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Dead giant, from Gigantomachy on the north frieze of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi. Ca. 525 B.C. Bryn Mawr photo.

WOUNDED FIGURES IN GREEK SCULPTURE

By BRUNILDE SISMONDO RIDGWAY

IN THE FREQUENT BATTLE SCENES of the *Iliad* many verses exalt the arrow shot or the spear thrust, and the might of the warrior who wielded the weapon. But seldom does the focus of poetic attention shift to the wounded hero to describe his physical pain. His misfortune is usually expressed by the laconic comment: "He fell, thunderously," and what echoes in our minds is not his cry of agony but the rattling of his shining armor.

Sculpture, deprived of such verbal and acoustical aids, makes its claim upon our sense of vision, capturing and immobilizing one aspect, and one alone, of this process of dying. In keeping with the static nature of its medium, it may choose to portray the easiest aspect of all, the stillness of death. Or like the deaf-mute who must have recourse to sign-language and exaggerated gestures to convey his thoughts, it may devise a compositional pattern or pose expressing pain, physical disability, sorrow, the imminence of death. In any given instance, the type of pose chosen and its psychological content are largely determined by the phase of stylistic and technical development reached by sculpture at the time.

The Archaic period (650-480 B.C.) is not interested in wounded figures for their own sake. They appear only in narrative contexts where, as in the Homeric epics, they serve as foils for the bravery and strength of the victorious hero. Sculptors of the sixth century do not linger over gory details. A dead warrior betrays his lifelessness by the turn of a hand, the fall of his hair and garment, the relaxed pose of one leg—though often the other leg, bent at an angle to be clearly visible, appears somewhat incongruous in a corpse. No emphasis is placed on the fatal wound; even a defeated warrior driven down on one knee by the force of the attack or the seriousness of his injury is not a pathetic sight, and we might never discover where a spear or arrow pierced his armor. Metal attachments (or the tell-tale holes where they were once imbedded) could resolve our doubts, but no compositional device points them out. The attention attracted from the surrounding figures may be limited to an isolated effort to recover the lethal weapon. Facial expressions are impassive; it is perhaps the unusual nature of injury and injurer which accounts for the open-mouthed cry of the giant bitten by Cy-



Giant bitten by the lion drawing Cybele's chariot, from north frieze of Siphnian Treasury. Ca. 525 B.C. Delphi Museum.

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bele's lion on the frieze of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi. Or is his scream only suggested by the shadow of the helmet on an infrequent frontal face?

The theme of the dying, wounded warrior does not appear on Archaic grave stelae. Armed soldiers in full possession of their vigor stand at attention within the narrow limits of their tall slabs. Only the location of the gravestone carries the message of death and valor. A broad stele with the relief of a naked helmeted warrior in a running pose, fists clenched over the chest and head sagging as if gasping for breath, has been made pitiful by romantic interpretation which saw in it the anachronistic memorial of a Pheidippides. Yet the relief represents only a running hoplite, and our misinterpretation exposes the innate artificiality of a pattern which could be used at will to portray full speed or utter collapse. In the Greek East,

the idea of death is even further divorced from pathos by being transformed into a metaphysical concept, and dead warriors, like toys, are shown in the grip of harpies in flight to other-world destinations.

FRIEZES, METOPES AND PEDIMENTS are the only Archaic monuments on which wounded figures appear. Delphi offers an important example of each kind in the frieze of the Siphnian Treasury, the metopes of the Athenian Treasury and the Gigantomachy pediment of the Alcmaeonid temple of Apollo. In the frieze, dead and wounded are introduced for variety, breaking up the isocephalic composition at different levels. In the metopes, in a face-to-face confrontation, the hero is identifiable through his erect stance, the villain through his cornered position. At times the victor fairly hovers over the prostrate victim, and the sense of supremacy is conveyed through spatial distribution: no sense of pathos is involved in the representation of the falling or kneeling opponent. In the



Running warrior, so-called Pheidippides, on an Archaic grave stele. Ca. 520 B.C. Athens, National Museum.

pediment, fragmentary as it is, the giant lunging from one corner repeats the scheme already employed in the Peisistratid temple on the Athenian Acropolis. But in both cases we can never be sure whether these giants are creeping, wounded, out of battle or are merely intent on watching it in the cramped position imposed by the sloping roof.

