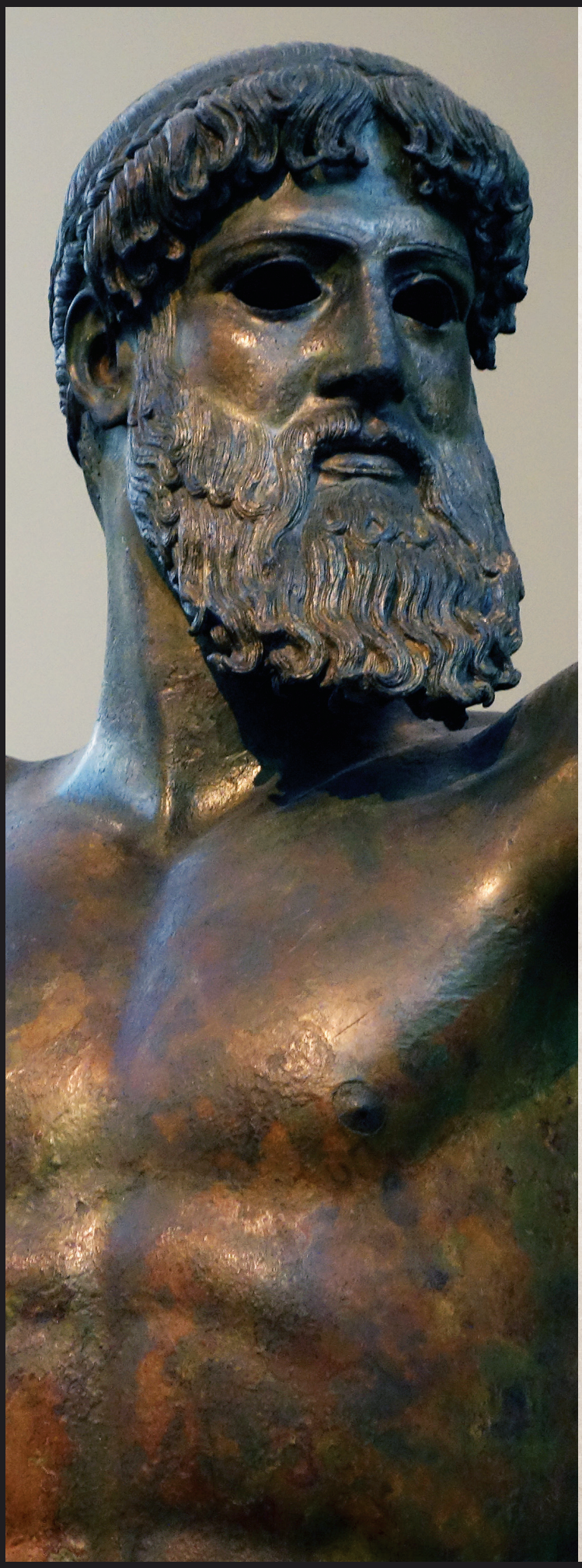


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GUIDE TO

ANCIENT GREEK ART

Smarthistory guide to Ancient Greek Art

Smarthistory guide to Ancient Greek Art

DR. JEFFREY A. BECKER, DR. RENEE M. GONDEK, DR. BETH HARRIS, DR. ELIZABETH MACAULAY-LEWIS, KATARZYNA MINOLLARI, DR. ERIN THOMPSON, AND DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Smarthistory • Brooklyn



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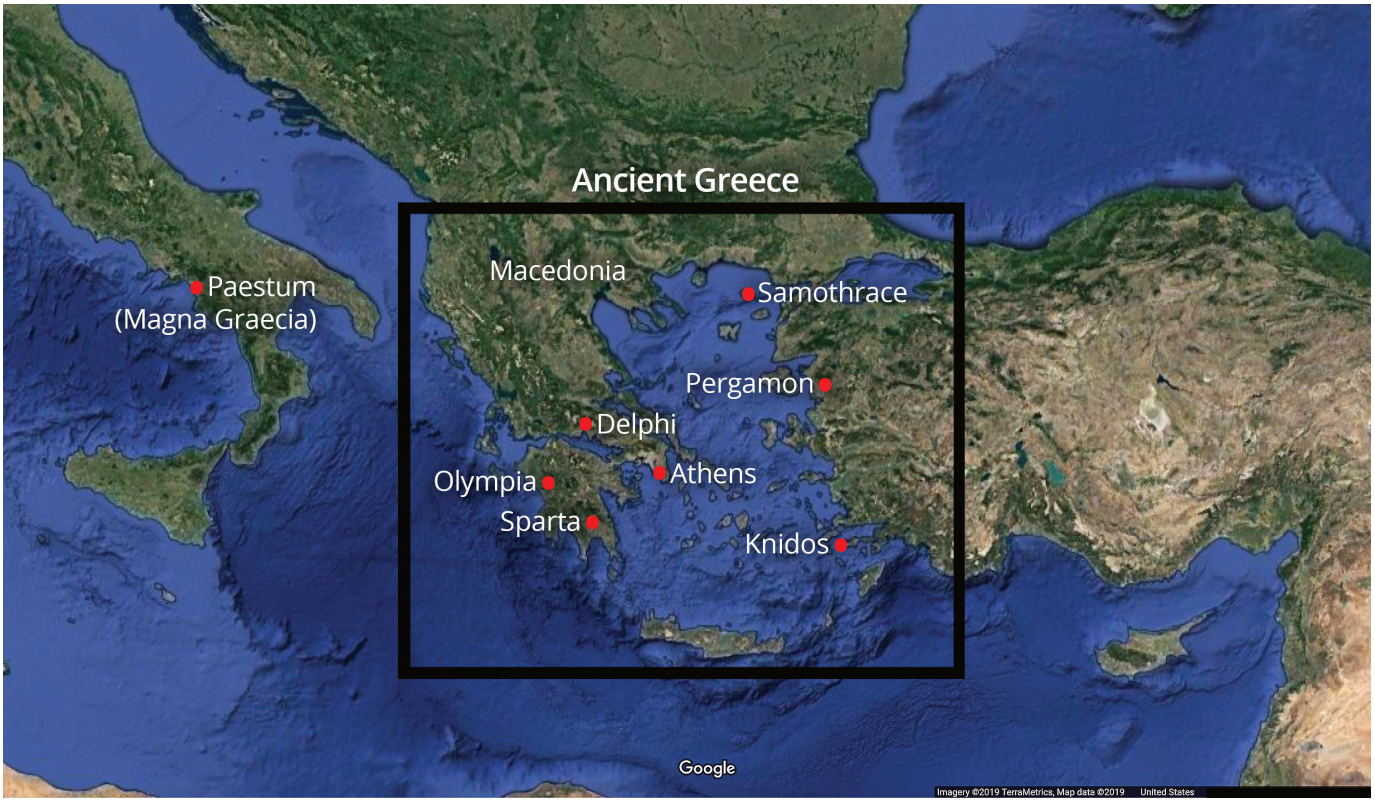
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Map


Ancient Greece
Macedonia
Samothrace
Paestum
(Magna Graecia)
Pergamon
Delphi
Athens
Olympia
Sparta
Knidos
Google
Imagery ©2019 TerraMetrics, Map data ©2019 United States

PART I

A beginner's guide

1. Introduction to ancient Greek art

Dr. Renee M. Gondek



Parthenon, from southeast, Iktinos and Kallikrates, Acropolis, Athens, 447 – 432 B.C.E. Phidias directed the temple's sculptural program (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

A shared language, religion, and culture

Ancient Greece can feel strangely familiar. From the exploits of Achilles (hero of Homer's epic poem, *The Illiad*, about the Trojan war) and Odysseus (also known as Ulysses, the hero in Homer's other epic poem, *The Odyssey*), to the treatises of Aristotle (an extremely influential ancient Greek philosopher from the 4th century B.C.E), from the exacting measurements of the Parthenon (image above) to the rhythmic chaos of the *Laocoön* (image below), ancient Greek culture has shaped our world. Thanks largely to notable archaeological sites, well-known literary sources, and the impact of Hollywood (*Clash of the Titans*, for example), this civilization is embedded in our collective consciousness—prompting visions of epic battles, erudite philosophers, gleaming white temples, and limbless nudes (we now know the sculptures—even the ones that decorated temples like the Parthenon—were brightly painted, and, of course, the fact that the figures are often missing limbs is the result of the ravages of time).

Dispersed around the Mediterranean and divided into self-governing units called *poleis* or city-states (small independent entities such as Aegina, Athens, Corinth, and Sparta), the ancient Greeks were united by a shared language, religion, and culture. Strengthening these bonds further were the so-called "Panhellenic" sanctuaries and festivals that embraced "all Greeks" and encouraged interaction, competition, and exchange (for example the Olympics, which were held at the Panhellenic sanctuary at Olympia). Although popular modern understanding of the ancient Greek world is based on the classical art of fifth century B.C.E. Athens, it is important to recognize that Greek civilization was vast and did not develop overnight.

The Dark Ages (c. 1100 – c. 800 B.C.E.) to the Orientalizing Period (c. 700 – 600 B.C.E.)

Following the collapse of the Mycenaean citadels of the late Bronze Age, the Greek mainland was traditionally thought to enter a "Dark Age" that lasted from c. 1100 until c. 800 B.C.E. Not only did the complex socio-cultural system of the Mycenaeans disappear, but also its numerous achievements (i.e., metalworking, large-scale construction, writing). The discovery and continuous excavation of a site known as Lefkandi <http://lefkandi.classics.ox.ac.uk/>, however, drastically alters this impression. Located just north of Athens, Lefkandi has yielded an immense, almost fifty-meter long structure with a semicircular end on one side (known as "apsidal"), a massive network of graves, and two heroic burials replete with gold objects and valuable horse sacrifices. One of the most interesting artifacts, ritually buried in two separate graves, is a centaur figurine (see photos below). At fourteen inches high, the terracotta creature is composed of a equine (horse) torso made on a potter's wheel and hand-formed human limbs and features. Alluding to mythology and perhaps a particular story, this centaur embodies the cultural richness of this period.



Centaur, c. 900 B.C.E. (Proto-Geometric period), terracotta, 14 inches high, the head was found in tomb 1 and the body was found in tomb 3 in the cemetery of Toumba, Lefkandi, Greece (detail of head photo: Dan Diffendale CC BY-NC-SA 2) <https://flic.kr/p/9nNTDP>



Athanadoros, Hagesandros, and Polydoros of Rhodes, Laocoön and his Sons, early first century C.E., marble, 7'10-1/2" high (Vatican Museums)

Similar in its adoption of narrative elements is a vase-painting likely from Thebes dating to c. 730 B.C.E. (see image below). Fully ensconced in the Geometric Period (c. 800-700 B.C.E.), the imagery on the vase reflects other eighth-century artifacts, such as the *Dipylon Amphora,* with its geometric patterning and silhouetted human forms. Though simplistic, the overall scene on this vase seems to record a story. A man and woman stand beside a ship outfitted with tiers of rowers. Grasping at the stern and lifting one leg into the hull, the man turns back towards the female and takes her by the wrist. Is the couple Theseus and Ariadne? Is this an abduction? (In Greek mythology, the hero Theseus slew the Minotaur, a creature with the head of a bull and the body of a man, with aid from Ariadne, then sailed with her to the island of Naxos.) Perhaps Paris and Helen? (Paris was the son of the king of Troy. He abducted Helen, wife of King Menelaus, sparking the Trojan War.) Or, is the man bidding farewell to the woman and embarking on a journey as had Odysseus and Penelope? (Odysseus, also known as Ulysses, left his wife Penelope for twenty years to fight in the Trojan War.) The answer is unattainable.

In the Orientalizing Period (700-600 B.C.E.), alongside Near Eastern motifs and animal processions, craftsmen produced more nuanced figural forms and intelligible illustrations. For example, terracotta painted plaques from the Temple of Apollo at Thermon (c. 625 B.C.E.) are some of the earliest evidence for architectural decoration in Iron Age Greece. Once ornamenting the surface of this Doric temple (most likely as metopes), the extant panels have preserved various imagery. On one plaque (see image below), a male youth strides towards the right and carries a significant attribute under his right arm—the severed head of the Gorgon Medusa, whose face is visible between the right hand and right hip of the striding figure. (In Greek mythology, a Gorgon is a monstrous feminine creature whose appearance would turn anyone who laid eyes upon it into stone.) Not only is the painter successful here in relaying a particular story, but also the figure of Perseus shows great advancement from the previous century. The limbs are fleshy, the facial features are recognizable, and the hat and winged boots appropriately equip the hero for fast travel.



Fragment showing Perseus with the head of Medusa likely from a metope from the Temple of Apollo at Thermon, c. 630 B.C.E., painted terracotta, 87.8 cm high (National Archaeological Museum, Athens)

The Archaic Period (c. 600-480/479 B.C.E.)

While Greek artisans continued to develop their individual crafts,



Late Geometric Attic spouted krater (vessel for mixing water and wine), possibly from Thebes, c. 730 B.C.E., 30.5 cm high (The British Museum, London) (photo: Egisto Sani CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/dtZEwo>



Left: Anavysos (Kroisos) Kouros, c. 530 B.C.E., marble, 6′ 4″ (National Archaeological Museum, Athens), photo: Steven Zucker Right: Aristion of Paros, Phrasikleia Kore, c. 550 – 540 B.C.E. Parian marble with traces of pigment, 211 cm high (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Asaf Braverman CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/4Tkhr8>

storytelling ability, and more realistic portrayals of human figures throughout the Archaic Period, the city of Athens witnessed the rise and fall of tyrants and the introduction of democracy by the statesman Kleisthenes in the years 508 and 507 B.C.E.

Visually, the period is known for large-scale marble kouros (male youth) and kore (female youth) sculptures (see below). Showing the influence of ancient Egyptian sculpture, the kouros stands rigidly with both arms extended at the side and one leg advanced. Frequently employed as grave markers, these sculptural types displayed unabashed nudity, highlighting their complicated hairstyles and abstracted musculature (below left). The kore, on the other hand, was never nude. Not only was her form draped in layers of fabric, but she was also ornamented with jewelry and adorned with a crown. Though some have been discovered in funerary contexts, like *Phrasiklea* (below right), a vast majority were found on the Acropolis in Athens. Ritualistically buried following desecration of this sanctuary by the Persians in 480 and 479 B.C.E., dozens of korai were unearthed alongside other dedicatory artifacts. While the identities of these figures have been hotly debated in recent times, most agree that they were originally intended as votive offerings to the goddess Athena.

The Classical Period (480/479-323 B.C.E.)

Though experimentation in realistic movement began before the end of the Archaic Period, it was not until the Classical Period that two- and three-dimensional forms achieved proportions and postures that



Niobid Painter, Niobid Krater, Attic red-figure calyx-krater, c. 460-50 B.C.E., 54 x 56 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

were naturalistic. The "Early Classical Period" (480/479 – 450 B.C.E., also known as the "Severe Style") was a period of transition when some sculptural work displayed archaizing holdovers. As can be seen in the *Kritios Boy*, c. 480 B.C.E., the "Severe Style" features realistic anatomy, serious expressions, pouty lips, and thick eyelids. For painters, the development of perspective and multiple ground lines enriched compositions, as can be seen on the Niobid Painter's vase in the Louvre (image below).

During the "High Classical Period" (450-400 B.C.E.), there was great artistic success: from the innovative structures on the Acropolis to Polykleitos' visual and cerebral manifestation of idealization in his sculpture of a young man holding a spear, the *Doryphoros* or "Canon" (image below). Concurrently, however, Athens, Sparta, and their mutual allies were embroiled in the Peloponnesian War, a bitter conflict that lasted for several decades and ended in 404 B.C.E. Despite continued military activity throughout the "Late Classical Period" (400-323 B.C.E.), artistic production and development continued apace. In addition to a new figural aesthetic in the fourth century known for its longer torsos and limbs, and smaller heads (for example, the *Apoxyomenos*), the first female nude was produced. Known as the *Aphrodite of Knidos,* c. 350 B.C.E., the sculpture pivots at the shoulders and hips into an S-Curve and stands with her right hand over her genitals in a *pudica* (or modest Venus) pose (see a Roman copy in the Capitoline Museum in Rome). Exhibited in a circular temple and visible from all sides, the *Aphrodite of Knidos* became one of the most celebrated sculptures in all of antiquity.



Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer) or The Canon, c. 450-40 B.C.E., ancient Roman marble copy found in Pompeii of the lost bronze original, 211 cm (Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli)

The Hellenistic Period and Beyond (323 B.C.E. – 31 B.C.E.)

Following the death of Alexander the Great (one of the most successful conquerers in history, whose empire stretched from Greece and Egypt to the Indus valley and Afghanistan) in 323 B.C.E., the Greeks and their influence stretched as far east as modern India. While some pieces intentionally mimicked the Classical style of the previous period such as Eutychides' *Tyche of Antioche* (Louvre), other artists were more interested in capturing motion and emotion. For example, on the Great Altar of Zeus from Pergamon (below) expressions of agony and a confused mass of limbs convey a newfound interest in drama.



Athena defeats Alkyoneus (detail), The Pergamon Altar, c. 200-150 B.C.E. (Hellenistic Period), 35.64 x 33.4 meters, marble (Pergamon Museum, Berlin)

Architecturally, the scale of structures vastly increased, as can be seen with the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, and some complexes even terraced their surrounding landscape in order to create spectacular vistas as can be seem at the Sanctuary of Asklepios on Kos. Upon the defeat of Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C.E., the Ptolemaic dynasty that ruled Egypt and, simultaneously, the Hellenistic Period came to a close. With the Roman admiration of and predilection for Greek art and culture, however, Classical aesthetics and teachings continued to endure from antiquity to the modern era.

Additional resources:

The Art of classical Greece from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tacg/hd_tacg.htm>

Greek Art in the Archaic Period on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/argk/hd_argk.htm>

Art of the Hellenistic Age and the Hellenistic Tradition on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/haht/hd_haht.htm>

Richard T. Neer, *Greek Art and Archaeology: A New History, c. 2500-c. 150 B.C.E.* (Thames and Hudson, 2011)

Robin Osborne, *Archaic and Classical Greek Art* (Oxford University Press, 1988)

John G. Pedley, *Greek Art and Archaeology* (Pearson, 2011)

J.J. Pollitt, *Art and Experience in Classical Greece* (Cambridge University Press, 1972)

Nigel Jonathan Spivey, *Greek Art* (Phaeton Press, 1997)



2. Introduction to ancient Greek architecture

Dr. Jeffrey A. Becker

For most of us, architecture is easy to take for granted. It's everywhere in our daily lives—sometimes elegant, other times shabby, but generally ubiquitous. How often do we stop to examine and contemplate its form and style? Stopping for that contemplation offers not only the opportunity to understand one's daily surroundings, but also to appreciate the connection that exists between architectural forms in our own time and those from the past. Architectural tradition and design has the ability to link disparate cultures together over time and space—and this is certainly true of the legacy of architectural forms created by the ancient Greeks.



The Erechtheion, 421-405 B.C.E. (Classical Greek), Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Where and when

Greek architecture refers to the architecture of the Greek-speaking peoples who inhabited the Greek mainland and the Peloponnese, the islands of the Aegean Sea, the Greek colonies in Ionia (coastal Asia Minor), and Magna Graecia (Greek colonies in Italy and Sicily).

Greek architecture stretches from c. 900 B.C.E. to the first century C.E. (with the earliest extant stone architecture dating to the seventh century B.C.E.).

Greek architecture influenced Roman architecture and architects in profound ways, such that Roman Imperial architecture adopts and incorporates many Greek elements into its own practice.



"Hera II," c. 460 B.C.E., 24.26 x 59.98 m, Greek, Doric temple from the classical period likely dedicated to Hera, Paestum (Latin) previously Poseidonia (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

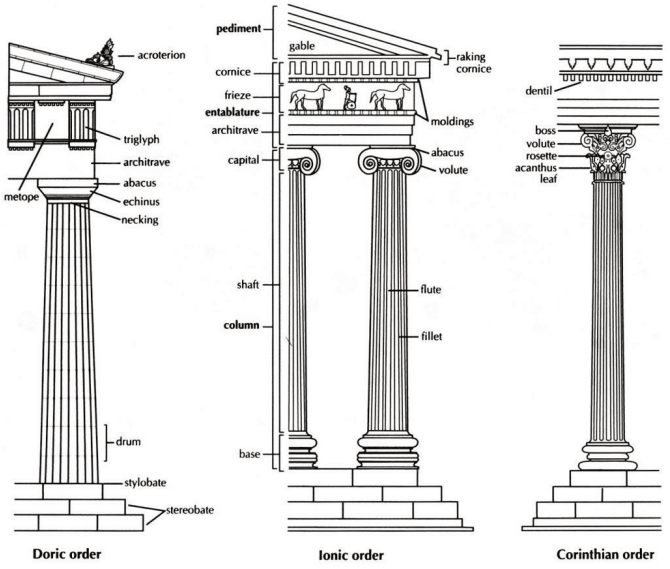
An overview of basic building typologies demonstrates the range and diversity of Greek architecture.

Temple

The most recognizably "Greek" structure is the temple (even though the architecture of Greek temples is actually quite diverse). The Greeks referred to temples with the term ὁ ναός (*ho naós*) meaning "dwelling," temple derives from the Latin term, *templum*. The earliest shrines were built to honor divinities and were made from materials such as a wood and mud brick—materials that typically don't survive very long. The basic form of the *naos* (the interior room that held the cult statue of the God or Gods) emerges as early as the tenth century B.C.E. as a simple, rectangular room with projecting walls (*antae*) that created a shallow porch. This basic form remained unchanged in its concept for centuries. In the eighth century B.C.E. Greek architecture begins to make the move from ephemeral materials (wood, mud brick, thatch) to permanent materials (namely, stone).

During the Archaic period the tenets of the Doric order of architecture in the Greek mainland became firmly established, leading to a wave of monumental temple building during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. Greek city-states invested substantial resources in temple building—as they competed with each other not just in strategic and

economic terms, but also in their architecture. For example, Athens devoted enormous resources to the construction of the acropolis in the 5th century B.C.E.—in part so that Athenians could be confident that the temples built to honor their gods surpassed anything that their rival states could offer.



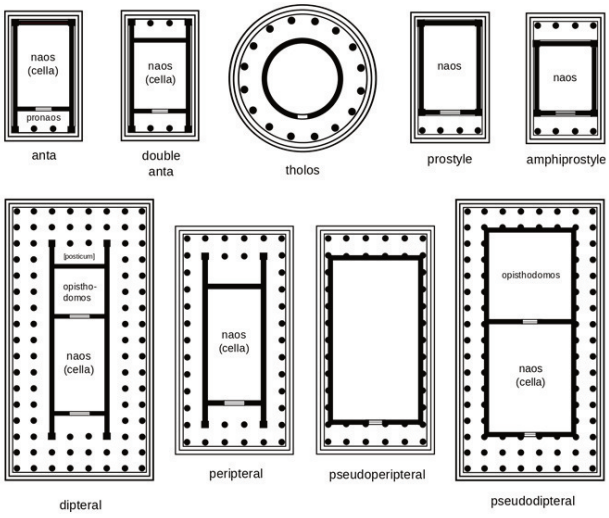
Greek architectural orders

The multi-phase architectural development of sanctuaries such as that of Hera on the island of Samos demonstrate not only the change that occurred in construction techniques over time but also how the Greeks re-used sacred spaces—with the later phases built directly atop the preceding ones. Perhaps the fullest, and most famous, expression of Classical Greek temple architecture is the Periclean Parthenon of Athens—a Doric order structure, the Parthenon represents the maturity of the Greek classical form.



Iktinos and Kallikrates, The Parthenon, Athens, 447 – 432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

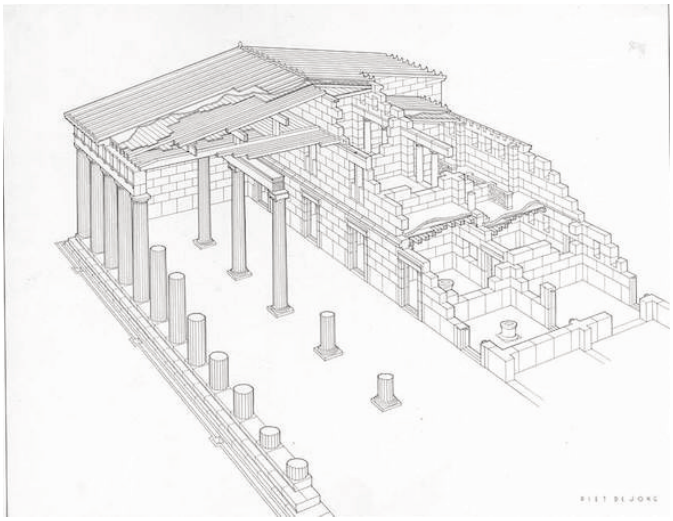
Greek temples are often categorized in terms of their ground plan and the way in which the columns are arranged. A prostyle temple is a temple that has columns only at the front, while an amphiprostyle temple has columns at the front and the rear. Temples with a peripteral arrangement (from the Greek πτερον (*pteron*) meaning "wing) have a single line of columns arranged all around the exterior of the temple building. Dipteral temples simply have a double row of columns surrounding the building. One of the more unusual plans is the tholos, a temple with a circular ground plan; famous examples are attested at the sanctuary of Apollo in Delphi and the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidauros.



Greek temple plans (source) <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greek_temples.svg>

Stoa

Stoa (στοά) is a Greek architectural term that describes a covered walkway or colonnade that was usually designed for public use. Early examples, often employing the Doric order, were usually composed of a single level, although later examples (Hellenistic and Roman) came to be two-story freestanding structures. These later examples allowed interior space for shops or other rooms and often incorporated the Ionic order for interior colonnades.



P. De Jong, Restored Perspective of the South Stoa, Corinth (photo: American School of Classical Studies, Digital Collections) <http://ascsa.net/id/corinth/drawing/104%20038?q=collection%3ACorinth%20stoa&t=drawing&v=list&sort=&s=23>

Greek city planners came to prefer the stoa as a device for framing the agora (public market place) of a city or town. The South Stoa constructed as part of the sanctuary of Hera on the island of Samos



Theater at the Sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus, c. 350 – 300 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

(c. 700-550 B.C.E.) numbers among the earliest examples of the stoa in Greek architecture. Many cities, particularly Athens and Corinth, came to have elaborate and famous stoas. In Athens the famous Stoa Poikile ("Painted Stoa"), c. fifth century B.C.E., housed paintings of famous Greek military exploits including the battle of Marathon, while the Stoa Basileios ("Royal Stoa"), c. fifth century B.C.E., was the seat of a chief civic official (*archon basileios*).



20th century reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos in the Athenian Agora (original c. 159-138 B.C.E.) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Later, through the patronage of the kings of Pergamon, the Athenian agora was augmented by the famed Stoa of Attalos (c. 159-138 B.C.E.) which was recently rebuilt according to the ancient specifications and now houses the archaeological museum for the Athenian Agora itself (see image above). At Corinth the stoa persisted as an architectural type well into the Roman period; the South Stoa there (above), c. 150 C.E., shows the continued utility of this building design for framing civic space. From the Hellenistic period onwards the stoa also lent its name to a philosophical school, as Zeno of Citium (c. 334-262 B.C.E.) originally taught his Stoic philosophy in the Stoa Poikile of Athens.

Theater

The Greek theater was a large, open-air structure used for dramatic performance. Theaters often took advantage of hillsides and naturally sloping terrain and, in general, utilized the panoramic landscape as the backdrop to the stage itself. The Greek theater is composed of the seating area (theatron), a circular space for the chorus to perform (orchestra), and the stage (*skene*). Tiered seats in the theatron provided space for spectators. Two side aisles (*parados*, pl. *paradoi*) provided access to the orchestra. The Greek theater inspired the Roman version of the theater directly, although the Romans introduced some modifications to the concept of theater architecture. In many cases the Romans converted pre-existing Greek theaters to conform to their own architectural ideals, as is evident in the Theater of Dionysos on the slopes of the Athenian Acropolis. Since

theatrical performances were often linked to sacred festivals, it is not uncommon to find theaters associated directly with sanctuaries.

