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1. Marble dedicatory stele in Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia.

## A GROUP OF STELES FROM BYZANTIUM

An interesting collection of six stone reliefs was purchased in Istanbul more than forty years ago by Mrs. Edgar J. Fisher, whose husband was dean of Robert College from 1913 to 1933. Their son, Edgar J. Fisher, Jr. of Richmond, Virginia, says that his mother recalls buying all the pieces at the same time from a man who claimed to have dug them up in a vegetable garden near the ancient Hippodrome.

In 1967 the six reliefs were sold at auction<sup>1</sup>

and the various pieces dispersed. One of these is now in the collection of the University of Missouri-Columbia.<sup>2</sup> Of the other five pieces formerly in Mrs. Fisher's possession, I have been granted permission to publish four. It was not possible to locate the sixth relief, No. 143, which is a marble stele similar to the one shown below (Fig. 4).

The stele in Missouri (Fig. 1), of a grayish marble, was originally much taller and apparently cut down later for re-use as a building block. The relief shows a cloaked horseman riding to the right (the horse, with only the left foot raised, seems to be in rather leisurely motion) and behind him a clothed standing male figure holding two indistinct objects. The inscription reads:  
 Μητρι εὐχὴν | Μήνιος Μηνίου = "To the Mother a vow, Menios, son of Menios."

The goddess to whom the vow is made is the Anatolian mother-goddess, sometimes called Cybele. There are traces of the first letter of a third line. Some of the letters are joined by ligatures: M-H in the first line, M-H-N and M-H in the second. The lettering, as shown by the lunate *sigma*, is of the Roman imperial period, probably the third century.

The inscription has two interesting features. The first is the name Menios spelled with *eta*, which at first glance suggests a connection with the god Men, a lunar divinity popular in Asia Minor.<sup>3</sup> The name Menios is not of frequent occurrence during any period of antiquity, or in any area except perhaps Byzantium itself and Kerch (ancient Panticapaeum) in the Crimea. Otherwise it occurs in a remarkably scattered fashion throughout the ancient world. The instances which I have been able to gather from epigraphical sources (a necessarily incomplete listing) are listed below.

The earliest *apparent* occurrence of the name is in an Attic cleruch list of 365/4 B.C.,<sup>4</sup> where the name Μένον Μηνίο seems to occur among the Oaieis (those from the deme of Oe). Since, however, the *eta* is restored from traces on either side of a break, and since the scholar who makes the join mentions a Μένιος Ὁθηθεν known from an inscription of 356/5 B.C.,<sup>5</sup> I wonder if the name Μένιος might not also be read here. Thus the early attestation of Menios with an *eta* would disappear. Outside of this we have two examples in Attica, a prytany list of

135/4 B.C., where the name Menios (the first letter missing) is restored among the Keiriadai, and a group of funerary inscriptions apparently of the early second century B.C.<sup>6</sup>

Elsewhere on the Greek mainland we have a Hellenistic proxeny decree of Oropos, honoring one Menios son of Zoilos, from Byzantium, and a number of instances of the name at Delphi: two manumissions, one of A.D. 196 in which Menios appears as the name of a manumitted slave (a Lucanian) and another in which Menios son of Hermokrates appears as the name of the former slave-owner, while his son is likewise called Menios. There is also a decree of Delphi, datable to A.D. 319, in which M. Aur. Menios appears as *prostates* of the *damiourgoi*—i.e., an official of the local governing body—for that year.<sup>7</sup>

The name also occurs in Laconia, in an inscription in which one Damonodikas is honored at Gytheion (first half of first century A.D.) and in a whole series of inscriptions from Sparta which mention a Mar. Aurelios Kleandros "also called Menios," who is thought to have flourished about A.D. 210 and to have held the office of *patronomos* mentioned in inscriptions of victors in the games at the temple of Artemis Orthia.<sup>8</sup>

Among the islands are these instances: sepulchral inscription from Mytilene of uncertain date, a name alone from Eretria, and a corruptly copied inscription from Thasos which apparently mentions a Polla, daughter of Menios. Deiphilos son of Menios, a Dardanian, is included in a second-century B.C. list of initiates into the Samothracian mysteries; and Asklepiodoros son of Menios appears at about the same time as secretary of the confederation of cities worshipping Athena Ilias; the two men may have been related.<sup>9</sup>

From Asia Minor, the center of the Men-cult, from which we would expect many instances of the name if it is actually connected with the god Men, I have been able to garner only five (besides the Dardanians mentioned above) and two of them are from Mysia, where the Men-cult is not attested, as far as I know. These are a decree of Cyzicus mentioning Menios son of Kephet—, secretary of the council in the mid-first century after Christ; and an inscription from Mysian Apollonia mentioning Magnilla, a

philosopher, daughter of the philosopher Magnus and wife of the philosopher Menios. At Amastris (Pontus) a certain Julia Aquilina is honored by the cities of Heracleia Pontica and Amastris with a statue in the theater erected "under the supervision of Tiberios Klaudios Menios, her husband." There are also two funerary inscriptions from inland Anatolia with this name: one of them is from Düyer, northwest of Ladik (Laodicea Combusta) and the other, which mentions an Aristeides son of Menios, grandson(?) of Tatas (another possibility is that Menios Tatas was a single person), is from Avdan, between the ancient sites of Dorylaeum and Nacoleia. In Moesia an Odessan epehebe-list of A.D. 215 mentions an Aur. Dionysios, son of Menios.<sup>10</sup>

