

## THE SEPULCHRAL BANQUET ON ROMAN TOMBSTONES.

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Among the many loans which Roman decorative art owes to the Greeks is the practice of putting a relief showing a banqueting scene on tombstones. It is one of the loans which resulted in a purely conventional ornament, of which there is a great deal in the Roman art of the Empire. That art possessed other and really original features. In many points it owed little to the Greeks, and in some it far transcended them. In the present case I wish to consider a detail which is almost entirely borrowed from Greece, and which the Romans treated almost entirely in a conventional and unoriginal manner.

The origin of the relief that I am going to consider can be traced far back beyond Greece; a relief found in the Euphrates valley by Sir Henry Layard shows the king Assurbanipal reclining on a couch, which is just like an ordinary sofa, and holding in his hand a cup; in front is a small round three-legged table, near his feet is his queen seated in a chair, above is foliage suggesting a garden, and at either end of the relief are servants waiting upon him.

This form of relief was adopted by the Greeks for funeral monuments. It was apparently combined with another form of relief, in which the hero is seated on a chair holding out a cup while his horse and dog stand by, the whole being probably an illustration of ancestor worship, the worship of the hero by his descendants or tribesmen. The exact idea, however, which the Greeks actually associated with these reliefs is not quite certain. They accepted pre-existing forms but they have not recorded precisely how they have interpreted them, whether as banqueting scenes from real life, or as a funeral banquet, or as a banquet in Hades; they have also mixed up this particular ornamentation of tombstones with such things as the worship of Bacchus, or in later

times of Mithras. Certain, however, it is that reliefs of one or two persons reclining on a couch and partaking of a meal more or less closely resembling the relief of Assurbanipal, were common in Greece, and particularly in Attica.

From Greece this kind of relief passed to Italy and first to Etruria; it is there represented on a few tombstones, and it forms the subject of three-quarters of the paintings on the walls of Etruscan tombs. Either from Greece or from Etruria it passed to Rome.

Its diffusion in the Roman world is somewhat curious and has perhaps been insufficiently noticed. At Rome itself and in Italy in general it is not very common, and it appears principally as a minor ornament of tombstones of distinctly Greek or Grecizing character. One inscribed instance, first quoted in this context by Stefani, seems to illustrate a Roman literal view of the relief:—

. . . . Discumbere ut me videtis  
(sic) et apud superos annis quibus fata dedere  
animulam colui.

The writer of this lucid, if unmetrical, epitaph goes on to advise his friends to enjoy life, for (he says) afterwards there is nothing.

However the only case in which this form of tombstone is really common at Rome is in the cemetery of the Equites Singulares, the imperial body-guard. In view of what we find in the provinces, it is noteworthy that this is a military cemetery, and that the soldiers in question were largely recruited on the Rhine. When we turn to the provinces, we find as might be expected some instances of Roman date in the Greek lands of the east. But in the west the provinces of Gaul, Spain and Africa show scarcely any instances. Thus the province of Gallia Narbonensis seems able to boast of only one instance, and in Gallia Belgica the only cases found occur in the valley of the Mosel, where the vigorous native art occasionally adapted the relief to its own purposes in an unconventional manner. In Spain only seven instances are quoted, and if I understand the description right, they are the relief of seated not of reclining persons; that is, they are not true instances. It is also to be noticed that six out of the seven have been

found in one place. In Africa this type of relief is equally rare; out of some fifteen thousand tombstones, I can only find twelve instances, and not all of these are satisfactory in their strict adherence to the type. It is curious that about two-thirds of them include figures of women reclining on the couch, and several of them are more or less closely connected with the army. A good instance is a tombstone 6 feet high by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide found at Auzia (Aumule). It represents the dead man, who had been a soldier, and his wife and two children all standing upright; below is the inscription, above in the semi-circular top of the stone is a small relief of two persons on a sofa, a three-legged table in front, and two lions by way of ornament. I am indebted to M. Cagnat for a photograph of this stone.

The case is very different on the frontiers of the empire. The fortresses along the Danube show several instances though perhaps not a very large number; the fortresses on the Rhine show a great many more, and in most cases both on Rhine and Danube the majority of the stones are in some way closely connected with the army. On the Rhine the greatest number of instances at any one place seems to occur at Cologne where, according to a recent catalogue of the museum, eight instances, all military, have been discovered; further, the examples found on the Rhine are sufficient to prove that this type of relief was in use in the first, second, and third centuries. It has been suggested that the frequency of this relief on the Rhine may be due to the influence of the Greek Massilia, moving up the Rhone and across the pass of Belfort. But there is no evidence that the relief was common at Massilia or in the Rhone valley.

