ONE

FIGURE AND TEMPLE IN THE GREEK WORLD UNTIL THE BEGINNING OF THE LATE ARCHAIC PERIOD

(CA. 700–530)

It is remarkable that the investigation of the uses of figural representation in Greek sacred architecture is not one of the main areas of present-day scholarship. There are as many monographs as there are temples and parts of the temple once used to display figures – the akroteria, pediments, and friezes; however, thus far there has been no general history of the use of figures on Greek sacred buildings.

The reasons for this odd situation become clear upon examining the history of the discipline, and in particular, the history of scholarly restorations of temples in the period between the beginning and the end of the nineteenth century.

For much of the nineteenth century, architects were very creative in their restorations of the original appearance of Greek temples and lavish in their imaginings of the temples' figural apparatus. One need only look at restorations of the Parthenon such as those of Gottfried Semper (ca. 1834), Alexis Paccard (1845–6), or Benoit Loviot (1879–81) to realize how important it was for several generations of scholars to create a model of the Greek temple in which figural decoration and architectural structure played equal roles in the original visual impact of the buildings.[1] As a result, the illustrations of these studies, dedicated to the masterpieces of Greek Archaic and Classical architecture from all over the Mediterranean, restore the temples overwhelmed by gaily colored figures from the top of the roof down to the bottom of the cella walls.

This situation changed at the end of the nineteenth century. Suddenly, restored temples often lacked both the figural decoration and the vivid and diffuse polychromy of their predecessors. These new restorations are symptomatic of a new iconoclastic trend in the field of Greek architectural history, one that was so radical that even buildings like the Parthenon were restored without their original, rich apparatus of figures – see, for example, Auguste Choisy's Classical res-

toration of the Acropolis (1899), which was later to be used by Le Corbusier in *Towards a New Architecture*. Of course, it is not a coincidence that in the same years, Adolf Loos was writing *Ornament and Crime,* arguing against the use of figural decoration in buildings, which he compared to the use of tattoos on the bodies of primitives. This book heralded the advent of modernism in architecture, with its banishment of figural decoration, and there seems to be little question that the new iconoclastic trend in Greek architectural history was a reflection of the new atmosphere in modern architectural theory and practice.[2]

What concerns us most is the fact that in the same years when historians of Greek architecture were giving up the original, figural decoration of buildings, historians of Greek sculpture began to make their appropriation of it. By "appropriation," I mean the process by which architectural sculpture was systematically detached from buildings and was instead reconceptualized according to the discourses that ruled, at that time, the discussion of free sculpture, such as style, authorship, and formal analysis. This process can best be seen at work in the main general books on Greek sculpture of the period (such as Murray's *History of Greek Sculpture* of 1890), in which akroteria and pediments were discussed beside statuary, and metopes and friezes were grouped with funerary and votive relief. Such books began the process of dissecting the original unity of Greek temple decoration.

This appropriation of the figural decoration of temples by historians of sculpture is more than justified, considering that at the time architectural sculpture represented the largest body of original Greek sculpture, a group able to be situated both chronologically and geographically. Yet, as a result of this appropriation, in a few decades scholarly narratives about Greek temple decoration moved from discussing temples decorated by akroteria, pedimental statues, and metopes, to talking only about akroteria, pedimental statues, and metopes, without much consideration of either the temples themselves or the totality of their original appearance. In fact, in the first few decades of the twentieth century, the typological discussion of architectural sculpture, that is to say, the discussion of bits and pieces of temples, became a regular scholarly genre, parallel to the typological discussions then being constructed for other categories of art-historical and archaeological objects, such as pottery. In these years dominated by a typological approach, there were books on kraters, cups, and amphoras; indeed, soon enough dissertations and books on akroteria, pediments, or friezes also arrived.[3] Such works contained detailed catalogs of surviving examples followed by systematic discussions of the origins and diffusion of a given type; but while doing so, they systematically disregarded the rest of the building to which the object under investigation once belonged.[4]

The impact of these studies and publications on scholarship of the second half of the twentieth century has been considerable, as is best indicated by the continued practice of publishing new, updated typological catalogs into the twenty-

first century.[5] More than in these specialized studies, this impact is shown in general narratives on Greek sculpture that are entirely based on such dissections of temples and the consequent typological treatment of pediments, metopes, and friezes.[6]

Luckily, times are changing, as is shown by recent more general discussions of Greek art and architecture that address architectural sculpture in conjunction with actual buildings.[7] Still, the legacy of that long-established scholarly tradition is so strong that the use of figural decoration on temples is still not one of the main concerns of current research.

