

NIKOLAUS HIMMELMANN, **Sperlonga. Die homerischen Gruppen und ihre Bildquellen.** Vorträge der Nordrhein-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Reihe G, Band 340. Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen 1995. 117 Seiten, 40 Tafeln.

The slender appearance of this book belies the weighty matter of its content. Likewise, its official date of publication conceals the fact that the text was updated to the last minute, thus including not only a Postscript (pp. 72–74), but also an Addendum made after proof had been corrected (pp. 115–16), to take into account the Catalogue of the 1996 Exhibition in Rome: „Ulisse, il mito e la memoria“. The rapid pace of publication made possible by the computer and other electronic means of communication is both a blessing and a curse of modern scholarship, in that authors are inevitably tempted to modify and expand their own text as relevant new articles and books appear, at times with piecemeal results.

The sculptures from the grotto at Sperlonga (near Terracina, south of Rome on the Tyrrhenian coast) will continue to occupy our attention for many years to come, since they can be rightly considered one of the most important discoveries of ancient art during our century. A vast bibliography has accrued around them since their first appearance in 1957, despite the fact that their restoration is not yet completed and many fragments remain to be studied and added to the various groups. After an initial publication (1963, by Giulio Jacopi) of all the finds from the grotto, scholarly interest has focused on the so-called Homeric groups, although some of them depict episodes not included in either Iliad or Odyssey. Yet there is no doubt that the events portrayed concern the Trojan War and its aftermath, whatever their ultimate literary source. These groups have been identified as: the Theft of the Palladion; the Rescue of Achilles' Corpse from the Battlefield; the Encounter between Odysseus' Ship and Skylla; and the Blinding of Polyphemos. (The preceding moment – when Odysseus offers the wine cup to the Cyclops to make him drunk – is now being considered the subject of a possible fifth group, on tenuous grounds.) As the original program of the sculptures and their intended message are being worked out, more pieces with less obvious Homeric overtones have been included in the listing: a Ganymede being kidnapped by the Eagle, and the rock-cut prow of a ship to the left of the grotto's mouth, which a mosaic label identifies as *Navis Argo PH*. Others, such as a relief showing Aphrodite / Venus and Eros, and a female figure in the round, perhaps Andromeda, are occasionally discussed and brought into connection with the postulated program. Some sculptures of obviously later date, which include a male portrait in Tetrarchic style, are usually omitted from consideration; yet they prove that the grotto continued to receive sculptural attention until as late as the fourth or fifth century of our era, when Christianity might have stopped the practice. We now know that by the eighth century a community of monks took over the cave, presumably removing or damaging most of the pagan symbols (Ulisse, pp. 272–73).

Among the many scholars who have concerned themselves with the Sperlonga finds, two stand out for the abundance of their writings and the importance of their theoretical positions: Bernard Andreae

and Nikolaus Himmelmann. The first has been involved virtually from the start in the painstaking reconstruction of the marbles and their interpretation; the second has been interested in the groups because of his own research in Hellenistic art, and his viewpoint has brought him into polemic with some of Andreae's suggestions. Andreae, it should be mentioned, continuously revises and expands his position, as new comparisons are found and more ancient sources come to his attention, but he basically believes that the 'Homeric' groups in the grotto reproduce bronze prototypes of the early- to mid-second century B.C. – the Skylla complex erected for Rhodes, the others for Pergamon at various times. Works in the minor or two-dimensional arts are adduced by him as confirmation of a mid-Hellenistic date for such originals. The marble copies would have been assembled at Sperlonga to glorify Odysseus as ancestor of the Emperor Tiberius, following a literary inspiration provided not so much by Homer as by Ovid – thus Achilles' corpse would be rescued by the Laertid (*Ov. met.* 13,280–285).

Himmelmann, however, would entirely reject the Ovidian connection as chronologically unlikely, if not virtually impossible. He believes the Sperlonga sculptures to be based on eclectic works of much later date (ca. first century B.C.), in their turn only approximately inspired by late Classical or early Hellenistic prototypes, primarily of two-dimensional format. He has already published several articles explaining his position (see especially N. HIMMELMANN, *Laokoon. Ant. Kunst* 34, 1991, 97–115; *idem*, *Ansichten von Sperlonga. Gymnasium* 103, 1996, 32–41; several articles in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on which see now *idem*, *Minima Archaeologica. Utopie und Wirklichkeit der Antike* [1996] and many mentions in writings dealing with related subjects). The book under review is primarily concerned with determining the types and dates of the iconographic sources for the Sperlonga groups, thus putting into question a second-century chronology for their alleged originals in the round.

