

P.O. Brøndsted and early research on the sculptures of the Parthenon

by Martin Kreeb

One of the results of Peter Oluf Brøndsted's travels and study was the publication in Paris of *Voyages dans la Grèce* (Paris, vol. I 1826, vol. II 1830) (fig. 1), appearing simultaneously in German as *Reisen und Untersuchungen in Griechenland*.¹ However, of the eight projected volumes only two were actually published, while a planned edition in English did not appear at all.

Brøndsted prepared the publication well, travelling again to the Levant, this time to the Ionian islands and Sicily in 1820, in order to research ancient monuments and to accumulate examples for comparison. What he had collected and recorded in his diaries, he revised in part at Rome, in part at Paris. In 1824 and again in 1826 he spent some time in London, according to the biography of R. Cockerell with whom he exchanged ideas,² to whom (together with Thorvaldsen) he dedicated the second volume of *Reisen und Untersuchungen* and to whom he owed the plan of the Parthenon printed in that volume (fig. 2).³ When he came to Paris for the first time, in 1806/07, he had met Karl Benedikt Hase, responsible for the Cabinet des Manuscrits at the Bibliothèque Impériale.⁴ In his foreword to the first volume of *Reisen und Untersuchungen* he thanks Hase, and also the archaeologist and egyptologist Jean

Antoine Letronne and the archaeologist Desiré Raoul-Rochette. Letronne wrote numerous reviews on subjects related to Greek archaeology.⁵ Given the fact that Brøndsted thanks these two scholars, we may assume that he had discussed matters of ancient Greek art, mythology and topography with both of them.

In the preface to his great publication Brøndsted announced that "the aim of this work is to present the results of the journeys and investigations in a worthy manner."⁶ After the publication of the first two volumes, however, there was a major change in the life of Brøndsted, who returned to Copenhagen and resumed the duties of his professorship in classical philology and archaeology at the University of Copenhagen and so was not able to continue the edition. This is a pity, for more than one reason. The German archaeologist Karl Otfried Müller tells us that numerous etchings for the third and possibly further volumes had been prepared already when Müller published his review of Brøndsted's second volume in 1835: "Der Ref.[erent] kann nur wünschen, daß Herr Geh.[eimer] Leg.[ations]-Rath Brøndsted diese Lieferungen, zu denen sehr zahlreiche Kupferplatten bereits gestochen sind, nicht lange zurückhalten möge [my italics]."⁷ But as

1. Brøndsted 1826-1830a; Brøndsted 1826-1830b.

2. See Watkin 1974, 99 and 62.

3. Brøndsted 1826-1830b, 132 fig. XXXVIII.

4. Delisle 1868-1881, II, 280; see also ADB, X, 725-727.

5. For instance Letronne 1818; Letronne 1820a; Letronne 1820b; Letronne 1820c.

6. "die ... Resultate, so wie die Reisen und Unternehmungen ...

würdiger Weise aufzustellen, ist der Zweck dieses Werks", Brøndsted 1826-1830b, I, XIII-XIV.

7. Müller 1835 (citation: p. 1847). Thanks are due to Dr. Maria Effinger, Heidelberg, and to Claudia Voos, Bonn, for providing me with copies of the articles in these early volumes of the periodical, not available in Greece.

REISEN UND UNTERSUCHUNGEN
 IN
GRIECHENLAND,
 NEBST
 DARSTELLUNG UND ERKLÄRUNG
 VIELER NEUENTDECKTEN DENKMÄLER
 GRIECHISCHEN STYLS,
 UND EINER KRITISCHEN ÜBERSICHT ALLER UNTERNEHMUNGEN DIESER ART,
 VON PAUSANIAS BIS AUF UNSERE ZEITEN.

S.^r M. dem Könige von Dänemark

GEWIDMET VON

D.^s P. O. BRÖNDSTED,

DER UNIVERSITÄT ZU KOPENHAGEN UND MEHRERER AKADEMIEN MITGLIEDE; RITTER DES DANEBROGORDENS,
 KÖNIGL. DÄNISCHEM GEHEIMEN LEGATIONS-RATHE UND GESCHÄFTSTRÄGER AM RÖMISCHEN HOFE.

Zweites Buch.



XXXV.