The Aeginetan pediments of the Transitional period (480-450 B.C.) dispel such doubts. With a grim smile a reclining warrior wrenches an arrow from his chest; another would collapse but for the shield still strapped around his arm. Narrowed eyes and precarious poses express various phases of exhaustion. Violent motion is borrowed from the more animated figures in bronze created by Aeginetan masters and permitted by the anchoring background. But the liveliness of the figures and the riot of colors with which they were once decorated allow no gloomy aura. The dying and wounded are normal elements of any battle, and their matter-of-fact appearance in the pediments

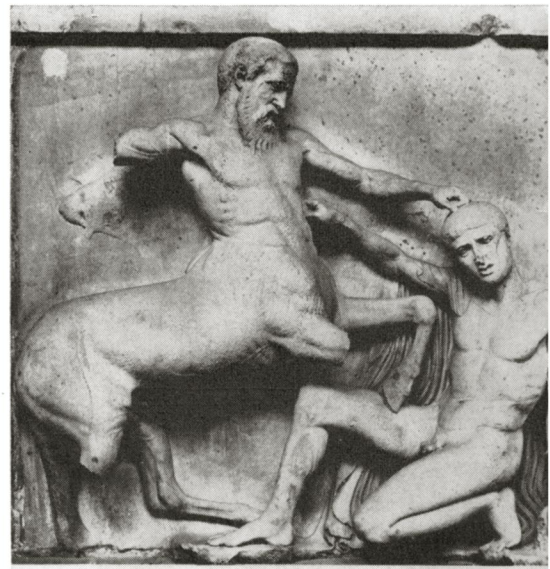
is certainly a touch of realism rather than of pathos.

The pediments of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, at a more advanced stage of evolution, rely on the fighting theme for compositional more than for emotional reasons. As the bronze blade is now missing from the breast and shoulder of the centaur, we are hardly aware that the monster must be in the throes of death. His strong hands still grip the Lapith woman, and his kneeling pose echoes that of his opponent; but with his head missing his pain is lost to us. Other faces survive, and their wrinkled brows and parted lips openly acknowledge the sting of a bite or the tug at a beard. Perhaps no extant fifth-century monument expresses physical hurt so eloquently as these Olympia heads.

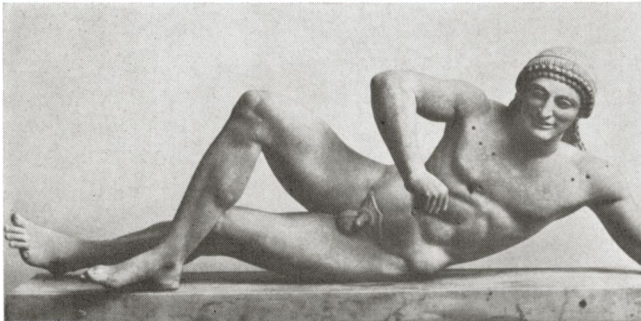
Should this remark seem a gross overstatement (and indeed some of the Olympia faces are studies in Classical composure), consider the Parthenon metopes which illustrate the same theme. The Doric frieze has automatically fractioned the composition into a series



Metope from Athenian Treasury at Delphi: victory of the Athenian hero Theseus over the Amazon queen Antiope. Ca. 500 B.C. Delphi Museum.



Centaur and Lapith on a metope from the south side of the Parthenon. Ca. 447-438 B.C. London, British Museum.



Dying warrior from west pediment of the Temple of Aphaia on the island of Aegina. Ca. 490 B.C. Munich, Glyptothek.



