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WHO CARVED THE HERMES OF PRAXITELES?

A BRILLIANT investigation into the technique of ancient Greek marble-cutting led Carl Blümel to the conviction that the famous Praxitelean Hermes at Olympia could not possibly be the original from the sculptor's own hands, but must be a Roman copy. He presented his evidence clearly and forcefully in his *Griechische Bildhauerarbeit*<sup>1</sup> (pp. 37-48); but as far as I can tell from casual notices and reviews and from conversations with my colleagues, he has not won any notable assent for his thesis.

Original or copy, the Olympia statue remains intrinsically just what it was. Extrinsically it loses somewhat, of course, by becoming the immediate product of a later and less renowned hand. My own interest lies not so much in the status of the statue itself, as in the more general phenomenon that, in view of the widespread hostility to Blümel's contention, we still apparently cannot reach correct decisions in our attempts to distinguish copies from originals. And since I have not the slightest doubt that Blümel is entirely accurate, and since I believe that his position can be still more definitely and conclusively defended, I should like to reopen the question by considering the evidence from a slightly different angle.

As a preliminary, it will be useful to reproduce the eight points with which Blümel sums up his findings:<sup>2</sup>

"1. The unfinished back of the Hermes is exceptional for the fourth century, but not for the technique of the Roman copyists.

"2. The dissimilarity in the formal rendering of front and back is unusual in the fourth century, but easily explained in copyists' technique.

"3. The thoroughgoing use of the flat and the rounded chisel for working the nude is not to be found in the good tradition of the fourth century, but is the customary rule in Imperial Roman times.

"4. The similarity in execution of the Hermes and of copies such as the Subiaco Youth, the Eubuleus, the Ilioneus, the Satyr torso of the Louvre, and the drapery of the so-called Germanicus is surprisingly great; whereas there is no correspondence in this respect with any fourth century work.

"5. The drill-working of the hair is supposed to occur here on the Hermes for the first time; but it is only in later centuries that it commonly occurs.

"6. The gouged surface of the tree-trunk cannot be really paralleled earlier than in Roman copies.

"7. The strut, in a quietly standing group such as this, where there is no technical necessity for it, is without parallel in Greek art, but extremely common as a copyist's addition.

"8. The fact that the Hermes is set on a basis of the first century (B.C.) cannot

<sup>1</sup> XI Ergänzungsheft: Jahrbuch des deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, 1927.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 45.



be explained by assuming that the statue was placed in the Heraeum in a later time. The statue was made for this position and consequently for its late base."

Taken together, these objections constitute a formidable indictment; and any single one of them, if incontrovertible, would be conclusive for the later date of the Hermes. But is such an incontrovertible objection to be found in the list? I believe that one exists, though it is only vaguely implied, and nowhere expressly formulated by Blümel. It is this: *the drapery of the Hermes is not Greek, nor even a copy of Greek work, but fundamentally and unambiguously Roman.*

Since this observation does not seem to have struck very many observers, it is permissible to imagine that it deserves a fairly comprehensive justification.

In the archaic period, drapery is a linear and superficial addition to a simple "atelier-form" of the block of stone. It is drawn on the general cubic mass which represents the human figure, and has either no plastic existence of its own or else a very crudely simplified one.

This linear origin of drapery-forms persists as a fundamental influence in Greek sculpture even into Hellenistic times. In the Olympia pediments the linear quality is still obviously paramount. In the Parthenon pediments the drapery-forms are still entirely determined by the linear schemes, here beautifully conceived to give the impression of the modelled human figure beneath and always harmonized geometrically into a pattern or system. About this time a change takes place as fundamental as that earlier one in the graphic arts, by which Black Figure turned into Red Figure, and exactly comparable with that inversion. Until this change, the linear forms are carved into the stone and hence result as furrows. But now the process is reversed and the linear forms become the ridges, while the intervals between the lines are sunk to make furrows. In the Olympia pediments the drapery lines are sunk; on the Nike Parapet reliefs they are raised. But they remain none the less linear, the outcome of a wholly linear conception and tradition. Nor can any distinction in this regard be drawn between drapery on the human form and drapery hanging free.