Paris,

GEDRUCKT BEI A. FIRMIN DIDOT, KÖNIGLICHEM BUCHDRUCKER,
 JACOBSSTRASSE, N^o 24.

1830.

Fig. 1: Brøndsted, Reisen und Untersuchungen vol. II (Paris 1830), title page.

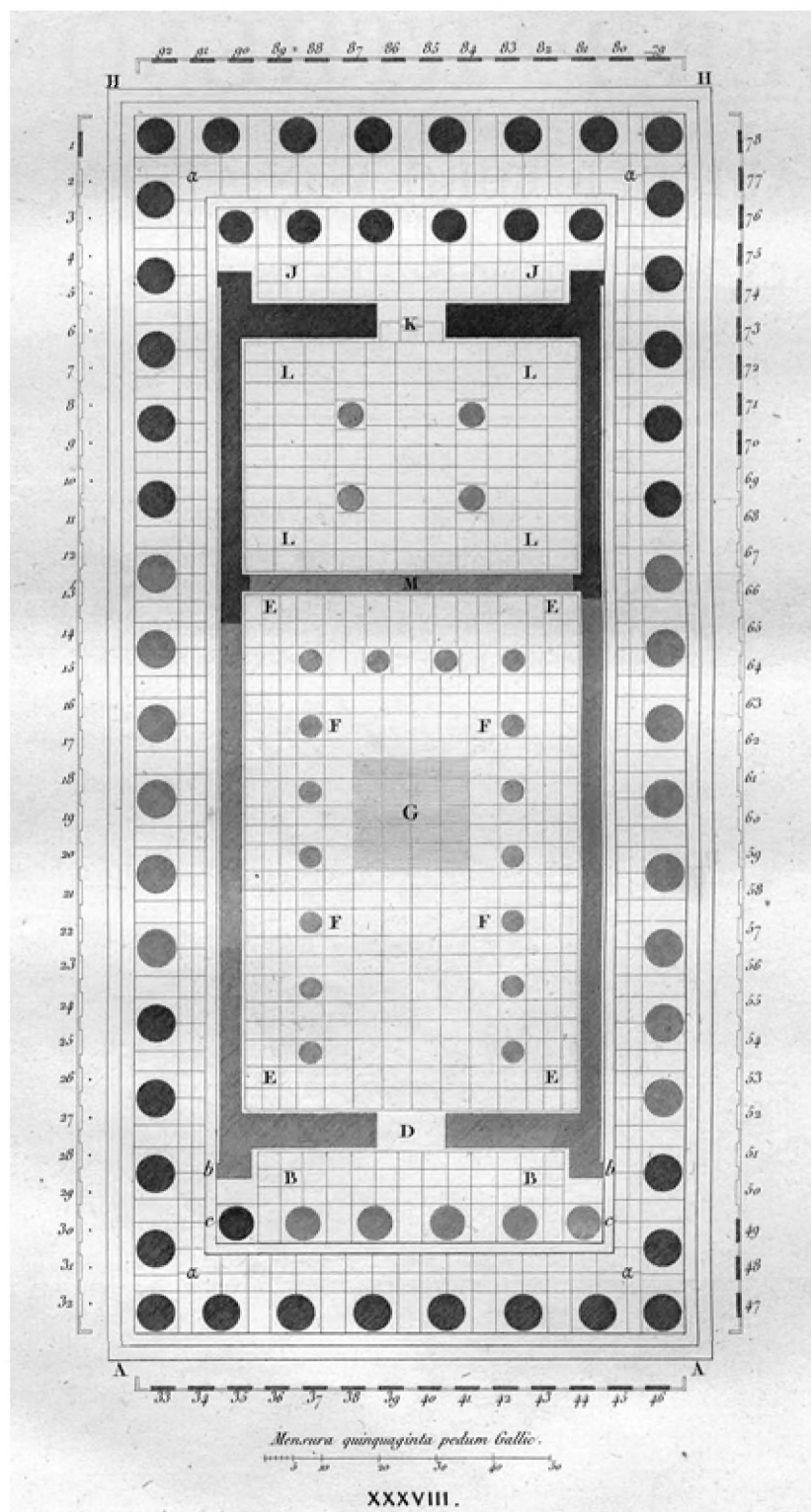


Fig. 2: Plan of the Parthenon, by C. R. Cockerell. Brøndsted 1830b, pl. XXXVIII.

early as 1832 Brøndsted had become also director of The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals in Copenhagen. His *opus magnum* remained a torso.