Detail from battle of Lapiths and centaurs, west pediment of Temple of Zeus at Olympia. Ca. 460 B.C. After G. Rodenwaldt and W. Hege, *Olympia*, plate 57.



Detail of warrior helping a wounded comrade, from the frieze of the Nike Temple on the Acropolis, Athens. Ca. 425 B.C. London, British Museum.

Wounded Figures continued

of duels where the centaurs appear to win or at least to hold their own against rather ineffectual Lapiths. This impression probably derives from the fact that the centaurs, because of the equine element in their nature, are “mounted” and therefore physically dominate their opponents on foot: an impression which proves how much the message of victory or defeat, as in the earlier Athenian metopes, is carried mainly by a compositional scheme in which the winner is placed above the loser. The surviving heads, mostly of centaurs, range from horrid masks to deeply human faces, but pain or triumph is seldom conveyed by altered features. A more subtle element finds admirable illustration in the southwest metope still *in situ*; pathos, absent from the faces, prevails in the contraposition of the two bodies—the centaur’s lively and vigorous, the Lapith’s lifeless and sagging.

This same approach prompts the introduction of a theme, greatly favored by later artists, which first appears in the frieze of the Nike temple on the Acropolis: the helping comrade supporting a wounded friend. It may seem of no consequence, yet this motif introduces a change in attitude toward battle casualties: from a climate of indifferent acceptance we move to one of concern and human compassion. For the first time the spectator’s attention is attracted to a wounded warrior by the reaction of other figures in the same context, and the injured fighter—no longer a mere space-filler or a compositional device against monotony—tells a story of his own.

The fifth century witnesses the introduction of the theme also in free-standing statuary, but the surviving monuments dilute pain with Classical coldness. The

sculptor Cresilas, Pliny tells us, made “a man wounded and dying, in whom the spectator can feel how little life is left, and a wounded Amazon” (*Natural History* XXXIV.74). The attribution of a specific Amazon to Cresilas is still uncertain, but the two extant wounded types show these stoic women totally unconcerned about their injury or barely aware of its existence. As for the statue of the man, either no replica of this famous work has survived, or we cannot recognize it because Pliny overstated its realism.

Impassive as they may be, these single wounded figures betray a shift in interest from the narrative context to the shorthand of allusion through single characters. In group compositions, the killing of the Niobids, potentially a didactic example of *hybris* (overweening pride) punished, inspired some restrained but compassionate sculpture of high quality. The famous Niobid in the Terme Museum in Rome is the epitome of fifth-century wounded figures, expressing her injury through gaping mouth and sinking pose. Only the flexion of her arms toward her back declares the invisible arrow planted between her shoulders, but agony is implicit in the disarray of her garment, unthinkable under normal circumstances, and the apparent immodesty of her revealed body.

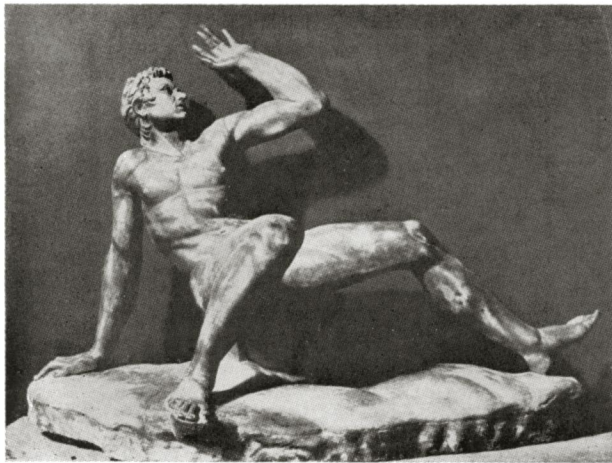
An increasing tendency toward introspection and the emphasis on spiritual rather than physical suffering account for the paucity of wounded statues in the fourth century. Perhaps the period was politically too uncertain. As men withdrew from public participation, seeking private satisfactions, art shied away from physical pain, and sculptural realism exploited other paths of expression. Pathos gathers in the sunken eyes of many a figure but carries only a psy-



