

A BRONZE STATUE FROM PETRA

Early in 1954 one of the Beduin of petra brought to light the imposing bronze statue that forms the subject of this note.¹ He found it lying among oleander-bushes in the bed of the Wadi Siyagh, about an hour's walk from el-Habis; and it would appear to have been washed down the wadi from the central area of the city by a winter spate, while another such spate would have exposed it to view by removing the sand and stones that must once have covered it. The piece, which is the property of the Jordan Antiquities Department, is now in the museum at Amman. It was to have been published by the late Mr. J. H. Iliffe, then Director of the City of Liverpool Public Museums. But he died before he was able to write on it. Its publication has now been entrusted to the present writer through the kind invitation of Dr. Awni Dajani, Director of Antiquities for Jordan and of Mr. P. J. Parr, Assistant Director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. But she must make it clear at the outset that she has had as yet no opportunity of seeing the original. Her study of the statue, is based entirely upon the fine set of photographs taken by Mr. Farid Morcos, of the Department of Antiquities, and sent to her by Mr. Parr.

The bronze, which is hollow-cast, is badly damaged. Lost are the head and neck, both arms from the shoulders, the right ankle and foot, and the whole of the left leg from just above the knee downwards; and a large hole has been torn in the centre of the back. The length of the statue from the base of the neck to the broken lower end of the flexed right leg is c. 1.60 metres or c. 5 feet, 4 inches : it is therefore roughly life-size. It shows a sturdily built, well proportioned, and excellently modelled woman clad in a short, sleeveless tunic girded at the waist. The girdle is knotted in front and from the knot depend its two ends, each terminating in a fringe. The tunic is pulled up through the girdle to form an overfold, the lower edge of which is level with the girdle on the left side, but runs down diagonally across the front and back of the figure and reaches to a point halfway down the hip on the right side. The garment covers both breasts; and its 'skirt' is drawn up on the left side so as to expose the whole of the left thigh; whereas on the right side it reaches to the knee at front and rear, only parting to reveal the back of the right thigh.

The right knee is, as we have seen, flexed; and since the left thigh is slightly in advance of and higher than, the right thigh, the left knee and leg must have been in advance of the right knee and leg and the left knee must have been slightly higher and less flexed than the right knee. The attitude is thus one of running or striding or lungeing. The figure has, indeed, been described as equestrian.² But were the woman riding her knees would be at the same level and the lower edge of her tunic, instead of sloping down diagonally from left to right, would be caught up between the legs at the 'join' and would reach, most probably, to the same point on the thighs on either side.

¹ a) *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 1957, p. 14, no. 25. b) See Pl. XXX
² *Ibid.*

Who is this personage? Diana hunting or a fighting Amazon¹ are the obvious interpretations that spring to mind.² But Diana would appear to be ruled out by the absence of a quiver-strap and of traces of a quiver on the back. On the other hand, the figure shows no feature that excludes its identification as an Amazon in combat. For although it is more usual for Amazons in ancient art to be depicted in a slipped tunic that leaves one of the breasts uncovered, they are also sometimes shown with the chest completely draped,³ as in the case of our bronze. If the latter were an Amazon we could think of her as once confronting a Greek opponent, as part of a group of statues in the round, meant to be viewed from all sides, and consisting of at least two figures. As to its date — the style of the drapery at once recalls classical Greek work of the late-fifth or fourth centuries. But an original of that period is perhaps unlikely to have reached Petra in either independent-Nabataean or in Roman times; and the technique in which the folds of the tunic are rendered anyhow suggests that we are dealing with a Roman copy or adaptation of the second century A. D.

Whatever its meaning and date may be, the piece is of considerable importance as being the first work of its kind, so far as the present writer is aware, to have been discovered at Petra. It indicates that the city had, at any rate under the Romans, some market for imported large-scale bronze statuary. For it is much less likely to have been cast in Petra than in a central Mediterranean workshop. It is furthermore less probable that a statue of this size and quality was privately owned than that it adorned some public square or building. In Hellenistic and Roman art battles between Greeks and Amazons were frequently employed as allegories of the victory of good over evil, of civilisation over barbarism. Assuming that our figure is an Amazon, its group could have stood for something of that character. And in this connection we are immediately reminded of another work from Jordan, the marble statue, dating from the late-second century A. D., of a barbarian fleeing with his child and presupposing the presence of a Greek or Roman vanquisher, that was found in 1947 at Amman.⁴ It stood, it seems, in an exedra or on a platform halfway up to the acropolis and was doubtlessly intended to convey the same conception.

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¹ Cf. *the marble mounted Amazon from the west pediment of the temple of Asklepios at Epidaurus, now in the National Museum in Athens* (G. M. A. Richter, *The Sculpture and Sculptors of the Greeks*, ed. 2, 1950, p. 595, figs. 716-7).

² See Note I.

³ See, for instance, *the marble Amazon from Epidaurus* (Note I) and *Amazons on the Mausoleum frieze* (Richter, *op. cit.*, p. 588, fig. 699).

⁴ *Studies Presented to David Moore Robinson*, i, 1951, pp. 705-12.