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SOME THOUGHTS ON “HERCULES FINDING TELEPHUS”

The *megalographia* “Hercules finding Telephus” (2.02x1.71m), an extremely well preserved wall mural found in the Basilica of Herculaneum, is one of the most typical examples of the fourth Pompeian style (Table 92). The work is dated back to the last years of Nero’s reign, although the theme depicted is, as is common, much older¹. Being the King of Mysia, Telephus is a persona known to the poets of the Epic Cycle; however, his childhood adventures were narrated by the tragic poets of the 5th century BC².

Having been warned by the Delphi oracle that the child of his daughter would kill his sons, the King of Tegea, Aleos, forced his daughter Auge to become a virgin priestess of Athena. However, passing through Tegea, Hercules met Auge and, while being heavily drunk, he raped her. When it was found out that Auge was pregnant, it was decided that she be killed. She was then either locked in a crate and thrown into the sea or sold as a slave. What is certain is that she was later found alive in Mysia. When infant, Telephos was exposed on Mount Parthenion, rescued by a female deer and, when he entered adulthood, went to Mysia as well, and later became its King. In his work *The Mysians*, Aeschylus refers only to Auge fleeing from Tegea. The first to narrate the marvelous story of how baby Telephus was saved was, as far as we know, Sophocles in his works *Aleadae* and *The Mysians*. Euripides was probably the one that conceived the pattern “father finds-recognises-restores his baby son”, i.e. the theme depicted on the Basilica wall mural.

The whole scene takes place in the countryside, amidst a rocky landscape. Hercules is first seen on the right having his back turned to the viewers. Leaning on his club, the hero is absorbed in watching what a winged figure half-hidden behind the rocks to the back is pointing to: a baby seated on the ground, in the lower left corner of the painting, is suckled by a female deer, which, at the same time, turns its head and licks it, as if it was her baby deer. Over this complex, opposite Hercules, an imposing female figure is seated on a rock. Her body almost facing the viewer, her raised left hand holding her sceptre –a knotty piece of wood- is “revealed” through the grandeur of a cult statue, and is the only one that is seemingly not touched by the miracle taking place next to her. Resting meditatively her head on her right hand, she gazes into the infinity, away from the scene. Next to her, a basket of fruit, pomegranates and grapes, and behind the rock she is seated on a half-hidden young satyr is watching the baby with a smile on his face. The scene is completed by an eagle with half-open wings between Telephus and Hercules, and, to the right, a lion seated on the ground behind Hercules.

What is immediately striking to the viewer is the fact that, although the scene takes place in the countryside, the landscape is depicted on a secondary level. The main focal point is the faces, and it is the physicality, the arrangement and the movement of the different human forms that create the 3D effect; on the contrary, some vague greyish and brownish shapes –something between rocks and clouds- were rather added to create the impression of an abstract scenery than a purely realistic representation. By cleverly placing the human forms of the first level (Telephus and Hercules) with their backs turned to the viewer, the illusion of depth is created and an imaginary circle is opened, which is closed by the two figures depicted on the third level (the

¹ Hermann-Bruckmann, *Denkmäler der Malerei des Altertums* (1904/44) 104 *et. seq.*, tables 78-80. F. Matz, *AM* 39, 1914, 65 *et. seq.*. E. Puhl, *MuZ* II (1923) 816 *et. seq.*, image 659. H. Diepolder, *RM* 41, 1926, 43 *et. seq.* L. Curtius, *Die Wandmalerei Pompejis* (1929) 229 *et. seq.* G. E. Rizzo, *La pittura ellenistico-romana* (1929) 41, table 69. M.B.Gabriel, *Masters of Campanoan Painting* (1952) 27 *et. seq.* R. Hamann, *AbhBerlin* 1952, 9 *et. seq.* W. Salomonson, *Oudheidkundige Medelingen N.R.* 38, 1957, 15 *et. seq.* M.Borda, *La pittura Romana* (1958) 241 *et. seq.*, table 16. E.Simon *JdI* 76, 1961, 138 *et. seq.*. A Majuri, *Le pitture di Pompei, Ercolano e Stabia nel Museo Nazionale di Napoli* (1964) 9 *et. seq.*, tables 3-4; V.Scherf, *Flügelwesen in Römischkampanischen Wandbildern* (1967) 139 *et. seq.*, G.Hafner, *Aachener Kunstblätter* 38, 1969, 231 *et. seq.*; Bauchhenss-Thürield, *Der Mythos von Telephos in der antiken Bildkunst* (1971). K.Shcefold, *La peinture pompéienne* (1972) 205-207, 261, 262.