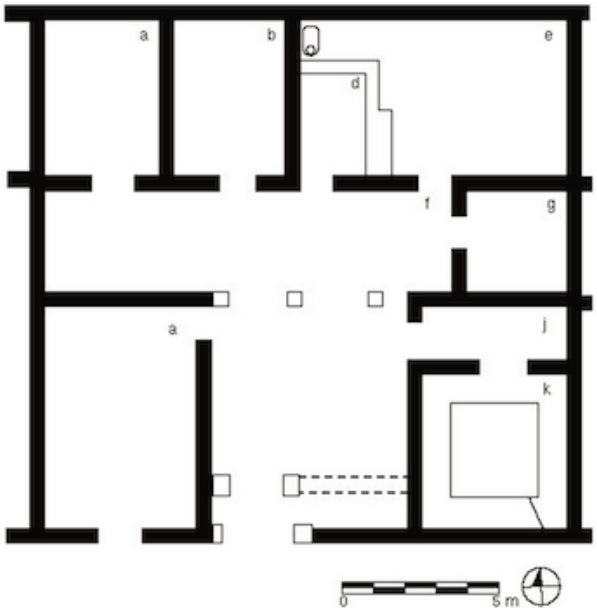


Bouleuterion, Priène (Turkey), c. 200 B.C.E. (photo: Jacqueline Poggi, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jacqueline_poggi/14526454533>

Bouleuterion

The Bouleuterion (βουλευτήριον) was an important civic building in a Greek city, as it was the meeting place of the boule (citizen council) of the city. These select representatives assembled to handle public affairs and represent the citizenry of the polis (in ancient Athens the boule was comprised of 500 members). The bouleuterion generally was a covered, rectilinear building with stepped seating surrounding a central speaker's well in which an altar was placed. The city of Priène has a particularly well-preserved example of this civic structure as does the city of Miletus.

House



Plan, Olynthus (Greece), House A vii 4, built after 432, before 348 B.C.E., from Olynthus, vol. 8 pl. 99, 100 and fig. 5, kitchen complex c, d, and e; andron (k) (photo: Perseus Digital Library)

Greek houses of the Archaic and Classical periods were relatively simple in design. Houses usually were centered on a courtyard that would have been the scene for various ritual activities; the courtyard also provided natural light for the often small houses. The ground floor rooms would have included kitchen and storage rooms, perhaps an animal pen and a latrine; the chief room was the *andron*—site of the male-dominated drinking party (*symposion*). The quarters for women and children (*gynaikeion*) could be located on the second level (if present) and were, in any case, segregated from the mens' area. It was not uncommon for houses to be attached to workshops or shops. The houses excavated in the southwest part of the Athenian Agora had walls of mud brick that rested on stone socles and tiled roofs, with floors of beaten clay.

The city of Olynthus in Chalcidice, Greece, destroyed by military action in 348 B.C.E., preserves many well-appointed courtyard houses arranged within the Hippodamian grid-plan of the city. House A vii 4 had a large cobbled courtyard that was used for domestic industry. While some rooms were fairly plain, with earthen floors, the *andron* was the most well-appointed room of the house.

Fortifications



Fortifications and gate, Palairos (Greece)

The Mycenaean fortifications of Bronze Age Greece (c. 1300 B.C.E.) are particularly well known—the megalithic architecture (also referred to as Cyclopean because of the use of enormous stones) represents a trend in Bronze Age architecture. While these massive Bronze Age walls are difficult to best, first millennium B.C.E. Greece also shows evidence for stone built fortification walls. In Attika (the territory of Athens), a series of Classical and Hellenistic walls built in ashlar masonry (squared masonry blocks) have been studied as a potential system of border defenses. At Palairos in Epirus (Greece) the massive fortifications enclose a high citadel that occupies imposing terrain.

Stadium, gymnasium, and palaestra

The Greek stadium (derived from *stadion*, a Greek measurement equivalent to c. 578 feet or 176 meters) was the location of foot races held as part of sacred games; these structures are often found in the context of sanctuaries, as in the case of the Panhellenic sanctuaries at Olympia and Epidauros. Long and narrow, with a horseshoe shape, the stadium occupied reasonably flat terrain.

The gymnasium (from the Greek term *gymnós* meaning "naked") was a training center for athletes who participated in public games. This facility tended to include areas for both training and storage. The

palaestra (παλαίστρα) was an exercise facility originally connected with the training of wrestlers. These complexes were generally rectilinear in plan, with a colonnade framing a central, open space.

Altar



Altar of Hieron II, 3rd century B.C.E. (Syracuse, Sicily, Italy)

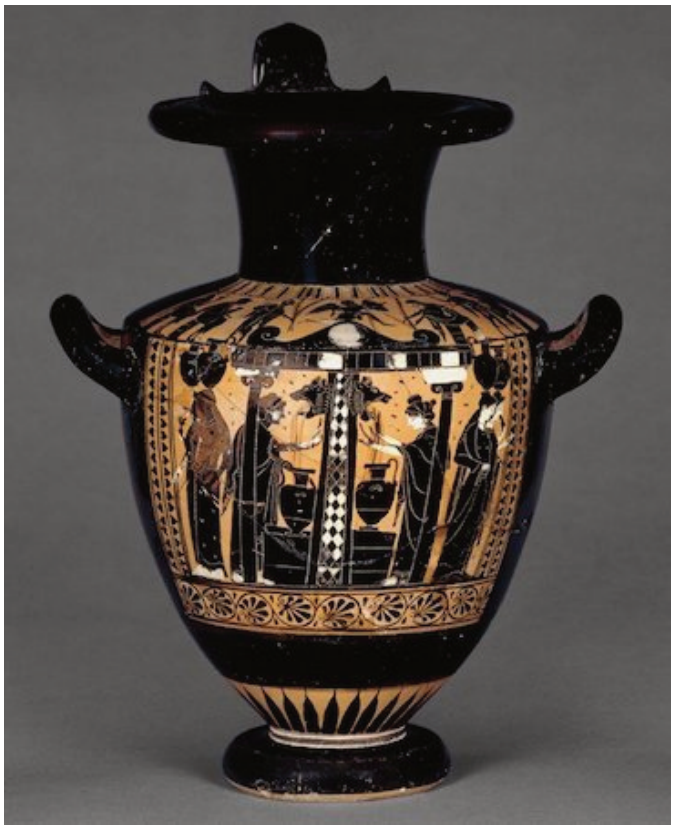
Since blood sacrifice was a key component of Greek ritual practice, an altar was essential for these purposes. While altars did not necessarily need to be architecturalized, they could be and, in some cases, they assumed a monumental scale. The third century B.C.E. Altar of Hieron II at Syracuse, Sicily, provides one such example. At c. 196 meters in length and c. 11 m in height the massive altar was reported to be capable of hosting the simultaneous sacrifice of 450 bulls (Diodorus Siculus *History* 11.72.2).



Model of the Pergamon Altar (Altar of Zeus), c. 200-150 B.C.E. (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Another spectacular altar is the Altar of Zeus from Pergamon, built during the first half of the second century B.C.E. The altar itself is screened by a monumental enclosure decorated with sculpture; the monument measures c. 35.64 by 33.4 meters. The altar is best known for its program of relief sculpture that depict a gigantomachy (battle between the Olympian gods and the giants) that is presented as an allegory for the military conquests of the kings of Pergamon. Despite its monumental scale and lavish decoration, the Pergamon altar preserves the basic and necessary features of the Greek altar: it is frontal and approached by stairs and is open to the air—to allow not only for the blood sacrifice itself but also for the burning of the thigh bones and fat as an offering to the gods.

Fountain house



Black-figured water-jar (hydria) with a scene at a fountain-house, Greek, about 520-500 B.C.E., 50.8 cm high, © The Trustees of the British Museum

The fountain house is a public building that provides access to clean drinking water and at which water jars and containers could be filled. The Southeast Fountain house in the Athenian Agora (c. 530 B.C.E.) provides an example of this tendency to position fountain houses and their dependable supply of clean drinking water close to civic spaces like the agora. Gathering water was seen as a woman's task and, as such, it offered the often isolated women a chance to socialize with others while collecting water. Fountain house scenes are common on ceramic water jars (*hydriai*), as is the case for a Black-figured hydria (c. 525-500 B.C.E.) found in an Etruscan tomb in Vulci that is now in the British Museum.

Legacy

The architecture of ancient Greece influenced ancient Roman architecture, and became the architectural vernacular employed in the expansive Hellenistic world created in the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great. Greek architectural forms became implanted so deeply in the Roman architectural mindset that they endured throughout antiquity, only to then be re-discovered in the Renaissance and especially from the mid-eighteenth century onwards as a feature of the Neo-Classical movement. This durable legacy helps to explain why the ancient Greek architectural orders and the tenets of Greek design are still so prevalent—and visible—in our post-modern world.

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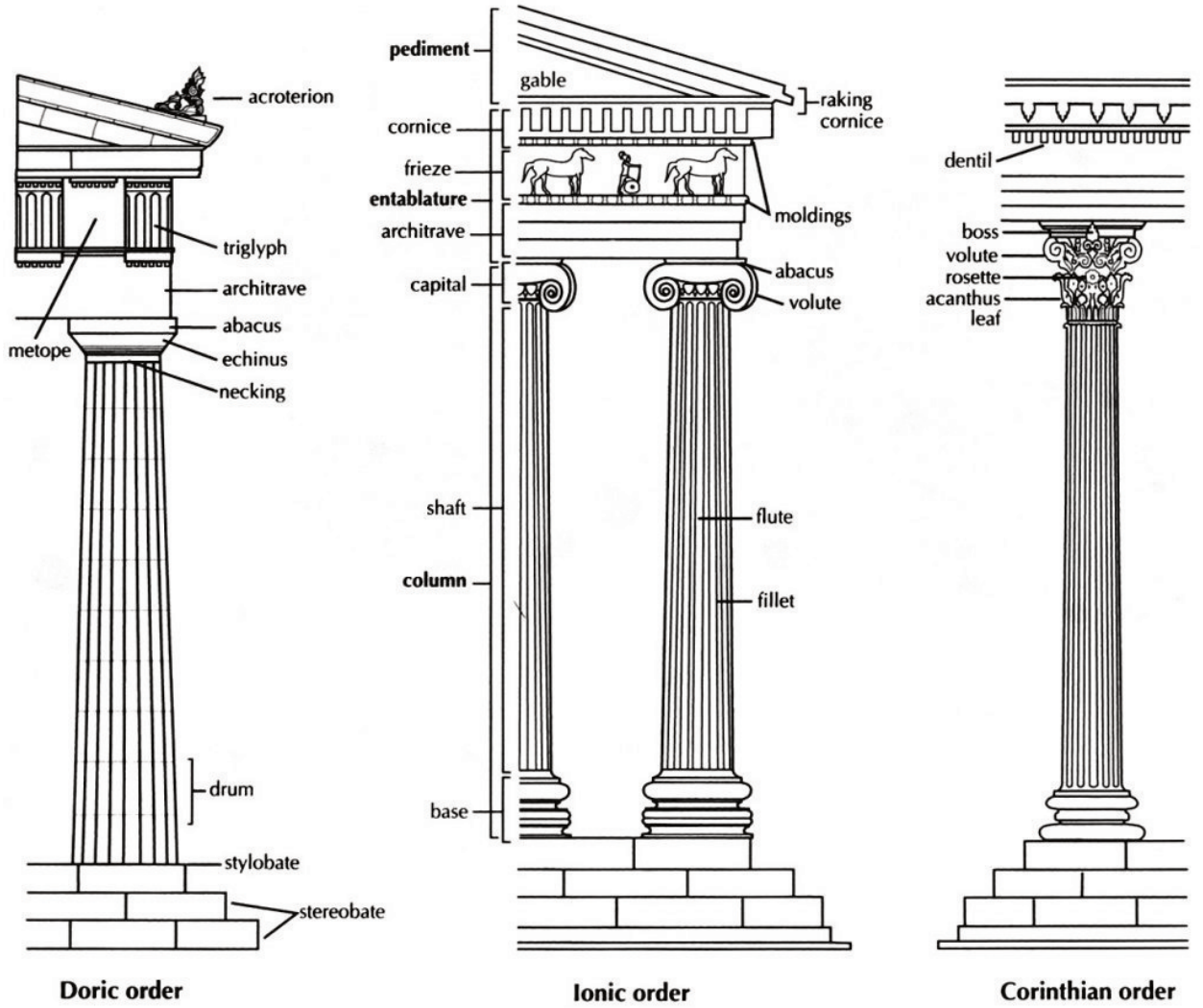
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3. The three classical orders of architecture

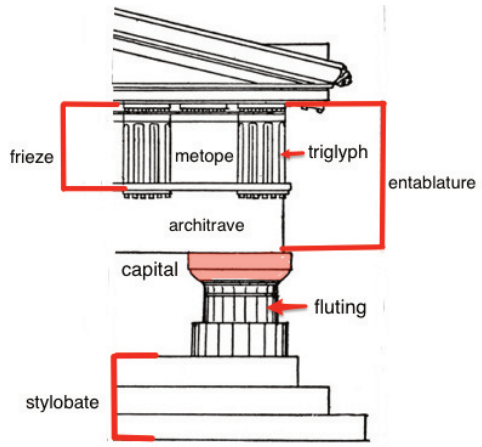
Dr. Jeffrey A. Becker



The Greek orders

An architectural order describes a style of building. In classical architecture each order is readily identifiable by means of its proportions and profiles, as well as by various aesthetic details. The style of column employed serves as a useful index of the style itself, so identifying the order of the column will then, in turn, situate the order employed in the structure as a whole. The classical orders—described by the labels Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian—do not merely serve as descriptors for the remains of ancient buildings, but as an index to the architectural and aesthetic development of Greek architecture itself.

The Doric order



Doric order

The Doric order is the earliest of the three Classical orders of architecture and represents an important moment in Mediterranean architecture when monumental construction made the transition from impermanent materials (i.e. wood) to permanent materials, namely stone. The Doric order is characterized by a plain, unadorned column capital and a column that rests directly on the stylobate of the temple without a base. The Doric entablature includes a frieze composed of trigylphs (vertical plaques with three divisions) and metopes (square spaces for either painted or sculpted decoration). The columns are fluted and are of sturdy, if not stocky, proportions.



Iktinos and Kallikrates, The Parthenon, 447 – 432 B.C.E., Athens

The Doric order emerged on the Greek mainland during the course of the late seventh century B.C.E. and remained the predominant order for Greek temple construction through the early fifth century B.C.E., although notable buildings of the Classical period—especially the canonical Parthenon in Athens—still employ it. By 575 B.C.E the order may be properly identified, with some of the earliest surviving elements being the metope plaques from the Temple of Apollo at Thermon. Other early, but fragmentary, examples include the sanctuary of Hera at Argos, votive capitals from the island of Aegina, as well as early Doric capitals that were a part of the Temple of Athena Pronaia at Delphi in central Greece. The Doric order finds perhaps its fullest expression in the Parthenon (c. 447-432 B.C.E.) at Athens designed by Iktinos and Kallikrates.

The Ionic order



Ionic capital, north porch of the Erechtheion, 421-407 B.C.E., marble, Acropolis, Athens

As its names suggests, the Ionic Order originated in Ionia, a coastal region of central Anatolia (today Turkey) where a number of ancient Greek settlements were located. Volutes (scroll-like ornaments) characterize the Ionic capital and a base supports the column, unlike the Doric order. The Ionic order developed in Ionia during the mid-sixth century B.C.E. and had been transmitted to mainland Greece by the fifth century B.C.E. Among the earliest examples of the Ionic capital is the inscribed votive column from Naxos, dating to the end of the seventh century B.C.E.

The monumental temple dedicated to Hera on the island of Samos, built by the architect Rhoikos c. 570-560 B.C.E., was the first of the great Ionic buildings, although it was destroyed by earthquake in short order. The sixth century B.C.E. Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, a wonder of the ancient world, was also an Ionic design. In Athens the Ionic order influences some elements of the Parthenon (447-432 B.C.E.), notably the Ionic frieze that encircles the cella of the temple. Ionic columns are also employed in the interior of the monumental gateway to the Acropolis known as the Propylaia (c. 437-432 B.C.E.). The Ionic was promoted to an exterior order in the construction of the Erechtheion (c. 421-405 B.C.E.) on the Athenian Acropolis (image below).



North porch of the Erechtheion, 421-407 B.C.E., marble, Acropolis, Athens

The Ionic order is notable for its graceful proportions, giving a more slender and elegant profile than the Doric order. The ancient Roman architect Vitruvius compared the Doric module to a sturdy, male body, while the Ionic was possessed of more graceful, feminine proportions. The Ionic order incorporates a running frieze of continuous sculptural relief, as opposed to the Doric frieze composed of triglyphs and metopes.

The Corinthian order



Corinthian capital

The Corinthian order is both the latest and the most elaborate of the Classical orders of architecture. The order was employed in both Greek and Roman architecture, with minor variations, and gave rise, in turn, to the Composite order. As the name suggests, the origins of the order were connected in antiquity with the Greek city-state of Corinth where, according to the architectural writer Vitruvius, the sculptor Callimachus drew a set of acanthus leaves surrounding a votive basket (Vitr. 4.1.9-10). In archaeological terms the earliest known Corinthian capital comes from the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae and dates to c. 427 B.C.E.



Acanthus leaf

The defining element of the Corinthian order is its elaborate, carved capital, which incorporates even more vegetal elements than the Ionic order does. The stylized, carved leaves of an acanthus plant grow around the capital, generally terminating just below the abacus. The Romans favored the Corinthian order, perhaps due to its slender properties. The order is employed in numerous notable Roman architectural monuments, including the Temple of Mars Ultor and the Pantheon in Rome, and the Maison Carrée in Nîmes.

Legacy of the Greek architectural canon

The canonical Greek architectural orders have exerted influence on architects and their imaginations for thousands of years. While Greek architecture played a key role in inspiring the Romans, its legacy also stretches far beyond antiquity. When James "Athenian" Stuart and Nicholas Revett visited Greece during the period from 1748 to 1755 and subsequently published *The Antiquities of Athens and Other Monuments of Greece* (1762) in London, the Neoclassical revolution was underway. Captivated by Stuart and Revett's measured drawings and engravings, Europe suddenly demanded Greek forms. Architects the likes of Robert Adam drove the Neoclassical movement, creating buildings like Kedleston Hall, an English country house in Kedleston, Derbyshire. Neoclassicism even jumped the Atlantic Ocean to North America, spreading the rich heritage of Classical architecture even further—and making the Greek architectural orders not only extremely influential, but eternal.

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4. More on the three classical orders of architecture

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Examples of contemporary use of the classical orders (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation that introduces the classical orders, which are the architectural styles developed by the Greeks and Romans and still used today.

Steven: Architecture is a language. And you know how when you learn a new vocabulary word, you start to notice it, for the first time, everywhere? Well, the same thing happens with architecture. When you learn a new architectural form, you start to see it everywhere.

Beth: And that's especially true of the classical orders. Because these are what are, essentially, the building blocks of Western Architecture. And they've been used for 2,500 years.

Steven: We're basically talking about styles of architecture that the ancient Greeks had developed mostly for their temples. And you're right, that we've continued to use.

Beth: And we've got several contemporary examples up above.

Steven: But what's important to remember is that it's just a fancy dressing, really, of a basic, ancient building system.

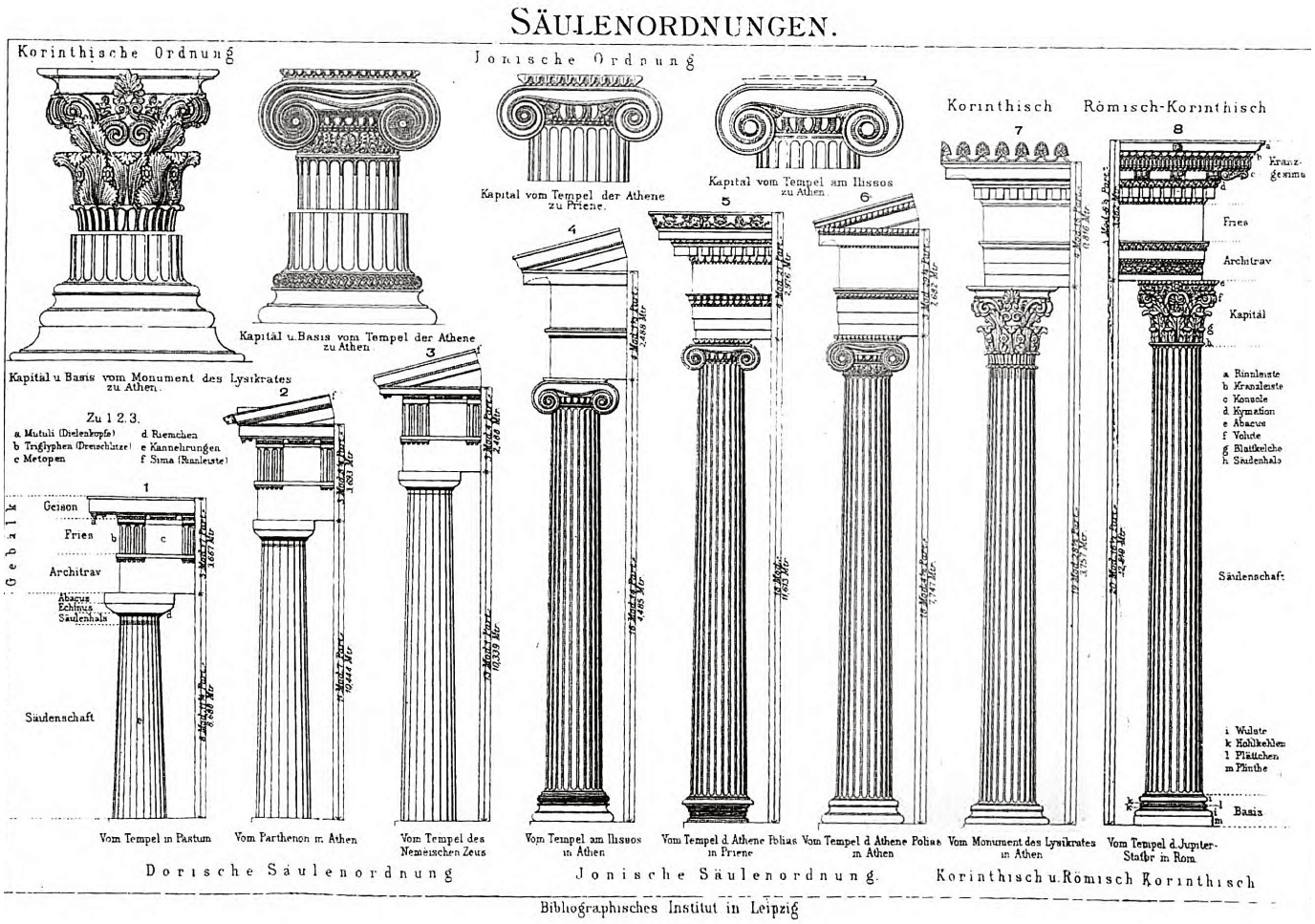
Beth: So we've brought in Stonehenge, to illustrate that ancient, building system called post and lintel architecture. This is the most fundamental, most basic, oldest kind of architectural system. The posts are the vertical elements and they support a horizontal element called a lintel.

Steven: And you know what? We still use this basic system when we nail two-by-fours together. And that's what the Greeks were doing. But they were doing in a much more sophisticated way.

Beth: Right. They developed decorative systems. And that's what we're referring to when we use the term "classical orders." There are three basic orders, the Doric, the Ionic, and the Corinthian. There's a couple extra—the Tuscan and the Composite—but we're not going to go into those today.



Stonehenge, c. 2500–1600 B.C.E., sandstone, Wiltshire, United Kingdom (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



The classical orders (source: Meyers Kleines Konversationslexikon, Fünfte, vol. 1. Leipzig und Wien: Bibliographisches Institut, 1892, p. 194)

Beth: So the Doric and Ionic and Corinthian are illustrated, here, in this diagram. First the Doric, and the Ionic, and then, the last two are Corinthian. These are just slight variations of these three orders.

Steven: And the Doric is really the most simple. The Ionic, a little bit more complicated. And then, the Corinthian, completely out of control.

Beth: So let's start with the oldest order, the Doric order.

Steven: We think that this order began in the seventh century, on the mainland in Greece. And we're looking at an actual Greek temple that happens to be in Italy. But nevertheless, is just a great example of the Doric in the classical era.

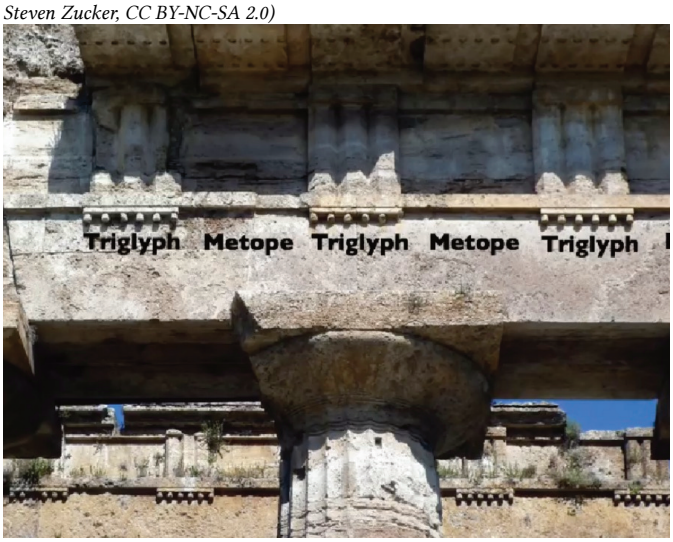
Beth: Let's start at the top, with the pediment. The pediment isn't, officially, part of the order. But since Greek temples had, at one end or the other, a pediment, we just thought we would name that for you. And that's that triangular space at the very top of the temple.

Steven: Right. These are gabled roofs. Sometimes they would be filled with sculpture.

Beth: The next area, below the pediment, is actually, officially part of the order. And that's called the entablature. The top part of the entablature is called the frieze.



Temple of Hera II, c. 460 B.C.E., 24.26 x 59.98 m, Greek, Doric temple from the Classical Period, Paestum, Italy (Latin) previously Poseidonia (Greek) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Temple of Hera II (detail of frieze), c. 460 B.C.E., Paestum, Italy (Latin) previously Poseidonia (Greek) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: OK, so only this part, right here, is known as the frieze. So in other words, that whole section, above the columns.

Beth: Right, and in the Doric order, it is decorated in a very specific way, using triglyphs and metopes.

Steven: Now, actually, if you look at the word triglyph, you'll notice that the prefix is tri. Just like tricycle, it means three. And its suffix, glyph, means mark. So a triglyph, literally, means three marks. And you can see patterns of three marks moving all the way across the frieze.

Beth: And then, in between the triglyphs are spaces that are called metopes. And in ancient Greek architecture, these were often filled with sculpture, like at the Parthenon in Athens.



Iktinos and Kallikrates (sculptural program directed by Phidias), Parthenon (detail of entablature), Acropolis, Athens, 447-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Now the triglyphs we don't think are just arbitrary. We think that they probably came from a time when temples were built out of wood. And these would have been the ends of planks that would have functioned as beams in the temple. And they would have, of course, been supported directly over the columns. You'll notice that every other one, at least, is aligned directly over the columns.

Beth: So as we move down the temple, the next area we come to is the capital.

Steven: And this is a Doric capital. It's very simple. It's got a flare. And then it's got a simple slab on top.



Temple of Hera II (detail of capital), c. 460 B.C.E., Paestum, Italy (Latin) previously Poseidonia (Greek) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So the Doric is the oldest, and most severe, and was associated,

according to the ancient Roman architectural historian, Vitruvius, most masculine form.

Steven: It is broad, it's not tall, and it feels heavy.

Beth: It does. As we continue to move down, we come to the area that we commonly call the column but art historians call the shaft.

Steven: And if you look closely, you can see that it is not entirely plain. There are, actually, vertical lines that move across the entire surface known as flutes. Now, in the Doric, a flute is very shallow. And really, what it is, is it's a kind of scallop that's been carved out the surface.



Temple of Hera II (corner view), c. 460 B.C.E., Paestum, Italy (Latin) previously Poseidonia (Greek) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And what fluting does is, it creates a nice, vertical, decorative pattern along the shaft.

Steven: Now, one of the other defining features of the Doric order is that, at the bottom of the shaft, there is no decorative foot. The shaft of the column goes straight into the floor of the temple.

Beth: And you can see that really well in the detail below, where there is no molding there to make a transition.



Temple of Hera I (detail of column base), c. 560-530 B.C.E., Paestum, Italy (Latin) previously Poseidonia (Greek) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Now let's have a look at what these look like in person.



