
Introduction

THE NATURE OF THE SOURCES

The study of Greek art through ancient literary sources is complicated by a number of factors which cannot be said to apply to the study of any other period. First there is the fact that most of the authors who provide significant information lived *much later than the artists about whom they wrote*. The Elder Pliny, for example, who is our most comprehensive source for the history of Greek painting and sculpture of the Classical period (the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.), wrote in the second half of the first century A.C. Not only is the distance between Pliny and Pheidias about 500 years, but, as a Roman, Pliny spoke a different language and belonged to a society that was different in many ways from that of the artists who were his subject. The fact is that there are scarcely any “contemporary sources” in the extant literature on ancient art; there is no ancient writer who wrote on Pheidias or Zeuxis, as Vasari wrote on Michelangelo, through a direct knowledge of the artist’s personality, aims, and products. The only contemporary references of any length that exist today for the art of the Classical period are inscriptions, some of which are presented in this volume, but these, it will be seen, are the most impersonal documents imaginable.

Another factor complicating the study of the literary sources for ancient art is that, with the exception of Vitruvius’s *de Architectura* and the rhetorical descriptions of works of art that became fashionable in late Antiquity, there are *no writings which deal intentionally, directly and exclusively with art as such*. Many of the passages in this volume are in the nature of parenthetical remarks made by writers like Herodotos or Aristotle, who, in pursuing another subject, found their attention momentarily arrested by the example of a particular monument or a particular artist. Even the all-important sections on art given in books 33–36 of Pliny’s *Natural History* are really digressions from more basic subjects. (The basic subject of books 33 and 34, for example, is metals; sculpture in metal is

treated as a special aspect of this general subject. The ostensible subject of book 35 is types of earth and minerals, but since painters used these materials as pigments, much of the book deals with painting. Book 36 deals with different types of stone.) Nor can Pausanias's meticulous and invaluable description of Greece in the second century A.C., any more than a modern guidebook to Greece, be said to deal primarily with art. In every case the information is there, but the modern scholar is required to select and arrange it in order to achieve a cohesive picture of ancient art. Hence in the present volume the reader will often find himself confronted with a series of relatively short passages extracted from larger works and juxtaposed for the purpose of unifying our knowledge of a particular artist or monument. It is well to point out that the nature of our sources makes this arrangement necessary. There is no ancient document which, like Baldinucci's *Life of Bernini*, can profitably be quoted without interruption and *in toto*. An average beginning student in the history of art who attempted to read through Pausanias without special instruction would probably get little out of it.

Granting all these qualifying factors, however, there are certain reasons why the writings of late authors like Pliny and Pausanias have a better claim to be considered "sources and documents" for the art of their early predecessors than does, say, a modern Englishman's critical evaluation of Masaccio. One reason is the *continuity of tradition* in ancient writings on art and the other is the relatively *objective, unoriginal nature* of many of our sources. Pausanias, for example, carefully describes the art which he saw and sometimes shows that he had an "eye" for style, but he almost never ventures any farther into the field of subjective evaluation than to say that a particular work is "worth seeing." Whatever historical information Pausanias gives about the works of art that he encountered is derived from inscriptions he had seen, earlier writers he had read, or word of mouth information given to him by his guides and informants. It was never his intention to be "original" or to provide for his own age a new assessment of the art that he described.

The traditional and unoriginal nature of Pliny's chapters on art is even more marked. As Pliny himself boasts at the beginning of the *Natural History*, the information in his work had been culled from 2,000 earlier sources. The picture of Greek art which Pliny presents is consequently an elaborate *mélange* of biographical, historical, and critical information derived from earlier sources which had diverse aims and interests. Fortunately we know what some of these sources were, since Pliny mentions them both in the text of the *Natural History* and in a book-by-book bibliographical index. These indices are especially important because they indicate that most of his sources for the history of art were Greek writers and that some of these writers were also practicing artists. Among the sources listed in the index to book 34 who are said to have written on sculpture, for example, we meet the following names: "Menaichmos, who