There are two additional problems with the traditional scholarly narrative about the early stages of Greek temple decoration (ca. 700–530). The first is that, because of the nineteenth-century tendency to identify temple decoration with architectural sculpture, scholarship tends to underestimate images made of materials other than stone or media other than sculpture. This is despite the fact that these images in terracotta or paint often played a major role in the visual communication of sacred buildings. The second problem is that we tend to think of Greek temples, all Greek temples, as being decorated by figural representations from the beginning of Greek sacred architecture, despite the fact that the use of images evolved in a consistent way over a century and a half – and largely antedated the formation of the architectural orders.

There is in fact substantial evidence for the use of figural representation in the decoration of sacred architecture for the period from the late eighth century to the last quarter of the seventh century. This evidence demonstrates a wide variety of uses that are continued throughout the period.

The limestone frieze from Chania, in western Crete, may represent our earliest evidence for this practice (end of the eighth century), since it most likely belonged to a religious building.[8] On the only surviving block of what must have been originally a continuous frieze, pairs of archers defend a temple from the assault of enemies in chariots. Inside this sculpted temple, the frontal cult statue of a goddess, framed by tiny walls and a flat roof, is prominently displayed. The battle frieze must have decorated the walls of the building to which it once belonged, although the precise location remains unclear. There is, however, an evident connection between this early occurrence of a stone frieze and the tradition of walls made entirely of stone in the architecture of the island, which dates back to the Geometric period.[9] Crete was in the forefront in the Greek world in the use of stone in architecture, and the use of a stone frieze at such an early date is thus hardly a surprise.

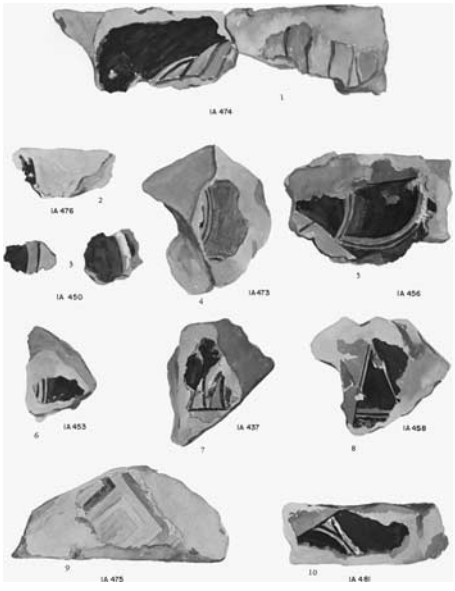
The next piece of evidence for the use of figural representation in the decoration of sacred architecture may date to the early decades of the seventh century, if it is correct to think that the object in question, a small fragmentary terracotta plaque from Naxos, originally belonged to a frieze.[10] The plaque was found in association with the third phase (ca. 680) of the temple at Iria, and it has been

attributed to a frieze decorating the entablature of a wooden portico that monumentalized the main facade of the building. The state of preservation of the plaque is so poor that any identification of its original function must remain hypothetical, and this is particularly regrettable in light of its possible subject. The plaque shows a pair of horses moving to the right, and since bigas are often found in Naxian vase painting and relief *pithoi* of the Orientalizing period as vehicles for deities and warriors, it is possible that the same subject was represented on the plaque. It is impossible to be certain, though, about the original function of the plaque, which may also have been a votive *pinax*.[11] Whatever the case, it is very likely that the use of terracotta friezes originated in this area of the Greek world because of the intense production of terracotta relief *pithoi* during the Late Geometric and Orientalizing periods.[12]

If the plaque from Naxos was indeed part of a frieze, it would be the only evidence for the decoration of the entablature of a building in the Greek world before the last quarter of the seventh century. Previous to this, though figural representation frequently appears on temples, it seems to have been limited to the walls of the buildings. This, at least, is the conclusion to be drawn from two of the main monumental temples of the Orientalizing period, those of Poseidon at Isthmia and of Hera at Samos.