Capital and drum of a column from the Parthenon, 447-432 B.C.E., width 2.01 m (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Capitals are up high so we would never see a person next to them. But I think it's easy to not realize just how big they. But I snapped this terrific picture of you at the British Museum next to a capital that actually comes from the most famous Doric temple, on the Acropolis in Athens.

Beth: Right, the Parthenon, which we already looked at above. And they really are massive. And this photo is good, also, for seeing—in this case, a reconstruction—but giving you a sense of the entablature with that frieze with triglyphs and metopes. And we've got an example, on the upper right, of a relief sculpture that was for one of the metopes on the Parthenon.

Steven: Right, so a metope like this one below would have actually fit right in one of these squares.



Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, metope with Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs, 447-32 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Let's talk about one last element that we find in Doric architecture. And that's something called entasis.

Steven: Now, this is a little tricky. Because I think most people assume that a column is straight up and down. That is, the sides of a column are parallel with each other, and the base of a column is just as wide as the area directly below the capitol. But in fact, the ancient Greeks didn't build their temples that way.

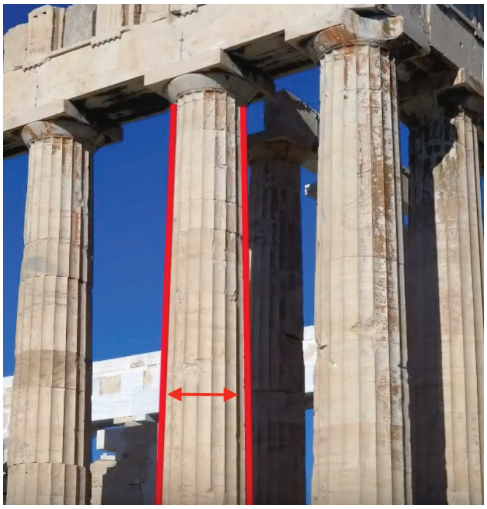


Diagram showing entasis, Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens, 447-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: No. It's fascinating to think about all the ways that the ancient Greeks are thinking about how to make their buildings beautiful, and speak of the realm of the gods. And so, when we look at an ancient Doric temple, we see that the shafts swell a little bit toward the center.

Steven: So right about a third of the way down, they would be at their widest. And it would taper, ever so slightly, towards the bottom, and taper much more so as we move up the top. So that the narrowest point of the column shaft would be right at the top. And the widest part would be about one third of the way from the base.



Temple of Hera II (flank), c. 460 B.C.E., Paestum, Italy (Latin) previously Poseidonia (Greek) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And so, the building has a sense of liveliness that I think it wouldn't have if the column was exactly the same width at the top as at the bottom.

Steven: Architectural historians have debated why the Greeks bothered to do this. Because this was expensive. This was difficult. It meant that every drum that makes up this column has to be an individual, unique piece. These could not be mass-measured and mass-produced.

Beth: So you just used the word drum. So the columns are not, actually, carved from one piece of stone.

Steven: And if you look very carefully at the photograph above, you can just make out the seams between those drums. They would, also, have generally been a hole that would have gone through the center of each of these pieces. So that a piece of wood, sometimes, would actually string them together, almost like beads on a necklace. One of the other things that entasis does is to emphasize the verticality of the temple. Because they get narrower as they go further up, it seems as if the shaft of the column might actually be taller than it really is. Because of course, as things move away from us, they get smaller in scale.

Beth: So the Greeks are thinking about human perception. They're thinking about how we see, not just an abstract idea of math and geometry, but actual human experience, which says something about ancient Greek culture.

Steven: One last detail—the entasis gives the shaft of the column a sense of almost elasticity, that it is bearing the weight of the stone above it.

Beth: It's really fascinating to think about all of these decisions that the Greeks are making as they build. So let's look at the Ionic order, which emerges shortly after the Doric order. Here's another building of the Acropolis, this is the Erechtheion.



East porch, the Erechtheion, 421-405 B.C.E. (Classical Greek), Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: This is such a different aesthetic. There's such a sense of delicacy here. There is not that sense of mass, that sense of the muscularity of the buildings that we associate with the Doric.

Beth: And in fact, Vitruvius the ancient Roman architectural historian, saw this as a more feminine order—it's taller, it's thinner.

Steven: Now, one of the columns from this building in Greece is in the museum in London. We have some good photographs of it.

Beth: And you can see the distinguishing feature really is at the top, at the capital, where we see these scroll-like shapes, also known as volutes. We also see a slightly different type of fluting. And we also, importantly, see a base.



Ionic column capital, North porch of the Erechtheion on the Acropolis, Athens, marble, 421-407 B.C.E., Classical Period (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Ionic Column Base, North porch of the Erechtheion, Acropolis, Athens, marble, 421-407 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Now let's move to the Corinthian order. This looks really different and is the most decorative. And the distinguishing feature here is, again, the capital, where we see leaf-like shapes.



Interior Corinthian Capital, from the Pantheon, Rome, c.125 (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: They also have bases. They tend to be taller than the Doric,

just like the Ionic. But they are highly decorative. There's a great myth about the origin of the Corinthian capital.

Beth: It's a kind of fun story. Of course, we have no idea whether this is true. But the story is that there was a young girl who died. And her possessions were placed in a basket and put on top of her grave. Underneath that basket was a acanthus plant that began to grow. And because the heavy basket with the tile on top was on top, the acanthus leaves grew out the side.



Acanthus leaves (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Well, if we look at a Corinthian column, it really does look like that.

Beth: It looks exactly like that.

Steven: And so, it's a great myth, whether or not it's true. So the Corinthian order is the most complex. It includes both the scroll, that we would expect to see in the Ionic.

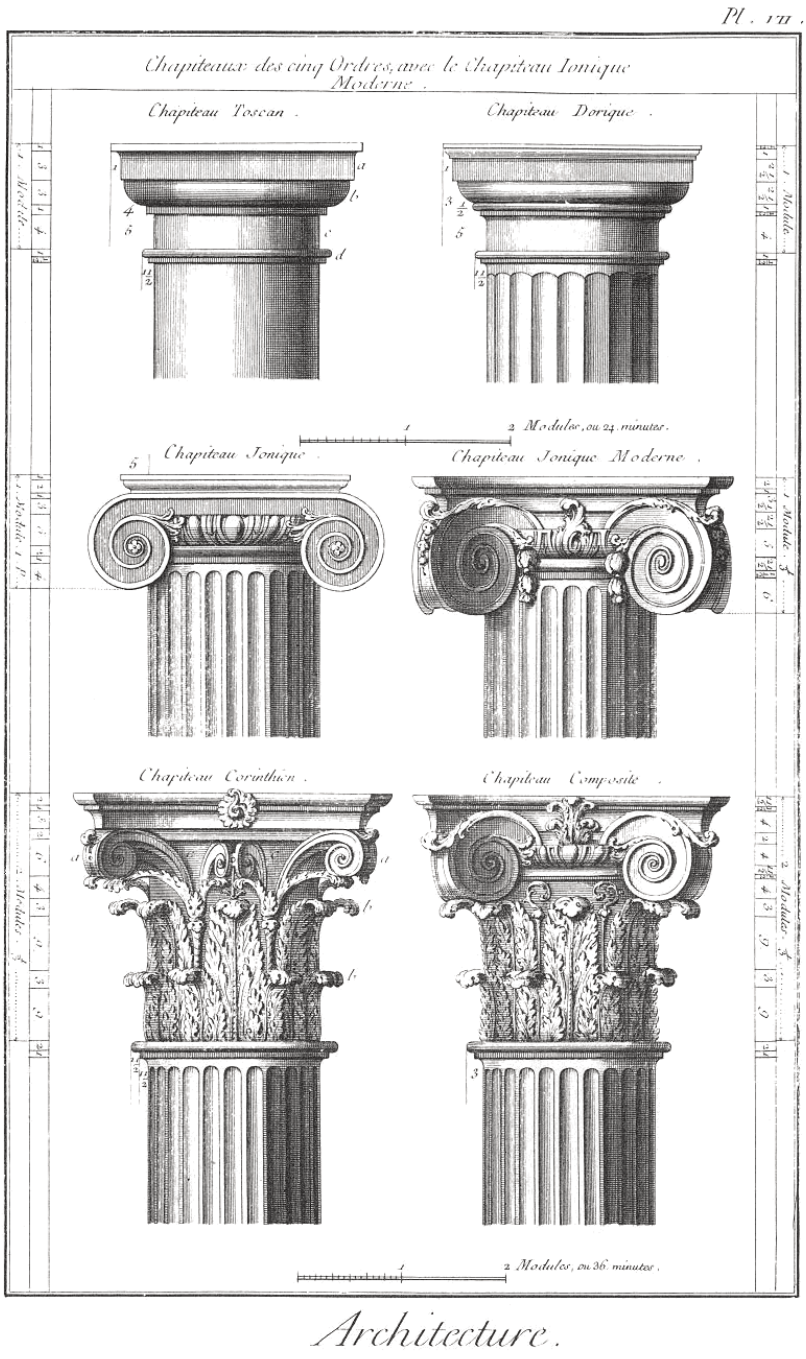
Beth: The volutes.

Steven: Right. But also these very complex leaf-like forms, which you can just make out here, which is actually from the acanthus leaf. And we have a photograph of an acanthus leaf for comparison.

Beth: And these grow wild so it makes sense.

Steven: What's important to remember is that the ancient Greeks, although they developed these three classical orders, were just the genesis. The Romans took these ideas over. And then, subsequently, people who've looked back to the classical tradition have borrowed from them yet again. And we still do this today. And there you have it. The Greek orders.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrRJkzXl4a4>



The classical orders (source: engraving from l'Encyclopédie de Diderot et d'Alembert, 1751-1766, vol. 18, plate 7)

5. The invention of contrapposto

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a discussion concerning the art-historical term "contrapposto." Although the objects treated here may not have been known in the Renaissance, the ideas and form of contrapposto was revived by Italian Renaissance artists.

Steven: Contrapposto—it's a word that gives people problems.

Beth: Because it's Italian, it's not English…

Steven: And it's a word that's just unfamiliar, but it means something very simple. It is the pose that the human body takes when it is relaxed and standing.

Beth: So it's a standing pose. We can say that, first of all, number one, but it's relaxed, and naturalistic.

Steven: And if you think about the way that you stand, you generally, when you're relaxed, put all your weight on one leg. Then when that leg gets tired, you shift your weight to the other leg.

Beth: So, it's a standing pose that's relaxed and naturalistic, and you have your weight on one leg and the other leg is not weight-bearing. Clearly, looking at these two images, one of the figures is standing in contrapposto and the other isn't. I think it's pretty clear, right now, that the figure on the right is the one standing in contrapposto.

Steven: Right. That's the Doryphoros. This is by an artist whose name is Polykleitos. It's ancient Greek-—both figures are ancient Greek—but this figure is from the Early Classical Period. By this time, artists had figured out how to observe the body and represent it naturalistically. Their culture was one that wanted its art to represent the naturalistic body.

Beth: So it's the ancient Greeks who invented this pose in the West. That means, they are the first culture to create in the West naturalistic images of the human figure.

Steven: Before that, the Greeks had produced a series of standing figures like the kouros that we see on the left.

Beth: So this is earlier. This is from the 500s B.C.E., from a period we call the Archaic. This is a figure which is not standing in contrapposto, and we can tell because his weight is equally placed on both feet. One foot is in front of the other, but his weight is equally placed.

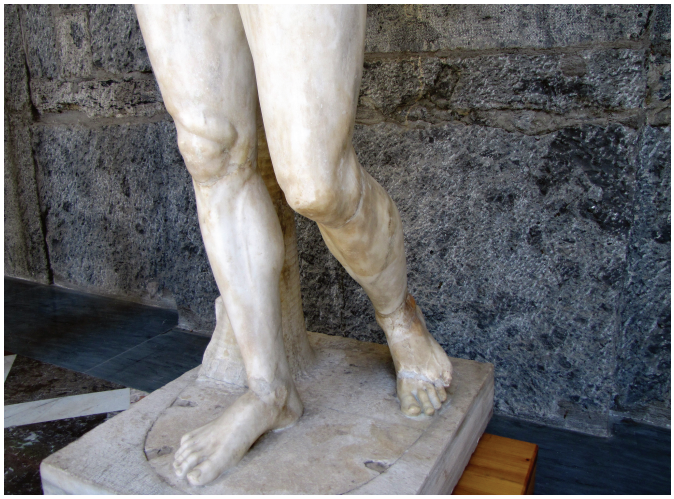


Left: Marble Statue of a Kouros (New York Kouros), c. 590–580 B.C.E., Attic, Archaic Period, Naxian marble, 194.6 x 51.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City); Right: Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Early Classical Period, Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E., 211 cm (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And the knees are locked. Look at that. It looks so wildly uncomfortable, doesn't it?

Beth: He looks like he's in some sort of performance or parade or something.

Steven: He looks frozen, absolutely. Whereas with the figure on the right, the body is so much more complicated. If you look at it, it seems so much more natural, as if he's taking a step forward.



Detail of lower legs, Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E. (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So we can say that the Doryphoros, the later figure, looks like he can move, so he's capable of movement. Whereas the earlier figure, the kouros, looks like he's frozen and he's stiff, and in a way, kind of timeless, right? He seems like he could be here tomorrow in this position, yesterday in this position. There is something that transcends time about this position.

Steven: And that's appropriate because we think this figure was originally a grave marker.

Beth: Right. So, in a way, it transcends time. In a way, the kouros does not exist in our world the way that the so-called Spear Bearer does.

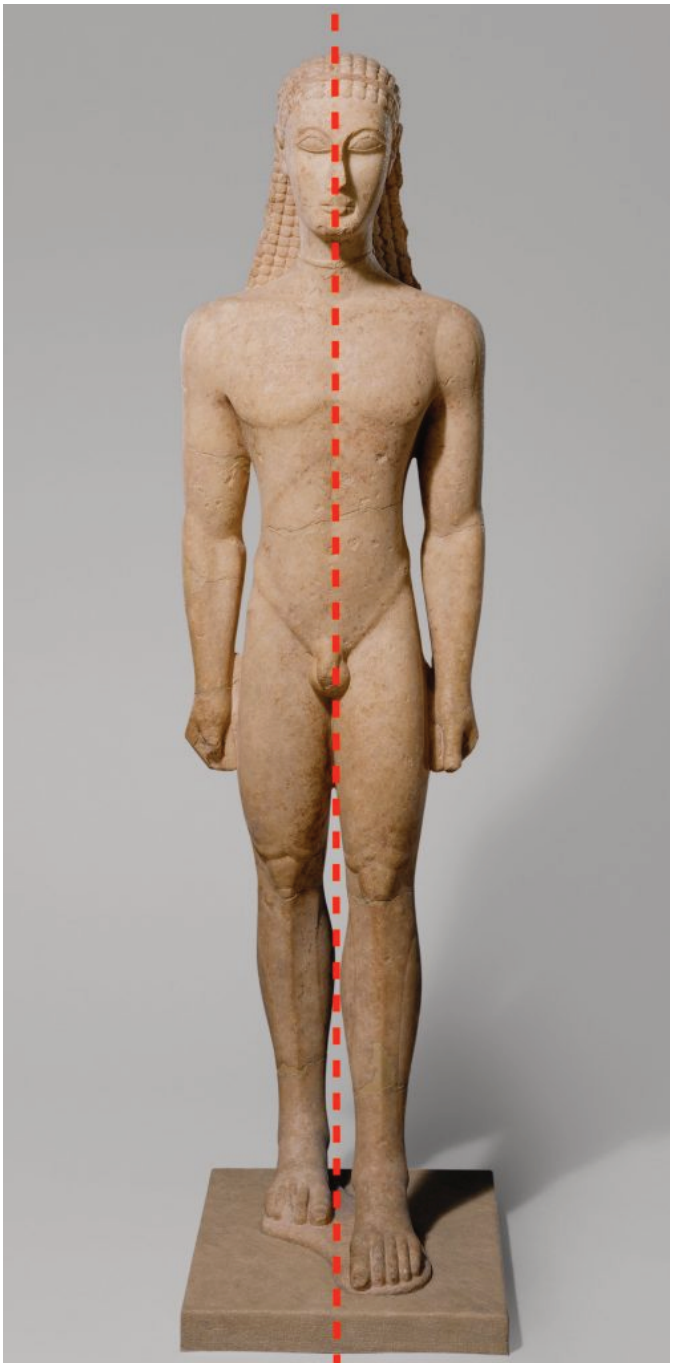
Steven: Let's take a look at the kouros for a moment a little more carefully, and see if we can figure out what actually causes that sense of timelessness. For me, I think, it's the symmetry of the body.

Beth: So let's write down that word, because that's a kind of word that we don't use every single day. Symmetrical means that if you cut something down the middle, one side is the same as the other.

Steven: So a kind of mirror, a left-right mirror.



Detail of locked knees, New York Kouros, ca.580-580 B.C.E. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)



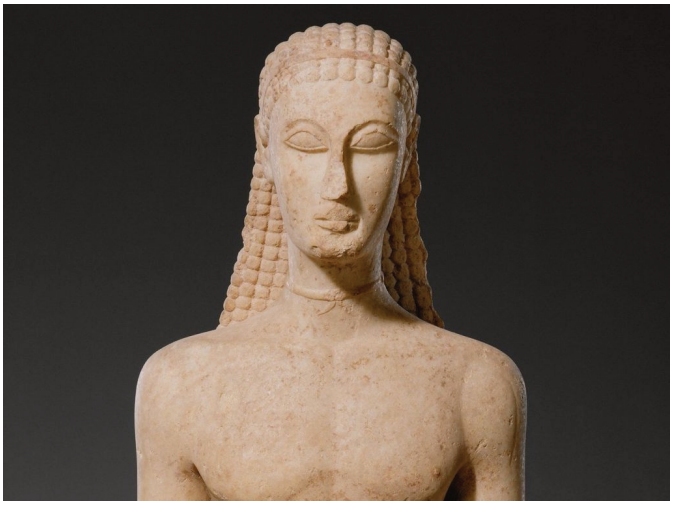
Demonstration of symmetry in New York Kouros, c. 590–580 B.C.E., 194.6 x 51.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Beth: So if we drew a line down the center of his body, one side would essentially be the same as the other, except for that left foot being a little bit forward.

Steven: So it is not a representation of a person in the world, as you said. It is much more this notion of a kind of ideal figure. Now what's interesting is the later figure in our comparison, the Doryphoros, is also an idealization, but a more complicated kind of idealization.

Beth: What do you mean by the kouros being ideal?

Steven: I think that it is the idea of a human as opposed to a representation of a human. Look, for instance, at the eyes.



Detail of upper body and face, New York Kouros, c. 590–580 B.C.E. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Steven: You have these big almond shapes. Now we know they're in the place of the eye so that we know they represent the eye. But they don't look like human eyes.

Beth: So in a way, this is a symbolic representation of a human being and not a real representation.

Steven: When the artist was producing the kouros, I don't think they were looking at a model. They didn't need to because, you're right, they were representing through symbol. But in the case of the Doryphoros, I think that the artist was definitely observing the human body and looking specifically at the forms, at the muscles, at the bone structure of the body.



Detail of face, Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E. (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So we can say that this is a sculpture based on the observation of the human body, and how human bodies look when they move.

Steven: And that's essential. Contrapposto is the result of studying the complex way in which our body aligns when we stand on one leg.

Beth: Can you unpack that a little?



View from the left, Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E., 211 cm (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Sure. Let's take a look again at the Doryphoros, or the Spear-Bearer, by Polykleitos. What you see is a figure that is asymmetrical, as you said, in a sort of wonderfully complex way. Take a look at the ankles for a moment. The left ankle is up, and you can draw an axis line right through the ankles. The axis line of the knees is in opposition to that. The axis line of the hips is parallel to the axis line of the knees. Sometimes, in some representations of contrapposto, the shoulders are in opposition to the hips and the knees, although more slightly. And in this case, we have the figure looking to the right. Now this has some important ramifications for the representation of the body. If you look at the kouros for a moment, the height of the waist on the left is the same as the height of the waist on the right.

Beth: Right.

Steven: If you look at the Doryphoros on the right side, you can see that the weight-bearing leg has a hip that juts up, it pushes upward, and that compresses the side.



View of right flank, Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E., 211 cm (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Mm-hmm, so this side of his body is shorter, and the left side of his body is longer.

Steven: Because his left side is where the free leg is, which allows the hip to sag. So there's a kind of hanging and a kind of expansion—an extension—of the side.

Beth: Yup.

Steven: And so the result is that you actually have a kind of swaying of the vertebrae, and you have, then, a kind of complex alignment that results from this opposition of one side of the body to the other.

Beth: To me, it's fascinating that the Greeks were the first culture in the West to decide to make a human figure who existed like we do in the world. We breathe, we move, we sense what's around us. The figure of the kouros doesn't look as though it's engaging with the world around it at all.

Steven: There is a sense that the Doryphoros is responding to stimuli around him. That is, he's turned his head to look at something. It is as if he is sentient. He is responding to the world.



Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Classical Period, Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E., 211 cm (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: He's thinking.

Steven: Absolutely.

Beth: And I think that the kouros doesn't seem to be thinking in the same way that we do.

Steven: That's right. The kouros is an object of our observation, whereas the Doryphoros seems as if he has taken on a life of his own in some way.

Beth: But there's a kind of sympathy that happens with the Doryphoros, because when we look at him, we look at ourselves. When we look at the kouros, we don't quite see ourselves, or we see a kind of different version, perhaps, of ourselves.

Steven: I think we see a different kind of ideal. I think we see, perhaps, a representation of ourselves in another world.



Marble Statue of a Kouros (New York Kouros), c. 590–580 B.C.E., Attic, Archaic Period, Naxian marble, 194.6 x 51.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So what is it about ancient Greek culture that makes them take this humongous leap? I mean, it's a small thing, a bent knee, and so you would think, "Well, why didn't "anyone come up with that sooner?" In art history we know that artists in cultures make things that are reflections of the values of the culture, so we know that before the 400s there just wasn't the need to make a figure like the Doryphoros. So what happens in the 400s? That's the meat of the art history question.

Steven: Well, if we look at what happens in Greek culture outside of the visual arts, we see an explosion in literature, we see an explosion in philosophy, we see a culture that is self-aware and that is pushing the boundaries of human knowledge.



Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Classical Period, Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E., 211 cm (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Yeah, I think there's a real interest in the Classical Period in expanding human knowledge based on our own observations of the world, a kind of confidence in human ability to understand the world as it exists, not to say this is some unexplained phenomenon that the gods created and all we can do is sort of pray and hope it all works out okay, but a world that human beings have some control over and some innate ability to understand.

Steven: One of the clichés about Greek culture is that the Greek gods and goddesses are a reflection of all the complications of human life.

Beth: And they are! They're just like us.

Steven: And so we really have within this Greek culture the idea of human capability, human achievement, at its center.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=358&v=1iTC9cBk6Ac>



Left: New York Kouros, c. 590–580 B.C.E. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City); Right: Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E. (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

PART II

Pottery



Diagram of Greek pot shapes (British Museum) <http://www.ancientgreece.co.uk/dailylife/explore/pot_shapes.html>

6. Greek Vase-Painting, an introduction

Dr. Renee M. Gondek



Niobid Painter, Niobid Krater, Attic red-figure calyx-krater, c. 460-450 B.C.E., 54 x 56 cm (Musée du Louvre)

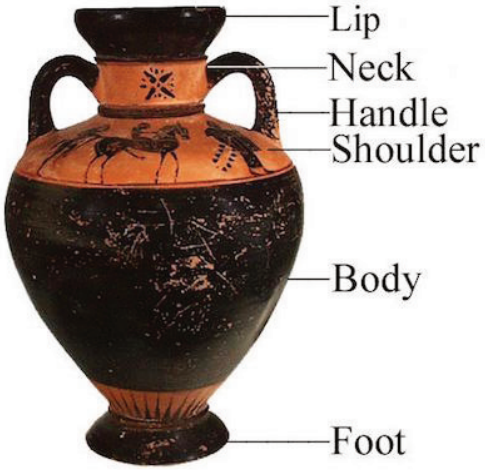
Useful for scholars

Pottery is virtually indestructible. Though it may break into smaller pieces (called sherds), these would have to be manually ground into dust in order to be removed from the archaeological record. As such, there is an abundance of material for study, and this is exceptionally useful for modern scholars. In addition to being an excellent tool for dating, pottery enables researchers to locate ancient sites, reconstruct the nature of a site, and point to evidence of trade between groups of people. Moreover, individual pots and their painted decoration can be studied in detail to answer questions about religion, daily life, and society.

Shapes and Themes

Made of terracotta (fired clay), ancient Greek pots and cups, or "vases" as they are normally called, were fashioned into a variety of shapes and sizes (see above), and very often a vessel's form correlates with

its intended function. For example, the *krater* was used to mix water and wine during a Greek *symposion* (an all-male drinking party). It allows an individual to pour liquids into its wide opening, stir the contents in its deep bowl, and easily access the mixture with a separate ladle or small jug. Or, the vase known as a *hydria* was used for collecting, carrying, and pouring water. It features a bulbous body, a pinched spout, and three handles (two at the sides for holding and one stretched along the back for tilting and pouring).



In order to discuss the different zones of vessels, specialists have adopted terms that relate to the parts of the body. The opening of the pot is called the mouth; the stem is referred to as the neck; the slope from the neck to the body is called the shoulder; and the base is known as the foot).

On the exterior, Greek vases exhibit painted compositions that often reflect the style of a certain period. For example, the vessels created during the Geometric Period (c. 900-700 B.C.E.) feature geometric patterns, as seen on the famous Dipylon amphora (below), while those decorated in the Orientalizing Period (c. 700-600 B.C.E.) display animal processions and Near Eastern motifs, as is visible on this early Corinthian amphora (The British Museum).

Later, during the Archaic and Classical Periods (c. 600-323 B.C.E.), vase-paintings primarily display human and mythological activities. These figural scenes can vary widely, from daily life events (e.g., fetching water at the fountain house) to heroic deeds and Homeric tales (e.g., Theseus and the bull, Odysseus and the Sirens), from the world of the gods (e.g., Zeus abducting Ganymede) to theatrical performances and athletic competitions (for example, the Oresteia, chariot racing). While it is important to stress that such painted scenes should not be thought of as photographs that document reality, they can still aid in reconstructing the lives and beliefs of the ancient Greeks.

Techniques, Painters and Inscriptions

To produce the characteristic red and black colors found on vases, Greek craftsmen used liquid clay as paint (termed "slip") and perfected a complicated three-stage firing process. Not only did the pots have to be stacked in the kiln in a specific manner, but the conditions inside had to be precise. First, the temperature was stoked to about 800° centigrade and vents allowed for an oxidizing environment. At this point, the entire vase turned red in color. Next, by sealing the vents and increasing temperature to around 900-950° centigrade, everything turned black and the areas painted with the slip vitrified (transformed into a glassy substance). Finally, in the last stage, the vents were reopened and oxidizing conditions returned inside the kiln. At this point, the unpainted zones of the vessel became red again while the vitrified slip (the painted areas) retained a glossy black hue. Through the introduction and removal of oxygen in the kiln and, simultaneously, the increase and decrease in temperature, the slip transformed into a glossy black color.

Briefly, ancient Greek vases display several painting techniques, and these are often period specific. During the Geometric and Orientalizing periods (900-600 B.C.E.), painters employed compasses to trace perfect circles and used silhouette and outline methods to delineate shapes and figures (below).



Frieze with mourning figures (detail), Dipylon Amphora, c. 750 B.C.E., ceramic, 160 cm (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NCSA 2.0)

Around 625-600 B.C.E., Athens adopted the black-figure technique (i.e., dark-colored figures on a light background with incised detail). Originating in Corinth almost a century earlier, black-figure uses the silhouette manner in conjunction with added color and incision. Incision involves the removal of slip with a sharp instrument, and perhaps its most masterful application can be found on an amphora by Exekias (below). Often described as Achilles and Ajax playing a game, the seated warriors lean towards the center of the scene and are clothed in garments that feature intricate incised patterning. In addition to displaying more realistically defined figures, black-figure painters took care to differentiate gender with color: women were painted with added white, men remained black.

The red-figure technique was invented in Athens around 525-520 B.C.E. and is the inverse of black-figure (below). Here light-colored figures are set against a dark background. Using added color and a brush to paint in details, red-figure painters watered down or thickened the slip in order to create different effects.