wrote on sculpture in metal [*toreutike*];¹ Xenokrates, who wrote on the same subject; Antigonos, who wrote on the same subject; Douris, who wrote on the same subject; Heliodoros, who wrote on Athenian dedications; Pasiteles, who wrote on marvellous works . . .” Of the writers mentioned, Menaichmos, Xenokrates, Antigonos, and Pasiteles are known to have been practicing sculptors. The date of Menaichmos and the nature of his writings are uncertain (see p. 42), but in the case of the other three writers there is enough information preserved to enable us to formulate some idea of their contribution to Pliny.

Xenokrates was active in the early third century B.C.² Although he may have been an Athenian by birth, he belonged to the sculptural school of Sikyon, and was a pupil of Euthykrates, the son of Lysippos, or of Teisikrates, a pupil of Euthykrates. In either case, he was a direct artistic descendant of Lysippos, the guiding genius of the Sikyonian school. Pliny not only tells us that Xenokrates wrote *volumina* on sculpture, but also refers to a statement made by Xenokrates (and Antigonos) in praise of the painter Parrhasios’s ability as a draughtsman; hence it is clear that he wrote about painting as well as sculpture. Many modern scholars have concluded that Xenokrates must have been the source of an evolutionary system of art history, characterized by a distinct Sikyonian bias, which is imbedded in both Pliny’s history of sculpture and his history of painting (see Bibliography 2). In this evolutionary system both painting and sculpture, after an early period of *rudis antiquitas*, gradually progressed toward a stage of perfection which was reached in the early Hellenistic period. Significant contributions or inventions that are ascribed respectively to five famous sculptors and five famous painters are thought to have marked distinct stages in this progression. In the history of sculpture that appears in book 34.54–65 of the *Natural History*, for example, the art is said to have been “opened up” (*aperuisse*) by Pheidias and to have been “refined” (*erudisse*) by Polykleitos. Myron is then said to have been “more precise in the application of *symmetria*” (*et in symmetria diligentior*) and to have made other improvements in the art. In the next stage the sculptor Pythagoras is credited with surpassing Myron (*vicit eum*) in the rendering of naturalistic details such as veins, hair, etc.; and finally Lysippos is said to have made the greatest contribution to the art (*statuarum arte plurimum traditur contulisse*) by improving on the achievements of all his predecessors. A similar evolutionary scheme, though perhaps less clearly presented, appears in the history of painting given in book 35 of the *Natural History*. Apollodoros is said to have begun the great era of Greek painting by developing the technique of “shading” or what the Greeks called *skiagraphia*. These innovations in the use

¹ *Toreutike* is the Greek term for “chasing” or “engraving” with a punch, burin, etc. It is applied to sculpture in gold and ivory as well as in bronze, and it is also used in connection with the decorative arts. On the background of the term see p. 206.

² For the literary testimonia on Xenokrates see p. 109 and 153. Three statue-bases signed by a sculptor named Xenokrates and dating to the early third century B.C. have survived (see Loewy, *IgB*, nos. 135a–c). On one of these (135a) the sculptor is identified as an Athenian.

of light and shade were further developed by Zeuxis. Parrhasios was then the first to introduce *symmetria* into painting, to perfect the rendering of the hair, the details of the face, etc., and to insist on clarity in draughtsmanship. In the next stage Euphranor “made symmetry his own” (*usurpasse symmetriam*), and finally Apelles brought all these qualities together (*picturae plura solis prope quam ceteri omnes contulit*). In each case, it will be noted, the sequence culminates with a great master of the Sikyonian school who was an immediate predecessor of Xenokrates. The criteria used to evaluate the artists in question are in many cases technical achievements – the use of proportion, control of detail, mastery of draughtsmanship and shading – which would be better understood by professional painters and sculptors than by laymen. The subject-matter of their statues and paintings seems, on the other hand, not to have been a primary concern. Basically what was handed down to Pliny from Xenokrates was the outlook of a practicing artist in the late fourth and early third centuries B.C. It is by preserving such material that Pliny’s chapters can have some claim to being a significant document for the history of Greek art.

