

GREECE, THE MOTHER OF ALL RELIGIOUS ART

BY THE EDITOR.

IF revelation means the discovery of eternal principles we may justly declare that the Greek nation has been the medium for the revelation of art to mankind as well as the founder of science. The Greek style of literature, Greek methods of artistic representation, Greek modes of thought have become standards and are therefore in this sense called "classical." We stand on the shoulders of the ancient Greeks, and whatever we accomplish is but a continuing of their work, a building higher upon the foundations they have laid. This is true of sculpture, of poetry and of the basic principle of the science of thought, of logic, and also of mathematics. Euclid, more than Leviticus or Deuteronomy, is a book inspired by God.¹

Whatever the non-Euclideans may have to criticize in the outlines of Euclid's plane geometry, we must say that the author of this brief work is, in a definite and well-defined sense, the prophet of the laws that prevail in the most useful of all space-conceptions. By Euclid we understand not so much the author of the book that goes under his name, but the gist of the book itself, the thought of it, the conception of geometry and the principles which are embodied in it. In our recognition of Euclid's geometry we include his predecessors, whosoever they may have been.

The man who for the first time in the history of mankind conceived the idea of points, lines, planes as immaterial quantities, as thought-constructions or whatever you may call the presentation of pure figures and their interdependence, was really a divinely inspired mind. Whatever flaws there may be in Euclid's presentation of plane geometry as to parallel lines, the main outline of the book, the scientific conception of the underlying thought, is the

¹By "God" we understand that superpersonal presence which shapes the world and is the standard of truth and right. See the author's book on *God; An Inquiry into the Nature of Man's Highest Ideal and a Solution of the Problem from the Standpoint of Science.*

revelation of an eternal truth, and such an outline was written in Greece.

But the same praise is due also to men of science in general, to the first formulators of philosophy, and to the founders of art, and it is no accident that the principles of all higher artistic productions go back to the Greeks.

I know very well that the Greeks had predecessors in Egypt, in Babylon, in Phenicia and perhaps elsewhere; that other nations developed along the same lines and reached similar, sometimes almost the same, goals, but the *ensemble* of all the arts and the very spirit of human ideals had nowhere, prior to the birth of Greek thought, found a better expression, and our own intellectual and artistic conceptions are practically Greek; our science is Greek, or, to say the least, it is a development which has risen from ancient Greek thinkers, among whom Aristotle is one main representative. All our philosophers were foreshadowed in ancient Greece. All our poetry and art is an off-shoot from Greek poetry and art, or at least has been profoundly influenced by it; the most significant productions of our art have their root ultimately in Greek prototypes.

Our religion too is Greek. We are accustomed to derive Christianity from Judaism, but that is a mistake. Judaism had an influence on the development of Christianity, and a Galilean whose religion was Jewish was selected as the universal Saviour; yea the Jewish literature, called the Old Testament, has been recognized by the Christians as inspired. Nevertheless the dominating and essential thoughts of Christianity are Greek.²

