

MEMORANDUM

ON THE SUBJECT OF

THE EARL OF ELGIN'S PURSUITS

IN

Greece.

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LORD ELGIN'S PURSUITS IN GREECE

Ed. El. Fac. Scind. Edin.

IN the year 1799, when Lord Elgin was appointed to the embassy in Turkey, he happened to be in habits of intercourse with Mr Harrison, an architect of great eminence in the west of England, who had there given various very splendid proofs of his professional talents, especially in a public building of Grecian architecture at Chester. Mr Harrison had besides studied many years, and to great purpose, at Rome. Lord Elgin consulted him, therefore, on the benefits that might possibly be derived to the arts in this country, in case an opportunity could be found for studying the architecture and sculpture in Greece; and his opinion very decidedly was, that although we might possess exact measurements of

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the buildings at Athens, yet a young artist could never form to himself an adequate conception of their minute details, combinations, and general effect, without having before him some such sensible representation of them as could alone be conveyed by *casts*. This advice, which laid the groundwork of Lord Elgin's pursuits in Greece, led to the further consideration, that, since any knowledge which was possessed of these buildings was obtained under the peculiar disadvantages that the prejudices and jealousies of the Turks had ever thrown in the way of such attempts, any favourable circumstances which Lord Elgin's embassy might offer should be improved fundamentally; and not only modellers, but architects and draftsmen, be employed, to rescue from oblivion, with the most accurate detail, whatever specimens of architecture and sculpture in Greece had still escaped the ravages of time, and the barbarism of conquerors.

On this suggestion, Lord Elgin proposed to his Majesty's Government, that they should send out English artists of known eminence, capable of collecting this information in the most perfect manner; but the prospect appeared of too doubtful an issue for ministers to engage in the expense attending it. Lord Elgin then endeavoured to engage some of these artists at his own charge; but the value of their time was far beyond his means. When, however, he reached Sicily, on the recommendation of Sir William Hamilton, he was so fortunate as to prevail on Don Tita

Lusieri, one of the best general painters in Europe, of great knowledge in the arts, infinite taste, and of the most scrupulous exactness in copying any subject he is to represent, to undertake the execution of this plan; and Mr Hamilton, who was then accompanying Lord Elgin to Constantinople, immediately went with M. Lusieri to Rome; where, in consequence of the late revolutions in Italy, they were enabled to engage two of the most eminent *formatori* to make the *madreformi* for the casts: Signior Balestra, the first architect there, along with Ittar, a young man of great talent, to undertake the architectural part of the plan; and one Theodore, a Kalmouk, who had distinguished himself during several years at Rome, in the capacity of figure painter.

After much difficulty, Lord Elgin obtained permission from the Turkish government to establish these six artists at Athens; where they prosecuted the business of their several departments during three years, acting on one general system, with the advantage of mutual controul, and under the general superintendance of M. Lusieri; and at length completed Lord Elgin's plan in all its parts.

Accordingly, every monument, of which there are any remains in Athens, has been thus most carefully and minutely measured, and, from the rough draughts of the architects, (all of which are preserved), finished drawings have been made of the plans, elevations, and details of the most remarkable objects; in which

the Kalmouk has restored and inserted all the sculpture, with exquisite taste and ability. He has besides drawn, with astonishing accuracy, all the *bas-reliefs* on the several temples, in the precise state of decay and mutilation in which they at present exist.

Most of the *bas-reliefs*, and nearly all the characteristic features of architecture, in the various monuments at Athens, have been moulded, and the moulds of them have been brought to London.

Besides the architecture and sculpture at Athens, all remains of them which could be traced through several other parts of Greece, have been measured and delineated, with the most scrupulous exactness, by the second architect, Ittar.

And picturesque views of Athens, of Constantinople, of various parts of Greece, and of the Islands of the Archipelago, have been executed by Don Tita Lusieri.

In the prosecution of this undertaking, the artists had the mortification of witnessing the very wilful devastation, to which all the sculpture, and even the architecture, were daily exposed, on the part of the Turks and Travellers. The Ionic Temple, on the Ilyssus, which, in Stuart's time, (about the year 1759), was in tolerable preservation, had so completely disappeared, that its foundation can no longer be ascertained. Another temple, near Olympia, had shared a similar fate, within the recollection of man. The Temple of Minerva had been convert-

ed into a powder magazine, and been completely destroyed, from a shell falling upon it, during the bombardment of Athens by the Venetians towards the end of the seventeenth century; and even this accident did not deter the Turks from applying the beautiful Temple of Neptune and Erectheus to the same use, whereby it is constantly exposed to a similar fate. Many of the statues on the *posticum* of the Temple of Minerva, (Parthenon), which had been thrown down by the explosion, had been absolutely pounded for mortar, because they furnished the whitest marble within reach; and the parts of the modern fortification, and the miserable houses where this mortar was so applied, were discovered. Besides, it is well known that the Turks are in the constant habit of climbing up the ruined walls, and amusing themselves in defacing any sculpture they can reach; and they frequently break columns, statues, &c. in the expectation of finding within them some hidden treasure.

