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978-0-521-84084-2 - Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description

A. A. Donohue

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GREEK SCULPTURE AND THE PROBLEM OF DESCRIPTION

This book explores the role of description in the interpretation of ancient Greek statuary. Although scholars have emphasized the importance of separating objective evaluation of evidence from interpretation, in practice the distinction is problematic. Even at the level of observation and vocabulary, the scholarship on Greek sculpture has been molded by concepts and convictions that impose particular interpretations on the material. This study examines the scholarship from the eighteenth century through the present on a select number of well-known Greek statues. The impact of the historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts that produced this specialized scholarship is demonstrated through considerations of issues such as ethnicity, psychology, theories about artistic form, and evolving conceptions of nude and clothed figures.

A. A. Donohue is professor of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology at Bryn Mawr College. She is the author of *Xoana and the Origins of Greek Sculpture* and has contributed articles on the history and historiography of classical art to the *American Journal of Archaeology*, *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, and *Hephaistos*.

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Bryn Mawr College



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CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>page vii</i>
<i>Preface and Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>xv</i>
1 The Problem of Archaeological Description	1
Description and Interpretation	1
Archaeology, Philology, and the Contest for Intellectual Rigor	3
Description as a Problem in Art History	14
Conventions of Description and Their Consequences	17
2 Nikandre’s Dedication and the Description of Early Greek Statuary	20
A Comparison	20
Descriptions of Nikandre’s Dedication	38
The Category of Early Greek Statuary	56
Material, Technique, and Form	62
Ethnicity and Early Greek Statuary	88
Psychology and Early Greek Statuary	101
The Statue from Levidhi	120
The Lady of Auxerre	131
The Victory of Samothrace	143
3 The Analysis of the Clothed Female Form	155
Approaches to the Clothed Female Figure	155
The Workings of the Draped Figure	165

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[More information](#)

CONTENTS

The Concept of Drapery	181
Representational Accountability	198
4 Nikandre’s Dedication and the Lady of Auxerre	202
5 Conclusion	222
<i>Bibliography</i>	225
<i>Index</i>	251

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Dedication of Nikandre, Athens, National Museum 1. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection AT 365, courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	page 22
2. Victory of Samothrace, Paris, Louvre Ma 2369. Photograph: Bridgeman-Giraudon/Art Resource, NY.	23
3. Plan of archaeological remains on Delos by Abel Blouet and Amable Ravoisié. Photograph: after <i>Expédition scientifique de Morée, ordonné par le gouvernement français</i> III. <i>Architecture, Sculptures, Inscriptions et Vues du Péloponèse</i> (Paris, 1838) pl. 1.	28
4. Plan of excavations on Delos by Louis Homolle, 1879. Photograph: after <i>Revue archéologique</i> 40 (August 1880) pl. XV.	29
5. Dedication of Nikandre, Athens, National Museum 1, right side. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection AT 367, courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	40
6. Dedication of Nikandre, Athens, National Museum 1, front. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection AT 365, courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	40
7. Dedication of Nikandre, Athens, National Museum 1, left side. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection AT 366, courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	40
8. Dedication of Nikandre, Athens, National Museum 1, three-quarters back. Photograph: after E. Loewy, tr. J. Fothergill, <i>The Rendering of Nature in Early Greek Art</i> (London, 1907) fig. 22.	41
9. Dedication of Nikandre, Athens, National Museum 1, back. Photograph: after <i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i> 74 (1950) pl. XXX right, courtesy École française d'Athènes.	41