Watered down slip or "dilute glaze" has the appearance of a wash and was used for hair, fur, and anatomy, as exemplified by the sketchy coat of the hare and the youth's musculature on the interior of this cup by Gorgos (below). When thickened, the slip was used to form so-called "relief lines" or lines raised prominently from the surface, and these were often employed to outline forms. Surprisingly similar to red-figure is the white-ground technique.



Dipylon Amphora, c. 750 B.C.E., ceramic, 160 cm (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NCSA 2.0)



Gorgos, Attic Red-figure Kylix (interior), c. 500 B.C.E. (Agora Museum, Athens)

Though visually quite different with its polychrome figures on a white-washed background, white-ground requires the craftsman to paint in the details of forms just like red-figure, rather than incise them (e.g. the kylix pictured here, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art).

Alongside figures and objects, one can sometimes find inscriptions. These identify mythological figures, beautiful men or women contemporaneous with the painter ("kalos" / "kale" inscriptions), and even the painter or potter himself ("egrapsen" / "epoiesen"). Inscriptions, however, are not always helpful. Mimicking the appearance of meaningful text, "nonsense inscriptions" deceive the illiterate viewer by arranging the Greek letters in an incoherent fashion.



Attributed to the Villa Giulia Painter, Attic white ground kylix (drinking cup), c. 470 B.C.E., terra-cotta, red figure, white ground, 6.2 x 16.2 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Exekias (potter and painter), Attic black-figure amphora (detail showing Ajax and Achilles playing a game), c. 540-530 B.C.E., 61.1 cm high, found Vulci (Gregorian Etruscan Museum, Vatican City)

Vases and Reception

The overall attractive quality of Greek vases, their relatively small size, and—at one point in time—their easily obtainable nature, led them to be highly coveted collector's items during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Since the later part of the nineteenth century, however, the study of vases became a scholarly pursuit and their decoration was the obsession of connoisseurs gifted with the ability to recognize and attribute the hands of individual painters.

The most well-known vase connoisseur of the twentieth century, a researcher concerned with attribution, typology, and chronology, was Sir John Davidson Beazley. Interested in Athenian black-, red-figure, and white-ground techniques, Beazley did not favor beautifully painted specimens; he was impartial and studied pieces of varying quality with equal attention. From his tedious and exhaustive examinations, he compiled well-over 1000 painters and groups, and he attributed over 30,000 vases. Although some researchers since Beazley's death continue to attribute and examine the style of specific painters or groups, vase scholars today also question the technical production of vessels, their archaeological contexts, their local and foreign distribution, and their iconography.

Additional resources:

Beazley Archive at the University of Oxford <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/archive/default.htm>

Athenian Vase Painting: Black- and Red-Figure Techniques on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/vase/hd_vase.htm>

Scenes of Everyday Life in Ancient Greece on the The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/evdy/hd_evdy.htm>

7. Dipylon Vase (Amphora)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the galleries of the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

Steven: We're in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens looking at the Dipylon Vase.

Beth: The so-called Dipylon Vase because it was found near what would later become the Dipylon Gate in Athens and a cemetery right near there.

Steven: So this is a gigantic, ceramic pot. It's an amphora. But it would have been used as a grave marker in antiquity and it's big. It's five feet one inch tall.

Beth: Yeah, it's almost as tall as I am. It's unusual in that we see figures. We see a narrative scene and this is something that we see emerging more and more in the late Geometric period. And "geometric" is such an obvious name for the style of this vase.

Steven: Well look at the vase, it's covered from its foot all the way to the lip of its mouth with sharp edge geometric patterns. I see meanders, I see diamonds, I see triangles. This is a pot coming out of that ancient tradition which really avoided empty space.



Dipylon Amphora, c. 755-750 B.C.E., ceramic, 160 cm (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Meanders, Dipylon Amphora, c. 755-750 B.C.E., ceramic (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: We do see black bands around the base where the neck meets the body and at the very lip of the vase. So we do have some black bands designating the separate parts of the vase.

Steven: But the most interesting part is the fact that we have emerging here representations of animals and even of people. As you said we only see that at the end of the geometric period.

Beth: On the neck of the vase we see deer grazing.



Neck with deer, Dipylon Amphora, c. 755-750 B.C.E., ceramic (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Frieze detail, Dipylon Amphora, c. 755-750 B.C.E., ceramic (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Below that we see what are either goats or gazelles perhaps or some people have said deer as well.

Beth: Lying down or seated.

Steven: But notice in both cases with the deer and with the goats, it's really a repeated motif so that it is a continuation of that pattern that is so much a part even of the non-figurative areas of the pot.

Beth: It's true in the bodies of the animals are reduced to geometric shapes, each one is exactly identical to the one before and the one after and they're almost easy to miss as animal figures.

Steven: Because they are so much a part of the pattern of the pot.

Beth: Exactly.

Steven: But in the main phrase at the shoulder of the pot, almost at its widest point.

Beth: Right where the handles meet the body.

Steven: We see a number of mourning figures on either side of the body of a dead woman.

Beth: Now we know it's a woman because she is wearing a skirt and different genders were identified in that way and she's lying on a funeral bier with a shroud held above her.

Steven: You see figures pulling at their hair, this is a symbol of mourning. Some people have even interpreted the little M-shaped patterns falling between the figures as tears.

Beth: Look at how the artist has avoided leaving any space blank. Even between those M-shapes, he's painted little star shapes to fill in the blank spaces.

Steven: Below the dead woman we can see perhaps the family. We see larger figures on their knees and then we see smaller figures, perhaps the children.

Beth: The bodies are upside down triangles. The legs are lozenges. Everything is very reduced and the figures are all rendered as black silhouettes. Now the Greeks had a very specific way of firing pots to get the red ground and the black figures above it.

Steven: So this is not glaze in the modern sense, instead this is slip wear. So slip is fine particles of clay that are suspended in water and then painted on the surface of the pot. Now this was very difficult because when you painted on that slip it was the same color as the dry clay before it was fired. But then it was the next step that was important.

Beth: It was fired in a kiln at about 900 degrees.

Steven: That's Celsius.

Beth: It was fired in a wake where oxygen was withdrawn from the kiln. This causes the entire pot to turn black.

Steven: The kiln was then allowed to cool somewhat and then oxygen was allowed back into the kiln and then what happens is, the parts of the vase that are not painted return to their warm, red color and only the parts that were painted remain black. And so you can imagine how difficult this was to control in the ancient world before thermometers.

Beth: It really is an amazing testament to the skill of Greek potters.

Steven: Well the person who actually fashioned this pot produced it on a wheel but had to produce it in sections and then fit these sections together seamlessly.

Beth: This is a great example of late Geometric Greek pottery.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uwpdiq9mYME>



Dipylon Amphora, c. 755-750 B.C.E., ceramic, 160 cm (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

8. Krater from the Dipylon cemetery in Athens

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



Terracotta Krater, attributed to the Hirschfeld Workshop, Geometric, c. 750-735 B.C.E., Ancient Greece, terracotta, 108.3 x 72.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Steven: We're in the Metropolitan Museum of Art looking at a gigantic clay pot.

Beth: This is from Ancient Greece.

Steven: Long before the classical period. The shape of this vase makes it a crater and it was found at the Dipylon cemetery in Athens.

Beth: Normally when we think about ancient Greek vases, we think about containers for wine or liquids but this ceramic pot had a very different purpose. This was made to mark a grave site.

Steven: We often think of headstones to mark a grave site but the Greeks used ceramic vessels. Somebody was buried underneath it.

Beth: And in fact the bottom of this vase is open and it's possible that liquid was poured in the top as an offering for the deceased. Or it's possible it was just used to drain off rain water.

Steven: But what makes this vase so important, so extraordinary, is its decoration.

Beth: It is covered, every inch of this, with decoration and that decoration is divided in two bands or registers.

Steven: This particular vase comes from an early period in Greek history and the style that is associated with is geometric because the surface is covered with geometric motifs. You see diamonds and triangles and circles and meanders.

Beth: We also see broad areas of black paint and striped areas that form the base.

Steven: And this particular pot has pictorial bands which we call friezes and in them, and this is a little bit unusual for the geometric period, we see human figures and we see animals, and the pictures remind us that this is funerary.

Beth: The large central scene along the top register shows us a figure on a bier, a dead figure, who's being mourned and the figures on either side of him, the female figures, have raised their arms in a gesture of grief.

Steven: And some art historians have interpreted the decorative lines on either side of the figures as a reference to tears.



Detail, Terracotta Krater, attributed to the Hirschfeld Workshop, Geometric, c. 750-735 B.C.E., Ancient Greece, terracotta (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Beth: And it's also possible that that checkerboard pattern that's above the deceased figure represents his funerary shroud but lifted so that we can see the body.

Steven: I love how the human forms are nearly as abstract as the geometric motifs that fill the rest of the vase. The torsos are nearly perfect triangles, the heads which are shown in profile are basically circles with eyes in the center.

Beth: And the legs are lozenge shapes as are the legs of the table that the deceased figure is on or the legs of the chair. When you walk up to this, you might not even notice at first that you were looking at a narrative scene, that you were looking at human figures.

Steven: The band below shows a procession and it's military in nature. We see chariots, we see horsemen, we see soldiers with shields and spears and swords. In fact the bodies are reduced to the form of ancient Greek shields.

Beth: And the horses were given three horses at a time and appropriately there are six legs in the front and six legs in the back, but there's no sense at all of the space the three horses would occupy.

Steven: Everything on the surface of this vase feels flat. There is no pictorial depth, there is no interest in illusion in that sense.

Beth: Not at all. And yet in the scene of a funeral, with perhaps his wife and child beside him and mourners around him, we still get a really palpable sense of sadness, of death here.

Steven: The pot was decorated with a material that is called slip–very fine particles of clay that are suspended in a liquid and then painted on to the surface. The Greeks at this point didn't use kilns that were hot enough to create the glassy surface that we take for granted in modern ceramics–that we call glaze–and this kind of ceramic is known as slipware.



Detail, Terracotta Krater, attributed to the Hirschfeld Workshop, Geometric, c. 750-735 B.C.E., Ancient Greece, terracotta (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Beth: And this would have been turned on a wheel…

Steven: …probably in sections and then constructed from those sections. Producing a pot this size and of this quality is a major undertaking. This is clearly representing the wealth and the power of the family for whom it was made.

Beth: So from far away in the cemetery your eyes might be drawn to this pot and therefore to the man that this pot commemorates.

Watch the video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9TAY70EEQk>



Terracotta Krater, attributed to the Hirschfeld Workshop, Geometric, c. 750-735 B.C.E., Ancient Greece, terracotta, 108.3 x 72.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

9. Amphora from the sanctuary at Eleusis

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Eleusis Amphora (Proto-Attic neck amphora), 675-650 B.C.E., terracotta, 142.3 cm high (Eleusis Archeological Museum, Greece) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Eleusis Archeological Museum, Greece.

Steven: We're in the sanctuary at Eleusis and we're looking at a gigantic pot that was actually found with the body of a 10-year-old boy in it.

Beth: This is a really unusual amphora. We're coming right off the geometric period when vases were mostly decorated with repeated geometric patterns and bands, but here we have large figures and the telling of two fabulous stories.

Steven: These are actually the largest figures ever found on a Greek pot. The frieze on the neck of the vase, tells the story of Odysseus and Polyphemus, the one-eyed cyclops, and down at the bottom, is the story of Perseus and Medusa. The style is before the Attic black figure was regularized. Now, that was a style that developed in the later Archaic period when you had dark silhouettes of figures against the light natural ground of the clay pot, but here you see a lot of experimentation.



Odysseus/Ulysses and men, Eleusis Amphora (detail), 675-650 B.C.E., terracotta, 142.3 cm high (Eleusis Archeological Museum, Greece) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: We have figures in that black silhouette, but we also have figures in outline, so we haven't quite settled into the typical black figure technique that we come to know. Now, both of the myths that we see here have to do with sight. With the top, we see a story that we know from Homer, of Ulysses…

Steven: …otherwise known as Odysseus.

Beth: He's on his way home from the Trojan War–he's come to an island occupied by giants with one eye, called the Cyclops.

Steven: And he brings his men into a cave, which he finds really well-provisioned.

Beth: But it turns out that the cave is occupied by a cyclops named Polyphemus.

Steven: So Polyphemus comes back to the cave and rolls a huge boulder to close the door, only then does he notice that he has guests.

Beth: And proceeds to eat several of Ulysses' men for dinner, and then several more the next morning for breakfast.

Steven: And Odysseus offers the giant some of his wine and the giant gets drunk. Now, what Odysseus has done in the meantime is to take his staff and to sharpen it and he heats it in the fire, and he plunges that staff into the eye of the giant when he sleeps, and that's the moment that we see here. We can see Ulysses, who is in outline.



Polyphemus, Eleusis Amphora (detail), 675-650 B.C.E., terracotta, 142.3 cm high (Eleusis Archeological Museum, Greece) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: When Polyphemus next goes to roll the boulder away from the mouth of the cave and let his sheep out, Odysseus and his men have strapped themselves to the underside of the sheep.

Steven: Now, of course, Polyphemus doesn't want to let these men out of the cave, so he feels with his hands, now blinded, each of the animals as it exits, but he feels their backs, not their stomachs where the men clinged.

Beth: And so Ulysses and his men make it out of Polyphemus' cave, and we have another great story on the body of the vase.

Steven: On the extreme left side, we see the now headless body of the Gorgon Medusa.



Headless body of Medusa, Eleusis Amphora (detail), 675-650 B.C.E., terracotta, 142.3 cm high (Eleusis Archeological Museum, Greece) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: She's been beheaded by the hero Perseus. Now, the Gorgons are these mythical monsters, so ugly that just the sight of them kills.

Steven: And this is the result of a task that he's been given by a king, and Perseus knows he doesn't stand a chance, but lucky for him, both the god Hermes and the goddess Athena take pity on him. The problem is that if he looks at her, he will turn into stone, and so what he does is, with Athena's assistance, he looks into the reflection of his shield and cuts off her head in that way. Now, what the pot is showing us, is the now-headless body of Medusa. Next, we see her sisters and they are chasing Perseus, but before we get to the figure of Perseus, we can just make out a little bit of the arm and face of Athena.

Beth: Who's protecting Perseus.

Steven: And then we see the remains of Perseus on this vase, we only see the black legs running. Stylistically, it's really interesting. We don't ever see the entire story. When we're looking, for instance, at Perseus, we can't see Medusa on the far side of the vase. But probably the most interesting and the most unique aspect of this painted vase is the way in which the surviving Gorgon sisters are portrayed.



Gorgon sister (either Stheno or Euryale), Eleusis Amphora (detail), 675-650 B.C.E., terracotta, 142.3 cm high (Eleusis Archeological Museum, Greece) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: They're horrifying. They have snakes for hair; snakes emerging from their shoulders; teeth like spikes; giant, staring eyes; and deformed faces.

Steven: And more than that, they're looking at us and we're in danger of turning into stone as spectators.

Beth: Now, anyone in the seventh century—when this pot was made—would have known these stories.

Steven: We can see one leg forward, showing that they're running. They might be running over the sky or running over the ocean, you have a continuous curvilinear band, in fact, there's curvilinear forms over this vase, as a whole.

Beth: Which differs from the angular geometric forms that we've seen in the geometric period.



Gorgon, Eleusis Amphora (detail), 675-650 B.C.E., terracotta, 142.3 cm high (Eleusis Archeological Museum, Greece) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: The heads look almost as if they're doubled cauldrons, that is bronze cauldrons that have been, like a clamshell, laid one atop the other.

Beth: And cauldrons were used as gifts, as votive offerings to the gods, and they were found frequently in temples, so there's an association here of the cauldron with the idea of seeing the divine, of being awed by the sight of a god.

Steven: Well, that issue of sight links the scene below with the myth on the neck of the vase. In the case of Polyphemus, we have that giant being blinded. Down below, we have the idea that sight can have an evil power that can turn you into stone, and so sight and blinding are critical here in both stories, and so one can only hypothesize what the original intent of this vase was.

Beth: We see the repetition of some design elements that the painter has used in between the animal forms, in between the figures, and even painted on the body of one of Ulysses' men, so even as we move from a strict geometric style to one that's more figurative, the artist is still using even the form of the body as a surface on which to paint a geometric pattern.

Steven: We will see that interest in removing any real blank space. I mean, that had been so much more dominant during the geometric period, and here you have the allowance of some space between the figures, but whoever the artist is has carefully placed some orientalizing motifs within those spaces. Now, that orientalizing is the style that comes after the geometric that is influenced by art from the East. Now, this pot would have been made on a wheel, and you can actually see the marks of the tools that would have been used to shape it.

Beth: We should imagine, though, this vase much more brightly colored. What we see now that looks like a pale brown was likely a deeper red, and so, the Gorgons would have been much more frightening, I think, than we see them today.

Steven: Nevertheless, it's really remarkable how much of this vase has survived.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WU1AGu_C6bQ>



Animals and geometric pattern, Eleusis Amphora (detail), 675-650 B.C.E., terracotta, 142.3 cm high (Eleusis Archeological Museum, Greece) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

10. Exekias, Attic black figure amphora with Ajax and Achilles playing a game

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Exekias (potter and painter), Attic black figure amphora with Ajax and Achilles playing a game, c. 540-530 B.C.E., 61.1 cm high, found Vulci (Gregorian Etruscan Museum, Vatican City) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted at the Etruscan Museum, Vatican, Rome.

Steven: We're in the Etruscan Museum in the Vatican Museums in Rome and we're looking at my favorite pot in the entire world.

Beth: I can see why it's your favorite pot. It seems to almost glow.

Steven: The thing that makes it so fabulous is we have these two heroes and we have a very simple image, but it's giving us so much information.

Beth: The heroes are Achilles on the left and Ajax on the right, two of the great Greek heroes featured in Homer's Iliad and Exekias, the potter, who signed only two pots as the potter and the painter, has identified these two figures by including their names above them, but he's also telling us what's happening between the two: Achilles on the left is saying the word "four."



Exekias, Attic black figure amphora, detail with game, c. 540-530 B.C.E., 61.1 cm high, found Vulci (Gregorian Etruscan Museum, Vatican City) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: You can see "tesara."

Beth: And on the right, we see Ajax, saying "three."

Steven: "Tri."

Beth: We know immediately that Achilles is winning the game that they're playing.

Steven: But this is, of course, a metaphor for the way that this myth will unfold.

Beth: On either side we see their shields. Achilles still has his helmet on, although Ajax has taken his off. So: a moment of relaxation between battles.

Steven: They're on the battlefield of Troy, but Exekias has given us even more information than this, not simply the rolls of the dice, but in a larger sense, their fate. Look at the way, for example, that while both figures are hunched over and clearly focused on the game at hand–and remember, these two men are really close friends, so there's an intimacy here, brotherhood—nevertheless, Achilles, who has the higher roll, is holding his spears loosely. You can see the way the points are actually separating. At the bottom, you can see from the lines, they're not as parallel. But look at the figure on the right, Ajax, whose spears are held in a more parallel way, so that we know that he's actually clenching with his fist, he's tense.



Exekias, Attic black figure amphora, detail with Ajax, c. 540-530 B.C.E., 61.1 cm high, found Vulci (Gregorian Etruscan Museum, Vatican City) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: I even sense a little bit of that tension in his brow.

Steven: That's right. If you look at the brow really closely, you can see that Achilles has a single incised line to represent his eyebrow, but Ajax has a double line and it is a subtle clue that perhaps there's a little bit of tension there. One other detail that can be easily seen, although it's really subtle: look at the feet of both figures. Achilles, again, is relaxed. His heel is on the ground line, but Ajax, his heel is picked up ever so slightly, so you can see just a little bit of light underneath it, which means his calf is engaged, those muscles are tense, his body is tense.

Beth: He's also a little bit more hunched over. His head is a little bit lower than that of his friend Achilles. That does seem to mean something wider than just this board game.



Exekias, Attic black figure amphora, detail with Achilles, c. 540-530 B.C.E., 61.1 cm high, found Vulci (Gregorian Etruscan Museum, Vatican City) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Anybody who was looking at this pot in the ancient world would have known the story of Ajax and Achilles that Homer tells, as you said, in the Iliad. Achilles is a great hero. In fact, as a child, his mother dipped him in the river Styx, which had the magical quality of making him invincible. It's just that she held him by his heel, so his heel was not protected and ultimately, he would be killed by an arrow that hits him there.

Beth: Hence the term that we use often of someone's Achilles heel, that is, their vulnerable spot.

Steven: Nevertheless, Achilles will die a great hero. Ajax will have a more complicated fate. He will outlive Achilles, and he will carry his great friend off the battlefield, but ultimately, he'll be in a battle for Achilles' armor.

Beth: Achilles had very special armor, which had been made by the god Hephaestus, the god of the forge.

Steven: Two people would want that armor, and they would both give speeches to convince judges as to who should get the armor, but Ajax, although he was much closer to Achilles, would lose the contest, have a bad moment where he slayed a bunch of Greeks, and ultimately, would kill himself on his own sword. Humiliation at the end of his life.

Beth: It's really interesting to think about this as an ancient Greek viewer who knows that whole story and what will unfold for both of these heroes, but the story is one thing and the way that Exekias, the potter, has represented this moment and these two figures with so much nobility, with such fine detail in the shape of a vase, which is so elegant, is something else.



Exekias, Attic black figure amphora, detail with Ajax's shield, c. 540-530 B.C.E., 61.1 cm high, found Vulci (Gregorian Etruscan Museum, Vatican City) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Exekias really was the great master of Attic black-figure vase painting. These are black figures, they are silhouettes. If you look closely, the decorative forms is mostly incised with a needle.

Beth: And the black surface is like paint, but it's not quite paint.

Steven: This is slipware. Now, the Greeks didn't have the technology to get kiln ovens hot enough to vitrify, that is to create true glazes, the way ceramics do now. What they would do instead is they would take very fine particles of clay, suspend them in water, and use those as a kind of paint. Depending on the amount of oxygen that they allowed into a kiln, they could turn it black or red. They would paint the surface with this slip and then they would burnish it. That is, they would take a very smooth surface, imagine the back of a spoon, and they would rub it back and forth so you get this surface that is really glossy and it almost looks like glaze.



Exekias, Attic black figure amphora, handle motif, c. 540-530 B.C.E., 61.1 cm high, found Vulci (Gregorian Etruscan Museum, Vatican City) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: When I look closely at the decorative borders on the handles or the decorative border just above the frieze of figures, I can see beautiful detail and the almost three-dimensional form of the slip is almost raised in areas, so it catches the light.

Steven: The Greeks did often use a syringe to paint the finest lines onto

the surface, so one could imagine almost decorating a cake. You have a kind of syringe and you have the icing and it leaves a kind of bead that is raised against the surface and at a much finer level, that's what we're seeing here.

Beth: So Exekias is a master. His pots stand out in so many ways in their shape, in the painting, in the detail, in the drama that he was able to convey.

Steven: Certainly the Etruscans thought that was the case, because they must have spent a good deal of money importing this pot from Greece, across the Mediterranean, all the way to the Italian peninsula where they lived. So many of the great pots from ancient Greece are actually buried in Etruscan tombs. They were imported. The Greeks did a tremendous business exporting such pots, but Exekias was one of the great masters.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2fdtepbkz8>



Exekias, Attic black figure amphora, other side, c. 540-530 B.C.E., 61.1 cm high, found Vulci (Gregorian Etruscan Museum, Vatican City) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

11. Exekias, Dionysos Kylix

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in Munich at the Antikensammlungen.



Exekias, Dionysos Kylix, c. 530 B.C.E. (Antikensammlungen, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: We're in the Antique Collection in Munich, and we're looking at a small drinking cup by an artist whose name is Exekias from ancient Greece.

Beth: It's funny that you called it a small drinking cup because I imagine if you drank all the wine that you could put into this bowl, you would be quite drunk.

Steven: It's true. Actually, in terms of our wine glasses now, it's pretty big. The shape is a kylix. You'll notice that it's quite shallow. It's got a little bit of a base, a little bit of a pedestal, and it's got two handles that you're meant to hook your thumb around.

Beth: It seems to me as you drank down your wine, the decoration at the bottom of the bowl would be revealed.

Steven: Well, that's right. It's a little bit unusual, but the bowl itself is a canvas for this cup, and we have this marvelous scene that shows an ancient Greek boat occupied by the god Dionysus, the god of wine. When you just look at it, you can see a few unusual things. First of all, you've got all of these playful dolphins that seem to be swimming around the boat. We can imagine the fields that would be the water and the sky. It's all red. There's no differentiation, but I've always liked to think that the dolphins on either side of the boat are jumping out of the water.



Detail with dolphin, Exekias, Dionysos Kylix, c. 530 B.C.E. (Antikensammlungen, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: There's a sense of joyousness, and this is a cup by the great Greek vase painter, Exekias. We have about thirty-five vases from this artist, so this is a really special object.

Steven: He both painted and potted, and he often signed his work, and that's the case here. If you look closely, you can see another unusual element, which is that there's a grapevine that's growing right beside the mast. There's all these wonderful bunches of grapes and grape leaves that almost function as a kind of arbor over the boat.

Beth: And the story was that Dionysus was fleeing pirates, and in order to hide from them, he made a grapevine grow from the boat itself.



Exekias, Dionysos Kylix, c. 530 B.C.E. (Antikensammlungen, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And turned the pirates into the dolphins.

Beth: That's right. I see how Exekias is trying to fill that circular space of the kylix by making the vines grow out horizontally, with the dolphins jumping all around, so he's using that whole space. It's not an easy space for an artist to fill.

Steven: No, that's right. And actually, there's a gentle curve to almost every element in this composition that seems to be responding to the curvature of the cup itself. There's the arc of the vine, there's the elegant and beautiful arc that's created by the wind-filled sail—you can just see it billowing, pushing the boat forward. And of course, the arcs of the dolphins, and of the hull of the ship…

Beth: And then those circular forms of the grapes that mirror the circular shape of the bowl.

Steven: I love Dionysus. He's lying back as if he's at a dinner party. Perhaps he's speaking, but there's a wonderful sense of relaxation.

Beth: And I like the stars on the cloak that he wears and the leaf shapes on the crown.

Steven: This is Attic black-figure painting. It's a style of painting from the Archaic period. The artist would paint with slipware and then would scratch into it with a kind of needle to incise the lines and create those very delicate patterns that we can see in the woodwork of the ship, for example.



Detail with grapevine, Exekias, Dionysos Kylix, c. 530 B.C.E. (Antikensammlungen, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Or in the grapes above Dionysus.

Steven: You can see in the ship, there's quite a bit of ornamentation. Not only does the prow of the ship have a face carved into it, but you can see a sort of swan's head by its stern. Really, my favorite part—you had mentioned before—is that if your thumb were hooked over the upper handle and this was filled with red wine, it would

obscure the boat until you raised it and began to drink. At one point, at least, the boat would seem as if it were floating on a sea of red wine.

Beth: And you might feel as relaxed as Dionysus.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTF5ZY6aitg>



Detail, Exekias, Dionysos Kylix, c. 530 B.C.E. (Antikensammlungen, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

12. Euphronios, Sarpedon Krater

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Erin Thompson

This is the transcript of a conversation that tells the story of the Sarpedon Krater, which was looted from a tomb, trafficked out of Italy, bought by the Met, and finally returned. It comes from the ARCHES: At Risk Cultural Heritage Education Series.



The Metropolitan Museum of Art (photo: Wally Gobetz, CC BY-NC-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/n/nPqsu>

Steven: When I was in high school one of my favorite objects to visit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was a Greek vase by an artist whose name is Euphronios.

Erin: This vase is decorated by Euphronios with the scene from the Trojan war. Sarpedon, a son of Zeus, has died in the battle field and one thing that the Greeks were afraid of if they died on the battle field it was that their bodies would be neglected. So Zeus has sent two messengers the winged deities Sleep and Death to take Sarpedon on back home.

Steven: They're lifting him up so that his torso is exposed to us so that we can see the beautiful delicate work in that abdomen.

Erin: And the Greeks thought that actually the best time to die was when you were young and beautiful. You'd never have to know the indignities of growing old.

Steven: And the painters expressed that not only for the beauty of the human body—the definition of the musculature—but also in a particularly signal Greek way, representing the face as serene even in the face of death and in perfect profile.

Erin: And you can tell Euphronios must have been very proud of this face because he signed it right across the top on one side of the head of Hermes the messenger god, who is guiding Sarpedon's soul: "Euphronios painted me."

