

# ASKLEPIOS BY BRYAXIS

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## ASKLEPIOS BY BRYAXIS

[Plate I.]

IN the Museum of Alexandria is to be seen a colossal head of fine workmanship which has its face curiously surrounded by rough planes where curly hair would be expected, and where this must have been added originally in coloured plaster<sup>1</sup> (Pl. I. *a*). It has been taken for a head of Sarapis or Zeus, and I must confess I have accepted the former name unsuspectingly, so great is the similitude in style to the various copies of the Sarapis of Bryaxis, of which the Egyptian museums possess several<sup>2</sup> by far exceeding in artistic merits the more generally known head of the Vatican. On the other hand, it reminded me so much of the famous Blacas Asklepios from Melos in the British Museum (Pl. I. *b*) that I did not doubt the likeness went so far as to prove the latter to be another work of Bryaxis.

On further investigation, however, I found that those parts of the hair and beard that have been executed in marble correspond neither lock by lock to the beginning of the curly beard, nor to the bases of the massy curls that overshadow the earnest face of the mysterious Alexandrian deity.

The moustache especially is easy to compare, and is seen to be absolutely different. In the Alexandrian head, though drooping at the ends, it leaves the upper-lip entirely free. Among the copies of Sarapis, the largest and finest, I think, is that from Arsinoë at Cairo<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 1). Here the moustache

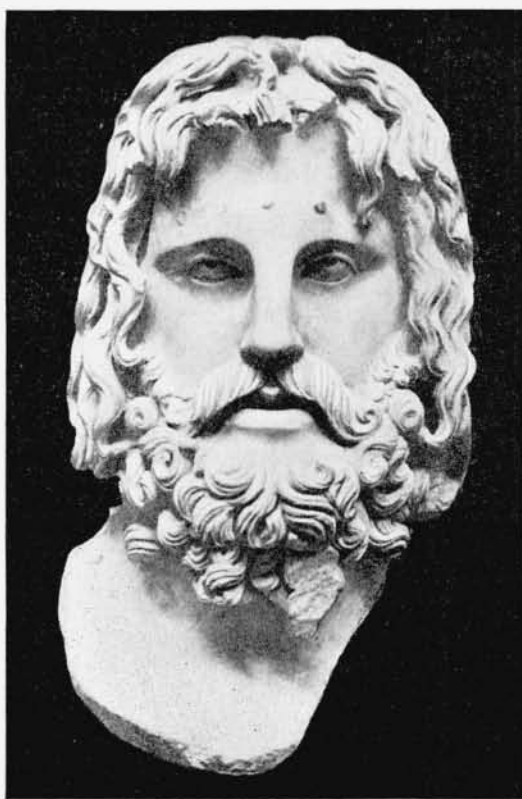


FIG. 1.—HEAD OF SARAPIS FROM ARSINOË, CAIRO.

<sup>1</sup> E. Breccia, *Alexandria ad Aegyptum*, p. 203, Fig. 75; Brunn-Bruckmann, Fig. No. 605, p. 3, Abb. 6 (Sieveking); Hauser, *Berl. Phil. Woch.*, 1906, p. 69; Rubensohn,

*Arch. Anz.*, 1906, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Amelung, *Rev. Arch.*, 3, IV. ii. p. 177, Pl. XIV.; *Ausonia*, 1908, p. 115 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Cat. Général*, No. 27432 (Ht. 0.90 m.).

ends in a spiral [and, by hiding the corners of the mouth, accentuates the expression of strength of the straight under-lip, so different from the goodness that speaks from the fuller form of the other.

Upon turning to a closer comparison of the Alexandrian and Melian heads, I was surprised to find the greatest similarity where I had failed to find it before. The way the hair borders the forehead is exactly the same, and the little that remains of the hair fits in very well. The half-open mouth particularly is very like, and the surrounding growth of hair on the Egyptian head differs only in so far that the forms are more sharply cut, in a more realistic contrast to the mellower surface of the flesh. On the whole the identity of the types is evident. It merely seems that the Egyptian fragment is everywhere far superior in artistic quality to the famous head from Melos



FIG. 2.—ASKLEPIOS.  
STATUETTE FOUND AT  
EPIDAUROS.

in the modelling of the forehead with its curious swelling at the right temple, and in the deep-laid eyes with their Praxitelean *hygrotes*. Though both works seem to render the same conception, they differ somewhat in the shape of the nose, which is a trifle broader, especially in the nostrils, at Alexandria, though not quite so much perhaps as it seems from the photograph which I have before me, the same as is reproduced in the *Museum Guide*, for it shows less under a different light in the one which Sieveking has reproduced as his Figure 6 in the commentary on a head of Zeus from the Villa Albani.

