

REMARKS ON A GEM OF THE LAOCOON.

By EDWARD SMIRKE.

IN the 24th volume of the Journal of this Society, Mr. King, a gentleman well known for his glyptological knowledge and discrimination, brought under the notice of its readers a remarkable intaglio of the Laocoon in the form of a wax impression of it attached to a deed containing a grant of the advowson, *pro hac vice*, of the church of St. Anthony, in Meneage, by the Prior and Convent of the old alien priory of Tywardreth, in Cornwall, to Thomas Arundell, "armiger." This seal, or a copy from it in gutta percha, was shown to my friend, Mr. Way, some fifteen years ago, and to several friends, both professional sculptors of celebrity and collectors of gems, and was exhibited during that interval at the meetings of more than one learned society in the hope of attracting attention and eliciting information on the apparent existence of an unknown gem, of which an impression was thus found among the papers and instruments of an obscure conventual establishment, situate near St. Austell Bay in the county of Cornwall, recording an early and well executed memorial of a group of statuary disinterred at Rome only a few years before the date of the document, and about the time when the prior named in it had become its last prior.

A printed notice of it was inserted by me in a Supplement to my friend Dr. Oliver's *Monasticon* of the Exeter Diocese, to which Mr. King has referred.

There is abundant proof that the discovery of this celebrated group of statues excited general interest, and soon became known far beyond the limits of Italy; but it is not probable that there was, at that time, any cast or copy of it in this country which was then publicly known or accessible; and I was led by the late Mr. Hertz (a well-known collector of works of art of this kind) to believe that no ancient gem on the subject existed, except a few cinquecento works which he showed to me, in which the treatment

of it was entirely different. I know not to what weight his opinion was entitled, but it was on the faith of that opinion that I ventured to describe the seal as a cinque-cento work.

Mr. King has expressed a different opinion. His belief is that the particulars, in which the gem deviates from the present restored group at the Vatican, are not accidental, or the mere product of the gem-engraver's fancy or taste, but that the gem, as represented by the seal, was either copied from the present group in an earlier and more perfect state, or was the original work of some early Greek engraver long before the finding of the existing group; and he founds this opinion on the superior technical execution of the work to that of any known engraver of the cinque-cento period.

If the peculiar execution of the seal be really decisive of its date, I am the last person to set up any opinion of my own on a matter so far beyond the range of my imperfect powers of artistic discrimination; but I rather infer that Mr. King does not speak on this point with so much confidence as to silence or exclude all question on it. Perhaps if he had then known the date of the document to which the seal was found attached, he might have spoken with more hesitation.

I have already stated that the document is a grant of the patronage of a living, of which the convent was patron, to a member of the well-known knightly family of the Arundells of Lanherne. The date is 25 May, 21 Henry VIII. (A.D. 1529), about 23 years after the discovery of the mutilated marble group in the vineyard of Felice de Fredis at Rome in the spring of 1506; a date which is fixed by contemporary letters and other early notices. It at first appeared to me (as I stated in Dr. Oliver's Supplement) that the grant, being found in a collection of title-deeds and muniments of the dissolved priory and purporting to be a grant of some property of the convent, was the identical grant by the convent, and it appeared singular that the convent seal (well known, and of a very different type) should not be attached to it; but on reconsideration and reinspection of the original by the favor of Lord Arundell of Wardour, I am satisfied that the seal was the seal of the grantee, Thomas Arundell. The deed is styled in the deed itself an "indented" one, and it is so indented along the upper edge in the usual fashion of the time, indicating that it was one of two facsimile instru-

ments written at opposite ends of a single piece of parchment. This seal is, alone, attached to it by a single strip of parchment. The regular seal of the priory was no doubt attached to the other half, and delivered to the grantee for his own use and security, and was therefore not likely to be found among any muniments of the priory. The bundle of priory instruments had long been deposited, for some unexplained reason, in the muniment room of the Arundells, though it is not known that any portion of the convent land had ever been granted by the crown to that family. We know, indeed, historically, that such a grant was very improbable. That there had in fact been some voluntary transactions, directly or indirectly, between the convent and that family *before* the dissolution, is apparent from the documents specified by Dr. Oliver in the volume of the *Monasticon* first printed, and inserted in his long list of instruments under the head of this priory.

The general practice of the Augmentation Office was, I think, to deliver the muniments of the surrendered monastery, or some of them, only to the subsequent grantee of the crown; but I can easily believe that a religious house, on the eve of its threatened dissolution, might consider it expedient to put its muniments of title into the custody of a favoured and powerful family, on whose known friendship it had good reason to rely.

