PART ONE

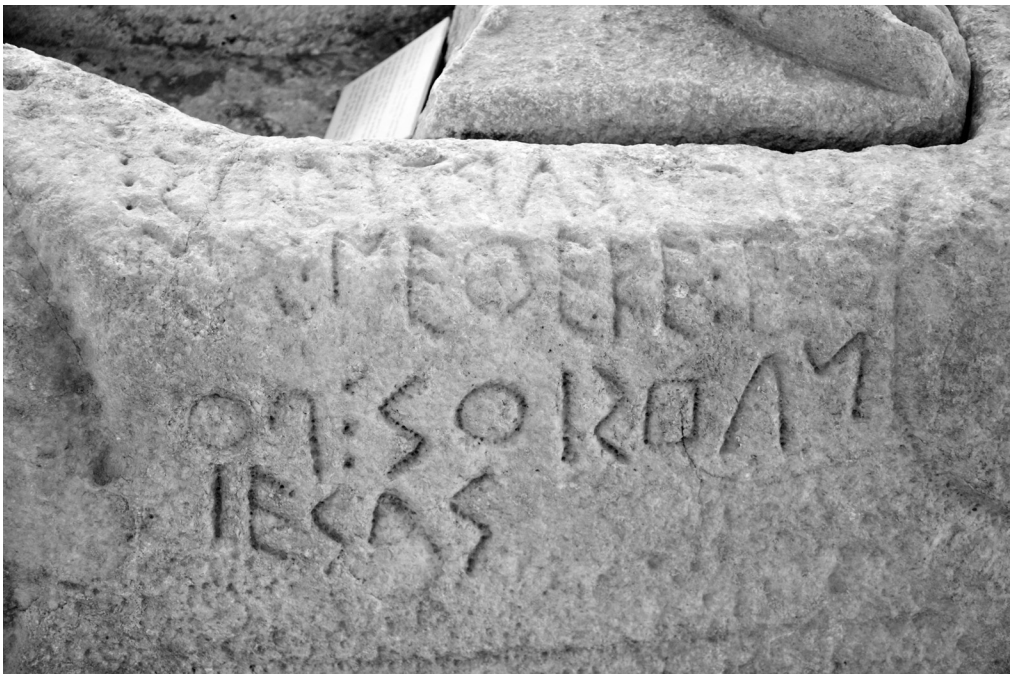
ON THE STATUS, ORIGINALITY, AND DIFFERENCE OF THE GREEK ARTIST

CHAPTER ONE

EUTHYKARTIDES' TOES: SIGNATURES AND THE STATUS OF THE GREEK ARTIST

It was only one, at most two, generations after the invention of the type that a sculptor from the island of Naxos carved an over-life-size *kouros** out of a block of Naxian marble and dedicated it in the *temenos** (sacred precinct) of Apollo on Delos [Pl. I].[1] At least, we think the statue was a kouros: there is even less of it preserved now than there was when it was found in 1885 – just part of the left foot, merely the tips of a couple of toes on the right[2] – and so there is a small possibility that the statue was an offering-bearer who just stood like a kouros, upright, left leg advanced, like the later Kriophoros (Ram-Bearer) from Thasos or the Moschophoros (Calf-Bearer) from the Athenian Acropolis.[3] In any case, its hexagonal plinth was set into a roughly worked, roughly triangular marble boulder (adorned at the corners with the heads of a ram, a lion, and a gorgon) so that the statue stood at a slight angle upon it.[4] That is, whoever stood directly before the ram-headed corner of the base – the presumed "front" of the ensemble – would have seen the statue in a three-quarter view: the kouros would have turned a bit to the spectator's left, so that its Apolline stride would have been clear. But the view of the monument opened up still more, since the spectator was encouraged to attend to the side of the base between the ram and the lion by an inscription that begins on the flat top of the base and continues, *boustrophedon,** down that side [Fig. 1]:

