

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.

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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

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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)
MonPiot	<i>Monuments et mémoires publiés par l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres (Fondation E. Piot)</i>
PW	G. Wissowa et al., eds., <i>Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> (Stuttgart, 1894–)
REA	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i>
REG	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
RevArch	<i>Revue archéologique</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>