

THE COLOSSUS OF PORTO RAPHTI RECONSIDERED

(PLATES 31–34)

“RIGHT in the middle of the entrance, breaking the force of the waves when the wind blows from the east, a rocky islet in the shape of a sugar-loaf or pyramid rises abruptly from the sea to the height of about 300 feet. Its sides, clothed with lentisk bushes and dwarf pines, are so steep that it can be scaled only on one side, the north. On its summit, looking seaward, sits a colossal but headless and armless statue of white marble on a high pedestal, the blocks of which were falling to ruin at the time of Dodwell’s visit [1805] but are now [1894] held together by iron clamps. This statue, which, to judge from its style, dates from the time of the Roman empire, is popularly supposed to resemble a tailor (*raphti*) seated at his work; hence it has given its present name (*Porto Raphti*) to the bay.”

J. G. Frazer, Commentary to Pausanias I, 31, 2

The large draped seated figure which sits atop the island in the mouth of the bay of Porto Raphti (Pl. 31, right center) has long been a landmark of the east coast of Attica and has caused written comment for over half a millennium. The most recent comments have been those of Mr. C. C. Vermeule who has produced a welcome compilation of the *testimonia* of early travelers who had visited the area.¹ Because of the poor state of preservation of the statue, and because of its height above the viewer standing on the ground, there are questions which cannot be easily answered concerning this monument. The present paper seeks to define those questions and to offer answers which appear most likely to be correct based on a study of the statue at its own level. These answers will, in several instances, differ from those most recently offered.²

A. Is the statue male or female?

The impression received by one viewing the statue at its own head level is that it is masculine (Pls. 32, 33). This impression is borne out by four considerations.

¹ C. C. Vermeule, “The Colossus of Porto Raphti in Attica,” *Hesperia*, XXXI, 1962, pp. 62–81; cf. C. C. Vermeule, *Roman Imperial Art in Greece and Asia Minor*, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 35–36. For comments, suggestions, and lively discussions during the preparation of this paper I am indebted to Evelyn B. Harrison, Stella Grobel Miller, and Homer A. Thompson. For the photographs herewith, prepared at the risk of life, limb, and liberty, I would thank Eugene Vanderpool, Jr.

² Most specifically, Vermeule, *Hesperia*, XXXI, 1962, pp. 62–63, 72–73, has attempted to identify the figure as female.

Firstly, there is simply no suggestion of the round fullness of chest necessary to indicate a female. While it is true that the chest does protrude somewhat, the protrusion is small and gradual, not full and sudden. Moreover, whatever protrusion really exists is exaggerated beyond its actual physiological importance by the concavity below it. This concavity of the abdominal area is one of the most striking features of the statue at Porto Raphti, and it does not betoken a woman. Rather, one has to do with a relatively slender man, slightly slouched over, whose abdomen is thus depressed (Pl. 33, a).

Secondly, the outer garment worn by the statue is not appropriate to a female. This garment is clearly a chlamys which was pinned in front of the figure's right shoulder. On the left side the chlamys is pulled back away from the front of the body by the arm in such a fashion as to catch the drapery in the crook of the elbow and the lower arm is left free (Pl. 32, a). Behind the arm the cloak is pulled back and then is reversed in its course beneath the elbow to flow beside and finally over the left thigh (Pl. 34, a). There is no trace of the chlamys falling further to the plinth.

Thirdly, the undergarment of the Porto Raphti statue is low girt in a typically masculine fashion (Pls. 32, a, 33, a). Just so the chiton is worn by, among many others, the attendants of Aeneas on the Ara Pacis.³

Finally, the lower legs (from about the knees) and the feet of the statue at Porto Raphti are bare in a most unfeminine fashion. The front of the rocky seat on which the statue rests is worked and obviously was visible. One can easily make out the hem of the chiton where it falls down beneath the figure over the top one-third of the front of the rocky seat (Pls. 32, a, 34, a). This necessarily means that no drapery was in front of the seat and, therefore, that the lower legs were bare. So too were the feet, for the outline of the left foot is still visible and one can easily discern several of the toes (Pl. 34, b).