At Isthmia (ca. 660), a series of fragments of painted stucco uncovered during the excavations of the Temple of Poseidon have been thought to belong to the walls of the seventh-century building (Fig. 1).[13] The paintings, which in style are reminiscent of Protocorinthian polychrome vases, may have decorated the exterior of the cella, forming a frieze (estimated height 64 cm) running between the piers of the walls in panels 1.94 m long. Today, just small fragments remain, showing only geometric patterns, parts of animals, and perhaps human figures. It is important to realize that those figures, though much smaller than life-size, were quite larger than those on contemporary vase painting. In this regard, they are primary documents for the beginning of monumental painting in Greek art.[14] The use of painted stucco for protecting the walls of temples is seen in several temples of the Geometric and Orientalizing periods. The closest parallel for Isthmia would be the first Temple of Apollo at Corinth (ca. 680), whose interior walls may have carried a painted decoration, although apparently without figural representations.[15]

A slightly different form of wall decoration is found at Samos. A block attributed to the walls of the second Temple of Hera (Hekatompedon II) (670–650) is incised with three warriors holding spears in their hands.[16] This representation is now generally thought to have belonged to a wall frieze 25–30 cm high, with incised and perhaps painted figures. Wall friezes were used in two buildings of the sanctuary during the Late Archaic period (Temple of Hera IV; South Building), and one may consider the earlier frieze as a forerunner, inaugurating a practice that had a distinct local significance.



1. Isthmia. Temple of Poseidon. Fragments of the painted frieze; ca. 660. *Source:* Broneer 1971, pl. A.

The relatively limited height of the friezes considered so far means that they could not have decorated the bottom course of walls. By contrast, this positioning is found in Crete after the middle of the century for two buildings: the Temple of Athena on the acropolis at Gortyn (640–630), and temple A at Prinias (630–620) (Fig. 2).

At Gortyn, the excavators of the temple on the acropolis have connected two limestone reliefs representing divine Triads to the facade of the building. This proposal has been widely accepted, unlike the theory that a carved sphinx decorated the doorway.[17]

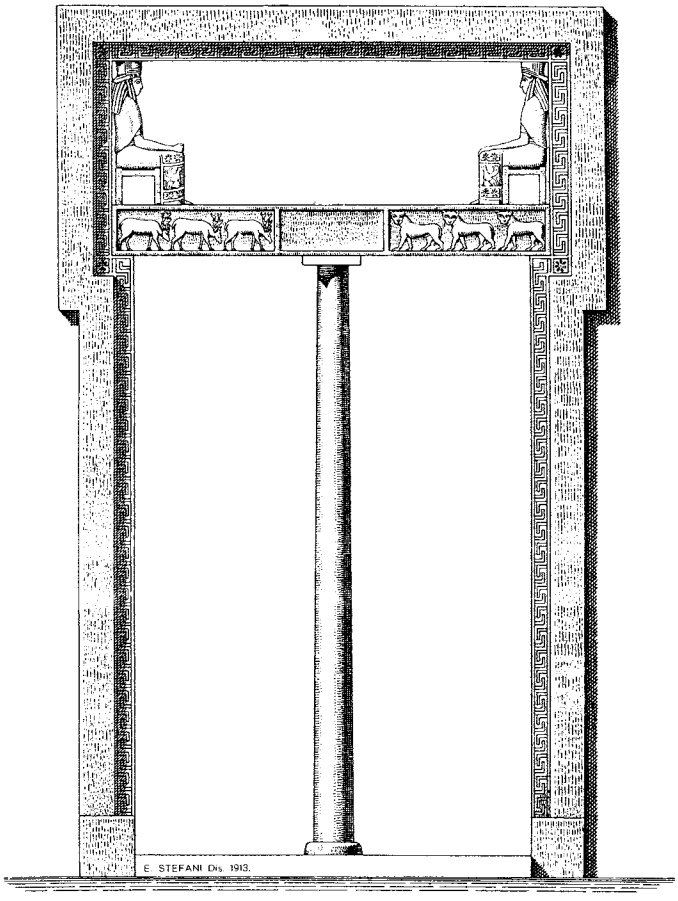
At Prinias, it was the well-known frieze of riders and horses that decorated the bottom course of the wall.[18] According to a fairly recent proposal (D'Acunto), the frieze began on the flanks of the temple, in correspondence to the pronaos, and then turned to the facade, thus showing the riders converging toward the doorway (an impressive precedent for the Parthenon frieze), where two sphinxes framed the entrance to the building. Much care was lavished on the decoration of the doorway: Frontal, naked goddesses were carved in relief on the jambs, and the top was dominated by statues of goddesses sitting upon a lintel carved with panthers (front), deer (back), and standing goddesses (on the underside).