ILLUSTRATIONS

10. Statue found near Levidhi, Arcadia. Photograph: after D. Burr, "A Primitive Statue from Arkadia," <i>American Journal of Archaeology</i> 31 (1927) 169 fig. 1.	122
11. Statue found near Levidhi, Arcadia. Photograph: after D. Burr, "A Primitive Statue from Arkadia," <i>American Journal of Archaeology</i> 31 (1927) 172 fig. 4.	123
12. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection EU 52, courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	128
13. Victory of Samothrace, Paris, Louvre Ma 2369. Photograph: Bridgeman-Giraudon/Art Resource, NY.	129
14. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098, three-quarters right. Photograph: after <i>Monuments Piot</i> 20 (1913) pl. II left, courtesy Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres.	132
15. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098, front. Photograph: after <i>Monuments Piot</i> 20 (1913) pl. I, courtesy Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres.	132
16. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098, left side. Photograph: after <i>Monuments Piot</i> 20 (1913) pl. II right, courtesy Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres.	133
17. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098, three-quarters back. Photograph: after <i>Monuments Piot</i> 20 (1913) 20 fig. 12, courtesy Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres.	133
18. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098, back. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection EU 55, courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	134
19. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098, detail. Photograph: after A. Stewart, <i>Greek Sculpture. An Exploration</i> (New Haven and London, 1990) II, fig. 28 (L. Goldscheider), courtesy Yale University Press.	139
20. Reconstruction of costume of Lady of Auxerre by Evelyn B. Harrison. Photograph: after <i>The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery</i> 36 (1977) 46 fig. 7 B, courtesy E. B. Harrison and the <i>Journal</i> .	141
21. Victory of Samothrace, Paris, Louvre Ma 2369, front. Photograph: after S. Reinach, "La Victoire de Samothrace," <i>Gazette des Beaux-Arts</i> 33.3, vol. 5 (1891) plate between pp. 94 and 95.	144
22. Victory of Samothrace, Paris, Louvre Ma 2369, three-quarters left. Photograph: after A. Conze et al., <i>Archaeologische Untersuchungen auf Samothrake II. Neue archaeologische Untersuchungen auf Samothrake</i> (Vienna, 1880) pl. LXIV.	145
23. Victory of Samothrace, Paris, Louvre Ma 2369, three-quarters left. Photograph: after O. Rayet, <i>Monuments de l'art antique II. Sculpture</i>	

ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>grecque, seconde moitié du IV^e siècle, III^e et II^e siècles. Sculpture romaine. Terres cuites</i> (Paris, 1884) livraison II, pl. I.	146
24. Victory of Samothrace, Paris, Louvre Ma 2369, and reconstructions. Photograph: after J. Overbeck, <i>Geschichte der griechischen Plastik</i> II (fourth ed.; Leipzig, 1894) fig. 210.	147
25. Youth from Motya, front. Photograph: after <i>Sculpture Review</i> 49.4 (Winter 2000) 25 (Giuseppe Cappellani), courtesy G. Cappellani and <i>Sculpture Review</i> .	158
26. Youth from Motya, back. Photograph: after <i>Sculpture Review</i> 49.4 (Winter 2000) 25 (Giuseppe Cappellani), courtesy G. Cappellani and <i>Sculpture Review</i> .	159
27. Peter Steiner, “Is It Too Revealing?” <i>The New Yorker</i> , Nov. 1, 1993, 60. © The New Yorker Collection 1993 Peter Steiner from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.	179
28. Athens, Acropolis Museum 973, Victory loosening sandal, relief from the parapet of the temple of Athena Nike. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection AT 136a, courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	188
29. Athens, Acropolis, caryatid “D” of the Erechtheum. Photograph: DAI-Neg.-No. 1973/697 (Hellner), courtesy Deutsches Archäologisches Institut.	189
30. “Peplos Kore,” Athens, Acropolis Museum 679. Photograph: after H. Lechat, <i>Au musée de l’acropole d’Athènes</i> (Lyon and Paris, 1903) 325 fig. 31.	190
31. Kore, Athens, Acropolis Museum 678. Photograph: after H. Lechat, <i>Au musée de l’acropole d’Athènes</i> (Lyon and Paris, 1903) 331 fig. 32.	191
32. Dedication of Nikandre, Athens, National Museum 1. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection AT 365, courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	204
33. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection EU 52, courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	205
34. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098, right side, detail of skirt. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection EU 53 (detail), courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	211
35. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098, front, detail of skirt. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection EU 52 (detail), courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	211
36. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098, left side, detail of skirt. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection EU 54 (detail), courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	211

