TERRACOTTA PLAQUES FROM EARLY ATTIC TOMBS
By Gisela M. A. Richter
Curator of Greek and Roman Art

The tablelike structures of sun-dried brick which have been found in several cemeteries of Attica (see fig. 1) have long been recognized as early Attic tombs, and the surmise that they were once decorated with terracotta plaques of the type of the well-known ones in Berlin has been generally accepted. The evidence for the theory is indeed strong. The plaques in question are decorated with funerary scenes, and a number of them are known to have been found in cemeteries. In many cases the plaques are evidently parts of a series. For instance, the ones in Berlin formed parts of at least twelve slabs; and several other sets of two or four have survived. Moreover, on some examples only mourners are represented, without the prothesis, or lying in state, a fact which presupposes other representations. An example now in Athens (fig. 2) is inscribed: . . . ζελα τας έττε αργεια, “this is the monument of warlike . . . .” indicating that it was applied on the outside of a monument and was visible to the passer-by. Most of the slabs have no holes for suspension, such as votive plaques regularly have, and they are larger than most of those known to have been votive—generally thirty-odd by forty-odd cm. and about three to four cm. thick. The backs are mostly not properly smoothed and were evidently not intended to be seen.

On this cumulative evidence it seems reasonable to suppose that the slabs in question decorated quadrangular tomb structures, though it must be admitted that the final proof is missing—a tomb with the slabs actually in place.

Since each slab is decorated with a scene which is complete in itself, the decoration evidently did not form a continuous frieze. Each slab must have been a sort of metope, perhaps enclosed by wooden or stucco triglyphs, and the whole surmounted by a simplified Doric cornice.

Most of the extant plaques belong to the middle and second half of the sixth century B.C. During that period the quadrangular tombs were evidently in frequent use. That they were also employed earlier is indicated by two examples acquired by the Boston Museum in 1927 (see fig. 3). Mr. Caskey at that time described them as “earlier by half a century than any other known examples.”


3 W. Zschietzschmann, Ath. Mitt., vol. LIII (1928), pp. 39 f., listed over twenty besides the Berlin ones. Several can now be added, e.g., four decorated by Lydos (A. Rumpf, Sakonides [Leipzig, 1937], pl. 14).

4 Ἑξεκιάς Ἀρχαιολογική, 1888, cols. 183 ff., pl. 11; Technau, Exekias, p. 22, under no. 22.

5 The adjective “warlike” is more likely here than the proper name Areios, which apparently occurs only in the later periods as a name of historical persons; cf. E. Sittig, De Graecorum nominibus theophoris (Diss. Halle, 1912), p. 116.


7 Mrs. Karouzou in her article on Sophilos (Ath. Mitt., vol. lxii [1937], p. 111) referred to a badly preserved fragment of a plaque with mourning women in the National Museum in Athens, no. 12352 (= 12352a), as the oldest of all extant funerary plaques and called it “früharchaisch.” Zschietzschmann in his list of prothesis scenes (Ath. Mitt., vol. liii [1928], p. 39, no. 24) included a fragment of a plaque, no. 12352, and called it “frühattisch”; but neither he nor Mrs. Karouzou gave an illustration. To judge by a pencil sketch kindly sent me by Mr. Beazley, the date should be before 600 B.C.
In this article I want to present three other possible early members of this highly interesting class. One has been known for some time, having been acquired by the Metropolitan Museum in 1914 through a Greek dealer, who stated the place of discovery to have been Olympos in Attica (fig. 4). It was published, though not as a decorative member of a tomb, in the Museum Bulletin in 1915 and in the first edition of the Handbook of the Classical Collection in 1917. Subsequently it suffered an eclipse, for its authenticity was questioned by Dr. Langlotz when he visited the Museum in 1925. His objections seemed well founded, for he drew attention to the following facts: (1) Parts of five women appeared at the top and only four below; (2) there was not sufficient room for the third woman from the left, of whom only the hair is preserved; (3) the style—in the rendering of the eyes, for instance—was different in some women from that in others; (4) the head of the couch, without a voluted top, had no parallel; (5) rubbing with alcohol removed the black glaze. The relief was therefore reluctantly placed in the study collection, and a large question mark was put on the label. A few years ago, however, a careful re-examination by several experts, including Humfrey Payne, re-established its authenticity. But instead of one plaque we now have two. After removal of the plaster backing it became evident that one fragment was inde-
pendent of the others and must have belonged to a companion piece (fig. 5). This discovery disposed of three objections—the difference in style, the difference in the number of women at the top and bottom, and the space occupied by the woman whose head is mostly missing (cf. fig. 6). The argument that the glaze was removable by alcohol, though impressive, turned out not to be valid. Further experiments showed that alcohol removed the glaze only where the latter was in bad condition and was scaling, not where it was nice and firm, and that it removed also the glaze of another early vase in similar condition, the genuineness of which nobody could question. And this is indeed what one might expect. Only where the glaze was well preserved did it resist rubbing.

