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INTRODUCTION: THE STUDY OF GREEK SCULPTURE

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The primary motive for studying the art of ancient Greece can be easily stated: its sheer beauty, which beyond our delight and wonder may demand some explanation. But that is an aesthetic sentiment, and such sentiments carry little weight nowadays. So we are obliged to summarize why the endeavour involved in ‘understanding Greek sculpture’ is objectively worth our time and intellectual effort.

As a logical progression, the reasoning might go as follows. Whether or not we agree that Greek sculpture is generally ‘beautiful’ to behold, there is no doubt that the artists who created this work, and those who commissioned it, were aware of the capacity of three-dimensional images to cause delight, wonder and awe. The potential for enchantment was there from the beginning; we have not invented it. The archaeological contexts of early Greek sculpture make it clear that it was originally and essentially produced as ‘gifts for the gods’: as such, intended for marvellous display.

That certain craft techniques were developed by Greek sculptors with the aim of making their work ‘marvellous’ is equally evident, whether from the material remains of the work itself or circumstantial inscriptions and ancient literature. In the history of Western art, there is no place and period to compare with what happened in the Greek world between *c.* 800 BC to *c.* 300 BC: a half-millennium of technical innovation and refinement, rooted in a continuity of artistic tradition that was often passed on from father to son. An apprentice in Greek sculpture might very well start work aged 7 or 8 (a letter survives from the Athenian Agora, written to his mother by one very unhappy boy set to work in a foundry). It is tempting to relate this custom to the modern reductive calculus whereby ‘genius’ relies upon some 10,000 hours of practice.

At Cambridge University (for example), the study of Greek sculpture has been part of the Classics curriculum since the early 1880s; today, it is widely diffused in school and university courses, particularly those titled around the concept of ‘Classical Civilization’. Why so? Because sculpture forms, along with architectural remains, the visible aspect of ‘the Classical world’ and so embodies various values traditionally attached to the cultures of Greece and Rome – or more specifically, the culture of Athens in the fifth century BC. This symbolic investment of Greek sculpture with such values – ‘control’, ‘order’, ‘serenity’, etc. – was established by the end of the eighteenth century; and, for all that it has since been challenged or repackaged, it remains a fundamental motive for academic and aesthetic homage.

WINCKELMANN'S HISTORY OF ANCIENT ART

The name of J.J. Winckelmann (Figure 1.1; Plate I) is often cited, and his work rarely consulted, by scholars of Classical antiquity. This reflects a peculiar sort of historical status. To some of his contemporaries, and to successive generations, Winckelmann was an inspirational figure – in Goethe's phrase, like an intellectual Christopher Columbus, finding a new world. To this day he is usually considered the 'founding-father' or *Gründungshero* of Classical art history. Yet when Winckelmann first published his thoughts on Greek art, in an essay of 1755, he had seen little of it beyond sundry engravings and casts. In appropriately majestic style, however, he summarized its characteristic qualities of 'noble simplicity' (*edle Einfalt*), 'calm grandeur' (*stille Grösse*) and 'serenity' (*Heiterkeit*).

When Winckelmann proceeded to publish his even more panoramic survey of ancient art – not only Greek, but also Egyptian, Etruscan and Roman – he had travelled from his native Prussia no further than to Florence, Rome and Naples. He dreamed of digging at Olympia; but he was not of an adventurous disposition and clearly felt, once he was ensconced in Rome as Prefect of Papal Antiquities (in 1763), that he had 'arrived'. It is not surprising, then, that in terms of its analytical detail Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (Dresden 1764; with numerous subsequent editions and translations) is now almost worthless. The range of material available to Winckelmann was simply too limited for him to be able to make sound judgements: though he took pains to add supplementary considerations of *Monumenti inediti* ('unpublished pieces'), his narrative was largely based on what he could

glean from ancient texts and what he knew from the collection of his first sponsors at Rome, the Albani family.

