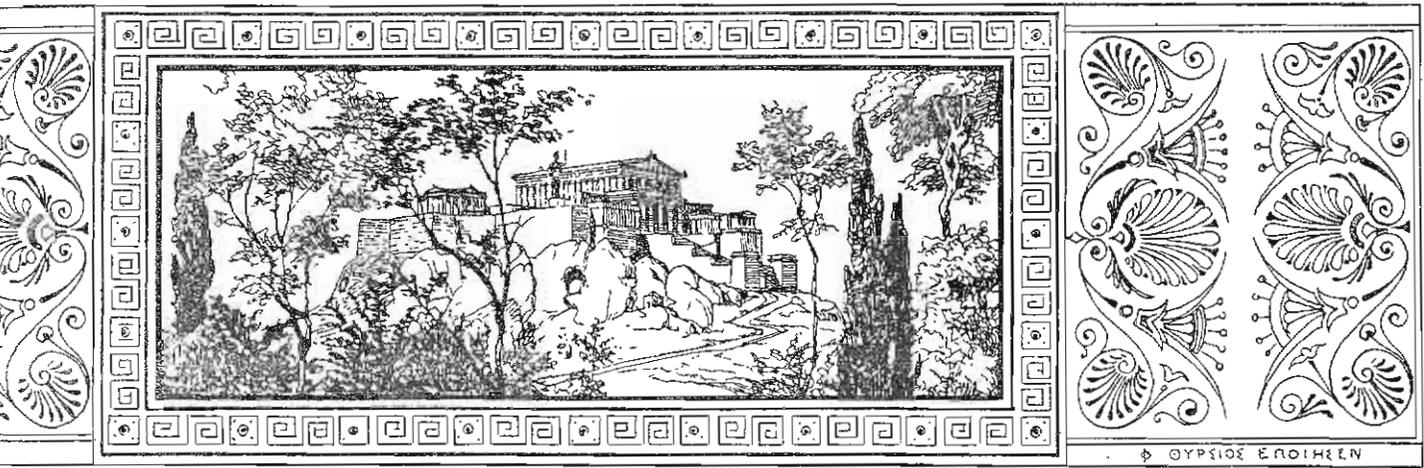


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## A ROMAN COPY OF THE ELEUSINIAN RELIEF

BY GISELA M. A. RICHTER

The hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Archæological Society seems a fitting occasion to discuss again one of the oldest and most prized possessions of Athens — the marble relief of Demeter, Persephone, and Triptolemos<sup>1</sup>. For the discovery in Rome some twenty years ago of a Roman copy of this relief<sup>2</sup> has still further enhanced its interest. Since known instances of the survival of a Greek original and its Roman copy are exceedingly rare<sup>3</sup>, it is indeed a happy chance that a copy of so famous a work should have been preserved. A detailed comparison of the two reliefs is highly instructive.

The Roman copy is not complete. There are in all about a dozen fragments (some of which join, others do not) constituting approximately one third of the relief (Fig. 3); but the close correspondence between the copy and the original has made it possible to supply the missing parts with a plaster cast taken from the original<sup>4</sup>. This rather complicated reconstruction was recently completed and the stately composition can now be presented as a whole (Fig. 2).

Anyone who studies this reconstruction will see how closely the marble and plaster parts fit, not only in size and in depth of relief, but in practically every detail, furrow for furrow and ridge for ridge. Only in a few places does the level of the

1 National Museum, no. 126. Svoronos, *Das Athener National Museum*, I, pp. 106 ff. Height 2.40 m. width 1.52 m., thickness 16 cm.

2 Acquired by the Metropolitan Museum, New York, through John Marshall. Acc. no. 14.130.9. The fragments were said to have been found between S. Clemente and the Braucacci Palace embedded in an old wall, which was torn down during building operations, see Schrader, *Phidias*, p. 88; *Metropolitan Museum Bulletin*, XXX (1935), pp. 216-221, figs. 1-4. Dimensions of slab, as reconstructed: height 2.27 m.; thickness of slab approximately 8.5 cm. A portion of the original right edge (which forms a slightly concave curve) is preserved; it has anathyrosis, but not for joining the slab to another one, for the unworked portion is higher than the smoothed edge.