Under these circumstances, Lord Elgin felt himself impelled, by a stronger motive than personal gratification, to endeavour to preserve any specimens of sculpture, he could, without injury, rescue from such impending ruin. He had besides, another inducement, and an example before him, in the conduct of the last French embassy sent to Turkey before the Revolution. French artists did then remove several of the sculptured ornaments from several edifices on the Acropolis, and parti-

cularly from the Parthenon. In lowering one of the metopes, it fell, and was dashed to pieces; but other objects from the same temple were conveyed to France, where they are held in the very highest estimation, and occupy conspicuous places in the gallery of the Louvre. And the same agents were remaining at Athens during Lord Elgin's embassy, waiting only the return of French influence to renew their operations. Actuated by these inducements, Lord Elgin made use of all his advantages, and ultimately with such success, that he has brought to England, from the ruined temples at Athens, from the modern walls and fortifications, in which many fragments had been used as so many blocks of stone, and from excavations made on purpose, a greater quantity of original Athenian sculpture, in statues, alti and bassi relievi, capitals, cornices, frizes, and columns, than exists in any other part of Europe.

Lord Elgin is in possession of several of the metopes from the temple of Minerva. These represent the battles between the Centaurs and Lapithæ, at the nuptials of Pirithous. Each metope contains two figures, grouped in various attitudes; sometimes the Lapithæ victorious, sometimes the Centaurs. The relaxed muscles of one of the Lapithæ, who is lying dead and trampled on by a Centaur, is one of the finest productions of art; as well as the groupe adjoining to it, of Hippodamia, the bride, carried off by the Centaur Eurythion, and struggling to throw herself from

the monster's back ; while he is grasping her with brutal violence, with one hand twisted into her hair. The furious style of his galloping in order to secure his prize, and his shrinking from the spear that has been hurled after him, are expressed with prodigious animation. They are all in such high relief, as to seem groupes of statues; and they are in general finished with as much attention behind as before. They were originally continued round the entablature of the Parthenon, and formed ninety-two groupes. The zeal of the early Christians, the barbarism of the Turks, and the explosions which took place when the temple was used as a gun-powder magazine, have demolished a very large portion of them; so that, except those preserved by the exertions of Lord Elgin, it is in general difficult to trace even the outline of the original subject.

The frize, which was carried along the top of the walls of the cell, offered a continuation of sculptures in low relief, and of the most interesting kind. This frize being unbroken by triglyphs, had presented much more unity of subject than the detached and insulated groupes on the metopes of the peristyle. It represented the whole of the solemn procession during the Panathenaic festival: many of the figures are on horseback; others are just going to mount: some are in chariots; others on foot: oxen, and other victims, are leading to sacrifice: the nymphs called Canephoræ, Skiophoræ, &c. are carrying the

sacred offerings in baskets and vases; priests, magistrates, warriors, &c. &c. forming altogether a series of most interesting figures, in all the variety of costume, armour, and attitude. Some antiquaries, who have examined this frieze with minute attention, seem to think it contained portraits of many of the leading characters at Athens, during the Peloponnesian war, particularly of Pericles, Phidias, Socrates, Alcibiades, &c. The whole frieze, which originally was six hundred feet in length, is of Pentelic marble, from the quarries in the neighbourhood of Athens.

The tympanum over each of the porticoes of the Parthenon, was adorned with statues. That over the grand entrance of the temple from the west, contained the mythological history of Minerva's birth from the brain of Jove. In the centre of the groupe was seated Jupiter, in all the majesty of the sovereign of the Gods. On his left, were the principal divinities of Olympus; among whom Vulcan came prominently forward, with the axe in his hand which had cleft a passage for the goddess. On the right was Victory, in loose floating robes, holding the horses of the chariot which introduced the new divinity to Olympus. When Athens lost her freedom, she shewed her adulation and servility to the Roman power, by adding the statues of Hadrian and Sabina to this groupe from the hand of Phidias. One of the bombs fired by Morosini, the Venetian, from the opposite hill of the Musæum, injured many of the figures in this

tympanum, and the attempt of General Kænigsmark to take down the figure of Minerva, ruined the whole. By purchasing the house of one of the Turkish janisaries, built immediately under and against the columns of the portico, and by demolishing it in order to excavate, Lord Elgin has had the satisfaction of recovering the greatest part of the statue of Victory, in a drapery which discovers the fine form of the figure, with exquisite delicacy and taste. Lord Elgin also found there the torsi of Jupiter and Vulcan, together with other fragments.