ILLUSTRATIONS

37. Lady of Auxerre, Paris, Louvre Ma 3098, back, detail of skirt. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection EU 55 (detail), courtesy American School of Classical Studies at Athens.	211
38. Ivory plaque from Sparta, Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia. Photograph: after R. M. Dawkins, ed., <i>The Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta (Journal of Hellenic Studies Supplementary Paper 5; London, 1929) pl. XCV.</i>	212
39. Ivory plaque from Sparta, Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia. Photograph: after R. M. Dawkins, ed., <i>The Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta (Journal of Hellenic Studies Supplementary Paper 5; London, 1929) pl. CII, 2.</i>	213
40. Ivory plaque from Sparta, Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia. Photograph: after R. M. Dawkins, ed., <i>The Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta (Journal of Hellenic Studies Supplementary Paper 5; London, 1929) pl. CIV, 3.</i>	214
41. Stele from Prinias. Photograph after <i>Monuments Piot</i> 20 (1913) 21 fig. 13, courtesy Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres.	215
42. Women from Thessaly. Photograph: after Smithsonian Institution, <i>Greek Costumes and Embroideries from The Benaki Museum, Athens</i> (Smithsonian Institution, 1959–1960) 18, bottom.	217
43. Dedication of Nikandre, Athens, National Museum 1, and detail of inscription. Photograph: after <i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i> 3 (1879) pl. I.	219

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pindars Gedichte zu verstehen, kostet Kopfzerbrechen; der Parthenonfries nicht.

Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern, 1948) 23

Il n'est donc jamais naïf (malgré les intimidations de la culture, et surtout de la culture spécialisée) de se demander devant une toile *ce qu'elle figure*.

Roland Barthes, "Sagesse de l'art" (1979), *L'obvie et l'obtus* (Paris, 1982) 169

This volume is concerned with the historiography of classical art. That is to say, its subject is neither the art itself nor its history, but rather how that history came to be written, why certain topics came to be formulated and developed along particular lines, and the effect that earlier scholarship continues to have on present treatments of ancient art. It is preliminary to a broader examination of the historiographic structures that have shaped the way we think about the art of ancient Greece and Rome. The aim of this work is not to offer a "history of history," but instead to consider historiographically significant issues of content and method that directly affect current practice.

The present work approaches the issue of description in the history of classical art through the specific case study of early Greek sculpture, particularly the draped female figure. The discussion focusses on the scholarly assessment of two statues of the seventh century B.C. – Nikandre's dedication from Delos and the "Dame d'Auxerre" – that were especially influential for modern studies of the style, chronology, and meaning of Greek sculpture. Although it is generally thought that these images have always been seen and interpreted as

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

objective, empirical evidence for the early stages of Greek statuary, examination of the scholarship shows that in nearly every respect they were viewed in terms of implicit comparisons with statues like the Victory of Samothrace and judged by criteria derived from preconceived ideas about the development of form and style in classical art. It is possible to identify the origin of these criteria and to show that the interpretation of these statues was decisively affected by elements of modern social, historical, and intellectual contexts ranging from eighteenth-century arguments over the nature of classical studies to nineteenth- and twentieth-century preoccupations with ethnicity and gender. The scholarly reception of these images allows us to explore the many contexts, including both specialized scholarship and wider social concerns, in which Greek sculpture is studied.

The project grew from my attempts to understand how our view of the “origins” of Greek art, especially sculpture, came to depend on a belief in the “xoanon,” the primitive wooden statue, which was in essence a historiographic mirage. This work led me to the conviction that many of the questions that concern historians of ancient art are best approached not through the prevailing model of adversarial scholarship – the championing of competing interpretations and theories in the expectation that a single, correct understanding will ultimately triumph – but instead by examining how and why those interpretations came into existence. Such an approach runs counter to many of the accepted conventions in the field, which tend to strip past scholarship of its context in order to highlight information and theories that seem most directly relevant to the subject at hand. In this way, the convention of reviewing “the state of the question” often serves to sever research on ancient art from intellectual history. Such explicitly historiographic interest as does exist in these contexts is also problematic, as too often the impulse is to reach for generalized characterizations of individual contributions and collective trends alike.