3 Lippold, *Kopien und Umbildungen griechischer Statuen* (1923), pp. 115 ff. was able to mention as

examples in marble only the Karyatids of the Erechtheion, the Eubouleus, the head from the south slope of the Akropolis, and three doubtful cases (Barberini Suppliant, Penelope, Akropolis Hermes). For further doubtful cases see Curtius, *Zeus und Hermes*, I, «Original und Kopie», in *Erstes Ergänzungsheft zu Röm. Mitt.*, 1931. For an example of a Greek copy of a Greek relief see Marconi, *Dedalo*, VIII (1928), pp. 597-602 (Padua) and Walter, *Öst. Jahresh.* XXVI (1930) pp. 75-104 (Athens and London) (I owe this reference to Dr. Lehmann-Hartleben). It is interesting to contrast with the accurate Roman copy of the Eleusinian relief the Roman adaptation in the Metropolitan Museum, acc. no. 24.97.99 (*Bulletin*, XXI (1926), April, part II, p. 10, fig. 2).

4 The cast was made from a new mould, with the kind assistance of the authorities of the National Museum, Athens.

Roman relief not quite correspond with that of the Greek one<sup>1</sup>, or do the folds in the two reliefs not quite tally<sup>2</sup>. This close correspondence must be due to the fact that the copy was executed not freehand but mechanically, by the pointing process. And so the portions not so worked are, as we might expect, different. Thus the crowning moulding is higher in the Roman than in the Greek relief; there is more background to the right of Persephone in the Roman relief than in the Greek one; the holes in the Greek relief which served for the attachment of metal ornaments<sup>3</sup> are not present in the Roman version; the back of the Greek relief is left rough<sup>4</sup>, that of the Roman one has been carefully smoothed.

In the execution there is, of course, a great difference between the delicate carving of the Greek original and the drier, harder treatment of the Roman copy. We need only compare some individual renderings to appreciate this. In the Greek Demeter (Fig. 4) the planes of the hair are subtly varied; the crown is differentiated from the free-falling locks and the ringlets at the bottom are of varying shapes and sizes; in the Roman copy (Fig. 5) these niceties are not observed: the crown is not clearly marked off from the locks and the ringlets are practically uniform. In the Greek Triptolemos (Fig. 10) the folds between the left arm and the body are convincingly differentiated by rising and falling planes; in



Fig. 1. The Eleusinian Relief  
in the National Museum, Athens.

Photograph by Alinari (with restorations marked).

1 For instance, at the right forearm of Persephone and the right thigh of Triptolemos (fig. 2). A seeming deviation-at the left thigh of Triptolemos-is due to a wrong restoration at this point in the Greek original (fig. 11).

2 For instance, in the recurving edges of the draperies on Triptolemos' right side and below Persephone's left forearm, where the construction of the folds was not entirely understood by the Roman copyist. (This

is frequently the case in recurving edges, so M. Bieber informs me). The folds on the back of Demeter-just below her hair-are also slightly different in the two reliefs (cf. figs. 4 and 5).

3 Two holes for a bracelet on Persephone's right arm, two similar ones on her left arm, three along her neck for a necklace, one in front of Triptolemos' hair.

4 The surface was originally worked with the punch, but it has been worn fairly smooth by later use.

the Roman version (Fig. 11) they are separated merely by a series of grooves. In the Greek Persephone (Fig. 8) the folds of the mantle below the waist pass imperceptibly one into the other; in the Roman copy (Fig. 9) the rendering is harder and more abrupt. And so on.