Steven: Like the pot is speaking.

Erin: And the viewers of this pot would have read these texts out loud. There is no such thing as reading silently in the ancient world. So you can imagine them drinking wine, talking about Hypnose and Thanatose and Euphronios.



Euphronios, Sarpedon Krater, (signed by Euxitheos as potter and Euphronios as painter), c. 515 B.C.E., red-figure terracotta, 55.1 cm diameter (National Museum Cerite, Cerveteri, Italy) (photo: Trafficking Culture) <http://traffickingculture.org/data/tracking-illicit-antiquities/>



The Euphronios Krater at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (photo: Jaime Ardiles-Arce, public domain) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euphronios_Krater#/media/File:Euphronios_krater_side_A_MET_L.2006.10.jpg>

Steven: This pot is in exceptionally good condition and that's especially clear in the decorative banding that surrounds the major frieze where we see the figures. There are these beautiful palmettes where the drawing remains wonderfully sharp.

Erin: Which is even more incredible when you consider that Euphronios would have painted this very quickly, before the pot dried too much.

Steven: And we can see the individual lines would have been laid down with a syringe to make a bead of color, and we're seeing it in a state that is not very different from the way it would have been seen when it was first made about 2500 years ago. Which is why this pot was so soought after when it came on into the market.

Erin: In 1972 the Metropolitan museum of Art paid a million dollars for this vase.

Steven: The director of the Metropolitan said that this vase was so important it would rewrite art history.

Erin: He thought the drawing was the quality of a Picasso, of a Leonardo de Vinci.

Steven: It is a stellar example of Attic red-figure vase painting, a style that we believe this artist introduced, and that allowed for the detailed representation of the human body that was so important to the Greeks as they moved towards the classical period.

Erin: And the reason it's so well preserved is that it spent those 2500 years in a tomb in the Italian town of Cerveteri. It was purchased by the ancient Etruscans and buried.

Steven: So the pot was made near Athens and was exported, bought by an Etruscan–that is the culture that existed just before Rome–and was buried in a tomb. The Etruscans are known for their elaborate burials.



Tombs in the Necropolis of Banditaccia, Cerveteri (photo: Mikael Kornhonen, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/pDZ845>

Erin: Which preserve things like this for us, but which provide a very tempting target for tomb robbers who try and find things in Etruscan tombs to sell on the art market. And that's exactly what happened in the early 1970s.

Steven: When a thief identifies a tomb and begins to dig, they're looking for the most valuable treasures, which means that they're willing to destroy everything else that they find along the way. Tomb robbery does irreparable harm not only to objects but to archeological evidence.

Erin: For example, we don't know whether the owner of the tomb ever used this vase or not. Because by the time it got to Metropolitan Museum, it had been cleaned and put back together. If archeologists excavate the tomb, they can see the residues on the inside of pottery to see whether they held a last funerary meal.

Steven: And that knowledge is lost permanently; it will never be recovered. This incredibly important vase could have been even more valuable.

Erin: By analyzing residues in pottery found in tombs we can do things like track ecological conditions, see what climate change has been like from 2500 years ago to the present.

Steven: So how did the pot make its way from a previously unknown tomb to the Greek and Roman galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and then back to Italy where it is now?

Erin: It all started with a car crash. Police when investigating found that the glove box was stuffed full of photographs of dirty broken antiquities, and after doing a lot of investigating, they eventually found [the car's owner] was part of a smuggling ring that was headed by a figure named Giacomo Medici who had a warehouse in Switzerland filled full of antiquities and filled full of records: records of this vase being sold to a dealer who sold it the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Polaroids of antiquities trafficked by Giacomo Medici <http://traffickingculture.org/data/tracking-illicit-antiquities>

Steven: This vase actually changed more than art history. It changed the way that we understand these elaborate networks of illicit trade.

Erin: Prior to the purchase of this vase there've been plenty of looted antiquities bought by American museums, but nobody really cared. The museums knew that they're probably looted but this vase caused so much publicity. It was so beautiful people wanted to know more about it. And then they were horrified at the thought that this ancient culture was being destroyed in order to produce a few master works like this in American museums.

Steven: The Metropolitan Museum should have known better. But they were offered a cover story that offered just enough plausible deniability that it allowed the museum to turn a blind eye–which was, at this historical moment, not so uncommon.

Erin: True, the story they got was that this vase had been owned by a Lebanese art collector and that his grandfather had bought it in London in the early 1910s. But they really should have asked more questions.

Steven: So the vase ended up at the Met on a lovely pedestal in the middle of the Greek galleries, and the Met was rightfully very proud of it. But our awareness of the damage that is done by grave robbing develops in the next couple of decades and this vase becomes increasingly problematic.

Erin: And once the Italians raided that warehouse in Switzerland there is no longer any deniability for the Met. One of the things that the Italian authorities found in this warehouse was a polaroid of Medici proudly posing next to the Sarpedon vase in the Metropolitan Museum. Interestingly, the way that international law works there was no legal right for the Italians to reclaim this vase. But the public relations aspect of it was so bad that the Met in 2006 did return it to Italy.

Steven: When the vase was repatriated—that is, when it was returned to Italy—it went into the Etruscan museum in Rome with a lot of pomp and ceremony. This was a great achievement by the Italian law enforcement agencies.

Erin: It was ultimately returned to Cerveteri, the town where it was dug up from illegally so many years ago. So now instead of millions of people seeing it, thousands of people do.

Steven: What is our responsibility now in the modern world? Where should objects reside?

Erin: And another thing that changes that question is the issue of the technological reproductions that we can make.

Steven: And so maybe, our technologies do change the equation.

Erin: Of course looking at a reproduction is never going to be as good as looking at the original. But if we look at reproductions, we're not increasing the risk of looting. So I think the sacrifice of looking at reproductions is worthwhile to make sure that these sites aren't looted anymore, that we never lose the archeological information that goes along with the beauty of these ancient images.

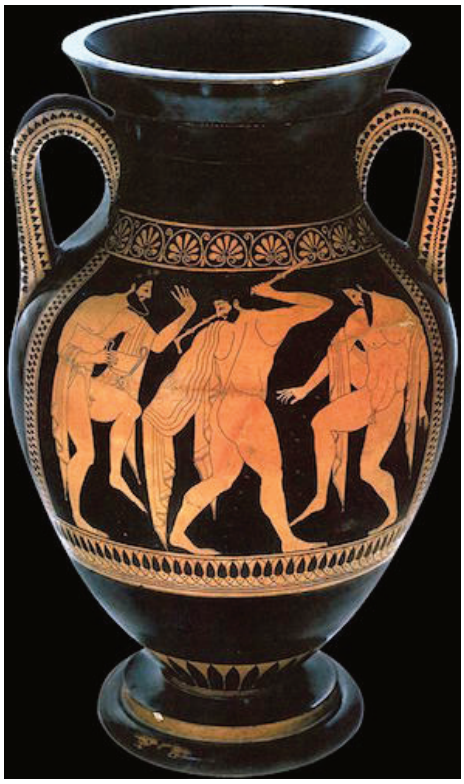
Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fzorm4Q_vuk>



The Euphronios Krater on display in the National Museum Cerite in Cerveteri, Italy (photo: Fantozzi Bruno/effebi-sm, used with permission) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/effebi/16581872243/>

13. Euthymides, Three Revelers

Katarzyna Minollari



Euthymides, Three Revelers (Athenian red-figure amphora), c. 510 B.C.E., 24 in high (Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich)

Competition

"As never Ephronios [could do]" wrote painter Euthymides after painting his new amphora (an amphora is a type of Greek vase in this shape). Euthymides had a clear sense of achievement and was indeed proud of his work, boastfully challenging his friend and rival—Euphronios. He would see Euphronios often, as well as other painters in the Kerameikos—the potter's quarter in Athens. They would be curious to see one another's new work, sometimes with appreciation, sometimes with a bit of jealousy. In the evenings they often had a good time together at a symposium (a kind of ancient Greek male drinking party). They would drink wine mixed with water, become garrulous, loud and—if drinking went on for too long—they might even start singing and even dancing. Perhaps what is depicted on this amphora is a scene similar to those Euthymides witnessed at one of these long parties. Euphronios indeed was a master potter and painter, and Euthymides knew that and had a full appreciation for his work. He thought however, that his figures seemed much more lively, caught in a split of a moment, in a dancing movement.

The beginnings of red-figure painting

Euthymides worked mainly between 515 and 500 B.C.E., in a time when artists were exploring the possibilities of red-figure technique, invented in Athens around 530 B.C.E. Both Euthymides and Euphronios belonged to a kind of camaraderie of artists, often dubbed the "Pioneer Group" by art historians—referring to their innovative efforts in the new technique. In the red-figure technique, an artist sketches figures on the red clay of a freshly fashioned vessel, then covers all the background with a slip (a liquid clay), which turns black after final firing. Details, like elements of anatomy, folds of drapery, etc., can be freely added with a thin brush; the slip can be darker, sometimes more diluted, brownish, adding even more variety. In the black-figure technique which was used previously, an artist had to fill the figures with slip, and then incise the details with a sharp burin, which was much more difficult to handle. At the time of the "Pioneers," there is a general trend in Greek art to observe the reality and represent human body more realistically, leaving the more stiff archaic models behind.



Hector receiving the helmet from Hecube (detail), Euthymides, Three Revelers (Athenian red-figure amphora), c. 510 B.C.E., 24 inches high (Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich)

Hector departs for war

Coming back again to the "Three Revelers" vase—on one side of his amphora the artist decided to decorate with a mythological scene—a solemn moment of Hector departing for the Trojan war, receiving the helmet from his mother Hecube (above).



Drinking and dancing (detail), Euthymides, Three Revelers (Athenian red-figure amphora), c. 510 B.C.E., 24 inches high (Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich) (photo: Richard Mortel, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/dvkaRn>

On the other side of the vase, which is probably better known, the artist gave way to his keen sense of observation, giving us a glimpse into everyday life. Three rather tipsy men dance around, enjoying their moment during a long symposium. The one on the left still keeps in his hand a kantharos—a wine cup with long handles. Euthymides made an effort to show them neither completely frontally, nor completely in profile, but rather in three quarters view, using foreshortening to convey a vivid, realistic image. The poses are very diversified, the man in the center is represented in a twisted view. The artist brought his keen sense of observation to describing human anatomy and movement. Greek vase painters often give us clear insight into everyday life—allowing us to understand daily habits, details of clothing and customs. Of course, these painted vases cannot be treated as documents, since we would not expect men to be naked at a symposium. However, appreciation for the human body and nudity was a usual part of ancient Greek culture, and it provided a way for the artist to showcase his ability.

The vase displays balance and harmony of proportions, with its elegant and graceful shape, and carefully planned pictorial decoration. The main scenes on both sides of the amphora are complemented by a delicate ornament. Despite the beauty of the vase, the potters and painters in ancient Greece did not have the status an artist has in our modern society. Their work was looked upon as a physical labor, not as an activity inspired by the muses. In fact, there was no muse of painting. The decorated vases were produced in large amounts to answer the growing demand of the markets, both in Greece, as well as abroad (especially in Etruria, and in Greek colonies). The Euthymides vase was in fact found in an Etruscan tomb at Vulci in Italy. Many Greek vases survived untouched because the Etruscans buried their deceased in large underground tombs with many everyday objects.

Most of the vases were simply everyday items, although a big, beautifully painted amphora like the one discussed here was also a luxury item, testifying to its owner's good taste and social standing. Despite their status as craftsmen, the artists around the time of Euthymides had a sense of personal value and achievement, hence the inscription "As never Euphronious [could do]". Because of the inscription "Euthymides egraphsen" ("Euthymides painted me") we are sure that he was the painter—and today we definitely think of him as an artist.

Additional resources:

Athenian Vase Painting: Black- and Red-Figure Techniques <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/vase/hd_vase.htm>

This Amphora in the Beazley Archive <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/tools/pottery/painters/keypieces/redfigure/euthymides.htm>

J. Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases, The Archaic Period, a Handbook*, 1975.

14. Niobid Krater at the Louvre

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Niobid Painter, Niobid Krater, Attic red-figure calyx-krater, c. 460-50 B.C.E., 54 x 56 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Beth: We're in the Louvre and we're looking at a large ancient Greek vase that dates from the middle of the fifth century. It's a calyx-krater by an artist that we call the Niobid Painter.

Steven: Now a calyx-krater is a large punchbowl, basically. The ancient Greeks used it to mix wine and water. Their wine was pretty strong.

Beth: Now the Niobid Painter is known for this particular vase, which shows on the back of it a terrible scene about a mortal woman named Niobe. Niobe had 14 children—seven daughters and seven sons—and she bragged about them as being more numerous and more beautiful than the children of the goddess Leto.

Steven: That was a bad idea. You never want to display that kind of hubris to a god or a goddess, and in this case, Leto's children happen to be the god Apollo and the goddess Artemis. Now Apollo is

associated with the arts, with music especially, with the sun perhaps, and Artemis is the goddess of the hunt. And both of those children here exact revenge for their mother.

Beth: The Greeks were often concerned about mortals displaying hubris, displaying pride. Here we see Apollo and Artemis killing Niobe's poor children.

Steven: According to the myth they murdered all 14 of the children. Here we see Artemis reaching back into her quiver for yet another arrow. We see Apollo drawing his bow back, and we see the children littering the field.



Enhanced detail with Artemis against a black ground, Niobid Krater, Attic red-figure calyx-krater, c. 460-50 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: These figures still have a kind of stiffness that I associate with the early Classical. I think that's especially obvious in the figure of Apollo, who strides forward but doesn't seem to have the sense of movement that would be entirely natural given what he's doing.

Steven: This is red-figure painting and that means that we're seeing bodies that are part of the red clay of the pot silhouetted by a black background. It allows for a tremendous amount of detail, as for instance, in Apollo's body, the tension to his abdomen, to his face. We see Artemis also with very delicate rendering of the folds of her drapery. Notice that both the goddess and the god are rendered in perfect profile, whereas the dying children are more frontal or at three quarters.



Detail of Apollo, Niobid Krater, Attic red-figure calyx-krater, c. 460-50 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: There is a stiffness there.

Steven: This is a period that we call the "Severe Style" and it's just this moment when the Archaic is becoming the Classical that we know, for instance, from the sculptures of the acropolis.

Beth: The other thing that's so obvious here is that where Greek vases before this had the figures on a single ground line, these figures occupy different levels. It seems as though the artist, the Niobid Painter, was attempting to give us some sense of an illusion of space with some figures in the foreground and some in the background, although they're all the same size.



Detail with Apollo, tree, and struck Niobid, Niobid Krater (detail), Attic red-figure calyx-krater, c. 460-50 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: That's right, there's no diminishing sense of scale, but we can get a sense of the idea that there are different ground plans when we look at the tree on the upper right of the scene. Let's go around to the other side because we have a very different image in contrast to the violence of the back.



View of Herakles, Niobid Krater, Attic red-figure calyx-krater, c. 460-50 B.C.E., 54 x 56 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Here in the center, in the place of honor on the vase, the hero Herakles. Herakles was part mortal, part god. He's identifiable because he holds a club and because he has a lion skin.

Beth: Now notice that he's in the middle of the vase literally. His feet don't touch the ground line. He's in the middle and figures are placed all around him. Again, that idea of the artist suggesting a sense of depth. Art historians think that this shows the influence of Greek wall painting, none of which survived.

Steven: In fact, we think that this vase might be a kind of copying of wall painting by an artist whose name we know, Polygnotus, who painted both in Athens and at the Sanctuary of Delphi, North of Athens.

Beth: He was credited as being the first artist to paint figures in depth.

Steven: What we may be seeing on this vase is an attempt to translate that wall painting here onto a vase. That would be an extraordinary thing since virtually no ancient Greek wall painting has survived.

Beth: What's going on here? What is Herakles doing? Why is he surrounded by all of these warriors some of whom are reclining, some of whom are standing, and what is Athena doing over to the left of him?

Steven: One of the more prominent theories suggest that this is not actually a representation of the god Herakles so much as a representation of a sculpture of the god Herakles. That is, this is a painting of the scultpure of the mythic figure. What's happening is that Greek soldiers are coming to honor Herakles asking him for protection before they go into battle.

Beth: Right. At the very end of the Archaic period, in 490 B.C.E, the Greeks battled the Persians and against overwhelming odds defeated the enormous Persian army. This may show Athenian soldiers asking for Herakles' protection before the battle at Marathon.



Herakles (close), Niobid Krater, Attic red-figure calyx-krater, c. 460-50 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: If you look very closely—it's almost impossible to see—there may be barely visible incised lines that suggest that Herakles is actually standing on a podium, which would support the idea that this was the sculpture of the god rather than the god amongst these men.

Beth: The relaxation expressed by the figures is remarkable to me especially the figure reclining at the bottom who seems to be pulling himself up using the leverage of his spears.

Steven: That relaxation is in such contrast to the violence of the

murders on the other side of the vase. It's a great reminder of the way that Greeks love to contrast the active against the passive, the complex against the plain and to draw sharp contrasts in both imagery and in their technique.

Beth: Art historians conjecture that the style that the figures on different levels comes from Greek wall painting, and we know about Greek wall painting from writers who celebrated it. The subject matter that we see here is still very much a mystery and the relationship of these two stories to one another is still very uncertain.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3TlDyT2lyg>



Detail of reclining solider, Niobid Krater, Attic red-figure calyx-krater, c. 460-50 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

PART III

Daedalic and Archaic

15. Statue of a woman (Lady of Auxerre)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Statue of a woman ("Lady of Auxerre"), Daedalic style, Crete (?), c. 640-630 B.C.E., limestone, 75 cm high (Musée du Louvre) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Steven: We're in the Louvre, in Paris, and we're looking at a small, free-standing sculpture—a figure that's often known as the Lady of Auxerre.

Beth: This is a Greek figure, likely from the island of Crete, but she was found, hence her title, in the French city of Auxerre, in the basement of a municipal museum. So we really don't know about her findspot (the location where the object was originally excavated).

Steven: There's some conjecture that she may have come originally from a cemetery in Crete, which would mean that she was a funerary sculpture, but we're not sure. It's possible that she was a votive figure, that is, a figure that was meant to honor the gods. And some scholars have even suggested that she might be a goddess herself.

Beth: This period, in the seventh century, is referred to as the Daedalic. And that name comes from the legendary sculptor Daedalus, who was said to be from the island of Crete.

Steven: This is a stylistic period that comes before the Archaic and parallels the orientalizing style in ceramic decoration.

Beth: And in so many ways, she really *does* seem to prefigure the Archaic figures that we call kore: freestanding female figures that were sometimes representations of goddesses, sometimes votive figures (offerings to the gods)… This columnar (resembling a column) female figure who is very frontally oriented.

Steven: And abstracted. Her head is flattened, the face is relatively flat, the eyes are almond shaped.

Beth: "Flattened" is a good word here, because the front of her body appears flattened–although we do see her breasts—and even her hair has a flattened effect on either side of her face, and the top of her head also seems flattened.



Detail, "Lady of Auxerre," Daedalic style, Crete (?), c. 640-630 B.C.E., limestone (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: But these are not unique characteristics to this sculpture. This is consistent with other sculptures of this period and of this area.

Beth: This is carved out of limestone. We're used to seeing Greek sculptures as white marble, but we now know that these sculptures were generally brightly painted.

Steven: One of the most delicate aspects is the incising (lines cut into the stone). And we can see it most obviously in the square patterns in the front of her dress, but you can also make it out in the wrap that she wears around her shoulders and that move down one side of her arm.



Detail, "Lady of Auxerre," Daedalic style, Crete (?), c. 640-630 B.C.E., limestone (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And you can also make it out in the very wide belt that she wears and even in that collar underneath the shawl. What strikes me is that this is a very idealized figure; this is not meant to be a portrait of the deceased person whose grave this may have marked. This is a figure shown, very much like later Greek figures in the Archaic and Classical period, at the prime of life. She is beautiful, she's young, she looks strong and healthy. Her waist is very narrow… She's very feminine.



Detail of face, "Lady of Auxerre," Daedalic style, Crete (?), c. 640-630 B.C.E., limestone (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And the corners of her mouth are upturned in an expression that is sometimes referred to as the "Archaic smile," even though this is before the Archaic period. Some art historians have conjectured that this may be an expression of well-being, of happiness, or perhaps a kind of transcendence. She feels so formal. Her feet are together.

Beth: That hand, in front…the other hand, that seems almost glued to the side of her body. But, unlike, earlier Egyptian figures, she's freed from the stone. We have space between her body and her arms, which is an important part of this very early Greek tradition, which we'll see in Archaic Greek art. And despite all the abstraction in her body that we just talked about, there's something very lifelike about her, especially in her face. And I think that would have been even more true when she was painted; if we imagine the pink of her lips, or painted pupils in her eyes, or her hair painted brown…

Steven: One of the reasons that a figure like this fascinates art historians is because we know what happens next. She stands at the beginning of this long history of Greek sculpture, which reaches levels of brilliance that we've admired for thousands of years after. We're seeing an early figure here, but one that, with all of the hindsight that we have, offers extraordinary promise.



Detail of feet, "Lady of Auxerre," Daedalic style, Crete (?), c. 640-630 B.C.E., limestone (Musée du Louvre) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoEVvoc2PlM>

16. Marble statue of a kouros (New York Kouros)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Marble Statue of a kouros (New York Kouros), c. 590-580 B.C.E., Attic, Archaic period, Naxian marble, 194.6 x 51.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City.

Steven: We're in the room in the Metropolitan Museum of Art that's devoted to Archaic Greek sculpture.

Beth: Most of it is funerary, so sculpture meant to mark graves.

Steven: But I just saw a man walk over to this 2,600-year-old sculpture and put his hand as a kind of caress against her backside. Of course, this is wrong in so many ways but what happened is, for him, 2,600 years collapsed. That sculpture was this sensuous female figure.

Beth: That man, walking through the Met, felt something that the ancient Greeks felt when they made these sculpture. They were a lot of other things but they were also deeply sensual.

Steven: We came into this room to look at a kouros, a funerary sculpture of a young man. It's a lifesize marble.



Marble Statue of a kouros (New York Kouros), c. 590–580 B.C.E., Attic, Archaic period, Naxian marble, 194.6 x 51.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And we should say a *nude* young man because as we've just learned, although the female figure is clothed, and when the Greeks made these the female figures were clothed and the male figures were nude both were equally sensual.

Steven: The only thing he's wearing is a little choker around his neck and a headband to fill it but what struck me was that the man who sculpted this kouros figure was creating something that was meant to trespass lifetimes, to exist longer than any individual.

Beth: It's made of stone and it endured for millenia and it was made to mark a tomb. So, indeed it was meant to last and to serve as a reminder not only of his life but of his connection to his family of his family's lineage across time.

Steven: It's important to note that this would have been made for an aristocratic family, but it's also important to note that this is not a portrait in the way that we think of that in a modern era. It's not in any way a likeness. It is, instead, a symbol…

Beth: …an ideal of manhood, of perfection. I'm interested in the way that in the sixth century we have sculpture during this Archaic period that's made largely for aristocratic families for the elite in Athens and the surrounding area. When we move into the fifth century with the developments towards democracy, we have sculptures that are

made and commissioned for the state and by the state and that are very different than what we see during the Archaic period. This early Greek image is so clearly dependent on the ancient Egyptians—we could go through the ancient Egyptian galleries and see figures very much like this. Usually, they're wearing a loin cloth or some kind of clothing representing the Pharaoh, representing the kings of Egypt.

Steven: But there's a real distinction here, which is that this figure is cut away from the stone. The stone between his legs is removed. There is no stone backing. He stands upright in this gallery, in the middle of the room, completely unaided by anything but his own two legs, and there is a kind of extraordinary autonomy that results.

Beth: Well, autonomy and so much more because when the Egyptians embedded that figure in the stone they gave it a sense of transcendence, of timelessness, of being godlike in some way. But by freeing the figure from the stone, we immediately have a sense of him being much more like us, much more human.

Steven: Existing in our space.

Beth: Exactly, and moving into our space, of striding forward.

Steven: Look at his stance. His shoulders are squared, his hips are squared, his leg is forward.

Beth: There's a sense of movement but no *real* movement.

Steven: Those limbs are locked in place even as they're representing symbolically the forward movement of the figure.

Beth: So during the Classical period, in the next century, the Greeks would make figures that stand in contrapposto, that is they've shifted their weight–their weight is firmly on one leg. One knee is bent and the whole body becomes asymmetrical. Here, really aside from that one foot being forward the figure is very symmetrical. It occupies a very strange place between being here present with us and also being absent from us and that's in the gaze too. There's a way that he looks past us. He doesn't engage us.

Steven: The lack of contrapposto, the symmetry, does place him in some ways firmly in a world that is not ours. A kind of ideal, perfect world.

Beth: His features have been reduced to geometric shapes, even his body parts are very geometric.

Steven: As a result, very much isolated from each other so you have an arm which seems distinct from the torso, as opposed to creating a smooth transition. In fact, you might even look at this sculpture and see it as very cubic, perhaps even referencing the four sides of the stone that this was carved from. One can imagine a block of marble that this sculptor is approaching from four different sides.

Beth: Actually, drawing the figure on those four sides and then cutting the stone away and using a system of proportions, very much like the Egyptians did.

Steven: The sculptor has been really careful about creating a kind of alternation between flat areas, for instance, of the face against much more complex and deeply carved areas, the braided or beaded hair, which creates this beautiful frame for the face.



Detail of profile, New York Kouros, c. 590–580 B.C.E., Attic, Archaic period, Naxian marble (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Mm-hmm.

Steven: Now, this is a huge block of stone. It weights about 2,000 pounds. It's about a ton of stone that remains. It really is a tremendous feat that they've been able to create a sculpture that is balanced and supported on essentially two narrow angles.

Beth: Without falling over.

Steven: But you'll notice that the sculptor has left a little bit of a bridge between the clenched fists at his side and his hips to help support those arms because if they were free hanging they would be too fragile.



Detail, right fist, New York Kouros, c. 590–580 B.C.E., Attic, Archaic period, Naxian marble (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And even so, you can see that this sculpture is 2,600 years old, and it was obviously put back together by the museum. Over time it broke, and it's always interesting to look for that and to notice what maybe a reconstruction and what's original. Although here, I think everything that we're seeing is original.

Watch the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ax8vcxRtmHY>

17. Anavysos Kouros (youth)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Anavysos Kouros, c. 530 B.C.E., marble, 6′ 4″ (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Steven: We're in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens looking at the Anavysos Kouros.

Beth: A sculpture from the Archaic period, the sixth century B.C.E. in ancient Greece.

Steven: It's about life-size, a little bit larger, and the idea of monumental sculpture of an ideal male youth is a very powerful motif in Greek culture.

Beth: Thousands of these figures were produced. We give them the generic name of kouros, or "youth." They could be used as grave markers, as offerings in sanctuaries, and sometimes, though more rarely, they represented a god, usually the god Apollo.

Steven: Some art historians think that perhaps these monumental sculptures were inspired by contact with ancient Egypt.

Beth: Well, you can see the resemblance to Egyptian sculpture very easily.

Steven: And look at the traces of the original paint in the hair, on the eyes, it really gives us a sense of what this would have looked like initially.

Beth: So one of the things that happens when you talk about the kouros figures is that you compare them to one another because they're of a type, but there's also the tendency to compare them to human bodies. How lifelike is it, or how far from being lifelike is it?

Steven: In the earlier kouros, you have a greater sense of stiffness, of abstraction of the human body, where forms are represented almost as symbols rather than as an articulation of what we see in the human body.

Beth: And in those earlier figures, too, you have the sense of the body corresponding to a block of stone, so you have four very distinct views. This particular kouros shows us the way that during the sixth century, during the Archaic period, the figures become more natural, more lifelike, more rounded, less blocky.

Steven: Well, look at the swelling of the calves, of the hips, of the abdomen. and certainly of the arms and the cheeks. In earlier figures, what we saw was a sort of inscribing in the stone, almost as if you were drawing into the stone, whereas here you have modeling in the round.

Beth: And in some earlier figures, we see a hard line where the torso meets the legs, and here that's been softened, so there's a more gradual transition.

Steven: And the forms of the face are more integrated. In fact, the forms of the entire body, one piece to the next, one part of the body to the next, is more integrated. So you see a more natural flow of the cheeks, to the sides of the face, to the temples, to the forehead. But there's still continuity with these older standing nude figures: the left leg is out, both knees are locked, the weight is evenly distributed on both legs. We still have traditional braiding of the hair, we still have that traditional headband—and those wonderful curls underneath it.