B. Whom does the statue represent?

When considering questions of identification, one looks for attributes, but none are preserved on the Porto Raphti figure. The author of the *Itinerarium Maritimum*⁴ of the latter part of the sixteenth century after Christ states that this statue held a pair of scissors in his hand at that time ("che tiene in mano un paio di forbice"). Recently these "scissors" have been identified as ears of grain,⁵ but a more basic question must first be posed. Did the author of the *Itinerarium Maritimum* actually

³ Cf. D. E. Strong, *Roman Imperial Sculpture*, London, 1961, fig. 38.

⁴ Vermeule, *Hesperia*, XXXI, 1962, p. 66, for the most accessible text and references.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78. Although it is implied by Mr. Vermeule that these "scissors" or "ears of grain" were in the right hand, it should be noted that the source does not so specify. This object, if it ever existed, had disappeared along with the arms of the statue by 1740; cf. C. Perry, *A View of the Levant*, London, 1742, p. 487.

see these "scissors"? It is obvious from his account that he did not climb up to see the statue⁶ and one cannot see such details from sea level. It seems very likely that this author supplied the "scissors" from his own imagination to account for the name of the statue and thus of the harbor (see Frazer's commentary above).

Without attributes and head, the question of identification can best be answered by a consideration of the drapery and the pose of the figure. The former has already been discussed, but the latter must be reconstructed to a certain extent. Since the head of the figure was set in a separate piece, the attitude of the head and the direction in which it was turned cannot be determined.

The position of the legs and feet is clearer. As already noted, the outline of the left foot is still visible and indicates that the left foot was drawn beneath the body with the heel raised and the weight of the left leg resting on the toes and ball of the foot at the juncture of the rocky seat with the plinth of the statue (Pl. 34, b). Near the front of the plinth there are the traces of the heel of the right foot of the statue (the front of the foot is now broken away; Pl. 34, d). This shows that the right leg was extended so that the angle at the knee was slightly more than 90° with the weight of the leg resting on the heel.

The left arm was bent at the elbow with the upper arm tight against the body and the forearm parallel to the left thigh. Since there are no traces of contact on this thigh, the left forearm must have been raised slightly above it. The right arm was raised and extended from the body at nearly a right angle to the line of the shoulders. This is shown not only by the remains of the upper arm at the shoulder (Pl. 34, a), but also by a cutting through the plinth. This cutting is located just behind and to the right of the right foot of the figure. It extends vertically completely through the plinth and is now broken away on the outside (Pl. 33, a). This hole will have served for an attribute held in the extended right hand of the figure in the manner of a staff or spear.

The pose of the colossus of Porto Raphti was, then, a common one known from all periods of antiquity. It is the pose of the Olympian Zeus of Pheidias,⁷ of Homer in the "Apotheosis of Homer" relief in the British Museum,⁸ of Augustus on the Gemma Augustea in Vienna,⁹ of Valentinianus II on the Missorium of Theodosius I in Madrid.¹⁰ It is a pose of dignity, of majesty, and is appropriate to a limited type of man or god who will represent "royalty" in a given context. On the other hand,

⁶ As Mr. Vermeule has noted, *Hesperia*, XXXI, 1962, p. 67, the first of the early travelers who wrote about the figure at Porto Raphti based on a personal examination of the statue was Charles Perry, *op. cit.*

⁷ Cf. G. M. A. Richter, *The Sculpture and Sculptors of the Greeks*⁴, New Haven and London, 1970, pp. 171-173, figs. 649, 650, 653.

⁸ Cf. M. Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*, New York, 1955, fig. 497.

⁹ Cf. Strong, *op. cit.*, fig. 45.

¹⁰ Cf. G. M. A. Hanfmann, *Roman Art*, London, 1964, fig. 145.

the chlamys of the Porto Raphti figure is evidence for an active, not to say military, role for the personage represented. This fact means that the Porto Raphti statue cannot represent someone like Homer, for example, who is always portrayed in a himation, never in a chlamys.¹¹ The latter garment is, however, appropriate to Roman emperors who are frequently portrayed in a chlamys and in the very same pose as the Porto Raphti statue.¹² Although it is impossible to say which emperor was intended, this is surely the most likely identification for the Porto Raphti statue.