But on the whole the resemblance is such that we cannot doubt they go back to the same artist; and that this must be Bryaxis seems plain by the similarity of style in these works and the various replicas of his most famous Sarapis, which to my mind is even closer than that which Amelung has noted between the Zeus of Otricoli and the Alexandrian god.<sup>4</sup>

It seems worth while mentioning that this author compares another head (though he does not know where it is) with both the Zeus of Otricoli and the Asklepios from Melos.<sup>5</sup> To me it appears to be nearer to the style of the Mausolos.

Wolters<sup>6</sup> has shown, with ample evidence, that we may know the general form of the statue to which the Melian head belongs, by a series of statuettes found at Epidauros (Fig. 2). He has, however, left open the question by whose hand this was, and where it may have stood.

It seems possible to put forward an acceptable proposition about this locality, now that we feel sure about the artist. Epidauros itself is out of question, since the chryselephantine statue of Thrasymedes was seated, as we know from Pausanias, and we need not dwell on any further difference

<sup>4</sup> *Ausonia*, l.c., p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> l.c., p. 118, Fig. 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ath. Mitt.*, 1892, pp. 3 and 4, Pls. II. and III.

either in ikonography or style. Nor can we find the original which we are looking for in the Asklepios of Bryaxis mentioned by Pausanias, without further detail, at Megara with a Hygieia by the same hand. The coins<sup>7</sup> that have preserved a memory of this work, be it ever so slight, suffice to prove that if it was analogous, it was certainly not the statue that we are looking for. That Pliny<sup>8</sup> mentions an Aesculapius in his catalogue of bronze-workers as one of two works of our master, does not help us any further. And if we might be induced to connect with our Alexandrian find the notice of Pausanias about the statue in the temple which Antoninus built at Epidauros for the Egyptian Hygieia, Apollo and Asklepios, we should soon be corrected by the Alexandrian coins. These show a head that agrees wonderfully well (Fig. 3, 1),<sup>9</sup>



FIG. 3.—COINS OF ALEXANDRIA AND COS.

but have a very different body (Fig. 3, 2):<sup>10</sup> not so much in the general pose, which is akin, as in the action—the right hand holding a phiale, the left arm wrapped in the mantle, whilst that which we are in search of leans on a long stick, with part of his garment propped under his left armpit, his right hand resting on his hip. This was, from the time of Mikon, a not unusual Attic scheme. The Egyptian deities whom the emperor introduced at Epidauros were, no doubt, Sarapis, Isis and Harpokrates.

Bryaxis, though Athenodoros calls him an Athenian, and though he may have developed his art in the Attic metropolis, bears a Carian name, and certainly worked in his native land, as the youngest, probably, amongst the famous sculptors of the Mausoleum in the middle of the fourth century, at

<sup>7</sup> Imhoof-Blumer and P. Gardner, *Num. Comm. Megara*, vi. and vii.

<sup>8</sup> *Hist. Nat.* xxxiv. 73

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<sup>9</sup> *Brit. Mus. Cat. Alexandria*, Pl. V., No. 1706 and specially 1782.

<sup>10</sup> *l.c.*, No. 703, 705, 1315, 1613.

Rhodes and at Cnidos, where five colossal gods of bronze and a marble Dionysos respectively are mentioned by Pliny.<sup>11</sup>

Now as Cos was one of the most renowned sanctuaries of Asklepios it seems worth while to inquire if there be any trace of his having made a statue of the god for this island. So it certainly is not unexpected that a unique Coan silver tetradrachm of the second century, with the magistrate's name of Nikostratos, in the Hunterian collection<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 3, 4), bears an Asklepios of grand style that corresponds in every detail to the Epidaurian statuettes, and differs only in its finer feeling for the great lines and the rhythm of the more svelt figure. Nor do the heads of Asklepios in profile, which occur in the same epoch on the smaller coins of Cos (Fig. 3, 3),<sup>13</sup> present any objection to the supposition that the image of the god at the sanctuary had the aspect of the Asklepios Blacas. That the Asklepios on the bronze coins of Hadrian<sup>14</sup> presents another type is no serious objection.

