

A LATE ARCHAIC / EARLY CLASSICAL GREEK RELIEF WITH TWO HOPLITES (NY CARLSBERG GLYPTOTEK IN 2787)

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NY CARLSBERG GLYPTOTEK IN 2787: BASIC DESCRIPTION

This is a fragment of a stele shaft with a low figurative relief. It was acquired for the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in 1929 by the then director, Frederik Poulsen, on the art market in Paris (fig. 1)¹. It was said to come from »near Athens«, a provenance which is possible but not proven². It is of a marble judged by Poulsen to be Parian; this is probable but has not yet been confirmed by petrographic analysis³. The maximum preserved height is 56 cm, the upper and lower part having been broken off. The sides of the relief are preserved, giving a width of 50.2 cm at the base line of the relief field, decreasing to 49 cm at the highest point of preserved width; this shows that the stele tapered very slightly towards the top. The low relief has a maximum depth of ca. 2 cm.

The average preserved thickness of the stele itself is 6 cm, with a maximum of 7 cm (figs. 2. 3). On the sides of the stele, the surfaces are smoothed to a fine finish; there are no remains of holes drilled for insertion of metal pins or hooks⁴.

The back of the stele (fig. 4) has been roughly worked with the pointed chisel in recent times. This was probably done to lessen the weight of the fragment before transport. The

¹ Poulsen 1951, 32 no. 13a with earlier bibliography; add: Bakalakis 1946, 22; Lippold 1950, 84 n. 4; Poulsen 1950, 116–118 (about acquisition); Friis Johansen 1951, 101 f. 108. 110. Johansen 1994, 50 no. 10 with bibliography since Poulsen 1951; add: Himmelmann 1956, 32 n. 9; Vos 1963, 78 n. 1; Despiniis 1967, 78 and n. 8. 12; Möbius 1968, 102; Schmaltz 1969/1970, 185 n. 30; Berger 1970, 146 f. fig. 156; Schefold 1974, 140 and n. 18; Hiller 1975, 68 n. 3; 122 n. 14; Stupperich 1977, 15; Floren 1987, 288 and n. 45. Bibliography after 1994: Grossman 2001, 100 and n. 10; Arrington 2015, 102 n. 44.

² The quality of the relief indicates high social status, such as that held by landed gentry, and important Archaic funerary monuments were also erected in the Attic countryside. A provenance »near Athens« is therefore possible. Well expressed by Friis Johansen 1951, 109 f.

³ We share this opinion, supported by the translucency revealed by a concentrated light source. To our knowledge, no other source has been proposed.

⁴ This feature is found on some Classical funerary reliefs, such as that of Chairedemos and Lykeas from Salamis (Piraeus, Archaeological Museum inv. 385), and is shown on Attic white ground lekythoi; offerings of taeniae are seen hanging on the hooks. Cf. Scholl 2018, 219 and n. 143. We thank Hans R. Goette for pointing out that such hooks are usually found higher up on the stele than what we have preserved on IN 2787.



Fig. 1. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek IN 2787. Fragment of a relief with two hoplites