C. What is the date of the statue?

The general consensus of opinion has always been that the Porto Raphti figure belongs to the Hadrianic or early Antonine period, but with so much of the statue destroyed and the extant surface so battered, it is difficult to be positive about this necessarily stylistic problem. Nonetheless, there would seem to be in the figure and its drapery a rigidity, a lack of plasticity, which is not representative of the best work of the Hadrianic and early Antonine period. A date in the second half of the second century after Christ or early in the third century would seem preferable, but this conclusion is obviously subjective. In any event, it would seem better not to attempt too close a dating and to place the figure within these larger limits.

D. Is the statue original to its present location?

This question has never been raised concerning the Porto Raphti colossus, and yet there are certain indications which make it likely that the figure was made elsewhere and only brought to its present location at a later date. In the first place, the back of the figure is straight and flat (Pl. 32, b), and either summarily done or not completely finished as best as one can judge from the present state of preservation. This suggests that the statue was made to rest with its back against a wall and not to be free-standing and visible from all sides.

Secondly, the high pedestal upon which the statue rests also would indicate that the figure was not original to this place. As Frazer remarks (above, p. 192), this pedestal has been repaired in modern times so that there is little to go upon on the basis of the present *pastiche*. However, two drawings made by early travelers before the modern repairs show that this pedestal was constructed of a series of

¹¹ Cf. G. M. A. Richter, *The Portraits of the Greeks* I, London, 1965, figs. 117-120, 125-127. This drapery trait seems, not surprisingly, to be true of all philosophers and poets.

¹² In addition to those examples cited above (notes 9 and 10) see the Tiberius from Veii in the Vatican (R. West, *Römische Porträt-Plastik*, I, Munich, 1933, pl. XLVII, 209), and the Tiberius and Claudius in the Lateran (A. Giuliano, *Catalogo dei Ritratti Romani del museo profano Lateranense*, Vatican, 1957, numbers 35 and 36 respectively, pls. 21-24).

If the identification of the Porto Raphti figure as a Roman emperor is correct, then the rocky seat of the figure would indicate an emperor in the guise of Zeus just as the pose has been seen as typical of Zeus.

poros blocks at ground level upon which rested more poros blocks placed in an upright position.¹³ Several of these blocks survive and have been re-used in their original positions in the modern reconstruction. This means that the completed monument consisted of a strange juxtaposition of the poros pedestal and the marble statue with its four (three now survive) marble base blocks. These latter blocks clearly were made to go with the statue plinth which now rests upon them, and they give rise to a question. If the statue was made for its present location, why was not the pedestal also made of marble, or else why were not both base blocks and pedestal made of poros? The easiest explanation is that both statue and base blocks were imported to stand on a pedestal of later date made for the statue.

There is also evidence for a repair to the statue such as might have been effected after damages to the marble in the course of moving. The traces of the right foot on the plinth, like those of the left, have the clear outline preserved around the area of the foot (Pl. 34, d). But while the surface of the plinth where the left foot will have made contact is jagged and uneven, the similar area of the right foot is smooth. Furthermore, the right foot has a dowel in front of the heel area. The obvious inference to be drawn from these facts is that the right leg was broken away and repaired. While this hardly proves that the statue was moved from another site to its present location, a move would have provided an excellent opportunity for such damage.

Finally, the motive for the erection of the Porto Raphti figure must be considered. Mr. Vermeule has shown that the purpose of the figure in its present location was probably as a naval landmark and perhaps as a lighthouse.¹⁴ This means that the figure must have been erected at Porto Raphti in a period when that harbor was busy and important. While the harbor is naturally good, it is so far removed from Athens that its importance has never been of long duration. There have been periods, however, when Peiraeus has been closed or in unfriendly hands and Porto Raphti has been significant as a "back-door" to Attica and Athens. Thus in the Hellenistic period, the port had a brief importance as is witnessed by the construction of the Ptolemaic fort on Korone, the large peninsula which juts out from the mainland to close off the greater part of the bay to the south of the island on which the statue sits (Pl. 31, bottom center).¹⁵ Again, as Mr. Vermeule has pointed out,¹⁶ Porto Raphti was an important means of access to those seeking to avoid the Turks at Peiraeus in the period before the Greek War of Independence. It is in some such period of closure of Peiraeus that the colossus at Porto Raphti will have been erected as a navigational aid.

¹³ E. Dodwell, *A Classical and Topographical Tour through Greece, I*, London, 1819, plate facing p. 532; and C. Wordsworth, *Greece*, London, 1884, p. 124.

