

A SUBLIMINAL STELE

Michèle Brunet – There is a very nice funerary stele at the Louvre that tells us that Sosinous who was a copper-smelter from Gortyne has died. Now that makes one think: Gortyne? Well that's very odd, this guy died in Athens and it is in Athens that his funerary stele was found so presumably also where he was buried, but he comes from somewhere else... Now at the time, to announce the fact that one comes from another city also signifies in Athens that one is a metic! That means a foreign resident who pays the taxes of a foreigner in order to live and work with a legal status in Athens. The second slightly astonishing thing is that we don't have the name of his father. On the other hand the authors are named since in the two lines that follow, we learn that these are his children who proudly proclaim his craft: he is a *chalkoptès*, that is to say, 'someone who cooks bronze' and he is depicted in profile, seated on a sort of chair. Moreover, the fact that he is proclaimed to be a blacksmith is associated with the representation of his tools, something that is rather unusual on this type of funerary stele. As for the epigram, it declares that this memorial remembering the justice, moderation and excellence of Sosinous was erected by his children after his death.

Now this is very striking because in Greek the three terms that are used to praise the strong qualities of this man, *dikaiosune*, *sophrosune* and *arete*, are terms that we find in all the rhetorical works of this period that praise the qualities of the good citizen. So here we sense the sons' wish for integration, as if they are saying our father was the very example of the kind of good person who is worthy to be Athenian since he exhibits all the qualities that are needed to be a good Athenian. And that suggests that there is a push by his descendants to seek to stay in Athens, saying look, we are doing well here, we hope to stay we are integrated, we are integrated, keep us, keep us... Ha, ha! Now this memorial, by word and by content conveys something absolutely astonishing from the point of view of iconography because the position given to Sosinous is a copy of the well-known position of the Gods represented on the frieze of the Parthenon that was completed thirty years earlier. On this monument that is emblematic of Athenian power at the time are images where we see the Gods seated one behind the other and visually speaking this is something very new, so the Athenians are going to see all this and say: Ah, So and so, this is such god etc. etc. and there, well it can be seen that to some extent, Sosinous is represented as the equal of a god. In this way we see that there is a particular kind of research that is specific to the intelligence of the Greeks of antiquity such that they wink or make allusions. This is what makes epigraphy so interesting, that we can put to work such a double approach in order to retrieve the underlying purpose in the making of this magnificent stele.

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