

## Late Antique Sculpture in Egypt: Originals and Forgeries

By Alexander V. Kruglov\*

UNEARTHING THE TRUTH: EGYPT'S PAGAN AND COPTIC SCULPTURE, BROOKLYN MUSEUM, 13 FEBRUARY–10 MAY 2009, curated by Edna R. Russmann.

UNEARTHING THE TRUTH: EGYPT'S PAGAN AND COPTIC SCULPTURE, by Edna R. Russmann. Pp. 91, color figs. 44. Brooklyn Museum, New York 2009. \$19.95. ISBN 978-0-87273-162-2 (cloth).

The Brooklyn Museum, which houses one of the most extensive Coptic art collections in the United States, has a long-established tradition of presenting Egypt's pagan and Coptic art to the public. Some of Brooklyn's Coptic sculptures that had at first been acclaimed and published later proved not to be authentic, including several of the most famous pieces. Thus, the question of authenticity is a special emphasis of the exhibition *Unearthing the Truth*, which displays Egyptian works from the third to the eighth centuries C.E.

The turn of the millennium was marked by special interest in the history of Christianity, and a range of exhibitions were dedicated to Byzantine art; some included Coptic objects, others were devoted exclusively to Coptic art—the Christian art of Late Antique Egypt. Christians and pagans lived side by side in the complex ethnic society of Egypt at this time. Since the Egyptian culture of these early centuries C.E. had absorbed the legacies of ancient

Egyptians, Hellenistic Greeks, and Romans, many pagan images and ideas were inherited by Christian patrons and artists. In addition, several of the iconographic schemes and types of reliefs employed were similar to or even borrowed from Byzantine art. Both the Brooklyn Museum's exhibition and its catalogue, however, wish to remove Late Antique Egyptian material from the Byzantine sphere,<sup>1</sup> and to this reviewer that approach seems problematic.

Many museums, especially older ones, have obtained forgeries in the course of building their collections, and this brings to the fore the interesting issue of why forgeries were accepted by art historians at the time of acquisition. Recognizing contemporary forgeries, of course, often requires the passage of time, and, as a result, a portion of a museum's storage can end up being devoted to fakes. In most cases, curators are aware of the forgeries in their collections. There is generally little need for public declaration of the presence of these fakes by means of display in museums because they have often been published. A special publication of the Coptic sculpture forgeries in the Brooklyn Museum appeared in 2001.<sup>2</sup> Yet the opportunity to view fakes is always of interest to museum visitors.

The present exhibition has been conceived as a small-scale, in-house show that offers 31 limestone sculptures displayed in two small galleries and a third large one (fig. 1). Contrast of authenticity has been chosen as the organizing principle of the installation design; black

\*I would like to dedicate this review to the memory of my father, whose death delayed its completion. Special thanks go to Museum Review Editor Beth Cohen for her suggestions and her help with the revision, Edna R. Russmann for visiting the exhibition

with me, and Mark Santangelo, of the Onassis Library for Hellenic and Roman Art at the Metropolitan Museum, for his assistance.

<sup>1</sup>Russmann 2009, 13.

<sup>2</sup>Spanel 2001.



Fig. 1. Installation view of the large exhibition gallery (© Brooklyn Museum).

walls and Plexiglas vitrines with black bases indicate sculptures accepted by the museum as authentic, while white walls and white vitrine bases set off recognized forgeries. The objects themselves are brightly lit by ceiling spotlights in otherwise dark galleries, thus creating a dramatic effect and an aura of mystery.

Despite the exhibition's clever organizational concept, the design also causes difficulties for the visitor. Some labels or parts of labels are illegible because they merge into the darkness, and some labels are written on posts, making them difficult to find. Moreover, labels for objects displayed in different cases tend to be grouped on one case only, and the viewer has to search for them. Another serious problem with the display is the way some objects have been installed. In contradistinction to their original disposition of generally being attached to or inserted into walls, the stone slabs in the exhibition, with few exceptions, are laid down horizontally inside the cases. Furthermore, many of the cases are low, forcing most visitors to bend over or even crouch down in order to look at the objects closely. Mounting the heavy stones vertically would have required a considerable

effort, employing technical procedures and devices that the Brooklyn Museum has chosen to avoid completely. Brooklyn's decision fares poorly in comparison with the fine presentation of similar material at the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Louvre, for example, where slabs are either positioned vertically or fixed against the wall at a height approximating their original architectural placement.

