A GROUP OF FUNERARY STELAE

. . . "thy work, touched by the common need,
Serenely effigied upon this tomb,
With the sure seal of hope upon the face
Hinting of faith in some sublimer creed,
Proclaims a life of all-compelling grace,
A death whose final ways are rent of gloom!"

—Harvey M. Watts.

These lines to an Etruscan statuary make one wish that something similar might commemorate the work of those stone cutters in ancient Athens whose hands were "led to such supreme design" in the marble steleae from the Ceramicus. The general beauty of these marbles and of all Greek funerary steleae is the more remarkable in view of the fact that the stone cutters must have been artisans working stock pieces rather than filling private orders as did the funerary sculptors of Egypt.

These ancient grave stones of whatever period have one common characteristic,—they never dwell upon the horrors of death, but always stress life, giving the idea that although life be past there is left at least a reflection of the vanished existence. As one able French critic has expressed it, "Death is always present, but as though it respected the beauty of the human form, it touches the marble effigies with a light finger, only to impress upon them a character of tranquil sweet gravity and of gentle, melancholy serenity."

The same spirit breathes from the epitaphs in the Greek anthology:

Why shrink from death, the parent of repose,
The cure of sickness and all human woes?
As through the tribes of men he speeds his way,
Once, and but once, his visit he will pay:
Whilst pale diseases, harbingers of pain,
Close on each other crowd,—an endless train.

The funerary stele was a flat quadrangular slab with sculptured decoration on one face. It was set in the ground in the fashion of
the headstones over modern graves. So far as can be determined it originated in Greece, for the Achaeans at Mycenae set up over their dead flat slabs decorated in low relief with scenes showing chieftains hunting or fighting as in life. Homer speaks of a pillar set up in Lycia where a man's "kindred bury him with a barrow and a στήλη, for such is the due of the dead." This pillar must be related to the original form of the classical stele, which would have been an unhewn stone, in later generations carefully shaped and decorated. The original idea apparently was that as the grave is the dwelling of the dead, so the stele is the house of the soul, an idea parallel with that of the Ægeans that the pillar is the dwelling place of deity. This

![Fragment of a grave stele. IV Century B.C.](image)

fundamental idea of the possibility of the soul haunting the monument set up over its body is not obliterated in classical times even by the popular belief in Hades and it is the logical basis of the heroizing of the dead which is so prevalent on Hellenistic tombstones. Wherever the stele itself originated, the custom of inscribing such a stone seems to have sprung up in the Islands of the Cyclades, where very early in the history of Greek art we find stones with the name of the dead cut upon them, and sometimes also the name of the relative who set up the memorial.

The stele of classical Greece is a carefully worked monument crowned with a decorative device, such as a palmette, and in course of time surrounded with architectural mouldings or framed between
columns supporting an architrave, and giving the semblance of a shrine or heroon. In the field of the slab the sculptor carved in varying degrees of relief the image of the dead in some habitual pose or favorite occupation, or again in a family group. The aim was to present something general and human rather than specific and individual. Thus it is that on such monuments we never see an individual incident but always a situation in keeping with a person's general qualities.

The stele is the commonest form of grave monument among the Greeks, undoubtedly because its fashioning could be as simple or as elaborate as the means of the bereaved might dictate. In the archaic period of Greek art the stones were very slender, and were decorated with the single figure of the deceased as he appeared in life, with perhaps a small secondary figure of a favorite slave or a pet animal, or the like. In the fifth century B.C. the secondary figure comes to be a very effective foil to the principal figure; family groups appear, and throughout the fourth century these are the regular motive for the decoration of the stelae. These groups show the nearest and dearest gathered about the deceased in restrained grief. By the clasped hands of the quick and the dead, by the calm dignity of the deceased, "untouched by the shadow of death which rests only on the living in the background." these groups reveal a deliberate ignoring of the fact of physical separation. The fourth century sees these funerary monuments come to their highest degree of development, for in this century sepulchral sculpture exhibits a happy combination of universal beauty with realistic or rather personal rendering of details and features. Toward the close of the century the stelae come to an abrupt end because of the sumptuary laws of Demetrios of Phaleron in 315 B.C.