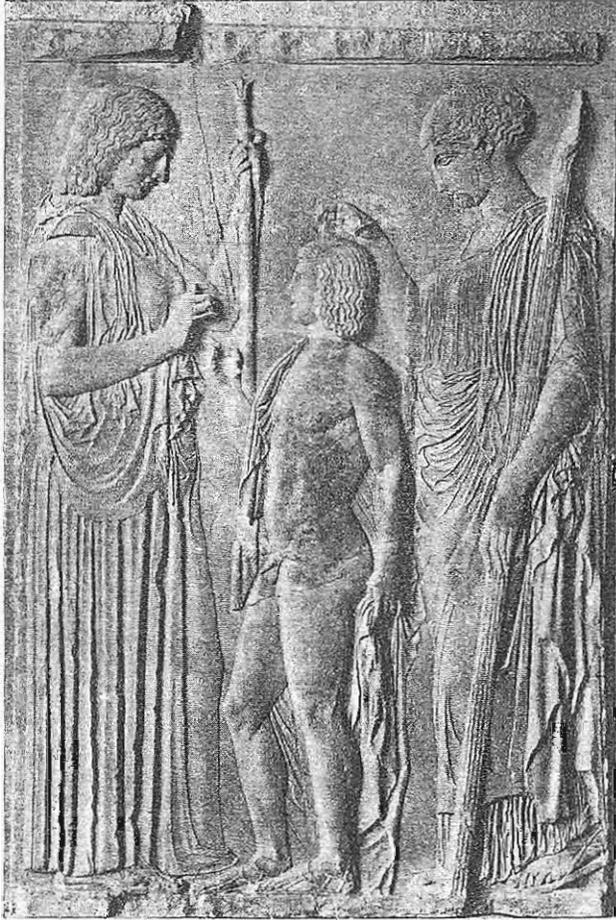


Fig. 2. Fragments shown in fig. 3 reconstructed with a cast of the relief shown in fig. 1.

(Photograph by E. Milla).

preserved than in the relief in Athens. We obtain, therefore, no further confirmation of the supposed action — Demeter handing ears of corn to Triptolemos, and Persephone crowning him.

Besides this illuminating comparison between Greek and Roman work, the Roman copy furnishes other important information. Here for once we know that an original was actually in Attica when it was copied in Roman times<sup>2</sup>. This fact lends

<sup>1</sup> It is mostly covered with a hard, brown incrustation which in places has peeled off and has carried with it part of the surface.

<sup>2</sup> Presumably the copy was made directly, not through the medium of a cast, since the Greek relief must have been painted according to the custom of

In one respect, however, the Roman copy is superior to the Greek original. Whereas the surface of the Greek relief is much weathered<sup>1</sup>, our Roman copy — what is left of it — is excellently preserved. And so it gives us a realization of several portions which have become obscured or are missing in the original. The Roman Demeter (Fig. 5), for instance, has an undamaged nose, upper lip, and eye, whereas these portions are chipped in the Greek original (Fig. 4); in the Roman Triptolemos (Fig. 11) the drapery falling over the right shoulder is more complete than in the original (Fig. 10); the drapery of the Roman Persephone (Fig. 9) stands out hard and distinct, even to the «piecrust» incisions along the edges of the mantle, but in the original (Fig. 8) such details have become blurred. Unfortunately in the Roman version, the right hands of Demeter and Triptolemos are entirely missing and that of Persephone is no better

the time and therefore probably no mould was taken and exported. (I am indebted to Professore G. Rizzo for this interesting observation). Note that the front sandal straps of Demeter and Persephone are not carved and so must have been indicated in color.

further support to the theory that Greece, and specially Attica, was the chief centre of manufacture for such copies<sup>1</sup> — a theory which has lately received a striking con-