On the opposite tympanum had been represented the contest between Minerva and Neptune for the honour of giving a name to the city. The Goddess of Wisdom had just gained the victory, by proving how much greater a benefit she should confer, in the peaceful and productive olive, than the God of Ocean, by his warlike gift of a horse. One or two of the figures remained on this tympanum, and others were on the top of the wall, thrown back by the explosion which destroyed the temple; but the far greater part had fallen: and a house being built immediately below the space they had occupied, Lord Elgin, encouraged by the success of his former excavations, obtained leave, after much difficulty, to pull down this house also, and continue his researches. But, to his great mortification, not the slightest fragment could be discovered; and the Turk, who had been induced, though most reluctantly, to give up his house to be demo-

lished, then exultingly pointed out the places in the modern fortification, and in his own buildings, where the cement employed had been formed from the very statues which Lord Elgin had been in hopes of finding. And Lord Elgin afterwards ascertained, on incontrovertible evidence, that these statues had been reduced to powder, and so used. Then, and then only, did he employ means to rescue what still remained from a similar fate. Among these objects, is a horse's head, which far surpasses any thing of the kind, both in the truth and spirit of the execution. The nostrils are distended, the ears erect; the veins swollen, one might almost say throbbing: his mouth is open, and he seems to neigh with the conscious pride of belonging to the Ruler of the Waves. Besides this inimitable head, Lord Elgin has procured, from the same pediment, two colossal groupés, each consisting of two female figures. They are formed of single massive blocks of Pentelic marble: their attitudes are most graceful; and the lightness and elegance of the drapery exquisite. From the same pediment has also been procured, a male statue, in a reclining posture, supposed to represent Neptune. And, above all, the figure denominated the Theseus, which is universally admitted to be superior to any piece of statuary ever brought into England. Each of these statues is worked with such care, and the finishing even carried so far, that every part, and the very plinth itself in which they rest, are equally polished on every side.

From the Opisthodomos of the Parthenon, Lord Elgin also procured some valuable inscriptions, written in the manner called Kionedon or Columnar, next in antiquity to the Boustrophedon. The greatest care is taken to preserve an equal number of letters in each line; even monosyllables are separated occasionally into two parts, if the line has had its complement, and the next line then begins with the end of the broken word. The letters range perpendicularly, as well as horizontally, so as to render it almost impossible to make any interpolation or erasure of the original text. The subjects of these monuments are public decrees of the people; accounts of the riches contained in the treasury, and delivered by the administrators to their successors in office; enumerations of the statues; the silver, gold, and precious stones deposited in the temples; estimates for the public works, &c.

The Parthenon itself, independently of its decorative sculpture, is so exquisite a model of Doric architecture, that Lord Elgin conceived it to be of the highest importance to the arts, to secure original specimens of each member of that edifice. These consist of a capital; assizes of the columns themselves, to shew the exact form of the curve used in channelling; a Triglyph, and motives from the cornice, and even some of the marble tiles with which the ambulatory was roofed: so that, not only the sculptor may be gratified by studying every specimen of his art, from the colossal statue to the basso-relievo, executed in the golden age of

Pericles, by Phidias himself, or under his immediate direction ; but the practical architect may examine into every detail of the building, even to the mode of uniting the tambours of the columns, without the aid of mortar, so as to give to the shafts the appearance of single blocks.

Equal attention has been paid to the Temple of Theseus ; but as the walls, and columns, and sculpture of this monument, are in their original position, no part of the sculpture has been displaced, nor the minutest fragment of any kind separated from the building. The metopes in mezzo-relievo, containing a mixture of the labours of Hercules and Theseus, have been modelled and drawn, as well as the frieze representing the battle between the Centaurs and Lapithæ, some incidents of the battle of Marathon, and some mythological subjects. The temple itself is very inferior in size and decorative sculpture to the Parthenon ; having been built by Cimon, the son of Miltiades, before Pericles had given his countrymen a taste for such magnificence and expense, as he displayed on the edifices of the Acropolis.

The original approach to the Acropolis, from the plain of Athens, was by a long flight of steps commencing near the foot of the Areopagus, and terminating at the Propylæa. The Propylæa was a hexastyle colonnade, with two wings, and surmounted by a pediment. Whether the metopes and tympanum were adorned with sculpture, cannot now be ascertained ; as the pediment