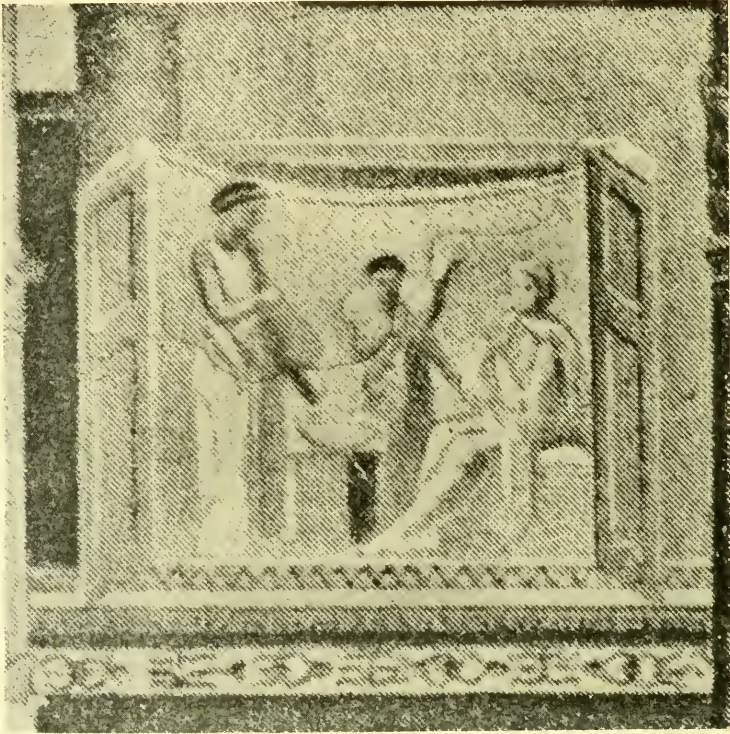
Christian art, likewise, is Greek. Just as the figure of the good shepherd goes back to Greek lamb-bearing shepherds and a calf-bearing Hermes,³ so the highest representations of saviours go back to the Greek conception of Apollo, the god of light and intellectuality. The figures of Buddha and Christ have their ultimate prototypes in conceptions of Greek artists, and so we must grant that Greek art has given to mankind the artistic formulation of its highest and best ideals.

About a year ago, in October 1913, I was sauntering through the ruins of the Palatine in Rome, and reached the place where the house of Livia has been dug out from the dust with which it had been covered for nineteen hundred years. We entered a small

² See the writer's book, *The Pleroma; An Essay on the Origin of Christianity*.

³ See the author's article on "The Nativity" in *The Open Court*, XIII, pp. 717-718.

atrium, apparently very secluded, and before us lay three rooms. Here Livia,⁴ the third wife of Augustus, lived, here she received her guests, here was the home of Augustus where he felt at ease in the most complete seclusion. There may still be seen the leaden pipes which served to carry water, the frescoes of exquisite workmanship on one wall and portions of the mosaic on the floor. The frescoes interested me. A large one on the left represents a



FRESCO IN LIVIA'S HOUSE.

street scene; some women are knocking at a door while a few persons on a balcony above are looking over the balustrade to see who the callers are. Another picture, on the right, is the well-known scene of Io watched by the thousand-eyed Argus who is stealthily approached by Mercury. Neither subject is of special significance, but there is a third fresco, in the center, which shows an altar with a bright fire and on either side a female figure. At the

⁴ See the author's article, "The Religion of Ancient Gaul and Caesar Worship, in *The Open Court*, XXIV, p. 743.

left we see a priestess standing ready to perform a sacrifice, and to the right a dignified matron seated comfortably in an arm-chair, while in the background a shepherd is carrying a lamb on his shoulders after the fashion of the Christian good shepherd. It is strange that this picture of unequivocal heathen provenience has not yet received the attention it deserves, and indeed the art photographer



GRECO-INDIAN BUDDHA FROM PESHAWAR (Gandhara).

has so far ignored its existence. Not even the large firm of Anderson has considered it worth the trouble to reproduce this little piece of art which, being exposed to the open air, is decaying rapidly in the moist atmosphere of rainy days.

In articles on the development of the Christ-picture⁵ we have learned that the older representations of Jesus as a beardless youth

⁵ Published in *The Open Court* for December, 1913, January, March and April, 1914. See especially the issue of December, 1913, pp. 716ff.

have originated from the custom of picturing Christ as the good shepherd, and the type of the good shepherd is a loan from pagan art. The pagan prototype, however, was not invented to represent the shepherd saving a lost lamb, but a youth bringing from the fold to the temple a sheep to be sacrificed. In this sense we must interpret the bas-relief on the so-called *Hermes Kriophoros*, a Mercury carrying a ram, and this too is the obvious meaning of the picture in Livia's house.

What a favorite *motif* the lamb-bearing shepherd was in pre-Christian times appears from the fact that it is found in the second century B. C. in the Gandhara sculptures of far-off India whither it had been imported by the Greek artists, the same who, in the service of the Yavana (i. e., Ionian) kings also chiseled the oldest marble statues of Buddha still extant, modeled after the prototype of the Apollo statues with the Attic topknot on the head and a halo about the face.