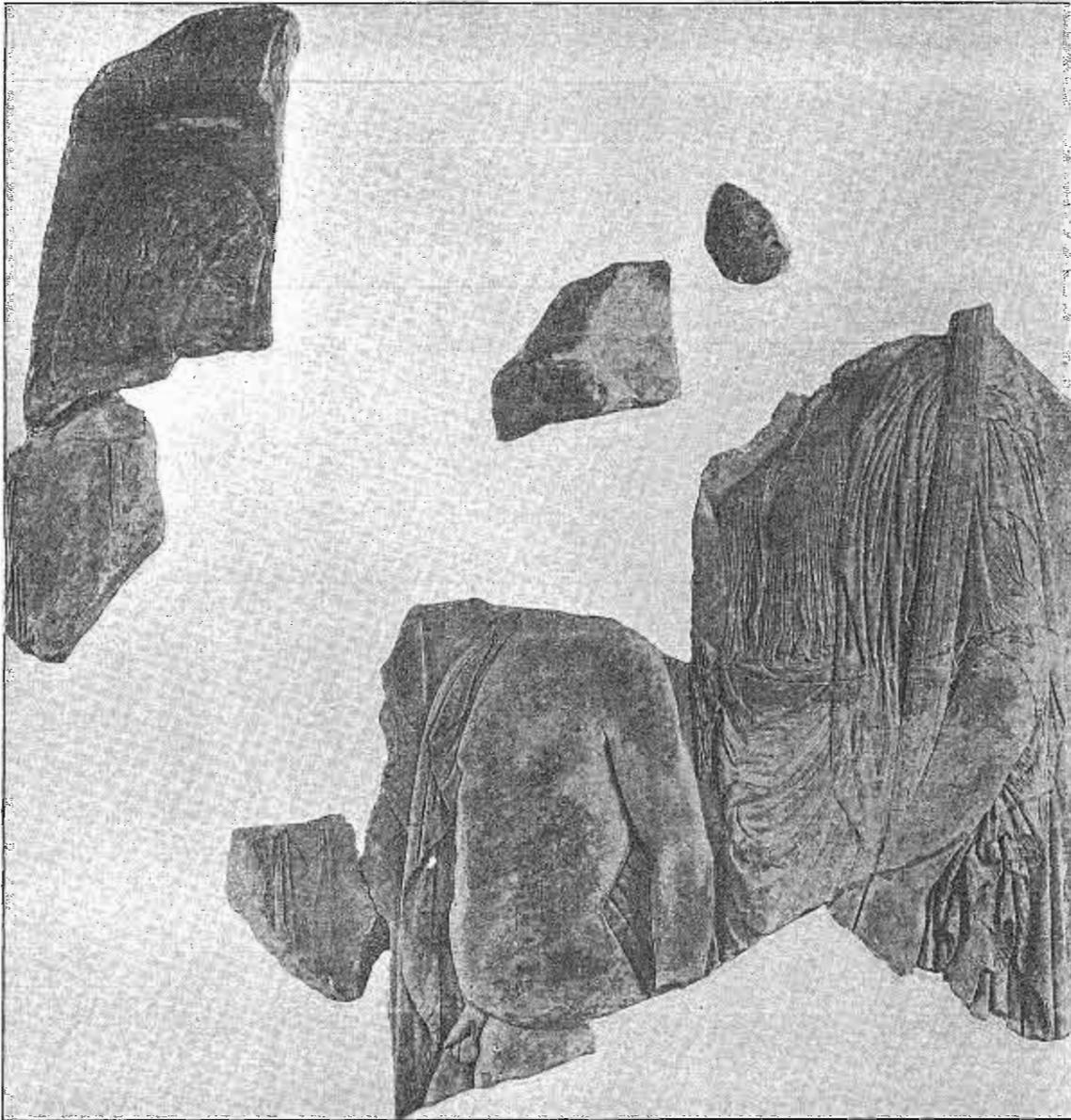


Fig. 3. Fragments of a Roman copy of the Eleusinian relief in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

(Photograph by E. Milla).

firmation in the reliefs dredged from the harbor of the Piræus<sup>2</sup>. The importance of the Eleusinian relief also in antiquity is now attested by the existence of a Roman copy. There must have been some reason why the Romans left the original in Greece

1 Cf. the arguments enumerated by Lippold, *op. cit.* pp. 44 ff.

des Piræus». in *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse.*, XI (1931), pp. 185 ff.

2 Schrader, «Zu den neuen Antikenfunden im Hafen

and contented themselves with a reproduction. And this brings up again the old question of the purpose of the Greek relief. Since it was found not *in situ* but among the ruins of a Byzantine church (to which it was brought presumably as building material) we do not know its original location, except that it probably came from the neighboring Sacred Precinct. Provisionally it has been called a votive relief, though its large size makes this theory unlikely — at least there are no known parallels for a votive relief of this size at this period. Unexpectedly our Roman copy supplies perhaps a new clue for the solution of this question or at least opens up a new line of investigation.



Fig. 12. Part of a sandalled foot.  
(Photograph by E. Milla).