Of Antigonos, another of the sculptor–authors mentioned by Pliny, less is known. He is said by Pliny to have worked on the monuments set up by the Attalid kings of Pergamon after their victory over the Gauls in the latter part of the third century B.C. (see pp. 112–13) and is probably identical with Antigonos of Karystos, a versatile writer of the period who dabbled in biography, philosophy, and epigraphy as well as art history.³ Since Pliny attributes the opinion that the painter Parrhasios was a draughtsman to Xenokrates and Antigonos jointly, it is usually assumed that Antigonos must have undertaken to expand and elaborate upon Xenokrates’ treatise. Possibly he added certain new standards of judgment to Xenokrates’ system, such as the representation of character and emotion – *ethos* and *pathos* – which is ascribed, in particular, to the fourth-century painter Aristeides (on Aristeides see p. 168; on *ethos* in general see pp. 230–1).

Pasiteles, another of Pliny’s sources, was a native of one of the Greek cities of south Italy and obtained Roman citizenship in 89/88 B.C. He wrote five volumes on art, the subject of which is variously given by Pliny as *Marvellous Works* (*Mirabilia Opera*) or *Famous Works Throughout the World* (*Nobilia Opera in Toto Orbe*). Although we have no extant works of art that can positively be said to represent Pasiteles’ own style, statues executed by members of his school are known, and these suggest that Pasiteles was one of the guiding spirits of the neoclassical movement in late Hellenistic art (see p. 120).

In the case of Xenokrates, Antigonos, and Pasiteles, then, we see that Pliny derived information from sources which were not only close to but in fact part of the history of Greek art.

³ The evidence is summarized in Sellers–Jex–Blake, *Chapters*, pp. xxxvi–xlv, which is based on H. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Antigonos von Karystos* (Philologische Untersuchungen, iv, Berlin 1881).

The same conditions also apply, at least in part, to the two other brief histories of Greek art that are preserved in Roman literature – those given by Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 12.10.3–9, and by Cicero, *Brutus* 70 (see p. 223). The purpose of both these histories is to provide a series of stylistic comparisons between important rhetoricians and important artists. Quintilian’s history, which is the more extensive of the two, clearly amalgamates several critical attitudes. Part of what he says about painting – as, for example, when he praises Zeuxis for his mastery of light and shade and Parrhasios for his draughtsmanship – seems to be derived from Xenokrates. His praise of Apelles’ *ingenium et gratia*, on the other hand, may be derived from the painter’s own writings (see p. 159); while the other *diversae virtutes* which he ascribes to various painters seem to stress qualities that would have been emphasized in treatises on rhetorical style.⁴ Quintilian’s history of sculpture, however, seems to follow a unified scheme of development which is derived neither from Xenokrates, nor from rhetorical criticism. In this scheme sculpture initially evolves from a state of “hardness” which characterizes the early fifth century toward a state of “softness” which is reached in the statues of Myron around the middle of the fifth century B.C. This development is followed by a stage in which Polykleitos is said to have attained perfection in representing human beauty and Pheidias is credited with having given form to the sublime qualities of the gods. In doing so, Quintilian says, Pheidias “added something to traditional religion.” After Pheidias a decline sets in. Praxiteles and Lysippos mastered realism in sculpture, but Demetrios is blamed for having carried realism so far that he was “fonder of similitude than of beauty.” Thus the high point of Greek sculpture comes, not, as in Xenokrates’ system, with Lysippos in the late fourth century, but rather with Pheidias in the Classical period. And the characteristic feature of this high point is not the mastery of different technical aspects of sculpture but rather the possession of a kind of “spiritual intuition” – which the Greeks came to call *phantasia* – through which the sublime qualities of the gods could be perceived. (For a selection of the important passages documenting this theory see pp. 223–4.)

