

AN ARTISTIC TREASURE FROM SPAIN.

THE LATELY DISCOVERED BUST OF ELCHE IN THE LOUVRE.

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FOR some years past archæologists have held the opinion that southern Spain offered a splendid and comparatively unknown field for research; and owing to the efforts and the enlightened initiative of M. Léon Henzey, conservator of antiquities of the Louvre, a mission for the purpose was intrusted, in 1892, to M. Arthur Engel. His labors yielded the fragments now in the Louvre, which consist of a series of much mutilated heads, and the statue of a man seated on a horned and winged beast of a most decorative type, and are chiefly of interest to archæologists. The study of these fragments gave rise to much controversy as to their origin and date, as did also the interesting series of sculptures discovered in 1830, known as the statues of Cerro de los Santos, or "Hill of the Saints," of which the Louvre now possesses casts. In 1897 M. Henzey was the means of sending another mission to Spain, on what is known as the Eugène Piot Fund. M. Pierre Pâris was in charge of it, and the principal result of the expedition is the now famous bust of Elche, which the Louvre was fortunate enough to procure through the generosity of M. Noël Bardao, who presented it to the museum.

Elche is situated in the southern part of Spain, not far from Alicante; and in ancient times was the country of the Iberians, and possibly was colonized by the Phenicians, who were attracted to it by the richness of its shores and plains. It may then have been peopled by Greek colonists, only in the end to fall into the hands of the Romans. Through these various transitions it was named, in turn, *Illici*, *Helice*, *Colonia Julia Augusta*, becoming finally the modern Elche. After the Roman domination it was conquered by the Moors, who beautified it in many ways.

The bust was not found in the course of the regular excavations, but was accidentally unearthed by some laborers who were cultivating a field near ruins which hitherto had yielded nothing but Roman antiquities. It represents the life-size head and shoulders of a young woman. In a short notice communicating to the Academy the acquisition

of the new treasure, M. Henzey quotes the following sentence, in which M. Pâris sums up his opinion of his discovery: "Native type, native costume, Spanish art profoundly impregnated with Oriental influences, and most on the surface with Greek influence"; M. Henzey adding: "Whatever may be the relative proportion of these different elements, it is certain that all three exist to a marked degree in the bust of Elche."

From the nature of its base it is evident that this piece of sculpture never was more than a bust. It is not merely a fragment of a complete statue, as was at first supposed; for the under part is hollowed out, and bears no trace of being broken off. It was undoubtedly a funeral or votive statue, as there is a hollow in the back, probably destined for votive offerings. The stone is that of the country, originally white, but now of a warm yellowish gray, owing perhaps to its long sojourn in the earth, or to its originally having been colored, or perhaps to both.

It is in an almost perfect state of preservation, save for a few slight injuries to the left arm, and to one of the wheel-like ornaments of the head-dress, caused by the picks of the workmen who discovered it. A few of the pearls from the band on the forehead are also missing, and the surface of the skin is slightly roughened in places; but otherwise it is intact. The face is of an impressive and fascinating beauty, the forehead wide and full, the nose straight and thin; the lips are well cut, and the chin is rounded and firm. It is framed by a marvelous head-dress, which is barbaric in its splendor, and unique. A miter-shaped cap runs almost straight back from the forehead; over it is thrown a veil, which falls behind in vertical folds to the nape of the neck. In front it is flattened out into four straight folds over the brow without showing the hair, somewhat after the manner of a nun's coif. The miter is evidently the support of the remainder of this curious coiffure. Above the folds on the forehead is a band, probably of metal, arranged in three rows, closely fitting



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the head, and which is ornamented by three rows of large beads or pearls, the lowest row pendulous and forming a sort of fringe. Supported by the metal band are two large wheel-shaped ornaments, fitting closely to the ears, and nearly reaching the shoulders, making a strange and very hieratic setting for this mysterious Spanish beauty of forgotten centuries. These strange, barbaric, and very artistic jewels were probably of gold filigree openwork. Inside and next the ears the wheels are fastened to carved plates, which in turn are connected with the diadem; and from these plates hang cords, probably covered with gold, supporting jeweled pendants. Around the neck and on the breast is a triple necklace from which hang amulets. The first row of carved beads supports a strange urn-shaped ornament; on the second, also of beads, though larger, are six smaller urns. The third row is of large plain beads, and the pendants are three large ornaments suggesting horseshoes, only one of which is completely visible, the others being partly hidden under the drapery which falls over the shoulders. Under the necklace is a tunic, which is fastened from left to right. Traces of color are found on various parts of the drapery; the lips are still a deep red; the same color shows on the band over the forehead, on the tunic, and on different parts of the head-dress. In harmony with this scheme, the pupils of the eyes are hollowed out.

Perhaps the most vital point about this work of art is the probability that it is the portrait of a person who has really lived. M. Pâris, in his review of it, says: "One might call it the true portrait of a princess, haughty and voluptuous, a Spanish Salammbô, on whom the sculptor had stamped his dream of an ideal beauty. One might long discuss this point; but, portrait or ideal figure, queen, priestess, or goddess, what I wish to express is the wonderful originality of the type, in which is revealed for the first time the strange,

sensuous, and mystic charm of a Spanish beauty."

Unfortunately, the photographs so far taken of the bust give only a faint idea of its charm. I know of but one taken by M. Pâris himself—I believe in its original environment, and under the bright Spanish sunshine. All do not understand its artistic merits or feel its subtle charm; but it is a curious fact that upon the majority of people of all classes—scientists, literary men, sculptors, painters, peasant, and bourgeois, those who see it after hearing of it, and those who come upon it unawares—it works the same mysterious attraction and fascination.

In the student and scientist curiosity is naturally aroused. Who was the sculptor, where did he study, from what race did he draw his inspiration, and where did he live? All these and many other questions must, unfortunately for the present, remain unanswered. M. Pâris says: "Whether this work dates from the fourth or even down to the third century, in order to leave time for Greek influence to extend to Spain, this influence is, without doubt, both direct and certain. I should hardly dare to say that a Greek sculptor had come to Elche, and placed his chisel at the disposal of some petty king or high priest, to execute the portrait of a favorite queen or the image of some revered goddess; and I should scarce dare to suppose that an Iberian sculptor had crossed the seas to study under a famous Greek master, and on his return to his native land, without having lost his personality, without having lost his appreciation of the beauties of his own country, had refined his art through contact with Attic sculptures; yet, without doubt, this sculptor had seen Greek art, and had felt its force and beauty."

One cannot help wondering if the author of it stood alone, a giant figure among his contemporaries, or will some other peasant hand in the future bring to light further masterpieces of equal beauty and by other hands?