I need hardly recall the frequent intercourse of Alexandria with Cos (which after the death of Alexander fell to the share of Ptolemy, and of which Herondas left us such a lively scene in his visit of Kunno and Kokkale, the Alexandrian housewives, to the sanctuary) to support the theory that our fragmentary head may have been a copy of the Coan original, as well as the Epidaurian statuettes and the Munich torso which Wolters cites.<sup>15</sup> However, I should prefer another solution. Close as we found the resemblance of the colossal head to the Melian, we yet had to observe a difference in the shape of the nose, which might easily be accounted for by the work of the copyist, but may not less well be due to the variations which an artist would make in using the same ideas of form and expression for different statues of the same god. And as we have found on the Alexandrian coins a type that stands no farther away from the Coan than the Megarian does, it looks as if Bryaxis might have made an Asklepios for Alexandria as well as a Sarapis.

The Alexandrian fragment even seems to be of such excellent quality that I venture to ask if it might not be an original, though I lack means to decide if the rather rare technique of plaster hair, surrounding a marble face, might be as early as Bryaxis and not beneath his standing as an artist.

If Bryaxis should thus have made an Asklepios for Megara, for Cos and for Alexandria, slightly varying in attitude though identical in type, one feels inclined to suggest that the Roman replica in the Pamfili collection,<sup>16</sup> which Wolters mentions as differing from the Epidaurian statuettes by its action and by the overlap of the mantle falling in front, might be a copy of the Aesculapius mentioned by Pliny. It would therefore be a fourth work, intermediate between the Coan and the Alexandrian, holding a phiale like the latter, but leaning on a stick like the former. Not that there is any reason to assume that our artist had a special predilection for sculpturing the healing god, but that as he succeeded in creating a type that answered to the highest

<sup>11</sup> *Hist. Nat.*, xxxiv. 42 and xxxvi. 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Greek Coins in the Hunterian Coll.*, II. Pl. 54, 18; *B. M. Cat. Caria*, Pl. XLV. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *B. M. Cat.*, Pl. XXXII. 2-5.

<sup>14</sup> *l.c.*, p. 218, No. 241. I owe the cast to the kind help of Mr. G. F. Hill.

<sup>15</sup> *l.c.*, p. 10, Pl. IV.

<sup>16</sup> *l.c.*, p. 6; Clarac iv. Taf. 551. 1160 c.

expectations of his age, he was called upon to repeat his success. If Petersen<sup>17</sup> was right in suggesting that Bryaxis created his Sarapis on the analogy of the Asklepios of Thrasymedes at Epidauros, and Wilcken<sup>18</sup> in accepting this view, it is probable that the advisers of Ptolemy advised the king to commission Bryaxis to make this statue, because his Asklepios had met with such success. It was their intention to resuscitate the Egyptian god Hesar-Hapi as a syncretic Hellenistic deity, whose character as a god of the dead was to be softened by qualities like those of the healing god.<sup>19</sup>

Be this as it may, it seems evident that the Alexandrian and the Melian head and the Coan coin go a long way to enlarge our knowledge of Bryaxis, the Carian artist who did so much to develop the Praxitelean style in the second half of the third century B.C., and who, attempting under the influence of Euphranor, to give a more earnest character to such gods as Zeus or Sarapis, solved this problem best in rendering the benignity of the god who heals the sufferings of the sick and ailing.