With regard to the form of the couch, it is true that in later sixth-century representations of couches with rectangular legs the head is regularly crowned by a volute. The normal type may be seen on an amphora in Munich and on a plaque in the Louvre (fig. 7). Here the mattress is laid over the crowning volute but does not conceal it. But the representation on our plaque is not of the later sixth century. It is about a century earlier and is in relief. It therefore has every right to look different. The type of couch is evidently the same—that is, the rectangular leg at the head is higher than that at the foot, but the top is hidden by the mattress. That the relation of the different planes does not make this quite clear is what we might expect in a seventh-century representation.

The overwhelming arguments in favor of the authenticity of the plaque, or plaques rather, are, first, their physical condition—the convincing surfaces of the black glaze, especially where diluted, and of the red accessory color—and, second, the consistent, seventh-century style. Now that we have in comparatively recent times, through the excavations at Vari, Aegina, and the Athenian Agora and Kerameikos, become more familiar with Attic seventh-century art, we recognize that the renderings on our plaques—for instance, of the garments (with lower himations in two sections), the hair (with horizontal wads sometimes fork-
ing at the bottom), the features (prominent noses, voluted ears, and strong chins), the skulls (flat at the top)—can all be paralleled on monuments of that time. The gestures too—the raising of the hand to the head as a sign of mourning and the extension of the hand toward the corpse—are the two conventional attitudes which occur again and again in prothesis scenes (cf. fig. 7). It seems inconceivable that nearly thirty years ago a forger, even if assisted by an experienced archaeologist, could have produced so consistent a whole.

A comparison with the vase paintings by the Nessos Painter, which have been dated in the last quarter of the seventh century, suggests that our reliefs are earlier. The figures and faces in our reliefs are not so well organized or so well proportioned, and the technique is not yet in full black-figure. That is, our reliefs should be earlier than about 620 or so, but not much earlier, for the style already veers toward that of the Nessos Painter away from that of the Kynosarges amphora, which has been dated about 640 B.C. If we date our reliefs about 630 to 620 B.C. we may not be far wrong.

The consequences of the rehabilitation of these reliefs are considerable. We can now push back the period of the known use of the rectangular tomb structure another few decades; for that these plaques belonged to a series which decorated such a tomb is suggested by the subject of the decoration, by the fact that there are two companion pieces, by the absence of suspension holes, and by the appropriate size. And, what is even more important, we have here one of the earliest extant Attic reliefs, antedating all the sculptures from the Akropolis and the Sounion group of kouroi—though later than the terracotta sphinxes and mourning figures from the Kerameikos. For our knowledge of early Attic sculpture this new accession to our slender store is invaluable.