² With regard to the available literary sources, see Roscher V (1924) λ. “Telephos” (J.Schidt).

young satyr and the winged female form). Various dark-coloured elements, the female deer, the eagle, the sunburnt skin of Hercules, the reddish-brown tunic and the greyish-brown wings of the female form, the young satyr, the fruit basket, are all placed on the perimeter of the scene projecting the brightly coloured body of the seated woman, which fills the circle and by being diagonally positioned functions as a transition from the third to the first level of the painting. This prevailing diagonal is extended to the back, in the upper left corner, by the head of the satyr and the pastoral rod he is holding slantwise, and to the front, in the lower right corner, by Hercules' bended leg and by the lion's leg. A second diagonal, very symmetrical to the other one, starts in the upper right corner with the wings and the head of the half-hidden female form and continues, being underlined by the dark-coloured rocks to the back, along her hand, which, like a luminous arrow, directs the gaze of Hercules and of the viewer to Telephus, and, after intersecting the other diagonal in the centre of the painting, is extended following the baby's body up to the lower left corner. Balance is achieved by vertical elements, such as the motionless body of Hercules, the raised arm holding the sceptre and the vertical folds of the tunic of the seated woman, the pipes of the *syrinx*, elements which underline the serenity and the sacred grandeur of the scene.

It is worth noting that all vertical motifs are arranged along the diagonal created by the three calming forms, while nothing seems to interrupt the movement of the second diagonal, where the two main acting figures are positioned diametrically.

The calculated use of tension created by the contrasting presence of the diagonal and the vertical, of movement and calmness, of light and shadow, of bright colours and dark ones, dressed bodies and nudity, is one of the main features of the composition, together with the restrained chromaticity expressed through the alternation of different hues and tints based on red, white, black, grey and their mixtures, with scarce green strokes that rather stress than disturb the chromatic austerity. At the same time, the advanced naturalistic perception is expressed through an experienced use of shading and realistic lighting. The light, the source of which is in the upper right corner, is refracted over the surface of the painting thus creating the various forms, and then it is consistently reflected on the tiniest details of the folds and the grapes.

A typical indication of the painter's skills is the way the Telephus-female deer theme is treated and integrated into the overall composition. By arranging the bodies and the movement of the two forms into a circle, this theme appears to be an autonomous, independent unit, while the inclination of the baby's body to the right links this complex with the diagonal formed by the winged female form and creates a balance with the movement of the left leg of Hercules. At the same time, by placing this complex on the first level of the painting, in a three-quarters back position, so that the light illuminates the child's body leaving the animal in the shadow –the lifted leg of the female deer leaving the view to the head of the baby unobstructed is a very clever trick– not only adds depth, but also visually underlines the form of the little hero juxtaposing, at the same time, the luminous form of the son against the dark body of the father, who is on the same painting level and is also seen in a three-quarters back position. Telephus is also where the gaze of Hercules and the other two forms closing the upper section of the scene focused on, "forcing", in a way, the viewer to look at the lower part of the painting, which is where the "miracle" happens.

All the above observations are more than enough, I believe, to indicate that "Hercules finding Telephus" is a work of a major artist, a composition with elements –and not only the morphological ones, as we will see– meticulously studied and interwoven in such a way so as to be impossible to remove anything without disturbing the fine harmony of the painting as a whole. However, it should be noted that the Basilica mural contains certain details, such as the less artfully drawn lion, that lead us to the conclusion that the creator of the composition and the

“Craftsman of Telephus” cannot be the same person. Based on our knowledge of painting in the region of Campania, three are the suggested alternative scenarios, as expected for such a major work of art that has been the object of research for many centuries. So, for some scholars³, the mural of Basilica is actually a classicising pasticcio of the 1st c. AD that was based on a very different original dating back to the 2nd c. BC. To refute this argument, it is more than enough to refer to the above morphological analysis, as well as to compare “Hercules finding Telephus” with other works, such as the “Maestro Chiaro” depicting god Pan seated among the Nymphs, which, unquestionably, is, indeed, a pasticcio⁴. Some others⁵ see here an original creation of the Imperial times. However, this theory, which was formulated in an effort to adequately interpret the seated female form, is not very convincing, since it is based on a highly debatable identification. Before proceeding to accept the seated form’s relation to the Roman goddess Tellus, which in these times, as far as we know, is never represented as in this mural, we should substantiate what is Roman in this painting and what is not⁶.