The contents of the two volumes are given on their respective title pages. The subtitle of the second volume does not quite exactly correspond with the contents, as we shall see, because the description of the Parthenon should have continued in a third volume. Actually, the second volume, the main text of which begins with page 131,⁸ contains

- a) thoughts on the beginning and development of the Doric frieze in Greek architecture;
- b) the decoration of the mentioned frieze;
- c) the shape and decoration of the pediments;
- d) descriptions of two fragments from the Parthenon in the Royal Museum, Copenhagen, together with a historical account of why and when the fragments arrived in Denmark;
- e) finally the metopes of the south side of the Parthenon.

We shall mainly deal with Brøndsted's presentation and interpretation of these metopes, and the question of what has survived of his interpretation to our own days.

Let me first mention, in a few words only, the architectural decoration of the Parthenon.⁹ This is thought by many to be the most splendid of all Greek temples, erected between 447 and 432 B.C. It was decorated with 92 sculpted metopes, a sculpted frieze with a length of 160 m, and two sculpted pediments with around fifty colossal marble figures. In the cella of the temple stood the colossal statue of Athena Parthenos on a basis, which also was ornamented with sculpted reliefs.

The metopes are to be seen over the columns and

just beneath the roof, from outside the temple like the pediment sculptures. The frieze had not been placed above the architrave, but on top of the cella walls, to be viewed from inside the corridor running around the interior of the building, the so-called peristyle. That caused difficulties in interpretation, as to whether the images were meant to be admired by humans or by the gods alone.¹⁰ One gets a good impression of the limited light in the narrow corridor from the replica of the Parthenon in scale 1:1 at Nashville, Tennessee.

The Parthenon had stimulated the curiosity of all travellers visiting Athens, beginning with Cyriac of Ancona in the 15th century, who has given us the first sketch of the western façade and, sketched under the façade, of a small part of the frieze; and also, in one of the two versions of his drawing, some metopes sketched above the pediment.¹¹ Pictures and descriptions of the Parthenon continued with the French traveller Jacob Spon and his English companion George Wheler in 1675,¹² up to the two English architects James Stuart and Nicholas Revett in the middle of the 18th century.¹³ Two historical moments, however, were of major importance for the later research on the architectural sculpture of the temple. In the years 1674/75 Charles Marie Ollier, Marquis de Nointel, ambassador of France to the Ottoman Empire between 1670 and 1679, travelled in Greece accompanied by two painters. One of these, usually known as Jacques Carrey,¹⁴ worked about two months on the Acropolis in order to prepare drawings of the sculptures for Nointel. Today we know 19 sheets with drawings by the artist. Twelve years later, on the 26th of September 1687, an explosion destroyed the Parthenon's whole central part, together with sections of the frieze and the central metopes (as far as they had not been destroyed when

8. The first volume ended with page 130.

9. See, for instance, Holtzmann 2003, 101-144. It is not necessary to cite more literature here – there are hundreds of books and articles on the subject. I shall mention, later, only four of the main works or articles dealing with the sculptures of the temple.

10. See, for instance, Osborne 1987.

11. See, for instance, Mallouchou-Tufano 1994, 165 figs. 1-2; Beschi 1998, 96f. figs 2-3.

12. See, for instance, Kreeb 2001.

13. See Stuart & Revett 1762-1816 and Salmon 2006.

14. It is not the place here to discuss or to resolve the problematic question, whether the drawings of the Parthenon sculptures are owed to Carrey or to his Flemish colleague (anonymous for us). See for instance Bowie & Thimme 1971. For other opinions, Holtzmann 2003, 250. Holtzmann has told me that he is referring to Vandal 1900.

the temple became a Christian cathedral). Thus, most of the research after 1687 depends on the mentioned drawings. A lively picture is provided by F. Fanelli, an Italian who took part in the blockade and was present at the bombardment, immediately after the explosion.¹⁵