My second candidate for a tomb plaque is a fragmentary terracotta slab that was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum in 1935 (fig. 8). On it is painted a lion in late seventh-century style. It was published in the Museum Bulletin and in the American Journal of Arch-

---

15 For the garments cf. our fig. 3; for the hair, Corpus vasorum antiquorum, Deutschland, vol. 11. Berlin, fasc. 1 (Munich, 1938), pls. 19, 23; F. R. Grace, Archaic Sculpture in Boeotia (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), fig. 68; for the features, Corpus vasorum antiquorum, loc. cit.; for the skull, loc. cit.
17 J. D. Beazley, Attic Black-Figure (London, 1928), p. 11, note 1; R. S. Young, American Journal of Archaeology, vol. XLVI (1942), p. 57 (about 630–600 B.C.).
19 Ibid., p. 205; R. S. Young, loc. cit., about 650–630 B.C.
20 Archäologischer Anzeiger, 1933. cols. 271–273, figs. 6–8.
aeology as a metope\textsuperscript{21}; but perhaps we may now surmise that it was a metope not of a diminutive temple but of a tomb. The size is again appropriate\textsuperscript{22}; there are no suspension holes; and the subject may well be sepulchral, for a lion on a tomb monument is a familiar figure in Greek art from the time of the Corfu statue\textsuperscript{23} to that of the Amphipolis\textsuperscript{24} and Chaionia\textsuperscript{25} ones.

The third early plaque which may be tentatively identified as the metope of a tomb is a recent acquisition of the Metropolitan Mu-

\textsuperscript{21} Acc. no. 35.11.15. Bulletin, vol. xxxi (1936), pp. 116 f.; American Journal of Archaeology, vol. xl (1936), pp. 304 f., fig. 3. The lion was painted directly on the surface of the clay in black glaze (which has now turned reddish brown) with, doubtless, applied red on certain parts.

\textsuperscript{22} Preserved height 32.4 cm.; preserved width 28.7 cm.; greatest thickness 2.8 cm.


\textsuperscript{24} O. Broneer, The Lion Monument at Amphipolis (Cambridge, 1941), pls. vi-xi.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., figs. 34, 35; G. M. A. Richter, Animals in Greek Sculpture (New York, 1930), fig. 29.
TERRACOTTA PLAQUES FROM EARLY ATTIC TOMBS

FIG. 7. TERRACOTTA PLAQUE WITH PROTHESIS SCENE. IN THE LOUVRE

seum (figs. 9–11). It is said to have been found near the Athenian Kerameikos. Only the right half is preserved. The size is appropriate for a sepulchral metope. The scene, which is in relief, was enclosed by a frame of varying width, like the prothesis shown in

26 Acc. no. 42.11.33.
27 Height 42 cm.; preserved width 25.5 cm.; total width probably about 50 cm.; thickness 5.5 cm. Traces of a reddish brown color remain on Achilles’ spear and crest, and here and there elsewhere. They are presumably the remnants of the black glaze which originally entirely covered the figures (but not the background) and has survived only here and there in discolored form. The inscriptions (figs. 11, 12) are also painted in brownish glaze directly on the background. What looks like a white engobe in spots must be part of the lime (calcium carbonate) incrustation which covered some of the surface. This incrustation covered portions of the inscriptions and remains of brownish discolored glaze on the figures.
28 As in some other early representations of fallen figures the second leg is not shown; cf. the Rhodian plate, fig. 17, and the Eurytios krater in the Louvre, E655.
29 E. Pfuhl, Malerei und Zeichnung der Griechen (Munich, 1923), vol. III, fig. 117; M. H. Swindler, Ancient Painting (New Haven, 1929), fig. 212.
30 E. Gerhard, Auserlesene griechische Vasenbilder (Berlin, 1847), vol. III, pl. cccv, 3; S. Reinach, Répertoire des vases peints, grecs et étrusques (Paris, 1900), vol. II, pl. 105, no. 2; A. Rumpf, Chalkidische Vasen (Berlin, 1927), p. 156, a. The present location of the vase is not known, Mr. Beazley informs me.

figure 6. There is no suspension hole on the preserved part of this frame.