The exhibition's first gallery, featuring a map of Egypt in late antiquity and an accompanying introductory wall text, displays only a single object: the funerary relief of C. Julius Valerius from the third century C.E. The most ancient work in the show,<sup>3</sup> it belongs to the period of Roman rule in ancient Egypt and displays both pharaonic and Roman features. This combination, which reveals the interaction of two pagan cultures and their religious beliefs, laid the artistic foundation for later Christian art in Egypt. Charles Edwin Wilbour (1836–1896), the American Egyptologist who spent several years in Egypt studying ancient monuments with hieroglyphic inscriptions and forming his collection, acquired this funerary relief in Cairo on 6 November 1881. In 1916,

<sup>3</sup>Inv. no. 16.105 (Russmann 2009, 20–1, no. 1).

after his death and that of his wife, their family gave Wilbour's library and collection of more than 2,000 items to the Brooklyn Museum and later established the Wilbour Fund, which has financed many acquisitions. Indeed, according to their labels, most of the items in the present exhibition, as well as in the display of the permanent collection of ancient Egyptian art at the museum, are either gifts of the Wilbour estate or purchases of the Wilbour Fund. It would therefore be appropriate for both the exhibition's didactic material and its catalogue to include a note on the history of the collection and perhaps a photograph of Wilbour.

The exhibition's second, and main, gallery continues the display of funerary stelae. Late Antique sculpture generally took the form of tomb elements, such as stelae, niche heads (the upper part of arched niches), relief friezes (including door and arch frames), and column capitals. Contemporaneous church decoration would have employed nearly the same types of reliefs. Thus, in late antiquity, the artistic choices became limited.

The Stele of Olympios (ca. 500–600 C.E.), which clearly belongs to a Christian grave, presents both traditional and new features.<sup>4</sup> It shows a young man framed by two spiral columns with papyrus capitals supporting a gable; the architectural framework serves as a sanctuary for the deceased, who, according to the inscription, died at the age of 28. This relief demonstrates how the late pagan iconographic tradition survived. The depiction of youth is a remnant of a pagan custom, as is the young man's nakedness, evoking classical heroic nudity. Finally, while his pose, with arms raised toward the crown on his head, recalls the pagan context of the athletic victor, this motif should be understood as indicating that the deceased will be awarded eternal afterlife. Olympios' crown is obviously a funerary, rather than a victory, wreath; it appears to represent a wreath

<sup>4</sup>Inv. no. 40.301 (Russmann 2009, 26–7, no. 4). The curator believes that this Christian monument was recut from a pagan one; however, her assumption that the left side of the stele was cut back does not seem to be correct. The column on the left side is indeed thinner, but it has the same capital with two leaves, indicating that nothing is missing from its design. The cross was not added later because the undercutting around it is similar to the carving of the eyebrows and nipple of the human figure.

<sup>5</sup>Krumeich 2003; Schmidt 2003, 62–75.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas (1989, 1:155–82) argues about individu-

of gold-foil laurel leaves with a central jewel or precious coin. Furthermore, both of Olympios' arms are raised like those of an *orans* (a figure in the attitude of early Christian prayer), and a looped cross, identical in shape to the ankh (the ancient Egyptian symbol for life), appears on the right side of the stele.

The C. Julius Valerius and Olympios stelae represent vividly the contrasting artistic approaches in rendering the human form characteristic of two different historical periods. The first still displays qualities inherited from Hellenistic Greek and Roman art, such as the treatment of plastic volumes and details of anatomy and proportions. The second demonstrates a new mode of expressiveness achieved by introducing anatomical disproportion and a flat form of relief, whose details are sharply outlined or incised.