Most probably, the majority of scholars are right when arguing that this is a replica of a Greek work of art⁷. Moreover, as implied by the high quality and the cohesion of the scene depicted, as well as by the absence of any landscape elements, buildings, etc., which could be attributed to the reproducer, this well preserved work of art is a relatively faithful reproduction, similar to the ones of the battle of Issus and to the Boscoreale frescoes. The fact that this kind of reproduction remained intact until today is something not very common and, at the same time, very useful in attempting to date the original work, always having in mind the risks in doing so when our only source of information is this reproduction.

A common assumption⁸ is that the model used for the creation of the Basilica fresco was a work from Pergamon dating back to the 2nd c. BC. This link with Pergamon, which was first supported by O. Jahn⁹ in the 19th century, mainly originates from the scene depicted. The life and works of Telephus, the mythical ancestor of the Mysians naturally interested the leaders of Pergamon. Besides, the “Telephus frieze” of the Pergamon altar dedicated to Zeus narrating the life of Telephus, which, having been transported to Berlin and becoming more accessible to the archaeologists, was and still is one of the most important points of reference for art in the Hellenistic times, is a proof of this interest and almost “automatically” connects the original of the mural with the corresponding scene on the Telephus frieze, despite the obvious differences between the two –on the frieze, the step mother of Telephus is a lioness and not a female deer. However, the problem is more complex than it seems.

The myth of the miraculous salvation of the foundling, already known as early as the 5th c., had been depicted elsewhere long before it was represented on the altar frieze, as several monuments show, which, even though they are known from as early as the beginning of 20th c., scholars do not seem to have taken them too seriously. The earliest depiction was found on a signet dating back to the 5th c. from Bithynia¹⁰ depicting a child on his knees under a female deer looking straight ahead. The same theme is depicted on a mirror¹¹ found in fragments dating back to the end of the 4th c., as well as on the back side of a series of coins from Tegea¹² that date to the 4th c. and the first half of the 3rd c., where the deer turns her head looking back. The scene depicting the father finding his baby ornamented a large relief vessel, a fragment of which was

³ Diepolder, *loc. cit.*; Schefold, *loc. cit.*

⁴ Charbonneaux-Martin-Villard, *Das hellenistische Griechenland*, image 180.

⁵ Hamann, *loc. cit.*; Salomson, *loc. cit.*

⁶ This view is refuted in a very well-substantiated manner by Scherf, *loc. cit.*

⁷ See Bauchhenss-Thürield, *loc. cit.* 36 note 198.

⁸ The only exception is Lippold in his work *Antike Gemäldekopien*, AbhBerlin 33, 1951, who believes that the original was a lost work dating back to the 4th c.

⁹ Arch. Aufs. 1845, 161.

¹⁰ Bauchhenss, *loc. cit.* 78 no. 11.

¹¹ This find is of Greek origin, see E. Gerhard, ES I 25, 9. Rebuffat-Emanuel, *loc. cit.* 66.

¹² BMC Poloponnesos 202, 14.15.16.25 table 37, 16.

found in Tripolis of Arcadia¹³. The sherd, which is dated back to the period between the end of the 4th century and the end of the 3rd century, bears just the breast-feeding scene (Telephus is seated on the ground posing a three-quarters back position, stretching his hands to the animal's breast and facing upwards, the female deer is depicted sideways, facing to the right, with its head turned towards the baby) and to the left, behind the animal, Hercules' bended leg. However, it is rather interesting to observe that the pattern of the animal-baby complex, almost identical to the one depicted on the coins, is very similar to the one represented on the mural, although the different forms here are far more smoothly interwoven, thus attesting to a more advanced artistic technique. The Hercules' motif missing from the sherd, i.e. the god standing in a resting posture, leaning on his club, with his leg bended and his right hand on his waist –in essence, a variation of the mural- is presented on a fragmentarily saved relief depicting the same theme and showing the various forms in a similar arrangement; the relief was found on the shores of Laconia and resonates with artistic trends of the 4th century¹⁴. It is worth noting here that on the shoulders of Hercules one can see the edge of the diadem's headband, which means that this relief depicts the hero as a royal ancestor, as well.