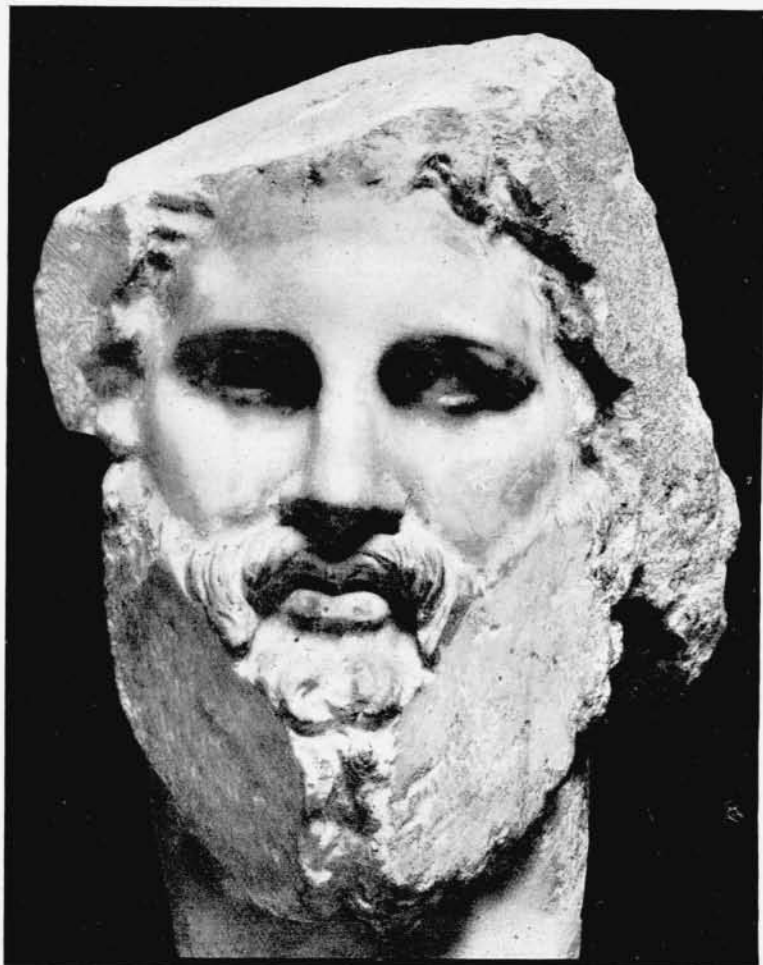
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<sup>17</sup> *Arch. f. Relig.*, xiii. p. 72.

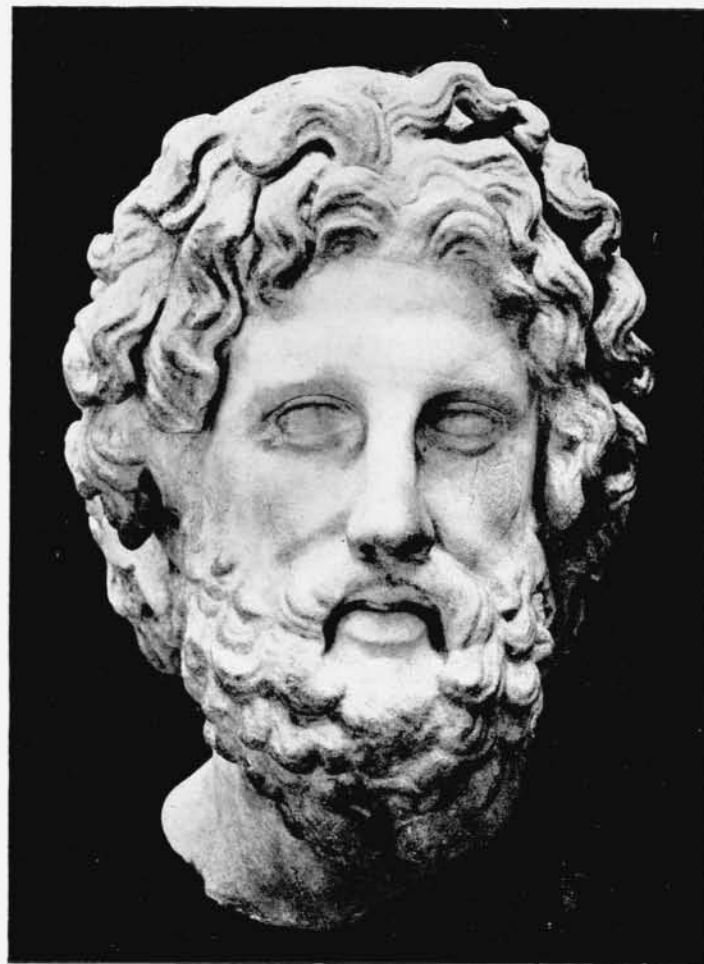
<sup>18</sup> *Jahrb.* xxxii., 1917, p. 190.

<sup>19</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.* IV. 84, deum ipsum multi Aesculapium, quod medeatur aegris corporibus, quidam Osirin, antiquissimum

illis gentibus numen, plerique Jovem, ut rerum omnium potentem, plurimi Ditem patrem, insignibus quae in ipso manifesta aut per ambages conjectant.



ALEXANDRIA.



BRITISH MUSEUM.

TWO HEADS OF ASKLEPIOS