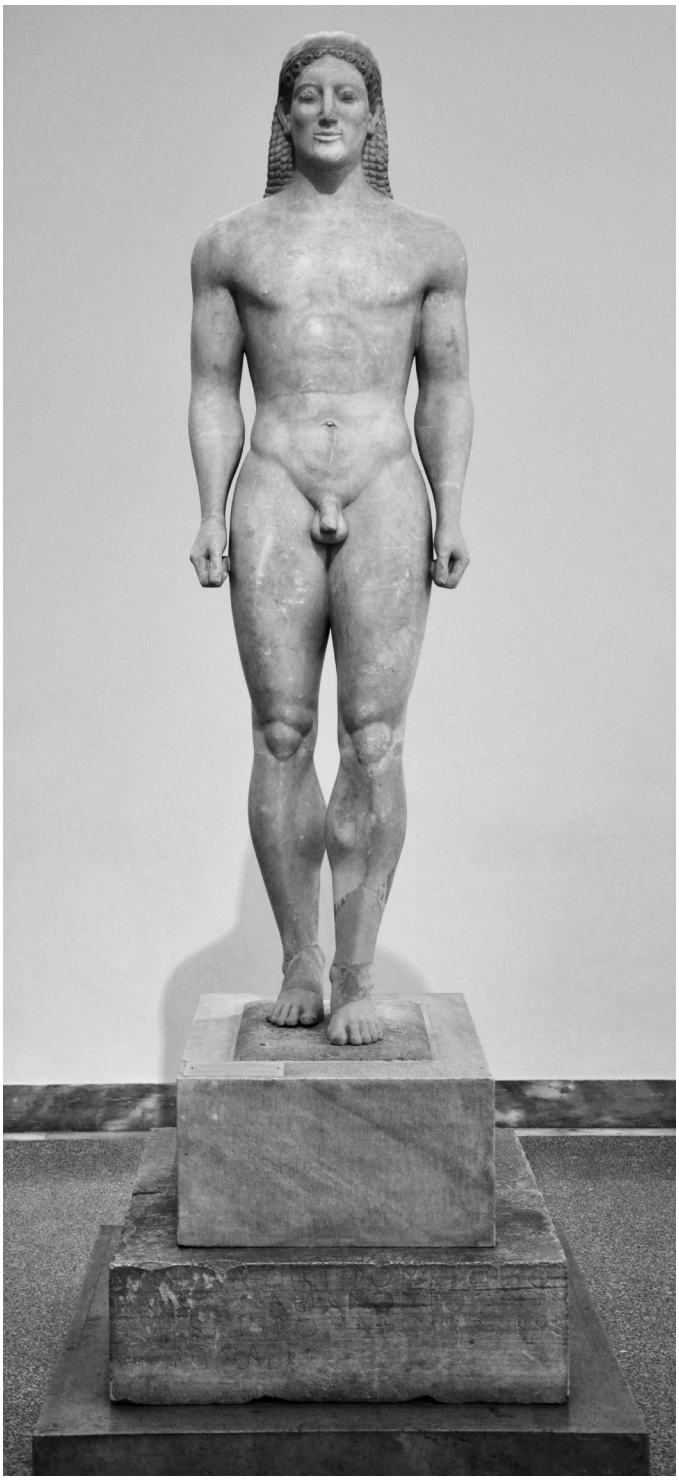
EUTHYKARTIDĒS MANETHEKE HO NAHSIOS POIESAS
Euthykartides the Naxian dedicated me, having made [me].



1. Detail of the base of Euthykartides' kouros (Delos A 728), with inscribed dedication and signature. Photo: author.

The only things we know about Euthykartides are what the toes, the base, and its inscription – probably the earliest Greek sculptor's *signature*,* certainly the earliest complete one[5] – tell us. The man was from Naxos; he dedicated (the word is *anetheke**) a statue that he himself carved in a sanctuary that (largely because of Naxian investment) was fast becoming one of the most important in Greece; he departed from a strict frontality that might have been expected of a statue this early and so encouraged the spectator to view it from more than one point of view; and he worked within a monumental stone sculptural tradition that was in the last quarter of the seventh century still new.

This much about Euthykartides we know. But, given his absence from our ancient literary sources (Pliny, Pausanias, and so on) and the absence of any other work attributable to him, his "artistic personality" is irretrievably lost.[6] Euthykartides thus occupies a familiar position held by most of the Greek artists whose names we happen to know. He was not on present evidence (and, again, that amounts to only a few human toes and a three-headed base) an "individual artistic genius" who used his sculptures self-consciously to "express himself" or his "inner vision" or his "originality." And his statue was probably completely conventional, even if the convention itself was in its infancy: it stood like all kouroi had stood and would always stand [cf. Fig. 2], until the death of the type a century and a half later. But neither was his



2. The Anavyssos Kouros, marker of the grave of Kroisos; c. 530. Athens, National Museum 3851. Photo: author.

statue "an anonymous product of an impersonal craft" – a famously absolutist characterization of Greek sculpture that has been adopted and promoted by some who wish to overthrow the idea of the individual creative artist as the principal generator of artistic change and who wish to banish the concepts of "genius" or "personality" or "originality" from art historical discourse.[7] The idea that art mechanically runs its course apart from the minds and intentions of artists (even if we cannot always discern what artistic intention is), the idea that the course of Greek art was propelled solely by impersonal social or historical forces acting upon passive, interchangeable automatons who were at best menial laborers, "rude mechanicals," or *banausoi** – these are arid, "posthumanist" ideas that an examination of Greek artists' signatures calls into question. They are refuted as well by emulating Dr. Johnson and kicking such rocks as Polygnotos, Polykleitos, Praxiteles, Apelles, Skopas, and Lysippos down the street: these names belonged to demonstrably innovative and influential artists who did not merely reflect or "channel" their culture but generated it, sending Greek art on new and original trajectories. Now, we should not heroize or deify the Greek artist (we should not heroize the art historian or cultural critic, either, by the way). And we should not deny the immense power that society and audience exert over the artist: he, too, is a cultural product. But the many academically trendy, Barthesian reports of the "death of the artist (or author)" have been greatly exaggerated.[8] So let us just stipulate that artists shape culture and culture shapes them, and move on.