Like many north Europeans, Winckelmann appreciated the warmth of moving south, and was content to imagine that blue skies and solar power had some formative effect upon art. But there is a more telling index of how far he belonged to his times. Winckelmann saw history as a lifespan, complete with the basic stages of infancy, adolescence, maturity and decline. Rise, flourish, fall: the artistic output of antiquity could all be explained according to this biological (or biographical) narrative. Coupled with a conviction that 'Liberty' (*Freiheit*) created ideal conditions for 'the flowering of the arts' (*Pflegerin der Künste*) and the human spirit, this meant that Classical 'perfection', or the 'Classical' as properly understood, must be located in the period between the battles of Plataea (479 BC) and Chaeronea (338 BC) – respectively, when the democratic Greeks had thrown off the Persians but not yet succumbed to Macedonian domination. The word 'Hellenistic' only came into circulation in the nineteenth century, but Winckelmann's comments upon a piece such as the Louvre 'Seneca' (see Figure 9.13) – 'a web of stringy veins' that 'can hardly be considered worthy of the art of antiquity' – would set the tone for a tradition of disparagement that lingers to this day.

'Art which received its life, as it were, from freedom, must necessarily decline and fall with loss of freedom.' So what about the products of autocratic patronage? Winckelmann's problem was that certain works of ancient art he passionately admired – the Laocoon; the Belvedere Torso; a relief of Hadrian's favourite, Antinous –

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Figure 1.1 Johann Joachim Winckelmann, by Anton von Maron, 1768. Painted when Winckelmann was at the height of his powers (but during the summer of the same year, Winckelmann was murdered in Trieste). A bust of Homer is in the background; on the scholar's *escritoire* lies an engraving of a relief-bust of Antinous (in the Albani collection). See also Plate I.

manifestly did not belong to the period of 'perfection'. Again we must remember just how few were the existing examples of 'the Classical', strictly speaking, in Winckelmann's day. Yet we cannot help feeling that had he lived to see, perhaps, the sculptures of the Parthenon – soon to be 'made known' by Lord Elgin's adventures on the Athenian Akropolis – Winckelmann would have felt vindicated. He had, after all, declared the 'golden age of art' to have been those decades when Perikles presided at Athens. This judgement may owe something to ancient texts – in particular, Plutarch's *Life of Perikles* – and established opinion from Enlightenment figures – notably Voltaire. Nonetheless, it has the force of a prophecy fulfilled.

Ancient writing about Greek sculpture

There is no extant ancient 'history' of Greek sculpture. This is not to say that none was ever written. There are signs that towards the end of the fourth century, academics based at the school founded by Aristotle, and following Aristotle's own interests not only in classification, but in how various arts achieved their effect, began to create 'family trees' of sculptors and collected piquant 'sayings' (*apophthegmata*) related to individual masters. At least one fifth-century sculptor (Polykleitos: see p. 37) left a record of his working aims and practice; and it was an active sculptor – Xenokrates, a pupil of Lysippos – who in the third century composed several historical 'volumes' (*volumina*) about his craft (Pliny, *NH* 34.83). Antigonos is named as another such artist-author, and although their writings have not survived, these sources were to inform Pliny the Elder when he came to compile his *Naturalis Historia* in the mid first century AD.

‘*Nature, which is Life, is my subject.*’ Pliny did not write a history of art as such. The information he collects about Greek sculpture comes as it were incidentally, subsumed in those chapters of his thirty-seven-volume encyclopaedia devoted to mineralogy. So sculptors using gold and silver are discussed in Book 33, on gold and silver; bronze-workers in Book 34, on bronze; terracotta sculptors in a subsection of Book 35 dealing with clay; and other sculptors in Book 36, mostly concerned with marble (plus some remarks on gem-cutting in Book 37).

In a sense Pliny did not need to write art history *per se*, since it already existed – as we might expect, given the late Republican Roman enthusiasm for collecting works of Greek sculpture. Pasiteles, a Greek sculptor from south Italy, active in the first half of the first century BC, had assembled five volumes of ‘world masterpieces’ (see p. 285); and for portraits, it appears that a comprehensive catalogue of *imagines* was drawn up by Varro by the late first century BC. Pliny’s contemporary Quintilian, who specialized in rhetoric, incidentally shows an intelligent eye for style and attribution. Pliny himself seems to have harboured a certain distrust of art as potentially corrupting *luxuria*; his patrons were the ‘down-to-earth’ Flavian emperors who succeeded the notoriously flamboyant philhellene Nero. We can be thankful that prejudice did not override Pliny’s omnivorous appetite for information and industrious habits of study (like Winckelmann, Pliny resented sleep as a waste of the scholar’s time).

