

PORPHYRIOS DIKAIOS

A TERRACOTTA RELIEF FROM MARION  
AND THE PALAIKASTRO HYMN

The terracotta fragmentary relief pictured on fig. 1 now in the Cyprus Museum (Inventory D. 224) comes from Marion (modern Polis tis Chrysochous). It formed part, evidently of the front, of a couch of a funerary statue such as are found in the necropolis of Marion (figs. 2—3) and dating from the fourth cent. B.C. It was described in the Catalogue of the Cyprus Museum by J. L. Myres and Ohnefalsch-Richter, Oxford 1899, under No. 3245 on p. 112<sup>1</sup> (see also my Guide to the Cyprus Museum 3<sup>d</sup> ed. 1961 pp. 209ff.).

The aim of these notes is to suggest an interpretation and connect the scene of the relief with the cult of Zeus-Velchanos on the one hand and the Palaikastro hymn on the other<sup>2</sup>.

The relief represents at the right end a tree in which a young nude male figure (now headless) is seated. By the trunk of the tree is another similar young, also nude, male figure but standing. The tree is flanked by two draped female figures the one on the left looking up at the youth seated in the tree and the other looking at the youth standing by the trunk of the tree. On the left of the above group is a palm tree with draped figures on either side. Near the broken edge of the relief appear the ends of the branches of another palm tree. There is room for more figures. The object at the extreme right end is the leg of the couch (fig. 2 and Ohnefalsch-Richter, *Kypros, the Bible and Homer* pl. 187, 1,4). The same kind of leg appears on the terracotta statue on fig. 3, also from Marion.

The first parallel which comes to the mind for the young male figure seated in a tree is the coin of Phaestos on the obverse of which appears a youthful male figure seated in the fork of a tree exactly

<sup>1</sup> See also P. Hermann, *Das Gräberfeld von Marion auf Cypern*, Berlin 1888, and O. Richter, *Kypros, the Bible and Homer* plates 186—7.

<sup>2</sup> In 1943 I presented to the Society of Kypriakai Spoudai a communication on the relief: see *Κυπριακαί Σπουδαί* Z, p. 126

as on our relief but holding in the right hand a cock.<sup>3</sup> In the field inscription FEAXANOS, i. e. (Zeus) Velchanos<sup>4</sup> (fig. 4). It is therefore, reasonable to consider the youth in the tree of the relief as Zeus-Velchanos, the latter being, according to Hesychius, the name of Zeus used by the Cretans (Ζεύς παρὰ Κρησίν). The existence in Cyprus of the name Velchanos for Zeus has also been suspected thanks to an inscription discovered at Atheaenou<sup>5</sup> which records a derivative name Φαλχάνιος. Moreover certain inscriptions discovered in Gortyna and Lyttos<sup>6</sup> mention a feast with the name of Βελχάνια.

Our relief then may be an illustration of a similar feast which probably took place at Marion (see below). Here we may introduce the Palaikastro hymn<sup>7</sup> which was found in the temple of Zeus Dikaios and which celebrates the youthful Zeus whom it beseeches to come annually conferring good luck and fertility on fields, men and cities<sup>8</sup>. The youth first pictured in the tree and then standing by the trunk of the tree, seems to be young Zeus who, after the ἐπὶ κλησὶς »'Ιώ etc. ἀ[μὴν θόρε κὲς στα]μνία, καὶ θορ' εὐποκ' ἐ[ς ποίμνια κὲς λή]α καρπῶν θόρε etc.<sup>9a</sup>, has leapt down from the tree to the earth to confer fertility as stated in the hymn. If this interpretation is correct it would lend weight to Nilssons' interpretation of the Palaikastro hymn and particularly of the words Θόρε ἐς which he translates "leap into" and not "leap on behalf of" as suggested by Miss Harrison<sup>9</sup>. The youthful god "leapt into" from the tree in order to confer good luck and fertility.

The same interpretation of the Marion relief would also strengthen Nilssons' opinion about the meaning of Μέγιστος Κοῦρος mentioned

<sup>3</sup> Head, *Historia Numorum* p. 473 fig. 253; Svoronos, *Num. de la Crète Anc.* pl. XXIII, 24—26; Ch. Seltman, *Greek coins*, p. 170 and pl. XXXVII, 1. Seltman considers the tree of the coin as a willow-tree; cp. A. B. Cook, *Zeus* II 946, and R. F. Willetts, *Cretan Cults and Festivals*, London 1962, 177f.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. also the coin of Gortyna with Europa seated in tree: Head op. cit. p. 466 fig. 248 (fig. 5)

<sup>5</sup> Meister, *LPz. Ber.* 62 p. 234ff. See also M. Bowra, *Homeric words in Cyprus*, *JHS* LIV, 1934 p. 62

<sup>6</sup> M. Guarducci, *Inscr. Cret.* I, XVIII 11, 3; IV 3, 1; 184, 3

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* III, II 2

<sup>8</sup> M. Nilsson, *A History of Greek religion*, Oxford 1949 p. 34; *BSA* XV, p. 358

<sup>9a</sup> Wilamowitz: ἀ[λλὰ βῶν θόρ' ἐς ποίμνια καὶ θόρ' εὐποκ' ἐ[ς πῶεα κὲς λά]α καρπῶν θόρε

<sup>9</sup> M. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and its survival in Greek religion*, 2nd ed. (1950) p. 549f.; cp. also Willetts op. cit. 214