and entablature have been destroyed, and the intercolumniations built up with rubbish, in order to raise a battery of cannon on the top. Although the plan of this edifice contains some deviations from the pure taste that reigns in the other structures of the Acropolis, yet each member is so perfect in the details of its execution, that Lord Elgin was at great pains to obtain a Doric and an Ionic capital from its ruins. On the right hand of the Propylæa, was a temple dedicated to Victory without wings; an epithet to which many explanations have been given. This temple was built from the sale of the spoils won in the glorious struggles for freedom at Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea. On its frieze were sculptured many incidents of these memorable battles; in a style that has been thought by no means inferior to the metopes of the Parthenon: The only fragments of it that had escaped the ravages of barbarians, were built into the wall of a gunpowder magazine near it, and the finest block was inserted upside downwards. It required the whole of Lord Elgin's influence at the Porte, to get leave to remove them, but he at length succeeded. They represent the Athenians in close combat with the Persians; and the sculptor has taken care to mark the different dresses and armour of the various forces serving under the great king. The long garments and zones of the Persians, had induced former travellers, from the hasty and imperfect view they had of them, to suppose the subject was the battle between Theseus and the

Amazons, who invaded Attica, under the command of Antiope; but the Persian tiaras, the Phrygian bonnets, and many other particulars, clearly point out the mistake. The spirit with which the groupes of combatants are pourtrayed is wonderful,—one remarks, in particular, the contest of some warriors to rescue the body of a dead comrade, which is expressed with uncommon animation. These bas-reliefs, and some of the most valuable sculpture, especially the representation of a marriage, taken from the parapet of the modern fortification, were embarked in the *Mentor*, a vessel belonging to Lord Elgin, which was unfortunately wrecked off the island of Cerigo, (ol. Cythera); but Mr Hamilton, who was at the time on board, and most providentially saved, immediately directed his whole energies to discover some means of rescuing so valuable a cargo; and, in the course of several weeks devoted to that endeavour, he succeeded in procuring some very expert divers from the islands of Syme and Calymno, near Rhodes; who were able, with immense labour and perseverance, to extricate a few of the cases from the hold of the ship, while she lay in twelve fathoms water. It was impossible to recover the remainder, before the storms of two winters had effectually destroyed the timbers of the vessel.

Near the Parthenon are three temples, so connected by their structure, and by the rites celebrated in them, that they might be almost considered as a triple temple. They are of small di-

mensions, and of the Ionic order: one of them dedicated to Neptune and Erectheus; the second to Minerva Polias, the protectress of citadels; the third to the nymph Pandrosos. It was on the spot where these temples stand, that Minerva and Neptune were said to have contended for the honour of naming the city. Athenian superstition long shewed the mark of Neptune's trident, and a briny fountain, which attested his having there opened a passage for his horse; and the original olive tree produced by Minerva was venerated in the temple of Pandrosos, as late as the time of the Antonines.

This temple of Minerva Polias is of the most delicate and elegant proportions of the Ionic order: the capitals and bases of the columns are ornamented with consummate taste; and the sculpture of the frieze and cornice is exquisitely rich. It is difficult to conceive how marble has been wrought to such a depth, and brought to so sharp an edge: the palmetti, oveti, &c. have all the delicacy of works in metal. The vestibule of the temple of Neptune, is of more masculine proportions; but its Ionic capitals have great merit. This beautiful vestibule is now used as a powder magazine; and no other access to it could be had but by creeping through an opening in a wall which had been recently built between the columns. Lord Elgin was enabled to keep it open during his operations within; but it was then closed, so that future travellers will be prevented from seeing the inner

door of the temple, which is, perhaps, the most perfect specimen in existence of Ionic ornament. Both these temples have been measured, and their plans, elevations, and views made with the utmost accuracy. All the ornaments have been moulded; some original blocks of the frize and cornice have been obtained from the ruins, as well as a capital and a base.

The little adjoining chapel of Pandrosos is a most singular specimen of Athenian architecture: instead of Ionic columns to support the architrave, it had seven statues of Caryan women, or Caryatides. The Athenians endeavoured, by this device, to perpetuate the infamy of the inhabitants of Caryä, who were the only Peloponnesians who sided with Xerxes in his invasion of Greece. The men had been reduced to the deplorable state of Helotes; and the women not only condemned to the most servile employments, but those of rank and family forced, in this abject condition, to wear their ancient dresses and ornaments. In this situation, they are here exhibited. The drapery is fine, the hair of each figure is braided in a different manner, and a kind of diadem they wear on their head forms the capital. Besides drawings and mouldings of all these particulars, Lord Elgin has brought to England one of the original statues. The Lacedæmonians had used a species of vengeance similar to that above mentioned in constructing the Persian Portico, which they had erected at Sparta, in honour of their victory over the forces of

Mardonius at Plataea: placing statues of Persians in their rich oriental dresses, instead of columns, to support the entablature.

