



FIG. 66.—Marble Eros from Lake Nemi.

MS 34 52
Neg 10848

TWO MARBLES FROM LAKE NEMI

FIFTEEN miles southeast of Rome in the midst of wooded hills lies Lake Nemi, the gem of the Alban Mountains. The deep forests along its shores, notorious in the last century for the bands of robbers with which they were infested, were in antiquity famous as the scene of torch-lit processions which on moonlight nights passed beneath the trees along the margin of the lake to the shrine of the goddess Diana. For here was a grove sacred to the goddess, and here at an early period had been built in her honor an altar and a temple to which from Rome and indeed from all Latium, came trains of suppliant women, their heads crowned with wreaths, their hands filled with gifts for the goddess and with the flickering torches with which their way through the woods was lit.

Desultory excavations have frequently been undertaken on the site of this temple, the earliest in the seventeenth century by the Frangipani family of Nemi. Some of the objects found in the course of their digging passed into the possession of Cardinal Lelio Biscia and there is still preserved a letter of the cardinal's secretary which gives a brief description of these antiquities. In the latter part of the eighteenth century a Spanish Cardinal, Antonio Despuig y Dameto, undertook excavations on the site. More fruitful of results were those carried on in 1885-1889 by the English ambassador to Italy, Sir Savile Lumley. The marbles, votive bronzes, and terra cottas which he found were given to the Art Museum of Nottingham. Within the next decade excavations were conducted by the princes Orsini and by other Italian scholars, but in no case were topographical notes kept or adequate inventories of the objects found, so that today there is a lamentable lack both of trustworthy plans and of detailed information about the antiquities themselves. These are now scattered throughout the museums of Europe and America. One group of terra cottas and bronzes from the excavations carried on by Sig. Luigi Boccanera was acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1897. Just ten years later a collection of marbles was purchased for this Museum, through the generosity of the late Mrs. Lucy Wharton Drexel. Two of these marbles are here described, the one a torso

of a nude youth, the other the figure of a draped woman. Both are about a third of life-size in height.

The torso of a boy had been fitted with a head which very clearly did not belong and which had itself been restored in plaster of Paris. Rid of this head and rightly set up with the weight supported on the left leg instead of on the right, the statue has gained immeasurably. It represents a boy at the dawn of manhood, his arms both occupied to his right and his legs and shoulders braced in some effort he is making. The identity of this boyish figure is not difficult to establish; on his shoulders are dowel-holes for the attachment of wings which would show that the figure was an Eros even without the help of the scores of statues in a similar attitude, which are to be found in the various museums of Europe. These, together with engraved gems reproducing the type, make it certain that the Eros of our figure was engaged in stringing a bow. His left hand grasped the bow near the middle, with his right he was attempting to pass the loop of the cord over the end of the bow. The large size of the bow and the fact that in one replica a knotted club is substituted for the tree trunk which commonly serves as support, has led more than one scholar to believe that it was the bow of Herakles that Eros was attempting to string, a conception quite in keeping with Roman taste.

The question of the origin of this type has often been discussed. Any statue of the boy Eros is bound to recall the famous anecdote of the Eros of Praxiteles and the ruse of Phryne, but both this Eros which was later dedicated by Phryne at Thespieae and the statue made by Praxiteles for the sanctuary of Eros at Parium are known to have been represented in an attitude quite different from that of our statue. Pausanias records that he saw at Thespieae near Praxiteles' statue of Eros a bronze statue of the same god made by Lysippus, but of this statue nothing is known, so that there is no warrant for connecting it with the type under discussion, although the origin of this type is generally assigned to just the period in which Lysippus worked. The majority of the Nemi marbles are thought to date from the last century before Christ and from the first two centuries of the Christian era, so that, whatever theory be held about the origin of the type, the Nemi replica is the product of the Roman period.

A large proportion of the statuettes found on the site seem to have been recovered from an area adjacent to the temple and



FIG. 67.—A Marble from Lake Nemi.

MS 4025

bounded on one side by a colonnade and on the other by a wall adorned with semicircular niches. Some of these statues were doubtless dedications set up within this sacred enclosure, whereas others served merely to adorn the colonnade and the niches of the wall. Again it is possible that they may have ornamented some of the lakeside villas for which Lake Nemi was famous. In the absence of information about the finding place of these statues their identity is sometimes difficult to establish. The statue of a draped woman shown in Fig. 67 might be taken as a priestess of Artemis, if it were not known that the sanctuary at Nemi was under the custody of a priest, the Rex Nemensis, who, by the way, was put to death by his successor and must needs always go armed against the dreaded usurper. That it should represent the goddess herself is unlikely, for the Diana of Nemi is generally represented in the costume of the chase. A possible theory is that it represented a priestess of Vesta whose worship is known to have been associated with that of Diana, or it may be that the statue is to be regarded merely as a portrait of a Roman lady.

The figure stands in an easy pose, the weight resting on the right leg and the left knee bent. The head, arms, and feet, all of which were cut from separate pieces, are missing. In addition to the dowel-holes by which these parts were attached there is also another dowel-hole on the left shoulder, the purpose of which is not clear. The surface of the marble is more weathered than that of any other specimen from the site. The drapery is that which constitutes the chief interest of the statue: two garments are worn, a thin sleeved undergarment, the folds of which are visible on the right arm and breast and below the outer garment at the bottom, and an outer garment of heavier material, which is worn over the left shoulder and under the right. On the left it is open and hangs in long conventional folds. The drapery, which is in general conceived as transparent and reveals the form beneath, is treated in a manner which, though graceful, is not free from affectation. Especially unnatural is the complicated group of little lines on the right hip.

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