Brøndsted spent some time at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and in Rome before travelling to Greece. Jacob Spon and other voyagers before him had done the same thing, whereas James Stuart and Nicholas Revett had stayed in Rome for a while at least. The difference was that Brøndsted saw at Paris the above mentioned drawings of the Parthenon sculptures, which entered the Bibliothèque Nationale after Nointel's death and after some adventures. They were familiar to the scientific world from the 18th century, since some of them had been etched for B. de Montfaucon,¹⁶ and the pediment drawings had been used also in the atlas of the Abbé Barthélémy's well-known *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis*.¹⁷ Brøndsted was thus better prepared to see the building than his predecessors had been. (Spon and Wheler had also seen the sheets, at Constantinople in Nointel's house where they were received as guests. But they did not pay attention to the importance of the drawings. Stuart and Revett regretably did not know of their existence.)

Besides examining the drawings at Paris, Brøndsted also studied the ancient literary sources, in part directly through the manuscripts. So for instance he discusses a textual emendation in Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 36, 5, having worked through six Latin codices.¹⁸ These studies, and his knowledge of the texts in general, allowed him to propose interpretations for what he saw on the Parthenon.

There is a major difficulty with the interpretation of

the Parthenon sculpture, which has never been resolved: We do not have ancient descriptions of the subjects of the metopes or the frieze. Pausanias mentions only the subjects of the pediments, and that very briefly (I 24, 5). Therefore Brøndsted (like all scholars before and after him) had to try to interpret. As for his theoretical background, in the foreword to the first volume of *Reisen und Untersuchungen* he mentions his commitment to Johann Joachim Winckelmann and to Ennio Quirino Visconti, once the Pope's and later Napoleon's antiquary.¹⁹ Visconti was one of the first scholars to deal with the Parthenon sculpture in his *Mémoires sur des ouvrages de sculpture du Parthénon* (1818).²⁰

Brøndsted's theories with respect to the metopes of the Parthenon were as follows. There were 92 sculpted metopes on the temple, two times 32 along the long sides and two times 14 along the front- and backsides, respectively. The 14 metopes of the east side of the temple, the ancient entrance, show, according to Brøndsted, "only actions of the goddess Athena herself and of her favourite heroes, Herakles and Theseus".²¹ Today one interprets the east metopes as illustrating the fight between the gods and the giants, with a series of different names for the particular gods, however. There is a good overview in a table produced by Berger that allows us to get just an idea of what it is possible to figure out.²²

The 32 metopes on the north side show, according to Brøndsted, Lapiths, Amazons, Athena, Perseus, Bellerophon, while some of the scenes cannot be understood. But actually North 24, 25 and 28 are scenes from the Ilioupersis, as Praschniker demonstrated in 1928, and if it is correct that North 29 illustrates Se-

15. Mallouchou-Tufano 1994, 168 fig. 6. See also Korres 1994, 155 fig. 21.

16. Montfaucon 1719–1724.

17. Barthélemy 1825, atlas volume pl. 19.

18. See Brøndsted 1826–1830b, II, 219 note 6. Brøndsted had studied at the Bibliothèque Impériale, in connection with Pliny, the codices Latini 6789. 6802. 6803. 6804 (not »6084«, as in his text). 6805. 6806.

19. Brøndsted 1826–1830b, I, XVI.

20. Visconti 1818/1830.

21. "nur Thaten der Athene selbst und der beiden, von ihr vorzüglich begünstigten Heroen, Herakles und Theseus", Brøndsted 1826–1830b, II, XIII.

22. Berger 1986, 56–57.

lene, one may understand North 1 as an illustration of Helios, the metopes between North 1 and North 29 reporting the Trojan war, and North 30–32 the assembly of the gods in connection with that war. Brøndsted's interpretation has not stood the test of time.²³

On the west side of the Parthenon Brøndsted saw the battle of Marathon, that is to say a battle between Greeks and Persians. The metopes had the misfortune to be at the entrance façade of the Christian church built into the Parthenon in the early Christian epoch. For this reason the believers destroyed the ancient scenes by beating them with hammers, as they had done also to the North and East metopes. Thus not even the English painter William Pars, who made drawings of the West metopes about 1765/66, could decipher the sculptures very well. The question still remains today, whether the Greeks struggle with humans, i.e. Persians, or mythological beings, i.e. Amazons. Ernst Berger believes that no trousers are to be seen, so he votes in favour of Amazons, because Persian warriors wore trousers.²⁴ Burkhard Wesenberg had discussed the question just three years before Berger's book was published.²⁵ It is clear that Brøndsted had a good idea, whether or not it may one day be proved right or wrong.