The architects have also made a ground plan of the Acropolis, in which they have not only inserted all the existing monuments, but have likewise added those, the position of which could be ascertained from traces of their foundations. Among these are the Temple and Cave of Pan; to whom the Athenians thought themselves so much indebted for the success of the battle of Marathon, as to vow him a temple. All traces of it are now nearly obliterated; as well as of that of Aglauros, who devoted herself to death to save her country. Here the young citizens of Athens received their first armour, enrolled their names, and took the oath of fighting to the last for the liberties of their country. Near this spot the Persians scaled the wall of the citadel, when Themistocles had retired with the remains of the army, and the whole Athenian navy, to Salamis. The remains of the original walls may still be traced in the midst of the Turkish and Venetian additions, and they are distinguishable by three modes of construction at very remarkable epochs,—the Pelasgic, the Cecropian, and that of the age of Cimon and Pericles. It was at this brilliant period, that the Acropolis, in its whole extent, was contemplated with the same veneration as a consecrated temple; consistent with which sublime conception, the Athenians crowned its lofty walls with an entablature of grand proportions, surmount-

ed by a cornice. Some of the massy triglyphs and motules still remain in their original position, and produce a most imposing effect.

The ancient walls of the city of Athens, as they existed in the Peloponnesian war, have been traced by Lord Elgin's artists in their whole extent, as well as the long walls that led to the Munychia and the Piræus. The gates, mentioned in ancient authors, have been ascertained : and every public monument, that could be recognised, has been inserted in a general map ; as well as detailed plans given of each. Extensive excavations were necessary for this purpose, particularly at the Great Theatre of Bacchus ; at the Pnyx, where the assemblies of the people were held, where Pericles, Alcibiades, Demosthènes, and Æschines, delivered their orations. The Theatre built by Herodes Atticus, to the memory of his wife Regilla, and the supposed Tumuli of Antiope, Euripides, &c. have also been opened ; and from these excavations, and various others in the environs of Athens, has been procured a complete and valuable collection of Greek vases. The colonies sent from Athens, Corinth, &c. into Magna Græcia, Sicily, and Etruria, carried with them this art of making vases, from their mother country ; and, as the earliest modern collections of vases were made in those colonies, they have improperly acquired the name of Etruscan. Those found by Lord Elgin at Athens, Æginae, Argos, and Corinth, will prove the indubitable

claim of the Greeks to the invention and perfection of this art : Few of those in the collections of the King of Naples at Portici, or in that of Sir William Hamilton, excel some Lord Elgin has procured, with respect to the elegance of the form, the fineness of the materials, the delicacy of the execution, or the beauty of the subjects delineated on them ; and they are, for the most part, in very high preservation. A tumulus, into which an excavation was commenced under Lord Elgin's eye during his residence at Athens, has furnished a most valuable treasure of this kind. It consists of a large marble vase, five feet in circumference, inclosing one of bronze thirteen inches in diameter, of beautiful sculpture, in which was a deposit of burnt bones, and a lachrymatory of alabaster, of exquisite form ; and on the bones lay a wreath of myrtle in gold, having, besides leaves, both buds and flowers. This tumulus is situated on the road which leads from Port Piræus to the Salaminian Ferry and Eleusis. May it not be the tomb of Aspasia ?

From the Theatre of Bacchus, Lord Elgin has obtained the very ancient sun-dial, which existed there during the time of *Æschylus*, *Sophocles*, and *Euripides* ; and a large statue of Bacchus, dedicated by *Thrasyllus* in gratitude for his having obtained the prize of tragedy at the Panathenaic festival. A beautiful little Corinthian temple near it, raised for a similar prize gained by *Lysicrates*, and commonly called the Lantern of *Demosthenes*,

has also been drawn and modelled with minute attention. It is one of the most exquisite productions of Greek architecture. The elevation, ground-plan, and other details of the octagonal temple, raised by Andronicus Cyrrhestes to the winds, have also been executed with care; but the sculpture on its frieze is in so heavy a style, that it was not judged worthy of being modelled in plaster.

Permission was obtained from the archbishop of Athens, to examine the interior of all the churches and convents in Athens and its neighbourhood, in search of antiquities; and his authority was frequently employed, to permit Lord Elgin to carry away several curious fragments of antiquity. This search furnished many valuable bas-reliefs, inscriptions, ancient dials, a Gymnasiarch's chair in marble, on the back of which are figures of Harmodius and Aristogiton, with daggers in their hands, and the death of Læna, who bit out her tongue during the torture, rather than confess what she knew of the conspiracy against the Pisistratidæ. The fountain in the court-yard of our consul Logotheti's house was decorated with a bas-relief of Bacchantes, in the style called Græco-Etruscan: Lord Elgin obtained this, as well as a *quadriga* in bas-relief, with a Victory hovering over the charioteer, probably an *ex voto*, for some victory at the Olympic games. Amongst the Funeral Cippi found in different places, are some remarkable names, particularly that of Socrates; and in

the Ceramicus itself, Lord Elgin discovered an inscription in elegiac verse, on the Athenians who fell at Potidæa, and whose eulogy was delivered with pathetic eloquence in the funeral oration of Pericles.