Inevitably, this approach lends itself to polemical overtones; thus all monuments cited are not examined solely for their stylistic and iconographic import (although these aspects are properly highlighted; see, especially, the analysis of the Laokoon arguing against its possible derivation from a bronze prototype: pp. 47–48), but also for their value in disproving Andreae's theory, which at present is the more generally accepted. The book is articulated into one main discussion and six short Excursus: on the identification of the Sperlonga grotto; on an Etruscan scarab (British Museum 673) depicting Laokoon and two children; on the sculptural group of Achilles and Penthesileia; on the intended viewpoint of the so-called Pasquino group; on the centaur head from the Esquiline (Conservatori no. 1137); and on Andreae's publication: *Praetorium Speluncae. Tiberius und Ovid in Sperlonga* (1994). The main text begins with a discussion of the Pasquino group, in which the author recognizes Ajax and Achilles; he then proceeds to the Blinding of Polyphemos, and its relationship to representations of the Offering of the Wine to the Cyclops. The Theft of the Palladion comes next, and is followed by a review of the Skylla / ship composition. The rest of the discussion focuses on the Laokoon and other 'Homeric' representations, on the definition of eclecticism, on comparisons with Hellenistic sculptures, either single statues or groups; it concludes (p. 50) that the prototypes of the Sperlonga marbles should be sought within the relatively brief time span of ca. 80 to 40 B.C., as suggested by the difference in the cargo of the Mahdia and the Antikythera wrecks. The former, in fact, contained no epic sculptures, as contrasted with the latter, which included at least two representations of Odysseus, perhaps one of Achilles, and a possibly related figure of a frenzied man. That Tiberius claimed descent from Odysseus is disproven by his son Drusus' genealogy as outlined by *Tac. ann.* 4,9 and 43 (p. 67; and cf. pp. 73–74).

A systematic critique of the author's specific arguments in the order in which they are made seems pointless, especially since the adjunctive nature of the book has produced a number of repetitions, from previous footnotes to main text and vice versa, as well as several proleptic references in the discussion. Only the main issues will therefore be addressed, but a somewhat partisan stance is virtually unavoidable, since to agree or disagree with the author usually implies rebuttal or acceptance of Andreae's theories. I should state openly that, on the whole, I tend to side with the author, as some of my writings have already shown, although in a few cases I hold a position of my own (see, e.g., my discussion of the Pasquino and of the Achilles and Penthesileia group, *Hellenistic Sculpture* 1. The Styles of ca. 331–200 B.C. [1990] 275–281 and 281–283; and my review of B. ANDREA, *Laokoon und die Gründung Roms* [1988]. *Journal Roman Arch.* 2, 1989, 171–181).

We begin with the locale. That the Sperlonga grotto is the place mentioned by *TACITUS* (*ann.* 4,59) and *SUETONIUS* (*Tib.* 3,9) where Tiberius once narrowly escaped death is probably correct, but some of the author's observations are worth considering. Many more grottoes, still unexplored, exist in that general area along the Italian coast. *Tacitus'* description, moreover, seems to imply a site farther inland for the Emperor's dining place where the rock fall occurred. In addition, the present mouth of the Sperlonga cave is at some distance from the location of the triclinia, which are now in the open air; would a collapse of the orifice (as mentioned by the sources) have truly endangered the diners? Conversely, if a considerable amount of the original aperture is now missing, could the Ganymede have been part of the total sculptural program (p. 54)? Its position above the grotto appears sure and intended for a specific

viewpoint from the dining area, to suggest a visual and mental link, according to Andreae, between Tiberius and Zeus, Ganymede's abductor; yet Ganymede compositions have been found in other villas, thus undermining the implied allusion (p. 68). The author would accept that the sheer scale of the Sperlonga sculptural layout is Imperial, and draws additional support from the fact that the Centaur from the Horti Lamiani (probably by the same Rhodian workshop) came from an undoubted Imperial context (p. 65). Yet he also points out that the epic figures from the Antikythera wreck are over lifesize (pp. 17, 42, 71). Monumental dimensions alone, therefore, cannot be used as a criterion for Imperial dating.