Although the kouros type was canonical and eminently reproducible, the genre clearly did not have the power to stifle Euthykartides' impulse to declare, with his signature, his own identity. These little bits of sculpture [Pl. I] are not anonymous – if a signature is anything at all, it is an overt rejection of namelessness – and for Euthykartides the original dedication was very personal indeed. This is so because we can plausibly infer a few other things about the man and his dedication. That the monument was a votive meant primarily to adorn the burgeoning precinct of Apollo – that it was an *agalma*,* a monument of devotion to delight the god – is clear enough: there is no reason to doubt Euthykartides' religious sincerity. But the god was hardly the statue's only intended audience. Any dedication is itself an entry into "a competition of votives," and the *temenos* was its arena. And so the inscription must also have been a kind of claim or advertisement meant to inform and impress priests and pilgrims and thus speak to potential clients: "this is what you can expect from Euthykartides." The work is certainly not about self-expression. But it *is* about self-promotion; it is about mastery of material and form; and it is also about Euthykartides' rivalry both with other sculptors for commissions and with other dedicants for the favor of Apollo. It may also be that Euthykartides dedicated and prominently signed this work precisely "*because* he was so proud to be a sculptor,"[9] and perhaps the relatively large size of the letters is a

symptom of that pride, as well as of his pride in being able to write at a time when literacy was probably not yet widespread or deep. His piety (and self-interest) provided the impetus to display his *tekhnē** – his craft, his mastery of skillful production. Reciprocally, his *tekhnē* allowed him to display his piety and win prestige. His literacy allowed him to declare his identity and purpose. And his apparent wealth made all of that possible. For the fact that he (1) could afford the marble in the first place, (2) had the time (a year? more?) to rough out a large-scale statue and a separate, heavy base in a Naxian quarry and then finish the ensemble in his workshop, then (3) could hire a ship and crew to transport the monument to Delos some 30 kilometers away, and then, finally, (4) could dedicate it to Apollo in his own name (presumably having negotiated with the Delian priesthood for a nice spot within the god's precinct, that arena of votives) – all of this indicates that Euthykartides was "a man of substance," literate and prosperous if not high-born.[10] And even if his social standing was not itself that of an aristocrat, he could at least afford to act like one.

The orthodox view – repeated as if it were uncontroversial in standard surveys of Greek art and archaeology – is that artists and "artisans had very low status" in ancient Greece,[11] and, it is true, a number of sculptors, painters, and vase-painters were or had been slaves.[12] But the ancient élite were, well, élitists who did not hold craftsmen of any sort and social standing in very high regard, finding them physically and therefore morally, politically, and militarily deficient. Thus, Herodotos, who puts the Greeks in the same company as

> the Thrakians, Skythians, Persians, Lydians, and nearly all the barbarians [who] think that their fellow citizens who learn crafts [*tekhnas*], and even their children, are dishonorable, but think noble those who have been set free from work, particularly those who, released from labor, are free to go to war.

Xenophon's Socrates (despite being the son of a stonemason) agrees that

> the so-called "banausic" occupations [*banausikai*] are both denounced and, quite rightly, held in very low esteem by states. For they utterly ruin the bodies of those who work at them and those of their supervisors, by forcing them to lead a sedentary life and to stay indoors, and some of them even to spend the whole day by the fire. When their bodies become effeminate, their souls too become much weaker. Furthermore, the so-called "banausic" occupations leave a man no spare time to be concerned about his friends and city. Consequently such men seem to treat their friends badly and to defend their countries badly, too. In fact, in some cities, especially in those reputed to excel in war, none of the citizens is permitted to work at the banausic occupations. (trans. S. Pomeroy)

Plato's Socrates, another arch-conservative, imagines that in the ideal Republic everyone would stay in his place: there would be nothing more absurd than

to find farmers dressed in fancy robes or potters enjoying themselves in a symposium (that might make them happy but it would undermine the order of the utopian state). And Plato's student Aristotle (who, like Xenophon, believed the craftsman weak-minded and so incapable of thinking or acting politically) concludes, simply:

> The best of states will not make an artisan [*banausos*] a citizen.[13]

Perhaps the unkindest cuts of all are found in Lucian (it is the personified *Paideia*, or Education, who speaks):