Detail, Anavysos Kouros, c. 530 B.C.E., marble (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And still, that "Archaic smile," which speaks of a figure that transcends this world, that has a sense of aristocratic nobility, and in fact this figure was set up by an aristocratic family as a grave marker to their son, who died in war. There were often inscriptions of the bases of the kouros figures, and there was a base with an inscription found near the find spot of this particular figure…

Steven: …that was probably from about the same period, and some art historians think that it belongs to this sculpture, some don't. But in any case, it's instructive.

Beth: The inscription reads "Stay and mourn at the monument of dead Kroisos, who raging Ares slew as he fought in the front ranks." So just to unpack that a little bit, Kroisos would be the name of the figure—

Steven: The man who died.

Beth: And Ares is the god of war. So this is obviously a youth who fell in battle, which is the most noble way to die, the way to die that's associated with the ancient Greek heroes that we read about in the Iliad.



Detail, Anavysos Kouros, c. 530 B.C.E., marble (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And look at the sense of potential, of this life that was cut short, but at this moment of greatest strength, of greatest beauty. And it's important to recognize that this is not a portrait, this is not a specific individual. There's a reference to an individual here, but the body that's being represented is an ideal, it is a perfected body. And as with so many of these standing male figures, the artist has had to leave a little bit of a bridge attaching the hands to the hips in order to strengthen the object.

Beth: Or else the limbs could easily break off.

Steven: This figure was found in 1936 and was spirited out of Greece, and was recovered by the Greek Police in Paris, and brought back a year later.

Beth: The intention was to sell it on the market outside of Greece.

Steven: And this has been a continuous problem, grave robbing of antiquities in Greece and in other countries because the market is so strong. It's created not only a black market, for stolen objects, but also a market for forgeries, which has complicated archaeological study.

Beth: But the good thing about this figure was that he was found, he was returned to Greece, and we can all see him here in the Archaeological Museum in Athens.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1_pCZBVWuY>



Detail, Anavysos Kouros, c. 530 B.C.E., marble (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

18. Peplos Kore (young woman)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Peplos Kore, c. 530 B.C.E., from the Acropolis, Athens, Greece (Acropolis Museum, Athens) (photo: Marsyas, CC BY-SA 2.5) <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Peplos_Kore#/media/File:ACMA_679_Kore_1.JPG>

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Acropolis Museum, Athens.

Beth: We're looking at a figure known as the Peplos Kore in the Acropolis Museum in Athens. Now this is one of the funny things that happens in art history. Things get named based on original thoughts about something. But then when later research is done that name doesn't really work anymore.

Steven: But we keep the name because everybody knows it by that name.

Beth: Exactly.

Steven: So this is known as the Peplos Kore because we originally thought she was simply wearing a peplos which is an ancient Greek costume, a rectangle of cloth often linen that is pinned at the shoulders and then falls down.

Beth: A kore is a type of figure that was found throughout ancient Greece. It's a female figure that's clothed and the counterpart to the male kouros who was nude.

Steven: Kore simply means young woman in Greek.

Beth: Both korai and kouroi were found in great numbers during the Archaic period which is the period just before the classical.

Steven: It's a small sculpture and it was found on the Acropolis.

Beth: Korai figures were generally offerings to the goddess Athena brought interestingly in many cases by men.

Steven: But recent research suggests that this may not be a representation of a young woman at all. This might be a goddess.

Beth: This figure is clothed in a very unusual way.

Steven: Among all of the sculptures of young women that were found on the Acropolis, this is the only one dressed in this way. Now art historians are actively arguing about what it is that she's wearing. Some still hold to the idea of the peplos. Some suggest that it is a chiton underneath the peplos. Some say that there's a cape above. So there's any number of possibilities. It has also been researched into

the original coloration of the figure, which helps us understand her costume.

Beth: Because what she is wearing is so unusual and is similar to sculptures of goddesses, there is some conjecture recently, very carefully researched conjecture that this may in fact not be an offering—which is what's true of most korai on the Acropolis—but that this is a goddess herself, perhaps Artemis or Athena.

Steven: Well Artemis is really important. She was the goddess of the hunt.

Beth: And she often carried a bow and arrow. And what's so frustrating about this sculpture is that we don't have what she was carrying which would settle once and for all a lot of questions about who she was.

Steven: Well clearly she had her left arm straight out, bent at the elbow…

Beth: …which was characteristic of most of the representations of these young women.

Steven: But in this case we think she might have been holding a bow with her left hand, and we can see in her right hand a fist, which is drilled in such a way that it could easily have held an arrow. So she may well be Artemis, the goddess the Romans would later call Diana. Let's take a close look at the figure. We can see that there are a lot of holes crowning her head. She probably wore a metal diadem, a kind of metal crown with rays that would have come up, which certainly suggests her divinity.

Beth: And it wasn't unusual for these female figures to wear crowns or to wear other kinds of jewelry that were represented either in paint or as metal that was applied to the sculpture.

Steven: We can also see that there's a rod that rises right out of top of her head and some art historians have suggested that there might have been a crescent above the diadem. And as you said, we can see holes for bronze earrings which would have been there originally. Her face would have been more complexly painted. Only the red really survives, but we think that there was likely some black around the eyes and around the eyebrows, as well as red and perhaps some more subtle colors as well.

Beth: The sculpture has indicated not only her breasts and her waist, but also a subtle sense of her legs underneath that very heavy drapery. There's a little bit of a sense of movement in the figure.

Steven: This is very much an Archaic figure.

Beth: She does wear that "Archaic smile."

Steven: But we have to remember that that smile was not meant to be an expression of emotion of happiness but rather a symbol of well being.



Peplos Kore, c. 530 B.C.E., from the Acropolis, Athens, Greece (Acropolis Museum, Athens) (photo: Marsyas, CC BY-SA 2.5) <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category: Peplos_Kore#/media/File:ACMA_679_Kore_2.JPG>

Beth: And that smile gives us the figure a sense of being transcendent, a sense of being ideal, of not engaging in the world of emotion and difficulty, but somehow rising above all that. So that makes sense for a figure that was a goddess, or for a figure that represented ideal femininity.

Steven: And I think that was probably really beautifully expressed when this sculpture was new and still brightly painted. We found traces of paint in the band at the bottom of the cloth that hangs down over her abdomen. And then in the front of her garment it seems to part just in the middle of her torso.

Beth: We see representation of embroidery, of decorative patterns, and of animals.

Steven: Right, we see sphinx, we see horses; there are representations of perhaps goats. All of which is visible only under special lighting and is no longer visible to the eye…

Beth: …and perhaps suggests fecundity or fertility. It's very difficult to know.

Steven: What we *do* know is that she is one of the most exceptional figures from the Archaic period. We're lucky she survived for all of these years.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjpT4Apgda8>



Plaster cast of the Peplos Kore (left) and a reconstruction (right) showing polychromy (Museum of Classical Archaeology, Cambridge) (photo: Zde, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Peplos_Kore#/media/File:Peplos_Kore,_cast_and_reconstruction,_Cambridge_Museum_of_Classical_Archaeology,_154248.jpg>

19. Ancient Greek Temples at Paestum

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted while walking around the temples of Hera I, Hera II, and Athena at Paestum, Italy.



Ancient Greek Temples at Paestum: Hera I (front), c. 560-530 B.C.E., Archaic Period; Hera II (beyond), c. 460 B.C.E., Classical Period, Paestum (Latin) previously Poseidonia (Greek) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: We're in a small town on the Mediterranean called Paestum.

Beth: Paestum is the Roman name, the Latin name. Before that, it was Greek, and it was called Poseidonia. The town was named after the God of the Sea, Poseidon.

Steven: This was a Greek settlement, sometimes called a colony, although it was really an independent small Greek city.

Beth: And there were lots of these all over the south of Italy in what historians call Magna Graecia, or the greater Greece. Greece had colonies in Italy but also in many other places in the Mediterranean including what is now Turkey. Paestum contains three fabulously preserved ancient Greek Doric temples, two from the Archaic period of the sixth century and one from the Classical period, of the fifth century. The Greeks, over time, adjusted the proportions of the architecture, of the width of the columns and number of columns on the front and side, always in a search for perfection or ideal beauty.

Steven: The oldest of the three is dedicated to the Goddess Hera, who was the wife of Zeus. This temple, Hera I, has all of the elements that we would expect to see in a Doric temple. It's got massive heavy columns that have no feet. They go directly into the platform of the temple itself, the Stylobate. They rise up with a shallow broad fluting and end in a very simple geometric capital. In addition, that temple has a kind of exaggerated entasis: the column isn't straight; it bulges towards the middle and tapers towards the top. In this case it's so exaggerated it makes it seem as if the column is bulging under the weight above.



Hera I ("The Basilica"), c.560-530 B.C.E., 24.35 x 54 m, Archaic Period, 9:18 column ratio, Paestum (Latin) previously Poseidonia (Greek) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And the capitals also almost seem flattened by the weight of the roof so there's a real sense of horizontality and of weight in the oldest of these temples.

Steven: The temple is an interesting deviation. The front of it has nine columns across and that's a little bit peculiar. Because it's an odd number, you have to walk around that central column.



Hera I ("The Basilica"), c.560-530 B.C.E, interior view with central colonnade (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Greek temples were really meant as houses for the gods, not the way we think of a temple or a church as a place of worship. The worship would have happened outside of the temple. But in the case of Hera I, there's a row of columns right in the middle of the cella (the inner chamber of the temple), so it's hard to imagine how the cult statue fit inside.

Steven: Actually, there's a number of different theories about this. Some have suggested that perhaps this was a temple to both Hera and her husband Zeus, in which case perhaps there were two cult statues in the back, but to be honest nobody knows for sure. There is a lovely sense of balance, of proportion of Hera one, of this oldest of the three temples. You've got nine columns in front and on the side you've got 18, so you've got a very neat geometric doubling.

Beth: And art historians really like to contrast the older Hera I with so-called Hera II, from the Classical period, which is very different in it's proportions. It has a much greater sense of verticality, of being more slender, of not being so subsumed under the weight of the roof. It's also, in many ways, better preserved in that we can see the frieze with the triglyphs (vertically channeled rectangular tablets) and metopes (square or rectangular elements between two triglyphs) and part of the pediment remains.



"Hera II," c. 460 B.C.E., 24.26 x 59.98 m, Classical Period, 6:14 column ratio, Paestum (Latin) previously Poseidonia (Greek) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: But probably the biggest difference for me between Hera I and the so-called Hera II is that Hera II is much closer to what we have come to expect from a Doric temple such as the Parthenon, on the acropolis in Athens. This has six columns in the front so it is symmetrical in the front. There is a gap in the middle that we could walk through. And the side contains 14 columns. This temple, though, has some other kinds of variations. It's got a second colonnade just in back of the first, and then the interior space is defined by an outer wall and then a colonnade that has a second set of columns above it.



Hera II double collonade, c. 460 B.C.E., flank (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: This seems to be a better solution for supporting the roof than a row of columns down the center that we see in Hera I.

Steven: So let's spend a moment really looking at Hera II and looking at the changes that have taken place. The columns have less pronounced entasis. In addition, the flair at the top of the column, at the base of the capital, is not as exaggerated, it's not as wide or as plate-like as it was in Hera I.



Hera II flank, c. 460 B.C.E., flank (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And as a result, this structure has a greater sense of lift. But one of the things that's often missing from a discussion of both of these

temples is the location. All around are even older Greek ruins and Roman ruins.

Steven: The Romans would conquer this area, would take the entire peninsula of Italy, they would push out the Greeks in the south of Italy and push out the Etruscans in the north.

Beth: They took this area of Paestum in the third century B.C.E., so that's when this became Roman.

Steven: So all around these temples are Roman houses, Roman apartment blocks—there's an amphitheater…



Hera II, c. 460 B.C.E., amidst mostly Roman ruins (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So, these things literally *coexisting*. When we look at Hera II, this Classical Doric temple, I think it's also useful to think about ancient Greek sculpture that was made at this time like the Doryphoros or some of the images of gods and goddesses that we saw today in the museum in Naples, or of Greek athletes and heroes. We're at this moment of what was called the "Golden Age" of Greece, of Periclean Athens, of the invention of democracy, of humanist philosophy…



Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Classical Period, Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E. (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: The culture—that at this very moment was inventing the geometry that we still use—was seeking to understand the movements of the heavens, the movement of the human body, was inventing the philosophy that we still struggle with. We're looking at artifacts, at buildings, that were created by a culture that profoundly shaped our world.

Beth: Both of these temples, and the third temple that archaeologists believe was dedicated to Minerva or Athena, all have a sense, to me, of rising out of the landscape, of giving form to human aspiration.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tNnI_w6TTQ>



Temple to Athena, c. 500 B.C.E., 14.54 x 32.88 m, Archaic Period, 6:13 column ratio (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

20. Sanctuary of Apollo, Delphi

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



View from the Sanctuary of Apollo, Delphi, Greece (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Sanctuary of Apollo at the ancient site of Delphi, Greece.

Beth: Sitting here overlooking the Sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi makes it really clear to me why the Greeks believed that the gods dwelt on a mountain.

Steven: Well we have this glorious view.

Beth: I feel on top of the world. It makes sense. The Greeks practiced their religion in places called sanctuaries that became complexes of many buildings.

Steven: This is one of the most important Pan-Hellenic sanctuaries. What that means is that it was not controlled by one city state, but it was a place that Greeks came from numerous city states from all over Greece.

Beth: Therefore Pan-Hellenic, meaning across Greece. The Sanctuary at Olympia is another example of Pan-Hellenic sanctuary.

Steven: Now of course in that case, Greeks from all over came to compete in athletic games, but Olympia also had an oracle that is a priestess who had a connection to the gods, but here at Delphi this was perhaps the single-most important sanctuary because here although there were games, there were musical competitions and there were sporting competitions. This was the place with the single-most important oracle. That is with the priestess who could help decide major political and even private issues.

Beth: The priestess here at Delphi—the oracle—was called the Pythia, and she made her pronouncements. She answered questions from the temple that we're looking at now.

Steven: When she did this, she was seated behind a curtain we believe. She was seated on a tripod and over a kind of chasm that went into the earth and according to traditions that go back at least to the ninth century, this was a way that she connected directly to the god Apollo.

Beth: Right, a way that Apollo could speak through her, and so we're in a space that is entirely sacred to the god Apollo.

Steven: So according to the ancient reports we have, the way this would work is somebody of high stature with significant wealth or political power would come with a very specific question, often a yes or no question. They would give it to one of the priestess' assistants and that would then be read to the priestess who was behind a curtain. She would make a pronouncement which would then be interpreted so that it could be understandable by the assistant priests.

Beth: So as a Pan-Hellenic sanctuary, as a sanctuary for all Greeks, this was a place where one could really show off the wealth and the power of your city state. The primary way that city states could do that was by building treasuries. Now, treasuries were often small buildings. They weren't peripteral, that is, as we normally think about a Greek temple being, having columns all around it. Instead they had columns in the front (*in antis*), and they were mostly storehouses for objects that were being offered dedicated to the god. It's important to remember, I think, that Greek religion was transactional: people gave gifts to the gods and in turn the gods favored them.

Steven: This might be booty that was taken in war. It might be the result of some other kind of good fortune, but there's no question that that transactional aspect was important. You wanted to give as much as you could to the Sanctuary of Apollo in order to stay in Apollo's good graces.

Beth: And so when visitors came to the sanctuary, they walked up, what was called the sacred way and they passed by numerous treasury buildings built by numerous Greek city states, or what the Greeks called the *polis*.



Temple of Apollo (with reconstructed columns) Sanctuary of Apollo, Delphi, Greece (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Sacred Way, Sanctuary of Apollo, Delphi, Greece (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Now you can imagine how competitive this was because each city state was showing off against the other.

Beth: Right, and we can look down at the reconstructed treasury built by the city state of Athens.



Athenian Treasury (reconstruction), Sanctuary of Apollo, Delphi, Greece (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: That's a great example. Just beside it, we believe that there had once been a huge pile of booty that they had taken from the Persians at the Battle of Marathon.

Beth: Right, which they won against great odds and so you really could understand why they would thank the Gods for that victory.

Steven: It's one of the larger treasuries, and it's in a very prominent place, just below the Athenian treasury is a smaller treasury, which was, according to reports, the most lavishly decorated of all the treasuries here. This belonged to the small island of Siphnos in the south of the Aegean Sea.

Beth: And the Siphnians were especially wealthy because they had gold and silver mines so they could afford to build a really lavish treasury.

Steven: The treasuries were stacked up over each other in such a steep space.

Beth: Well, you wound your way back and forth to go up to the very top of the sanctuary where we see the theater.

Steven: Well most sanctuaries had a theater. The most famous probably, the theater Epidaurus, which was an important sanctuary for healing.



Theater, Sanctury of Apollo, Delphi, Greece (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: This is a good reminder that theater was connected to religious practice. It's interesting to note, too, the form of the theater: we have the actors on the bottom and the seats rising up above built into the hillside. Imagine sitting in that theater, looking down past the actors, to this amazing view of the temple and the valley beyond.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAuCHWr8A_o>

21. Siphnian Treasury, Delphi

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Siphnian Treasury (reconstruction) with east pediment and frieze (at front) and north frieze (at right side) visible, c. 530 B.C.E., Sanctuary of Apollo, Delphi, Greece (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



East pediment and frieze, Siphnian Treasury, c. 530 B.C.E., Sanctuary of Apollo, Delphi, Greece (Delphi Archaeological Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in Greece at the Delphi Archaeological Museum.

Beth: One of the most prominent buildings in the sanctuary at Delphi, the Pan-Hellenic Sanctuary, was the treasury. This is a small building meant to house treasure that was dedicated to the god, Apollo, whose sanctuary this was.

Steven: Now, the Siphnians came from a small island in the south Aegean. They could afford to do this because they had both silver and gold mines—and at least according to one ancient chronicler, they devoted a tenth of the money they made from these mines to Delphi. Now, the reason they did this is because religion in ancient Greece was transactional: that is, if you gave sacrifice to the gods, they would favor you in return.

Beth: Sacrifice in gifts, exactly. And the Siphnian treasury was supposedly the most beautiful, most elaborate, most highly decorated of the different treasuries from each of the Greek city states at the Pan-Hellenic Sanctuary at Delphi.

Steven: When you walk up the sacred way—the pathway that leads up into the sanctuary—and you come to the Siphnian treasury, you first see its back, or east side. The sculpture from the pediment, and from that side of the frieze, has been preserved. There was a kind of band or ribbon of carving that went around all four sides.

Beth: Well, a continuous frieze around the treasury makes sense because this is a building in the Ionic style.

Steven: So, let's take a look at what that sculpture depicts. In the pediment, you have something that's very appropriate for this location. It is the hero, Herakles, who's trying to steal the tripod from the god, Apollo.



Artemis, Apollo, Zeus, and Herakles, East pediment (detail), Siphnian Treasury, c. 530 B.C.E (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Now, the tripod was associated with the oracle at Delphi. The oracle sat on the tripod and made pronouncements channeling Apollo.

Steven: You can see why that would upset Apollo, and why Zeus has had to step in. Zeus would be the figure that has lost his head in the middle, who seems to be trying to negotiate between the two.

Beth: You can see Herakles, he's got the tripod on his back, and he's heading away as though he's going to be successful in this theft. But the tripod is being held at the other end by both Apollo and Zeus.

Steven: And we see Artemis, the goddess who seems to be restraining Apollo, who had quite a temper.



Artemis, Apollo, Zeus, and Herakles, East pediment (detail, oblique view), Siphnian Treasury, c. 530 B.C.E (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: These figures look like they Archaic-style figures to me. Here we are at the end of the sixth century—that's when the Siphnians built this treasury. They have a little bit of that stiffness that we associate with Archaic figures. We see them from the profile view, or frontal view. There's not a lot of twisting and turning in space, which we'll see more of, actually, in the frieze below.

Steven: But we *do* get a sense of energy from, for instance, Herakles' more widely spaced legs, as if he is trying to really pull away. So let's look at the east side of the frieze—that is the area just below the pediment. It's divided into two parts. On the right side, we see a scene from the Iliad, the great Trojan war epic. We see two soldiers, one on the Trojan side, one on the Greek side.



Memnon and Achilles, East frieze (detail), Siphnian Treasury, c. 530 B.C.E (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So Achilles is on the right, he's the Greek, and Memnon is on the left, he's the Trojan.

Steven: Achilles is holding a shield that has a Gorgon (a terrifying monster) head on it. He's fighting with Memnon over the dead body of Antilochus. But while these men feel that their fate is being decided by their battle, in fact, what the sculptor is showing us is that their fate is being decided far away on Mount Olympus, by the gods.

Beth: So on the left side, we see the gods and goddesses who are siding with the Trojans, and on the right, the gods and goddesses on Mount Olympus are siding with the Greeks.

Steven: The figure that's seated in the center is probably Zeus, who's actually making the final determination, and we get the sense that the gods and goddesses on either side are arguing for him to listen.



Gods and goddesses, East frieze (detail), Siphnian Treasury, c. 530 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: There have been different identifications of the figures here, so we have to be careful, but it does seem as though on the far left, we have Ares, god of war, and we may have Eos.

Steven: And she's the mother of Memnon.

Beth: Then we may have Artemis or Aphrodite, and then Apollo.

Steven: Now, Apollo is turning back and really listening to what the women are saying. And we see these beautiful, elegant figures. Apollo has a real nobility, and there's a kind of stasis to these figures as opposed to the figures that are actually in battle.

Beth: The women seem to be pleading with Apollo: they raise their hands, they open their palms, and they seem to look directly at him. Apollo turns around to listen to them. Now, remember *all* of this would once have been painted, and therefore much more visible.

Steven: The three gods and goddesses that remain, that would have been arguing on the side of the Greeks, are Athena on the left, in the center, Zeus' wife, Hera, and then possibly Thetis, who would be pleading for her son, Achilles.

Beth: While there's a sense of emotion, there's still primarily a sense of stability here, of figures in profile. But when we move to the battle that they're deciding, we see foreshortening, we see a real illusionism into space. Look at these horses who are turned toward us, moving almost into our space.



East frieze (detail), Siphnian Treasury, c. 530 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



North frieze (left), Siphnian Treasury, c. 530 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: We see that sense of space even more explicitly rendered as we walk up the hill towards the front of the treasury, and we look at the north side of the frieze.

Beth: Here, we see a common scene in Greek sculpture—this is a battle of the gods and the giants (called the Gigantomachy).

Steven: So, according to Greek mythology, everything starts with the most primary deities: the goddess of the Earth, Gaea, and Uranus, the god of the sky. And they give birth to the Titans, they give birth to the giants. The giants, in turn, give birth to the Olympian gods. And so, the gods are, in a sense, the third generation, and they rule from Mount Olympus. But according to myth, the giants want to be able to rule from Mount Olympus—they want what the gods have.

Beth: So, this is the great battle that takes place between them.

Steven: The giants are really stand-ins for humans having a great hubris, and really wanting to take from the mighty gods of Mount Olympus…

Beth: …hubris, meaning a kind of pride, a sense that you can accomplish more than you can really accomplish as a human being.

Steven: In fact, so much of the sculpture at the Siphnian treasury is about reestablishing the power of the gods and showing the foolhardiness of trying to upset that natural order. So, let's take a look at the action. On the very far left side of the north frieze, we have the god Hephaestus. Now, this is the god who is associated with craftsmanship.

Beth: He's a blacksmith.

Steven: That's right, so he's associated with the forge. We see him, actually, pushing down the bellows, manufacturing a lightning bolt, which Zeus can use against the giants.

Beth: Or a weapon of some sort, in any case. And we see the giants advancing from the right.

Steven: Luckily, Hestia and Demeter are there to meet them. Without a doubt, the most famous part of this frieze is the chariot of Dionysos, which is pulled by two lions.

Beth: Those lions are attacking one of the giants, biting and clawing the torso.

Steven: And the other lion is rearing up; it looks like it's about to bear down. And in fact, that further lion, which is almost completely gone—you can just make out its mane—is also wrapping its forepaw around that giant's neck. That giant has had it.



Lion biting giant, North frieze (detail), Siphnian Treasury, c. 530 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Now, that giant, who's being devoured, wraps his arm around the lion as if to pull it away from him.

Steven: The artist has done something really quite exceptional for the Archaic period. He's turned the head at a kind of three-quarter pose. It's helmeted, but that mouth piece is a means of expressing the pain that this figure is feeling, even though if you look very closely, the mouth is still closed in the traditional noble expression.

Beth: Look at how Dionysos strides forward. He looks so powerful.



Dionysos and Themis, North frieze (detail), Siphnian Treasury (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And just in front of him is the local goddess, Themis, and she actually rides on the chariot.

Beth: What we have here is a sense of the chaos of battle. As our eye moves to the right to follow this story, we see two archers—those are Apollo and Artemis—but just to the right of them, we see a fleeing giant who looks absolutely terrified. He looks back behind him, but runs forward with this sword. Look at his drapery, flowing back behind him—you get a sense of real movement.



Artemis, Apollo, and giant, North frieze (detail), Siphnian Treasury, c. 530 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: He's so terrified, he's abandoning his colleague to those lions.

Beth: And below him is a fallen giant.

Steven: So, the giant is so interesting because he's in back of Apollo and Artemis, but there's an expression of distance between them because of the distinction in the depth of relief. In other words, Apollo and Artemis are carved fairly deeply while the giant is at a slightly smaller scale, and carved in a more shallow way, so that we know he's part of the scene in back of them.

Beth: So, we have a real sense of deep space here in the battle field.

Steven: Look at the way the artist links that fleeing giant through his shield, which is concave, with a concave shield of the three giants that are confronting Apollo and Artemis.

Beth: And we have a sense of the imminent danger that he's in because one of his colleagues is fallen below.

Steven: The Olympian gods are always overmatched, and yet, they triumph.

Beth: The other thing that happens is that the Olympian gods are represented very individualistically—very heroically, fighting together, but also with a sense of their fighting individually, with their own strength and power, whereas, the giants are fighting as an anonymous group.

Steven: The next section of the north frieze is missing, but we know what would have been there. It would have been the chariot of Zeus in the middle with horses which we can still see, and he would probably have been throwing a thunder bolt.

Beth: And those horses are rearing up, and you can almost hear them galloping, and they're followed by two more giants with their shields, throwing spears.

Steven: And so, Zeus, a single god, is taking on at least two giants.

Beth: And below, we see Aphrodite, who's aiming a spear so intensely at a falling giant on the ground, we can just barely make out his body, his knee has bent under his weight, his arm is holding him up. It's as if he's in the process of dying, and next comes Athena. Always the hero.

Steven: We can identify her quickly because of the aegis that she wears, which is fringed by snakes. We can see the inside of her shield, and we can actually see, there, a little bit of the very bright paint that would have covered this entire frieze.



Athena with aegis and shield, North frieze (detail), Siphnian Treasury, c. 530 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And she's clearly advancing on the enemy.

Steven: In front of Athena, we have another giant who has fallen, this time backwards. And then there's another dead giant just behind him. In back of him is yet another giant, still standing, ready to throw a spear.

Beth: But we know he won't be successful against Athena—that's apparent.

Steven: And at the head of all of the gods, we have Ares, the god of war.

Beth: He strides forward, his shield in his left hand, actively in pursuit of the giants.

Steven: And it's quite a collection of giants that he's after. We can see the one just beside him is actually ready to hurl an enormous rock, while another has his spear ready to throw. And finally, we can recognize Hermes, under a conical helmet—and *he*'s taking on what looks like a small army of giants.

Beth: It looks like he's about to pull a dagger from his sheath.

Steven: In back of him, there are just a few traces of what would probably be Poseidon, but that part is mostly lost. So, what we see here is this really interesting moment of transition from the more static and symbolic representations that we so much associate with the Archaic period, and this increasing interest in the complexity of human interaction…

Beth: …and storytelling, absolutely…

Steven: …as we move towards the Classical.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxmRlLEEJ5o>



Frieze fragments, Siphnian Treasury, c. 530 B.C.E (Delphi Archaeological Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

PART IV

Early Classical

22. East and West Pediments from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Glyptothek, Munich.



Glyptothek sign, Munich (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: We're in the Glyptothek in Munich. This is an extraordinary museum devoted to ancient Greek and Roman antiquities.