In the area of Byzantium itself, from which our stele comes, we find the name on a considerable number of sepulchral inscriptions of the third, second and first centuries B.C.<sup>11</sup>

In the region of Kerch the name also occurs with frequency, particularly in inscriptions erected by the religious *synodoi* (private cult-groups). We hear of a *synagogos* (a cult-official) of A.D. 82 called Menios son of Bradakos; another *synagogos* (undated) called, Menios, Jr.; a Basileides son of Menios and a Menis son of Menios, in funerary inscriptions. Also recorded are a former *prosodikos* and *hellenarches* (official titles) called Menios son of Chariton, who restores a gate from his own funds; and two members of a *synodos*, Danarazmanos (?) son of Menios, and Menios son of Hermes; finally a Mamia, mother of Menios, and a Menios son of Athenios and grandson of Meinas, in funerary inscriptions.<sup>12</sup>

One wonders whether Menios is a hypocoristic, or shortened, form of some theophoric name such as Menophilos, Menodoros, Menodotos or Menogenes. These names, formed from the name of the god Men, acquired a popularity which far exceeded that of the god's cult but they did not become widespread until ca. 200 B.C.<sup>13</sup>

That the dedication is made simply to the "Mother" is the second unusual feature of our inscription. Almost invariably the goddess is called the "Great Mother," or "Mother of the Gods," or specified by some epithet usually derived from a place-name. Of the very few exceptions to the rule the earliest

I have found is a *boustrophedon* inscription (ca. 500 B.C.) in the Smyrna Museum of which the last two lines read "—meneos to the Mother."

There are a number of such inscriptions from islands along the coast of Asia Minor. One from Chios (first century B.C.) records that Kallisthenes son of Asklepiades dedicated a pavement and some theater seats to the Mother. An Aeolic inscription from Eresos (Lesbos), of uncertain date, tells that Aphaistis Theodoreia gave some tables to the Mother. From Proconnesus in the Sea of Marmora we have a heavily restored inscription of the reign of Antoninus Pius dated "when Kodratos (Quadratus) was priest of the Mother." One example occurs at Odesus (modern Varna), where a relief of Herakles and Cybele is accompanied by an inscription that seems to read "coming in first . . . a thank-offering to the Mother and Herakles." Two dedications of the Roman period come from central Asia Minor, one from Ladik (Laodicea Combusta) and one from Kozanlı (ancient Drya) on the Iconium-Ancyra highway. There is also an interesting though illiterate funerary inscription from an island in the lake of Egirdir, with a relief showing people fishing with tridents from a boat. The monument honors a certain Aurelios Ares, who "became a *prooikos* [literally, "someone in front of the house"] for the Mother." The name is probably that of a minor temple-official.

Finally there is a statuette of Cybele at Antalya, with an inscription possibly reading "Bas, son of Menedemos, to the Mother."<sup>14</sup> Our votive inscription thus can be added to what seems a very exiguous group of monuments on which the goddess is simply called the "Mother."

A second marble relief, preserved almost intact, is a funeral stele (Fig. 2).<sup>15</sup> This stele belong to the widespread funeral-banquet type of Graeco-Roman Byzantium. To the viewer's left there is a seated woman, with a fold of her garment pulled over her head. She holds her left hand to her cheek in a pensive attitude. To the right a man reclines on a couch, holding a wreath in his right hand, in his left a cup. Below him, on the floor, is a three-legged table with funeral cakes on it. At the bottom left is a small standing female servant-figure imitating her mistress' pensive attitude. On the right a corresponding



2. Funerary stele in collection of Dr. David Landau.



3. Funerary stele in the collection of Mr. Eric Lomnitz.

male servant repeats the pensive gesture, but seems more bored, his legs crossed and his gaze directed not to the main figures but off into space.<sup>16</sup>

The inscription reads: *Μάμα Ἀφφου Ἀφφου* . . . . (ca. 4 letters illegible) = "Mama, daughter of Apphous, Apphous [son of . . . ]."<sup>17</sup>

The use of the four-barred *sigma* and the style point to a date in the second or first century B.C.

The name Apphous occurs on other examples and apparently originated from a term of endearment and/or relationship.<sup>18</sup> The use of Mama as a proper name is more unusual, and many apparent instances of it as a feminine name may actually be the genitive case of the relatively common masculine name Mamas. It occurs (with some uncertain reading and conjectural restorations) in a number of inscriptions from central Asia Minor. We read in one: "Aur. Meiros, son of Bassos, and Mama, daughter of Bassos, to their own mother, Mama." In another, "To Mame, the mother" (this form is more correct in Greek), the name likewise cannot be a term of relationship, and in a third, "Sokrates, son of Menophilos, and Mama and Menophilos, to Hosios." In two inscriptions from Isauria we read, "—as, her father, (honored) Mamma, for memory's sake," and "Apollonios, while alive, set up (a memorial to) Nounnos his father, while he also was alive, and Mama, his spouse, for memory's sake." Finally, in one from Lycaonia we read: "Aurila Mama (?), his wife . . ."