But Brøndsted's main concern in the second volume of *Reisen und Untersuchungen* was the 32 metopes of the south side. Before him only William Martin Leake had discussed these sculptures to any extent.²⁶ Earlier travellers, as Spon and Wheler, Guilletière and Cornelio Magni,²⁷ all of them in Athens between 1675 and 1687, had observed only the battle between centaurs and young men and women. All of the 16 metopes that had been transported to the northwestern part of Europe, that is 15 to London, 1 to Paris and two frag-

ments to Copenhagen, show exclusively centaurs, because every one of them has been taken from the south side of the temple. The opinion of the 17th century that the metopes of the Parthenon showed exclusively depictions of the Lapiths' and centaurs' myth, could thus survive into the 18th century. I mention especially A. C. Quatremère de Quincy, a wise and careful scholar, who believed, however, that there were at least 80 metopes with representations of centaurs.²⁸

It is Leake's and Brøndsted's merit to have laid a firm foundation for the discussion to follow over the next 190 years. Brøndsted counts only 23 metopes with centaurs within the 92 metopes once on the Parthenon. Five of the 23 show centaurs with female antagonists. Far more interesting are the nine metopes South 13–21, and there are dozens of different suggestions as to how to explain them. Nearly all scholars suggest they illustrate local myths of Attica. The problem is, however, that no battle with centaurs is known by the literary or artistic tradition to have taken place in Attica. Is a break in the subject of the South metopes possible? We do not know. One may compare, once again, one of Berger's tables with the different interpretations of South 13–21, Brøndsted's proposals being the first ones on top of the table.²⁹

One development in research could not have been foreseen, however, by Brøndsted or by anyone else. Research on the Acropolis began soon after the Greek war of independence.³⁰ First of all, the ruins of the Turkish village had to be dismantled. Lots of fragments that came to light were put into piles of stones, being lost again immediately. Only in the last two decades has a program to recover these fragments been established by the responsible scholars of the Acropolis Ephorate. Because of this program, archaeologists