Beth: That's all thanks to Prince Ludwig of Bavaria, who, in the early nineteenth century, wanted to found a collection of antique works of sculpture—because, as he said, "We must also have in Munich what in Rome in known as a museum."

Steven: I love that. "Museum" wasn't even a commonly used word. The idea of a public collection was just coming into being in Britain, in France, and here in Germany.

Beth: Ludwig was ambitious for Munich; he wrote, "I will turn Munich into a city of the arts, so that no one can claim to know Germany who has not also seen Munich."

Steven: Art was a way of really putting a city on a map. It spoke to its cultural superiority. Ludwig put together an incredible collection.

Beth: We're looking now at one of the great treasures of the museum, the sculptures from the pediment of the temple of Aphaia, on the island of Aegina, just off the coast of Greece.

Steven: This is an island that's visible from Athens, so it's very close to the Greek mainland; and we really shouldn't say "pediment," we should say "pediments." Let's unpack that just a little bit. On a Greek temple—imagine the Parthenon—this is a long structure, with a gable at either end that is above the column head. At either short end of the temple there is a low triangle. Historically, those were areas that were filled with sculpture.



Aphaia Acropolis Model, showing Temple of Aphaia, Aegina, Archaic/Early Classical Periods, c. 490-480 B.C.E. (Glyptothek, Munich) (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



West Pediment sculptures from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina, Archaic/Early Classical Periods, c. 490-480 B.C.E. (Glyptothek, Munich)

Beth: On the Temple of Aphaia there was a pediment on the east side and on the west side, on the two short ends of the temple. The sculptures that filled these pediments were discovered in the early nineteenth century when some German architects were surveying the ruins of the temple, and they were soon put on auction, and Ludwig was very pleased to acquire them for his new museum.

Steven: The pediment sculptures were not made at the same moment, and that makes them even more interesting, because it helps us see the evolution of Greek sculpture. The west pediment was earlier, and we think that those sculptures were carved when the temple was actually built, about 490 B.C.E. The east side were later, and what's really interesting is those older west sculptures are in the Archaic tradition, but the east pediment sculptures are just taking on the characteristics of the style that we'll come to know as the Classical.

Beth: We can say it's an early moment of the Classical for the sculptures on the east pediment.

Steven: It's this moment of transition, as the style is really just being invented.

Beth: Now, the subject for both pediments was the Trojan war, the War between the Trojans and the Greeks.

Steven: Now, this war is really a mythic war, but we know about it because it is the subject of Homer's great epic poem, "The Iliad."

Beth: Some of the heroes of the Trojan War were from the island of Aegina, so it makes sense that they would make an appearance on the pediment.

Steven: Let's start off by looking at the sculptures on the western pediment. In terms of being a space that gets filled with sculpture, a pediment is kind of an awkward environment.

Beth: It's incredibly awkward, because you have these two narrow areas of the triangle that are very hard to fill. One of the ways that you can do that is to have reclining figures.

Steven: That's right. It's almost as if the sculptures have to play limbo, they get lower and lower as you move to the edges. But, in this case, the sculptor has really been inventive and has found a marvelous solution. In the very center of the pediment, on both the east and the west sides, we have a standing figure–noble, looking outward, the goddess Athena.

Beth: Athena was known as the goddess of war, in addition to being the goddess of wisdom.

Steven: On the west pediment, we see Athena now holding a modern shaft, meant to represent the spear that would have originally been there, perhaps in wood, more likely in bronze or another metal.



Athena (close up), West Pediment from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: When we look at Athena, we see a figure who looks typically Archaic in style. She is frontal, she's rather rigid, fairly symmetrical, and there's a linear quality to her drapery. She has that typical "Archaic smile" that removes her from emotion, removes her from the everyday world. She seems like a transcendent goddess.

Steven: On either side of the standing Athena are two warriors, and they move outward. They're actually lunging with the spears. One has their shield facing us, one is turned in the other direction, the shield is facing away from us; but they move our eye in either direction outward with real energy, real velocity, and of course, they are both slightly lower since their knees are bent so that they fit under the eave of the gable.

Beth: On either side of those figures, we see kneeling archers, who are shooting bows.

Steven: The archer on the left, we can actually identify as Paris, and we can see his cap is tied in the back, his weight is on one knee and on one heel. The bow is missing, but we can certainly see an arm movement that suggests that he was in the middle of loosing his arrow.



West Pediment (left side, oblique view), from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And then behind him, a striding figure with a weapon, who's attacking a figure who's falling to the ground.

Steven: Look at the complexity of that group of three in the way in which they overlap. There's a real sense of energy. There's a real sense of dynamism. Just pretty extraordinary for the Archaic moment.

Beth: On the far left corner, another wounded figure just fits into that corner space.

Steven: Let's focus for a moment on the wounded warrior that is on the right side of the west pediment. You can see that he's fallen back. He's on his left hip and he's on his left elbow, and his right hand seems to be clutching, or perhaps trying to remove a spear that has wounded him.

Beth: Let me stop you for a moment, because he doesn't really look like he's in the position of a wounded warrior. His knee is bent, it comes over his left leg, he's propped up on his left arm, and his right elbow comes up in a rather awkward way. This figure really doesn't seem believable in terms of what he's supposed to be doing, pulling this spear from his body.



West Pediment (right side), from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: That's right, this must be tremendously painful, and probably will kill him, and yet, look at his face; he still retains the "Archaic smile," but for all of this it's important to remember that this is not naturalism, this is not an attempt to render the feelings of the human body. This is a highly stylized, very schematic structure.

Beth: In a way, the figure is a symbol more than a real figure; a symbol of a fallen warrior in the Trojan War.

Steven: One art historian has likened this figure to vase painting, where there was an attempt often to raise torsos up so that you could see the full musculature in the entire front; so, this is not about naturalism, it's about revealing the body in a way.

Beth: The same art historian likened this figure to a reclining kouros, and that's exactly how he looks. It's as though a standing kouros figure has been tipped over. This is so different than what we see on the east pediment, which dates from only about a decade or two later, where we see the beginnings of the Classical style.



Dying Warrior, West Pediment (right side), from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



East Pediment (left to right), from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Let's go take a look. Now, the east pediment is much more fragmentary on the left side, but the one figure of the fallen soldier is in great condition, and it's so different from what we saw, the earlier Archaic west facade.

Beth: While this figure still has a bit of that "Archaic smile," everything else about the position of his body tells us that this is a wounded figure taking his last breath.



Laomedon (upper body), East Pediment from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: You can see that he is holding his sword with his right hand, but he's also trying to push himself back up, but he doesn't seem to be able to do it. His left arm is still in the shield, and he seems to be balancing himself. You know it's just a moment before that shield falls over with a bang.

Beth: There's a sense that he's propping himself up, but also falling at the same time, lowering his body as he dies.

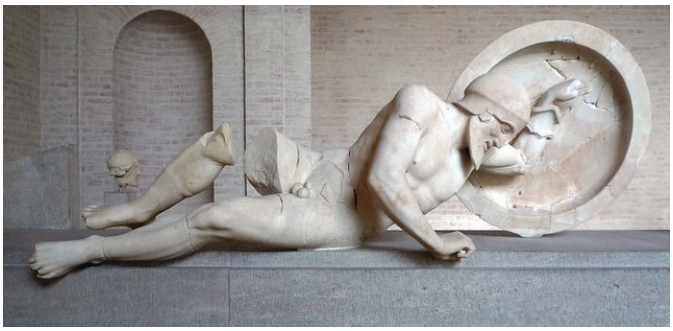
Steven: He's looking down at the ground, and his body is more mature than the other figure, it's also much more naturalistically rendered. We're seeing the origin of the Classical tradition.

Beth: In the Archaic period, we see the hard divisions between the muscles and the parts of the body, outlines almost, to parts of the body, and here, one muscle flows into another, and there's a real sense of skin lying over a skeletal structure.

Steven: That's right. A moment ago, you had said that the Archaic sculpture was nothing but really a set of symbols, and here it's as if the artist has actually observed a human body and *thought* about what it must be like for a figure to fall.

Beth: Instead of having that back leg coming over the front leg in a very unnatural way, and instead of having that elbow lifted up, the right arm of the figure comes over his torso fully; there's no attempt to reveal the whole body tipped forward to us the way we had in the Archaic figure.

Steven: Now look at the torso. Look at the muscles of the leg. This is a far more complex rendering of the human body in a complex pose.



Laomedon, East Pediment from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Just like on the west pediment, as we look at the east pediment, we've got a central figure again, Athena.



Athena (fragment), East Pediment from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: To the right of Athena, we have figures that are much more intact. We have a lunging figure, we saw that on the west pediment as well, who is in the process of impaling a man who has lost his helmet, his shield is falling off his arm, and he is tottering, he has lost his balance.

Beth: He looks as though he's about to collapse.

Steven: We know he's lost his helmet because the young man who's in back of him who seems to be trying to aid him and running towards him, is holding a fragment that we know would have originally been his helmet.

Beth: His body forms a diagonal in that lunge, and so it fits nicely into that triangular space of the pediment. Behind him is another archer just like we saw on the west pediment.



Archer (Herakles), East Pediment from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Archaeologists think that archer is actually the one who has hit the wounded warrior on the opposite side.

Beth: The one who we were discussing before.

Steven: That's right.

Beth: So, we have this wonderful unification of action among all of these figures on the east pediment.

Steven: We have this more complex narrative, even though the same story is being told. We have a much more complex musculature, much more careful attention to the human experience. This makes us ask what has changed? This just been a few years between these pediments, and yet they are so different.

Beth: This is always the questions that art historians ask as we look at works of art that are separated not by a very long period of time, in this case. What has happened in the values of ancient Greek culture that has led them to represent the human figure so differently.

Steven: If you go back in Greek history, the Greeks were deeply influenced by monumental Egyptian sculpture. You can still get a sense of a trace of that in the Archaic tradition, but now there's a sense of self-awareness. These are mobile figrues out in the world that are almost enacting human emotion, human expression, and human experience. That is so different from the idea of representation as symbolic, which it so informed earlier Greek art.

Beth: In the Classical period, we have figures who we can believe are part of a story, it's a story that we can begin to feel for them, we can sympathize with them as we watch them. This is a moment in ancient Greek history when the Greeks have just defeated the Persians in battle; this is an epic victory for Greek culture when many of the Greek city states united to fight their enemy, the Persians.



East Pediment (right side), from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Right, this common enemy that really should have been victorious, the Persians should have won, it was a much larger army; and the Greeks knew it, and the fact that they were victorious suggested to them that there was a kind of order in the universe.

Beth: There's a sense now that the world is into place that just operates arbitrarily according to the laws of the gods, but it's a place that the human mind, with its sense of the rational, can understand.

Steven: So, there is a much greater burden placed on the Greeks with this realization. They are now responsible for their own society. They're not part of a random order, they are part of an order that they actually devise.

Beth: Art historians see the origins of the Classical style in this historical moment. We have an obligation, even here in the twenty-first century, to try to put ourselves, even though it's an impossible task, in the minds of the ancient Greeks, and to truly understand these works of arts from their point of view. It's really important ot remember that these sculptures were painted just like all ancient Greek sculptures, and with very bright colors.



Painted Mockup of Pediment Sculptures, Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: This completely destroys our image of Greek art. When we think about Greek art, we think about these pristine, brillian, white marble surfaces, and they were garish; they were yellow, they were blue, they were green.

Beth: Art historians and archaeologists have done scientific analyses of these sculptures, and found traces and residues of pigments and been able to determine it pretty acurately, at least the red and blues that we find here in some of the geometric patterns.

Steven: It's so jarring for me to try to imagine these colors back, and it's not just that the figures themselves were painted, but the architectural spaces in which these figures were placed was painted as well.

Beth: There are so many ways that we're not looking at these the way that the ancient Greeks did. First of all, these were outside in the open air. They were high up on a pediment on this island.



Head with traces of color, Pediment Sculptures, Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Certainly the color would have made it much easier to see these figures, would try to have been in the shade of architecture. There's another element that we can re-imagine, which is that these figures not only holding things that have since disappeared, they were holding spears, and bows and arrows, but they also had other pieces of metal work that have since been lost. There was hair, sometimes actually hanging like bangs over the forehead, and also long locks that came down and framed the faces. In this case, they were made out of lead, and we can actually see little pieces of the remaining lead that are still there, and so we know precisely where they came out of stone, and that would have helped, I think, create not these figures as single stone objects the way that we see them, but as these much more complex figures that interact with their architectural environments.

Beth: Let's not forget, too, that these are temples. These are places of religious worship, and that they were homes to the gods, and that the central figure on both the east and west pediment is the goddess Athena; and of course, the Greek idea of gods and goddesses is entirely different from our own Judeo-Christian tradition. These are all important things to keep in mind as we look at the Greek sculptures in museums.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdqOIg_QYSc>

23. Kritios Boy from the Acropolis, Athens

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Kritios Boy, from the Acropolis, Athens, c. 480 B.C.E., 3′ 10″ high (Acropolis Museum, Athens) (photo: CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kritios_Boy#/media/File:009MA_Kritios.jpg>

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Acropolis Museum in Athens, Greece.

Steven: We're in the new Acropolis Museum, in Athens, looking at the Kritios Boy.

Beth: We're in the very late Archaic period. Some call this the "Severe Style." We might even call this Early Classical.

Steven: It's really this transition between the late Archaic and the Early Classical. The sculpture is such a great embodiment of that.

Beth: It allows us to see the transition between the archaic kouros, and the much more naturalistic, movement-filled figures that we find on the Parthenon, for example, on the frieze or in the metopes.

Steven: This sculpture was probably broken originally when the Persians invaded Athens and desecrated the Acropolis. This was a huge blow to the Greeks, and when they finally recovered this territory, they took the sculptures that had been destroyed, and they buried them, so it's ironic that the reason that these sculptures are preserved is in part because they were destroyed, but to make the story even more complicated, before the Greeks had been defeated by the Persians, they had an earlier victory at Marathon.

Beth: Where an overwhelming force of Persians was defeated.

Steven: Now that first victory by the Greeks, over the Persians, is important to understand in relationship to the sculpture, because some art historians have suggested that the newfound naturalism that we see in the sculpture is a result of the new sense of self—the new sense of self-determination–that came in the wake of the victory over the Persians.

Beth: And a sense of Athens as the leader among the Greek city-states, who united against the Persians.

Steven: So like the earlier kouros figures, this is marble; it's a standing nude; he's relatively still, although there is this potential for movement.

Beth: With the kouros figures, we had a figure that was both standing still and moving simultaneously, but we here we have incipient movement—movement about to take place. We have a sense of

process, and I think it's that unfolding of time that makes this figure seem so much a part of our world, instead of the timeless world of the kouros.

Steven: The kouros figures were depicted as stick figures. There were mechanical joints, that were suggested, but did not really exist.

Beth: Didn't really work.

Steven: That's right. There was no way for those figures to actually move, whereas this figure, the much more naturalistic renderings of the volumes of the body; the understanding of the musculature; the understanding of the bone structure; and especially the transitions from one part of the body to the next, make the potential for movement believable.

Beth: Although we don't see the feet, and the right side, we don't see the calf, there is a sense that this figure is standing in a pose that art historians call contrapposto. That is, his weight is shifted onto one leg, and here's the important part: as a result, other things happen within the body, so that one shift in one part of the body affects the rest of the body, so the body acts in unison.

Steven: We can see that very clearly with the knees. The weight-bearing knee is higher than the free-leg knee, and that's because that knee droops down a little bit. The axis of the hips are no longer aligned. The weight-bearing leg has a hip that juts upward, into the torso, where the free leg, the hip hands down.

Beth: The shoulder above the weight-bearing leg actually drops down slightly, and that compresses the torso in between. His lifelikeness is carried into the head, which shifts a little bit, so we don't have that strict frontality that we saw in the kouroi. The symmetry of the body is broken. In actuality human beings are never symmetrical, right? Our bodies move and shift.

Steven: That's why the kouroi seem so artificial.

Beth: Exactly; they seem transcendent and timeless, but because the Kritios Boy is asymmetrical, we have a sense of his engagement with the world. Gone is that "Archaic smile," that seems to transcend reality, but one of the really interesting things about the Kritios Boy is, if we look from the side, we see an arch in his back, and there's a sense that he's moving forward, and holding himself back at the same time. He's a bit of a tease.

Steven: Well, he's in a very relaxed pose.

Beth: We should mention that the Greeks had started to make bronze sculptures just before this, and bronze allowed artists to create sculptures with limbs more separated from the torso, or limbs lifted into space.

Steven: And you can see why that could be tricky in marble. In fact, this figure has lost its leg, and it's lost its arms. On his left hip you can still see a fragment of the strut or bridge that would have helped support the arm that would have been next to it. That also lets us know that the arm really was at his sides, very much like a traditional kouros.

Beth: So we see the desire on the part of the Greeks, on the part of this artist, to create a sculpture that's more open, where the limbs and the torso are more separated from one another—but in marble, that's really hard to do.

Steven: One more point about the interest in bronze. Unlike so much marble sculpture, here we have eyes that have been hollowed out. They would have been inset, probably, with glass-paste eyes, that would have been very lifelike, and that's a technique that was commonly used in bronze. In traditional marble sculptures, you actually have the eye carved as part of the solid piece of marble, and they would have just been painted. There is this interesting reference to the technique of bronze casting, even here in a marble sculpture, and I should mention that the reason we call this sculpture the Kritios Boy is because the Kritios sculptor was an important sculptor in bronze at this time, of which this is very stylistically similar. In the entire body, we've moved away from the linear representation of symbols of the body, and we now have these smooth, beautiful, volumes, that represent this Greek ideal of the athletic male youth.

Beth: That represented the peak of human achievement, and also the qualities of the divine.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= Q5IWDhXtsmE>

24. Charioteer of Delphi

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Delphi Archaeological Museum, Greece.



Charioteer of Delphi (half-length), c. 478-474 B.C.E., bronze (lost wax cast) with silver, glass and copper inlay, 1.8 m high (Delphi Archaeological Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: One of the most exceptional objects to have survived from antiquity in Delphi is the Charioteer.

Beth: This figure was part of a very significant, expensive monument that included a team of horses and a groom. Now, chariot races were common at athletic competitions, and there were athletic competitions that we all know about at Olympia—the Olympics. But there were also athletic competitions here, at the Sanctuary at Delphi.

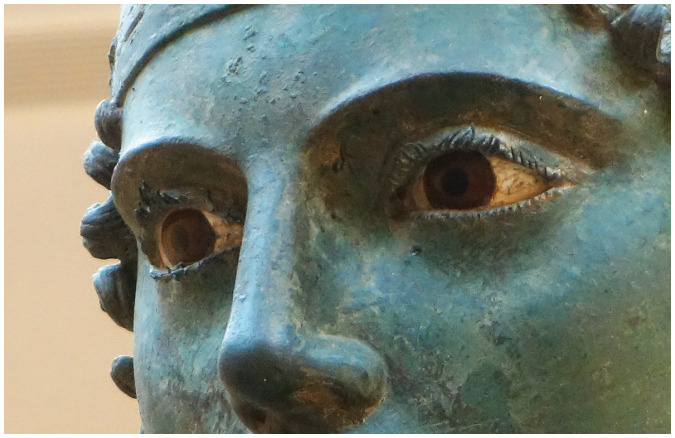
Steven: People would commemorate particular victories. This particular sculpture was commissioned by a king or a tyrant from Sicily.

Beth: There were Greek city states, or poleis, in Sicily that competed in these games.

Steven: So you can imagine that when you would create an elaborate bronze sculpture like this that it was commemorating a particular victory, you were really showing off. This was a kind of trophy, and a very public one.

Beth: Delphi was a place that all of the city states came to compete, and to honor, and make dedications to the God Apollo.

Steven: It's showing off not only because of what it represents, but because of what it's made out of. This is bronze which was a very expensive material. It's largely copper with a little bit of tin. This was cast; it's hollow. In fact, where the arm is missing and on the opposite side you can actually see how thin the bronze is. It still has glass-paste eyes, and it would have been inlaid with silver. There's tremendous workmanship here.



Charioteer of Delphi (detail of eyes), c. 478-474 B.C.E., bronze (lost wax cast) with silver, glass and copper inlay, 1.8 m high (Delphi Archaeological Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: The silver went around his headband and you can see very finely cut pieces of bronze that were used for his eyelashes. He seems remarkably lifelike. What's interesting about this sculpture is that, here we are in what we call the Early Classical period, sometimes referred to as the "Severe Style" (c.480-460 B.C.E). We have the beginnings of naturalism and what's interesting to me about this sculpture is that in some ways he's very life-like the way he turns his head, but at the same time we're seeing contrapposto, but his body is very columnar. There's not a lot of sense of movement in his torso.



Charioteer of Delphi, c. 478-474 B.C.E., bronze (lost wax cast) with silver, glass and copper inlay, 1.8 m high (Delphi Archaeological Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: The moment that's being represented is not the moment of winning the race, it's not that kind of active moment. Instead, this is the moment of quiet victory afterwards.

Beth: Not only that, the legs would not have been visible since they were in the chariot.

Steven: That might explain why it's attenuated—that is, why the figure's legs seem to be a bit too long. That's accentuated because the drape is belted very high above the waist.



Charioteer of Delphi (detail of belted drapery, back), c. 478-474 B.C.E., bronze (lost wax cast) with silver, glass and copper inlay, 1.8 m high (Delphi Archaeological Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And look at those folds, they really remind us of the fluting of a Greek column and look at the way the drapery billows out above the belt. He's not strictly frontal, we might think about a kouros figure, a male nude figure during the Archaic period. Here, he's not frontal. He turns a little bit to the right. He lifts his arm out. You see the beginnings of an interest in a more open pose that would become much more popular in the Classical period. In other words, not a figure with his arms firmly attached to his body.

Steven: The legs are parallel but they lack the stiffness of the earlier Archaic kouros. Look at the delicacy, for instance, with which the feet are represented. These are no longer symbols that are being incised into stone, this is clearly the product of the careful study of the anatomy of the human body. This is based on direct observation.



Charioteer of Delphi (detail of feet), c. 478-474 B.C.E., bronze (lost wax cast) with silver, glass and copper inlay, 1.8 m high (Delphi Archaeological Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: I almost feel like I'm at the games and this is the moment where the winners are being celebrated and this great athlete is there to be admired by the crowd.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-Q79HlORtM>

25. Artemision Zeus or Poseidon

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Artemision Zeus or Poseidon, c. 460 B.C.E., bronze, 2.09 m high, Early Classical (Severe Style), recovered from a shipwreck off Cape Artemision, Greece in 1928 (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Steven: We're in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, and we're looking at a great bronze sculpture of a striding god.

Beth: You didn't even have to tell me it was a god. He so powerful, he looks so in control. We look at him and we know that this is a god who controls the fates of human beings.

Steven: We're pretty sure either Poseidon or Zeus.



Artemision Zeus or Poseidon (left view), c. 460 B.C.E., bronze (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Now, Poseidon is the god of the sea.

Steven: And his brother Zeus is the god who rules all of the Olympian gods from Mount Olympus. The way that we would be able to determine which it was, is dependent on what he was holding.

Beth: If he was holding a trident, he would be Poseidon and if he was holding a thunderbolt, he would be Zeus. Now, sadly, his attribute is lost.

Steven: Most art historians tend to think it is Zeus. A thunderbolt was short and it would not have obscured the face the way that a trident would have, which was much longer. In addition, if you look at the gap in his hand, it's a wide grasp, much wider than it would be if it was the narrow handle of a trident.

Beth: A thunderbolt was Zeus's weapon of choice, he's referred to as, "The Hurler of Thunderbolts." Now, this is bronze, it's important to talk about what this would have looked like in 460 B.C.E. when it was created. It would have gleamed, it would have shined in the light.

Steven: It's so rare that we have an original Greek bronze. The only reason we have this one is that it was recovered from an ancient shipwreck on the Artemision Cape, Greece. What happens is, bronze doesn't rust unless air and water alternate. Underwater, it gets encrusted with lots of barnacles and sea creatures, but it can actually be quite well preserved, as is the case here.



Hellenistic bronze, 1st-3rd century B.C.E, recently found off the Croatian coast (photo: D. Frka/UNESCO)

Beth: That gleaming, shining, radiant effect goes with the idea of this being Zeus.



Artemision Zeus or Poseidon (detail of head), c. 460 B.C.E., bronze (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Look at the way he occupies space, we don't want to stand in front of him, we would be the victim of that thunderbolt. His focus is extraordinary, we have that incredible extension that is more than six feet of one hand to the other and he's steadying himself, but also aiming with that hand before him.

Beth: He's shifting as you would need to do in order to hurl something like a thunderbolt, though it's hard to imagine hurling a thunderbolt.

Steven: That's right, he's pushing off with his right leg and his left leg, the toes are up as if that foot is readying itself to bear the weight of the body as he steps forward.



Artemision Zeus or Poseidon (stance), c. 460 B.C.E., bronze (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

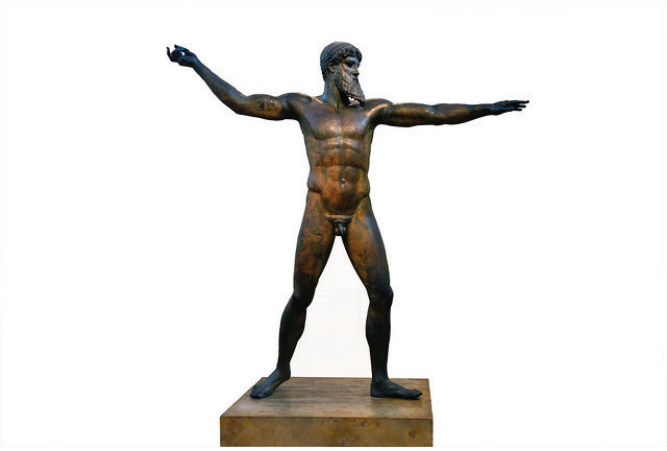
Beth: Now, if you think back just a hundred years to the Archaic period, Greek sculptors were making sculptures out of marble and they were very contained—that is the limbs were close to the body. We see during this Early Classical period—

Steven: Sometimes known as the "Severe Style"—

Beth: An interest in figures that are more open, where you have limbs that are apart, figures that move into the space of the viewer. This is possible because of the use of bronze.

Steven: We don't need the struts, we don't need the bridges that are required in a marble sculpture. Here, the tensile strength of the bronze is great enough so that those arms can be out and give that kind of extraordinary vitality to this figure and invite us to walk around it.

Beth: There are really three distinct views of this sculpture, the front and the back make the figure look very flat, very schematic, very silhouetted. We see the full body, we see both legs, the torso—



Artemision Zeus or Poseidon (front view), c. 460 B.C.E., bronze (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: It's almost like a drawing.

Beth: The arms stretched out.

Steven: The arms, especially the left arm are a little longer than they would be naturally.

Beth: When we move to the side, that sense of flatness changes, and we get a figure that seems to occupy space in all directions.

Steven: We see the depth of the torso, we can see a little bit of twist in the hips and the upper body. So we see this figure breaking out from that kouros tradition dramatically.

Beth: What seems like silhouette actually exists in depth.

Steven: Look, for instance, at the angle of the hole in the right hand. We can see that the thunderbolt (or the trident) was not held parallel with the hand, but would have swung around because it's at a little bit of an angle.



Artemision Zeus or Poseidon (side view), c. 460 B.C.E., bronze, 2.09 m high (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: The remarkable thing to me is that he looks powerful, he looks super human, but still human in his nudity.

Steven: The Greeks, understanding the male human body as this receptacle for all of its ideals. Plato talked about the idea that the gods were the perfect manifestation and that we were a kind of inferior reflection of that perfection. And here, we see the Greeks setting up this idealized human male body, and we are just a reflection of that.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqb4Zvb5PNA>



Artemision Zeus or Poseidon (detail from front, close), c. 460 B.C.E., bronze (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

26. Riace Warriors (or Riaci Bronzes)

Dr. Jeffrey A. Becker



Statue A (foreground) and Statue B (background), from the sea off Riace, Italy, c. 460-450 B.C.E. (?), Statue A, 198 cm high, Statue B, 197 cm high (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale Reggio Calabria) (photo: Robert and Talbot Trudeau, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/robert_trudeau/5082393520>

The *Riace Warriors* (also referred to as the *Riace bronzes* or *Bronzi di Riace*) are two life-size Greek bronze statues of naked, bearded warriors. The statues were discovered by Stefano Mariottini in the Mediterranean Sea just off the coast of Riace Marina, Italy, on August 16, 1972. The statues are currently housed in the Museo Nazionale della Magna Grecia in the Italian city of Reggio Calabria. The statues are commonly referred to as "Statue A" and "Statue B" and were originally cast using the lost-wax technique.