The origin of this *phantasia* theory is not certain, but it has been ascribed to the philosophical school which is usually called the “Middle Stoa.” The thought of the chief figures of this school, Panaitios (c. 185–109 B.C.) and Poseidonios (c. 135–50 B.C.), was characterized by a fusion of Platonic idealism and Stoic psychology, both of which seem to have played a role in the formulation of the *phantasia* theory.⁵ It was also characterized by a respect, even nostalgia, for the civilization of Greece in the fifth century B.C., i.e. the age of Pheidias and Polykleitos, and thus in many ways provided an intellectual background for the

⁴ The concept of a *virtus*, or in Greek *arete*, of rhetorical style, i.e. an “essential excellence,” seems to have originated in the literary criticism of the Peripatetic School, perhaps with Theophrastos. See Pollitt, *Ancient View*, pp. 60–1, 144–50.

⁵ On this question see the second appendix to Schweitzer, *Xenokrates*; also Pollitt, *Ancient View*, pp. 52–5, with further references.

classicism that pervaded the late Hellenistic period. It is at least possible that this classicistic view of the history of sculpture was promulgated in the *quinque volumina* of the sculptor Pasiteles, since the date of his career and artistic predilections seem to have been in harmony with it.

VARIETIES OF ART CRITICISM IN ANTIQUITY

The different types of writers on Greek art and the critical attitudes which they expressed have already been touched upon in the preceding discussions. They may be summarized in four basic categories. The best preserved and hence most prominent group might be called *compilers of tradition*; it consists of writers who collected from disparate sources biographical, technical, and anecdotal information about art and artists. Sometimes these collections were supplemented by a certain amount of first-hand observation, as was the case with Pausanias, while at other times, they were almost wholly traditional, as is the case with Pliny. Such compilations can be traced back at least as far as the early Hellenistic period. Perhaps the earliest was the treatise on painting by Douris of Samos (c. 340–260 B.C.), who, as already mentioned, was one of the sources cited by Pliny in his index to book 34 of the *Natural History*. Douris' life and writings had many facets.⁶ We know that he was at one time the tyrant of Samos, that he won a prize as a boxer in the Olympic games, and that he was a pupil of Theophrastos, Aristotle's successor as head of the Peripatetic school. His writings included historical chronicles, literary criticism, essays and biographies, and seem to have been characterized by an interest in unusual personalities and sensational anecdotes. In view of his background Douris is thought to be responsible for much of the anecdotal detail about the lives of artists that appears in Pliny. Pliny directly cites him as the source for the story that Lysippos had no teacher, but entered upon a career as a sculptor after having heard the painter Eupompos declare that nature itself, rather than any human teacher, was his model (*N.H.* 34.61; see p. 98). Other anecdotes in Pliny such as the story of the painting contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasios or the story of how Protogenes finally perfected one of his paintings by throwing a wet sponge at it seem to bear Douris' stamp (see pp. 150, 172). The critical attitude which lies behind these stories is one which might be called *popular criticism*, since it is characterized by ideas about art which are more typical of the layman than of either the practicing artist or the experienced connoisseur. The most abiding ideas of this popular criticism are an unquestioning acceptance of naturalism as the goal of art – i.e., the purpose of art is to imitate the external world and the best work of art is that which imitates it most convincingly – and an interest in the role of chance and the miraculous in art.

