

A NEW RELIEF WITH HERACLES  
IN THE NORTH-WESTERN CRIMEA

E.A. Popova and S.A. Kovalenko

Recently, testimony to how widely the cult of Heracles spread among the Greeks who inhabited the far *chora* of the Chersonesian state in north-western Crimea has been provided by an interesting find. In 1996, during excavation of the tower of the Chersonesian fortress situated near the modern town of Evpatoria in the Crimea and known in the literature as 'Chaika settlement' (see map in Popova/Kovalenko 1996, 64), a stone relief with a depiction of Heracles was found. It is the third such find discovered at this spot (for publication of the reliefs found earlier, see Yatsenko 1977; Popova/Kovalenko 1996).

Like the two previous reliefs this latest discovery is made of local limestone. It is small: 12 x 16 cm. The thickness of the rectangular stone tablet on which the relief is cut is about 4.5-5.0 cm (Fig. 1). The tablet has no rims but Heracles stands on a ledge which was left along its lower edge. Its front surface and its lateral facets were carefully hewn and polished. Heracles is depicted standing *en face*, leaning with his right hand on a club which rests on the ground. A lionskin, which trails on the ground, is thrown over his outstretched left hand, in which he holds an object, possibly a drinking-horn (rhyton?). Traces of respectively yellow and blue paint were visible on the lionskin and horn. The relief has been preserved almost completely. Only a part of the ledge on which Heracles stands has been broken off. The height of the actual relief depiction is about 1.0-1.5 cm. A peculiarity of the relief is the presence of a special projection (about 1 cm high and 2.7 cm wide) cut for the whole thickness of the tablet in the centre of its upper facet. It corresponds with the position of Heracles' head (Fig. 1).

The find is very interesting for demonstrating the traditions of Greek monumental art which were preserved in the distant areas of the Greek colonisation and were reflected in the production of local artists but also for the archaeological context in which it was discovered. First of all, Heracles' pose is a traditional one for statues depicting him (*LIMC* IV, *s.v.* nos. 319-21, 380, 436, 461). Undoubtedly, it originates from copying some monumental sculpture which might have stood in Chersonesus but which has not



Fig. 1. A Relief with Heracles from the Chaika Settlement (Excavations of the Department of Archaeology, Moscow Lomonosov University, Director E.A. Popova. The relief is kept in the Evpatoria Local Museum, Crimea). 12 x 16 cm.

survived into our time. The popularity of this iconographic scheme in the Hellenistic-Roman period is confirmed by finds in various regions of the ancient world, including Chersonesus and its *chora* of stone reliefs depicting Heracles standing *en face* with club, lionskin and other attributes of his heroic exploits (*LIMC* IV, *s.v.* nos. 311, 383, 385, 431, 450-1; Bibikov 1976, nos. 60-2; Shcheglov 1978, fig. 66, 1; Popova/Kovalenko 1996, figs. 3-4). In the relief under discussion, Heracles stands with his weight on his right leg, his left is slightly bent forward; his right hand rests on his club which, in turn, rests on the ground (Fig. 1). Although the familiar pose and attributes have been reproduced, the artist has failed to communicate the feeling of hidden movement and liveliness so usual in ancient monumental art. Instead, Heracles has a stiff, clumsy pose. Heracles is shown slightly bent to the left side, which is contrary to what is natural for this iconography of hand on club. The artist has tried to reproduce the feeling of movement in the rest of the depiction but succeeded only in an imitation of walking; overall, the pose is stiff and schematic, at variance with the ease and naturalness usual in monumental sculpture.

The anatomical details of the human form are reproduced awkwardly and badly proportioned: the combination of short legs, a lengthened torso, long neck, and tight, slanting shoulders gives an appearance of weakness which contrasts with the physical strength normally conveyed in depictions of Heracles. The musculature of the body is not well shown; the belly and chest are just marked with shallow straight lines. The head is reproduced schematically. It is beardless, indicating that this is a depiction of the young Heracles at the beginning of his heroic life. The schematic and flat nature of the depiction is just emphasised by the artist's naive attempt to strengthen its volume by hewing off the upper facet and leaving a relief projection behind the head. The artist's insufficient knowledge of anatomy is partly compensated by the good quality of the reproduction of the attributes: the knotty surface of the club is shown in quite a realistic manner; the lionskin falls smoothly from the left hand, one side touching the ground, the other gathered into folds. The object in Heracles' outstretched left hand is not clear: it appears like a rhyton or a torch. Its shape and dimensions are similar to *cornucopia*, and statues and *hermae* of Heracles with this attribute are well-known (*LIMC* IV, *s.v.* nos. 1165-6). However, it is noteworthy that he always holds *cornucopia* in a peculiar manner — leaning on his humerus or bent elbow. On this relief the fingers of his left hand clasp the lower part of the object firmly, fixing it in a vertical position. The most plausible interpretation of the object seems to be a drinking-horn (or rhyton). Depictions of Heracles with various vessels for drinking wine (skyphoi, kantharoi, rhyta, bowls) are known in monumental and miniature works of ancient plastic art (*LIMC* IV, *s.v.* nos. 763-4, 769-70, 772-3, 786, 788). He is shown at rest or making a sacrifice (Shcheglov 1994, pl. 1, 3). Depictions of him with a rhyton are quite rare and usually the rhyton has small dimensions

(*LIMC* IV, s.v. nos. 770, 772-3). On this relief the object has the shape of a rhyton — even its roundish rim is visible — and it may have been shown a bit larger than scale to make its recognition easier.

