

THE AEGINETAN SCULPTURES REDISCOVERED

WAGNER (J.M.), SCHELLING (F.W.J.) *Report on the Aeginetan Sculptures. With Historical Supplements. Translated, edited and with an introduction by Louis A. Ruprecht Jr.* Pp. xxvi + 318, ills. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017. Cased, US\$99. ISBN: 978-1-4384-6481-7.

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The Aegina pediments, discovered in 1811 and exhibited in Munich since 1828, have again become a focus of scholarly interest in recent years, partly in connection with their masterful and thought-provoking new installation in the Munich Glyptothek in 2011. Concomitantly, interest has also grown for early Classical Aegina in general, comprising its identity, thought and modes of artistic expression. In this atmosphere, the scholarly community cannot but greet with pleasure the contribution made by Ruprecht Jr, by 'rediscovering' and making accessible the first professional description of the 'Aegina marbles'. The booklet, originally published in German in 1817, was written by the neoclassical artist Johann Martin Wagner (1777–1858), entrusted by Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria with the acquisition of the Aegina sculptures, and by Friedrich W.J. Schelling (1775–1854), who officially figured as the 'editor' of Wagner's 'report', but whose contribution out-reaches the former's text both in extension and in depth of content. The original German text, now accessible on Google Books, bears much interest for the history of research on the Aeginetan pediments.

The volume consists of four main parts. First, after a technical note on the linguistic choices made by Ruprecht, the acknowledgements and a brief timeline of the discovery and musealization of the Aegina marbles, comes Ruprecht's 'Historical Introduction'. The central part is taken up by the English translation of Wagner's and Schelling's text, followed by Ruprecht's own endnotes.

The 'Report' itself consists of a preface by Schelling, followed by nine chapters by Wagner, seven of which are followed by an 'Editor's endnote' or 'appendix' written by Schelling. The central chapters deal with the description of the sculptures and other fragments 'that belong either to the Aeginetan Figures or to the Temple'. Under discussion here are the question of the statues' style; the difference between the heads and the other body parts; 'mechanical matters' related to the working of the marble; the chronological assessment of the Aegina marbles, their original arrangement and their 'meaning' (i.e. the subject they once depicted); finally, the painting of the sculptures and of the temple itself. The booklet is completed by a one page 'Conclusion' by Wagner, followed by Schelling's 'Concluding Remarks'.

The translation is followed by Ruprecht's 'Historical Afterword' (including endnotes). The work is concluded by five appendices: a 'Chronology of Charles Cockerell's Grand Tour'; an 'Itinerary of Johann Martin Wagner's Greek Journey'; a discussion of 'Schelling's 1815 Lecture "On the Deities of Samothrace"'; a brief presentation of 'Theories on the Relationship between Egyptian and Greek, or Aeginetan Art'; and, finally, a section 'On Polychromatic Greek Art'.

Ruprecht's main achievement is the translation of the texts and their interpretation within the more general history of philosophy and aesthetics of the early nineteenth century. His 'Historical Introduction' and 'Afterword' give a correct and useful, although somewhat schoolbook-like summary of the first discoveries of Greek antiquities, of the lives and careers of the personalities involved in the story of the Aegina marbles and,

finally, of the conception and afterlife of the Munich museum complex inspired by this extraordinary monument. It seems evident, however, that Ruprecht is interested mainly in Schelling's philosophical thought and in the role played in it by this almost unknown work. Thus, the reader finds the book's best-developed essays tucked away in appendices 3, 4 and 5. These three appendices actually constitute a continuous sequence of meditations on Schelling's relationship with Greek antiquity. As Ruprecht tells us, the philosopher's 1815 lecture 'On the deities of Samothrace', which permitted him to formulate for the first time his view of Greek religion as a 'natural', and therefore 'pluralistic', monotheism, was also an indispensable prelude to his 1817 work on Aegina. Starting from this assertion, in the following appendix Ruprecht presents an excursus on early modern theories about the relationship between Egyptian and Greek art, mostly through a discussion of Quatremère de Quincy's ideas. In Ruprecht's opinion the question of priority between 'Egyptian' and 'Greek' art occupies a crucial place in Schelling's meditations on the 'style' of the marbles and on the 'sculptural school of Aegina'. The last appendix, though apparently dedicated to the polychromic character of ancient Greek sculpture, in reality continues the previous meditations and leads to a conclusion that may be Ruprecht's main point: namely that Schelling, taking notice of the polychrome and thus the essentially naturalistic and non-abstract character of these newly discovered highlights of Greek art, must have found in them confirmation of his views on Greek religion developed during the preceding years. Thus the inquiries on 'Aeginetan style' would have provided Schelling with another way of returning to his idea of an ancestral religion focused on a 'god, who creates', and therefore 'cannot, or at least would not care to, exist alone' (p. 290).