We have spoken of the accuracy of our copy and of the way our fragments could be completed with the help of a cast of the relief in Athens. In this picture puzzle there was, however, one fragment which did not fit — the front part of a sandalled right foot with folds of drapery in the background (Fig. 12). Since the direction of the foot is from right to left it should belong either to Persephone or Triptolemos. But it does not. The scale is slightly larger, the depth greater<sup>1</sup> (for it occupies the full

depth of the relief, whereas the right feet of Triptolemos and Persephone do not), the sandal straps do not correspond, and above all the folds in the background are different from those above the right foot of either Triptolemos or of Persephone in the Greek original. Instead of the horizontal folds of Demeter's peplos above her left foot, or the crinkly folds of Persephone's chiton, there are widely spaced folds of a mantle or a peplos hanging vertically down. The fragment can therefore not belong to this relief at all but must be part of a different composition. Nevertheless the marble is of the same Pentelic variety as that of the other fragments, the weathering is identical, the workmanship and the style are similar (note especially the simplified vertical folds which point to a fifth-century date), and so is the general scale<sup>2</sup>; and such large reliefs are, as we have said, rare at this period. It would be a strange coincidence if the fragment belonged to an unrelated relief. A more plausible explanation would seem to be that the fragment is part of a companion relief<sup>3</sup>.

1 3.01 cm. as against 1.27 cm. and 1.9 cm. for the right great toes of Persephone and Triptolemos.

2 The fragment is broken at the back, so we cannot compute the thickness of the slab.

3 The relatively large size of the foot points to a

male figure, and the fact that the foot occupies the full depth of the relief suggests that the figure was striding, with feet widely separated (Hades carrying away Persephone?)



FIG. 4. HEAD OF DEMETER, FROM THE GREEK RELIEF SHOWN IN FIG. 1.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY H. WAGNER



FIG. 5. HEAD OF DEMETER FROM THE ROMAN RELIEF SHOWN IN FIG. 2.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY E. MILLA

ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ ΕΦΗΜΕΡΙΣ  
ΤΟΜΟΣ ΕΚΑΤΟΝΤΑΕΤΗΡΙΑΟΣ  
1937

Ο. Μ. Α. ΡΙΧΤΕΡ  
ΕΛΕΥΣΙΝΙΑΝ ΡΕΛΙΕΦ  
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FIG. 6. HEAD OF PERSEPHONE FROM THE GREEK RELIEF SHOWN IN FIG. 1.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY H. WAGNER



FIG. 7. HEAD OF PERSEPHONE FROM THE ROMAN RELIEF SHOWN IN FIG. 2.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY E. MILLA



FIG. 8. DRAPERY OF PERSEPHONE  
FROM THE GREEK REL'EF SHOWN IN FIG. 1.

PHOTOGRAPH BY H. WAGNER



FIG. 9. DRAPERY OF PERSEPHONE FROM THE ROMAN  
RELIEF SHOWN IN FIG. 2

PHOTOGRAPH BY E. MILLA



FIG. 10. BODY OF TRIPTOLEMOS FROM THE GREEK RELIEF SHOWN IN FIG. 1.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY H. WAGNER