The new relief from Chaika belongs to the very original images of Heracles, made of stone in the settlements of the far *chora* of Chersonesus (Shcheglov 1978, fig. 66). In style it is very similar to the monument from Panskoe-I (Shcheglov 1976, 135; 1978, fig. 66, 1). The iconography is very close. On the relief from Panskoe-I, Heracles is reproduced in a flatter manner, but the artist proved more skilled in his treatment of human anatomy, reproducing the correct proportions of the body and the physical strength of the hero. The attributes of his heroic life were placed close by his figure on the rock. Such monuments can hardly be considered as the imported output of Chersonesian artists (Bibikov 1976, 30). Numerous finds in Chersonesus of fragments of undoubtedly local sculpture testify to both the widespread familiarity of Chersonesian artists with the best examples of ancient monumental art and their much higher craftsmanship, artistry and quality of production (*cf.* Bibikov 1976).

A combination of iconography usual for the late Classical-early Hellenistic period with the quite limited set of descriptive methods used by local artists brought about the creation of works which were quite naive in the eyes of skilled artists but which give a quite vivid impression of the ideology and wishes of the customer. Although exhibiting a similar lack of skill in reproducing the human form or perspective, these reliefs were the individual works of various artists. They were not mass produced, nor did they belong to one artistic school.

So far, three reliefs depicting Heracles have been found at the Chaika settlement. One shows him lying down and feasting (Popova/Kovalenko 1996, fig. 2); the others, standing (Popova/Kovalenko 1996, figs. 3-4; Fig. 1). They were found on the same settlement and date approximately from the same period — second half of the 4th-beginning of the 3rd century BC. However, their style and artistic level are so individual that it has become clear that not only were they made by completely different artists but by artists whose style had been determined mainly by personal skill and experience and not through belonging to some artistic school. Some common technical features, such as the ledge on which the subject stands, or his head standing out against the upper facet of the relief (Popova/Kovalenko 1996, figs. 3-4), do not invalidate this conclusion. Use of such reliefs in domestic sanctuaries, where they would be visible only to family members, minimised any problems the customer might have about their artistic quality. It may be supposed that there were inhabitants of the settlement possessing some experience in the artistic processing of stone and who could have executed the Chaika reliefs. The Chaika finds, showing various iconographic schemes of depiction of the one personage, indicate that the choice of pose

probably resulted from the worship of different aspects of the cult of Heracles and not the different fashion adopted in the city and *chora* to images of him (Shcheglov 1994, 140).

In this connexion the archaeological context in which the relief was found is quite important. It has been discovered in one of the semi-cellar rooms of the tower of the west fortress wall which flanked on the north entrance to the fortress. The room had been specially designed for winemaking: it was paved and had a pressing-ground. On the paving many wine amphorae and pythoi were discovered. As well as the stone relief, fragments of a large terracotta figurine of a clothed female figure, which may be identified as Demeter, and a miniature stone altar with stepped base, relief pediments on each side and acroteria at the corners have been found in the fill of the room. Such a set of finds, obviously connected with religious cults in the winery, is hardly accidental. Most probably it testifies to the existence on the second floor of a domestic sanctuary where the cults of Heracles and Demeter could be worshipped simultaneously, as on another Chersonesian rural settlement Panskoe-I (Shcheglov 1976, 138-9). After the destruction of the tower the objects placed on the second floor fell through into the area below. The position of the tower in the layout of the settlement, and the archaeological material found during its excavation, allow us to date it to the middle-second half of the 4th century BC.

Publication of the new relief of Heracles inevitably involves the question of the worship of different aspects of his cult in the settlements of the Chersonesian *chora*. There are now several ways of approaching this problem. S. Saprykin believes that the main side of the cult was chthonic, not only in the metropolis of Chersonesus — Heracleia Pontica — but in the Chersonesian state itself, where the cult of Heracles was closely linked with ancestor worship (Saprykin 1987, 52). Depictions of the recumbent feasting Heracles confirm this opinion, reflecting life on Olympus after Heracles was deified and had achieved immortality. Another aspect of the chthonic side of the cult was underlined by E. Solomonik (1984, 14): patronage of agriculture and fertility. V. Stolba points to the importance of its soteric function: Heracles was first of all protector and patron of the Chersonesites (Stolba 1989, 61-9). There were depictions of the standing Heracles, which clearly demonstrated his physical strength and essential heroism and obviously reflected ancient Greek ideas about him as defender and patron of mere mortals.

It is noteworthy that the new relief contains features which can be connected to both the chthonic and soteric sides of his cult. His pose, showing him as protector and defender, holding symbols of his heroic exploits, doubtless reflects his soteric function. At the same time the presence of the rhyton, which is an attribute of the posthumous feast and, thus, of his deification, points to his connection with the other world in which he has immortality. Thus, the relief reflects a quite curious phenomenon: the combination of the

different functions of one deity in a single monument, and gives very important new material for understanding the content of the Heracles cult and its worship by the inhabitants of the far *chora* of Chersonesus.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

- LIMC* *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*.  
*SA* *Sovetskaya Arkheologia* (Soviet Archaeology) (in Russian).  
*VDI* *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* (Journal of Ancient History) (in Russian).

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E.A. Popova, Department of Archaeology, Faculty of History, Moscow State Lomonosov University, Vorobevy Gory, 119899 Moscow, Russia.  
S.A. Kovalenko, Griechisches Münzwerk, Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Jägerstr. 22/23, D-10117 Berlin, Germany.