The geometry of consistent line still wholly dominates the sculpture from the temple of Asklepios at Epidauros and the statue of Eirene and Plutos,—works with which we are approaching dangerously near to the period of Praxiteles. In the huge statues of Mausolos and Artemisia, from the Halikarnassos Mausoleum, plastic independence at last begins to inform the drapery. And yet there is scarcely a ridge or furrow whose direction and curvature is not obtainable from the traditional geometry of linear forms. The Man-

tinea Basis, the Alcestis column-drum from Ephesos, the Lateran Sophokles, the Demosthenes, the so-called Menander are all only so many repetitions in confirmation of this fundamental thesis that the plastic volume of classical drapery is everywhere sacrificed to linear constructions. Even the famous pendent drapery-piece from Lykosura possesses only the life of its decorated surfaces and is without plastic interest.

In opposition to all this, the Hermes drapery<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1 and Fig. 3)



FIGURE 1. THE DRAPERY, SHOWING "FINGER-PRINTS"



FIGURE 2. THE DRAPERY, SHOWING "ZIGZAG"

is not a succession of simple surfaces controlled by traditional linear forms, but a free plastic creation. The moderately plausible but presumably apocryphal anecdote of the German savant who, on seeing a photograph of the then newly-discovered Hermes, asked why the photographer had not removed his cloth, should have

<sup>1</sup> I have to thank Mr. Ess Askew, fellow in the American Academy in Rome, for taking the photographs for Figs. 2, 3, and 5.

warned us that we were confronted with an advanced stage of plastic realism in an inanimate object such as could not have existed before Pergamenean times, at the very earliest.

And actually, plastic realism of drapery virtually begins with the great frieze of the Zeus altar at Pergamon. Despite all their classicism and admiration for fifth-century Attic work, the masters of this frieze had begun to conceive drapery as an independent entity whose volume determines highly complicated and almost illogical solid forms. Roman realism completed the process. It was quite natural and inevitable that Blümel should have found the nearest parallel<sup>1</sup> to the Hermes drapery in the so-called Germanicus of the Louvre, where a classical Greek theme has had Roman drapery added by the copyist. Not until Roman times had the long development fulfilled itself, leading out of the linear approach of archaism into the final stage of complete solid-plastic apprehension.

When analyzed purely in terms of the evolution of plastic form, the nude Hermes and his discarded drapery fall nearly half a thousand years apart.

But it is not the habit of the present generation of students to envisage its problems in terms of the gradual self-realization of the fully free plastic sense in the ancient world. This is a method which the next generation will recognize and utilize: *virginibus puerisque canto*. But a less far-reaching test of style remains accessible.

The Asia Minor schools of the second century B.C. created certain schematic mannerisms for drapery that are easily discernible and readily describable. Not knowing their proper chronological relations, I list them at random:

(1) "Fingerprints," giving an affect of a putty-soft surface which has been indented by shallow pressure. The manner occurs sparingly and tentatively on fourth-century Attic grave-reliefs. It is rather fully developed on the Pergamon frieze. In Roman times it is one of the commonest devices for suggesting the pliant texture of heavy cloth. It is apparent in an advanced state of over-use on the large pendent surfaces of the lower half of the Hermes drapery (Fig. 1).

(2) "Zigzags." The drapery of the main frieze of the Pergamon altar is riddled with this mannerism. As far as I know, this is its first occurrence as a stereotyped formula. It can be easily detected on any photograph of the Chiaramonti Niobid in the Vatican. On

<sup>1</sup> Another drapery parallel: Lowther Castle, Augustus (Arndt, *Einzelaufnahmen* 3074), a Polykleitan theme with drapery *obligato* by the copyist.

the Olympia Hermes it occurs most plainly a little below the horizontal strut (Fig. 2, right center).