While these (somewhat hidden) conclusions have all the merit of integrating this less well-known work of Schelling into the history of early nineteenth-century philosophical thought, the publication also has some weak points. The most important of these is related to the translation itself. In order to offer the widest possible overview of the work's cultural context, Ruprecht translates and discusses texts not only in German, but also in French, Latin, Greek and Italian. Usually he gives the citations in the original followed by an English translation, meticulously indicating the author of each. The almost ubiquitous misspellings in the French quotations, however, raise suspicions about the level of understanding. Indeed, certain discrepancies between the French and English versions are occasionally to be found (e.g. on p. 184: 'Ce germe, tout informe qu'il peut paraître, porte déjà certains caractères qu'il ne perdra plus' is translated as 'This seed determines everything that may appear, and already contains certain characteristics which it will never lose' instead of 'This seed, *as shapeless as it may seem*, carries already . . .').

What is more embarrassing, the main text appears in more than one place to contradict itself, the confusion driving the reader to check the facsimile original on the internet, which sometimes reveals some evident misunderstandings. Only a couple of examples, taken from pp. 123–4, the beginning of Schelling's 'Note on the Style of the Aegina Figures': 'Worin jenes Auszeichnende oder Charakteristische der äginetischen Schule eigentlich bestanden haben könne, das Pausanias mit solcher Bestimmtheit anerkennt und voraussetzt?' in Ruprecht's translation becomes 'whether these distinctive features or characteristics of the Aeginetan School, which Pausanias recognized and presumed with such certainty, could have existed', while the sentence really means '*in what consisted* that specificity or characteristic feature of the Aeginetan School, which Pausanias recognized and presumed with such certainty'. Similarly, 'Das letzte, ob es gleich Herr Wagner auch an den erst entdeckten Figuren bemerkt, ist doch ebenfalls an anderen wahrgenommen worden, von denen erst zu beweisen stünde, dass sie der Aeginetischen Schule angehören' is translated as 'This last feature, similar to what Mr. Wagner also observed on the first

figures that were discovered, is also clearly visible on other pieces, on which basis it was first possible to prove that these sculptures belonged to the Aeginetan School'. However, the true meaning would be: 'This last feature, *although* Mr. Wagner observed it on the first figures that were discovered, has nevertheless been observed equally on other pieces that *still must be proven to belong* to the Aeginetan school'. In fact, in this passage Schelling argues *against*, and not in favour of, considering a certain peculiarity as decisive evidence for the definition as 'Aeginetan'.

Such mistranslations may be due to Ruprecht's lack of deeper familiarity with the topic of Greek sculpture and the history of research in the field, which comes to light in his end-notes, first of all in the omission of at least a select bibliography on such questions as the relative and absolute chronology of the two pediments.

Nevertheless, the publication has an eminent value for the Classical archaeologist and for the historian of Classical studies alike, due to the intrinsic interest of the 1817 text. Schelling's intuition and deep engagement with Classical cultures allowed him to formulate a series of groundbreaking questions and, what is more, some genuinely insightful methodological principles. I wish to point out three main assertions, which will not seem to be outdated in the context of today's archaeological research. First, Schelling was concerned with a problem that has been sadly neglected since: Pausanias' special affinity for and interest in a stylistic phenomenon that he called 'Aeginetan art'. Trying to understand what Pausanias meant by this term became a crucial point in Schelling's discussion, and he addressed it with the methodological precision of a modern scholar. Taking into account every relevant passage in the literary sources, he arrives at the conclusion that the term should not be interpreted as a chronological definition but as a distinct form of artistic expression, coexisting simultaneously and in contrast with what Pausanias calls the '(old) Attic' sculpture (mainly at pp. 114–28 and 155–70 of the original). Another point of interest is found in one of Schelling's preliminary statements, which might be regarded as a necessary premise towards this conclusion: his rejection of the concept of 'borrowing', i.e. the idea of a one-way relationship between one (older and superior) artistic tradition and another (more recent and therefore secondary). Instead, Schelling proposes a model (best formulated in his 'Endnote' to Wagner's introduction), which is still too rarely applied to early Greek art, though suggested from time to time, in modern research: to consider the cultural milieu of the ancient Mediterranean, including Egypt, as a framework for interaction among multiple distinct and co-equal traditions. Finally, Schelling's answer to the question concerning the decisive peculiarity of Aeginetan art becomes another important anticipation of later art historical thought. According to Schelling the essential quality of 'Aeginetan art' would be its thorough attention to visible reality or, in his words, its imitation of nature. On the contrary, Attic art, as well as Egyptian, would have been guided by the search for an 'ideal': that is to say, determined by an abstract system of rules (mainly from p. 113 in the original). The two distinct approaches came together in the generation of Pheidias, following the political defeat of Aegina and the dispersal of its artistic tradition within the Greek world. This view, with all the naivety manifest in its overvaluation of Aeginetan art and in its somewhat speculative treatment of artistic phenomena, expresses nonetheless an astonishingly keen-eyed approach to the problem of style, with a theoretical foundation that should be kept in mind even in our current discussions.

Péter Pázmány Catholic University, Budapest

ÁGNES BENCZE
agneseb3@hotmail.com