Another group of ancient writers on art might be called the *literary analogists*;

⁶ See Sellers-Jex-Blake, pp. xlvi–lxvii and A. Kalkmann, *Die Quellen der Kunstgeschichte des Plinius* (Berlin 1898), pp. 144–71.

to it belong the rhetoricians and poets who looked to the visual arts as a source for stylistic analogies with literature or sometimes even as a direct source for literary inspiration. The short histories of art given by Quintilian and Cicero, for example, are primarily intended to serve as analogies to the stylistic development of Greek and Roman rhetoric. Dionysios of Halikarnassos (late first century B.C.), in writing on the different styles of Greek rhetoric, likewise draws analogies between the style of particular rhetoricians on the one hand and particular painters or sculptors on the other (see pp. 224–6). It has been suggested that these analogies may be traced back to a comparative canon of artists and rhetoricians formulated in the second century B.C.⁷ The works of painters and sculptors also served as the subject-matter for short poems and rhetorical descriptive exercises, and in this sense they may be said to have had an influence on the actual content of ancient poetry and rhetoric. The tradition of writing short poems about works of art originated in the custom of inscribing metrical epigrams on the bases of statues. Many of the poems from the *Greek Anthology* that are included in this volume were presumably written for such a purpose. In time, however, epigrams became a formal literary genre, and many were written without any intention of ever having them inscribed on a stone base. There are, for example, over thirty epigrams extant about the famous Heifer by the sculptor Myron (see p. 50). Rhetorical descriptions of works of art, which in Greek were called *ekphraseis* (singular *ekphrasis*) appear to have come into vogue during the Roman period. A well-known example is Lucian's description of Zeuxis' *Centaur Family* (see pp. 151–3).

While it is clear that the literary analogists were primarily interested in their own disciplines rather than in the visual arts, they must be given credit for recognizing the importance of “personal styles” in the history of ancient art. They were aware that great artists, like great rhetoricians, had certain *virtutes* which distinguished them from other artists. The primary interest of the literary analogists was not so much in the ethical value of art nor in the evolution of artistic technique as in those obvious but sometimes difficult to define personal mannerisms that made each artist unique.

The third significant group of writers on ancient art might be called the *moral aestheticians*, and would include Plato, Aristotle, and the other Greek philosophers who judged art chiefly by its capacity to influence human behavior and moral awareness. Plato's condemnation of painting in the tenth book of the *Republic* (see pp. 231–3) is based on the belief that art encouraged men to indulge their natural tendency to be deceived and hence made it more difficult for them to perceive a higher, undistorted reality. Aristotle, unlike Plato, does not reject the value of all painting, but he does recommend in the *Politics* that the youth of a city be allowed to see only those paintings which are likely to have an ennobling effect (see p. 231). The authors of the late Hellenistic *phantasia* theory

⁷ See Pollitt, *Ancient View*, pp. 60–1, 81–4.

discussed above generally had a more sympathetic and positive attitude toward the overall value of art and artists than did Plato or Aristotle, but they too seem to have believed that the greatest artistic creations were those which conveyed spiritually uplifting qualities. The ultimate artistic experience in this view was a kind of mystical communion; it is best expressed by Dio Chrysostom when he says that even the most wretched man upon viewing Pheidias's Zeus at Olympia forgot his worldly afflictions and found peace (see p. 62).

