

SOCIÉTÉ ROYALE D'ARCHÉOLOGIE — ALEXANDRIE

BULLETIN

No. 33 — N. S. Vol. X. 2.

Publié par A. ADRIANI.

ALEXANDRIE

SOCIÉTÉ DE PUBLICATIONS ÉGYPTIENNES

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1939

« Le Dieu Cavalier à l'Anguipède » and Soldier Saints

Among victorious sky-gods and vanquished demons of darkness, the « Cavalier à l'Anguipède » find a place ; therefore cannot well be left quite out of sight in the study of so wide a subject as soldiers saints and

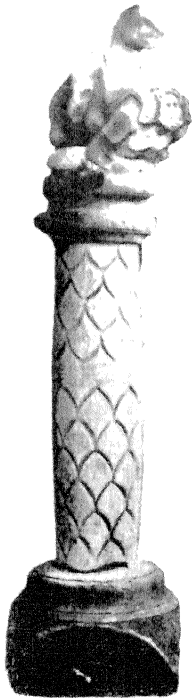


Fig. 1.

conquered dragons. Familiar to students of Gallo-Roman sculpture from remains of groups of statuary that once surmounted « colonnes au géant » in Belgica and Roman Germania, now housed in the museums of erstwhile Burgundy, yet comparatively little known ; a few photographs may be useful to show what they were like, since Espérandieu's great work, « Recueil général des Bas-reliefs, Statues et Bustes de la Gaule romaine », is not to be found in many public libraries ; nor are rem-

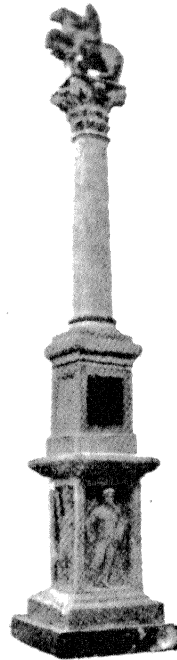


Fig. 2.

nants of these monuments, of which not one exists entire, to be seen in many museums outside France and the Rhineland.

The column, fig. 1, found at Neuweiler and preserved in the Musée de Saverne ¹ shows a shaft carved with a design of overlapping leaves

¹ E. E. ESPÉRANDIEU (E. E.) Vol. VII. No. 5700 p. 247.

and a base and capital of no special interest. The column, fig. 2, found at Ehrang, and now in the Musée de Trèves ¹ has a similar shaft, a base in the form of an altar, a rectangular pedestal, and a Corinthian capital. Columns of this type sometimes have octagonal pedestals.

The surmounting groups of statuary are so arrestingly vigorous, it is surprising to learn how small they are ; but the columns themselves are not very tall, as a rule under two metres in height. The Saverne exam-



Fig. 3.

ple is only about 1 m. 45 high over all. The column from Ehrang is a questionable restoration, being made of two kinds of stone ². The total height would be about 10 m. but the group on top is of average dimensions, less than a metre each way. However, the photograph answers the purpose of showing the altar base and typical leaf covered shaft.

These groups of statuary ³ invariably represent a galloping horseman trampling on the serpent coils ending

in two serpent's heads, of a human-headed monster, which either turns to fight with its naked hands, fig. 3. or grips the ground in anguish under the weight of the horse, fig. 4; unless, indeed, it is bearing him

¹ E. E. Vol. VI. No. 5233, p. 416.

² E. E. op. cit. Vol. X. p. 413 n.

³ E. E. Vol. VI. No. 4557, p. 25, Musée de Nancy ; No. 5247, p. 425, Musée de Trèves.

aloft on its shoulders, as a happier expression on its countenance seems sometimes to suggest ¹.

Associated with tree cults and well worship ² these columns were erected beside springs and rivers, probably where votive streamers al-



Fig. 4.

ready fluttered on the nearest hawthorn tree, to propitiate the water sprites, whether nymphs or demons. The pillar shafts were essential to the efficacy of the dedication, representing the rough-hewn sacred tree trunks, revered before the Romans came ³. The overlapping leaf pattern is, however, too common in architecture for any mythological meaning to be safely attributed to it.

The coming of the Romans flooded Gaul with imagery. Altars to the gods of Rome and to semi-Roman native gods rose everywhere.

¹ A. N. NEWELL, *Gallo-Roman Religious Sculpture*, Pl. IV. Vol. III, «Greece & Rome», 1934.

² G. DRIoux, *Cultes indigènes des Lingons*, p. 44.