Fig. 2. As fig. 1, left side

Fig. 3. As fig. 1, right side



Fig. 4. As fig. 1, back

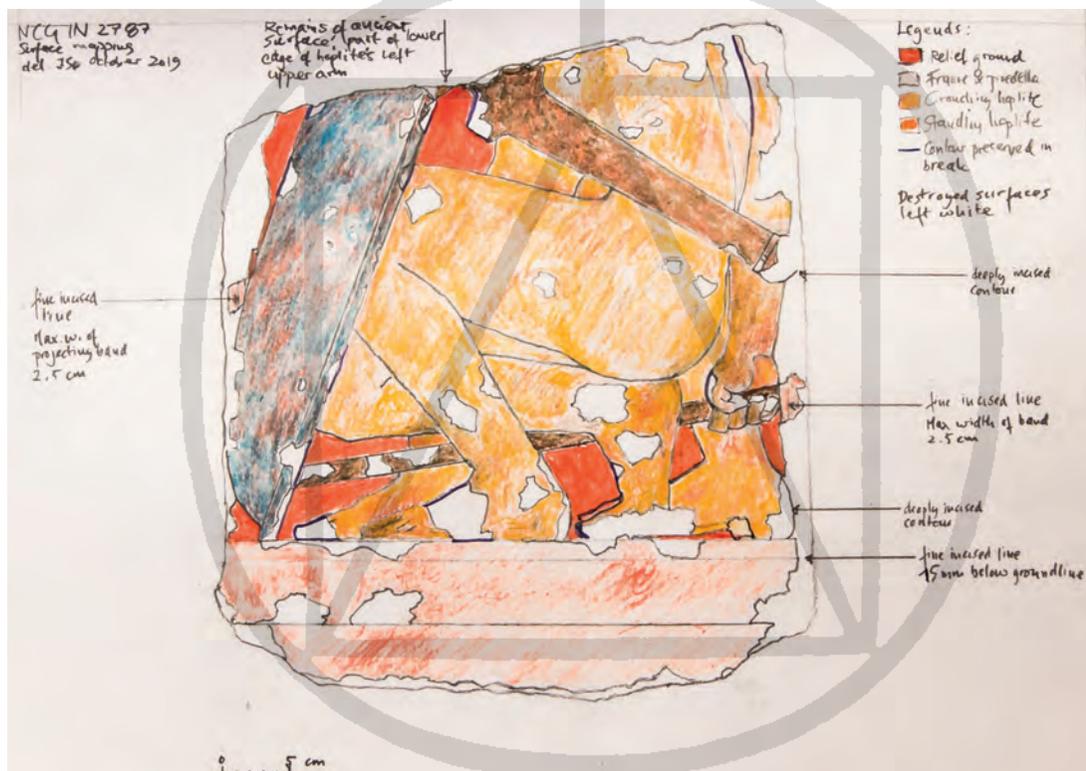


Fig. 5. As fig. 1, surface mapping of the front of the fragment

thickness of the stele is correspondingly below the average of 10 cm or more of comparable stelai⁵. On the vertical axis, there are the remains of the two iron dowels which once served to attach the piece to its first museum mounting, on a wooden backing. Six brass bolts from an earlier mounting on the wall of Room 6 in the Glyptotek in 1974 have been covered with plaster. For the present mounting, holes have been drilled in the lower break surface.

BRIEF RESEARCH HISTORY

Frederik Poulsen published the relief very speedily in 1929⁶. He reconstructed the original motif and its context in a concise and generally convincing manner, suggesting a date between 500 and 490 BCE on the basis of comparison with Attic red-figure vase painting. He followed up in 1942 with a short article in support of the connection of the motif with the battle of Marathon in 490 BCE; in his 1951 catalogue entry, he summed up his opinions⁷.

That same year, Knud Friis Johansen mentioned it in his seminal work on the Attic grave reliefs of the Classical period. He placed the relief in its proper context, emphasising the need to study the Archaic antecedents of the Classical Attic reliefs to understand the latter⁸.

Gisela M. A. Richter mentioned the piece briefly in her »Archaic Attic Gravestones« (1944)⁹ and then again in her 1961 monograph on the same subject¹⁰. Since then, the piece has, to our knowledge, been discussed at any length only by Reinhard Stupperich in 1977¹¹. He found that Poulsen's interpretation was rather »abwegig« but did not provide the reader with the reasons why. To our knowledge, this remains the only published criticism of Poulsen.

The general context of IN 2787 was developed by Bernhard Schmaltz in 1983, in an in-depth critical section on Archaic Attic grave reliefs, and in 1987 by Josef Floren¹². In 2001, an important parallel to IN 2787, now in the J. Paul Getty Museum, was published by Janet Burnett Grossman. This relief provides vital evidence for details of the iconography of our sculpture and constitutes a close stylistic parallel, with a concomitant bearing on the issue of dating¹³. In 2015, Stupperich's work was continued by Nathan Arrington; in connection with figural reliefs decorating Athenian casualty lists, he says that IN 2787 »[...] may also have decorated a public grave because of the unusual subject matter«¹⁴. Be that as it may, Arrington's work provides a valuable insight into the context in which the relief would originally

⁵ An estimate based on the evidence provided by Richter 1961, *passim*. The closely related stele of Pollis has a thickness of 15.9 cm: see Grossman 2001, 98.

⁶ Poulsen 1929.

⁷ Poulsen 1942; Poulsen 1951, with further bibliography before 1951. To our knowledge, no argument against Poulsen's interpretation and dating has since been put forward.

⁸ Johansen 1951, 100 f.

⁹ Richter 1944, 103.

¹⁰ Richter 1961, 50 f. no. 77.

¹¹ Stupperich 1977, 15 f. and n. 1.

¹² Schmaltz 1983, 150–189; Floren 1987, 281–290. Schmaltz 1969/1970, 185 n. 30 briefly mentions doubt about the function of IN 2787.

¹³ Grossman 2001, 100 and n. 10. The details in question are the angle of entrance of the left arm into the shield, the relation of the left arm to the scabbard of the sword and the relation of the upper edge of the shield to the face of the hoplite; cf. below p. 16–19, »Iconography and reconstruction«.