There have recently been placed again on exhibition in the Mediterranean Section two ancient funerary marbles, gifts of long standing. One, presented by Mrs. Lucy Wharton Drexel, is a fragment of Pentelic marble from the top of a fourth century stele; the other, the gift of Mrs. John Harrison, is a small coarse grained stone of the Hellenistic age. There had already been on exhibition a mutilated stele, hitherto unpublished, the gift of Mrs. Drexel, and a large stele recently acquired, published by Dr. Luce in the MUSEUM JOURNAL VIII, 1917, No. 1, p. 10 ff. Although none of the three unpublished marbles is of intrinsic beauty, it seems opportune to make brief mention of them as specimens of a class of sculpture.
A grave stele representing a banquet scene.
Fig. 58.
which has a very special interest in that it is at once the simplest and the commonest memorial to the dead in ancient Greece.

Figure 57, a fragment measuring in its greatest dimensions 28 inches by 17, shows the top of a family group which would be about 42 inches in height if intact. The setting is a sort of heroon, with a triangular gable surmounted at the apex by a palmette, much damaged, and ornamented at the ends with acroteria, one of which is wholly gone and the other is in bad condition. This gable was supported at each side by flat pilasters, the upper part of one of which, on the right, is preserved. In the center of the field in low relief is the head of a woman full front. Her hair, parted in the middle and waved on both sides, is covered with a veil the ends of which hang down on each side of her neck. At her left is the head of a bearded man in high relief, turned to the left, gazing past the woman to the part of the stele now lost. Apparently he is looking at the seated figure of the deceased. On the architrave are cut two feminine names, [ΓΑ]Τ[Κ]ΕΡΑ ΦΙΛΙΠΠΗ Glyceria and Philippa. The first name is apparently that of the deceased in whose honor the tomb was set up, daughter, perhaps, to the man and woman represented in the fragmentary heads. The second name would be that of a female relative previously deceased to whom no stone was set up at the time of the interment, and who now shares the stele of Glyceria.

Figure 58 is a small stone 27 inches by 18.5. It is said to have been acquired in Athens. Framed by columns supporting an arch is represented a banquet scene, a motive that becomes very common after the fourth century B. C., and is especially popular with the Romans. In some form the motive is very old. It occurs in archaic Greek art as a sort of symbolic food offering to the dead. How far and for how long a period the stone cutter is conscious of this significance of the motive is difficult to say. Certainly in the late work there seems to be more of the commemorative than of the votive about it.

In this rendering of the motive a beardless man reclines on a couch, his left elbow resting on a double cushion and his right arm extended, bent at the elbow, the hand holding a patera raised for the pouring of a libation. The pose is very comfortable,—the right knee bent and raised a bit, and the left knee bent and the leg flat on the couch. The man is dressed in a short-sleeved chiton, over which is wrapped a himation which covers his legs and the left arm. By the foot of the couch on a four-legged stool sits a woman closely
A funereal stele.

Fig. 59.
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draped in a long chiton and a himation which covers her hair. She is probably the wife of the deceased. Her right hand lies at rest in her lap, her left is raised holding her veil close to her cheek. Her feet rest on a low footstool. Before the couch stands a three-legged table spread with food. At the extreme right and left are two diminutive attendants, the one at the right with garment girded high above the knees, the one at the left wearing a Doric chiton with an overfold, and carrying a tall jar.

On the architrave in carefully cut regular letters one reads

ΜΕΝΕΜΑΧΕ ΔΙΦΙΛΟΥ
ΧΡΗΣΤΕ ΧΑΙΡΕ

"Worthy Menemachos son of Dipilios, farewell." The alpha is cut with a broken bar.

Another stele, Fig. 59, has been for some time on exhibition in the west room of the Mediterranean Section but no account of it has been published. It is a fragment of a relief from which the top is lost. The stele at present measures 23 by 40 inches, and is decorated with a group of three figures only one of which is complete. It was obviously intended as a memorial to the woman represented by the prominent seated figure. She is dressed in an Ionic chiton and a himation, and sits comfortably in a high-backed chair, with her feet crossed and resting on a low footstool. She seems to wear sandals. Her left arm is partly hidden under her himation, and her right hand is extended clasping the hand of a man who stands facing her. He is draped in a himation which covers his legs, passes about the waist and hangs over the left shoulder, leaving the chest and right arm bare. His left hand holds his cloak near the shoulder. The head of this figure is gone, so also is that of the woman whose figure in low relief is placed in the background between husband and wife, for such the two prominent seated figures may be assumed to be. The third figure may be that of a daughter. As the architrave, the place where the inscriptions were carved, is missing, we have no means of knowing the names of any of the individuals.

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