¹⁴ Vermeule, *Hesperia*, XXXI, 1962, pp. 67, 71, 75.

¹⁵ E. Vanderpool, J. R. McCredie, A. Steinberg, "Koroni: A Ptolemaic Camp on the East Coast of Attica," *Hesperia*, XXXI, 1962, pp. 26-61.

¹⁶ Vermeule, *Hesperia*, XXXI, 1962, pp. 64, 73.

One such period, in addition to those mentioned above, is in the latter part of the twelfth century after Christ and in the very early years of the thirteenth century. During this period the Metropolitan of Athens, Michael Choniates, wrote many letters complaining of the pirates based on Aigina and Salamis who were very active and practically free to come and go as they pleased. Beginning in A.D. 1182 or 1183, Michael's complaints continue until A.D. 1202 when the pirates apparently joined forces with Leo Sgouros of Nauplia and Michael says that naval war was being waged against Athens.¹⁷ This warfare culminated in *ca.* A.D. 1204 with the unsuccessful siege of the Acropolis by Leo and his destruction of the lower town of Athens.¹⁸ Although this may not have been the only time which meets our requirements, and although we are not specifically told that Porto Raphti was being used then, it is obvious that a port on the east coast of Attica would have been a useful means of avoiding the pirates. It may be suggested then, although it cannot be proven, that the colossus of Porto Raphti was taken in the later twelfth century after Christ to its present location¹⁹ to serve as landmark and lighthouse during a troubled period of Athenian history when Peiraeus was unsafe. If this is true, then perhaps it is not fortuitous that the first reference to the figure at Porto Raphti does not come until the fourteenth century after Christ.

