

# THE MARBLE TROPHY FROM MARATHON IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

(PLATE 31)

THE British Museum possesses a marble trophy from the plain of Marathon which was presented to the Museum by John Walker, Esq., in 1802. It is briefly described and illustrated with a line drawing in A. H. Smith, *A Catalogue of Sculpture in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, British Museum*, Vol. III, London, 1904, p. 221, no. 2142. Reference is made there to earlier Museum publications which give essentially the same information as is contained in the *Catalogue*. Apart from these brief notices the trophy has not received much attention in the archaeological literature. Ad. Reinach in his article "Tropaeum" refers to it as "un monument tardif élevé à Marathon" and says that it is no doubt a fragment of the trophy of white marble mentioned by Pausanias and depicted on certain coins.<sup>1</sup> G. C. Picard in his book *Les trophées romains* (p. 50, note 1) merely cites Reinach's opinion. A. J. Janssen on pages 170-171 of his book *Het antieke Trophaion*, Ledeberg/Gent, 1957, says (I translate) "a marble trophy that comes from the plain of Marathon and consists of a helmet with cheek pieces, a bow, greaves, and a shield, stands quite apart because of its composition and compact form." This mention occurs in the chapter on the trophy by itself, that is, trophies without accompanying figures either because they were originally erected thus or because they lost their additions.

I became interested in the British Museum trophy when I was studying the great Ionic votive column in the northeastern part of the plain of Marathon, which I believe to be the true "trophy of white marble" mentioned by Pausanias.<sup>2</sup> Through the courtesy of Mr. D. E. L. Haynes, Keeper of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, I was able to examine the trophy in the basement of the British Museum. The Museum provided a set of four photographs for further study, and the Trustees kindly gave permission to publish them here (Pl. 31). This examination enables us to dispel some illusions and establish some facts about the trophy without, however, solving all the problems connected with it.

The trophy is about 2 feet 9 inches or 0.84 m. high. It is of marble which, as nearly as I could judge in its present condition, is fine grained and white. It consists

<sup>1</sup> In Ch. Daremberg, E. Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, V, p. 503 and note 8.

<sup>2</sup> I, 32, 5. See *Hesperia*, XXXV, 1966, pp. 93-106; on the last page there is a short note on the British Museum trophy.

of a tree trunk (clearly delineated at the back) on or against which are placed a helmet with cheek pieces and crest (partly broken), a pair of greaves, a bow and a shield. It is therefore a faithful representation of an actual trophy. On examination, however, we see that our trophy is not an independent monument, complete in itself, as might appear at first sight. A break across the spectator's right side of the helmet which carries down that side as far as the top of the greaves shows that something now missing was attached there. Furthermore, the right side of the trophy is narrow and forms an acute angle, no arms or armor are represented on it, and it is clear that this side was not fully visible. In fact the trophy merely served as the support for a statue that once stood at this side of it. Arms and armor in various combinations are often found on statue supports, and numerous examples have been collected by Muthmann.<sup>3</sup> I find, however, nothing strictly comparable to the British Museum trophy, nor is that trophy listed by Muthmann as it had not been recognized as a statue support.

The date of the British Museum trophy is not easy to fix exactly. A date in Classical Greek times is excluded on various grounds. The style and technique, with some surfaces finished with a rasp, is late, and a date in late Hellenistic or possibly early Imperial times appears most suitable. Statues with elaborate supports such as ours are commonly found in this period but do not occur earlier. Armor of types that appear on our trophy was in use in late Hellenistic times. For example, the helmet with cheek pieces and the shield with central ridge and boss, the Roman *scutum*, can be paralleled on the Ahenobarbus base of the third quarter of the first century B.C.<sup>4</sup> Finally, greaves, which form such a conspicuous part of our trophy, were standard equipment in Hellenistic times and are mentioned by Polybios (VI, 23) as a regular part of the Roman panoply. Soon after Polybios' time, however, they go out of fashion, and in later times were worn only by centurions as part of a parade uniform.<sup>5</sup> These various considerations point to late Hellenistic times as the most probable date for our trophy without perhaps excluding the early Imperial period.

