

A STATUE OF PROTESILAOS

An important new acquisition for the Classical Department has been placed this month in the Room of Recent Accessions. It is a marble warrior, somewhat over life-size,¹ in a fair state of preservation, undoubtedly one of the most impressive pieces in our collection (figs. 1-3).² He is represented standing, on a slanting base,

¹ Total height as preserved, with plinth, 7 ft. 3 in. (2.21 m.).

² A more detailed article on this important statue will appear in the next number of Metropolitan Museum Studies.



“DISPATCH BOX” WITH FRENCH
OF THE ANNALS

box.” Among the woodcut illustrations may be mentioned nice copies of the Nuremberg Heiligenleben of 1488 and the Strassburg Virgil of 1502, the cuts in the latter of which served as models for the unusual series of painted Limoges enamels of the taking of Troy that was acquired for the Department

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and leaning back slightly as if to acquire momentum for throwing his spear against an enemy. He wears a helmet with leather lining and carried a shield on his left arm. The statue is evidently a Roman copy of a Greek work produced soon after the middle of the fifth century, full of power and swing, and monumental in conception. The original was presumably of bronze, as were the majority of free-standing statues of that time.

The type is a new one and we welcome it as an important addition to our somewhat meager store of works of this important period, contemporary with the Parthenon metopes (450-440 B.C.). But who is this mighty warrior about to attack an enemy? It would be difficult to make an identification — the choice of warrior heroes is so extensive in Greek history — were it not for one important clue. In the British Museum is a torso, evidently another replica from the same original as our statue; and found with it and belonging to it is a slanting base, worked in greater detail than ours, in the form evidently of the fore part of a ship surrounded by waves.³ On the evidence of this base the figure in the British Museum was identified as the sea-god Poseidon, perhaps wielding his trident. Our statue, preserved with helmeted

head⁴ and arms which carried spear and shield, now excludes this possibility. But the example in the British Museum teaches us that our slanting base must be explained as a simplified rendering of the ram of a boat.⁵

So our hero must have been one associated with a ship from which he advanced for an attack. Such a one was Protesilaos, the son of Iphiklos, "the first man who dared to leap ashore when the Greek fleet touched the Troad." An oracle had foretold that whoever first stepped on Trojan soil would be the first to fall. But Protesilaos, nothing daunted, jumped on land from his ship, "beating death to not a few barbarians and was then himself killed by Hektor." It was a splendid deed in true heroic style, and the memory of Protesilaos was ever afterwards revered. There was a shrine of him in Thessaly, at Phylake, his home, and games were instituted there in his honor (Pindar). Near his grave at Elaïos in the Thracian Chersonese there was a temple with rich treasures as well as a shrine (Herodotos). Philostratos, writing

of this sanctuary in the early third century

⁴ The head is said to have been found in the same general locality as the statue, the marble and weathering are identical, the size and style fit; but it does not actually join on to the body, since an intervening portion is missing.

⁵ The disturbing support in the form of a tree trunk would not have been needed in the bronze original.



FIG. 2. STATUE OF PROTESILAOS
RIGHT SIDE

³ Smith, Catalogue of Greek Sculpture, III, no. 1538.



FIG. 1. STATUE OF PROTESILAOS. ROMAN COPY OF A GREEK WORK OF ABOUT 450-440 B.C.

A.D., speaks of a temple statue of Protesilaos "standing on a base which was shaped like the prow of a boat." Moreover, coins of Elaïos of the time of Commodus have on the reverse representations of Protesilaos standing on the fore part of a ship, clad in helmet, cuirass, and short chiton, in the right arm a spear, the left raised. Coins of Phthiotian Thebes in Thessaly have similar representations of Protesilaos, but standing in front of the ship instead of on it.

With such evidence we need not hesitate to identify our new statue as Protesilaos descending from his ship to set foot on Troy.⁶ It is apparently the only extant statue of this hero — except of course the second replica in the British Museum which can now be rechristened; and very few representations of him are known at all,⁷ one or more on early vases, two on Roman sarcophagi—where not only the landing at Troy, but his reunion with his wife, Laodameia, is represented, perhaps one of the Heroön of Gjölbaschi, a head on a coin of Skione, and the two coin

⁶ This identification was first tentatively suggested, I believe, by Edward Warren.

⁷ cf. the list given by Türk in Roscher's Lexicon, columns 3165 ff.

reliefs mentioned above. As a Thessalian, he evidently was not so popular with Athenian and Peloponnesian artists as their own heroes, and so, while Herakles, Theseus, Perseus, and Odysseus have become

household names, Protesilaos is comparatively unfamiliar. Though northern Greece held him in reverence for his deeds, the artistic South set up few memorials in his honor. Pausanias, on his travels in southern Greece, saw no statues of Protesilaos in any of the sanctuaries he visited. The British Museum torso was discovered at Kyzikos in Mysia, which, according to tradition, was founded by Thessalian settlers, and so a statue of him in that city was an appropriate offering. But the love story of Protesilaos and the inconsolable sorrow of his widow had a psychological appeal for a dramatist; and if Euripides' play, Protesilaos, had survived, his name would doubtless have

been better known today.⁸ So dependent are even great heroes on the artists for their permanent fame!

GISELA M. A. RICHTER.

⁸ Wordsworth's Laodamia is so nineteenth-century in spirit that it is little read today.



FIG. 3. STATUE OF PROTESILAOS
LEFT SIDE