The first grouping of objects in the main gallery also includes three stelae associated with pagan graves at Oxyrhynchus. About 650 pieces of architectural reliefs have been found at this site,<sup>5</sup> which was once a provincial capital and was also certainly an important center for sculpture with its own workshops.<sup>6</sup> However, many pieces were not excavated by archaeologists, and they passed through the antiquities market, where they were massively recut or repainted.<sup>7</sup> This material introduces the sensitive issue of how one ought to define and perceive forgeries. In the 1970s, German scholars started to use the designation *verfälschte Stücke* (faked works) in contradistinction to absolute fakes; they reserved the term for ancient but severely recarved and repainted pieces<sup>8</sup> and also suggested that such objects should be excluded by scholars from the circle of authentic works.<sup>9</sup>

Pieces in the Brooklyn Museum from Oxyrhynchus have been reworked to different degrees. A large stele portrays a woman of high social rank, who was probably a priestess of Isis.<sup>10</sup> This stele is executed in such high relief

al artisan's practice, supported by references to construction contracts preserved among the papyri. Török (2005, 201–11) insists on the presence of workshops. There is no reason to question the two different practices: individuals were employed for small-scale work (e.g., private tombs), and workshops were employed to decorate churches and monasteries.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas 1989, 1:127–38, 148–49.

<sup>8</sup>Parlaska 1978, 117\* (163); Severin 1995.

<sup>9</sup>Severin 1999, 365.

<sup>10</sup>Inv. no. 70.132 (Russmann 2009, 54–5, no. 18).

that it gives the impression of being sculpted in the round, and this impression is also emphasized by its fragmentary state of preservation, which may be attributed to tomb robbers, who cut away portions of the thick background to make the piece lighter. The following two pieces exhibit even more extensive reworking commissioned by modern antiquities dealers. These are funerary stelae that represent boys, either standing or kneeling.<sup>11</sup> While painting on a prepared plaster layer applied over the porous stone surface is a common feature of limestone relief sculpture from Late Antique Egypt, on the stele of the kneeling boy one can easily observe the contrast of the remains of original paint on the surrounding arch with the wholly repainted surfaces of the boy's face, his garment, and the cushion. The recarving and repainting are even more obvious on the relief depicting a standing boy. Despite the assertion in the catalogue that on account of this reworking the piece should be considered a forgery,<sup>12</sup> it has been exhibited among the authentic objects in a vitrine with a black base rather than in the white section containing the fakes. Surely, the exhibition's conception and display ought to have helped visitors distinguish clearly reworked objects from authentic pieces and complete fakes by introducing gray as a third color-coded category.

Two other stelae, both Christian works from the seventh to eighth centuries, are remarkable pieces of ornamental art.<sup>13</sup> The Christian symbolism of the larger of these two stelae is emphasized by means of five representations of the cross and an outer ornamental border of grapes and a vine issuing from a vessel; in addition to an allusion to resurrection, which was also known to pagans in a Dionysiac context, the vine symbolizes the Christian faith. Another motif that appears on both of these stelae consists of two columns supporting a shell-shaped arch; it brings to mind a similar structure in Late Antique Egyptian architecture—the arched niche—employed by pagans for their tombs and by Christians for both sepulchral and ecclesiastical architecture.

Examples of reliefs designed as niche heads are exhibited nearby. Sculptures in this section

represent allegorical and mythological subjects, such as personifications of the Nile River and the Earth and a nymph riding a sea monster (fig. 2).<sup>14</sup> When excavations revealed similar reliefs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the archaeological evidence was incomplete, making it difficult to decide whether the context was purely pagan or Christian. The mythological reliefs were nevertheless believed to have come from church architecture, and Christian meaning was applied to them. This understanding fostered speculations about the interpretation of pagan motifs in Christian art. More recent scholarship, however, has established that the architectural remains where such reliefs have been found should instead be interpreted as pagan funerary chapels and thus that the mythological reliefs must have been commissioned by the pagan elite who still held the ideas of classical culture.<sup>15</sup> The testimony of inscriptions and epigrams from Graeco-Roman Egypt also associates allegorical or mythological images with the deceased. Two epigrams inscribed on the doorway of the funeral chamber of Isidora of the second century C.E., from the necropolis near Hermopolis Magna, state that the young girl is becoming a nymph—a form of apotheosis.<sup>16</sup> Including a quotation from this beautiful poetry on a text plaque near the nymph relief would have enabled visitors to learn directly about pagan beliefs and funerary symbolism.