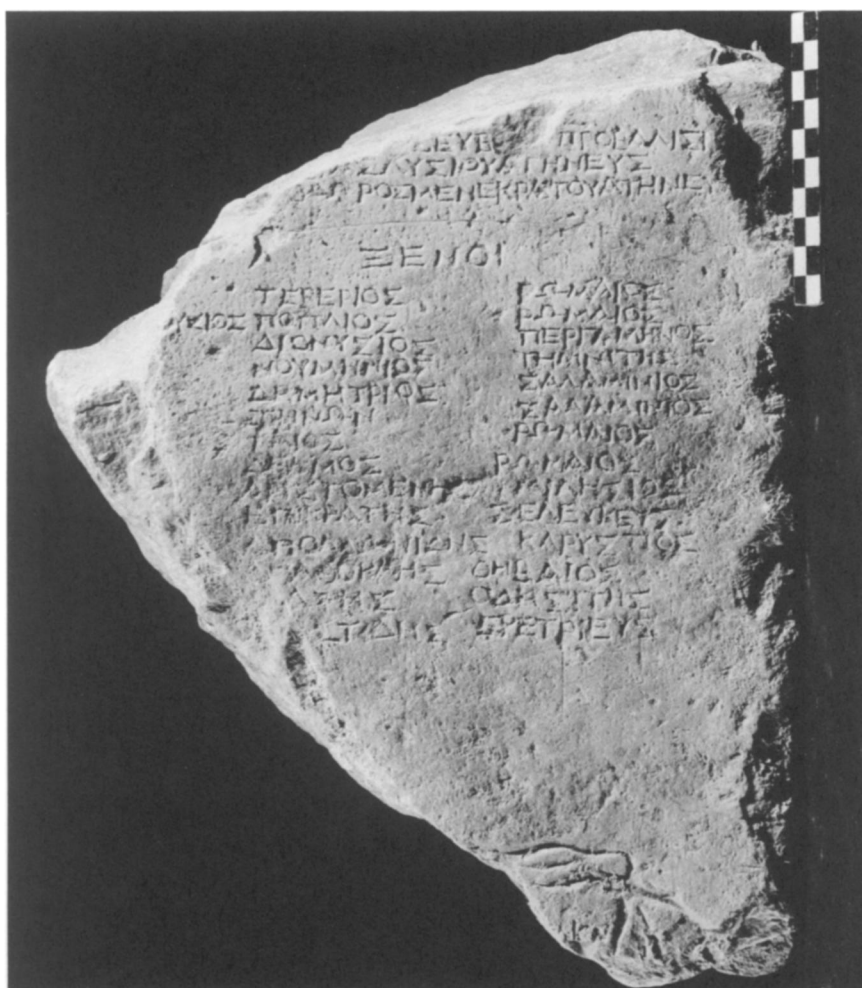
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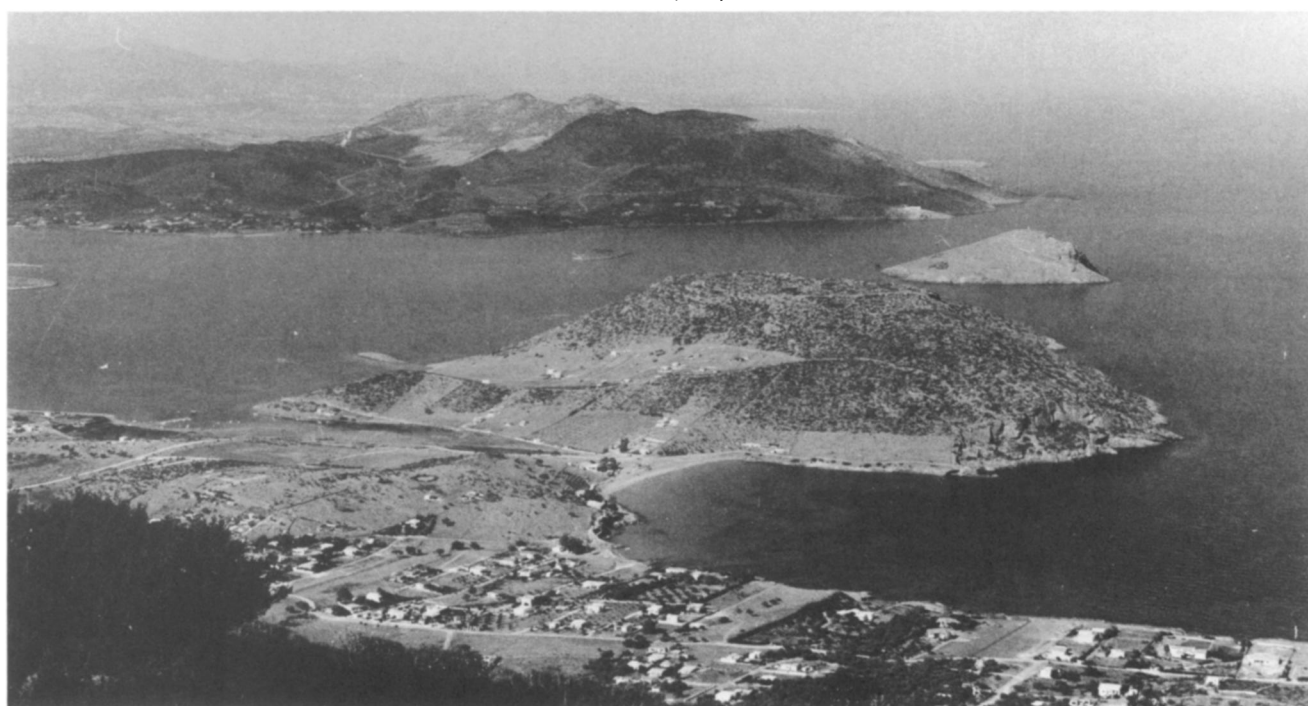
¹⁷ Michael Choniates (Akominatos) II, pp. 122, 124-125, 129-131 (ed. Lampros, Athens, 1880); cf. pp. 40-43, 74-75, 98-100, 105-107, *et al.*

¹⁸ Niketas Choniates, pp. 800-803 (ed. Bekker, Bonn, 1835).

¹⁹ The original provenience of the statue cannot be determined although one would reasonably think of it as having been fairly near, presumably somewhere in Attica.