That Buddhist sculpture was imported into India by the Greek conquerors who followed in the wake of Alexander the Great, has, as we have stated in former articles in *The Open Court*, been pointed out by Grünwedel of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin, and other German scholars, and the arguments have been reinforced of late by M. Fouchet, a French scholar, who in one of his lectures at the Musée Guimet shows that the oldest Buddha sculpture has been found in Peshawar, the modern name of the ancient kingdom of Gandhara. Chinese pilgrims visited the town in the time when Buddhism was still flourishing, and the environs of Gandhara were crowded with monasteries and Buddhist monuments of all kinds. Excavations in recent times have brought to light a great number of Buddha statues, and there is no doubt that these statues were made by Greek artists imported by the Yavana kings.

We here reproduce the ruins of an old Buddhist monastery situated in a most romantic spot on the top of a mountain surrounded by ranges of other high mountains.

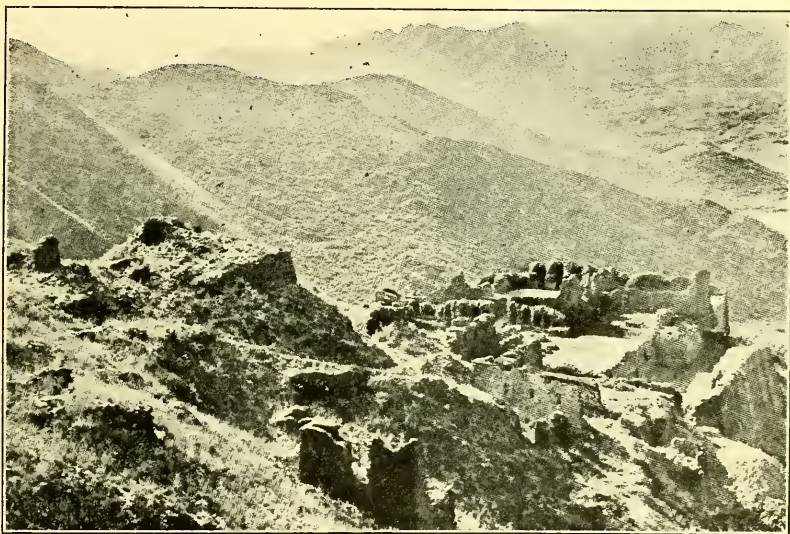
India was most accessible to invaders on the northwest, and it was here that the Greeks, and later on the Scythians, invaded the fertile valleys of the Indus and the Ganges. The coins tell the stories of the history of this part of the country, and from Gardner's collection of Indian coins M. Fouchet selects four pieces of money which show the successive conquests and the gradual trend of the country towards the supremacy of Buddhism.

The first coin shows on the obverse Alexander the Great; and on the reverse, Zeus, holding a scepter in the left hand and an

eagle on his right hand. It characterizes the Greco-Macedonian conquerors of India soon after the time of Alexander the Great, being Greek in style and indicating the ruler's religion also as Greek.

The Ionians change into Yavanas and become Indianized. The second coin, bearing the name of Demetrius, shows Indian influence in so far as the helmet of the king is made in the shape of an elephant's head, but the obverse is still Greek, showing Hercules with club in hand.

The Indianization grows stronger. The third coin is that of the famous king Milinda, the Greek Menandros, who appears to have



THE RUINS OF TAKHT-I-BAHAI.

shown a great interest in Buddhism as he is made the hero of a Buddhist book called *The Questions of King Milinda*, in which he praises and also endorses the views of the Buddhist patriarch Nagasena. We might almost believe that King Milinda had become a convert to Buddhism, but the coin before us shows Athena in full armor on the obverse, indicating that in his admiration for the Indian faith Milinda did not make such concessions to Buddhism as to cut off his official allegiance to the gods of Greece. In fact we find among the Gandhara sculptures a figure which closely resembles Athena, the favorite goddess of King Milinda, and we may assume that this indicates that while the king unreservedly

showed his admiration for the Buddhist faith, as described in the Buddhist book, the Buddhists on the other hand allowed his favorite goddess a place among religious works of art.⁶

Times changed again, and now we find the Indo-Scythians in possession of northern India. Greek rule was replaced by that of the barbarians of the Asiatic north, and among their kings we find Kanishka who in Asiatic pride calls himself the Shah of the Shahs. He is the immediate predecessor of Ashoka and appears on the fourth coin in barbaric dress, clothed in a kind of tunic; he is full-bearded while all the Greeks are shaved. At the same time we notice



INDIAN COINS.