The name is also recorded from the area of Odessus where there are such inscriptions as: "Mama, daughter of Artemon and wife of Serapion, son of Demetrios, farewell"; "Mama, daughter of Xenon, farewell"; "Parmenion, son of Aiantides, and his wife Mama, daughter of Antipatros, and their daughter Annei, farewell" and "Apellas, son of Zoilos, and his wife Mama, daughter of Metrodoros, farewell."<sup>19</sup>

The third and fourth reliefs are also funeral steles of marble.<sup>20</sup> One (Fig. 3) is a variation of the funeral-banquet motif, with one significant change, as befits a gravestone for three persons instead of two. This is the second major female figure standing in the middle of the composition. Like the woman on the left, she has a fold of her garment pulled over her head. The right hand is held across her breast, the left is relaxed.

In other respects, the stone is quite similar to the preceding (Fig. 2), except that the woman on the left does not repeat the pensive gesture, and the male servant seems more attentive. The inscription reads: Ἡρόξενος Διονυσίου Μάμα | Ἡροξένου Δύναμις Ἡροξένου = “Heroxenos, son of Dionysios; Mama, (daughter? wife?) of Heroxenos; Dynamis, (daughter? wife?) of Heroxenos.” If the order of the names is the same as that of the figures in relief, one would identify Mama with the seated figure (therefore the wife), Dynamis with the standing figure (therefore the daughter). The use of the lunate *sigma* points to a fairly late date. The *xi* is also rather peculiar, apparently having the shape of a backward *nu*.

The proper names tie this inscription to the preceding one as well as to that shown in Figure 5. It seems unlikely that there is any connection between the individuals of this and the preceding in-

scription, in view of the apparent difference in date, but it is not impossible, since we are probably dealing with stones from one burial plot, that Heroxenos in this inscription and Markia in another discussed below may actually have been brother and sister.

Neither Heroxenos nor Dynamis is recorded as a proper name in the book by Firatli and Robert (the standard work on this subject—see note 11) and, as a matter of fact, neither seems to be very common. I find Heroxenos in two Attic ephebe-lists, one of the time of Trajan, the other of “Antonine times.”<sup>21</sup> The earliest instance is from Apollonia in Thrace, of the fifth or early fourth century B.C. Like Menios, the name Heroxenos seems to have been most popular in the Crimea. I find six sure occurrences of the name among the Crimean inscriptions, as well as two conjectural restorations.<sup>22</sup>

4. *Left:* stele in collection of Mr. Eric Lomnitz. *Right:* grave monument for a child. Photo courtesy Brooklyn Children's Museum.



Dynamis was the name of a Pontic princess of Augustus' time, a descendant of Mithridates the Great, but I find only two less noteworthy people who merited this name, which means "force" or "power." Both are mentioned in sepulchral inscriptions, one a Dynamis of Ephesus, the other from Tarrha, both of imperial date.<sup>23</sup>

Mr. Lomnitz' second stele (Fig. 4) has a relief showing a central male figure, draped and standing, with a smaller servant figure in the lower left corner. The inscription reads: Εὐφρόνιος Νείκο | νος = "Euphronios, son of Neikon." The relief uses the lunate *sigma* and the ligature N-E, again pointing to a rather late date, probably second century. Neikon is too common a name to require comment. Euphronios is likewise a common name, both in literature and inscriptions, as far back as Plato's *Theaetetus* (144 c.).

The final inscription to be discussed here is a stele of a rather coarse stone (Fig. 5).<sup>24</sup> The relief shows a female figure standing in frontal view. In a pediment above the relief are two hands, the thumbs pointed inward. Below the relief is inscribed: Μαρκία Διονυ | σίου ζήσασα ἔτη | θ' = "Markia, daughter of Dionysios, who lived nine years." The use of the lunate *sigma* and the style of the writing and relief point to a date in the third century of our era.

The name Dionysios is attested in Firatli-Robert (p. 150). The name Markia does not occur there, but this feminine form of a Roman *nomen* occurs frequently enough in the Greek part of the empire as an ordinary name.<sup>25</sup>

Much significance attaches to the upraised hands above the relief field. It was established by F. Cumont that these hands, frequently occurring on funerary monuments, symbolize those who died violent or untimely deaths.<sup>26</sup> The idea behind the gesture seems to be an invocation to the gods (frequently the sun-god) to find and punish those who caused the violent death. Cumont established this point conclusively by means of funerary monuments where the hands are accompanied by an imprecation on the evil-doer as well as by the normal inscription. Since in antiquity any untimely death seems to have been attributed to some unnatural agency, the use of this symbol was extended to funerary monuments

in these cases also, in hope that the one who died an untimely death could achieve rest and not be forced to roam the earth until his appointed hour came to be received into the underworld. So it is an appropriate symbol on the tombstone of this young girl who died at the age of nine.