¹⁴ Arrington 2015, 102 n. 44.

have belonged – were it to be shown to be a fragment of a *polyandrion* from the burial ground of the city state, the *dēmosion sēma* in the Kerameikos, along the road to the Academy.

›HYBRID‹ SURFACE MAPPING OF IN 2787

The surface mapping shown here (fig. 5) is based on naked-eye observation and the use of $\times 3$ magnifying glasses¹⁵. A complete surface mapping would include a greater range of features such as incrustations and closer characterisation of the state of preservation of the surfaces and identification of toolmarks. The version presented here is a simplified ›hybrid‹, concentrating on features relevant to a reading and an interpretation of the scene shown. Areas where the ancient surface is lost are left in white to facilitate observation of the preserved parts of the ancient relief. What the surface mapping offers is therefore a detailed documentation of the state of preservation of the artefact. Here at the outset, it may be noted that the ancient surfaces do not show signs of weathering and have not undergone anything but superficial cleaning in modern times¹⁶.

The mapping shows, in two tonalities of red, the preserved portions of the relief ground, the surrounding frame of vertical plain projecting bands and the horizontal reverse Lesbian cyma moulding below. The close examination required for surface mapping reveals easily overlooked details (figs. 6–9). Thus, one may note the very fine incised lines, horizontal on the cyma (fig. 6) and vertical on the framing plain bands (figs. 7, 8), no doubt serving as guidelines for the polychromy in the form of ornamental borders¹⁷. Not shown in the mapping are the traces of red pigment below the cyma (fig. 9). Extreme raking light has revealed the incised contours of the leaves of the Lesbian cymation¹⁸.

The preserved parts of the figurative scene are shown outlined in soft pencil. As in the case of the relief ground, the colours chosen for the figurative scene reflect, in a very general way, the little we know of the polychromy of Archaic Attic reliefs¹⁹. The principal aim here is to demonstrate how colour increases the readability of the motif²⁰. The importance of polychromy for the visual reading of a relief – especially a low relief – was first explored by Georg Treu in the Dresden Albertinum in the 1880s. In its cast collection, the polychromy of Archaic sculpture was highlighted by the installation almost side by side of two casts of the stele of Aristion, one with the polychromy as preserved on the original painted in (fig. 10). We do not know whether Treu informed visitors of his intentions, but he did so elsewhere, most famously in his programmatic lecture »Sollen wir unsere Statuen bemalen?« from 1884:

¹⁵ An introduction to this important method of documentation needs to be made available in published form.

¹⁶ The absence of any trace of weathering, with even fine incised lines preserved, shows that the stele cannot have stood above ground for an extended period.

¹⁷ On both sides, the incised line is ca. 1.7 cm from the outer edge of the stele. The incised line on the cymation is 1.7–1.8 cm below the upper edge of the moulding.

¹⁸ Brinkmann 2003, cat. 236, with fig. 236.1. The image could not be retrieved.

¹⁹ Brinkmann 2003, cat. 145 (stele of Aristion), with earlier bibliography; Richter 1961, no. 67 is particularly valuable.

²⁰ The relief itself remains to be investigated in depth by the Glyptotek's Tracking Colour project, for which see <www.trackingcolour.com>.



Fig. 6. As fig. 1, detail of horizontal incised line on cyma



Fig. 7. As fig. 1, detail of vertical incised line on the left framing band



Fig. 8. As fig. 1, detail of vertical incised line on the right framing band



Fig. 9. As fig. 1, detail of traces of red pigment below cyma

So viel ihnen [i. e. the painted plaster casts] im Einzelnen auch noch fehlen mag, den Vorzug charakteristischer Belebung der Form, deutlicher und decorativer Fernwirkung bemalter Sculpturen zu erweisen, vermögen sie schon jetzt, während die weißen Gypsabgüsse daneben auch für den nicht allzu weit zurücktretenden Beschauer sehr bald zu bloßen, hart gegen den Hintergrund umrissenen Silhouetten mit verschwindender Innenzeichnung werden.²¹

This was the first instance of the intended juxtaposition of a cast of an original in a monochrome state and a polychrome reconstruction, accompanied by an assessment of the difference in basic visual effect²². Treu's example was taken up recently by the Institute of Classical Archaeology at the University of Tübingen: here, a cast stands next to a full reconstruction of the polychromy of Aristion's stele (fig. 11)²³.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FRONT OF THE FRAGMENT

Preserved as the lowest part of the fragment (fig. 1) is a flat surface which the parallels available²⁴ suggest is what remains of the bottom part of the stele shaft, a rectangular or square field, a ›predella‹, intended to carry either an inscription or a figured representation of some sort, often in two-dimensions rather than in relief²⁵. The shaft would probably have been set in a square stone base. Only very rarely have both shaft and base come down to us – as in the case of the stele of Aristion (fig. 12).

