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The British Museum Bronze Hoard from Paramythia, North Western Greece: Classical Trends Revived in the 2nd and 18th Centuries A.D.

Judith SWADDLING

A summary

The Paramythia bronze hoard has been known since the eighteenth century, but it has never been fully published and certain aspects deserve consideration. Among the problems are the integrity of the hoard, its actual provenance, and above all, its date.

The Paramythia bronzes in the British Museum comprise the following:

1. Venus adjusting her sandal. *BM Catalogue of Bronzes* (1899) nr. 280. Ht. 17,5 cm. *Pl. 49, fig. 1.*
2. Apollo stringing his bow. *Ibid.* nr. 272. Ht. 24,8 cm. *Pl. 49, fig. 2.*
3. Castor. *Ibid.* nr. 277. Ht. 34,0 cm. *Pl. 50, fig. 3.*
4. Dione. *Ibid.* nr. 279. Ht. 30,3 cm. *Pl. 50, fig. 4.*
5. Serapis, seated. *Ibid.* nr. 276. Ht. 16,2 cm. *Pl. 51, fig. 5.*
6. Odysseus escaping beneath a ram. *Ibid.* nr. 1446. Ht. 5,6 cm. *Pl. 51, fig. 6.*
7. Jupiter. *Ibid.* nr. 275. Ht. 19,6 cm. *Pl. 52, fig. 7.*
8. Poseidon. *Ibid.* nr. 274. Ht. 21,9 cm. *Pl. 52, fig. 8.*
9. Mercury, seated. BM acquisition nr. 1904.10-10.1. Ht. 22,8 cm. *Pl. 53, fig. 9.*
10. Lar. *Ibid.* nr. 278. Ht. 23,3 cm. *Pl. 53, fig. 10.*
11. Medallion with head of Apollo as sun-god. *Ibid.* nr. 273. Diameter 8,2 cm. *Pl. 54, fig. 11.*
12. Arm from a statuette. *Ibid.* nr. 281₁. Length 19,3 cm. *Pl. 54, fig. 12.*
13. Bull's hoof and fetlock. *Ibid.* nr. 281₂. Ht. 7,0 cm. *Pl. 55, fig. 13.*
14. Repoussé relief from a mirror-case; Aphrodite visiting Anchises on Mount Ida, with two Erotes and a dog. BM acquisition nr. 1904.7-2.1. Ht. 15,3 cm. *Pl. 55, fig. 14.*

The bronzes are of fine workmanship; several have eyes and finger-nails inlaid with silver, and nipples inlaid with copper.

Firstly, an account of the more recent history of the bronzes is essential to the discussion¹.

A hoard of some twenty bronzes was unearthed by some Albanian peasants near Paramythia, north-western Greece in 1791-1792. Although the provenance of the bronzes has always been known as Paramythia, this is not an accurate location. According to Leake the actual findspot was several kilometres away at a village called Labovo, near the modern Liboni, and standing on the site of the ancient Photice, which flourished as a Roman and Byzantine town (*pl. 57, fig. 17*)². The finds from this region are, significantly, predominantly Roman.

The peasants took the bronzes to Ioannina and sold them as scrap metal, but a dealer who had seen similar items in a private collection in Moscow quickly bought up as many of the items as he could retrieve for little more than the scrap value of the metal. He took them to Leningrad, and had agreed on a sale to the Empress Catharine of Russia when her sudden death ended the bargain. Nine of the bronzes were then purchased by a Mr. Wierislawski, a learned Polish traveller who kept them at Warsaw for a time. A further six were bought by the

Count Golowkin and the whereabouts of these is now unknown; they constituted a Jupiter, a Juno, a bearded faun, a Cupid, a Hekataion and a Hercules.