These finds are crucial in the study of the Basilica mural, not only because of their resemblance. The fact that all of them were found in the region of Arcadia, the hero's birthplace, cannot be accidental, especially since it is widely known that an episode of the life of Telephos, the colonist and king of Mysia, was chosen to decorate the frieze of the greatest temple in the region¹⁵. It seems that the Heraclid from Tegea, at least in the second half of the 4th century, was so popular that his fellow-citizens decided their coins to depict the miracle of his salvation, a fact which indicates that, most probably, one could find even more monumental representations of the same theme in the region. This theory is supported by the resemblance observed between the coins and the reliefs, a resemblance that easily results in the assumption that all these are –more or less faithful- repetitions of the same model, of a work of art that should have impressed its contemporaries and could be dated on the basis of the *terminus ante quem* set by the coins, i.e. 240BC. Consequently, neither Pergamon is the only candidate for the original depiction of the "Hercules Finding Telephos" theme nor the mural's dependence on the altar's Telephos frieze can be considered as unquestionable.

The organisation of space on the basis of the physicality of forms and the restricted contribution of the landscape are both characteristics that remain within the strict classical tradition. The rocks, which gradually raise from the "horizon" of the image, are also found in a similar arrangement at the edges of the frieze in "Philip's tomb"¹⁶, while the positioning of the figures to the back on a higher level and behind the rocks almost hiding them and distinguishing them from the ones on the other level is an old trick commonly used by the pottery painters of the 4th century¹⁷. An invention of the 4th century is also the use of intersecting diagonals, a technique which was considered by some scholars a typical characteristic of the fourth Pompeian style¹⁸. This can be easily inferred by some pottery compositions¹⁹, and substantiated by the main scene depicted on the Vergina frieze, where the diagonal formed by the white hunting dog and the horse rider coming from the rear of the scene intersects at the head of the lion with the diagonal formed by the raised dog and the standing man holding a hatchet. An artistic trend of the same century seems to be the restricted chromatic scale that is based on the principle of the four-colour palette, while the advanced technique of chiaroscuro corresponds to the mosaic of Alexander and the Boscoreale frescoes. The interest for complex artistic lighting techniques, e.g.

¹³ CVA Copenhagen (4) 185, 5.

¹⁴ Smith, British Mus. Cat. Sculpture III, no. 1728 image 13.

¹⁵ The temple of Athena Alea.

¹⁶ M. Andronikos, *Βεργίνα* (1984), images 57-69.

¹⁷ E.g. Trendall-Cambitoglou, RFV LCS I, table 59, 7.

¹⁸ As, e.g., in M. Borda, *loc.cit.*; opposing argument by Scherf, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ Cf. Trendall-Cambitoglou, RFV LCS I, table 59, 7; RFV A I, table 57, 2.

chiaroscuro, which grew in artists in the turn of the century, is also attested by tradition with regard to a painting created by Antifilos depicting an adolescent blowing a fire.

A reference to the last third of the 4th century is unquestionably the figure of Hercules, which is nothing more than a painted version of the much-copied Farnese Hercules by Lysippos seen from behind –the bended leg and his back that turned to the viewer aim at integrating his figure into the composition. A characteristic form of this period is also the winged figure. The same stands for the eagle²⁰ and the lion head²¹. The baby-deer complex constitutes a standard modernistic element, a *genre scene*, typical of the Hellenistic taste²², which, according to the same view, dictates, in a way, the inclusion of a “still nature” theme, i.e. the fruit basket. The first part of this argument is immediately refuted by the representation of the breastfeeding scene on the coins; this “unnatural” adoption is an integral part of the myth and cannot be considered as corresponding to various artistic plays, such as the doves of Sosus of Pergamon or the boy with the goose. A similar mistake is trying to consider the fruit basket as being a simple supplement to the scene, since, together with the flower garland and the scepter, it is rather a symbol closely related to the figure it is presented with.