The peasants at Athens generally put into a niche over the door of their cottages, any fragment they discover in plowing the fields. Out of these, were selected and purchased many curious antique votive tablets, with sculpture and inscriptions. A complete series has also been formed of capitals, of the only three orders known in Greece, the Doric, the Ionic, and the Corinthian; from the earliest dawn of art in Athens, to the zenith of taste under Pericles; and, from thence, through all its degradations, to the dark ages of the lower empire.

At a convent called Daphne, about half way between Athens and Eleusis, were the remains of an Ionic temple of Venus, equally remarkable for the brilliancy of the marble, the bold style of the ornaments, the delicacy of the finish, and their high preservation. Lord Elgin procured from thence two of the capitals, a whole fluted column, and a base.

Lord Elgin, in his excursions on the plain of Troy, was so fortunate as to secure the celebrated Boustrophedon inscription, from the promontory of Sigæum, a monument which several ambassadors from Christian Powers to the Porte, and even Louis XIV. in the zenith of his power, had ineffectually endeavoured to

obtain. Lord Elgin found it forming a seat at the door of a Greek chapel, and habitually resorted to by persons afflicted with ague, who, deriving great relief from remaining reclined upon it, attributed their recovery to the marble, and not to the elevated situation and sea air, of which it procured them the advantage. Meanwhile, this abuse of it had obliterated many of the letters. It is, however, the most ancient and curious specimen extant of Greek writing, at an epoch when the alphabet was very imperfect, and when the lines went alternately from right to left, and from left to right, like the furrows made by oxen in plowing; whence it has received the denomination of *Boustrophedon*.

By the aid of this valuable acquisition, Lord Elgin's collection of inscriptions comprehends specimens of every remarkable peculiarity in the variations of the Greek alphabet, throughout the interesting period of Grecian history.

A few bronzes, cameos, and intaglios, were also procured: in particular, a cameo of very exquisite beauty, in perfect preservation, and of a peculiarly fine stone: it represents a female centaur suckling a young one. Lord Elgin was equally fortunate in forming a collection of Greek medals, among which are several that are very rare; others of much historical merit; and many most admirable specimens of art.

The late Dr Carlyle, professor of Arabic at Cambridge, had accompanied Lord Elgin to Turkey, in the hopes of discovering any

hidden remains of Grecian literature, as well as any unknown Arabic productions. Accordingly, Lord Elgin obtained for him access to some deposits of MSS. in the seraglio : and in company with another gentleman of the embassy, amply qualified also for the research, he examined many collections in Constantinople, and in the neighbouring islands ; all the monasteries, to the number of above thirty, on Mount Athos ; and various other religious establishments throughout Greece, and the Archipelago islands. From these, they brought home a great many MSS. which to them appeared valuable ; as well as a particular catalogue and description of such as they were obliged to leave behind them.

In proportion as Lord Elgin's plan advanced, and the means accumulated in his hands towards affording an accurate knowledge of the works of architecture and sculpture in Athens and in Greece, it became a subject of anxious inquiry with him, in what way the greatest degree of benefit could be derived to the arts from what he had been so fortunate as to procure.

In regard to the works of the architects employed by him, he had naturally, from the beginning, looked forward to their being engraved : and accordingly all such plans, elevations, and details, as to those persons appeared desirable for that object, were by them, and on the spot, extended with the greatest possible care, and they are now in a state of complete preparation. Besides these, all the working sketches and measurements have been pre-

served, and offer ample materials for further drawings, should they be required. It was then Lord Elgin's wish, both out of respect for the subjects themselves, and in a view to their future utility, that the whole of the drawings might be executed in the highest perfection of the art of engraving: and for this purpose, he conceived it not impossible, and certainly very much to be desired, that a fund should be procured by subscription, exhibition, or otherwise, by aid of which, these engravings might still be distributable, for the benefit of artists, at a rate of expense within the means of professional men.

More difficulty occurred in forming a plan, for deriving the utmost advantage from the marbles and casts. Lord Elgin's first attempt was to have the statues and bas-reliefs restored; and in that view he went to Rome, to consult and to employ Canova. The decision of that most eminent artist was conclusive: on examining the specimens produced to him, and making himself acquainted with the whole collection, and particularly with what came from the Parthenon, by means of the persons who had been carrying on Lord Elgin's operations at Athens, and who had returned with him to Rome, Canova declared, That however greatly it was to be lamented that these statues should have suffered so much from time and barbarism, yet it was undeniable, that they had never been retouched; that they were the work of the ablest artists the world had ever seen; executed under the most