As the reader has doubtless seen, the group of inscriptions we have presented is not very cohesive. Dates vary apparently from the second century B.C. to the third century A.D. The one at the University of Missouri is a pagan dedication, apparently re-cut, the rest gravestones of various sorts. If it were not for the Missouri stele, one might suspect that the man digging in his vegetable garden had stumbled across an ancient cemetery which had been in use for several centuries, but the presence of a dedication makes it more likely that he found a dump of some sort into which ancient stones of various types had been tossed at a later time, perhaps on such an occasion as that of the re-foundation and expansion of the city by Constantine the Great.

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<sup>1</sup> Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York. January 20, 1967, nos. 142-147.

<sup>2</sup> Museum of Art and Archaeology, Acc. No. 67.23. Height 0.32 m., width 0.365 m., thickness 0.055 m.

<sup>3</sup> See E. N. Lane, *Berytus* 15 (1964) 5-58 and 17 (1967-68) 13-47, 81-106.

<sup>4</sup> *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (hereafter *SEG*) XV, 129; D. Hereward, *AJA* 60 (1956) 172-174.

<sup>5</sup> *Inscriptiones Graecae (IG)* II2, 1622; J. Kirchner, *Prosopographia Attica* (Berlin 1901-03) 10031.

<sup>6</sup> Prytany list: *SEG* XII, 101; B. D. Meritt, *Hesperia* 21 (1952) 359-367. Meritt does not comment on the restoration, but it seems unobjectionable. Funerary inscriptions: *IG* II, 2024-2026; Kirchner, *op. cit.* 10105...

<sup>7</sup> Oropos: *IG* VII, 339. First Delphi example: *Sammlung der griechischen Dialektinschriften (SGDI)* 2041; W. Schulze, *Zur Geschichte lateinischer Eigennamen* (Goettingen 1904) 515, note 2, fails to understand the name, taking it as Italic. Here we may note some perhaps related Latin names: a Menia Iuliane of Tyana (H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 4069 [*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL)* III, Suppl. 7532]) from near Tomi, of imperial date; her name is very likely connected with Menios. More problematical is M. Menius M. F. Rufus (Dessau, *op. cit.* 3071 [*CIL* V, 5779]) of 6 B.C. Second Delphi example: *Fouilles de Delphes* III, vi, no. 47. Third Delphi example: *SEG*