We are also indebted to Pausanias, an itinerant Greek from Asia Minor who during the second half of the second century AD composed a ‘Guide to Greece’ (*Periégêsis tês Hellados*) in ten volumes. This work had a literary pedigree – one notable predecessor was Polemon, who in the second century BC made a particular study of dedications at sites such as Olympia, Delphi and the Athenian Akropolis – but there is no doubt that Pausanias actually made his own tour of the area, which then comprised the Roman province of Achaëa (excepting Aetolia and the islands). The frequent citations from the *Periégêsis* throughout this book show Pausanias as truly devoted in his eagerness to experience ‘all things Greek’, above all the sanctuaries. His travels, it has been observed, resemble a pilgrimage; his testimony about Greek sculpture is accordingly dominated by its active deployment in acts of worship. His curiosity can lapse in certain places (around the Parthenon, for example), and he may not have checked his information as thoroughly as we might wish; at least, however, Pausanias took the trouble to interview local people. For that reason alone we may set him apart from the more library-bound commentaries on art scattered in the writings of the ‘Second Sophistic’ – the period (first to third centuries AD) of an extended vogue for self-consciously ‘clever’ rhetoric. Lucian, Athenaeus, Callistratus and the Philostrati are among such sources, valuable to us chiefly because among favoured declamatory exercises was the *ekphrasis* – the verbal description (literally ‘speaking-out’) of any object, which might very well be an actual statue or painting.

The discipline of ‘aesthetics’ hardly existed as such in antiquity, but Second Sophistic texts are fertile in evidence for ancient concern about the sometimes opposed roles of ‘imitation’ (*mimēsis*) and ‘imagination’ (*phantasia*) in the artistic process.

The modern tradition The ‘reception’ of Greek sculpture – which includes various attempts to classify it – is addressed in Chapter 12. Here our concern is merely to outline the development of the current system whereby surviving works are ordered into a chronological sequence and – if they carry no signature, as is mostly the case – assigned to particular names.

Winckelmann had relatively little interest in artistic personality. For him, individuals were subsumed by the prevailing ethos of the epoch; and in this respect, Winckelmann prefigured the Hegelian penchant for describing this or that period of history in terms of its *Zeitgeist*, or ‘spirit of the age’. It was another German, Heinrich Brunn, who in the mid nineteenth century shifted the scholarly perspective away from *Geistesgeschichte* to *Kunstlergeschichte* – that is, sought to create a narrative of the development of Greek art driven by a genealogy of ‘names’. Beginning with Daedalus, Brunn created a generation-by-generation roster of master-sculptors. His sources were mostly literary; but he nobly incorporated epigraphic evidence even when this was difficult to reconcile with the literature (the inscribed names of sculptors employed in carving the Erechtheum frieze, for example, are more or less ‘unknown’ from ancient writers). Along with his fellow-countryman Johannes Overbeck – whose collection of ancient ‘written sources’ (*Schriftquellen*), published in 1868, is of enduring utility – Brunn laid the groundwork for the sort of study that would be pursued by his star Bavarian pupil, Adolf Furtwängler. This consisted in the application of ‘perceptual understanding’ (*Anschauung*) to philological expertise: that is, developing a visual sense for the personal style of this or that ancient sculptor, even when little or nothing has survived of that sculptor’s original work. So the student of Classical art must hone the skills of *Kopienkritik* – the tracking of derivative pieces, allowing identification of those persistent traits that indicate the quality of the lost original. Furtwängler’s best-known achievement remains his folio volume of 1893, *Meisterwerke der griechischen Plastik* (translated as *Masterpieces of Greek Sculpture* by Eugenie Strong in 1895).