³ A. N. NEWELL, op. cit. p. 77. T. D. KENDRICK, *The Druids*, p. 144.

day, is the only one represented. On an octagonal pedestal they sometimes all appear. Or again, they occur on the shafts themselves, one above another—Hercules, Minerva and Juno on the example at Bonn and also on a cast in the Mayence Museum. ¹ From among the acanthus leaves of the capital a woman's head looks out on each of the four sides, thought to represent the four seasons.

The horseman above, whether he is supposed to be causing springs to rise in the hoofprints of his horse ² or protecting his worshippers from that wiliest of ghouls, the water fiend, he is so like portraits of the emperors from Septimius Severus to Julian the Apostate with their short curly beards, that he might well be mistaken for an emperor conquering bar-



Fig. 5.

barians, before the first I. O. M. came to light or the first iron thunderbolt found. So numerous are the fragments of these monuments and so much alike, as to suggest that they were produced in the local Roman craft shops of the period to which they belong—the end of the second or beginning of the third century A. D. They would not be erected without official sanction ; hardly without a compliment to some Jove—emperor intended. They show what Roman craftsmen could accomplish in the provinces, when untrammelled by their own more beautiful traditions ; very different indeed from the naïve images achieved by native workmen, so fascinating for what they reveal of the Celtic concepts of their pantheon ; and so soon more than half forgotten, as to be barely recognizable in fairy lore and legends of the saints.

¹ E. E. Vol. IX. No. 6612, 6614.

² G, DRIoux, *op. cit.* p. 51.

In native reliefs and bronzes Jupiter is naturally accompanied by an eagle. Like Zeus, he is no horseman ; nor is the Celtic sun-god, met with in the far West as the hero Cuchlain, who never rides but drives a chariot like Apollo. In fact, neither the Dieu Cavalier nor the Anguipède seems to come straight out of any one pantheon. Sometimes the god wears the solar wheel, not winged as on Babylonian and Assyrian sculptures ; whence came also, as everyone knows, the serpent-headed tails of the Greek Chimaera and of the Anguipède. On the « colonnes au géant », he brandishes his thunderbolt, but makes no attempt to touch the foe. It is the horse that prostrates the giant, crushing it to earth, overpowered, but not dead.



Fig. 5.

Fig. 6.

Is Odin in the hinterland, always a horseman, riding year by year to his springtime fight with the ice giants, on Skin-faxi, scattering sunshine from his mane ¹ quite out of mind ?

The Jupiter and Giant columns remained standing for perhaps two hundred years. In the eyes of Gaulish Christians, they were but pagan emblems like any other, becoming, with time, more or less neglected. Some may have perished after Constantine's proclamation ; many more doubtless, fifty-two years later, (365 A. D.) lay among the ruins of towns and villages overrun by the Alemanni. Christian missionaries would account for the rest. The Dieu Cavalier had not proved invincible against the Anguipède. People were still drowned in rivers and many wells bore evil reputations ². They could not easily become holy wells or their nymphs turn into decapitated saints in heaven, powerless to harm, while the Cavalier-god and the Anguipède were held in awe beside them. At any rate, these pillars and statues were all broken in pieces, sunk in rivers, and hidden in woods, while less

¹ H. A. GUERBER. *Myths of the Norsemen*, p. 4.

² E. COSQUIN, *Contes populaires de Lorraine*, t. I. Paris, 1886, p.p. 72-78. DELEHAYE, *Les Saints Militaires* p. 38n.

conspicuous monuments, altars, stelae, etc., have survived intact, or in far better condition ¹.

When the Jupiter and Giant columns were becoming things of the past in Gaul, Egyptian Christians were having engraved on the medallions of those Byzantine amulet bracelets M. Clermont-Ganneau has made famous ² a minute half-human monster which bears some superficial resemblance to the Anguipède. (fig. 5.) It has, however, the body of an animal and the saint's horse only brings him to the fray (fig. 6). It is simply a Christian emblem inserted between the words of a text invoking divine protection.

Nor do pictures elsewhere, in stained glass or other medium, of a saint in conflict with a dragon, really resemble the Dieu Cavalier à l'Anguipède. Nothing of the sort can be seen, for instance, in those series of saints painted on the church screens of Devon, many of them copied from service books illuminated abroad and only to be recognized by comparison with Continental saints. ³

In short, this equestrian Jove and a giant appeared too late, within too narrow and remote an area, and disappeared too soon to have effectively influenced the medieval ideal of soldier saints in art.

META E. WILLIAMS.

¹ E.E. Vol. VI. p. 205 ; Vol. VII. p. 205, etc.

² Services des Antiquités de l'Égypte, *Annales*, Vol. IX. figs. 11, 5.

³ G. Mc. N. RUSHFORTH M.A., F. S. A. lecture.

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