23. Praschniker 1928, 87–141; Berger 1986, 12–17.

24. Berger 1986, 99.

25. Wesenberg 1983, 203–208.

26. Leake 1821, 226–232.

27. See, for instance, Stark 1880, 136–137 (“Carolo Magni” instead of “Cornelio”); Kreeb 2001.

28. Quatremère 1818, 54.

29. Berger 1986, 92–93.

30. See, for instance, Pantou & Kreeb 2005.

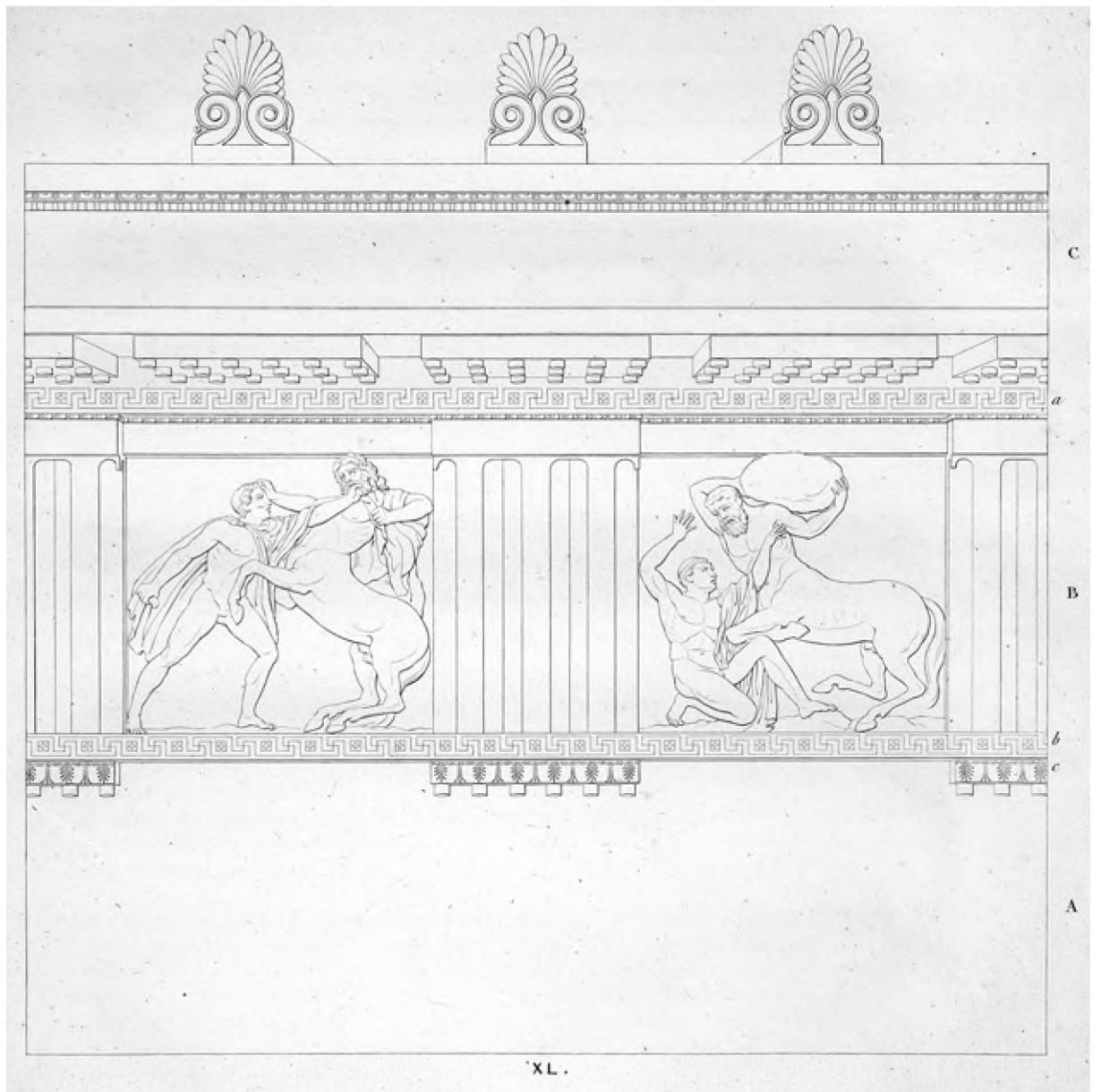


Fig. 3: Metopes South 7 and 8, with surrounding entablature. Brøndsted 1830b, pl. XL.

like Ismini Trianti or Alexandros Mantis have been able to reconstruct parts of metopes thought to have been lost forever, for instance South 20 and South 21.³¹

South 20 was destroyed by the explosion of 1687.³² As Brøndsted (relying on ‘Carrey’) saw a roll in the hand of the figure at the left, he interpreted two priestesses or maidens with text rolls, perhaps law codes. The new attachments of Akr 1118 and Akr 3332 show clearly that the figure at left holds part of a cloth taken from a loom. Mantis writes: “Taken in connection with the woman spinning in metope 19, it is now certain that metopes 19 and 20 illustrate the making of a new piece of cloth (the preserved fragment of which recalls the peplos in the east frieze). It is difficult to determine what part the right-hand figure plays in these preparations, because the slightly curved cylindrical object that she holds in her right hand (variously interpreted as a law code, knife, band, torch) has been irretrievably lost.”³³ Brøndsted’s interpretation, as also those of Murray and Schrader, is certainly wrong.³⁴

South 21, too, was destroyed by the explosion of 1687.³⁵ Because of the partial nudity of the woman at the right side, Brøndsted interpreted her as a woman who had just given birth, coming together with a priestess to visit the wooden statue of Artemis from Tauris. However other xoana, wooden cult statues, stood on the Acropolis, like the statue of Athena erected by Erichthonios,³⁶ or the Palladion from Troy,³⁷ or the statue of Eileithyia from Delos,³⁸ or a xoanon of Artemis Chitone.³⁹ According to Brøndsted both the xoana of Artemis and the one of Eileithyia influenced the representation. Both are goddesses who help women in childbirth. But now we know that the

woman on the left side of the metope undresses the xoanon, while the barebreasted woman possibly takes finery from the xoanon’s head (or, as B. Sismondo Ridgway suggested, is washing the statue).⁴⁰ Mantis proposes that South 19–21 show a sequence of a common topic – but we do not as yet know what it is.