Niche decoration of this sort is rather unusual, thus additional explanatory information should have been provided for the general public. If not sophisticated computer touch screens with digital reconstructions, then graphic reconstructions and photographs ought to have been employed here. The exhibition's installation has no didactic material of this kind, and its absence becomes even more glaring in that the gallery's two long, empty walls bear nothing but inappropriately oversized titles and texts.

Most unfortunately, little or no information from the museum's conservators about the objects is included anywhere in the installation—not even for pieces believed to be highly reworked or outright forgeries. And this vital information does not appear in the catalogue.

<sup>11</sup> Inv. nos. 58.129, 71.39.2 (Russmann 2009, 46–7, no. 14; 58–9, no. 20).

<sup>12</sup> Russmann 2009, 58.

<sup>13</sup> Inv. nos. 69.74.2, 71.39.1 (Russmann 2009, 52–3, no. 17; 56–7, no. 19).

<sup>14</sup> Inv. nos. 41.891, 41.1226 (Russmann 2009, 30–1, no. 6; 32–3, no. 7).

<sup>15</sup> Torp 1969; Török 2005, 31–7, 115–29.

<sup>16</sup> Kákósy 1982, 294–95.

The visitor thus receives the perhaps misleading impression that the Brooklyn Museum's decisions about authenticity have been made largely on the basis of art historical connoisseurship. After careful observation of the works on display, this reviewer is inclined to add his own empirical observations as well as certain queries.

Attentive observation of the supposedly authentic nymph relief (see fig. 2), for example, reveals various discrepancies, such as the missing outer border of the architectural ornament; a state of preservation in which the carving of the nymph and sea monster looks fresher than that of the ornament,<sup>17</sup> which has heavy weathering and traces of paint; and the unusual iconography of a completely dressed nymph. None of these features is mentioned by the curator. Is this paint ancient in its chemical composition, and have traces of paint also been discovered on the figures themselves? If the figures have been recarved, then to what extent? And if the recarving was extensive, should this piece be considered authentic or faked?

This group of architectural reliefs also includes a fragmentary frieze with a representation of Hercules and a bull (fig. 3).<sup>18</sup> It seems strange that the authenticity of this relief has not been questioned, though an attentive eye immediately notices some rather bizarre features that suggest that the work is *unerhörtes* (incredible).<sup>19</sup> The structure of this frieze's relief is highly unusual. In authentic representations, half of an animal normally emerges from a scroll, and together they form a unified relief level above the background. This piece, however, shows three different relief levels: one close to the background formed by scrolls, a middle level with the bull, and the highest level with the figure of Hercules. As a result, the projecting forefeet of the galloping bull and left foot of the hero have received supporting struts. Providing struts for fragile parts is necessary in the carving of large marble sculpture in the round but is not necessary for small limestone reliefs. The projecting strut for the bull's feet is especially odd because it interrupts the vine scrolls, whose composition

<sup>17</sup> Thomas (1989, 2:98) has already noted that the nymph's mouth and the sea monster's pelt were recarved. Moreover, the tool marks indicating the sea monster's eyes and teeth and the nymph's facial features and dress embroidery appear to be the same as in the recarved areas.



Fig. 2. Top of a Late Antique Egyptian limestone arch with a nymph riding a sea monster, ht. 46 cm, wdth. 80 cm, fifth–sixth century C.E., from Herakleopolis Magna. New York, Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Willbour Fund, inv. no. 41.1226 (© Brooklyn Museum).