One cannot reject the possibility that the system of decoration of these two Cretan buildings reappeared in Mainland Greece, since a series of fragmentary reliefs from the hilltop of Mycenae closely resemble the sculptures from Prinias.[19] One of these reliefs is well known and shows a female figure preserved from the

waist up, turning her head frontally toward the viewer. The good state of preservation of this sculpture allows a close comparison with plastic heads on Protocorinthian vases, and the prevailing opinion is that the reliefs date to around 630.[20] Most probably, the woman represented in this fragment is a goddess, unveiling herself in what may have been a divine epiphany (a problem to which I shall return later). Other fragments indicate that war also played a prominent role in the series. Some of them show warriors engaged in close combat. The most interesting, however, belongs to a scene where two sphinxlike creatures (the Keres?) press their talons into the flesh of a nude male figure and lift his body from the ground. This scene is reminiscent of images of sphinxes/Keres carrying off dead heroes and also of representations of Hypnos and Thanatos removing the body of Sarpedon from the battleground.[21] The last parallel may also account for the disproportionately large size of the dead body (in comparison with the figures on the other fragments), a disproportion that has sometimes led to an unnecessary skepticism as to whether or not the fragment originally belonged to the series.[22]

Unfortunately, we know almost nothing about the architecture of the building to which these reliefs once belonged, and there has thus always been much uncertainty about their original function and position.[23] Today, the prevailing opinion is that these reliefs were metopes (Rolley), or quasi-metopes (Klein). Other scholars place them as low as the bottom course (Boardman) or say that they could have been placed anywhere in the elevation of the wall (Harl-Schaller).

The identification of these reliefs as metopes or quasi-metopes is based solely on a fragment of a slab on which the relief is framed by a lateral border. This border has often been taken as evidence that the reliefs did not belong to a continuous frieze, despite the fact (already noticed by Harl-Schaller) that lateral borders are often found on Archaic friezes (e.g., Prinias or the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi), where they mark the end of blocks or panels. Furthermore, this border may indicate that the reliefs were not metopes or quasi-metopes. Early metopes were usually inserted between the triglyphs: Thus, the painted plaques from Thermos have undecorated bands to the sides of the frame, allowing for an overlapping by contiguous elements, whereas the stone metopes of the Temple of Artemis at Corcyra were slotted into grooves in the sides of the triglyphs. If the reliefs from Mycenae were metopes, they could only have been placed side by side with the triglyphs, since their lateral border has the same projection as the plinth. Per se, this juxtaposition of triglyphs and metopes would not be unparalleled, since it is well documented at Selinus. But there, as we shall see, the metopes were made much more thick, to prevent them from falling off the entablature. At Mycenae, not only are the slabs very thin, but they also have no clamps or cuttings to fasten them. For these reasons, the reliefs from Mycenae cannot be metopes or quasi-metopes, and the best placement for them is the bottom course of the wall.



2. Prinias. Temple A. Doorway restored by Pernier; ca. 630–620. *Source:* Pernier 1914, pl. V.

Any investigation of the use of figural representation in the decoration of temples during the Orientalizing period is complicated by the problem of metal reliefs with figural decoration *à jour,* of which the most well known is a suckling cow from Olympia.[24] Several reliefs executed in this technique have been found in Greek sanctuaries, for example, Olympia and the Acropolis, and many of them have nail holes, indicating that they were once attached to something. What that something was, however, has been the subject of much speculation, including a theory that the reliefs were originally fastened to the entablature of wooden buildings. Even reliefs that do not have these holes, such as a bronze disk from the Acropolis representing a Gorgon (675–650), have been thought to belong to the decoration of buildings (the disk from the Acropolis has been identified as an akroterion), with even less of a basis of evidence than the others.[25] The problem with these attributions is that even though the use of bronze reliefs for the decoration of Archaic temples might be documented in both literary sources (Pausanias 3.17.2 for the Temple of Athena Chalkioikos at Sparta, though here the

reliefs may have decorated the cult statue instead of the walls)[26] and monumental evidence (bronze plaques from Kyrene, though their original function is unclear),[27] most of the metal reliefs of the Orientalizing period that have been thought to have this function predate the erection of buildings in the place where they have been found, as in the case of Olympia.