As the missing deed has, after much search, been at last recovered, I have thought it worth while to print a copy of it, leaving an occasional blank where there is some obscurity or obliteration in the original; and I am the more disposed to do so, because its existence had well nigh become a matter of doubt, and because it gives me an opportunity of correcting some former observations on it made by me in the supplemental volume of the above work. I there expressed some surprise that the old prior, then on the verge of his professional extinction, should have possessed himself of an ancient gem, and employed it as the official representative of his House in the course of a strictly canonical and capitular act. That such an ornamental object should be found in the possession and use of the scion of a distinguished family, who figures, if I mistake not, among the young retainers of that magnificent Cardinal, who was himself a candidate for the See of Rome in competition with the House of the Medici in the person of Clement the Seventh,—could be a matter of no

surprise at all. In fact, he had, in various ways, abundant facilities for obtaining from beyond seas such specimens of ancient art at that time so highly prized.

In attempting to reproduce a conjectural restoration of the Laocoon group as corrected by the aid of this seal, I have only so far deviated from the disposition and arrangement of the figures, as found in the seal, as was needful to contract the distance between them on the field of the gem so as to conform to the contour and pedimental shape of the original group. The seal is, in fact, engraved on a prolate or very elongated ellipse, whose major axis is horizontal; and thus the gem engraver has thought proper to spread out the figures laterally, and to lower and recurve the right arm of the Laocoon, and has thus given to the entire group a more symmetrical and probable restoration of the original composition than that which the inferior taste and judgment of Baccio Bandinelli had led him to suggest. For the purpose of carrying out my conception, I have obtained the very able assistance of my young friend, Mr. Augustus Mulready, who has not only produced a very careful and excellent drawing, but has, as it were, corrected the Vatican restoration by entering into the spirit of the engraver of the seal. This design does not materially differ from that of Mr. King's vignette.

Eminent living authorities inform me also that this amended composition is, in itself, better adapted for practical execution, when the material is marble, than the less graceful conception of the last restorer, whoever he may be.

Such are the grounds on which I venture to believe that the intaglio, used for this seal, was the work of a skilful artist, who had no other guide than the group in its mutilated state, sometime between the year 1506 and the year in which the design of Baccio Bandinelli was actually carried into execution. This must have been before the year 1544, which is the date of the edition of Marliani's Topography of Rome, which contains the earliest woodcut of the group as first restored by him. The edition of 1534 has no such engraving.

There is in truth considerable practical difficulty in ascertaining either the authorship or the date of the changes which the group has undergone since 1506. The original state of it at the time of the discovery is probably correctly repre-



Geo. E. Mulready

sented in a well-known and nearly coeval engraving ascribed to Marc of Ravenna, one of the pupils of Marc Antonio. The parts, which have been since added by some later sculptor, are fully described by Mr. George Scharf in his *Guide to the Greek Court Catalogue of the Crystal Palace Sculpture*, and they are delineated in Bouillon's *Musée des Antiques*, and Clarac's *Musée de Sculpture*, in which the restored right arm of the Laocoon is attributed to a comparatively modern French sculptor, Girardon, in conformity with a previous one attributed to Giovan-Angelo Montorsoli.

The heads of the two serpents needed, it should seem, no restoration ; for both are represented in the group in its first mutilated state ; and there is therefore no good ground for supposing that there was another, i.e. a *third*, head near the throat of the principal figure, as Mr. King has suggested ; at least if we are entitled to assume that the figures now at the Vatican are those which the engraver of the seal had in view. Mr. Mulready executed another drawing for me, in which this suggestion of Mr. King was attempted to be carried out ; but it required a complete reversal of the position of both serpents, and other changes too considerable to be reconciled with the rest of the figures *as actually found*. I have, therefore, not thought it worth while to reproduce this design on wood.