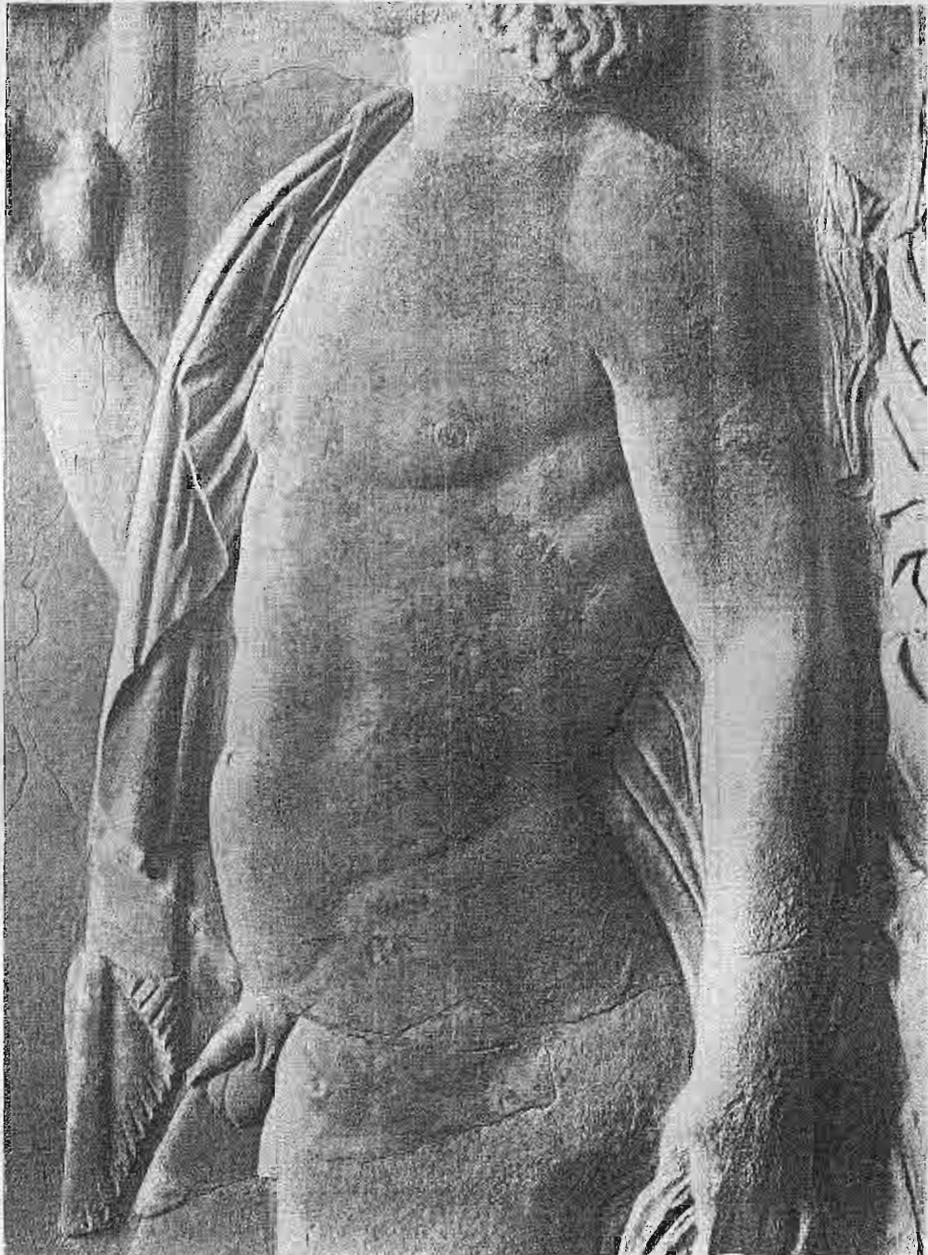


FIG. 11. BODY OF TRIPTOLEMOS FROM THE ROMAN RELIEF SHOWN FIG 2.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY R. MILLA

But if there were two Roman copies there must have been two Greek originals. And if there were two, the old theory of a votive relief becomes even less likely than before. It is more probable that the two reliefs decorated a building; not, of course, as metopes or part of a continuous frieze — for the crowning moulding preserved in the relief in Athens juts out on either side and makes this impossible — but in some other way.

To which particular building the reliefs might have belonged it is, of course, impossible on the present evidence to say. But of the various possibilities<sup>1</sup> the great Telesterion, the Hall of Mysteries, is perhaps the most likely for several reasons. (1) The unusually large size of the reliefs points to an unusually large building, such as the Telesterion was. (2) The style, being «Pheidian»<sup>2</sup> and related to that of the Parthenon, would be appropriate for the Periklean Telesterion in which, so Strabo<sup>3</sup> and Vitruvius<sup>4</sup> inform us, Iktinos, the architect of the Parthenon, had a share; moreover the Telesterion is coupled by Plutarch<sup>5</sup> with the Parthenon as a building erected during the time of Perikles «under the general management and supervision of Pheidias». (3) The time also corresponds. At least, that the Telesterion was designed not at the end of the Periklean administration, as had been assumed, but in the previous decade of 450-440 is suggested by an inscription recently found at Eleusis<sup>6</sup>. And this decade exactly fits the style of the Eleusinian Relief<sup>7</sup>. (4) If the reliefs belonged to the Telesterion there would have been sufficient reason for leaving the originals in place, for the Romans respected the Mysteries.

It is possible then, though of course it is mere conjecture, that the Eleusinian Relief and its hypothetical companion were placed in the Periklean Telesterion — perhaps on the outer walls of the ἀνάκτορον, or holy of holies — where they could be seen by the assembled people as they sat on the surrounding steps, waiting to see the mysteries<sup>8</sup>.