Meanwhile, Richard Payne Knight, numismatist and art collector, had purchased another of the bronzes, the Jupiter (nr. 7), which had found its way to England. Delighted with this, when Payne Knight heard that more of the Paramythia bronzes were available he immediately sent an agent to Warsaw who managed to purchase the nine owned by Wierislawski. The Earl of Aberdeen presented Payne Knight with two fragmentary pieces also from Paramythia—a finely modelled arm (nr. 12) and a bull's hoof (nr. 13). Payne Knight's entire collection of bronzes was bequeathed to the British Museum in 1824.

Eighty years later, in 1904, two more Paramythia bronzes were acquired by the British Museum from the collection of the antiquary John Hawkins. These were a relief from a mirror-case (nr. 14) and a statuette of Mercury seated (nr. 9). Both were formerly owned by Robert Walpole. The Mercury had been presented to Walpole by Dimitrio Vassili, a merchant of Ioannina, a year or two after the discovery of the hoard. The relief was purchased by Walpole in 1798 and said to have been discovered at the same place as the Paramythia group a year or two before his arrival; it cannot therefore be certainly considered as part of the original hoard, which was found some years earlier.

According to a manuscript catalogue by Payne Knight of his own collection, a very small terminal bust, 3.8 cm. high, (*pl. 56, fig. 15*)³ also came from Paramythia but the text is ambiguous and I have not been able to find any other source which mentions this association.

Since the discovery of the bronzes they have been traditionally dated on historical grounds to the 2nd century B.C. They were thought to be the household deities of a wealthy family, a supposition which now seems even more likely in view of the overall similarity of the bronzes from the *Iararium* excavated at Avenches in 1916⁴. The Paramythia bronzes were thought to have been buried for safety during the Roman invasion of Epirus in 167 B.C. Hammond, in his recent topographical survey of Epirus, suggests an even earlier date in the 3rd century B.C., linking the bronzes with the prosperous period of the Epirote league, and in particular associating the Paramythia statuettes of Serapis with the cult whose introduction in that area he ascribes to Pyrrhus⁵. But this can be regarded only as a *terminus post quem* for the statuettes.

It is now essential to establish the general period of the bronzes from the point of view of style and iconography. Most of the Paramythia objects fall into two groups: those that could be considered Hellenistic, and those that are more obviously Roman.

To the first group belong the Venus, the Apollo, the Castor, the Dione, the Serapis and Odysseus escaping beneath the ram (nr. 1-6). To the second group belong the Jupiter, the Poseidon, the Mercury and the Apollo medallion (nr. 7-11).

There are however certain features in some of the statuettes of both groups which indicate a stylistic association. The Castor, the Apollo and the Mercury for example are related to one another by the summary treatment of anatomy, the imprecise forms and the heavy, sloping shoulder-muscles. The anatomy of the Jupiter and the Poseidon also shows a certain lack of understanding; the representation of the muscles is aimed at effect rather than realism. The horizontal ridge below the chest, for example, does not bear any relation to nature. Both statuettes have the same thick-set proportions. They both exhibit the same treatment of the hair which forms a mane-like frame around the face, and of the beards with their intricately curling locks. The deep-set eyes and bulge of the forehead above the nose are further common characteristics. All these features also occur on two other statuettes in the British Museum, a Poseidon from Lyons, and a Jupiter from Hungary, which have been dated between the 2nd and 4th centuries A.D.⁶

A tiny silver statuette of Serapis, 4 cm. high, may have been found with the Paramythia bronzes, but unfortunately Payne Knight's manuscript is ambiguous here (*pl. 56, fig. 16*)⁷. Vermeule has commented that the conventional date for the Paramythia bronzes (*i.e.* 2nd century B.C.) would give the silver statuette an unusually early dating⁸. If the statuette does belong to the hoard, and if, as in my view, the Paramythia bronzes are Roman, then there is no reason why the statuette should not be given a more plausible later dating.