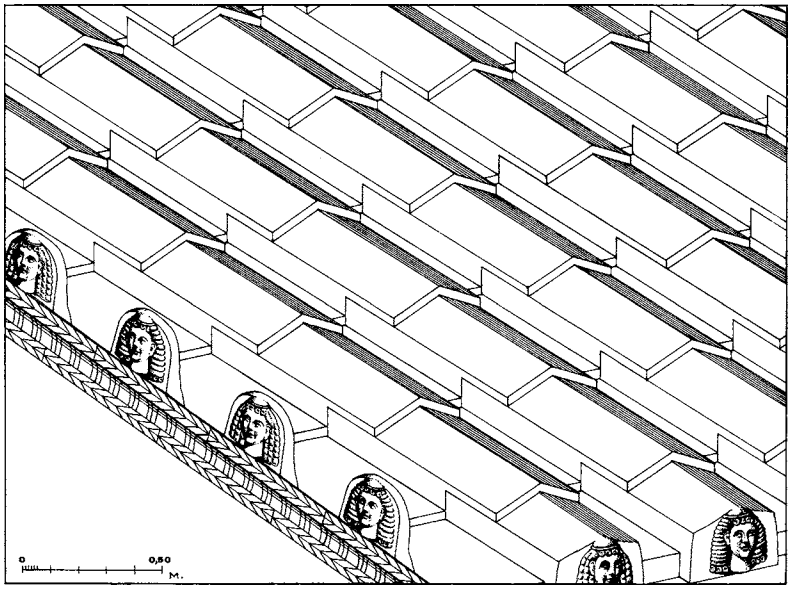
This discussion of metal reliefs is of some relevance to our general understanding of figural decoration in Greek sacred architecture during the seventh century, since, with the possible exception of the frieze from Iria, there is no evidence of figural representation used on the entablature or roof of buildings before 630–620. The builders of these temples did use figures in several media, but the favorite location for these figures appears to have been not the entablature or the roof but rather the wall, even its bottom course, as in the case of the Cretan buildings, and, perhaps, of the temple at Mycenae.

It is possible that further research will change this picture, but today, with the evidence at hand, one is tempted to speak of a revolution in Greek sacred architecture around 630–600, when the entablature and the roof suddenly become the favorite areas for the figural decoration of temples. The figures seem thus to have been literally lifted up from the walls. That this revolution has passed almost unnoticed is revealing with regard to current approaches to temple decoration.[28] In reality, there was a dramatic change that affected not only the external appearance of the buildings but also the whole landscape of sanctuaries, cities, and regions.

The first building in which this new practice is found brings us to Aetolia, to the Sanctuary of Apollo Thermios, the religious center of the Aetolian *ethnos*. Temple C (630–620) (Fig. 3), the main monumental structure in the sanctuary, was a large peripteral (5 × 15) building with a pediment at the front and a hip roof at the back.[29]

The most remarkable feature of this temple was its lavish figural decoration. On the facade a gorgoneion may have covered the end of the ridge tile at the pediment apex, while frontal heads may have projected above the edges of the raking *sima*. The eaves of the roof on the other three sides were crowned by antefixes with mold-made frontal female heads wearing *poloi,* while on the hipped back the corner *geison* tiles were decorated on both sides by mold-made lion-head (and perhaps male-head) spouts.