Scholarly trends since then have moved, broadly speaking, from the study of individual sculptors to the interpretation of statues and monuments. That shift of focus is more or less reflected in the thematic organization of this book. The frailty of our knowledge about individual ‘Great Masters’ was starkly revealed by the discovery of the Riace Bronzes in 1972 (Plates IIa and b), and the problems of

constructing any kind of artistic biography are discussed in Chapter 7 with regard to Pheidias, one of the several proposed creators of those statues. To highlight those problems, however, is not to deny that the historical development of Greek sculpture was largely driven by rivalry between individuals. Meanwhile, as already cautioned, the attempt to establish symbolic meanings for Greek sculpture is fraught with its own uncertainties.

The periods and styles of Greek sculpture: a glossary

Like all academic disciplines, Classical archaeology is hedged about with its own terminology, some of it arcane. This summary is offered for the sake of readers not yet initiated into a chronological system now more or less standard across the subject.

Prehellenic This is not, strictly, a denomination of Greek sculpture. It implies a time when the inhabitants of those areas we think of as ‘Greece’ are not

historically counted as Greeks (*Hellènes*), a period extending thousands of years, from the Stone Age to the decay of Bronze Age citadels by the end of the second millennium BC. Neolithic and Cycladic figures are encompassed by this span; so too the archaeological cultures known as ‘Minoan’ and ‘Mycenaean’. Insofar as it can be assigned an absolute date, ‘the Trojan War’ took place *c.* 1250 BC. In later times – when Socrates was alive, in the fifth century BC – Greeks were accustomed to consider, albeit vaguely, that their ‘Heroic Age’ had drawn to a close when Odysseus finally regained his kingly domain on Ithaca – in Homer’s narrative, ten years after the fall of Troy.

Early Iron Age Some archaeologists resort to the term ‘Dark Age(s)’ to describe an intermediate phase between the collapse of Mycenaean centres (*c.* 1200 BC) and the ‘rise of the *polis*’

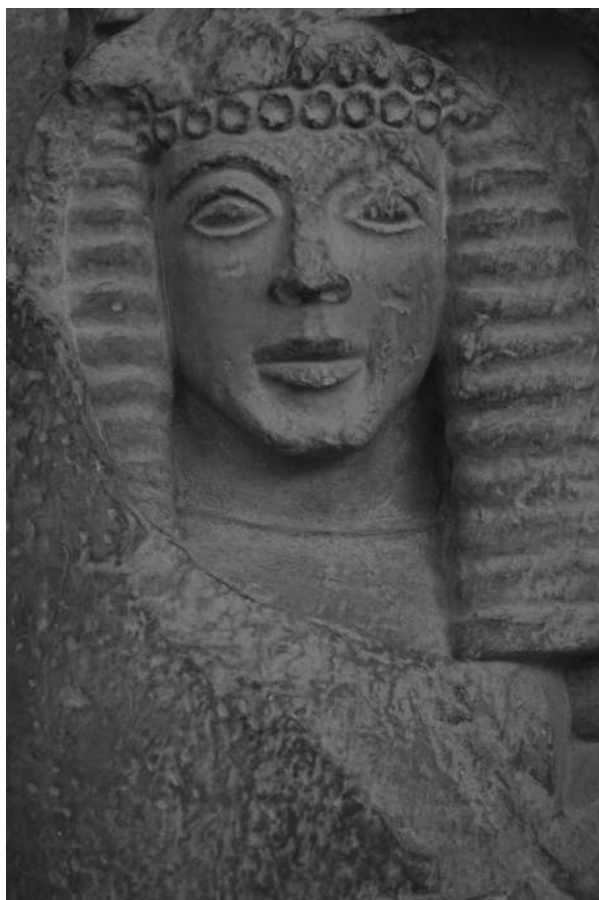


Figure 1.2 Fragmentary limestone relief from Mycenae, *c.* 630. Ht 41 cm. A female figure, perhaps a goddess, in the gesture of veiling herself: from a series of metopes belonging to a temple of Athena erected on the acropolis of Mycenae.

