

DIE JACOBSTHAL-RELIEFS: KONTURIERTE TONRELIEFS AUS DEM GRIECHENLAND DER FRÜHKLASSIK

BY FLORIAN STILP. PP. XII + 281, B&W PLS. 85, TABLE 1, MAP 1. GIORGIO BRETSCHNEIDER EDITORE, ROME 2006. €180. ISBN 88-7689-211-7 (PAPER).

At a time when many new books follow currently fashionable interests in theory or gender, exhaustive studies of artifactual material, which are among the primary building blocks of archaeological research, are becoming rather rare. Stilp's comprehensive study of a distinctive class of terracotta reliefs is therefore all the more welcome. The material studied is by no means new, its first comprehensive publication having been Jacobsthal's book *Die melischen Reliefs* (Berlin 1931). Although Jacobsthal and other scholars continued to be interested in this fascinating group, no systematic reevaluation of the material was ever undertaken until Stilp's excellent study. The author not only incorporates material not known at the time of the original publication but is able to apply to the whole corpus accumulated knowledge and new approaches to the study of terracottas, which have developed considerably since the 1930s.

The class has been renamed "Jacobsthal reliefs," acknowledging the misnomer "Melian" and honoring the scholar who first recognized them as a distinct group. The greatest stumbling block has always been to establish where these reliefs—which were widely distributed—were manufactured. Careful technical, iconographic, and stylistic study has made clear the lack of coherence within the corpus. To address this problem, Stilp has organized the reliefs into three blocks. The source of the first block is thought to be Attica, on the basis not only of provenance but also iconographic and stylistic links with Attic vase painting and sculpture.

Dating from the 480s to the 460s, it is neither the earliest of the three blocks nor the largest in number. Nevertheless, it has been placed in the first position because of the security of its dating and attribution. The earliest reliefs, dating to the 490s, belong to the second block, which was produced into the 460s and is the most numerous of the three blocks. It is also the most difficult to place, although the largest concentration comes from Melos. Taking into account the non-Attic iconography and Ionian stylistic connections, Stilp has opted for the designation "inselionisch." The third and smallest block is again assigned to Attica, on iconographic grounds, but it is later—dating from the 450s to the 440s, when production ceased. The author has presented his reasoning carefully and honestly (61–3), aware that his solutions are only the best that can be proposed with the available evidence.

Other matters have been clarified more definitively. The purpose of the reliefs, once thought to be furniture attachments, is now better understood. On the basis of their findspots, they are now known to be freestanding or hanging grave gifts or shrine votives. They may have been mounted in some way, especially those that are vulnerable to breakage because of cutout limbs or other features; some examples are scored on the back, a treatment usually suggesting attachment.

Another resolution concerns the nature of the prototypes from which the reliefs were reproduced. The nuanced, plastic surfaces of the moldmade reliefs suggest to Stilp that the

prototypes were modeled in clay. The reliefs do not have the fine linear detail that might point to metallic prototypes.

Only one of the proposals in this sound study does not quite sit right with this reviewer, who has been a student of Corinthian terracottas for some time. When seeking a context for the Jacobsthal reliefs, Stilp develops the idea that contoured reliefs made in Corinth during the Archaic period were forerunners, especially a class of sphinx and Gorgon plaques made in the Potters' Quarter. Stilp is aware that these plaques are markedly different from the Jacobsthal reliefs. Although similar in votive and funerary function, and also employing an openwork technique, they are altogether simpler and smaller objects, very light in fabrication, without narrative content, and themselves at the end of a tradition as cheap, mass-produced ceramic copies of objects made of more precious materials. To this reviewer, these qualities are significant because they were determined by the manufacture of the plaques in coroplastic workshops specializing in churning out such simple items for export. A better context for the Jacobsthal reliefs might be sought in a different direction within the world of terracotta manufacture, that is, a different kind of workshop.

To continue using Corinth as an example, the Tile Works produced not only architectural terracottas but also a small secondary output of other objects, similarly made with slabs of clay pressed into molds and/or knife-cut, such as votive furniture, including relief plaques (G. Merker, *The Greek Tile Works at Corinth. Hesperia* Suppl. 35 [Princeton 2006] 23–5, 75).

This production of smaller, nonarchitectural objects may have been economically motivated by helping to fill the kiln, or to provide work when architectural commissions were lacking. While the Corinthian reliefs, which have mainly floral and animal motifs, do not resemble the Jacobsthal reliefs, they do suggest a better sort of context for the latter than coroplasts' workshops. The artisans who made the earliest Jacobsthal reliefs could perhaps have utilized training received in an architectural terracotta factory, which would have contributed the basic technique (including openwork), the interest in narrative, and the lack of interest in mass production, or even in a second generation of reliefs. An architectural context also might explain the relatively short duration of each of the three blocks into which the reliefs are divided, all of which ceased even though quality was maintained (unlike coroplastic production, which tended to wear itself out). The differing locales of each block also become more understandable, if each depended upon the availability of facilities primarily intended for the manufacture of something else.

These are merely suggestions to help explain some of the anomalies of this most interesting material, made possible because the author has presented it so thoroughly and with such clarity.

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