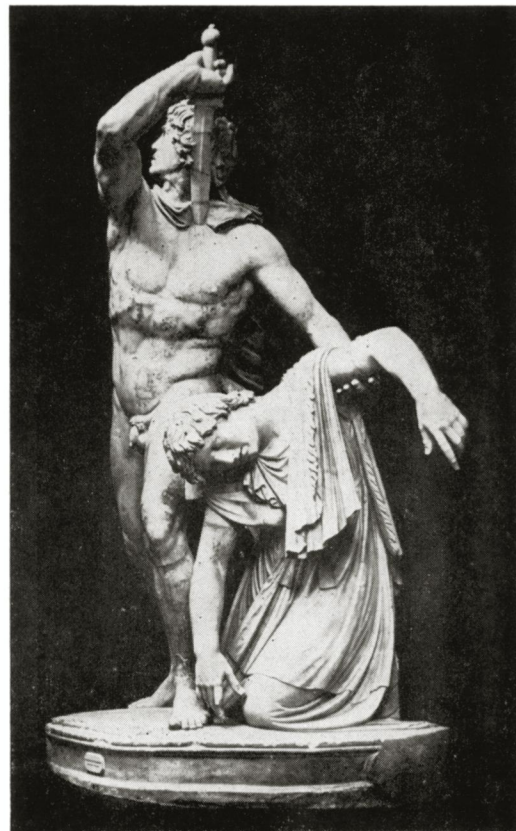
Niobid struggling to remove an arrow from her back as she is falling. Ca. 450-440 B.C. Rome, National Museum.



Detail from the so-called Alexander sarcophagus, showing battle between Greeks and Persians. Ca. 325-300 B.C. Istanbul, National Museum. Bryn Mawr photograph.



Falling Gaul. Roman copy of a Hellenistic original. Venice, Museo Archeologico.



The Ludovisi Gaul holding the sagging body of his wife. Roman copy of Hellenistic original of second century B.C. Rome, National Museum.



Head of a dead Persian. Roman copy of a Hellenistic original. Rome, National Museum.



Menelaus with the body of Patroclus, the Pasquino group. Roman copy of Hellenistic original. Florence, Loggia dei Lanzi.

Wounded Figures continued

chological message. Gravestones become increasingly mournful, but their themes stress the sorrow of the spiritual loss, not the pain of the physical injury. The conventional motif of the victorious horseman rampant over a prostrate foe casts the deceased as the rider and therefore demands no compassion for the wounded. Once again the type of the dying warrior retreats to the narrative context of pediments and friezes, where less crowded compositions and staccato articulation against a plain background bring it into strong relief. But the repertory of motifs has not greatly changed. The sculptors of the Nereid monument, the Mausoleum, the Heröon of Trysa, the Amazon sarcophagus, borrow largely from fifth-century prototypes and merely increase the freedom and violence of the poses in keeping with the sculptural evolution of their time. They never impinge upon the aloofness of the spectator by making too strong a demand on his feelings; gory details are still conspicuously missing; mutilations and defacing wounds are never rendered; injury and death continue to be expressed by patterns and poses and by the occasional involvement of other figures. Even color, so exceptionally preserved in the Alexander sarcophagus, succeeds only in localizing the wound, not in dramatizing it. Nor do historical battles seem more realistic than mythological fights.