On resorting to the best authorities¹ for the names of the sculptors who are said to have been engaged in the work of reparation, I find the names of Baccio Bandinelli, of Michael Angelo himself, of G. Angelo Montorsoli, of Bernini, of Cor-nacchini (also a later artist), and of Girardon ; and the material used in the repairs has been described to be wax, stucco, plaster, marble, chalk, and terra cotta, by the various authorities. The Florentine copy by Bandinelli is, of course, wholly in marble. It is possible that, in the lapse of 350 years, several and successive renovations have been undergone ; but on the whole, and having regard to the ordinary principles of reasonable evidence, I regard the claim of Bandinelli to be the veritable, substantial, author of the modern

¹ The French edition of Winkelmann, printed at Paris, 2 Republic (1793), seems to be the most instructive one. The opinion of the author had at that time undergone some change ; the Italian editions of Milan, and of Carlo Fea, are largely quoted in the notes, and the

dissertations of Heyne and of Lessing are incorporated. I have also consulted the best edition of the Museo Pio Clementino ; the *Life of M. Angelo* by Grimm, and by Harford ; and the *Topography of Rome* by Marliani, and also by Platner and Bunsen, as well as the work of Mr. Perkins.

part of the group, so far as regards the right arm, to be the most trustworthy.

It ought not, however, to be overlooked that there are some grounds for believing that the mutilated remains of other and different copies of the same group, on a different scale, had been before found at Rome, of which the existence is mentioned both by Winkelmann, and by Montfaucon in his *Diarium Italicum* (*Antiquité Expliquée*. Suppl., vol. i.).

It is observable that Pliny is not very clear on the point whether he means that the work in the Bath of Titus in his time was the identical group executed by the three Rhodian sculptors several Olympiads before the birth of Titus, or was only a facsimile copy of it, perhaps the work of a Greek artist afterwards settled at Rome. The reference by him to the supposed single block of marble looks as if he assumed the work to be the real "original" production of Greek (Alexandrian?) date, transported by the Roman conquerors, as they were wont to do, to Rome. The group of Dirce and the Bull, also described by Pliny as made of a single block, is stated by him to have been itself brought from Rhodes to Rome in the time of Augustus.

There are some observations not immediately connected with the principal subject of this paper, which occur to me to make in connection with the convent, and with the ancient family whose name we find associated with it in the above document.

Among the muniments of the priory, which are several hundreds in number, I find one which purports to grant to *John Arundell, Esq.*, eldest son of Sir J. Arundell, Knight, and to two others (probably trustees), the next presentation to the church of St. Austell, also in Cornwall. Like the grant of St. Anthony to Thomas Arundell, it has only one seal attached, accompanied by an *apparently autograph subscription* by the grantee, Jno. Arundell. It is plain that this must be a counterpart, though called a "scriptum" only and not an indenture. The seal is not the convent seal, but one in a finger ring, which was doubtless the property of John Arundell. It is remarkable that the seal is a well-executed, but fanciful, one, perhaps with some mystic meaning, and represents what seem meant for a lion, a crab, and a small mirror. The date of this deed is 20 March, 1530 (in

words, not figures), i. e. 21 Henry VIII. It is, therefore, nearly of the same date as the one sealed with the Laocoon seal. Copies of the seal, made fifteen years ago, are in the possession both of myself and of Mr. Way, and the deed has not been lost, but is now in the possession of Lord Arundell with the original papers. The autograph signature serves to identify the ownership of the signet ring, and to confirm what I have already stated, that the instrument is a counterpart, as in the case of the Laocoon deed.

At the present time the subscription of the name of a grantee would be a matter of course in a counterpart. At the time of this grant it was not a very usual, or a necessary practice; and, so far as my experience extends, the reign of Henry VIII. was about the time when the practice of autograph subscription in addition to a seal was coming into use. It was, indeed, a marked period in our history as to art, architecture, and legal forms; a sort of line of demarcation between the outgoing and the incoming law, about to be followed, in the next century, by the great living land-mark of Lord Chief Justice Coke, whose works constitute a real wall of separation and transition between the living and the dead jurisprudence.

Again. I find another curious document of a rather earlier date. It is a licence given by the same Prior Colyns to Richard Wencote, dated on 5 February, A. D. 1517.² Wencote then was, or had lately been, one of the monks of Tywardreth and a priest, and the licence enabled him to go to Rome with the utmost expedition, "*cum per magnâ celebritate,*" and there to obtain from the Pope liberty to visit the holy places at his pleasure, "*in fulfilment of his pious and meritorious vows.*"

Now it may be that the sole object of this visit to Rome was only of a professional or religious character; but it is certain that, if the worthy envoy happened to be a man of taste, or had learned at the court of Leo of this famous monument of Rhodian art, of which the praises were at that

² The indorsement on this parchment is, I think, in the handwriting of the late Mr. Michael Jones, a well known record agent, formerly engaged by Lord Everard Arundell in arranging and describing his

lordship's ancient muniments. The date of it is clearly 1517, and not 1507, as Mr. Jones has described it. I think also that the name of the bearer is misread by him "*Wernecote.*"

time sung by Sadoletus in verses of no mean merit, he might have been tempted, or perhaps was duly commissioned by the Prior or his friends at Lanherne, to make an investment in the purchase of such ornamental specimens of glyptographic art as the two signets of which the wax impressions are now before me.