On the other hand, the positioning of the complex within the painting, in a three-quarters back position, was also common in the works of the artists of the 4th century. See, for example, the first rider from the left depicted on the Vergina frieze. In addition, the body form of the baby, i.e. the long and thin hands and legs and the small head, stands closer to the children depicted during this era than to the chubby babies prevailing in the artistic works of the Hellenistic times. Seated on the ground with one leg bended and the other stretched, leaning on his right hand and raising his head and his left hand, the young Telephus seems to be the painted version –from behind- of the archaic children’s sculptures²³ devoted in 320-310 to the Asclepeion.

Another typically posterior element is the young satyr. The smile that causes the cheeks to bulge thus disfiguring the face, analysing the painted surface into small, distinct forms, and breaking the outline is the main criterion that, as Scherf sums up²⁴, renders the dating of the figure to a period earlier than the late 3rd century rather improbable. It should be noted, however, that this is another example of a faithful replica of an element that was already used in its final form in the last twenty years of the 4th century, as indicated by the young satyr depicted on the ivory relief found in tomb III in Vergina²⁵. Unfortunately, the pipe covers the lower part of the young satyr’s face; however, the smile of the bearded god on the same relief causes the cheeks to bulge and analyses the painted surface into smaller forms, despite the figure’s idealised representation. Similar trends can be seen on the face-mask of Pan, i.e. the lamp bearer in Philip’s tomb²⁶, the animal grimace of which causes even greater changes on the surface and breaking of the outline, although this is an earlier work of art. These examples prove that, in certain rare cases, such realistic representations were already in use in the late-Classical times, although we should take into account the evolution between the young satyr on the mural and the Vergina examples. It is, nonetheless, worth questioning ourselves whether this evolution really took more than 100 years to be complete, especially since, in the first case, our work of art is a relief and, in the second, a painting.

Finally, the seated figure is, according to the prevailing theory²⁷, the main evidence of a later dating given its obvious classicising characteristics. However, this also needs a more careful,

²⁰ See W.Fucks, *Die Skulptur der Griechen* (1969), image 621.

²¹ Cf. the lion depicted on Alexander’s sarcophagus.

²² Charbonneaux *et al.*, *op. cit.* 154.

²³ Cf. Ch.Vorster, *Griechische Kinderstatuen* (1983) 372 no. 23, table 92.

²⁴ *Op. cit.* 147; this is actually a repetition of the argument formulated by A.v.Salis, *Der Altar von Pergamon* (1912) 144.

²⁵ Andronikos, *op. cit.* image 169.

²⁶ Andronikos, *op. cit.* image 131.

²⁷ Cf. Scherf, *op. cit.* 147.

closer observation. If we compare this round face with the low triangle forehead, the chubby cheeks and the unproportionally small mouth with the faces depicted in neoclassical works of art²⁸ dating to the 2nd c. BC reproducing, according to the current trends, elements from the 4th century, we realise that, apart from the general similarity of the idealised form, there are, indeed, crucial differences: these faces are less “heavy”, more oval-shaped and with more regular proportions, as far as their features are concerned. Far more similar are the faces of figures dating to the 3rd c. BC, e.g. the face of the statue of Themis found in the site of Rhamnous or of a figurine depicting the Great Mother that was found in Pergamon²⁹. The exact same model of beauty with the fleshy expressive face is also used in the goddess depicted on the Derveni *krater* and in the Muse on the *kline* of Philip’s tomb³⁰, whose similarity to the goddess on the mural is not limited to her head. A work dating to the 3rd century³¹ must also be the –unfortunately headless- statue of the throned Great Mother from Pergamon, which typologically is very similar to the problematic figure of the mural. Typical of the 3rd century is the monumental representation and the accentuation of the volume of the clothing, while the arrangement of the *himation* in such a way so as to form tube-like folds, which affects the way the human form is depicted³², seems to betoken rather than follow similar relief representations of the Zeus altar. This is also evident in how the torso is represented. The loose belting does not affect the position of the breasts and the belt is not that far from the finish of the *himation*; however, in the classicising forms of the 2nd century³³, the *chiton* is so high and tightly belted that the breasts are pushed upwards and the torso is elongated in a manneristic way creating the illusion that the distance between the belt and the *krothos* of the *himation* is more than double.