(3) The "countersunk fret." This mannerism may have originated among the copyists as a convenient time-saver with the drill. The furrow assumes the form of a slot with angular edges, making sunken patterns like frets or keys. It is characteristic that the breaks, turns, or angles in these patterns are slightly rounded as a result of the drill with which the corners were laid out. The manner is not fully developed on the Pergamon frieze; but is particularly blatant on statues not copying Greek prototypes in the Julio-Claudian period, continuing thereafter rather obstinately for two full centuries. I have never seen more than the most timid hint of this rather vicious mannerism in an indubitable Greek original of the fourth century; nor do I believe that it is possible to point to a piece of drapery laid out in terms of such countersunk frets before the time of the overworked copyist ateliers of Imperial times. The Hermes drapery is extensively worked in terms of this mannerism. The looped folds under the elbow (Fig. 3) would make a classic example. The little loop of drapery thrown over the forearm would alone date the garment as Roman. Almost equally prolific is the region of the heavy loops at the level of the knee and calf. Such passages can be paralleled in numberless Imperial statues, of which I choose one almost at random (Fig. 4). They have no parallels in Greek work of the fourth century B.C.

So completely is the drapery of the Hermes permeated with plastic realism of form and these late-Hellenistic or Roman conventions of detail, that it is not possible to call it even a Roman copy of a fourth-century Greek original; for there is no such original latent in



FIGURE 3. THE DRAPERY, SHOWING "COUNTERSUNK FRET'S"

it anywhere. The drapery must, therefore, be a Roman creation<sup>1</sup> improvised and added by the copyist.

Herein we have the key to all the many difficulties and embarrassments which have beset the commentators and admirers of this highly admirable statue. Let us briefly review their array. Like Blümel, I, too, shall arrange them under eight points:

(a) The tree-trunk, with its masking drapery, is a crude device, a makeshift hardly worthy of a great artist. How necessary for the



FIGURE 4. ROME, CAPITOLINE MUSEUM. MARS AND VENUS, DETAIL

proper effect of the statue it is to suppress tree-trunk and drapery may be gathered from Treu's jubulations<sup>2</sup> over Otto's water-colors in which he damped out these disturbing elements with red and dark brown.

(b) The horizontal strut, running brutally into the naked flesh, is

<sup>1</sup> Unlike the meagre garment of the infant Dionysos, which preserves the true linear tradition of the fourth century B.C.

<sup>2</sup> *Olympia: die Ergebnisse*, III, p. 201.

still less forgivable. Treu even ventured<sup>1</sup> the suggestion that the strut was intended only to strengthen the statue in transport, and should have been worked away when the statue was set up—but this was neglected or forgotten.

(c) The hair is very sketchy in its execution and manifestly neglected on the crown and back of the head. Furtwängler<sup>2</sup> indicated the use of the drill in the hair as an innovation and individual peculiarity of Praxiteles (*i.e.* of this particular work of Praxiteles).

(d) Almost the whole rear of the statue has been left unfinished. The back view of the drapery on the tree-trunk is as hasty and careless as anything in the worst Roman work.

(e) The small of the back has been recut, as though it had been worked out too large in scale at the first try: hardly the mistake to be expected of the greatest master of marble-cutting at the height of his career.

(f) When the statue was found, there were traces of red color on the hair and on the sandal; and this is very generally (and almost certainly correctly<sup>3</sup>) interpreted as a sizing for gold. But are we to imagine that the polychromatic taste of Praxiteles time (and we have the Alexander sarcophagus in Constantinople to tell us more closely what to expect) favored gilded hair on a marble statue?

(g) Whereas the marble of the drapery has all been dragged with a rasp (Fig. 5) in the usual manner of Roman Imperial portrait statues, the marble of the nude has been polished until it shines with reflected light, although whenever we discover indubitable Greek originals of the fourth or fifth century B.C. they show merely a fine matte finish and never this lustre.

(h) The main sandal-thong by the large toe vanishes into nothing just after an elaborate knot has been tied in it. The missing continuation must have been supplied merely in paint, the necessary marble for it having been cut away by mistake or heedlessness: a strange observation on a Praxitelean work.

All these uncomfortable observations and objections dissolve the moment we assume (as we must assume) that the Hermes is a marble copy after a bronze original.

<sup>1</sup> *Olympia: die Ergebnisse*, III, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> *Meisterwerke*, p. 352.