> Even if you should become a Pheidias or a Polykleitos and created many wondrous works, everyone will praise your skill [*tekhnē*], but no one who sees them, if he had any sense, would long to be like you. For you would be thought of like this: a *banausos*, a mechanic, a man who lives by the work of his hands.

and in Plutarch (who speaks for himself):

> No one, no naturally good youth, having seen the Zeus at Pisa [i.e., Olympia], ever wanted to be Pheidias, or having seen the Hera at Argos wanted to be Polykleitos, or, having enjoyed their poems, ever wanted to be Anakreon or Philetas or Arkhilochos. For it does not necessarily follow, if a work delights you with its elegance, that its creator is worthy of your serious consideration.[14]

An early hint of such prejudice may be found in Homer, where, at the end of the *Iliad*'s first book, the lame craftsman god Hephaistos, maker of marvelous objects (such as the Shield of Achilles) that are "wonders to see," is a source of cruel amusement for the other gods (who, having laughed at his limp, return ungratefully to the splendid homes Hephaistos has built for them). At all events, the disparagement of the artisan and artist (and, in Plutarch's case, let it not be missed, the poet as well) is harsh. But we need not consider such famously derogatory opinions the rule at all times and in all places (besides, Lucian was a satirist, and his Education belittles almost every occupation in addition to that of the sculptor). Hephaistos may be misshapen and his ugliness (in the eyes of the other Olympians) comical, but Greek tradition also gives us the magical Telkhines, the first men to work iron and bronze, and Daidalos, hero and archetypal Cunning Artisan. The status of the Greek artist may have changed from period to period, the status of a particular Greek artist may have changed even in the course of his career, the status of one kind of artist (say, the vase-painter) was almost certainly very different from that of another (say, the panel painter),[15] and Greek attitudes toward the artist in general may have been at all times more ambivalent, shifting, and complex than the blanket prejudices recorded by Herodotos and expressed by Xenophon and Aristotle

suggest. And even if Plutarch's or Lucian's attitudes were widely shared among condescending, landowning bluebloods, so what? They are unlikely to have been shared by the average Greek – the average Greek was a *banausos* – or by members of the moneyed or business classes (who valued profit before birth), and they would have meant nothing to the artist himself, especially the upwardly mobile and prosperous one.[16] Well-born Greek youths may or may not have wanted to be Pheidias or Polykleitos (how many noble young Florentines wanted to be Michelangelo?), but many of them would not have minded being as wealthy and respected as Praxiteles (whose family had married into the land-owning Athenian aristocracy, who evidently made a fortune as a sculptor, and who may even have served as a liturgist – that is, as a state-selected financier of the public good who in his case paid for a dramatic or choral production), or his son Kephisodotos the Younger (who was a liturgist even richer and more called-upon than his father),[17] or Telesinos of Athens (who in the early 3rd century donated two statues to the Sanctuary of Apollo on Delos, restored as many other statues as needed it free of charge, and for that was given a crown of laurel at the Delian festival and the right to own land on the island),[18] or the early 2nd-century Neoclassical sculptor Damophon of Messene (who made and donated the cult images at Lykosoura and who for that and other acts of largess was apparently built a hero shrine at Messene, possibly crowned with a bronze statue of the sculptor himself),[19] or Eukheir and Euboulides, 2nd-century Athenian sculptors and members of a distinguished family of artisans who earned impressive public honors.[20] Upper-class Greeks like Xenophon and Plutarch might have found it demeaning that sculptors like these labored and sweated and got dirty while they worked, but money talks, and especially in the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods it spoke the language of prestige.[21] As for wall- or panel-painters, they were apparently in a different category from the start: Plutarch's "naturally good youths" might not have refused the accolades the early 5th-century painter Polygnotos of Thasos received at Delphi (where he was granted free food and lodging for life) and Athens (where he was granted citizenship),[22] and Pliny has nice things to say about painters such as Pamphilos (essentially a Late Classical Renaissance Man, schooled in all branches of learning) and the art of painting itself, which he says was fundamental to a Greek liberal education and was an honored profession practiced by distinguished men.[23]

Sweeping generalizations about the supposedly low status of the Greek artist simply sweep aside too much. Xenophon, Aristotle, and Plutarch, on their high horses, might not have held him in much esteem, but the very first Greek sculptor whose full name we know – probably the first one to sign his work and announce his identity and so consciously distinguish himself from other sculptors – in fact acted very much like later sculptors renowned for their

success, wealth, and even civic standing. Like them, Euthykartides, maker and dedicant, must have sweated plenty when he carved his kouros. But hammering away at a marble block with a chisel for a year or so would not have made his body soft or effeminate (what was Xenophon thinking?), and the fusion of dedication and signature on the base of a statue in which he had personally invested so much [Fig. 2] indicates that he was no common laborer, no mere *banausos* – at least not in his own mind, which is the one that counts.