I.G., II², 1031 (E.M. 7611)
OSCAR W. REINMUTH: *I.G.*, II², 1006 AND 1031



Mouth of the Harbor of Porto Raphti from the South

STEPHEN G. MILLER: THE COLOSSUS OF PORTO RAPHTI RECONSIDERED



a. The Colossus of Porto Rapti from the Front (East)



b. The Colossus of Porto Rapti from the Back (West)

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a. The Colossus of Porto Raphti from its Right Side (South)

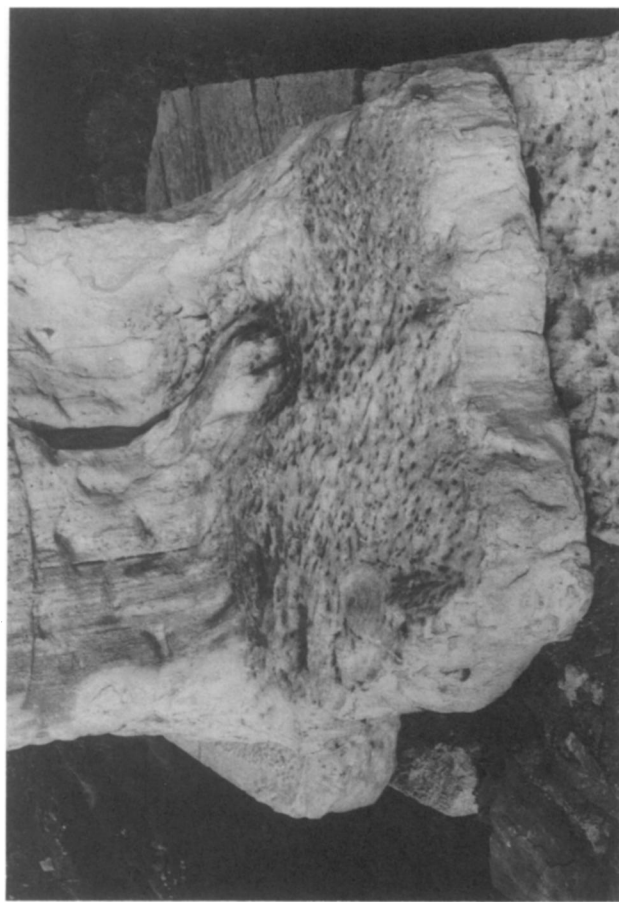


b. The Colossus of Porto Raphti from its Left Side (North)

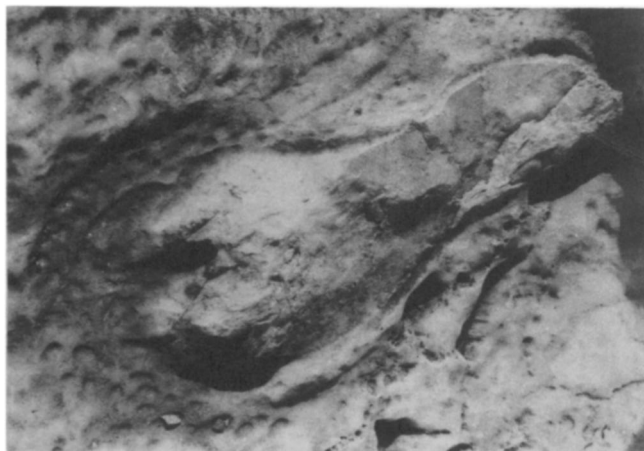
STEPHEN G. MILLER: THE COLOSSUS OF PORTO RAPHTI RECONSIDERED



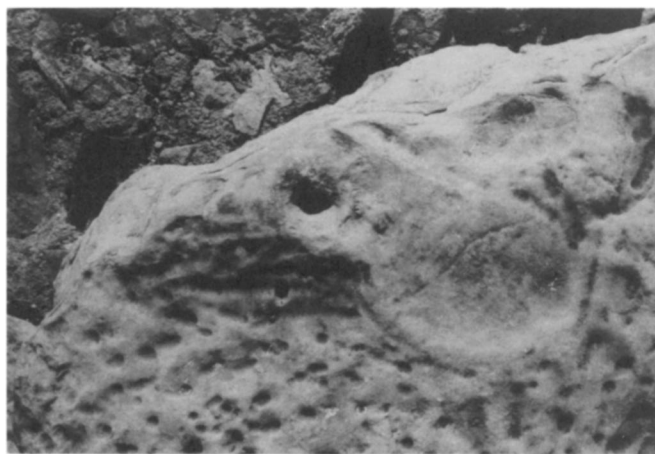
a. Detail of the Front of the Colossus



b. Detail of the Plinth of the Colossus



c. Detail of Traces of Left Foot



d. Detail of Traces of Right Foot

STEPHEN G. MILLER: THE COLOSSUS OF PORTO RAPHTI RECONSIDERED