

The Telephos Frieze



Telephos receives arms from Auge

The Placement on the Pergamon Altar

The Telephos Frieze depicts the life story of the hero Telephos, the legendary founder of Pergamon and the mythical ancestor of the royal house. It was mounted on the inner court walls of the Pergamon Altar and was preserved noticeably worse than the Giant Frieze. The interpretation of some fragments is not certain, and the arrangement of other scenes cannot be determined. Only about 47 whole or partial frieze panels are preserved from the original 74 meaning that some of the important scenes which provide insight into the story of the frieze are missing completely. The panel order in the Northeast, Southeast and Southwest corners of the court was decided upon by their bevelled edges indicating their right angle placement to the adjacent panel.

The dimensions of the inner court amounted to about 26 metres on the East side and 16 metres on the North and South sides, which was calculated using the architectural measurements of the outer colonnades. The court would have been actually bigger than what has been reconstructed in the Museum space. The Telephos Frieze spread onto the West side of the altar with a scene (two panels) on each of the spur walls flanking both sides of the entrance hall. The frieze panels measured 1.58 metres high and were set above a 25-centimetre thick dark blue marble slab,

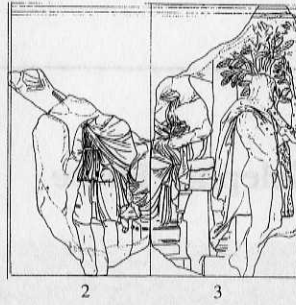
both of which were supported by a smooth wall socle. The slabs under the frieze were finished with a profile. The upper border of the frieze panels were profiled with crown mouldings which were repeated at the same height on the architrave in the outer colonnade. The wall casing was made up of several layers of dark blue marble squares and the frieze panels in the inner court were finished with simple ceiling tiles up above. On top of them rested the coffered ceiling supported by the surrounding columns outside. Colonnades in front of the court walls were planned but were never carried out because the building project was discontinued. Painting of the frieze was also planned and perhaps even partly completed, which would have had a similar effect as wall paintings in Classical times arranged on the wall behind the colonnades.

The Period of Origin

Based on historical considerations it is widely accepted that work on the frieze began in 165 BC. The frieze obviously belongs to the upper structure of the altar which remained unfinished because some of the frieze panels were not completely formulated. Two examples are the scene with the building of the boat for Auge (panels 5,6) and the religious scenes in front of the statue of Athena (panel 11). The building of the altar was concluded before completion and might

West spur wall

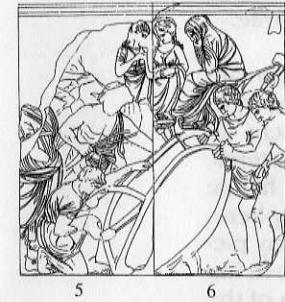
North wall



2. At the court of King Aleos
3. Herakles sees the king's daughter Auge, the priestess of Athena



4. Telephos, the son of both, is abandoned in the wilderness
5.,6. A boat is built, in which Auge is cast out to sea



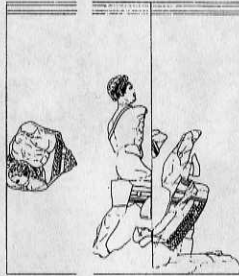
10. King Teuthras hurries to the shore where Auge is stranded

East wall - Northern section

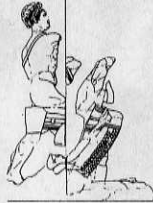


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9. Unidentified scenes from the youth of Telephos



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13.,32.,33.,14. Telephos voyages by ship to Asia Minor

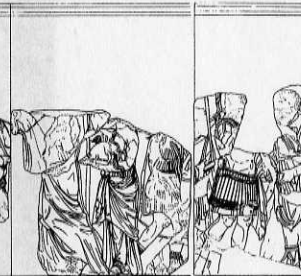


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16.,17. Telephos receives arms from Auge

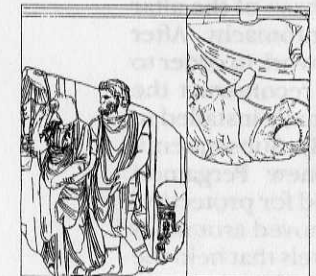


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18. Telephos goes into battle against the enemies of King Teuthras

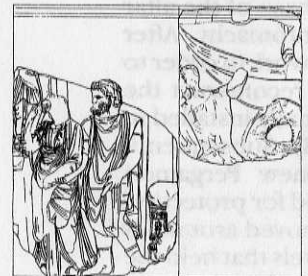


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20. Teuthras gives Auge to Telephos in marriage



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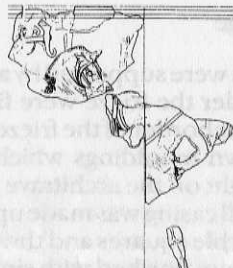
21. Mother and son recognise one another on the wedding night

East wall - Southern section



22

22.-24. Battle against the Greeks. Nireus kills the Amazon Hiera, the wife of Telephos



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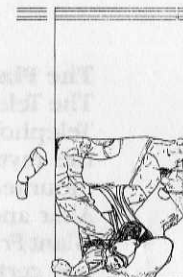
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51. For the funeral of Hiera the battle is interrupted



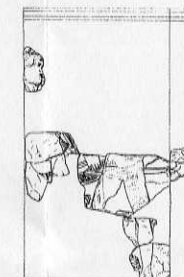
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25. Two Scythian warriors fall in battle



28

28. Battle scene by the river Kaikos



30

30.-31. Achilles wounds Telephos with the help of Dionysos



31



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1. An oracle is consulted about the healing of the wound

have been brought to an end in connection with the death of Eumenes II in 159 BC who had commissioned the structure. However, the cause for its termination could have also been the war against Prusias of Bithynia that devastated the Pergamene land in 157/56 BC.