The fourth and final important group of ancient writers on art consisted of the artists themselves. Treatises by practicing architects go at least as far back as the middle of the sixth century B.C. when Theodoros and Rhoikos wrote on the Heraion at Samos and Chersiphron and Metagenes wrote on the temple of Artemis at Ephesos (see pp. 181–3, 233). Technical manuals on sculpture were written at least as early as the second half of the fifth century B.C. when Polykleitos wrote his famous *Canon* (see pp. 75–7), and in the fourth century there was apparently a rash of treatises by well-known painters. In the index to book 35 of the *Natural History*, for example, Pliny mentions writings by Apelles, Melanthis, Asklepiodoros, Euphranor, and Parrhasios, and the names of other painters who wrote about their art are known. The common element in all such writings seems to have been a preoccupation with problems of form and the technical procedures by which form is produced. Polykleitos's *Canon*, judging by what evidence is available, was essentially a highly technical manual of proportions. Its ultimate purpose was, in all probability, to define what perfect beauty in the human figure was, but it proceeded toward this goal not by analyzing and praising known works of sculpture but rather by presenting a complex series of measurements through which the commensurability (*symmetria*) of all the parts of a statue was to be achieved. The *Canon* was perhaps only an unusually complex and philosophical representative of a tradition of sculptors' workshop manuals which dated back (like architectural manuals) to the sixth century B.C. We know that at least one of his prominent predecessors, Pythagoras of Rhegion, "aimed at *rhythmos* and *symmetria*" (see p. 44). The preservation of such workshop manuals throughout the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. would account for the relatively unified and steady development of Greek sculpture during this period. Each new generation of sculptors began with a clear conception of the standards of the preceding one, and made innovations on the basis of its own taste and convictions. According to Cicero (*Brutus* 296), Lysippos used to say that the *Doryphoros* of Polykleitos was his model; Pliny, on the other hand, notes that Lysippos modified the "square quality" which was a characteristic of statues by his predecessors by using a new and hitherto untried system of proportions (*N.H.* 34.65). This "square quality," moreover, is specifically ascribed to Polykleitos. These two passages are not necessarily contradictory; rather, when taken together they suggest what the effect of the theoretical treatises of one generation may have been on the art of the next. Lysippos was familiar with the theoretical principles of Polykleitos and

admired them enough to make them a point of departure for the development of his own system of proportions. In spite of his respect for the work of the earlier sculptor, however, he clearly viewed his own innovations as improvements.

The interests and aims of the *professional critics*, as we might call Polykleitos and the other artists who wrote on art, seem to have been summed up in Xenokrates' history of sculpture and painting, in which, it will be remembered, the artists in question were evaluated on the basis of their formal and technical achievements. As a practicing artist Xenokrates must have been familiar with the technical treatises of his predecessors, and it is not unlikely that he used them in formulating the critical bases of his history.

The existence of these professional treatises is of paramount importance in the study of the sources and documents for the history of Greek art, since they form the earliest link in the chain of tradition by which our extant sources are connected with the original spirit that characterized the art of the Classical period.

Chapter 1

Ancient memories and primitive beginnings

THE EARLIEST RECORDS

The earliest documents that preserve a record of the Greek language are the “Linear B Tablets.” These unbaked clay tablets were used by scribes in the great palaces of Bronze Age Greece to keep an inventory of property – equipment, livestock, land, etc. – that belonged to the rulers of the Mycenaean period. A substantial number of them were accidentally baked, and thus preserved, in the conflagrations that destroyed the Mycenaean palaces around 1200 B.C. (The exact dates of the destructions at the different sites, such as Knossos, Pylos, and Mycenae are disputed.) These tablets were, of course, practical, impersonal documents that were never intended to record the aesthetic sensibilities of artists or their patrons in the Mycenaean world. Nevertheless, a number of them, of which two examples are given here, do preserve detailed descriptions of vessels, furniture, and other objects that both call to mind surviving works of Mycenaean decorative art and seem to have echoes in the Homeric epics (see below). Readers should note that the exact meanings of certain words in these texts are matters of speculation and dispute.

Linear B Tablet from Pylos, no. Ta 642 (DMG 239): One stone table, of spring type, inlaid with aquamarines and *kyanos* and silver and gold, a nine-footer. One crescent-shaped stone table, inlaid with ivory and carved in the form of pomegranates and helmets. One stone table of the encircled type, a nine-footer, with feet and strutting of ivory and a carved running spiral.

Linear B Tablet from Pylos, no. Ta 707 (DMG 242): One ebony chair with golden back decorated with birds; and a footstool decorated with ivory pomegranates. One ebony chair with ivory back carved with a pair of finials and with a man’s figure and heifers; one footstool, ebony inlaid with ivory and pomegranates.

THE MEMORY OF MYCENAEAN GREECE

While the myths and sagas of Classical Greece preserved a substantial amount of information about personalities and events of the Mycenaean age, the art of this period