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(c. 750 BC); others prefer the more general ‘Early Iron Age’, the more so as light is shed on this period. In any case, it is during the ninth and eighth centuries that our first stylistic category comes into currency. **Geometric** is a term introduced by Alexander Conze in the 1870s. It denotes art characterized by a fondness for certain shapes, tending towards abstraction; mostly the evidence for the style comes from painted pottery, but simple figures of humans and animals are also included (see Figure 2.3), and these develop into the idiosyncratic category of **Daedalic** (c. 700–600). Triangular heads, rhomboid torsos, circular earlobes – such are among the hallmarks of a Daedalic statue (Figure 1.2).

The period may be given wider context by noting that Homer is thought to have flourished, on the Ionian coast, c. 750–700 BC; Hesiod, in Boeotia, seems to have been his younger contemporary. The accession of the Saite pharaoh Psamtik (Psammetichus) I in 664 is usually taken as the date when Greeks began to make direct contact with Egypt.

Archaic Stimulated by external influence (from Egypt especially) and internal developments (particularly the rapid growth of sanctuaries), Greek sculpture ‘takes off’ in the Archaic period (c. 600–c. 480). A primary catalyst was the monumental growth of sanctuaries, requiring not only increasingly numerous and ambitious sculpted votive offerings, but also ‘cult statues’ (some using precious materials, such

as gold and ivory) and temple decorations (including pediments, friezes, metopes and akroteria). Freestanding images of ‘maidens’ (*korai*) and ‘youths’ (*kouros*) – both types essentially symbolic of aristocratic values – proliferated, not only as votive dedications, but also as gravemarkers (Figure 1.3). Limestone predominates at first, soon yielding to marble, especially from island sources such as Naxos and Paros; towards the end of the period, however, hollow-cast bronze-working became a favoured medium, at least

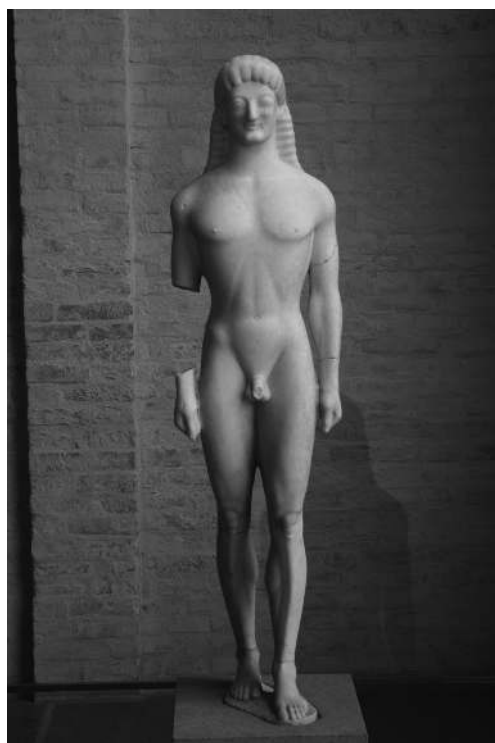


Figure 1.3 *Apollo of Tenea: marble kouros (youth), c. 560–550 BC. Ht 1.53 m. Found in a cemetery at Tenea (near Corinth) in 1840, this shows the mix of schematic and naturalistic elements that are hallmarks of the Archaic style.*