- XII, 266; J. Bousquet, *BCH* 76 (1952) 653-660.
- <sup>8</sup> Gytheion: *IG* V, 1167; Sparta series: *IG* V, 307, 313, 314, 601. In the first of these, where the future *patronomos* is a victor himself, the name is given in deliberate Doric as Κλέανδρορ ὁ καὶ Μῆνιρ which shows that the name could be equivalent to the commoner Menis.
- <sup>9</sup> Mytilene: *IG* XII, ii, 324; Eretria: *IG* XII, ix, 682, Thasos: *IG* XII, viii, 461; Dardanians: *IG* VII, viii, 160 and L. Robert, *Monnaies antiques en Troade* (Paris 1966) 31, respectively.
- <sup>10</sup> Cyzicus: R. Cagnat et al., *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes (IGR)* IV, 148; J. H. Mordtmann, *Ath. Mitt.* 6 (1881) 41. Apollonia: *IGR* IV, 125; J. A. R. Munro, *JHS* 17 (1897) 269. Amastris: *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum* III, 4150b, year 168 of the era of Sinope=A.D. 99. Inland Anatolia: *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua (MAMA)* I, 287 and V, 140 respectively. Odessus: G. Mihailov, *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria Repertae (IG Bulg)* I, 47 a 17.
- <sup>11</sup> N. Firatli and L. Robert, *Les stèles funéraires de Byzance gréco-romaine* (Paris 1964) nos. 15, 19, 74, 129, 170, 175, 189, 219. Also G. Mendel, *Catalogue des sculptures grecques, romaines et byzantines des musées impériaux, Constantinople* (Constantinople 1912-14) no. 1005 (dated by Mendel 2nd-3rd c. A.D. but it uses the 4-barred sigma; if the person commemorated is a relative of the one mentioned in *Stèles funéraires* no. 19, it should be dated earlier). Cf. also A. Dupont and T. Homolle, *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'épigraphie* 369, no. 64b, 15, from Selymbria (*non vidi*).
- <sup>12</sup> Respectively: *Année épigraphique* 1959, no. 220. B. Latyshev, *Inscriptiones Antiquae Orae Septentrionalis Ponti Euxini* II, 60. *Ibid.* II, 139 (1st c. A.D.). *Ibid.* II, 432, A.D. 227-233. The former *synodos* member, *ibid.* II, 448; the latter, *ibid.* II, 450 and restored in 448. I find the restoration of Menios questionable in no. 441. *Ibid.* IV, 382 and 214 respectively for the funerary inscriptions.
- <sup>13</sup> It is interesting to observe that Menios appears as the name of a person dedicating a statue of a warlike maenad (*Anthology* VI, 122) in a poem attributed to Niketas, physician and contemporary of Theocritus, who lived in Cos and Miletus. The name is also used by Lucian (*Vera Historia* I.20) for one of the treaty-signers of the moon-forces, after their defeat by the sun-forces.
- <sup>14</sup> Smyrna: *SEG* XVI, 728; L. Jeffery, *BSA* 50 (1955) 84, no. 3. Chios: *SEG* XXII, 512; W. G. Forrest, *BSA* 58 (1963) 59, no. 9; C. Michel, *Recueil d'inscriptions grecques* 1146; *BCH* 3 (1879) 324, no. 11. Eresos: *SGDI* 286. Proconnesus: *IGR* IV, 117; *JHS* 26 (1906) 30. Odessus: Mihailov, *IG Bulg* I, no. 81 (there is apparently no room on the stone for the word θεῶν or an epithet. Ladik and Drya: *MAMA* VII, 2 and 434 respectively. Egirdir: *SEG* VI, 598; *ibid.* II, 747; *Annuario* 3 (1916-20) 53, no. 42. Antalya: *SEG* XVII, no. 617; *ibid.* VI, no. 644; G. Bean, *Bellethen* 22 (1958) 85, no. 113; *Annuario* 6-7 (1923-24) 420-421, no. 120, fig. 53; so George Bean, but read by L. Robert *apud* H. Metzger, *Catalogue des monuments votifs du Musée d'Adalia* (Paris 1952), no. 17, pl. 10, as *ikas* etc., instead of *Bās*.
- <sup>15</sup> It was purchased by Safani Gallery, New York, and is now in the possession of Dr. David Landau, Boston, Massachusetts. We are grateful to Mr. Safani and to Dr. Landau for permission to publish the relief here. Height 0.505 m., width 0.345 m.
- <sup>16</sup> More than half the examples in the book by N. Firatli and L. Robert, *Les stèles funéraires*, belong to this type. Our example is very close to, e.g., no. 49 of that collection (pl. 16, no. 49). The type is also common to the area of Odessus: cf. Mihailov, *IG Bulg* I, *passim*; also I. Stoian, *Tomitana* (Bucharest 1962) 202, pl. 54.
- <sup>17</sup> For this name see L. Zgusta, *Kleinasiatische Personennamen* (Prague 1964) 78-79.
- <sup>18</sup> Firatli-Robert, *op. cit.*, nos. 45 and 121; see p. 142.
- <sup>19</sup> Central Asia Minor: *MAMA* I, nos. 59 and 135; *ibid.* V, no. 148. The supposed example, *IGR* IV, 19 (*SGDI* 287) is actually a genitive of Mamas. Cf. also W. M. Ramsay's emendation, *Social Basis of Roman Power in Asia Minor* (Aberdeen 1940) 30, no. 21 (*SEG* VI, 76, no. 426) of the name Μαμάθια into Μάμα θία (aunt). Isauria: *SEG* VI, 514 and 549 (latter same as J. R. S. Sterrett, *Wolfe Expedition to Asia Minor*, (Boston 1888) no. 209. Lycaonia: *ibid.* VI, 146. Odessus: Mihailov, *IG Bulg.* I, nos. 116, 166, 191, perhaps also no. 205. See also now L. Zgusta, *op. cit.* 281-282.
- <sup>20</sup> These are in the possession of Mr. Eric Lomnitz, New York, who has kindly given permission to publish them. Fig. 3: Height 0.36 m., width at top 0.33 m., at bottom 0.35 m. Fig. 4: Height 0.38 m.; width 0.23 m.
- <sup>21</sup> *SEG* III, 271, a correction of *IG* III, 1092, line 29; *CIG* I, 275, where the father of two ephebes is named.
- <sup>22</sup> Apollonia: Mihailov, *IG Bulg* I, 416. Crimea: Latyshev, *op. cit.* I, no. 98 (a "strategos" who joined in the dedication of a gold Nike), 359 (a "sealer" of a decree of A.D. 129/130), 431, 581; II, 446 (A.D. 220), 456. Conjecturally restored: I, 435, 703.
- <sup>23</sup> The princess: Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 54. 24. The commoners: *IG* XII, i, 415 (Rhodes) and *SEG* XIX, 603; G.D. Weinberg, *Hesperia* 29 (1960) 107-108 (Crete).
- <sup>24</sup> This stele is in the collection of the Brooklyn Children's Museum, to which we are grateful for permission to publish. Height 0.235 m., width 0.133 m.
- <sup>25</sup> The main sources: F. Cumont, *Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia, Memorie* I, i, 76-80; *ibid.*, *Rendiconti* 5 (1927-28) 69-78; *Syria* 14 (1933) 393-395; *MAMA* V, no. 225; *MAMA* VI, no. 102; L. Robert, *Collection Froehner* (Paris 1936) no. 45—all with references to further examples. Cf. also L. Robert, *Hellenica* X, 248 and pl. 32. None of the known examples seems definitely to be from Byzantium itself, but cf. Cumont, *op. cit.* 78, nos. 27-28 for some possibly from there.
- <sup>26</sup> To cite examples only from the *MAMA*: I, 351; I, 377a; V, 28; VII, 250.