Summing up, our impression is that this representation tries to be within the framework of the 4th century tradition by using techniques (composition, colour) and types (Hercules, Telephus) that are typical of this period. At the same time, certain influences of the 3rd century are easily identified (young satyr’s face, clothes of the seated figure), while no element in the work is necessarily dated to the 2nd century, apart from the evident classicism, if we consider it as such. Consequently, the original on which the Basilica mural was based on must have been a work created in the 3rd century. As far as its origin is concerned, the only evident indication leading us to Pergamon is the typological similarity of the seated figure to the statue and the figurine of the Great Mother, while the similarity of Hercules and Telephus complex to the Peloponnesian monuments supports some kind of relation with Tegea.

The stylistic and typological analysis, so commonly used as a *modus operandi* in the classical archaeology, is proved inadequate by itself to resolve the complex problems that such a work entails. The determining difference of this representation with respect to other studies of the same subject is its multiform character. Instead of the three integral personae of the myth, eight appear here -5 human and 3 animal ones- along with a number of symbols that constitute a complex and, until now, inadequately decoded system.

The two basic characters are easily recognisable; Telephus suckled by the deer and his father surrounded by his symbols. However, here Hercules is not only the hunter, the civilising hero. The crown that he wears on his head –a totally unusual and therefore particularly important *attribut-* exalts through him the founder of the royal family.

²⁸ Aphrodite of Milos, Aphrodite Heyl, Aphrodite of Munich. See Charbonneaux, *op. cit.* images 354, 355, 329.

²⁹ E. Töpferwein, *Terrakotten von Pergamon* (1976) 183, table 32, 194.

³⁰ Andronikos, *op. cit.* image 88.

³¹ Cf. A. Linfert, *Kunstzentren hellenistischer Zeit* (1976) 108 note 406-8.

³² We should comment here on an oversight on the part of the reproducer regarding the part of the *himation* falling from the left arm and the one forming the *krothos*.

³³ E.g. the seated goddess(?) depicted in the Telephus frieze of the Zeus altar or the forms on the “Apotheosis of Homer” relief, see Charbonneaux, *loc. Cit.* images 303, 317.

In the wilderness of the mountain, we can easily understand the presence of the little satyr, who induces an atmosphere of an Arcadian pastoral idyll, dressed in animal skins, holding a pastoral rod and a *syrinx* in his hand.

The presence of the winged figure that takes active part in the scene and apparently reveals to the hero the identity of the infant is less evident. The ear of grain that she holds in her left hand allows us to recognise the *Παρθένον, ἢ ῥ' ἔν χειρσί φέρει στάχυν ἀήληέντα... καὶ ἔ Δίκην καλέεσκον*³⁴. In her name one can hear the name of the mountain (TN: the Greek name of the Virgin (Παρθένος), resembles to the name of the mountain (Παρθένιον) Parthenion), where the infant was abandoned, but apart from the association of the sounds, she seems to have a deeper connection with the myth, because this figure is present in the scenes of the rape of Auge³⁵, where, though herself a Virgin, she seems to consent to the injustice done to another woman. However, this injustice is only superficial, and this is guaranteed by the presence of Justice. The humiliation of the rape becomes the beginning of a royal clan. Telephus, who is conceived under the constellation of Virgo and is so cruelly condemned, will be saved, justice will be restored, Virgin-Justice herself will ensure it will be so, by leading Hercules to his son. The stars are favourable for this Heraclid descendant and his dynastic order. Beyond doubt this is an early and very interesting case of astrological mythology; the main problem, though, is different.

The painter used all the means that he possessed in order to exalt the sitting figure and force the viewer to notice it, as if this is the leading character of the scene. However, the myth, as we know it from the literary sources, gives us no evidence as to its identification. The researchers are content with naming it Arcadia, an otherwise unknown local deity, whose only reason of existence is to specify the place of the event. It is, indeed, hard to explain why an empty of content female form poses at such a central point of the painting as a great goddess making Hercules look like a timid adolescent; and, moreover, why it was deemed necessary to cover more than half the surface of the painting, in order to provide such a simple piece of information, which was already implied by the satyr and the Virgin. It is more sensible to reject this name theory that neither can be proved nor does it serve to answer to any of the questions posed, and to examine the painting more closely.