<sup>3</sup> Treu, in the *Olympia* publication (*Ergebnisse*, III, pp. 201–2) is clearly wrong in preferring to think of the red on the sandal as the original final color; for a flake of gold was recorded as still adhering, and on a recently found statue in Delos with this same red there were likewise traces of gold. The little "rosette" was, therefore, not attached separately "um sich vom roten Grund abzuheben," but because it would have been too difficult to carve and too easy to break had it been made in marble. The rosette (or whatever ornament it was) is a typical bit of toreutic decoration, reflecting a bronze original. Treu's parallels in the Artemis of Versailles and the Apollo Belvedere are also both taken from bronze originals.

I rehearse the now liquidated argument in the same sequence:

(A) The tree-trunk is the commonest device of the copyist to give support to marble where bronze could dispense with it. That such a pose could have been safely cast without any support under the arm is shown by MacMonnies' Dancing Bacchante in the Metropolitan Museum, where a child is similarly perched on the bent forearm of a larger figure. Since the tree-trunk was absent in the original, the drapery could not have existed, either, and hence had to be supplied by the copyist *more suo*. This would explain why the garment is



FIGURE 5. THE DRAPERY, SHOWING  
RASPED SURFACE

Roman, whereas all the rest of the statue is Greek in style. I can think of no other way of explaining this extraordinary discrepancy.

An almost perfect parallel may be found in the Polykleitan Diadumenos from Delos,<sup>1</sup> likewise a brilliant marble copy from a bronze original, with tree trunk, strut, and drapery added by the copyist. The drapery here again is a purely Greco-Roman creation, with the same tell-tale "zigzags" and countersunk furrows to prove that the date is after the middle of the second century B.C.

<sup>1</sup> *Mon. Piot*, III (1896) Pl. XIV.



Only, as this addition reaches no higher than the thigh, it is far less pretentious than the drapery added to the Hermes. Even so. . . . "avec quel naturel retombent les plis du manteau, jeté plutôt que posé sur le tronc. . . . En sculptant ce tronc d'arbre, accessoire modeste, il a montré qu'il n'était pas incapable de faire oeuvre personnelle."<sup>1</sup>

(B) The strut is equally eloquent of the needs of the copyist afraid of his more brittle medium. With strut, tree-trunk and drapery removed, a magnificent, chiasmically balanced Praxitelean pose leaps to light. Is it too curved and too off-centre? The lovely boy from Marathon Bay will show us how much Praxiteles could swing and curve his bronzes without further support.

(C) The hair is not rendered in marble-style at all, which was necessarily much more linear, but in a rather summary imitation of the fourth-century bronze tradition, now magisterially illustrated for us by the same delightful bronze boy discovered only a few years ago by fishers in Marathon Bay and now exhibited in the rotunda of the Athens National Museum. There we may see what the little projecting knobs of hair on the Hermes are meant to imitate. The hair of the Hermes thus reproduces (not too brilliantly) a clay-style, built up by attachment, not a marble-style achieved by cutting down. (The two little struts between locks of hair, left by the drill, would be hard to parallel in classical marble-cutting, but are a commonplace trait of late-Antonine work.)

(D) The back of the statue was left in the rough. When we consider the finished condition of the utterly invisible backs of the Parthenon pediment statues, we cannot but be somewhat taken aback at such remissness in the most finished of masters. The position against the wall in the Heraeum would perhaps excuse this. But note that the original could not have been made for this niche,—as was already pointed out by Treu,<sup>2</sup> who remarked that the lighting was not at all calculated to bring out the good points of the pose. It is only if we assume that an original was made in the atelier without thought of its eventual setting, while the copy therefrom was specifically made with the Heraeum setting in view, that the difficulty vanishes.

(E) All admit<sup>3</sup> that the back between the shoulder blades was roughly gone over *after* it had already once been worked to a more careful finish. We can hardly imagine Praxiteles to have exercised such gross self-criticism. But if the copyist, on submitting his work,

<sup>1</sup> *Mon. Piot*, III, p. 153 (Couve).