The decoration consists of a nude warrior, wearing a crested helmet and armed with a spear and a shield which has a large gorgoneion as a device. He was evidently part of a composition showing two warriors fighting over the body of a fallen warrior. Of the opponent, what looks like a bit of the edge of the shield remains; of the fallen companion, the right leg and what looks like the shield (held up in profile view) and part of the sword or spear (traveling obliquely upward). Similar compositions occur on a number of early vases, for instance, on the well-known Rhodian plate where the inscriptions identify the combatants as Menelaos and Hektor fighting over the body of Euphorbos (fig. 17). In the New York plaque the fighting warrior is identified as Achilles by the inscription ΑΧΙΛΛΕΥΣ, which is painted in brown glaze on the background behind him (fig. 11). One might think, therefore, that the relief represents the combat of Achilles and Memnon over the body of Antilochos, like the scene on the black-figured amphora shown in figure 15. On removal, however, of the thick incrustation which covered part of the plaque (cf. figs. 9, 10), the
name of the fallen figure emerged, painted in brown glaze above the bent knee (fig. 12). The last three letters are obviously νςζ (the direction of the nu shows that they must be read from left to right). Evidently, therefore, we have here the end of a feminine name; and in this context it can only have been that of an Amazon. The two preceding letters are incomplete (cf. fig. 13), but I think they must have been α and τ (cf. fig. 14). There seems to be no possible name ending in -ainia, and it is doubtful whether there would have been room for more letters to the left of the preserved ones, at least if our reconstruction of the composition—with a round shield in front view held by the opponent of Achilles and a shield in profile view held by the fallen figure—is correct. But Ainia, as an ethnic name derived from Ainos, is possible and appropriate; for Ainos was the name of a town in Thrace, and in the Aithiopis, the lost sequel of the Iliad, which dealt with the Amazons at Troy, their queen is said to have been a Thracian. Ainia happens not to occur elsewhere as an Amazon’s name, but new names for Amazons are constantly cropping up.

If the fallen figure was an Amazon, we also know the name of Achilles’ opponent. She was Penthesileia, the queen of the Amazons, who went to Troy to help the Trojans and “while performing heroic deeds” (ἀριστεύοντα) was killed by Achilles. In the version of the story

31 Near the right leg of the initial alpha is embedded a dark particle. This is visible in fig. 12 but has been erased in figs. 13 and 14 as it confuses the line.
32 As M. Rostovtzeff and M. J. Milne also assure me. For the use of ethnics as heroic names see A. Fick and F. Bechtel, Die griechischen Personennamen (Göttingen, 1894), pp. 418 ff. For the name Ainos cf. Iliad XXI. 210. &’ανος Ειντίη Αίνιας. After om. 1. Αίνιας, τος Μοίρων Αίνιας, της Ιλίως, ος Αίνιος Βεντνία, επικηλοθετήτω, The name on our relief cannot of course have been Aineias, even if we supply letters of which no trace remains. Aeneas did not fall in battle at Troy; he survived and went to Italy.
33 Proklos Chrestomathia II.
FIG. 10. TERRACOTTA PLAQUE IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, AFTER CLEANING. ORIGINALLY IT SHOWED ACHILLES, PENTHESELIA, AND AIINIA
told by Quintus Smyrnaeus, we learn that before killing Penthesileia Achilles slew several of her companions. Moreover, on Attic black-figured vases a fallen Amazon actually appears in the combat of Achilles and Penthesileia (fig. 16).

The date of our plaque must be somewhere in the late seventh or early sixth century B.C. In attitude the warrior closely resembles one from the temple of Artemis at Corfu, which may be dated about 600–590 B.C. (fig. 20). The rendering of the anatomy by grooves and ridges, the large features, and the vigorous, rather harsh style suggest the period of the Sounion, Dipylon, and New York kouroi (about 620–590 B.C.).

The Gorgon on the shield recalls the marble Gorgon from the Akropolis and stands midway between Early and Middle Corinthian examples; note the squarish form, the rounded outline of the hair over the forehead, the indication of the chin. The letters of the inscription would be appropriate for the late seventh or the early sixth century. The forms of the letters point to an Attic origin and thus substantiate the report that the relief was found in Attica.