enlightened patron of the arts, and at a period when genius enjoyed the most liberal encouragement, and had attained the highest degree of perfection; and that they had been found worthy of forming the decoration of the most admired edifice ever erected in Greece: That he should have had the greatest delight, and derived the greatest benefit, from the opportunity Lord Elgin offered him of having in his possession, and contemplating these inestimable marbles: But, (his expression was,) it would be sacrilege in him, or any man, to presume to touch them with a chisel. Since their arrival in this country, they have been thrown open to the inspection of the public; and the opinions and impressions, not only of artists, but of men of taste in general, have thus been formed and collected. From these, the judgment pronounced by Canova has been universally sanctioned: and all idea of restoring the marbles has been deprecated. Meanwhile, the most distinguished painters and sculptors have assiduously attended this museum, and evinced the most enthusiastic admiration of the perfection to which these marbles now prove to them that Phidias had brought the art of sculpture. They have attentively examined and ascertained, that they were executed with the most scrupulous anatomical truth, not only in the human figure, but in the various animals to be found in this collection. They have been struck with the wonderful accuracy, and, at the same time, the great effect of the minutest detail, and with the ani-

mation and expression, so distinctly produced in every variety of attitude and action. Several of the persons, more advanced in years, never cease to testify the liveliest concern, at not having had the advantage of studying these models. And several who have had the opportunity of forming the comparison, have publicly and unequivocally declared, that, in a view to professional men, this collection is more valuable than any other collection without exception. It may be added, on the subject of these impressions and opinions, that one of the groupes of female statues so rivetted and agitated the feelings of Mrs Siddons, that great master of representation, as actually to draw tears from her eyes; and that Mr West, no less eminent as an artist, than as the zealous patron and encourager of the arts in this country, after passing some months in the daily study of these marbles, and making every examination to ascertain the advantage of such models, to painting as well as to sculpture, communicated to Lord Elgin the annexed report of his operations.*

Two suggestions have, however, met with much approbation, in a view to the improvement to be obtained to sculpture, from these marbles and casts—The first, that casts of all such as were ornaments on the temples, should be placed in an elevation, and in a situation, similar to that which they actually had occupied; that the originals should be disposed, in a view to the more easy

* *Vid.* Mr West's Letter subjoined.

inspection and study of them; and that particular subjects should occasionally be selected, and premiums given for the restoration of them: This restoration to be executed on casts, but by no means on the originals; and in the museum itself, where the character of the sculpture might be the more readily studied.

Secondly, From trials which Lord Elgin was induced to make, at the request of professional gentlemen, a strong impression has been created, that the science of sculpture, and the taste and judgment by which it is to be carried forward and appreciated, cannot so effectually be promoted, as by athletic exercises practised in the presence of similar works, the distinguishing merit of which is an able, scientific, ingenious, but exact imitation of nature. By no other way could the variety of attitude, the articulation of the muscles, the description of the passions; in short, every thing a sculptor has to represent, be so accurately or so beneficially understood and represented.

Under similar advantages, and with an enlightened and encouraging protection bestowed on genius and the arts, it may not be too sanguine to indulge a hope, that, prodigal as Nature is in the perfections of the human figure in this country, animating as are the instances of patriotism, heroic actions, and private virtues deserving commemoration, sculpture may soon be raised in England to rival the ablest productions of the best times of Greece.

LETTER
BENJAMIN WEST, Esq.
TO
THE EARL OF ELGIN.

MY LORD, *London, Newman Street, Feb. 6. 1809.*

I HAVE to acknowledge the receipt of your Lordship's obliging letter from your residence in Scotland; and have to thank you for the indulgence you afforded me, to study, and draw from, the sculptures by Phidias, in your Lordship's house in Piccadilly.

I have found in this collection of sculpture so much excellence in art, (which is as applicable to painting and architecture, as to sculpture,) and a variety so magnificent and boundless, that every branch of science connected with the fine arts, cannot fail to acquire something from this collection. Your Lordship, by bringing these treasures of the first and best age of sculpture and architecture into London, has founded a new Athens for the emulation and example of the British student. Esteeming this collection as I do, my Lord, I flatter myself it will not be unacceptable for your Lordship to know, what are the studies I have made from it.

I must premise to your Lordship, that I considered loose and detached sketches from these reliques, of little use to me, or value to the arts in general. To improve myself, therefore, and to contribute to the improvement of others, I have deemed it more important to select and combine whatever was most excellent from them, into subject and composition.

From the Centaurs in *alto rilievo*, I have taken the figures of most distinguished eminence, and formed them into groupes for painting; from which selection, by adding female figures of my own, I have composed the Battle of the Centaurs. I have drawn the figures the size of the originals, on a canvass five feet six inches high, by ten feet long.