“ Artifices magni !
 Vos rigidum lapidem vivis animare figuris
 Eximii, et vivos spiranti in marmore sensus
 Inserere aspicimus, motumque iramque doloremque,
 Et pene audimus gemitus. Vos obtulit olim
 Clara Rhodos : vestrae jacuerunt artis honores
 Tempore ab immenso, quos rursum in luce secunda
 Roma videt, celebratque frequens, operisque vetusti;
 Gratia parta recens.”

Sadoleti Carmina.

APPENDIX OF DOCUMENTS MENTIONED IN THE FOREGOING MEMOIR.

1. Grant to Thomas Arundell of the next presentation to the Vicarage of St. Anthony in the district now called Meneage.

Omnibus Christi fidelibus ad quos presens scriptum indentatum pervenerit Thomas Colyns Prior domus et ecclesie Sancti Andreæ Apostoli de Tywardreth et ejusdem loci conventus veri patroni vicarie ecclesie parochialis Sancti Antonii in Maneck in com. Cornubiæ Exoniensis diocesis salutem. Sciatis nos prefatum priorem et conventum unanimi nostris assensu pariter et consensu dedisse et hoc presenti scripto nostro indentato concessisse Thomæ Arundell armigero proximam et primam presentationem, donationem, sive nominationem vicarie parochialis Sancti Antonii in Maneck predicti : proxime et immediate post datum presentium quandocunque et qualitercunque vacare contigerit, ita quod bene liceat eidem Thomæ Arundell et assignatis suis personam habilem et idoneam ad vicariam Sancti Antonii predicti quocunque loci diocesano vel de . . .³ ordinario, nomine dicti prioris et conventus presentare quod personam idoneam ad eandem admitti, institui et induci, et hoc pro viginti dierum prox' et immediate post datum presentium. Salvis nobis et successoribus nostris omnibus pensionibus et omnibus proficiis et revencionibus quæ ab antiquo tempore de et in eadem vicaria annuatim percipere sive recipere consueverimus. In cujus rei testimonium hiis presentibus scripturis sigillum nostrum commune apposuimus. Datum in domo nostrâ capitulari de Tywardraith [sic] 25 die maii anno regni regis Henrici 8^{vi} vicesimo primo. [A.D. 1529].

The seal of the Laocoon is alone attached at the bottom of the parchment, and in the middle of it.

³ Some omitted parts of this are obscure.

The convent seal will be found attached to the acknowledgment of the royal supremacy by Colyns, 13 August, 1534, and his name is subscribed to it.

2. Licence to a monk of the priory of Tywardreth in Cornwall to visit Rome and its holy places. 5 Feb., 1517.

Pateat omnibus tam ecclesiasticis quam secularibus presentem paginam inspecturis, quod Ego dominus Thomas Colyns, Prior monasterii divi Andreæ Tywardreth vulgariter appellati in comitatu Cornubiæ et diocesis Exoniensis liberam dedi facultatem domino Ricardo Wencote sacerdoti et nostræ religionis nuperrime confratri votum religionis necnon professionis susceptum penitus deserendi et relinquendi sub hac sequenti lege et conditione, quod predictus Ricardus Wencote cum summa et permagnâ celeritate Roman adiens liberam ubiliter vagandi e Summo Pontifice assequatur veniam, idemque Ricardus suapte sponte pleraque sanctorum monumenta peregre proficiscens, Deo duce, visere decrevit. Quod neminem lateat antedictum Ricardum pacifice progredientem tollerare pium esse et meritorium suaque suscepta vota perfecturum, et quoniam (*quod?*) hanc scedulam veram esse liquido intelligetis sigillum officii mei presentibus infixi. Datum apud Tywardreyth (*sic*) quinto die mensis Februarii anno Domini millesimo quingentesimo septimo decimo.

The original on parchment before me has no seal attached; it is, therefore, only a copy or memorandum of the original under seal of office, *i. e.*, office of Prior, and not of the convent.

E. S.