The story of Achilles and Penthesileia evidently appealed to Greek artists. We have many beautiful representations of it—especially...
FIGS. 12–14. DETAIL OF PLAQUE SHOWN IN FIGURE 10. FIGURE 12 SHOWS THE INSCRIPTION AS IT APPEARS WHEN PHOTOGRAPHED; FIGURE 13 SHOWS EXTANT TRACES (REINFORCED ON THE PHOTOGRAPH IN PENCIL) AS THEY CAN BE MADE OUT WITH THE MAGNIFYING GLASS (SEE ALSO P. 86, NOTE 31); FIGURE 14 SHOWS THE INSCRIPTION AS RECONSTRUCTED FROM THESE TRACES
ly on Attic vases—by Exekias, the Berlin Painter, the Penthesileia Painter (fig. 18), and others. Our relief is, I believe, the earliest Attic rendering of the subject so far known. The painting on the terracotta shield from Tiryns at Nauplia must be about a century earlier. The “Argive-Corinthian” bronze reliefs from Delphi, Noicattaro (see fig. 19), and Olympia have been variously dated.

In a forthcoming dissertation on Amazons by Dietrich von Bothmer a list of these will be given.

The theory that epic subjects do not appear in Attic art before 570 to 560 B.C. (cf. W. Zschietzschmann, Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, vol. XLVI [1931], pp. 45 ff.) is disproved not only by our relief but also by early sixth-century vase representations (cf. e.g. J. D. Beazley and H. Payne, Journal of Hellenic Studies, vol. XLIX [1929], pl. xv, nos. 17, 19).
from the third quarter of the seventh century\textsuperscript{47} to the second quarter of the sixth.\textsuperscript{48} In these reliefs Penthesileia is represented as falling backward, while Achilles is striding forward with spear and shield. In our plaque, however, the bit of terracotta adjoining Achilles' shield, if rightly interpreted as part of Penthesileia's shield, would suggest that she was still fighting, like Hektor on the Rhodian plate shown in figure 17.

There is no suggestion of the love motive in our fierce Achilles, nor in the "Argive-Corinthian" and Tiryns renderings. The expression of the rather complicated emotion felt by Achilles when he fell in love with Penthesileia after mortally wounding her was outside the scope of the early artist. But probably he knew that aspect of the story. Though in extant classical literature the love motive does not actually appear until Roman times, it seems to be implied in Proklos's summary of the \textit{Aithiopis}, where Achilles kills Thersites because the latter accused him of love for Penthesileia; and it is vouched for at least in the fifth century by the vase paintings in Munich (fig. 18)\textsuperscript{49} and New York.\textsuperscript{50}

That contest with Amazons were considered appropriate sepulchral subjects is shown by their appearance on the Mausoleum of Halikarnassos and on many sarcophagi. Moreover such contests were referred to in funeral speeches when the heroic deeds of the past were recalled.\textsuperscript{51} A plaque with Achilles fighting the Amazons would therefore be appropriate for a tomb. The other plaques—since we

\textsuperscript{47} Payne, \textit{Necrocorinthia}, p. 225 ("developed Proto-corinthian or Transitional").


\textsuperscript{49} Furtwängler and Reichhold, \textit{Griechische Vasenmalerei}, vol. I, pl. 6.

\textsuperscript{50} Acc. no. 39.11.11. \textit{Bulletin}, vol. XXXV (1940), p. 40, fig. 6.

\textsuperscript{51} Arrian \textit{Anabasis} VII.13.6; A. Klugmann, \textit{Die Amazonen in der attischen Literatur und Kunst} (Stuttgart, 1875), pp. 65 ff.; Lysias, II.4–6.
must visualize a series of them—presumably represented other exploits, comparable to those of the hero who had fallen in battle and to whose tomb our relief belonged.

The plaques we have discussed enlarge our knowledge both of early Attic tombs and of early Attic art. Particularly the relief of Achilles is an important new document. It shows that the splendid Sounion-Dipylon-New York kouroi were not isolated phenomena. The same high spirit pervaded the more modest works. If our dating is correct, this is the spirit of pre-Solonic Athens, the time of the wealthy, aristocratic Eupatrids.