Fig. 3. Limestone relief with Hercules and either Acheloos in the form of a bull or the Cretan Bull, ht. 34 cm, wdth. 37.5 cm, either Late Antique Egyptian, ca. 300–500 C.E., from Oxyrhynchus, or forgery, 20th century C.E. New York, Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Willbour Fund, inv. no. 61.128 (© Brooklyn Museum).

would otherwise be continuous. Even if one were to suggest that this relief had been left incomplete and that is why struts remain, how would these figures' feet look if they had been finished as completely separate entities project-

<sup>18</sup> Inv. no. 61.128 (Thomas 1989, 1:248–49, esp. n. 281; 2000, 60–1; Russmann 2009, 48–9, no. 15).

<sup>19</sup> Severin (1999, 366) introduced the term *unerhörtes* to describe incredible iconography in faked Coptic sculpture.

ing into space? In addition, the scroll does not continue behind Hercules' head, and here there is simply a blank recessed background. None of the above features occurs in the limestone carving technique developed by Late Antique sculptors.<sup>20</sup>

Classical iconography, which was adopted in Late Antique Egyptian sculpture, distinguishes clearly between representations of Hercules with Acheloos vs. the Cretan Bull. While the museum identifies the bull in this relief as the river god Acheloos, he is normally shown either as a bull with a human head or as entirely human, but never simply as an animal. Therefore, whether the Brooklyn relief is real or fake, its bull must be the Cretan Bull.

Late Antique (both pagan and Christian) architecture in Egypt developed a fashion of ornamenting the interior or exterior walls with bands of horizontal or curving reliefs. A carved limestone arch in five segments is the central focus of the exhibition's design (see fig. 1, middleground). Contrary to the curator's opinion about the modest size of this arch,<sup>21</sup> the piece actually demonstrates the large scale that may be employed for architectural elements. This big arch, installed on a separate freestanding wall section, helps the visitor visualize the scale of Egyptian monuments in this period. Its decorative motif repeats the same pattern—birds and flowers shown in mirror images. This arch is unique: it does not have an exact parallel among extant decorative architectural reliefs.

The most intriguing part of the show is the white color-coded section displaying the revealed forgeries, some of which have not previously been published. The notorious forged "Paralytic," for a considerable time accepted as a marvel of Coptic sculpture in the round (fig. 4),<sup>22</sup> is clearly related to the forged figure of a man in high relief.<sup>23</sup> Both probably came from Sheikh Ibada, the place that appears to have produced and whose name now designates an entire group of outright fakes or reworked sculptures.<sup>24</sup> They might even have been made in the same workshop because their treatment of facial features—especially eyes—is very

<sup>20</sup> Many reliefs represent the feet positioned on the lower border. When the border is broken or fragmentary, it can look like a console (Strzygowski 1904, 24, no. 7281; 26, no. 7283).

<sup>21</sup> Inv. no. 45.131a–e (Russmann 2009, 37–9, no. 10).

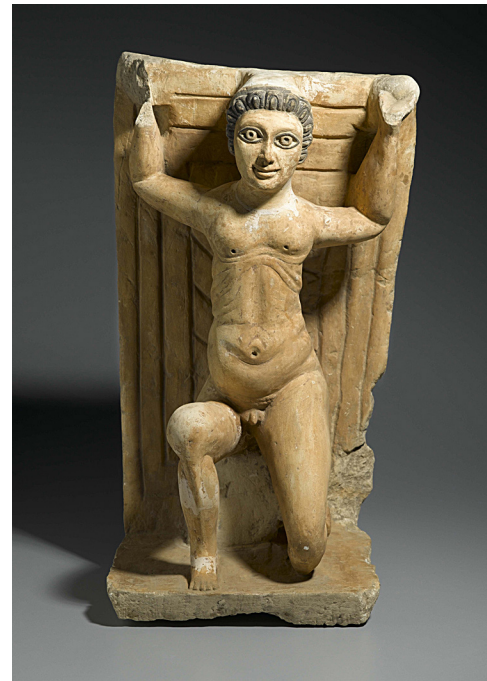


Fig. 4. Painted limestone relief with a paralytic raising his bed, ht. 61.5 cm, said to be from Sheikh Ibada; forgery, 20th century C.E. New York, Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, inv. no. 62.44 (© Brooklyn Museum).