The Telephos Frieze and Historic Pergamon

The Hellenistic kings who reigned over parts of the extensive empire of Alexander the Great based their legitimacy on their godly descent. Since the reign of Attalos I in the 3rd century BC the royal house of Pergamon traced its mythical origins to Telephos. As the son of Herakles and grandchild of Zeus, Telephos is connected by birth with Arkadia and hence the Greek motherland and later by fate with Mysia and the landscape around Pergamon. In addition, in an oracle of the 1st century AD the inhabitants of Pergamon called themselves Telephidai, descendants of Telephos.

The myth of Telephos is known from Greek and Roman literary works, including the Homeric epics, the poetry of Pindar, and especially from fragments of dramas by Greek authors of tragedies, such as Aischylos, Sophokles and Euripides from the 5th century BC. Such sources have made it possible to interpret a large part of the preserved frieze fragments. The pictures of the battle at the river of Kaikos can be explained through the work 'Heroikos' by Philostrat (2-3rd century AD) who seems to have used the same literary source as was used for the basis of the frieze representation.

There are many places in the frieze where references to both the Pergamene cult and contemporary politics are hidden in the mythological scenes. For example, one panel in the North frieze (panel 11) depicts the cult in honour of Athena that was introduced in the late 4th century BC in Pergamon, however its mythical foundation is accredited to Auge, the mother of Telephos. By associating this cult back into mythical times, the most important cult of the town is then bestowed with distinct venerability. The close connection of the ruling house with the Dionysos cult is intimated in the East frieze (panel 30) with the wrath of Dionysos who tangles up Telephos in a grape wine. River and other nature gods create a connection for the observer from mythological events to their familiar scenic surroundings around them. For example, two panels in the South frieze (panels 49, 50) show the construction of an altar, meaning the founding of a sanctuary which must have had a special significance for Pergamon because framing this picture are two river gods, presumably personifying the local rivers Kaikos and Selinos. Certainly the portrayal of the mythical battle at the Kaikos springs in which Telephos and his allies defeated the Homeric Greeks and drove them to their ships has to be seen as a parallel. For the Pergamenes it would call into memory the important historical victories that they won in the same area over the Galatians, which would then gain an exalted meaning through its connection to the mythical battle by Kaikos springs.

The Style of Narrative

The life of Telephos is recounted in chronological scenes, from the birth of the hero to his old age. Telephos is always shown in new surroundings, where the transition from one place to the next is intimated through arrivals and departures. The focal point of the depiction is not in the struggle and glory of one single deed, which was how heroes were typically represented in Archaic and Classical times, rather in

how the deeds related to the development of his life and its progression guided by fate. This style of continuous narrative apparently developed in Greek art during the 2nd century BC. The Telephos Frieze represents the most important preserved example.

The pictures are joined sequentially, however are separated from each other by columns, pillars, trees or simply by having the figures turn their backs on each other. Trees with lush foliage, cliffs, curtains, cult scenes or buildings characterise both the change of place and create a scenic and spacious atmosphere. A restrained, subdued mood spreads over many pictures in the frieze. Both this peaceful narrative in the Telephos Frieze and the fervent emotionalism of the Gigantomachy (battle between Giants of the Earth and the Olympian gods) are acknowledged Hellenistic styles of art expression found in the middle of the 2nd century BC.

The Restoration of the Frieze

The panels of the Telephos Frieze were found shattered into uncountable pieces at the base of the altar structure, as were those of the Gigantomachy. After decades of scientific and restoration work in order to join the fragments together and to reconstruct the panels in sequence, the frieze was finally installed in the first Pergamon Museum (1901-08). Subsequently it was transferred into the new Pergamon Museum (opened in 1930), evacuated for protection during the Second World War, and moved around in the post-war period, causing the dowels that held the frieze panels together to work themselves loose. In addition, the dowels had rusted, threatening to crumble the marble. Originally the missing parts of the panels were supplemented with bricks and cement, however it turned out that they were unsuitable.

The Telephos Frieze was restored in 1994/5 through a joint venture together with the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and was carried out by the firm Silvano Bertolin (Munich). The old bonding material and dowels were removed, and then all the parts of the frieze were cleaned and reassembled with stainless steel dowels. To supplement the missing panel pieces, limestone from Friuli was used to secure the necessary stability.

When the frieze panels were dismantled it was possible to review their order and to implement some changes in their arrangement in order to incorporate what new research had revealed. In contrast to the earlier ordering of the panels, the pieces with beveled edges could now be placed in the corners of the room. This rearrangement presented some difficulties since the original measurement of the altar court was bigger than the allotted exhibition space in the Museum. For this reason, two panels in the South frieze (panels 37, 43) had to be foregone. However, the result is a new arrangement of the Telephos Frieze which presents a version closer to that of the original.