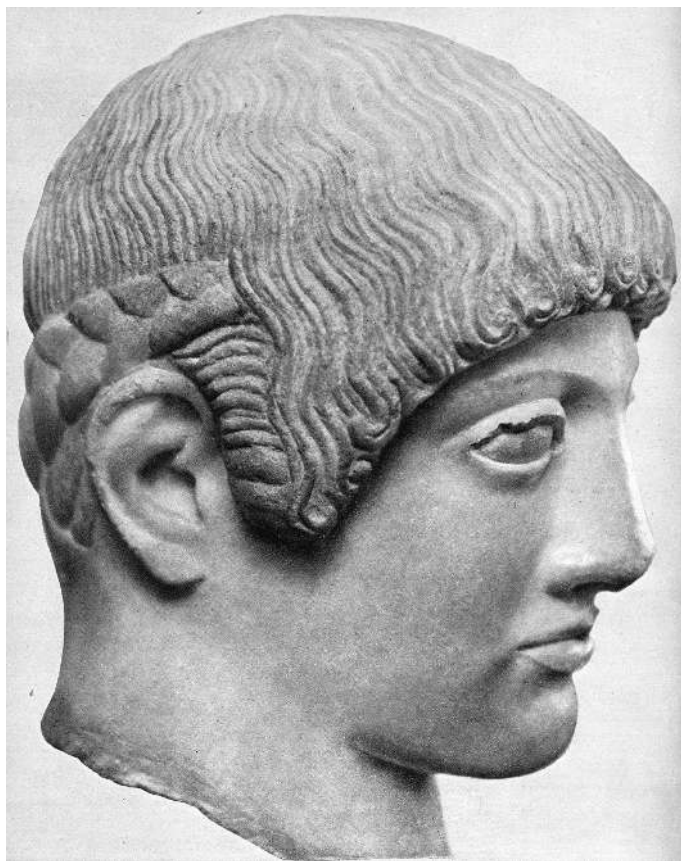


Figure 1.4 *Blond Boy*: head of a statue dedicated c. 485–480 BC on the Athenian Akropolis. Ht 24.5 cm. The sobriquet comes from the traces of golden colour evident on the piece when discovered. Long hair is braided from the nape and brought forward, creating the heavy fringe of ‘snail-curls’.

for individual statues. Its stylistic influence affected architectural sculpture in marble, as may be seen in the pedimental ensembles from the temple of Aphaia on Aegina – whose discovery in 1811 signalled the arrival of an ‘Archaic’ category in Classical archaeology (see p. 127).

Severe Style Translated from the German, *der strenge Stil*, this may seem an over-pedantic sub-division, applied to sculpture of the period c. 480–c. 450. (Some will prefer the label ‘Early Classical’.) It is not, however, difficult to recognize the hallmarks of the Severe Style, epitomized by sculptures from the temple of Zeus at Olympia. The so-called ‘Archaic smile’ is gone, and in its place a facial expression tending to be sober, abstracted or

downcast. Heavy-lidded eyes are a conspicuous feature of these solemn faces; and although hair is represented by a mass of simple wavy lines, hairstyles – for men especially – went through a phase of fussiness, as evident from the figure identified as Apollo on Olympia’s west pediment and the exquisite head from the Athenian Akropolis known as Blond Boy (Figure 1.4).

Classical (c. 480/450–c. 330) More than any other, this term demands explanation, because it can be used in various senses. In this book, for example, ‘Classical’ can denote all of the Graeco-Roman period – as in ‘Classical Civilization’, or ‘the Classical world’. Applied to sculptural style, however, ‘Classical’ sits between ‘Archaic’ and ‘Hellenistic’, with an implicit *apogée* around the time of the building of the Parthenon (447–432). The word derives from the Latin *classis*, literally ‘rank’ or ‘class’, but by the second century AD having the sense ‘of first rank’ and used for a work (of art, literature or other intellectual or creative endeavour) assigned such primacy by educated consensus. By the late first century BC, in fact, it is clear that a Roman who considered himself a ‘learned man’ (*homo doctus*) understood that the *floruit* of Greek ‘wisdom’ from the

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Figure 1.5 View of the Athenian Akropolis from the north-west.

time of Perikles (c. 450) to the rise of Macedon (c. 330) was a golden age, enshrining cultural models for respect and emulation.

Such ‘flowering’ of excellence took many forms, often presented as if interdependent: so advances in geometry may relate to the accomplishments in architecture; the great victory odes of Pindar *et al.* connect to a golden age of athletic excellence at the Panhellenic sanctuaries; the dramatic stagecraft pioneered by Aeschylus opened the way not only for the imaginative writing by Sophocles and Euripides, but also the large-scale theatrical ‘scene-painting’ techniques attributed to Agatharcus – and so on. It is in this ‘crucible of genius’ that we locate some of the ‘great names’ of Greek sculpture, including Myron, Pheidias, Polykleitos, Praxiteles and Skopas. One place dominates the monumental record: the Athenian