The existence of 'Homeric' sculptures during the first century B.C., in the author's opinion (cf. his n. 71), has not been sufficiently emphasized. It is dramatically confirmed by the publication of large-scale terracotta groups from Colle Cesarano (near Tivoli) and Tortoreto (near Chieti), which include the story of Polyphemos. These have now been illustrated and discussed in the *Ulisse* catalogue, which dates them to the second half of the first century B.C., the Tortoreto pieces perhaps even later. But the author compares them to urn reliefs or pedimental compositions in the Etruscan tradition and would reverse the sequential order, placing them in the middle and the end of the second century B.C. respectively (ns. 63 and 69; cf. pp. 42–43, 116). This high chronology would weaken his contention that the Antikythera wreck signals the inception of the epic compositions; I believe, in fact, that the disparity between the Mahdia and the Antikythera cargoes was caused primarily by the heavy weight of the architectural elements carried by the former, which prevented the inclusion of large-scale sculpture, rather than by any chronological distance. (The Mahdia ship, which foundered around 70 B.C., carried a 300-ton shipment that included ca. 60–70 monolithic columns of various dimensions, bases, capitals, and other architectural elements, as well as many metal fixtures for beds and an unusually large number of anchors. See G. HELLENKEMPER SALIES et al. [eds.], *Das Wrack. Der antike Schiffsfund von Mahdia* [1994], and my review of it, *Journal Roman Arch.* 8, 1995, 340–347. The Antikythera wreck occurred ca. 50 B.C.) On the other hand, I would agree that local Italic traditions should be explored before postulating Hellenistic prototypes in Asia Minor or Rhodes for which little or no material evidence exists.

In this regard, I would particularly stress the presence of epic subjects in the Tarentine funerary reliefs in soft stone that were so popular during the late fourth and almost the entire third century B.C., yet have not so far been brought to bear on the Sperlonga question. These works display stylistic traits commonly labelled Baroque, and comprise marine motifs that often include Skylla – a popular monster on Etruscan monuments and Sicilian coins as well. The feral creature may carry a specific geographic connotation – the Straits of Messina, on the Italian side opposite Charybdis, or, at the very least, Italian waters – and, like several other marine symbols, seems to stand for the afterlife, as consequence of the perils of the sea. It is therefore improbable that it was used, as argued by Andreae, as a memorial for the Rhodians who perished in their fight against pirates, a human agent, in the Aegean sea. The author is correct in stating (n. 47 on p. 29; cf. p. 72) that the subject could not have celebrated victory, since the enemy is depicted as more powerful than its opponent, and Odysseus does not 'win' the encounter, suffering heavy losses in the event.

In most ancient examples, moreover, Skylla appears alone with her victims, without Odysseus' ship. The boat is included only in two-dimensional representations, such as 'Megarian' (Rhodian) and Calenian bowls. The author objects to the late chronology suggested by Andreae, which would make these representations derive from a monumental group in the round erected in Rhodes around 180 B.C. His own dating, in the third century B.C., makes them at least two generations earlier than the alleged prototype, and probably dependent on a toreutic or pictorial tradition that often shows the prow of Odysseus' boat, rather than the stern, as at Sperlonga, and adds an archer on deck with the hero, perhaps as part of a different story (pp. 31–33, 41). The author further objects (p. 30) to the current Sperlonga reconstruction that places Odysseus in an impossible position for a spear throw or thrust at the monster, and even to the latest interpretation (mentioned in the *Ulisse* catalogue) of the hero's action, as about to grab the remaining steering oar (p. 116). Since, however, constant modifications are being made to the recomposed fragments, these reasonable strictures need not be discussed here. (For the author's objections to the reconstruction of the Theft of the Palladion after the cista from Megiste, see his pp. 24–28.) Even the newly uncovered mosaic emblema from Gubbio, „questionably dated ca. 100 B.C.“ (p. 116), although closer to the Sperlonga composition, confirms the existence of a two-dimensional model.

A further point in the author's favor is the fact that the Rhodians' presumed inclination for placing sculpture within natural settings cannot be demonstrated on present evidence. The Rhodini 'park', as the author stresses (p. 36), was a cemetery, not a pleasure spot; and a recent article by E. E. RICE (*Grottoes on the Acropolis of Hellenistic Rhodes. Ann. British School Rome* 90, 1995, 383–404) has strongly argued against the presence of monumental compositions within Rhodian grottoes.

Works in the minor arts have been adduced by Andreae also to establish the dates of the Theft of the Palladion, the Pasquino Group, and even the Achilles and Penthesileia and the Laokoon, although these last two compositions are not represented at Sperlonga. But the Achilles and Penthesileia group

seems dependent on the Pasquino (the author, p. 60, points to the otherwise meaningless turn of Achilles' head, whose frontality in fact makes the love link between the two figures unclear), and the Laokoon was by the same masters who signed at Sperlonga. They are therefore relevant to the general discussion. The author's conclusion is clear: minor-art works can indeed be used to prove the precedence of monumental prototypes in the round, but the opposite also applies: large-scale statuary may have derived inspiration from two-dimensional compositions, especially when the latter are considerably earlier than the sculptures in question (p. 34). Variations in poses and details may be explained as modifications according to media, but also, and perhaps more likely, as eclectic renderings of generic motifs that can be recombined and juxtaposed without following a specific pattern, as will be especially true of later Imperial sarcophagi (p. 40 and n. 70). Eclecticism is usually seen as a symptom of decadence or lack of imagination, often even as a sign of misunderstanding of 'proper' style, but largely because of modern prejudice. The author rightly considers it a form of emancipation, typical of Augustan propaganda (p. 53).

