

“Memorial Wings”

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(Excerpt from the article) “Stroll through the modern cemetery intent upon the study of wings and their relations to the objects they are attached to, keeping in mind that wings are a motive of flight, be they the anterior limb of the fowl or eagle, or the imaginative growth of the artist’s angel, and you will conclude that the true sculptor, one who originates, has no easy task before him in creation of these aerial appendages. In our cemeteries, nine-tenths of the angels would not, if they were animated with life, be able to tour beyond the precincts of their sculptured confines, they lack not so much in the grace of composition as they do the possibility of strength and security if they were put in motion....”

This article, which begins on the next page,
is presented on the Stone Quarries and Beyond web site.

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Memorial Wings.

SKETCH BY FRANK T. ROBINSON.



TROLL through the modern cemetery intent upon the study of wings and their relations to the objects they are attached to, keeping in mind that wings are a motive of flight, be they the anterior limb of the fowl or eagle, or the imagina-

tive growth of the artist's angel, and you will conclude that the true sculptor, one who originates, has no easy task before him in the creation of these aerial appendages. In our great cemeteries, nine-tenths of the angels would not, if they were animated with life, be able to tour beyond the precincts of their sculptured confines, they lack not so much in the grace of composition as they do the possibility of strength and security if they were put in motion. Perhaps, like the halo, they are only symbolic, spiritual, suggestive of divine associations; indeed their functions are of the emotional sort, but for all that they should, like the draperies, have some feeling of a material nature, some practical semblance of lightness and possible usefulness.

In the imitative sense alone, there is no reason why the detail and lightness of the lifting limbs should not average nearer truth than they do, for the old and some of the new masters have set splendid examples of these heavenly designed instruments of propulsion. One has but to glance through the illustrated works of modern and antique sculpture to find any required design or proportion to suit the figure in process of construction or contemplation. The mechanical application alone is all that remains for the completion of the work. By a little effort and research you are furnished at sight



FIG. 1. GREEK SARCOPHAGUS.

*Photographs by Chas. Balliard, Official photographer, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

with your subject, you have not to think, only to work. It were better to copy than to affect, steal outright than destroy good marble. A true sculptor makes his figure from the life, then drapes it; he is thus sure of exact anatomy, of correctness in the flow and fold of the garment, its movement and subtleness. He will study the wings of birds,



FIG. 2. GREEK TOMBSTONE.

those of mammoth proportions who live in high altitudes, examples are plenty in the natural history rooms, or at Central Park. He will get at the nature of these wonderfully constructed, delicate, beautiful limbs; he will sketch the details from others' works or from nature, then make his own applications. How few there are who make these endeavors! The result is too evident.

With these thoughts in mind, finding little inspiration for material in the cemeteries, the writer visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, so prolific in examples of handiwork and creative skill, archaeological and modern, and by the earnest assistance of that genius who has made the museum what it is, the Director General L. P. di Cesnola, I am able to illustrate the ideas.

Fortunately every step one needs to take, every detail one requires for the perfect design and completion of wings, may be found at that institution, and inspiration with it. It is interesting to study the conceptions of wings exemplified by the Greeks, Phœnicians, Persians, Romans, Assyrians and Egyptians in their memorial or votive sculpts.

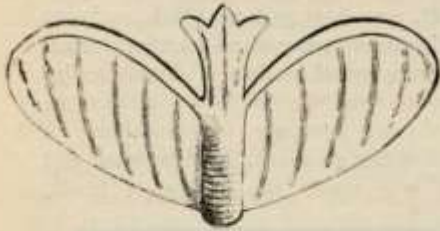


FIG. 3. MIR, OR WINGED DISK.

all fair types were, from Egyptian sources, the ancient sculptor never failed to impress one with the notion that the wings if exerted, would lift the wearers of them above the level of their environments. Take the sphinxes which adorn the Greek sarcophagus found in the Phœnician city Amathus by Gen. di Cesnola, and now forming a part of the grand, unexampled collection in the Museum. One will note, Fig. 1, the figures as similar to the Theban Sphinx, a lion's body, female head and bird's wings; though rude in some respects, one will not question that there is force and spirit in the wings, they certainly appear lighter in texture and material than the body; a better example, in fact one of the finest known, is shown, Fig. 2, in the Greek tombstone belonging to the same collection. The wings are the most perfect, airy and capable of use imaginable, both in construction and locality of attachment. They are proportionate, graceful and powerful and as harmonious as the beauty of the face and lines of the body require; also the weight of the monster guardians.

A much earlier example of the use of wings in memorial art, is shown in the Cesnola collection of Curium treasure gems. Here on one of the large scarabæus, deeply cut in Carnelian, is a hawk-headed sphinx and a seated deity before an altar. In front stands a man with hands raised in adoration, overhead soars the Mir, Fig. 3, or winged disk, emblem of the presence of divinity. (C. W. King, M. A. The Rings and Gems in the Treasures of Curium). The upward tendency of the wings impresses one with the feeling that they are desirous of escaping the confines of the collet, and well illustrate the sense of motion, crude as the engraving may be. These curious, quaint engravers and sculptors of twenty-five or more centuries past were keen observers of nature. They were well acquainted with beasts, birds, reptiles and insects; their very



FIG. 5. BRONZE HAWK.

language was symbolic in the highest sense.

Among the other ancient wings in the Museum which cannot be overlooked, are those decorative examples in sculptural relief on calcareous stone, and found in the Necropolis at Golgoi. This sepulchral stela, a part of the Cesnola collection, shows, Fig. 4, the upper section with the graceful conventional scroll forms containing two semi-sphinx crowned figures. The handsome faces, modeling and other details would make an independent article. These are rare types of feathered work, unusual in the sense that the wings are so seriously considered. The suggestion of the tree of life and its branches which would seem hardly strong enough to hold the sphinxes, gives one a good idea and feeling that the wings are performing their functions, they keep the objects in their proper places, the design is made complete by their use even though they are ornamental and exquisitely so.

Another conspicuous exhibit may be found in the Cesnola bronzes, which is styled the "Bronze Hawk," Fig. 5, and was found in the Treasure Chambers of Curium among the rich debris of ages. Its companions for nigh on to thirty centuries consisted of sandals, spear-heads, vases, cups, buttons, mirrors, bracelets, ivory handles, and a series of bronze ornaments, doubtless parts of an iron chair or throne which had fallen into a heap. It is conjectured, rightfully, that the hawk was perched upon the chair back or hung over it, the pierced legs and wing sections as well as the ornamental work about the neck, indicating such a possibility. This sacred emblem always indicated the presence of Deity, and in this instance he appears as if about to alight after a flight.



FIG. 4. SEPULCHRAL STELA.

Photo and engraving captions from the 1895 “Memorial Wings” article presented above:

Page 17:

“Sketch by Frank T. Robinson”

“Fig 1. Greek Sarcophogus”

“Fig. 2. Greek Tombstone”

“Photographs by Charles Ballard, Official photographer, Metropolitan Museum, New York”

Page 18:

“Fig 3. Mir or Winged Disk.”

“Fig. 4. Sepulchral Stela”

“Fig. 5. Bronze Hawk.”