<sup>2</sup> *Olympia: Ergebnisse*, III, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> Treu: "die Sache ist ganz unzweifelhaft" (*ibid.*, p. 203).

was checked up and proven wrong in his measurements, he may well have left his rectification in this crude state on the plea that the back would not show and therefore was not very vital. By his summary correction of his error, he thus fulfilled his contract and took his pay, even while proclaiming himself a deficient craftsman. Incidentally, there is no evidence that the statue ever stood on a different base from the one which it now fits. If it fits it badly, and if the base itself is somewhat carelessly worked and shows profiles that cannot be earlier than the second century B.C.<sup>1</sup> (and may equally well be considerably later, since I observe that the identical sequence of crown mouldings occurs on some of the pedestals for the statues from the Exedra of Herodes Atticus from the middle of the second century after Christ)—the obvious conclusion that the entire statue was fabricated in this late time is presumably correct.<sup>2</sup>

(F) It would be interesting to know whether those who think the statue an original believe that so naturalistic a work had the crude red hair of archaic art or the equally startling shimmer of bright gold. There is not the slightest excuse for taking the red color as sizing for paint,<sup>3</sup> since we have several examples of fourth-century coloring (the Alexander sarcophagus, the Volo gravestones) to prove that the pure tone of the color was made to penetrate the grain of the marble without the dulling intermediation of an opaque sizing. Now, bronzes were gilded apparently at all periods;<sup>4</sup> but would the hair of an original marble of the fourth century have been gold? Roman marbles, on the contrary, were frequently gilded (such red sizing appearing, for example, on many of the statues excavated at Corinth by the American School); and the copy of a gilded bronze would be all the more likely to tolerate gold in order to reproduce the coloring of the original.

(G) Precisely for this reason the nude is so highly polished, that it may imitate the effect of bronze with its gleaming high-lights and strong chiaroscuro contrasts. An exact parallel is the Delphi Antinoos, whose body has the same lustre and whose hair is also manifestly imitated from bronze. Fortunately, an Antinoos must have a very obvious *terminus post quem* in his dating.

<sup>1</sup> *Olympia Ergebnisse*, p. 204 (Treu); II, p. 157 (Bulle).

<sup>2</sup> The clamp cuttings in the plinth under the foot (mentioned in *Ergebnisse*, III, p. 201, and illustrated in fig. 231), because horizontal, are presumably a mend to strengthen a break or flaw. The explanation given (p. 204) that they are traces of a fastening into some other previous base is untenable because plinths, if pegged at all, are dowelled from below. Blümel explains the clamp as an atelier fastening.

<sup>3</sup> "Grundfarbe für die dunklere Zeichnung," Treu, *ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> That Praxiteles gilded his bronzes is stated by Paus. (x. 14.7): Φρόνης δὲ εἰκόνα ἐπίχρυσον Πραξιτέλης μὲν εἰργάσατο κτλ. and Plut. (*amator* 9.10): Φρόνη . . . ἐν Δελφοῖς κατὰ χρυσος ἐστῶσα.

To those who by any chance imagine that such a finely worked and lustrous finish is a rarity in Roman work, we may suggest, in addition to Blümel's comparisons with the Subiaco Youth and the Louvre satyr torso, the Aphrodite from Cyrene or the "Poppaea Sabina" found next to the Hermes in the Heraeum at Olympia.<sup>1</sup> Her face has identically the same waxy sheen; and Treu noted other stylistic and technical similarities which he hoped to explain by supposing the sculptor was imitating the Hermes!<sup>2</sup>

Ed. Schmidt's recent suggestion<sup>3</sup> that the high polish is modern and dates since the statue's excavation, although intended to help, rather hinders the case. To be sure, it eliminates one of the obvious difficulties in claiming the Hermes for a Greek original,—but does it not thereby remove one of the most effective reasons for wishing him to be such? Precisely this wonderful polish ("durch Reinigung mit Säuren entstanden," says Schmidt) has been the chief source of the prejudice against thinking that anyone but Praxiteles himself could have made the statue!

(H) Lastly, the little trouble of the missing sandal-thong between the toes, where the marble knot ends in air, most painfully bespeaks the copyist. The hands which first worked out the sandal's lovely and elaborate detail, could hardly have made this slip.

All in all, the case is so conclusive that we can only wonder why the Hermes was ever mistaken for an original. Presumably there were two powerful factors at work: the beautiful workmanship, and the testimony of Pausanias.