# Hayagriva

## A Minor Incarnation of Vishnu



The Sanskrit word for the horse—*aśva*—literally means “pervader.” Although the horse itself is not considered a sacred animal, yet its attributes, such as swiftness and speed, have been revered in India. Celestial horses draw the cars of gods. One of them is Uccaiśravas, the loud-neighing white horse, who is regarded as the King of Horses, and is the *vāhana* (vehicle) of the god Indra.<sup>1</sup> The swift god, Etaśa, is designated as the horse of Sūrya (the Vedic sun-god) and draws Sūrya’s car.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the celestial horses, various individual divine horses are also mentioned in Vedic mythology. One of them is Dadhikrā, who is celebrated in four later hymns of the Rig Veda. He is praised for his swiftness and bird-like speed. Tārksya,<sup>3</sup> in Vedic texts, represents the sun in the form of a divine steed, and in the epic and classical literature he is identical with Garuḍa<sup>4</sup> (the winged horse), the *vāhana* of Vishnu.

The significance of the horse as a symbol of fertility and fecundity is exemplified in *Aśvamedha*, the Vedic Horse Sacrifice. For this rite a horse was selected, a tag was fastened around its neck bearing the name of the sovereign, and it was allowed to wander for one year anywhere it would. When the horse was returned, it was sacrificed with celebrations. This sacrifice was performed during the Vedic period only by kings, and it continued until about the seventh century of our era. Its successful performance assured the sovereign of offspring and prosperity, proving that he was a conqueror and “King of Kings.”

Vishnu, the Pervader and Preserver, the second god of the Hindu triad,<sup>5</sup> assumes various *avatāras* (incarnations) to save mankind from destruction whenever it is threatened by catastrophe or by anti-gods. Two of Vishnu’s *avatāras* have the form of horses. One is two-armed Kalki, the tenth major



1. Three views of dark bronze figure of Hayagriva (66.208) from Madhya Pradesh, Central India.

avatāra, who, it is believed, will one day come to save the people of the world from being destroyed by their immorality. Another is Hayagriva, a minor avatāra who usually has four arms.

In later times Vishnu was no longer connected with natural phenomena. According to the Rig Veda, before Āditya gained importance as a god of light in the Hindu pantheon, Vishnu was considered a god of light and represented the sun.<sup>6</sup> Thus the appearance of the horse as an avatāra of Vishnu can readily be understood in the light of their relationship to the sun.

The name of Hayagriva appears in the epic literature. The word has several meanings: an attribute of Vishnu, an *asura* (demon) and various other forms.<sup>7</sup> Hayagriva, the horse-headed avatāra of Vishnu, is a minor incarnation.<sup>8</sup> He is sometimes identified with Hayaśīrsa (horse-headed). In the Hindu pantheon he is the Reciter of the Vedas (Holy Scriptures), Dis-

seminator of the Sacred Word, God of Learning and the "Protector of the Scriptures."<sup>9</sup> As Demon Hayagriva he is also known as the chief of the asuras. The Museum of Art and Archaeology has three bronzes of Hayagriva from South India (Figs. 1-3).<sup>10</sup>

The *Mahābhārata* (one of the two great Hindu epics) says that Vishnu descended upon the earth in the form of Hayagriva to rescue the Vedas from two demons, Madhu and Kaitabha, who had stolen them while Brahmā was asleep during the great Deluge.<sup>11</sup> Quoting *Devī Bhāgavata*, Shukla<sup>12</sup> maintains that "the god Vishnu had to assume this form of half-horse and half-man to destroy the Rākṣasa (demon) Hayagriva," because he (Rākṣasa Hayagriva) was granted the boon that neither man nor beast could kill him. According to the *Bhāgavata Purāna* (a mythological literary work), Matsya (the fish), the first incarnation of Vishnu, is credited with the rescue of the Vedas from the asura Hayagriva,



2. Front and back of brass figure of seated Hayagriva (66.188) from South India.

who had stolen them from Brahmā while he was asleep at the time of the Deluge. Matsya dived into the ocean, killed Hayagriva<sup>13</sup> and brought the Vedas back to Brahmā. But Hastings<sup>14</sup> says that in the Hindu pantheon Hayagriva is only a demon and always hostile to Vishnu. This theory is supported by the fact that he is worshiped in only one temple in South India. The demonic aspect of Hayagriva gained prominence when Śaktism<sup>15</sup> developed and the terrific, destructive characteristics of images were emphasized.

Evidently Hayagriva evolved from two different ideas, the asura (demon) and the avatāra (protector), illustrating the interrelationship of opposites, which finally ends in the motif of destruction of Hayagriva by Hayagriva. This brings out the principle of the eternal cycle of destruction and creation and illustrates a basic concept of Hindu philosophy—that both good and bad, creative and destructive aspects, are present in all nature. Zimmer<sup>16</sup> describes this

characteristic of Indian art and says concerning it: "This is a dichotomy familiar to the Indian mind and common in Hindu art; for India is deeply imbued with a sense of an ambivalent character of divinity. The Indian gods are simultaneously auspicious and terrific and the Lord of the World comprises in his transcendent totality all the pairs-of opposites."