Above the flat surface is the preserved, lower part of the stele relief itself. It is framed below by a 7 cm high horizontal moulding, a reverse Lesbian cymation²⁶. As mentioned above, faint traces of the leaves of the cymation have been observed. On both sides, the relief field is framed by a narrow projecting flat band. It would not be surprising if the ornament on the plain bands proves to be, for example, a guilloche²⁷. Within this frame, and crossing over it in various places, we have a quite complicated figurative motif²⁸.

Immediately recognisable is the figure of a crouching warrior. In the light of the parallels offered it is important to distinguish his posture from that of ›kneeling‹ or ›squatting‹. His stance is close to that of ›get set‹ in contemporary athletic terminology. ›Kneeling‹, by contrast, is a physically static pose, with one or both knees resting on the ground; ›crouching‹ is active and in this case, as we believe, preparatory to action.

²¹ Treu 1884, 36: »Whatever their deficiencies [i.e. of painted plaster casts] in the detail, they are able to show the advantage of painted sculptures – a characteristic enlivening of the forms and a clear and decorative effect when seen from a distance; while even to an observer taking a few steps backwards, the white plaster casts next to them quickly become nothing but sharply outlined silhouettes against the background, with only faint inner lines.«

²² Knoll 1994, 71 fig. 53; Østergaard 2019, 188 f.

²³ Østergaard 2019, 190.

²⁴ Closest in time are Richter 1961, nos. 45 (square, relief biga); 64 (square, rider in relief); 67 (Aristion, square, no motif); 70 (Lyseas, rectangular, painted, rider); 65 (square); 71 (square, painted rider); 75 (square, with inscription).

²⁵ Cf. Schmaltz 1983, 156.

²⁶ See Hiller 1975, 122 n. 14.

²⁷ Cf. Richter 1961, no. 45 (guilloche).

²⁸ Figures regularly cross into the frame of stelai, e. g., on the stele of Aristion and others, earlier, as Richter 1961, no. 23 fig. 86, before mid-6th century BCE, Athens, Kerameikos Mus. inv. P 1132. Stroszeck 2014, 146 with fig. 27.36.



Fig. 10. Dresden, Albertinum, 1891.

Interior from the collection of casts with two casts of the stele of Aristion



Fig. 11. Tübingen, Sammlungen des Instituts für
Klassische Archäologie der Universität Tübingen.

Two casts of the stele of Aristion



Fig. 12. Athens, National Archaeological Museum inv. EAN 29. Stele of Aristion

The crouching figure is naked, his upper body twisted towards his own right and his back shown in a three-quarters view. He is barefoot, his left foot set squarely on the ground while the right is supported on its toes, the buttock resting on its heel. Remarkably, the transition from the side of the foot to the arch of the foot sole is plastically rendered by a slight ridge (fig. 13). He is armed with a shield, a sheathed sword and a spear; his round shield is shown in profile. There are no signs of greaves or body armour. He holds his shield in front of him on his raised left arm, at a slight inwards angle, the shield's lower edge resting on the ground and



Fig. 13. As fig. 1, detail of feet

its curved front overlapping the frame²⁹. In his lowered right hand, he grips his spear so tightly that the tendon of the *palmaris longus* muscle stands out in his wrist. The spear is overlapped by the frame on the right, and by the shield on the left. Along his left flank his sword in its scabbard can be seen, its chape overlapping the frame of the relief. The baldric crossing over his back up to his right shoulder would have been shown in paint only. In sum, his armament identifies him as a hoplite. The specifics of this armament in the context of Greek city state warfare will be considered further below.

The crouching hoplite is not alone: another person stands upright behind him, also facing to the left (fig. 1). We have his bare feet preserved on the ground line of the relief, with the left advanced; between the spear and the right shin of the crouching hoplite we get a glimpse of the front of his lower shin. Being almost vertical, it would not line up with the left knee shown further above. The outline of the toe of his right foot is preserved behind that of the crouching hoplite. On that right foot, the arch of the foot sole is shown plastically, in the same way as on that of the crouching hoplite (fig. 13)³⁰. His left knee is visible between the scabbard and the left thigh of the crouching hoplite. How the rest of this standing figure may have looked is discussed further below; but that we have to do with a second hoplite seems to us beyond doubt³¹.

²⁹ As on the stele of Pollis (fig. 9).

³⁰ On Attic reliefs the earliest instance of the arch of the foot being suggested is the Stele of Aristion, cf. detail photo Hurwit 2017, 115 fig. 64.

³¹ Pace Vos 1963, 78 A.1, who suggests a Scythian.