What else can be said about Brøndsted’s publication? With the help of his friend Cockerell he tried to provide a reconstruction of the metopes with the surrounding entablature (fig. 3). The drawing shows South 7 and 8, and Cockerell wrote observations on traces of ancient colour, which can still be recognized today. Brøndsted also interpreted, to some extent, the Parthenon fragments in Copenhagen. He believed that they belonged to the metopes shown in the drawing, South 7 and 8. Today we know they belong to South 4.⁴¹

What did Brøndsted really achieve with his publication of parts of the Parthenon sculpture? He was the first not only to make use of all of the “Carrey” drawings, but also to present them in outline sketches – as far as he managed to publish his work (fig. 4). The outlines do not represent Carrey’s drawings with accuracy, but Brøndsted interpolated the state of the metopes at his own time. He presented a drawing by R. Cockerell of the plan of the Parthenon (fig. 2). Up to that time one could use only the plans made by Stuart and Revett or in the “Elgin Marbles” publication of 1818. He discussed problems that were examined by other scholars of his time, as the roots of the Doric order or the polychromy of ancient Greek buildings, being perfectly up-to-date with the research of his own time. He tried to summarize the iconographical pro-

31. Trianti 1992, 187–197; Mantis 1997, 66–81.

32. Brøndsted 1826–1830b, II, 240–249; drawn by ‘Carrey’; Brommer 1967, 107–108. 237; Mantis 1997, 75–77.

33. Mantis 1997, 76–77.

34. Brommer 1967, 237.

35. Brøndsted 1826–1830b, II, 250–264; drawn by ‘Carrey’; Brommer 1967, 109. 237–238; Mantis 1997, 77–79.

36. Paus. I 26, 7; Apollodoros III 14, 6 § 9.

37. Apollodoros III 12, 3 § 4–10; see Paus. I 28, 9.

38. Paus. I 18, 5.

39. Callimachus, Hymn to Artemis 225–227; Scholion in Callimachus’ Hymn to Zeus 77.

40. See Mantis 1997, 78 with mentioning of the suggestion of Sismondo Ridgway.

41. See Holtzmann 2003, 125 fig. 105: S 4, not S 8; see Brommer 1967, pl. 177; Brommer 1967, pp. 80–82, especially 81 “Bruchstücke in Kopenhagen”. Cf. the article by Jan Zahle in this publication.