THE BREAK-THROUGH of emotionalism comes finally during the Hellenistic period. A full surge of pathetic and dramatic feeling invests sculptural compositions and finds manifestation in a whole gamut of moods, from deep, contained suffering to tragic and contorted agony. Poses vary from the quiet scheme of the dying trumpeter in the Capitoline Museum in Rome to the explosive fall of the Gaul in Venice. Facial expressions range from the relaxation of death, as in the Persian's head from the Terme Museum, to the distortion characteristic of convulsive fighting, as in the Laocoön. The theme of the wounded figure breaks loose from the enframing background and reasserts itself in statuary in the round. Persians and Gauls, Amazons, giants and other mythological characters collapse and die in stone with a frequency which sheds a revealing light on the emotional taste of the times. Psychology again plays an important part in the choice of subject matter. Single statues and groups leave scope for imagination, often suggesting a background story bound to arouse compassionate response. The so-called Ludovisi Gaul, turning his head toward an approaching enemy, implicitly reveals the fury of pride and sorrow which has led him to kill his wife

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and is now prompting his suicide. His dagger, like an exclamation mark, emphatically points to his wound and the spurting blood. The powerful musculature of his living body—almost ironical since it could not save him—is enhanced by the limp corpse he supports. Less actively dramatic but equally pathetic is the so-called Pasquino group—Menelaus with the body of Patroclus—which plays on the same contraposition of opposites. The Parthenon metope had already exploited this motif, but there the two protagonists were enemies and the strength of one caused the weakness of the other. In these Hellenistic groups the components are bound by emotional as well as compositional ties, and the viewer must include them both in his sympathetic reaction. Great is the sorrow of Menelaus supporting the body of his friend; even greater is the tragedy of the Gaul who himself killed his wife to save her from a greater evil, or of Achilles who too late discovered his love for Penthesileia. Sculptural skill fuses with narrative content and emotional undertones to create a sophisticated work of art.

As the Hellenistic era draws to its close, wounded figures in the Greek tradition make their last appearance. The warrior from Delos and the Niobids in



One of the Niobids in the Uffizi, Florence. Roman copy of a Hellenistic original dating about 100 B.C.

Florence illustrate this final phase. Once again only the pose conveys the idea of physical injury and peril, a pose no longer merely violent but spectacular, playing with diagonal lines and patterns, expressing distress with outflung limbs and startled gestures. In friezes, the old motifs are still treated with almost the detached idealism of Classical times; the few realistic traits in the Amazonomachy from the temple of Artemis at Magnesia fail to impress because of their poor execution.

Seen in isolation, Greek sculpture does not appear particularly restrained in the representation of wounded or dying figures. In comparison with Oriental or Roman art, its characteristic lack of ugly details becomes significant. Steeped in symbolism and idealizing tradition, the Greek sculptor could not express the final degradation of a human being through mutilation and horror. At first, when technical ability and expressionism were limited, the impact of a wound was conveyed mostly by the pose, in a detached narrative context not meant to arouse pity or stimulate the imagination. The incipient realism of the Transitional phase rapidly ended in the idealizing restraint of fifth-century sculpture. This period, however, colored the theme with psychological nuances and extended it to statuary in the round. The fourth century shied away from an almost embarrassing subject at a time when public activity was generally avoided rather than considered glorious, and Athenian citizens needed the stirring eloquence of the great orators. Once again the motif made only an inevitable appearance in the narrative context of mythological reliefs. The outburst of emotionalism in the Hellenistic period finally led to the dramatic exploitation of physical suffering, but because of its psychological and spectacular potentialities, not because of the horrid appeal of a realistic wound.

We are bound to conclude that throughout Greek art the rendering of wounded figures remained for the most part an experimentation with poses, at times quiet and controlled, at times violent and theatrical. Taken by the dramatic impact and expressive patterns of these figures, we accept them unquestioningly, unaware that they are realistically implausible and, so to speak, not really wounded at all.

A NATIVE OF Italy, where she did her undergraduate work at the University of Messina, the author came to the United States as Special Foreign Scholar for Italian at Bryn Mawr College, with the aid of a Fulbright Travel Grant. She received an M.A. degree at Bryn Mawr in 1954 and a Ph.D. in 1958, after two years at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Dr. Ridgway, who has published a number of articles on Greek sculpture, is at present Assistant Professor of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology at Bryn Mawr College.