much alike. Genuine Late Antique Egyptian sculpture presents a surprising variety of about 10 types of eye modeling. The forgers of the Sheikh Ibada group appear to have created their own type of eye, which is outlined by sharply carved eyelids that contain an enlarged spherical iris with a drilled pupil, while the rest of the eyeball is omitted; this eye has no parallel in authentic sculpture. In addition, faces in this forged group are well-proportioned, and the smiles of its figures suggest their psychological state, features that are otherwise unfamiliar in Late Antique sculpture from Egypt.

Two reliefs in the next case are betrayed as fakes by their being carved in porous nummilitic limestone, which was not employed for ancient reliefs. The relief with three busts on a capital of leaves has meaningless iconog-

<sup>22</sup> Inv. no. 62.44 (Russmann 2009, 68–9, no. 24).

<sup>23</sup> Inv. no. 72.9 (Russmann 2009, 78–9, no. 2).

<sup>24</sup> Inv. nos. 62.44, 72.9 (Russmann 2009, 68–9, no. 24; 78–9, no. 29). Forgeries from Sheikh Ibada have been discussed by Boyd and Vikan 1981, 8–9; Thomas 1989, 1:139–49; Spanel 2001, 89–97.

raphy,<sup>25</sup> and the relief that is possibly meant to depict the Holy Family has a very weak composition.<sup>26</sup> The two arches enclosing the figures in the Holy Family relief do not form a true frame because they do not fill the entire surface of the slab, leaving blank space—a trait that is not characteristic of genuine reliefs. These two fake reliefs show yet a different type of eye modeling, which consists of a large, slightly elongated eyeball with a drilled pupil, inserted below an eyebrow that substitutes for the upper eyelid; there is no indication of the lower lid. Authentic sculpture rarely omits eyelids.

Another group of black cases with “authentic” objects is displayed adjacent to the white area containing works designated as forgeries, but to this observer some of the accepted pieces also seem questionable. Defining the typology and the purpose of sculptures is very important for detecting forgeries. Much attention has been drawn to the fact that many Christian subjects not known in genuine Coptic sculpture appear in the forgeries. Is Brooklyn’s “Bust of a Saint” relief, dated from the fourth to fifth century C.E., genuine?<sup>27</sup> The saint has wide-open eyes with sharply carved lids and large spheres representing the irises instead of full eyeballs, a nose that is exceptionally thin and elongated, somewhat smiling lips, and an unusually rendered beard. All these details have parallels in the above-mentioned forgeries. Once again, there is no overall homogeneity; the head of the saint is too three-dimensional compared with the shallow relief of the rest. Significantly, while the Bust of a Saint (though it lacks a frame) resembles the fragmentary stele representing a monk standing in an *orans* pose,<sup>28</sup> there are no other *orans* bust compositions in Coptic reliefs. Nonetheless, as demonstrated by its thin lower border, this piece was evidently conceived as a bust.

Over time, the Coptic church excluded figurative sculpture from ecclesiastical interiors, which came to be decorated exclusively with frescoes and painted icons. Thus, it is not entirely clear how some early reliefs with Christian subjects originally might have been

employed. This is the case for the two famous reliefs depicting the martyrs St. Thekla and St. Sissinios (fig. 5), displayed in black cases in this area.<sup>29</sup> Previous studies have not noted that these reliefs have been left unfinished. This lack of finish is evident from visible tool marks of the tooth chisel used for basic shaping in stonework. These marks appear nearly everywhere on the Thekla relief and on part of the border of the Sissinios relief. The unfinished state of the last relief is also suggested by the presence of an undeveloped mass of stone behind Sissinios’ head and elbow, which was once thought to be an animal’s skull.<sup>30</sup> Looking carefully at this relief reveals that the surfaces of its figures were evidently reworked in modern times until they became smooth with roundish outlines. But traces of paint on the surface of both reliefs were discovered decades ago,<sup>31</sup> and this makes the situation even more puzzling. Were these unfinished reliefs accepted as complete at the time they were made and thus painted, or did a new style, a Coptic *non finito*, develop?<sup>32</sup> Once again, one regrets the absence of conservators’ observations that could enhance the visitors’ understanding of the objects.