Below the roof, presumably confined to the main front, painted terracotta metopes displayed a wide variety of subjects: monsters, for example a gorgoneion and perhaps a sphinx; beasts, such as a lion; and myths, like Perseus escaping the Gorgons with Medusa's head in his bag, and Chelidon and Aedon killing baby Itys (to these may be added a hunter – Herakles, Meleagros, or some other local hero – and possibly the Proitides unveiling themselves). Divinities may have also played a role, since one plaque shows three goddesses sitting on a throne. Long regarded as a seventh-century original, this metope has been more recently con-



3. Thermon. Temple C. Roof restored by Winter; ca. 630–620. *Source:* Winter 1993a, fig. 12a. *Drawing:* by permission of Oxford University Press.

vincingly dated to the fourth–third century (Stucky). It is still possible that the later metope was a replacement replicating the iconography of an earlier, seventh-century plaque. That these terracotta plaques were metopes is suggested by the short tangs that project from the upper edges, meant for insertion into an element in a different material, and by the undecorated border that frames the representation at the side, which allows for overlap by a contiguous element. Because of these two details, since their discovery, the plaques have been identified with metopes belonging to a wooden entablature of the Doric order, where they would have alternated with wooden triglyphs. This reconstruction, which makes the Thermos plaques our earliest evidence for the appearance of a Doric frieze, has been questioned from time to time.[30] However, the recent discovery at Spathari, in nearby Acarnania, of a temple (600–590) with a Doric frieze made of wooden triglyphs and terracotta metopes, the latter with tangs projecting from the upper edges for the insertion into a wooden *geison*, confirms the traditional identification of the Thermos plaques.[31]

The visitors to this Sanctuary of Apollo were confronted by images telling stories or staring back at them from all sides. This arrangement must have made quite an impact on the public, as one can deduce from the fact that figural representations continued to play a prominent role in the buildings erected in this sanctuary in the next few decades. Thus, the small Temple of Apollo Lyseios (580–570) featured a gorgoneion as akroterion at the pediment apex as well as metopes with a variety of subjects.[32] Another roof displayed antefixes decorated with bearded heads and presumably female busts with upraised hands.[33]

This new system of figural decoration was previously thought to have its origins in Corinth, based on Pliny's reference (35.152) to Butades of Sikyon as the inventor of antefixes with human heads. This theory is simply not supported by archaeological evidence, since antefixes with human heads are not documented in the northeastern Peloponnese during the Archaic period.[34] Thus, the new system is now regarded as a local Aetolian creation.[35] This system soon spread beyond the Sanctuary of Apollo Thermios, since only a few years later it reappears in the same region in the Sanctuary of Artemis Laphria, near Kalydon.[36]

In this sanctuary, the earliest (600–590) decorated roof ("polychrome roof") featured antefixes with female heads wearing *poloi* along the eaves and was associated with a frieze with painted metopes, one of which represents a hunter.[37] A roof that dates only a few years later (traditionally, 580–570), known as the "pale yellow roof," displayed a round disk akroterion painted with a gorgoneion at the apex of the pediment, female heads on the pediment slopes, and sphinxes as lateral akroteria.[38] Another roof, almost contemporary ("lion *sima* roof") had a *sima* with lion-head waterspouts running the entire circumference and akroteria above the main pediment: a running Gorgon at the center and sphinxes at the corners.[39] To this wide variety of figural representations should also be added two sets of painted terracotta metopes, which seem to belong with some of the roofs just mentioned (the task of matching buildings and decoration at Kalydon is hopeless). These metopes are decorated with the usual repertoire of monsters (gorgoneia, sirens, sphinxes), beasts (lions), and myths, such as Achilles and Troilos or Herakles and the Erymanthian boar.[40]

By the end of the seventh century, the decoration of temple C at Thermos had influences far beyond Aetolia, since it inspired the architects of Corcyra, the Corinthian colony off the coast of Epirus in the Ionian Sea. On this island, the idea of decorating the eaves of the roof with figural representations was systematically developed around the turn of the century (ca. 600). The focus of this new activity was the Sanctuary of Hera at Mon Repos, one of the most important cult places of the colony. There first appeared a small building decorated by a set of antefixes with frontal female faces.[41] Immediately afterward, this experimentation with figures was taken to a whole new scale in a monumental temple of the goddess.[42] This temple had antefixes above the raking *sima* on the main facade and antefixes (female heads and gorgoneia) alternating with waterspouts (lions' heads and perhaps also male heads) on the remaining three sides. What is remarkable about these antefixes and waterspouts is that here they were placed without interruption on the eaves of the roof, creating a friezelike effect – an unbroken succession of staring eyes and open mouths. This building, like temple C at Thermos, had a hip roof on the back and a pediment on the front, and it is precisely to this pediment that a fragment of a limestone relief with a human figure has been thought to belong. This would be the earliest evidence for the use of carved pediments in the Greek world.