From the equestrian figures in *relievo*, I have formed the composition of Theseus and Hercules in triumph over the Amazons, having made their queen Hippolita a prisoner. In continuation, and as a companion to this subject, I have formed a composition, in which Hercules bestows Hippolita in marriage upon Theseus. Those two are on the same size with the Centaurs.

From the large figure of Theseus, I have drawn a figure of that hero, of the same size with the sculpture. Before him, on the ground, I have laid the dead body of the Minotaur which he slew. As, by this enterprise, he was extricated from the Labyrinth by the aid of Ariadne, I have represented that Princess sitting by his side, gazing on him with affection. In the back ground, are the Athenian youths, whom he delivered from bondage; and near them, the ship "with black sails," (in the poetic fancy of Pindar), which brought him to Crete. The size of this canvass is six feet high, by nine feet long.

From the figure of Neptune, I have formed a companion to the Theseus. In this composition, I have shewn Neptune reclining, with his left arm upon the knees of Amphitrite, while with his right he strikes the earth with his trident, and creates the horse. Around him, is Triton, with his train of marine gods; in the back ground, are equestrian exhibitions; and in the distance, ships at anchor.

From the casts in plaster of Paris, taken from the moulds which your Lordship had made at Athens, I selected such figures as I was enabled to form into a composition ; the subject of which is, Alexander and his horse Bucephalus: it is on a canvass smaller than those before mentioned.

In order to render the subjects which I selected, with perspicuity, and the effect, which arises from combined parts and the order of arrangements, comprehensive, I have ventured to unite figures of my own invention with those of Phidias ; but as I have endeavoured to preserve, with the best force of my abilities, the style of Phidias, I flatter myself, the union will not be deemed incongruous or presumptuous. Your Lordship may perhaps be inclined to think with me, that a point, and, if I may so express it, a kind of climax, is thus given to those works, by the union of those detached figures, with the incorporation of the parts of individual grandeur, and abstracted excellence of Phidias. For what I have done, my Lord, I had the example of Raphael, and most of the Italian masters of the greatest celebrity. Is it not, moreover, this combination of parts which comes the nearest to perfection in refined and ideal art ? for, thus combining what is excellent in art with what possesses character in nature, the most distinguished works have been produced, in painting, poetry, and sculpture.

In following this system of combination, I had the singular good fortune, by your Lordship's liberality, to select from the first productions of sculpture which ever adorned the world in that department in art ; which neither Raphael, nor any of the distinguished masters, had the advantage to see, much less to study, since the revival of art. I may, therefore, declare with truth, my Lord, that I am the first in modern times who have

enjoyed the much coveted opportunity, and availed myself of the rare advantage of forming compositions from them, by adapting their excellencies to poetic fictions and historical facts. I sincerely hope that those examples of art, with which your Lordship has enriched your country, and which has made London, if not the first, one of the most desirable points in Europe to study them—will not only afford to the British people, the frequent opportunity of contemplating their excellencies; but will be the means of enlightening the public mind, and correcting the national taste, to a true estimation of what is really valuable and dignified in art. The influence of these works will, I trust, encourage the men of taste and opulence in this country, to bestow a liberal patronage on genius to pursue this dignified style in art, for the honour of genius, themselves, and the country. I need not impress on your Lordship's mind a truth, of which the experience of the progress of art, through all ages, is the best confirmation, that without such refinement in this higher department of poetic or historical subjects, England will never acquire the glory of possessing the arts, in any but a subordinate degree. It is my wish, therefore, as it has been my endeavour, that the supreme excellence of those works of sculpture should become the means, and act as an incentive to that improvement amongst us, by which we may gratify the ambition of all honourable minds, and be remembered amongst the lovers of art and our country in a distant posterity, as those who have opened the avenues of excellence, and have rightly known and valued them. Let us, my Lord, justify ourselves, at least, by our intentions. In whatever estimation the arts of the present day shall be held by those of future ages, your Lordship must be remembered by the present, and be recorded by those to come, as a

benefactor who has conferred obligations, not only on a profession, but upon a nation ; and as having rescued from the devastation of ignorance, and the unholy rapine of barbarism, those unrivalled works of genius, to be preserved in the bosom of your country, which a few centuries more might have consigned to oblivion.

To your Lordship I have to return my sincere thanks, for the means you have afforded me of adding my name to that of Phidias, by arranging his figures in my own compositions, and adapting them to subjects, by which my sketches may be rendered more acceptable, as well as more improving to myself in the higher point of my profession. And may the materials from which those sublime sculptures have been produced, be preserved from accident, that men of taste and genius, yet unborn, may be gratified with a sight of them ; and that the admiring world may revere the Author of all things, for having bestowed on man those peculiar powers of his mind and hand. With these sentiments, and with profound respect for your Lordship, I have the honour to be,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's most

Obedient and obliged,

BENJ. WEST.

To the Earl of Elgin.