These convictions account for the appearance in the present study of extensive quotations and of illustrations from older publications. They are intended to facilitate the reader’s access to scholarship that, although historiographically interesting or even crucial, has receded from scholarly awareness and to significant aspects of broad cultural and intellectual context that are often invisible within the specialized literature of classical studies, however strongly they have influenced their form and content. Original texts accompany their translations (contemporary, whenever practicable) to facilitate the assessment of critical aspects of vocabulary and expression. What becomes clear from the

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study of the past scholarship in its context is a rich complexity of thought that does not survive in reductionist summaries or labels. The scholarship is surprising both in its difference from our own range of knowledge and our own practices and in the similarity of many of its questions and concerns. Current practice owes much of its form to the alien as well as to the familiar aspects of earlier scholarship, and it is only by understanding this often problematic intellectual inheritance that we can set our own directions. I hope, too, that by showing that the history of ancient art does not exist in a vacuum, this work may contribute to current attempts to articulate the place of the field within intellectual history.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help I have received from individuals and institutions in pursuing this work. I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a generous fellowship in 1992–1993, to the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art, where I was a Samuel H. Kress Senior Fellow in 1993–1994, and to Bryn Mawr College for a sabbatical semester in Fall 2000. The librarians of the National Gallery, the Center for Hellenic Studies, and Bryn Mawr College provided me with cordial assistance of the highest professional level. For many references, discussions, and criticisms I thank M.-A. Ataç, T. C. Brennan, A. B. Brownlee, D. Cast, M. D. Fullerton, L. Heer, J. Isager, K. Lapatin, S. L. James, M. M. Lee, S. Z. Levine, T. C. Loening, G. W. McDonogh, G. Merker, S. Miller-Collett, G. Ferrari Pinney, J. Reilly, A. Seyhan, the members of the Faculty Development Seminar, and especially C. C. Mattusch, B. S. Ridgway, and J. P. Small, whose comments on the manuscript improved it greatly. I thank E. Garberson, M. L. Levkoff, P. Marandel, and J. Shell for valuable discussions of issues in the art-historiographic traditions in German-speaking lands, France, and Italy and for improvements to my translations of texts. Whatever virtues this study may have are largely owed to the help of these patient friends and colleagues, all of whom have asked the fundamental question cited by Barthes and can vigorously contest Curtius's assertion that the interpretation of art is an easier task than the interpretation of texts.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i>
ADelt	Ἀρχαιολογικὸν δελτίον
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
ANRW	H. Temporini and W. Haase, eds., <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> (Berlin, 1972–)
AntK	<i>Antike Kunst</i>
ArchEph	Ἀρχαιολογικὴ ἐφημερίς
ArchZeit	<i>Archäologische Zeitung</i>
AthMitt	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung</i>
BAR	<i>British Archaeological Reports</i>
BCH	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i>
BEFAR	<i>Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome</i>
CRAI	<i>Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, Paris. Comptes rendus des séances</i>
GBA	<i>Gazette des Beaux-Arts</i>
IstMitt	<i>Istanbuler Mitteilungen</i>
JdI	<i>Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts</i>
JdI-EH	<i>JdI-Ergänzungshefte</i>
JHS	<i>The Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JÖAI	<i>Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts</i>
JRS	<i>The Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JWalt	<i>The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery</i>
LIMC	<i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

LSJ ⁹	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, eds., <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (ninth ed.; Oxford, 1940; suppl. 1968)
<i>MonPiot</i>	<i>Monuments et mémoires publiés par l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres (Fondation E. Piot)</i>
<i>PW</i>	G. Wissowa et al., eds., <i>Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> (Stuttgart, 1894–)
<i>REA</i>	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i>
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
<i>RevArch</i>	<i>Revue archéologique</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>