The exhibition’s final, small gallery, devoted to authentic works recut in the 20th century, bears the title “True or False?” Although reworked objects have already appeared in the main gallery, they have not been distinguished by color throughout the exhibition. This final gallery highlights material with atypical iconography. Without additional comparative pieces in an analogous style and technique, it is difficult to explain the peculiarities of two reliefs displayed here, which are said by the Brooklyn Museum to be recarved: the “Plant Scroll with Human Figure” and the “Plant Scroll with Snakes and Bird Heads.”<sup>33</sup>

A small catalogue published on the occasion of the exhibition does not organize the entries for the individual objects according to the installation; instead, within chapters devoted to authentic Late Antique works and “Evocations of Late Antique Sculpture,” they are listed in numerical order according to their accession

<sup>25</sup> Inv. no. 72.10 (Russmann 2009, 80–1, no. 30).

<sup>26</sup> Inv. no. 77.129 (Russmann 2009, 82–3, no. 31).

<sup>27</sup> Inv. no. 55.2.3 (Russmann 2009, 44–5, no. 13).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the reliefs in Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection and the British Museum (Vikan 1995, 55–6, figs. 21–21.1).

<sup>29</sup> Inv. nos. 40.299, 40.300 (Russmann 2009, 22–5, nos. 2, 3).

<sup>30</sup> Nauert and Warns 1981, 70.

<sup>31</sup> Cooney 1944, 38.

<sup>32</sup> Archaeologists have observed sculptural blocks employed without final finishing (Grossman and Bailey 1994, 56).

<sup>33</sup> Inv. nos. 67.176.2, 68.3 (Russmann 2009, 72–5, nos. 26, 27).



Fig. 5. Late Antique Egyptian limestone relief with St. Sissinius, perhaps with modern reworking, ht. 38.8 cm, width. 58 cm, sixth century C.E. New York, Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, inv. no. 40.300 (© Brooklyn Museum).

numbers.<sup>34</sup> The catalogue provides the reader with brief descriptions and thematic considerations and a short, selected bibliography. Its color photographs, including enlargements of fragments, are helpful for studying the sculptures. Unfortunately, this slender volume does not include detailed information about the history of the Late Antique collection, the possible findspots of objects or else their purchase on the art market, a discussion of how and where the fakes were made, or, most importantly, results of the conservators' examination of the objects—all topics that the chosen subject requires.

With this exhibition, the Brooklyn Museum provides an important selection of objects that are not otherwise on display. It will surely prompt further discussion by scholars, and it is also of interest to members of the general public eager to learn more about art forgery. At the end of the last gallery, one may enter comments at a computer terminal that are then displayed on the museum's Web site for the exhibition. Visitors' comments reveal their excitement about and involvement with questions concerning the authenticity of sculpture from Late Antique

Egypt. The curator's focus is on forgeries from the 1950s to 1970s, but doubts about authenticity ought also to extend to objects acquired earlier.<sup>35</sup> Since the late 19th century, scholars and archaeologists acquired Coptic antiquities on behalf of European and American museums, and the market reacted to growing demand. When Wilbour traveled to the pyramids at Giza in 1881, he could not miss seeing "a flock of vendors of false antiquities."<sup>36</sup>

435 FORT WASHINGTON AVENUE, APT. 3E  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10333  
ALEXVKRUGLOV@EARTHLINK.NET

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<sup>34</sup>Russmann 2009.

<sup>35</sup>At least four reworked pieces were acquired in 1940 or 1941: inv. nos. 40.299, 40.300, 40.302, 41.1226

(Russmann 2009, 22–5, 28–9, 32–3, nos. 2, 3, 5, 7).

<sup>36</sup>Wilbour 1936, 11, 77, 146.

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