Finally we must consider the association of the trophy with Marathon which is what first aroused my interest in it. Clearly it can have nothing directly to do with the famous battle of 490 B.C. It might possibly, I suppose, have been part of some later embellishment of the "trophy of white marble" or the tomb of the Athenians, some allegorical or mythological figure placed near by as an act of piety or commemoration, but this seems rather unlikely. If our late Hellenistic date is correct, the trophy cannot have anything to do with Herodes Atticus in whose time many statues were

<sup>3</sup> Fritz Muthmann, *Statuenstützen und dekoratives Beiwerk an griechischen und römischen Bildwerken*, Heidelberg, 1951, pp. 58-71.

<sup>4</sup> Inez Scott Ryberg, *Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art* (= *M.A.A.R.*, XXII, 1955), pp. 27-34, pl. VIII; D. E. Strong, *Roman Imperial Sculpture*, pp. 14-15, pl. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Johannes Kromayer and Georg Veith, *Heerwesen und Kriegsführung der Griechen und Römer*, pp. 278, 324, 410, 522.

erected in Marathon.<sup>6</sup> We can then only suppose that it was part of some otherwise unknown statue that once stood somewhere in the Marathon district.

But does the trophy really come from Marathon at all? I have tried to find out more about John Walker, Esq., and the circumstances under which he acquired the trophy, but I have had no success. *The Dictionary of National Biography* lists or mentions no less than nine men named John Walker who were alive in 1802, but none of them visited Greece and I see no reason to associate any of them with our trophy.<sup>7</sup> I have not come across any reference to him in the travel books of the period. The record of accession in the British Museum gives, in addition to the published information, only the exact date of the acquisition, August 6, 1802. There is no correspondence in the Museum files relating to the gift as Mr. Haynes informs me. Without knowing more about the circumstances of finding of the trophy it would not be prudent to reject the Marathonian provenience outright, but one cannot help reflecting that a marble trophy that could be *supposed* to have come from Marathon would be more attractive to a prospective buyer and would command a higher price than one of unknown or indefinite provenience.

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Graindor, *Hérodote Atticus*, pp. 130-132, 185-188.

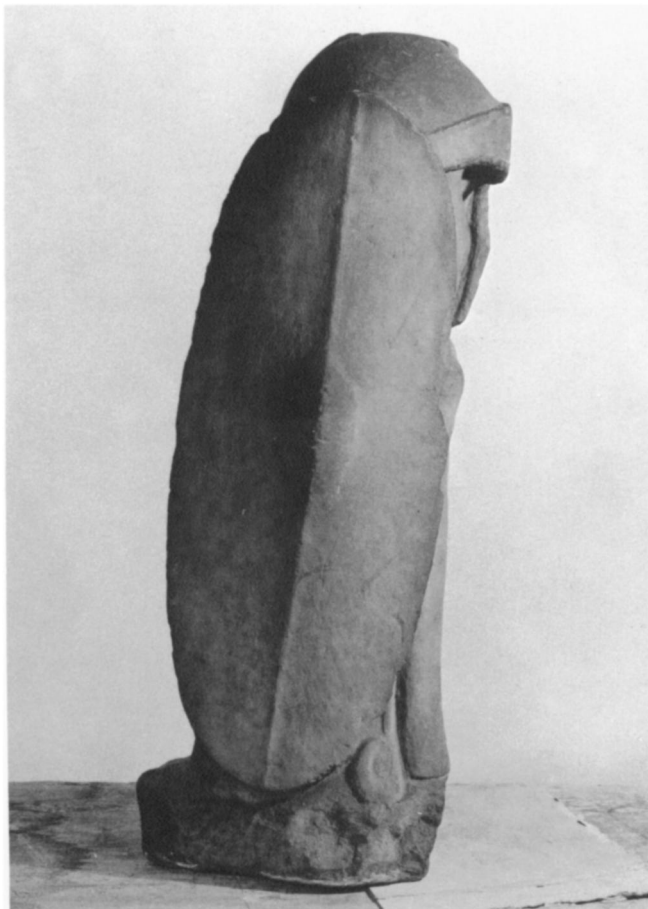
<sup>7</sup> John Walker (1759-1830), man of science, was in Egypt in 1802 but returned to England without visiting Greece; he was not interested in antiquities but only in vaccinating people. John Walker (1770-1831), antiquary, did his research in the archives of the Bodleian Library and seems never to have left Oxford. John Walker (fl. 1800; see under Anthony Walker), landscape engraver, may be the man who engraved many of the plates in William Martin Leake's books (sometimes in collaboration with C. Walker), but again I find no evidence of a visit to Greece.



Front



Back



Left Side



Right Side