by Zenodorus showed that the art of casting in bronze had disappeared, though Zenodorus was second to none of the ancients in his skill of modelling or of chasing. The Carlisle bronze is cast solid and is therefore an instance of the loss of the art of true casting. Pliny goes on to remark that Zenodorus, while at work in Gaul, had made copies of extraordinary exactness from two cups which had been chased by Calamis, a Greek artist of the end of the archaic period. The cups had been handed down to the Governor of the Gaulish province. Thus, a native Gaulish artist would apparently have had no difficulty at that time in finding Greek originals of various periods from

^a *Nat. Hist.* xxxiv. 45.



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which to combine what features most attracted him for a figure of Hercules. We see this also in a bronze bust copied from the Doryphorus of Polycleetus which has been found in Gaul.* The famous gold treasure of Vetersfelde, in Brandenburg (now in Berlin), and several other finds attest the presence of archaic Greek sculpture in Gaul and Germany, whether as contemporary imports from Greece or as the imports of Roman connoisseurs in later times. We know how much the Romans valued the archaic sculpture of Greece, and how readily they acquired Greek works in metal, carrying them about with them in their military expeditions, as did Nonius Vindex a statuette of Hercules by Lysippus, which had once belonged to Alexander the Great. These remarks, if accepted literally as bearing upon the Carlisle bronze, would lead us to place its origin about the time of Nero, and that would involve the difficulty of accounting for its finding its way to this country at that date. But if this difficulty is insuperable, we could imagine that the Greek influence of Zenodorus in Gaul may have lasted on to the time of Hadrian, and I would accept this view the more readily from remembering how strong the tendency was in the age of Hadrian to imitate archaic Greek sculpture.

In quoting the instance of a Roman general, Nonius Vindex, carrying about with him a famous bronze statuette, I did not wish to imply that the Carlisle bronze had been similarly brought to this country by a Roman general. A work of so distinctly provincial a character would hardly have attracted a Roman, however great an admirer he may have been of Hercules. But admiration of Hercules was not in those days confined to Roman generals in this country. I have already mentioned an altar found at Corbridge and now in the British Museum which bears a dedication in Greek to the Tyrian Hercules by a priestess, Diodora. So that even a priestess may have brought the bronze to this country, whether a Greek or a Gaulish priestess.

I am not directly suggesting that this Greek-speaking Diodora had actually brought over this bronze as an image of the Tyrian Hercules whom she served. There would be this objection so far as it goes that the Tyrian Hercules as we see him not unfrequently on Gaulish coins, is of a somewhat different type. He there holds his club downwards to the ground, is nude, and has no sign of archaism. As you are aware, these Gaulish coins were copied from the later coinage of Thasos, in which island the worship of the Tyrian Hercules had, according to tradition, been established by the Phœnicians at a very early period. At the same time the type of the Tyrian Hercules was not absolute and unchanging. We know as much

* Reinach, *Antiquités Nationales* (Musée St. Germain), 222

from the archaic coins of Thasos itself, and from certain literary records. There was a statue of him holding a club in one hand and a bow in the other sent to Olympia by the people of Thasos (Pausanias, v. 25, 7), and there was at Erythrae an image of him floating on a raft. Between these extremes a good many varieties of type are possible, one of which may have been seen by our Gaulish sculptor.

Were it known for certain that the bronze had been found in Northumberland, say at Corbridge itself, it would not necessarily follow that we have here the type of the Tyrian Hercules, as there worshipped. Yet believing as I do that the Carlisle bronze is of Gaulish workmanship, and finding as we do among existing Gaulish figures of Hercules a not inconsiderable variety, not to mention the curious and as yet unattested type of that deity described by Philostratus, I do not see any serious objection to regarding this bronze as a Tyrian Hercules made by a Gaulish artist and brought to this country by an adherent of that particular form of worship.

But be these observations ever so wrong, there is no doubt that we have here a most interesting example of provincial sculpture, executed in Roman times, and combining artistic features derived from two widely different periods of Greek art.

* * * This interesting figure has since been acquired by Sir A. Wollaston Franks, K.C.B., President, and by him presented to the Anglo-Roman collection at the British Museum.