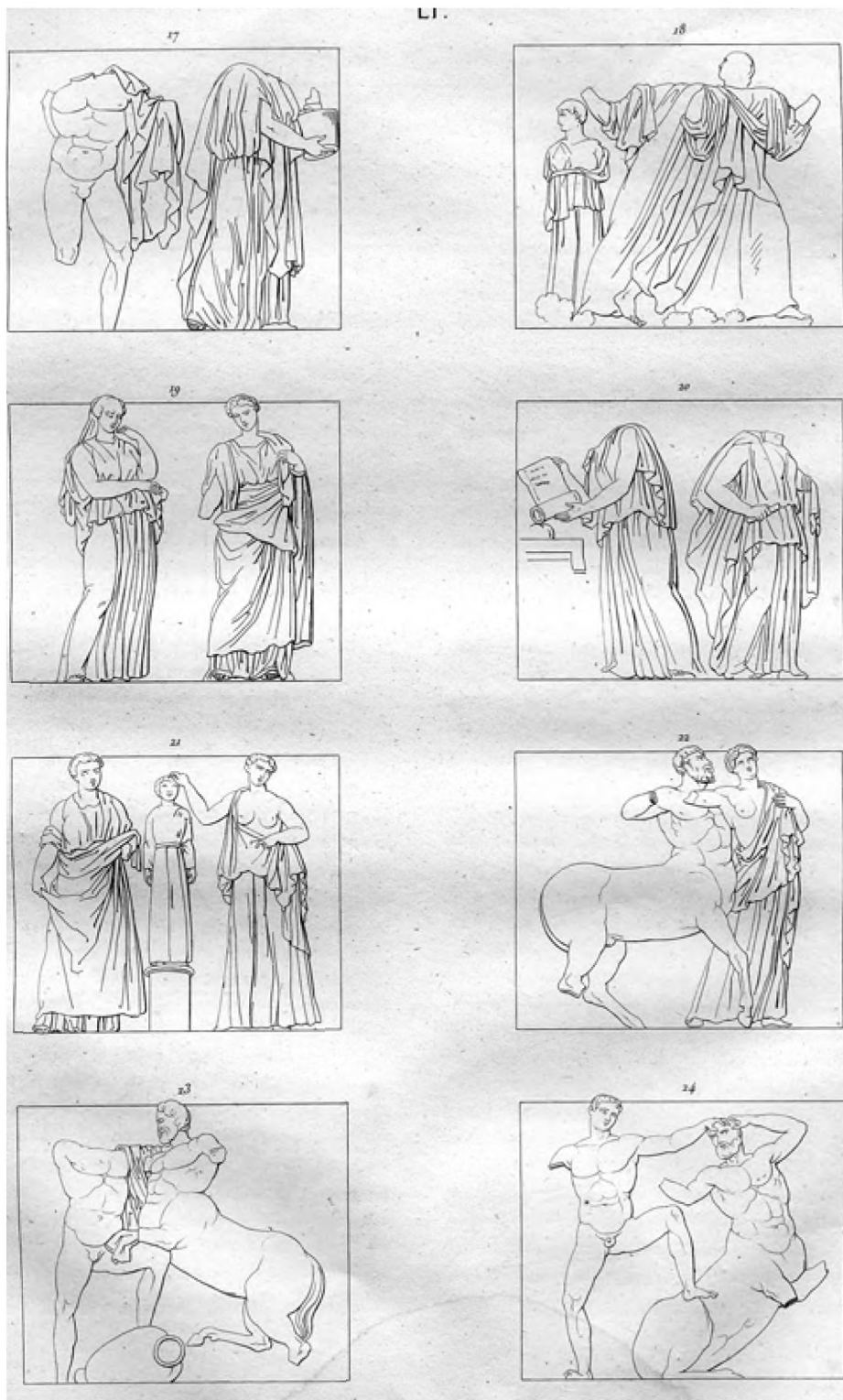


Fig. 4: Metopes South 17 – 24, outline sketches. Brøndsted 1830b, pl. LI.

gram of the Parthenon sculpture, and he analyzed *all* the South side metopes, the ones preserved in the British Museum, the Louvre and *in situ* on the Parthenon, as also the ones thought to be lost at his time. Finally, for his interpretation he used all his philological and mythological learning, and came to certain results that have stood since then. Of course, others were rejected on the basis of more or less sound arguments.

It is harder to say what Brøndsted did not attain. He apparently was not very fond of stylistic analysis. He was interested in the interpretation of the scenes, which he saw, but normally he did not look for comparable material for iconographic comparison or the study of different sculptors' work. But that was quite normal at his time. Karl Otfried Müller in his review of the first volume of *Reisen und Untersuchungen* felt that it suffered from a certain loquaciousness, and Adolf Michaelis repeated that judgement; the same

Müller, however, admitted in his review of the second volume that he had not meant to be rude.⁴² Of course, if we compare the very compact writing of Frank Brommer in the 1960s with the literary style of Brøndsted in 1826/30, we might imagine how we could reduce the pages of *Reisen und Untersuchungen*.⁴³ But that is not the point, I think, and Brøndsted has a right to have written in personal style.

Finally, Brøndsted's book has been used by a great number of scholars, among them Brommer and Berger. It may please the honourable association of scholars who are participating in this colloquium on Peter Oluf Brøndsted to learn that both volumes in German and also the second volume of the French edition have been made available as digital copies on the Internet.⁴⁴ It is to be hoped that this might be another step in the direction of taking Brøndsted's work into account again.

42. Michaelis 1871, 101; Müller 1835.

43. Brommer 1967.

44. Thanks are due to Dr. Maria Effinger. The web addresses are:
<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/brondsted1826bd1>;
<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/brondsted1826bd2>;
<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/brondsted1830>.