

A DECORATIVE MARBLE SLAB DISCOVERED
LATELY AT NOTABILE - MALTA

by Sir T. ZAMMIT

The photograph illustrating this paper represents a classical scene cut in low relief on a white marble slab 49 cms. in length, 43 cms. in height, and 5 cms. in thickness, found in Malta and lately acquired by the Valletta Museum.

The slab in a good condition was meant, evidently, for a decorative plaque to be fixed in a niche or against a wall, as evinced by the plaster which still adheres to its back.

The scene, complete in itself, represents the ceremonial execution of a young Asiatic prisoner dressed in clinging soft garments and a loose military cloak. His head is covered by a pileus or Scythian hood with flaps reaching to the shoulders.

The young prisoner stands between two Greek warriors. With legs apart and outstretched right arm he leans slightly towards the bearded man on the left who tugs him by his head-dress; the left arm of the prisoner appears to be tied behind him as the free end of a cord is seen dangling freely by his side.

The warrior to the left, evidently a bearded mercenary, wears a helmet and has his chest partly protected by a fleecy short mantle. He is pulling aside the flap of the prisoner's pileus in order to bare his neck so as to stab him with the short pointed sword firmly held in his right hand.

With his right leg, already advanced towards his victim, the man looks down with great deliberation on the prisoner whose face is however turned towards the other soldier as if expecting to see him give the fatal signal for his destruction.

The soldier on the right, evidently in command, wears a military helmet and has the shoulders protected by a flowing mantle. He stands unconcerned holding a spear in his left on which a small circular shield is hung. With his half closed right hand he appears to be conveying an order to his companion ready to execute it.

As a similar scene is not frequently met with in archaeological literature it might be of special interest to those who are concerned in this class of decoration.

The sacrificial execution of prisoners has been often depicted especially on Etruscan and Greek pottery of the 7th. and 6th. Century B. C. (1)

In his book: "Gli Etruschi e la loro Civiltà," prof. B. Nogara illustrates on page 300 the sacrifice of Trojan prisoners on the tomb of Patroclus, copied from a Stamnos in the *Antiquarium* of the Berlin Museum.

On pages 362 and 365 of the same volume prisoners are shown sacrificed by their enemies, copied from vases in the Vatican Etruscan Museum.



Decorative Marble Slab discovered in Malta — now in the Valletta Museum.

(1) B. Nogara—"Gli Etruschi e la loro Civiltà" U. Hoepli—Milano 1933 - XI.