(1) Of Alexander; (2) Of Demetrius; (3) Of Menander; (4) Of Kanishka.

the progress of the Buddhist faith, for the obverse shows a Buddha statue surrounded with two halos, one oblong mandola covering the whole body and another one of a circular shape surrounding the head. The inscription in Greek is ΒΟΔΔΟ . King Kanishka reappears again on the reliquary of Buddha's tomb discovered at Peshawar.

The origin of the Buddha type from Greek ideas may be considered as firmly established, and later developments still show Buddha always with western features, while the saints of Buddhism

⁶ See "Greek Sculpture the Mother of Buddhist Art," *The Open Court*, XXII, 306.

have been more freely modeled and show more the type of the Asiatic ethnology.

The Greek simplicity of the first Buddha statues was soon lost. Later Buddhas were decked more and more with Asiatic ornaments and suffered from Asiatic taste, but it is interesting to notice that ultimately the Buddha ideal is Greek, and we add that the Christ ideal has been derived from the same source, as can be proved by a juxtaposition of the two representations, where the original features of the Greek prototypes are not yet completely wiped out.



GRECO-CHRISTIAN CHRIST AND GRECO-BUDDHIST BUDDHA.

M. Fouchet, in his lecture on the Greek origin of the Buddhist image, places side by side a Christ statue and a Buddha statue, which both have been derived from the type of a Greek figure, commonly called Sophocles, or "the orator," and the similarity in attitude of this noble piece of work to the Buddha and Christ statues is obvious.

In comment on the two statues we will say that the Indian

treatment shows a great lack of proportion in so far as it shortens the lower part of the body and thus gives the impression of a stumpy figure, while the Christ figure exhibits a better proportion of the limbs.

One important difference between the two Saviour ideals is explained by a consideration of Buddhist traditions, which are



THE ORATOR.

older than Buddhist art. The Greek artist has done his best. He has changed the lump on the head, supposed to be indicative of the higher intelligence of the Enlightened One, into a knot of hair such as Greek youths used to wear and as appears on the head of

Apollo, the Greek prototype of Buddha, the god of light and the leader of the Muses.

The halo was used in the Alexandrian period in Greece for the purpose of representing the gods of light in paintings, but it did not appear in Greek sculpture. So we may assume that its presence in the Gandhara statues of Buddha presupposes previous painted pictures, in which a halo was more appropriate without undue violence to the principles of art. The Greek sculptor would probably not have represented it if it had not been imposed upon him by the common recognition of haloes in Buddhist imagination. So we may very well assume that the Gandhara marble statues of Buddha are not the oldest prototypes, but presuppose a religious school of painters whose works were not substantial enough to be preserved.

Whether the painted Buddhas were produced by Greek artists can no longer be determined, but it is probable. We may fairly well assume that the halo was a Greek invention, and that the Greek painters who introduced it into India were imported by the same Greek conquerors who imported the Greek sculptors.

Christianity owes much more to Greek civilization than the early Christians were inclined to concede. We know that Christianity originated in opposition to Greek paganism, and there can be no question that it came as a protest against polytheism, the worship of idols and pagan sacrifices, but for all that Christianity accepted the fundamental Greek ideas and also the moral aspirations of ancient Greece. Whatever we owe to ancient Israel, and especially to Judah and its development of a religious monotheism, we must not be blind to the fact that the main elements of our civilization were in their outlines first developed among the Greeks, and we note among them the conception of the Logos idea as the second God, the divine mediator as a means of creation, and the moral aspiration toward a love of one's enemies.