1 Mr. Kourouniotes, with whom I had the advantage of discussing the problem in Athens in the summer of 1934, suggested as possibilities: the temenos of Plouton which stood in the precinct from archaic times to the fourth century; the sanctuary of Triptolemos mentioned by Pausanias, which has not yet been discovered; the two altars (mentioned in an inscription, cf. Kourouniotes, Ἐλευσινιακά, I, pp. 173 ff.) which presumably stood in front of the Telesterion; and the Telesterion itself. (Not the temple of Demeter, for Mr. Kourouniotes believes this to be not Kimonian, as Noack did, but Roman.)

2 Schrader, op. cit., pp. 88 f.

3 395.

4 VII, pref. 16.

5 Perikles, XIII, 4.

6 Kourouniotes, op. cit., I, pp. 173 ff. and especially p. 188: the inscription which is dated by the form of its letters—three-stroke sigma, consistent use of H for the rough breathing, straight legs of the N, horizontal

stroke of the A—between 446 and 440 B. C. (perhaps nearer to 446), mentions «the architect Koroibos», the very architect who according to Plutarch (loc. cit.) began to build the Telesterion at Eleusis and before he died carried it up to the architrave.

7 The severe treatment of the hair and the lack of proper foreshortening in the back of Demeter and in the chest of Triptolemos relate it to the Parthenon metopes (c. 447-443 B. C.) rather than to the frieze (442-438 B. C.) or the pediments (438-432 B. C.); there are many striking similarities between the draperies of the Parthenon metopes and those of the Eleusinian Relief; cf. especially the fragments figured by Smith, Sculptures from the Parthenon, pl. 28, nos. 355, 358, 361. The advanced rendering of the multitudinous folds in the chiton of Persephone, which has been thought by some to point to a later date, can be paralleled on the metopes; for instance on S. XXI and N. XXXII (Smith, op. cit., pls. 23,1; 25,1).

8 The only real evidence we have for the original

To pass from Eleusis to Rome. Have we, at least for the Roman relief, any definite evidence indicating what purpose it served? Unfortunately not. The fragments, as we have said, were reported to have been found not in the ruins of a specific building but embedded in an old wall as building material. We do not know, therefore, whether it once served to decorate a sanctuary. All we can say is that considering the interest in the Eleusinian Mysteries taken by the upper classes in Italy, especially during the early Imperial epoch<sup>1</sup> — which is perhaps the period of the Roman copy — it is possible that the purpose of the Roman relief was likewise religious, perhaps in a Roman sanctuary of Ceres. But there is the alternative possibility that it was copied not for its religious significance but for its artistic appeal. Perhaps a rich Roman collector, impressed by its simple grandeur, had it made for his private enjoyment, just as some of his contemporaries carried off Athenian grave reliefs<sup>2</sup> regardless of their purpose. In that case the relief — or reliefs — may have served merely as decorative panels.

Metropolitan Museum of Art.

GISELA M. A. RICHTER

location of the relief is its present condition. Three points may be mentioned. The relief must have stood in the open for a considerable time, for, as we have said, it is much weathered. The moulding at the top is not finished on the sides, so the front view was evidently the only one considered. There are traces of ancient fastenings — on which Bert H. Hill kindly sent me the following report: «Three dowel holes in the top c. 06 m. X 014 m. X 05 m. deep (one contained lead, one lead and iron [?], the third empty); two holes in the bottom, running in the same direction as those on the top and originally of about the same height and width (now the marble is much broken about them). Those at the bottom may have contained dowels which held the stele to its basis. The dowels at the top per-

haps supported a coping, though the top surface has not the usual *ἐπεργασία* to receive it (it is merely coarsely toothchiselled) and two dowels would have been sufficient; but the cuttings are hardly for clamps to hold the stele to something behind. The dowels were presumably leaded from above through drilled holes. (The cuttings on the sides of the stele are modern)». These conditions, while they may fit many theories, would meet also the hypothesis of the anaktoron.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rostovtzeff, *Mystic Italy*, p. 126, and his bibliography, pp. 170-173, (1)-(5).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, the large Greek stele with a horseman in the Villa Albani (Helbig, *Führer*<sup>3</sup> II, p. 417, no. 1861) which was found in Italy in 1767.