In Britain this form of relief is no less common than on the Rhine, and, as there, it occurs almost entirely in military posts. Two specimens have been found on the Vallum of Antoninus Pius in a curious sepulchral edifice at Shirva, along with the tombstone of a soldier in the Second Legion. These reliefs are so broken that it is difficult to be certain if they included the usual three-legged table; they certainly show in each case a man reclining on a couch with a dog near him. For this dog there are precedents elsewhere; it may be noted that the

men have their knees bent, that is, their legs tucked up. On the wall of Hadrian only one instance is known to me: a monument, found at Procolitia, to the wife of an inferior officer, which shows the three-legged table and food set thereon, but is otherwise too much broken to be worth describing. The forts near the Wall have yielded more instances; at Corchester there has been found a relief now in the Blackgate Museum, which shows two persons reclining on a couch, but this like the last is much broken. At South Shields a much more ambitious and better preserved relief has been discovered, the monument of a certain Victor, freedman of a cavalry soldier; it shows the deceased on an elaborately carved couch with a small slave and a worked basket of food in front; the deceased has in one hand a bunch of grapes and in the other a cup or saucer. Lanchester has yielded a much defaced relief now in the collection of Canon Greenwell. Finally from Kirkby Thore we have a grotesque relief of a woman, daughter of an under officer, reclining on a couch with a table in front with food on it, holding a two-handled cup in one hand and receives food from a servant with the other hand. To these we may add two examples found in York, where the Sixth Legion was stationed. One shows man and wife on a couch with a slave and three-legged table in front, and in the wife's hand a cup; the inscription below is in memory of a woman, but it is unfortunately very imperfect. The other York instance is a fragment without an inscription showing a woman holding a small cup in her hand.

But the greatest number of such reliefs in Britain come from the cemetery of the Legions stationed at Chester. The tombstones of Furius Maximus of the Twentieth Legion, of Aurelius Lucianus and of Cecilius Donatus, soldiers whose Legion is not mentioned, of Curatia Dinysia, of Fesonja Severiana, of Restita and Martia, of Flavia Saturnina, and of two persons, apparently females, whose names are almost entirely lost, all exhibit the same type. Besides these, one or two stones now wholly devoid of lettering exhibit the same type. Chester we may compare in this connection with Cologne on the Rhine, and as the population of Chester was throughout

composed of soldiers and their belongings, we may conclude that here as elsewhere these sepulchral banquets owe their appearance to the presence of soldiers; we may also notice that, as elsewhere, the type was largely though not exclusively used for the tombstones of women. In point of art the Chester reliefs are as conventional and monotonous as could well be wished, and they are interesting for this very reason. For they show how conventional and wanting in originality some branches of art in certain contexts became under the Empire, and they show also how closely the ultimate conventional type of the Romans resembles as by a sort of atavism the far-off Assyrian original. The table in front of the couch with food on it, the slave standing by, the recumbent figure holding a cup, even the festoons of foliage, which are frequently carved at the top of the Roman reliefs, all reproduce primitive features. Perhaps there could be few better instances of the permanence of the details in a type which must have lasted in Asia and Europe for at least a thousand years.

To the student of the Empire the interest of these Sepulchral Banquets is many-sided. He sees in their conventionality an illustration of the worst side of imperial art; he sees in their distribution, and in their special occurrence in the two great military districts, an example of the variety which really pervaded the Empire, and differentiated districts and provinces from one another; he sees thirdly in their occurrence, especially in Britain and in Gaul, an illustration of the connection in military matters, in recruiting, in supplying troops, which existed between the two great frontier administrations of North Britain and the Rhine. One thing remains unexplained, the special choice of this relief for the tombstones of females, and this puzzle I must leave others to solve.

[The following references may be added:—Perrot and Chipiez, *Chaldée et Assyrie*, p. 107; P. Gardner, *Sculptured Tombs of Hellas*, p. 188; Roscher, *Lexicon*, i, Pl. 2539, 2557; L. Stephani, *Der aussehende Herakles* (Mémoires de l'Académie de S. Petersbourg, Series VI, tome viii, 1855), p. 299; Burmann's *Anthologia Lat.*, IV, 377; *Philologus*, XL, 257; *Bonner Jahrbücher*, XXXVI, Pls. I and IV; Hellner, *Rheinisches Museum*, XXXVI, 438; Alexander Wiltheim Lucili-

burgensia (printed at Luxemburg, 1842); *Revue Archéologique*, IX (1887), p. 83; *Jahrbuch des deutschen Instituts*, 1887, p. 24; Boletín de la real Academia de la Historia (Madrid, 1892), tome xxi, p. 530; the series of catalogues of the Tunisian and Algerian Museums by Cagnat and others; the catalogues of the Rhenish Museums. For the British examples, see especially Bruce's *Lapidarium*, 705, 752, 926; the catalogue of the Blackgate Museum (ed. 1886), No. 150, *Arch. Æliana*, X, 314, and my catalogue of the Grosvenor Museum, Chester.]