I am in perfect agreement with these general principles. My difficulties begin when the author tries to strengthen his chronological assessment by pointing out differences between the Sperlonga compositions and what he considers Classical and high-Hellenistic groups (p. 34). I am not at all confident that the Ludovisi (Suicidal) Gaul, for instance, truly copies an Attalid dedication (p. 38), or that the well-known Niobids belong at the turn from the fourth into the third century B.C. (pp. 37, 48). Nor can I accept as Lysippan the so-called Sandalbinder, which the author compares (p. 48) to the Laokoon's older son (for my position on the Attalid dedications, see my *Hellenistic Sculpture 1* [*op. cit. supra*], 284–304, especially the last page; cf. also pp. 82–84 on the Niobids. On the Sandalbinder, see now B. S. RIDGWAY, *Fourth Century Styles in Greek Sculpture* [1997] 307–308).

To me, even the discrepancy in size between father and children in this famous composition is not so much an indication of the culmination of sorrow in the stricken priest of Apollo (p. 52; cf. n. 92), but rather a manifestation of that expressionism typical of Italic art which tends to emphasize significant elements regardless of relative proportions. Finally, I no longer believe in the evolution of styles, which would allow us to assign specific chronological spans to baroque or classicizing trends, as the author seems to suggest (pp. 59–60). I am convinced that, from the late fifth century B.C. onward, different styles coexisted and that stylistic choices for the sculptors increased as time progressed toward the inception of the Christian era, as indeed can be established for the Imperial phase, when only specific techniques rather than styles can provide us with a basis for precise dating. In this connection, I want to recall the apparent idiosyncrasy of the – undoubtedly genuine – „Creeping Odysseus“ in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, whose definite archaistic rendering stands in marked contrast to the ‚mid-Hellenistic‘ style of other epic sculptural representations. Although a baroque or classical tone was presumably considered better suited to such narrative compositions, this early Imperial sculpture of Odysseus probably creeping toward the Palladion clearly demonstrates an intent to allude to remote times, as appropriate for ‚Homeric‘ events (B. S. RIDGWAY, *the Archaic Style in Greek Sculpture* [1990] 456, fig. 149).

As a final comment, let me mention the Fourth Langford Conference, on „Sperlonga and the Pergamon Altar“, which was held at the Florida State University in Tallahassee on February 21–22, 1997. The papers presented on that occasion will be published and shall stand on their own merits. A few points, not necessarily complementary, can however be anticipated. Among the speakers, Peter Green pointed out that the tradition of Odysseus carrying Achilles' corpse (according to Andrae's reading of the Sperlonga Pasquino) goes back well before Ovid's *Metamorphoses* – where it represents a boastful and untruthful claim – since it occurs, in a variant account, in the *Little Iliad* (fr. 32). Green, on the other hand, stressed the appropriateness of equating Ajax with Tiberius, since the Emperor's unusual strength and size had caused him to be nicknamed after the Aiginetan hero (Iuv. sat. 10,84). H. Anne Weis rejected both the Greek and the Ovidian associations of the Pasquino group, reading it instead in a Vergilian light which she then extended to the entire sculptural program of the grotto. Finally, Stephan Steingraber and Nancy T. de Grummond explored the possible Etruscan connections of both themes and places.

To me, it seems essential that the Sperlonga sculptures be examined in the light of their Italian location and, probably, tradition. Yes, the actual sculptors were Rhodians, but they were working for a specific Roman customer, for whom they were capable of providing whatever he desired – as were the Greek manufacturers of the luxury objects being shipped to Italy on the earlier Mahdia boat. We should also free ourselves from the shadow of the Pergamon Altar and of Pergamon itself – a shadow cast primarily because its sculpture is virtually our only evidence for the artistic production of the Hellenistic period, now that the riches of Alexandria, Antioch, and Macedonia are lost to us. Rhodes should not be exalted beyond its due, given the very limited sculptural evidence we possess from the island itself (see, on this subject, J. ISAGER, *The Lack of Evidence for a Rhodian School*. *Mitt. DAI Rom* 102, 1995, 115–131). Most important, we should abandon our prejudice against ‚copies‘, eclecticism, and a Roman destination or date of manufacture, which makes us unconsciously consider inferior any work that is not

a ‚Hellenistic original‘. The author’s book goes a long way in this direction and is a welcome addition to the Sperlonga literature.

Bryn Mawr

Brunilde Sisondo Ridgway