The problem is solved by the lion, which is closely related to the goddess, despite the fact that the first-level Hercules comes between them, since it is on the same level of the painting and sits by her legs. The sitting matron can be no other than the Great Mother³⁶. Her incorporation in a mythical scene, which is rare for this myth-less goddess³⁷, justifies the absence of all typical symbols (*polos*, tympanum, bowl) related to her worshiping representations, while her flower wreath and the fruit basket “mark” the seminal influence of the Mother on nature. But how can we explain the *sceptre* and –above of all– the presence of the goddess in this scene? The answer to these questions contains, in my opinion, the solution to the problem of the origin and of the overall interpretation of this work.

As the painter wanted, this figure proved to be a key figure in the picture. An autochthonous goddess of M. Asia, deeply rooted in the consciousness of its people, the Great Mother occupied a central place in the cult of the Hellenistic Pergamon³⁸. Moreover, according to an apocryphal

³⁴ (TN: “... the Virgin, who in her hands bears the gleaming Ear of Corn ... Her men called Justice.” Translated by G. R. Mair, www.theoi.com/Text/AratusPhaenomena.html)

Aratus, *Phaenomena*, 96 *et seq.* This association was first proposed by C. Robert, *AdI* 1884, 75k. According to Scherf, *op. cit.* she is one of the *Horae*, according to J. Boardman, *Αρχαία Ελληνική τέχνη*, im. 235, she is Iris.

³⁵ Simon, *op. cit.* 138k

³⁶ Same in Schefold, *op. cit.*, who, however, did not examine the consequences of this identification, because what he saw in this mural was a pasticcio.

³⁷ W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion* (1982) 276 *et seq.*

³⁸ E. Ohlmutz, *Die Kulte und Heiligtümer der Götter in Pergamon* (1940) 174 *et seq.*

myth³⁹, she gave birth there, on the top of the mountain, where the acropolis was built, to the king of the gods. As the mother of Zeus, however, the goddess is directly related to Hercules, Telephus and the “descendants” of the latter, the rulers of Pergamon. The Great Mother, ancestor of the royal house, becomes “mother queen” and with this epithet she was worshiped in the acropolis, as attested by the inscriptions⁴⁰. On the other hand, the Mother is traditionally the goddess of wild nature, the lady of the wild animals; the defenceless infant, exposed on the mountain, evicted from the world of humans belongs to her jurisdiction and is one of her creatures, ultimately saving his life. It doesn't need much thought to understand that behind the miracle of saving Telephus is the goddess herself, who saved her great-grandchild to allow her dynasty to rule over Minor Asia; and it is impossible this association to have originated anywhere else than in Pergamon.

The saviour of Telephus, the Mother of gods and humans, the origin of all living creatures, by rights occupies the place of the leading character in the picture; the *skeptré* that she holds –the goddess of nature holds a simple branch- underlines the special role of the “mother queen”, the mother of the king of the gods and ancestor of the kings of men. A source of power, the womb of the goddess is in the visual centre of the picture, at the point where the diagonal lines intersect. The miracle that all the other characters look at in amazement is performed under her protection; but she, the wise oracle, sees into the bright future of her protégé and his dynasty. The recognition by the royal father promises to the son a legitimate accession to the throne. The Virgin herself, the Justice of the golden century, left the skies and flew to earth, in order to assure that justice will be served; the presence of this *giver of justice* seals the prophecy and Zeus, the supreme ruler, sends as a guarantee his sign, the eagle.

The strict and consistent arrangement of the form on the basis of the principle of the opposites, which was identified in the morphological analysis, is also valid as far as content is concerned. It is interesting to observe the clear, geometrical structure of the semantic levels that corresponds to the separation of the surface in two halves and three uneven horizontal zones, each having a width proportional to the importance of the figures. The seated –motionless- goddess, the woman, the mother is juxtaposed to the standing –moving- hero, the man, the hunter; the flowers and the ripe fruit to the weapons and the hunting trophy; the signs of euphoria and life to the signs of power and death; the bearded king Hercules to the young shepherd satyr; the mother to the Virgin; the smile of the creature of nature to the austerity of the personification of law. A remarkable analogy is observed on the level where all the animals are depicted, in the lower zone of the painting, to which Telephus, adopted by the wild animal, belongs, visually as well. The female animal, the prey, the mother –on the part of the goddess- are juxtaposed to the male, the hunter –on the part of the hero. However, the lion “forgets” its nature, not rushing to devour the deer. The prey saved the hunter's son and the hunter left his weapons aside. On one hand the primal nature (left), on the other the law and the civilisation (right); under the *skeptré* of the goddess –on the axis of the picture- the two worlds meet and conflicts are eliminated. The royal order begins from the Mother's Paradise. The prophecy will be fulfilled in the face of the Attalids, the look of the goddess is the bridge between the myth of the representation and the historic reality of the work.