The horse-headed Vishnu avatāra has several forms. That represented by our statuettes is a four-armed seated image. In the first of our three figures (Fig. 1) Hayagriva is seated cross-legged on a lotus pedestal on top of a rectangular base which is decorated with diaper, floral and columnar patterns. He is wearing a long *dhoti* (loincloth) and an elaborate necklace as well as a knobbed conical crown with a diaper design in the center. In his upper left hand he holds an *akṣmālā* (rosary), in his lower left hand a *pustaka* (manuscript) symbolizing the Vedas. In his upper right hand is a *śankha* (conch shell) edged with three flames, and in his



3. Front and back views of bronze figure of seated Hayagriva (66.189) from South India.

lower right hand he holds a *pāśa*, or noose. On the back of his head is a small *śiraścakra* (halo). Details of the decoration are precisely done in low relief.

The other two figures of Hayagriva in the Museum collection are essentially the same. That shown in Figure 2 is seated upon a lower base, wears a shorter dhoti, carries some elaborate attributes and has a more finely delineated halo (see back view). The third bronze (Fig. 3) is smaller and in some respects less detailed, while the horse head is more naturalistic. Here the noose seems to be missing from the lower right hand and must have been a separate attachment.

There is a four-armed form which has been confused with Kalki, the future avatāra of Vishnu. An example of this popular form is shown in Figure 4, a contemporary wooden image, brightly painted, from Benares. Van Gulik<sup>17</sup> identifies this image as Hayagriva, but in modern times the figure has been identified as Kalki because he carries a sword and

shield in two of his hands. However, the eight-armed form of Hayagriva (Fig. 5) also has a sword and shield; therefore these attributes are not sufficient for an identification as Kalki. Thapar<sup>18</sup> discusses this confusion of identification and states that Kalki, when horse-headed, never has more than two arms. Typically, Kalki is represented as a man with a sword and shield standing before a white horse.

In Figure 5 we see the eight-armed standing form of Hayagriva. This stone figure of the thirteenth century was found at Lakṣminarasimha temple at Nagahulli (Mysore). He is shown in a warrior's pose, with the following objects held in his eight hands: *gada* (club), *bāṇa* (arrow), *cakra* (disc), *khadga* (sword), *śaṅkha* (conch shell), *kheṭaka* (shield), *dhanuṣa* (bow), and *padma* (lotus). Under the feet of Hayagriva an asura equipped with sword and shield is shown lying in an abject condition. He, of course, is the demon which Hayagriva defeated and cast down.



4. Painted wooden image of standing Hayagriva from Benares. H. 15 cm.



5. Stone sculptured relief of eight-armed Hayagriva from Lakshminarasimha Temple, Mysore, 13th c.

6. Bronze figure of Buddhist Hayagriva from Kashmir, 13th c. H. 22.3 cm. Courtesy of the City Art Museum, St. Louis.

At Khajuraho, along with four-armed images of Hayagriva there are two-armed Hayagriva images with a bull vāhana; one hand holds a *kamaṇḍalu* (water vessel); the other is placed either in *abhaya mudrā* (attitude of protection) or *varada mudrā* (giving a boon).<sup>19</sup>

Thus far we have described the Demon Hayagriva and Vishnu Hayagriva in the Hindu pantheon. But the Buddhist Hayagriva, who is taken from the Hindu pantheon, occupies a much more important position in that pantheon than does the Vishnu Hayagriva in the Hindu pantheon. It is argued by some that the Vishnu Hayagriva was incorporated in the Mahāyānic pantheon<sup>20</sup> as a special deity about A.D. 500.<sup>21</sup> While assimilating it, Buddhism wholly removed the demonic aspect of Vishnu Hayagriva, which is an attribute of the great Hindu god. The function of the Buddhist Hayagriva is regarded as to guard Buddhist devotees against the attacks of the swarms of minor demons. Also the Buddhist Hayagriva, as an attendant of Avalokiteśvara,<sup>22</sup> is considered to be a Dharmapāla, or Defender of the Faith, against the attacks of demons and enemies. His special characteristic is a horse head incorporated in his headdress. Being a Horse-Headed One, he is considered a horse-god, especially in Tibet and Mongolia. He is worshiped particularly by horse traders in Tibet because his loud neighing is thought to make the demons run away.

In Buddhist iconography, Hayagriva is represented as a primary god as well as a secondary one and he appears in various forms. As an independent figure, Hayagriva is shown with a horse's head protruding from a human head and may have a seated Amitābha<sup>23</sup> in his headdress. In his miniature forms he is always represented as an attendant of Avalokiteśvara, along with the other attendants, and is always on the left side. In this form he appears without a horse head in his headdress. He is distinguished by his fierce appearance, his protruding belly and his snake ornaments.

A fine specimen of the image of the Buddhist Hayagriva is shown in Figure 6. In it the Tantric<sup>24</sup> Buddhist Hayagriva, with three faces and four arms, is seated in *lalitāsana* pose (at ease) on a

double lotus pedestal. A seated Amitābha, in relief, is on the tiara, and a horse head peers above it. The lower right hand is in varada mudrā (attitude of boon-giving); the upper right hand holds a *ghaṇṭā* (bell); the upper left holds a kamaṇḍalu (water vessel) and the lower left a long-stemmed padma (lotus bud).