As for the first of these, the execution is really extremely uneven and ranges from a very perfect lustre finish to a very noticeable negligence (not usually chosen for photographic illustration). It must inevitably remain a matter of personal opinion whether the matte surface of the Olympia pediments or of the Elgin marbles does not betray a subtler and more perfect understanding of the medium; but the real root of the prejudice against allowing the Hermes to be a copy lies in the assumption that there were no great craftsmen in Roman times and that all that is fine is classical Greek. We shall gradually outgrow that notion.

As for Pausanias' explicit testimony that the Hermes is the work of Praxiteles (*τέχνη δέ ἐστὶ Πραξιτέλους*), the fact that our author has nothing to say about the dedicator or the occasion of the statue, and seemingly knows nothing about it except the sculptor's name, might equally well indicate that he saw no inscription on the

<sup>1</sup> *Ergebnisse*: III, pl. LXIII, 6; LXIV, 2-3; p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Gnomon*, 1931. p. 11.

base<sup>1</sup> and had to content himself with the local verbal tradition. This is not the first nor the most serious mistake of his Olympian periegesis. Why, for example, did he assert that Paionios and Alkamenes carved the pediments of the Zeus temple? Why did he say the Philippeion was built of brick? Why did he say the Leonidas of the Leonidaion was a native of the land, when the epistyle inscription says he came from Naxos? Why did he say the treasury



FIGURE 6. THE HERMES OF PRAXITELES

of Sikyon was built by the tyrant Myron, when its style of architecture proves that it must have been erected at least two centuries after that ruler's chariot victory of the 33d Olympiad? It is thankless to berate Pausanias for his mistakes, when without him we should know so little. But let us not make gospel of every statement in his text, especially when it is so easily demonstrable that he happened to be wrong.

Would it not be a more cogent objection to demand whether such

<sup>1</sup> So already conceded by Treu, *Ergebnisse*, III, p. 205.

a copy would have been made in Roman times and set up in a site so abundant in old original masterpieces? That the original bronze should have been removed is surely easy to believe,—but that it should have been replaced by such a splendid copy?

Blümel and others have scarcely emphasized with enough vigor the extraordinarily apt parallel from Pausanias' own pages. In speaking of Thespieae and the famous statue of Eros there, *by our same master Praxiteles*, he mentions<sup>1</sup> that Gaius removed the original, Claudius restored it to its place, and Nero again seized it. "And," says he, "the Eros now in Thespieae is a copy of Praxiteles' original, executed by Menodoros of Athens."<sup>2</sup> We are not told who ordered this copy to be made, nor is it perhaps necessary for us to know. And we shall have to be content with the same absence of information for the Olympia Hermes. Was it that arch-plunderer Nero who fell in love with the bronze original and carried it away with him to Rome and, in order to soothe the feelings of the Greeks who had shown him such adulatory hospitality on the occasion of his state visit to the Olympic games, ordered the finest obtainable copy to be made to replace it? Along with it, did he present the statue of his wife Poppaea, to become its nearest neighbor in the Heraeum? Or does the copy date from Hadrianic times, as the already-mentioned parallel between the crowning mouldings of its base and those from the exedra of Herodes Atticus, and in general the technical tradition of the highly polished surface and the drill-struts in the hair, seem to indicate?

We shall have a better chance of answering these queries when our knowledge of Roman copies has progressed sufficiently for us to tell Neronian from Hadrianic work with certainty. Alas for the state of that knowledge at present, when we can still debate the impossible choice between a Praxitelean original of the fourth century before Christ and a Roman version of four to five hundred years later!

The problems here raised cannot be settled or even properly argued in distant studies, libraries, and museums. Only in the little square room at Olympia can the case be argued out. Yet the real issue in the theme, Who Carved the Hermes of Praxiteles? is no longer very edifying. For it is not a question whether Praxiteles himself had a hand in it; but whether the Athenian marble-cutter who copied the bronze original lived in Julio-Claudian or Hadrianic times.

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<sup>1</sup> Paus. IX. 27. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> This time, Pausanias seems to have found the base inscribed and so could not confound copy with original.