A further recommendation in favour of dating all the Paramythia bronzes to one period is the chemical analysis, performed by Dr. Paul Craddock in the British Museum Research Laboratory. Certain of the figures are especially close in relative quantities of particular elements, so close that they may even have been cast from the same batch of alloy. In addition, on average they have an overall high tin content and low lead content.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM BRONZE HOARD FROM PARAMYTHIA

	CU	PB	SN	AG	FE	SB	NI	AU	CO	AS	CD	BI	ZN
Apollo Lar	86.50 87.50	0.50 0.95	11.70 11.80	0.14 0.04	0.14 0.085		0.02 0.06						
Venus Jupiter Poseidon	86.00 86.50 86.00	3.70 2.30 4.10	10.60 10.70 10.40	0.04 0.05 0.03	0.025 0.16 0.02	0.04 0.40 0.06	0.02 0.15 0.02			0.05	0.001	0.003 0.02	0.10
Medallion Serapis Castor Mercury Arm Hoof	83.00 86.00 81.50 79.00 89.50 85.00	3.20 0.60 9.10 13.00 2.50 3.80	12.70 12.50 9.30 8.90 10.90 9.00	0.09 0.03 0.05 0.07 0.07 0.02	0.28 (TR) 0.30 0.05 0.04 0.95	(TR) (TR) 0.10 0.13 (TR) 0.30	0.03 0.11 0.04 0.03 0.01 0.20	(TR) (TR)	0.005	(TR) 0.17	0.001	(TR) 0.03	0.25 0.08 0.06 0.009
Dione	65.00	30.50	3.00	0.10	0.02	0.15	0.05					(TR)	

Only the analysis of the Dione differs outstandingly, with a high lead content of 30% but this is not an unacceptable analysis for either Hellenistic or Roman times. This particular alloy may have contained a good deal of scrap, which must have been a common constituent in many ancient alloys. The trace elements of each bronze are so similar that Dr. Craddock has suggested a common source of copper for each of the statuettes⁹.

To conclude, there are three main points in favour of the bronzes being Roman:

Firstly, the bronzes came probably from a Roman site.

Secondly, the bronzes are likely to be the contents of a *lararium*, especially in view of their overall likeness to the bronzes from the *lararium* excavated at Avenches, which have been dated to the 2nd century A.D. onwards.

Thirdly, the style of some of the bronzes suggests that they are Roman, and although others could be Hellenistic, there is no reason why they should not be Roman, particularly since analogies in style and chemical analysis point to the homogeneity of the group.

The Paramythia bronzes are classicising in style, and therefore the most likely period for their manufacture would appear to be the classical revival under Hadrian. It was the appeal of classical art in the 18th century which made the bronzes so much in demand by rival collectors¹⁰.

Notes

¹ The main sources are to be found in *Society of Dilettanti, Specimens of Ancient Sculpture* 2 (1835) lxxv-lxxvii; A. Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* (1835) 119-120 & references there cited; R. Walpole, *Travels in Various Countries of the East, European and Asiatic Turkey* 2 (1820) 481-2; and the manuscript catalogues of Richard Payne Knight and Edward Hawkins.

² W.M. Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece* 4 (1835) 62; N.G.L. Hammond, *Epirus* (1967) 580.

³ H.B. Walters, *British Museum Catalogue of Bronzes* (1899) nr. 1232.

⁴ A. Leibundgut, *Die römischen Bronzen der Schweiz, 2, Avenches* (1976) nr. 9, 15, 22, 23, 28, 30.

⁵ Hammond *op. c.* 581.

⁶ Poseidon: Walters *op. c.* nr. 786; Jupiter: Walters *op. c.* nr. 909.

⁷ H.B. Walters, *British Museum Catalogue of Silver* (1921) pl. 6.

⁸ C. Vermeule, *Greek and Roman Sculpture in Gold and Silver* (1974) nr. 13.

⁹ I should like to thank Dr. M.S. Tite, Dr. P.T. Craddock and Mrs. Frances Winter of the British Museum Research Laboratory for their generous assistance in providing scientific information for this paper.

¹⁰ I am grateful to the Trustees of the British Museum for granting me permission to attend the Colloquium and to the Comité d'Organisation for allowing me to present this paper. Thanks are also due to my colleagues in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, British Museum, for their helpful advice and comments.

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