With this apocryphal myth the court intelligentsia of Pergamon connected in the most appropriate way the autochthonous goddess with the highest ruler of the Olympian pantheon. The god of the Macedonian kings became son of the goddess of the local subjects. The old model of the Mediterranean world started to operate again, the consanguinity of the mythical foreigner king, with the great goddess on one hand and with Zeus and Hercules on the other, was used in

³⁹ Ohlemutz, *op. cit.* 180

⁴⁰ Ohlemutz, *op. cit.* 181. *Cf.* also the enthroned goddess holding a *skeptré* on late coins of Pergamon, BMC Mysia, table 32, 4.

order to legitimise the historic rulers. And it is not, naturally, an accidental choice that the crown of Hercules, a woven twisted piece of white fabric tied in the back with two ribbons that fall on his shoulders, is the same with the one that the Macedonian kings⁴¹ wear, and whose acquisition guaranteed the acquisition of power by the descendants. The language of politics was translated into the language of the myth. Recognising Telephus meant recognising Attalus I, who wore the crown in the year 241 and proclaimed himself a king. Thanks to the mythical ancestor, the kings of Mysia become equal as genuine Heraclids to the Macedonians and ties of traditional kinship with the Peloponnesian cities are woven. In his struggle for establishment and expansion of his sovereignty, the intellectual Attalus did not hesitate to use the myth, as did also his opponents. And the painter, who knew what the person who ordered the work wanted, did not restrict himself to convey the desired message only by working on the painting's subject; he also provided morphological references, a method that is known to the artists of Pergamon of the 3rd c., as in the case of the replica of the Phidian *Athena Parthenos* from the Library. So, the effort to create the impression of a work of that time and, most probably, of the entourage of Alexander cannot only be explained as a trend of the era it was created in; in the case of Hercules and Telephus it seems that it is rather a specific reference to an existing work of the last third of the 4th century, probably located in the area of Tegea. This would also explain the resemblance of these figures to those of the Peloponnesian monuments. The fact that in the painting, where this complex is seen from behind, and in the reliefs, where it is seen from the front, the figures stand in a left-right arrangement allows us to make the assumption that the original was a sculpture⁴², while the crown that, as the Laconic relief shows, Hercules wore supports the association with the Macedonian court. With Alexander's campaign being in progress, such an artistic decision seems very probable. Hercules, who finds and saves his son, is without a doubt a worthy parallel of Alexander, who frees the descendants of Telephus in M. Asia. In this context, the "Hercules Finding Telephus" mural acquires certain significance. And it is history that gives us as a *terminus post quem* for the original of the mural the year 241, the date when the kingdom of Pergamon was born.

Telephus proved for the Attalids a very convenient ancestor who could, depending on the needs of the moment, be used as an ambassador of the interests of his "descendants". Pergamon, apparently in the context of the treaties with the Romans, is the place where the apocryphal myth was created narrating that Rome, the wife of Aeneas, was the daughter of Telephus; the same myth that appeared in the literary sources until the 2nd c. BC⁴³. This explains both the popularity of the subject deer-Telephus, which is compared to the *Lupa Romana*, and the special place of the composition in the iconographic complex of the Basilica. Placed in the central niche of the back wall of the hall the statue of the emperor was framed by the "Hercules finding Telephus" (right lateral niche) and the "Triumph of Theseus" (left niche). In this way, the Roman monarch was incorporated into the group of the Greek heroes-civilisers, while by choosing this unusual in the iconography of Hercules subject the kinship of the emperor with the ancestor of the Greek dynasties was declared.

Cologne

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⁴¹ Andronikos, *op. cit.* 171 *et seq.*

⁴² Cf. the figurine of Farnese Hercules wearing a crown from Alexandria, M. Bieber, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, im. 398. Hercules holding Telephus in his arms is known from full relief Hellenistic works. Bauchhenss, *op. cit.* 84 *et seq.*

⁴³ Salomonson, *op. cit.*, who does not accept that the myth has its origin in Pergamon basing his argument, however, on the *argumentum ex silentio*.