Fig. 1

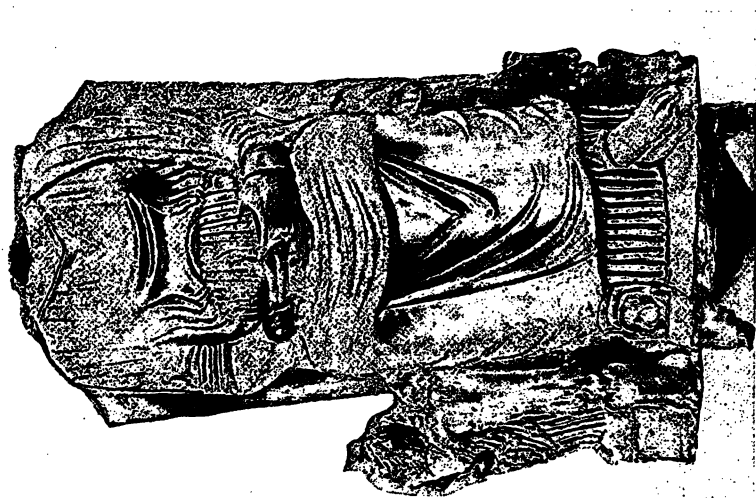


Fig. 2

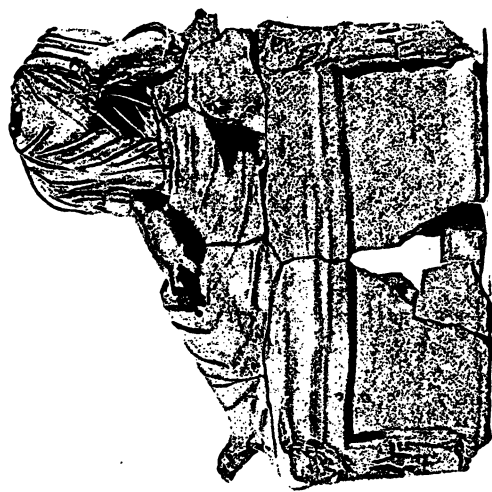


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Fig. 5

in the Palaikastro hymn namely that he is a youth and not a child<sup>10</sup>.

The words Δαίμόνων ἄγώμενος in the Palaikastro hymn as compared with the various persons female and male, in the Marion relief need comment. Nilsson<sup>11</sup> agrees that the δαίμονες are the *Couretes* who, however, do not appear as the armed dancers of mythology but as the daemons of fertility venerated in the Cretan rustic cult as accompanying the greatest Κούρος. On the Marion relief the men and women present are not the *thiasos* of Zeus Κούρος but evidently participants in the feast of Zeus Velchanos where the rite of ἐπὶ κλησὶς which is the gist of the Palaikastro hymn<sup>12</sup> is performed<sup>13</sup>. In fact the woman on the right looks up to the youth in the tree as if to call him to "leap" down while the other on the left looks at the youth already standing on the ground. Strabo XIV, 683 mentions a sacred grove dedicated to Zeus (Διὸς Ἄλσος) at Arsinoe the town which succeeded Marion, and it is possible that the annual feast suggested here took place in the Ἄλσος.

Thus the Marion relief is remarkable because it throws light on the cult of Zeus Velchanos in Cyprus which was suspected thanks to the Atheaenou inscription (see above). If the association of the relief with the Palaikastro hymn is correct then its contribution to the interpretation of certain passages in that hymn is valuable. As already stated the Marion relief belongs to the fourth century B.C. which agrees with the early date of the Palaikastro hymn. Gilbert Murray and others think that the hymn, although of the third century A.D., is older, possibly Hellenistic<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit. p. 547

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit. p. 547ff.

<sup>12</sup> Nilsson op. cit. p. 549

<sup>13</sup> It is quite possible that the relief comes from a couch of the funerary statue of someone, who took part in the rite. I may quote a remarkable parallel for this rite *mutatis mutandis*, in modern Cyprus. On the Saturday before Palm Sunday the priests of each parish visit the homes and perform the resurrection of Lazarus. A youth, with garlands tied round his body of a kind of wild flower (*Chrysanthemum Coronarium* L.) which in common language is called λάζαρος, represents Lazarus himself. When the priest who recites the song of Lazarus' resurrection (cf. A. Σακελλαρίου, *Κυπριακά* II, pp. 82ff.) quotes Christ's words calling Lazarus from the grave, the youth who heretofore was lying on the ground as if dead, rises and smiles to those attending the ceremony. Unfortunately this delightful custom is now disappearing (see Magda H. Ohnefalsch-Richter, *Griechische Sitten und Gebräuche in Cypern* pp. 86ff. About comparisons between ancient and modern greek religious customs see E. Gjerstad, *Tod und Leben in Arch. f. Rel. Wiss.* XXVI/i-2, pp. 152ff.

<sup>14</sup> Nilsson op. cit. p. 546

The relief is also important because it throws light on the relations of Cyprus with Crete during the classical period. These relations date back from the early second millennium B.C.<sup>15</sup> and continued during the whole of the same millennium. In the Iron Age these relations continued<sup>16</sup> and the present relief is a welcome addition to the story of the connections, cultural and other, between the two great Islands.

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<sup>15</sup> See H. Catling and V. Karageorghis, *Minoica in Cyprus*, BSA 55 (1960) pp. 109ff. and my communication to the First Cretological Congress, 1961: Αἱ σχέσεις τῆς Κύπρου καὶ Κρήτης κατὰ τὴν Β' π. Χ. χιλιετηρίδα (forthcoming)

<sup>16</sup> E. Gjerstad, *Swedish Cyprus Expedition IV*, 2 pp. 292ff.