Never a major god, Hayagriva is virtually unknown in India today. He is, however, still worshiped by a small group in the Madras area who honor him with an annual Pujā. The members of this group are followers of Vedānta Deśika, the Vaishnavaita saint, who commenced all his writings with the following verse:<sup>25</sup>

"I adore Hayagriva

Who has the supreme bliss of perfect knowledge,  
Whose form is pure like crystal,

Who is the source of all learning."<sup>26</sup>

As a god of learning Hayagriva has been overshadowed by Sarasvati, who enjoys great popularity with the students. The Vishnu Hayagriva's interest lies primarily in the fact that he gave rise to the Buddhist Hayagriva, an important figure in the Buddhist pantheon.

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<sup>1</sup> The spellings of proper names are not entirely consistent: forms familiar in English have been preferred, while others less well known are spelled as near the original as possible.

<sup>2</sup> A. A. Macdonell, *The Vedic Mythology* (Varanasi 1963) 149-150.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; Tārksya is "old mythic representation of the sun as a horse," *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. F. Max Müller 49 (Oxford 1879-1910) 62.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 149.

<sup>5</sup> Brahmā, the Creator of the Universe, is the first god and Shiva, the destroyer, is the third god.

<sup>6</sup> Macdonell. *op. cit.* 38-39.

<sup>7</sup> A. A. Macdonell, *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary* (London 1958) 375.

<sup>8</sup> In *Vishnu Purāṇa* it is stated that Vishnu "has preserved the world in the various forms of a fish, a tortoise, a boar, a horse, and a lion." *Vishnu Purāṇa; A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*, tr. by H. H. Wilson (London 1860) 541; R. H. van Gulik, in *Hayagriva, The Mantrayānic Aspect of Horse-Cult in China and Japan* (Leiden 1935), indicates that it is the

- only place in old literature where Hayagriva is positively listed as an avatāra. The *Bhaktamāla*, written about 1700 by Nabhadasa, officially lists Hayagriva as the eighteenth avatāra.
- <sup>9</sup> Alain Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism* (New York 1964) 185.
  - <sup>10</sup> Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia Acc. No. 66.208, height 0.094 m.; Acc. No. 66.188, height 0.098 m.; Acc. No. 66.189, height 0.078 m. All three figures are the gift of Dr. and Mrs. Samuel Eilenberg.
  - <sup>11</sup> It is stated in *Śabda Kalpadruma* (p. 1835 col. 3) that the Vishnu avatāra Hayagriva killed the two demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha.
  - <sup>12</sup> D. N. Shukla, *Hindu Canons of Iconography and Painting 2* (Gorakhpur 1958) 224.
  - <sup>13</sup> In *Sahasranāmastotra* it is stated that the Mother Goddess Durgā killed the demon Hayagriva and in *Trikānda śeṣa* it is mentioned that Mātali, the *sārathi* (charioteer of Indra) killed Hayagriva. It seems that there were various forms of Hayagriva as a demon.
  - <sup>14</sup> *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* ed. James Hastings, 7, (New York 1924-26) 764.
  - <sup>15</sup> The worship of female energy, whose followers are called Śākta. It can be traced to a few thousand years before the Christian era. It is mentioned in the Rig Veda.; See D. R. Thapar, *Icons in Bronze* (Bombay, New York 1961) 101.
  - <sup>16</sup> H. R. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia* 1, 2nd ed. (New York 1964) 360-361.
  - <sup>17</sup> Gulik, *Hayagriva* 21, fig. 3.
  - <sup>18</sup> Thapar, *op. cit.* 57, 74, 122, 125.
  - <sup>19</sup> U. Agarwal, *Khajuraho Sculptures and their Significance* (Delhi 1964) 42.
  - <sup>20</sup> One of the two main branches of Buddhism is Mahāyāna. These Buddhists, who are keen to help their fellow creatures for their salvation, are called followers of the Mahāyāna pantheon. Their compassion for the sufferings of others actuates them to renounce their comforts, their merits, and even their rights.
  - <sup>21</sup> van Gulik, *op. cit.* 24.
  - <sup>22</sup> Most popular god of Mahāyāna Buddhists and famous as a Bodhisattva; he is represented as refusing his well earned *nirvāṇa* (salvation) until all the creatures of the world obtain *Bodhi* (knowledge) and freedom from worldly miseries. See B. Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography* (Calcutta 1958) 11.
  - <sup>23</sup> One of the four Dhyāni Buddhas; spiritual father of Avalokiteśvara. He is identified by the lotus symbol.
  - <sup>24</sup> A Buddhist sect developed after the fifth century which believes in the worship of female energy (śakti).
  - <sup>25</sup> Information received from Dr. Desikan, Curator of Art, Madras Museum.
  - <sup>26</sup> Verse translated from Tamil by Dr. C. Sivaramamurti, Consultant to the Museums of India and former Director of the Madras Museum.