Statue A

Statue A stands 198 centimeters tall and depicts the younger of the two warriors. His body exhibits a strong contrapposto stance, with the head turned to his right. Attached elements have been lost – most likely a shield and a spear; his now-lost helmet atop his head may have been crowned by a wreath. The warrior is bearded, with applied copper detail for the lips and the nipples. Inset eyes also survive for Statue A. The hair and beard have been worked in an elaborate fashion, with exquisite curls and ringlets.



Head and torso (detail), Statue A, from the sea off Riace, Italy, c. 460-450 B.C.E. (?), 198 cm high (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale Reggio Calabria) (photo: Luca Galli, CC BY 2.0) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lucagalli/14933052391>

Statue B

Statue B depicts an older warrior and stands 197 centimeters tall. A now-missing helmet likely was perched atop his head. Like Statue A, Statue B is bearded and in a contrapposto stance, although the feet of Statue B and set more closely together than those of Statue A.

Severe style

The Severe or Early Classical style describes the trends in Greek sculpture between c. 490 and 450 B.C.E. Artistically this stylistic phase



The discovery of the statues in 1972

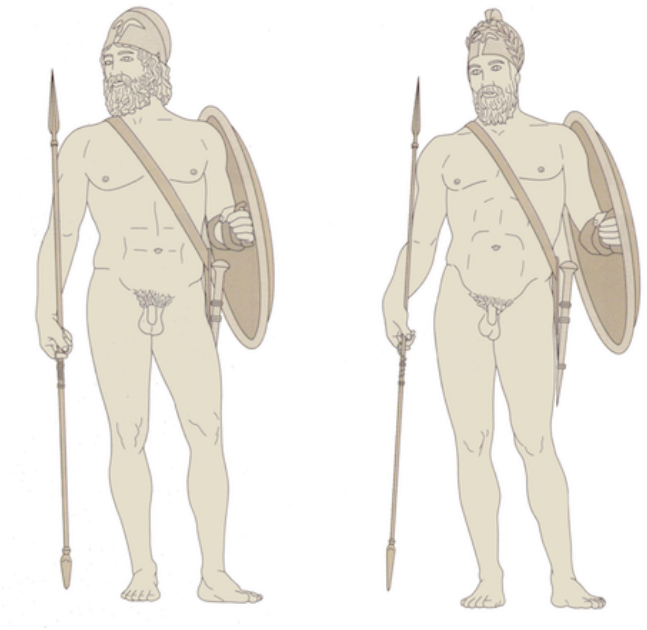
represents a transition from the rather austere and static Archaic style of the sixth century B.C.E. to the more idealized Classical style. The Severe style is marked by an increased interest in the use of bronze as a medium as well as an increase in the characterization of the sculpture, among other features.

Interpretation and chronology

The chronology of the Riace warriors has been a matter of scholarly contention since their discovery. In essence there are two schools of thought—one holds that the warriors are fifth century B.C.E. originals that were created between 460 and 420 B.C.E., while another holds that the statues were produced later and consciously imitate Early Classical sculpture. Those that support the earlier chronology argue that Statue A is the earlier of the two pieces. Those scholars also make a connection between the warriors and the workshops of famous ancient sculptors. For instance, some scholars suggest that the sculptor Myron crafted Statue A, while Alkamenes created Statue B. Additionally, those who support the earlier chronology point to the Severe Style as a clear indication of an Early Classical date for these two masterpieces.

The art historian B. S. Ridgway presents a dissenting view, contending that the statues should not be assigned to the fifth century B.C.E., arguing instead that they were most likely produced together after 100 B.C.E. Ridgway feels that the statues indicate an interest in Early Classical iconography during the Hellenistic period.

In terms of identifications, there has been speculation that the two statues represent Tydeus (Statue A) and Amphiaraus (Statue B), two warriors from Aeschylus' tragic play, *Seven Against Thebes* (about Polyneices after the fall of his father, King Oedipus), and may have been part of a monumental sculptural composition. A group from Argos described by Pausanias (the Greek traveler and writer) is often cited in connection to this conjecture: "A little farther on is a sanctuary of the Seasons. On coming back from here you see statues of Polyneices, the son of Oedipus, and of all the chieftains who with him were killed in battle at the wall of Thebes…" (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.20.5).



A conjectural restored view of the two warriors (source) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lucagalli/14936093115>

The statues have lead dowels installed in their feet, indicating that they were originally mounted on a base and installed as part of some



Statue A, from the sea off Riace, Italy, c. 460-450 B.C.E. (?), 198 cm high (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale Reggio Calabria) (photo: Luca Galli, CC BY 2.0) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lucagalli/14936093115>

sculptural group or other. The art historian Carol Mattusch argues that not only were they found together, but that they were originally installed—and perhaps produced—together in antiquity.

Additional resources:

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PART V

Classical

27. Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in Naples at the Museo Archaeologico Nazionale.

Steven: What is perfect? Well, the ancient Greeks thought the human body was perfect but for them, it was not an individual that was perfect. It was almost mathematical precision, where the proportions of every part of the body were perfect in relationship to the others.

Beth: We are looking at an ancient Roman copy of a Greek bronze original by the great artist, Polykleitos, who sought out to demonstrate just that–what would perfect ideal beauty *be*–thinking about the mathematical relationship of each part of the human body to the other, and in relationship to the whole?

Steven: This is a sculpture called the Doryphorus. Doryphorus means a spear-bearer, and he would have originally been holding a bronze spear. We call it the Doryphorus. Polykleitos apparently called it Canon, not to mean a piece of armament, but a kind of idealized form that could be studied and replicated. That is, a set of ideas that you followed.

Beth: The idea that you could create a perfect human form, based on math, was really part of a bigger set of ideas for the Greeks. If we think about Pythagoras, for example, Pythagoras discovered that harmony in music was based on the mathematical relationship between the notes.

Steven: In fact, Pythagoras tried to understand the origin of all beauty through ratio and, so, it follows that the Greeks would be looking for that in one of the forms that they felt were most beautiful, that is the human body. The Greeks would perform their athletics nude, celebrating the body and its physical abilities. But, even when they represented figures in noble pursuits, like this figure, we have a figure whose clothes have been taken off. This is not because soldiers went into battle nude in ancient Greece, but because this sculpture is not about warfare. It's not a portrait of an individual. This is a sculpture that is about the perfection of human form.

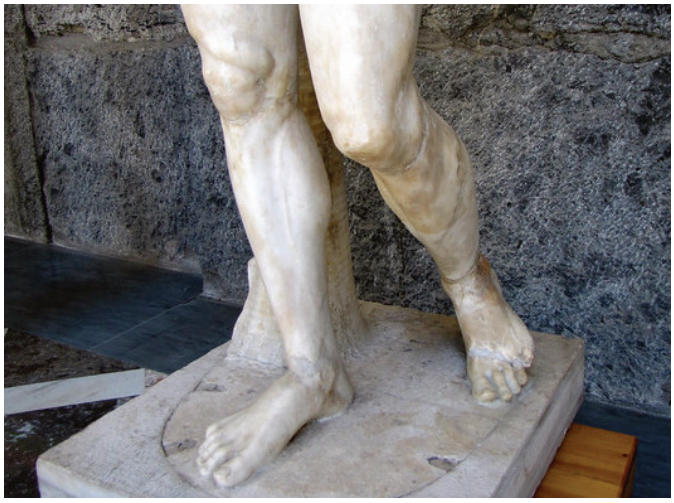
Beth: This was found in a palestra in Pompeii, a place where athletes would work out, perhaps as a kind of inspiration for them.



Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Classical Period, Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E. (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: So, that's another layer of meaning. The Romans loved Greek art, and had it copied in marble very often, and even in a city like Pompeii, we found thousands of sculptures that are copies of ancient Greek originals. This is based on a sculpture that is at the very beginning of the Classical period, before the Parthenon sculptures, but it's after the Archaic figures, it's after the standing figure that we know as the Kouros. Here, the Greeks have turned away from the stiff renderings that had been so characteristic of the Archaic, and have, instead, begun to examine the human body and understand its physiognomy. This is one of the classic expressions of contrapposto.

Beth: The Doryphorus stands on his right foot, his left leg is relaxed, the right leg is weight-bearing, but the left hand would have been weight-bearing the spear. Similarly, the right arm is relaxed, so there's a sense of counterbalancing and harmony in the composition of the body.



Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Classical Period, Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E. (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples)

Steven: In a kouros figure, you have both feet firmly planted, although one leg is forward, but, nevertheless, if you were to draw a line between the ankles, they would still be horizontal to the floor.

Beth: And, in a kouros, the figure is symmetrical.

Steven: Here, both of those things have changed, and you see that his left ankle is up, and so you have a tilt of that axis, the axis of the knees are tilted in the opposite way. The hips are parallel to the axes of the knees, but also tipped, and then look what happens as a result of that. In those earlier figures, there was a perfect symmetry, and a perfect line that could be drawn down the center of the body. Here, there's a gentle S-curve, and you can see, for instance, that his right side is compressed, compared to the left side, because the left hip is literally hanging down over that free leg. It's not being supported.

Beth: To complete that sense of balance and harmony, Polykleitos turned the head slightly, breaking that symmetry of the Archaic kouros figures. With the invention of contrapposto by the Greeks, in the fifth century B.C.E., we would have, for the first time in Western art history, figures who seem fully alive, as though they move in the world. They're like us.



Detail of head, Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer), Classical Period, Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E. (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: This is a sculpture that is, for all of the complexity of what we've just discussed, is simply walking, but the mechanics of the human body walking are incredibly complicated, and here we have a civilization that not only was interested in understanding, through careful observation, how the body moved, but were interested, culturally, in capturing that. We have a society that puts human potential at the center.

Beth: And creates figures who are not transcendent, who don't exist in a separate world, but who exist in our world. They're, in a way, ideal mirrors of ourselves.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqb4Zvb5PNA>



Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer) with viewer, Classical Period, Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450-440 B.C.E. (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

28. Myron, Discobolus (Discus Thrower)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Palazzo Massimo alle Terme in Rome.



Myron, Discobolus (Discus Thrower), Roman copy of an ancient Greek bronze from c. 450 B.C.E., Classical Period (Palazzo Massimo alle Terme) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Ancient Greek sculptures, bronze or marble, are frozen. But that doesn't mean that the ancient Greeks didn't want to convey movement.

Beth: In this case, movement that you couldn't even see with the naked eye.

Steven: What we're looking at is a sculpture by an artist whose name is Myron. We've lost his original, but we have a later Roman marble copy of the Discus Thrower.

Beth: The original was in bronze from the fifth century B.C.E.

Steven: About 450, 460.

Beth: And what we're looking at is one of many Roman copies. In fact, there's one next to the other in this museum, a testament to how popular these were among the Romans.

Steven: The sculpture shows a man who is at that moment where his body is fully wound. Look at the way that his right leg is bearing the weight of his body. His left leg—the toes are bent under, dragging slightly—and he's about to throw that discus.



Myron, Discobolus (Discus Thrower), two Roman copies of an ancient Greek bronze from c. 450 B.C.E., Classical Period (Palazzo Massimo alle Terme) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Detail of Myron, Discobolus (Discus Thrower), Roman copy of an ancient Greek bronze from c. 450 B.C.E., Classical Period (Palazzo Massimo alle Terme) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: This is a moment of tremendous tension, but it's also this moment stasis, of stillness, right before the action.

Beth: Athletes and art historians have debated whether this is even an actual pose that the discus thrower takes in the process.

Steven: It's so interesting, because when we think back about the history of the Greek figure, we think first of the Archaic Kouros, who is so stiff and so stylized. And then we have the tremendous breakthroughs of people like Polykleitos who developed an understanding of the body, and showed in a contrapposto. But here we have something that's so dynamic, and so complex, I mean just look at the arc of the shoulders and the arms, and the way that they reverse the arc of the twist of the hips.

Beth: That is the overriding concern of Myron, the sculptor, to capture the aesthetic qualities here. The sense of balance and harmony, and the beauty in the proportions of the body.

Steven: There is kind of anti-realism here, for all of its careful naturalism. There is no real strain within the body. It is absolutely at rest and ideal, even in this extreme pose.

Beth: If you think about a figure from much later but in a similar pose of movement, of athletic energy, like Bernini's David…

Steven: Well, that's got all this torsion, absolutely.

Beth: …that figure expresses all of the physical power in the face. He's clenching his teeth, right?

Steven: That's true. And his brow is really knit forward. But here, the face is absolutely serene. And it reminds me of the consistency with which the Greeks always maintain their nobility, even in battle, even in terrible situations with monsters. And here, even at this moment when he's about to release the discus.

Beth: Right, that nobility, that calm in the face, is a sign of a nobility of the human being.



Detail of Myron, Discobolus (Discus Thrower), Roman copy of an ancient Greek bronze from c. 450 B.C.E., Classical Period (Palazzo Massimo alle Terme) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Well, this is a sport, and the man is naked, which is what the Greeks did. But there was a real logic there. Why would you cover up the beauty of the body in sport, which is, of course, a celebration of what the human body can achieve. This is really a way to remind ourselves of the Greeks concern with the potential of humanity, the potential of the mind, and the potential of the body.

Beth: Taking that extra step to become even more ideal, more heroic, more noble, than even the finest athlete.

Steven: It is a perfect form.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=225&v=OhJKDqZgNXg>

This particular copy, sometimes known as the Lancelotti Discobolus, was unearthed on the Esquilline Hill in Rome in 1871. It is thought to have been executed during the reign of Antoninus Pius in 2nd century C.E.

29. The Athenian Agora and the experiment in democracy

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



View of the Athenian Agora (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in Athens.

Beth: We're overlooking the Agora, the most important public space in Athens in the fifth century B.C.E.

Steven: If up the sacred way, at the top of the Acropolis were the sacred sites of Athens, here at the base was the place of public discourse, the heart of the Athenian experiment in democracy.

Beth: In the fifth century we see this opening up of the ability of the citizenry to participate in the government. But Athens was not the kind of democracy that we think of in the West. The citizens of

Athens didn't vote for their representatives in the government, but participated directly. With an election, anyone who's a great speaker, or someone who's particularly wealthy could become politically powerful, and so offices were held by rotation, instead of by election.

Steven: There were few positions that were voted on. Those were positions where particular skills were required. For instance, Pericles was re-elected to be the general some 15 times.

Beth: He was essentially the leader or the president of Athens during about a 30-year period. But it's important to remember what we mean by the ideas of democracy that were started and formulated here.

Steven: Well, they were extremely limited. In order to be able to take part in public life, to take part in governmental decision making, you had to be a citizen, and in order to be a citizen, you had to be male, and you had to be Athenian. In fact, Pericles, the great Athenian general, would tighten up the rules, so both of your parents had to be Athenian in order for you to be able to participate.

Beth: Right inside the museum, we can see examples of democracy in action. There are primitive machines for choosing who would sit on the juries.

Steven: We also see inscriptions in small pieces of pottery that were used to vote to ostracize public leaders that were seen to have become corrupt.



Model of the Athenian Agora in the Agora Museum showing the 2nd century C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And so if one citizen was seen to be usurping power, the citizens could vote to ostracize him, and he would have to actually leave Athens. So this is a good reminder that there were a lot of checks in place against any one person assuming too much political power.

Steven: But importantly, it was during the fifth century, that the philosophy behind democratic rule was set forth, and probably the most famous expression of that was written by the historian Thucydides, who chronicled the Peloponnesian War, that is the war between the Athenians and the Spartans, and Thucydides recounts in his history a funeral oration Pericles gave during the early stages of the war with Sparta.

Beth: "If we look to our laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences. If to social standing advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit. Nor again does poverty bar the way. "If a man is able to serve the state, "he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition."

Steven: So what Pericles by way of Thucydides is laying out here, is this notion of a meritocracy, and that no able person's ability is lost due to having been born without wealth.

Beth: And the idea of equality before the law. These are fundamental principles to western ideas of democracy. It's no wonder that we look back to Athens in the fifth century B.C.E. and heroize it maybe a bit too much sometimes.

Steven: Well, especially considering how fragile it was, and how limited it was, and how short-lived it was.

Beth: So this is a space that started out as a place for market, as a place of buying and selling, and gradually during the archaic and then the classical period, became a place of government with administrative buildings, and also some sacred spots as well, although the primary sacred spot was of course on the Acropolis.

Steven: We also have increasingly substantial structures built in the fifth century in the Agora, and one of the most important is called the Stoa. People would have conducted business here. Political discussions might have taken place here. All kinds of civic life. Once a year, a great procession would make it's way through the Agora and up to the sacred mount.

Beth: This is the main religious festival in Athens, dedicated to Athena, the goddess who is the protectoress of the city. So we can imagine as we look over the Agora, a procession of Athenians making their way up to the Parthenon.

Steven: I love to look over the Agora, and to imagine the great philosopher Socrates walking through here, causing trouble, asking questions.

Beth: Asking uncomfortable questions that would ultimately make him an enemy of the Athenian state…

Steven: …and lead to his execution.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=278&v=TYXCcTchLnI>



View of the Athenian Agora from the Acropolis (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

30. The Parthenon, Athens

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Iktinos and Kallikrates, Parthenon (from the northeast), Acropolis, Athens, 437-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted walking around the Acropolis in Athens, Greece.

Steven: We're looking at the Parthenon. This is a huge marble temple to the goddess Athena.

Beth: We're on the top of a rocky outcropping in the city of Athens very high up, overlooking the city and the Aegean Sea.

Steven: Athens was just one of many Greek city states and almost everyone had an acropolis—that is, had a fortified hill within its city because these were warring states.

Beth: In the fifth century, Athens was the most powerful city state and that's the period that the Parthenon dates to.

Steven: This precinct became a sacred one rather than a defensive one. This building has had tremendous influence not only because it becomes the symbol of the birth of democracy, but also because of its extraordinary architectural refinement. The period when this

was built in the fifth century (constructed 447-38 B.C.E, sculpture completed 432 B.C.E.) is considered the High Classical moment, and for so much of Western history, we have measured our later achievements against this perfection.

Beth: It's hard not to recognize so many buildings in the West. There's certainly an association especially to buildings in Washington, D.C., and that's not a coincidence.

Steven: Because this is the birthplace of democracy—it was a limited democracy, but democracy nevertheless.

Beth: There was a series of reforms in the fifth century in Athens that allowed more and more people to participate in the government.



Contemporary view of Athens, with the Acropolis beyond (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: We think that the city of Athens had between 300,000-400,000 inhabitants and only about 50,000 were actually considered citizens. If you were a woman or, obviously, if you were a slave, you were not participating in this democratic experiment.

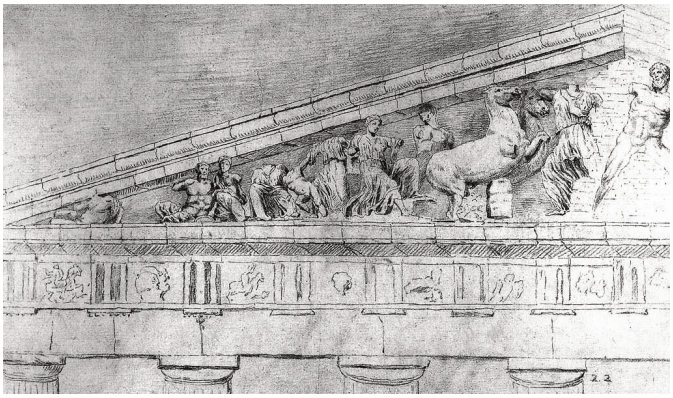
Beth: This is a very limited idea of democracy.

Steven: This building is dedicated to Athena, and in fact the city itself is named after her—and of course, there's a myth. Two gods vying for the honor of being the patron of this city…

Beth: …those two gods are Poseidon and Athena. Poseidon is the god of the sea, and Athena has many aspects. She's the goddess of wisdom, she is associated with war, and with a kind of intelligence about creating and making things.



Detail, Lithograph by Kaeppelin et Cie., ca. 1840, Athena and Poseidon, Amasis Painter, Attic black-figure amphora, c.540 B.C.E. (Cabinet des Medailles, Paris) (photo: Shakko, CC-BY-SA-4.0) <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Athena_Poseidon_ Cdm_Paris_DeRidder222.jpg>



Jacques Carrey, Sketch of the West Pediment of the Parthenon (Athena and Poseidon at far right), 1674, red and black chalk (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris) (photo: Alpunin, CC-BY-SA-4) <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ЛВ_Парфенон_Жак_Каррей.jpg>

Steven: Both of these gods gave the people of this city a gift and then they had to choose. Poseidon strikes a rock and from it springs forth the saltwater of the sea. This had to do with the gift of naval superiority.

Beth: Athena offered in contrast an olive tree. The idea of the land of prosperity, of peace. The Athenians chose Athena's gift. There actually is site here on the Acropolis where the Athenians believed you could see the mark of the trident from Poseidon where he struck the ground and also the tree that Athena offered.

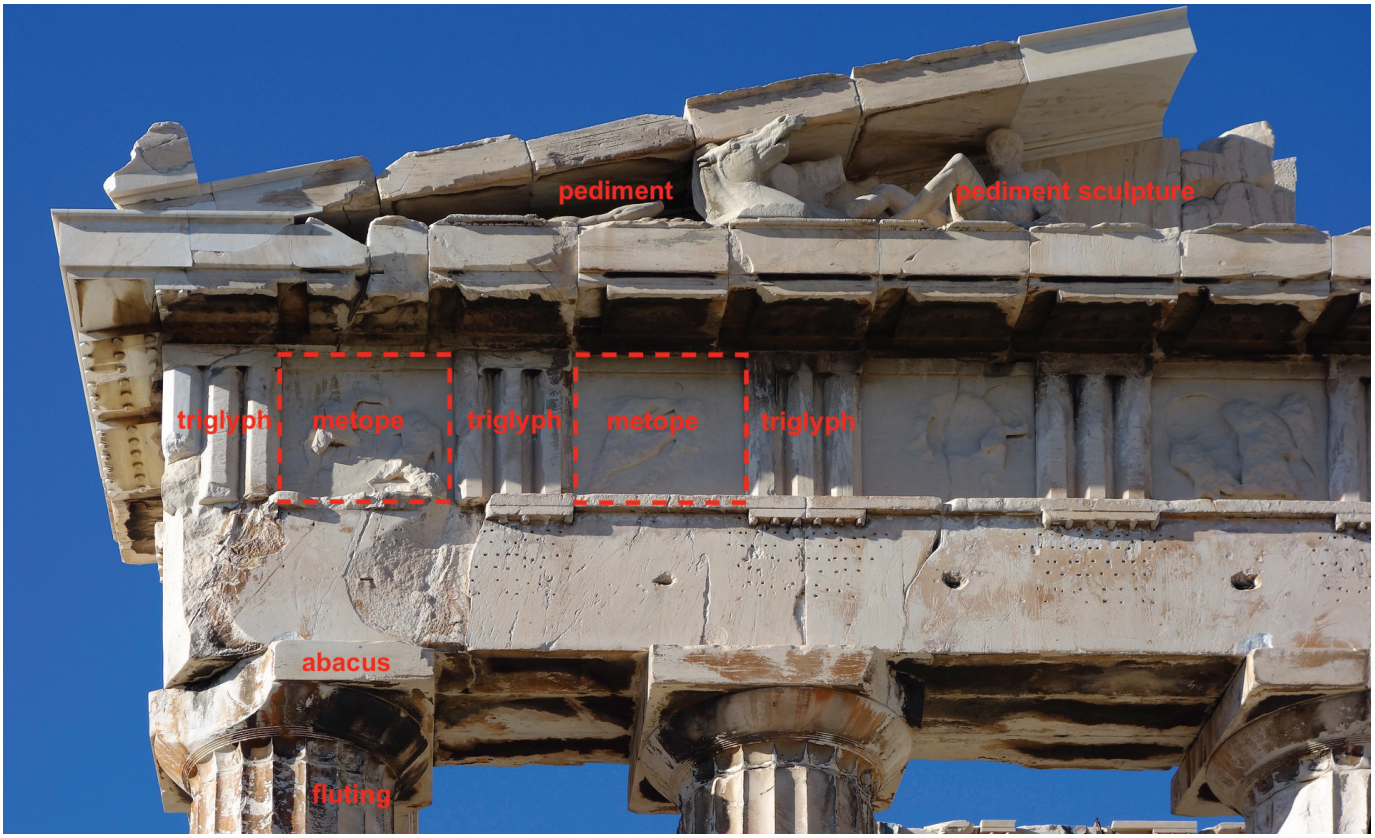
Steven: Actually the modern Greeks have replanted an olive tree in that space. Let's talk about the building. It is really what we think of when we think of a Greek temple, but the style is specific. This is a Doric temple.



Iktinos and Kallikrates, Parthenon (east facade), Acropolis, Athens, 447-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Although it has Ionic elements, which we'll get to.

Steven: The Doric features are really easy to identify. You have massive columns with shallow broad flutes—the vertical lines. Those columns go down directly into the floor of the temple which is called the stylobate and at the top the capitals are very simple. There's a little flare that rises up to a simple rectangular block, called an abacus. Just above that are triglyphs and metopes.



Annotated diagram of triglyphs, metopes, and pediment, Iktinos and Kallikrates (Phidias directed the sculptural program), Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens, 447-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: It's important to say that this building was covered with sculpture. There were sculpture in the metopes, there were sculpture in the pediments and, in an unprecedented way, a frieze that ran all the way around four sides of the building just inside this outer row of columns that we see. Now this is an Ionic feature. Art historians talk about how this building combines Doric elements with Ionic elements.



Frieze reconstruction, Iktinos and Kallikrates (Phidias directed the sculptural program), Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens, 447-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: In fact there were four Ionic columns inside the west end of the temple.

Beth: When the citizens of Athens walked up the sacred way, perhaps for religious procession or festival, they encountered the west end, and they walked around it either on the north or south sides to the east and the entrance. Right above the entrance in the sculptures of the pediment, they could see the story of Athena and Poseidon vying to be the patron of the city of Athens. On the frieze just inside, they saw themselves, perhaps—at least in one interpretation— involved in the Panathenaic Procession, the religious procession in honor of the goddess Athena. This was a building that you walked up to, you walked around, and inside was this gigantic sculpture of Athena.



Iktinos and Kallikrates, Parthenon (west facade with crane), Acropolis, Athens, 447-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: These were all sculptures that we believe were overseen by the great sculptor Phidias. One of my favorite parts are the metopes,

carved with scenes that showed the Greeks battling various enemies either directly or metaphorically: the Greeks battling the Amazons, the Greeks against the Trojans, the Lapiths against the Centaurs, and the Gigantomachy—the Greek gods against the Titans.

Beth: All of these battles signified the ascendancy of Greece and of the Athenians, of their triumphs: civilization over barbarism, rational thought over chaos.



Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, metope with Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs, 447-32 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: You've just hit on the very meaning of this building. This is not the first temple to Athena on this site. Just a little bit to the right as we look at the east end there was an older temple to Athena that was destroyed when the Persians invaded. This was a devastating blow to the Athenians.

Beth: One really can't overstate the importance of the Persian War for the Athenian mindset that created the Parthenon. Athens was invaded and beyond that, the Persians sacked the Acropolis, sacked the sacred site, the temples, and destroyed the buildings.

Steven: They burned them down. In fact, the Athenians took a vow that they would never remove the ruins of the old temple to Athena…

Beth: …so they would remember it forever.

Steven: But a generation later they did.

Beth: They did, well, there was a peace that was established with the Persians, and some historians think that that allowed them to renege on that vow, and Pericles, the leader of Athens and a sort of statesman-orator-general, embarked on this enormous, very expensive building campaign.

Steven: Historians believe that he was able to fund that because the Athenians had become the leaders of what is called the Delian League, an association of Greek city states that paid a kind of tax to help protect Greece against Persia, but Pericles dipped into that treasury and built this building.

Beth: This alliance of Greek city states—their treasure, their tax money, their tribute—was originally located in Delos, hence the Delian League, but Pericles managed to have that treasure moved here to Athens and actually housed in the Acropolis. The sculpture of Athena herself, which was made of gold and ivory, Phidias said if we need money, we can melt down the enormous amount of gold that decorates this sculpture of Athena.

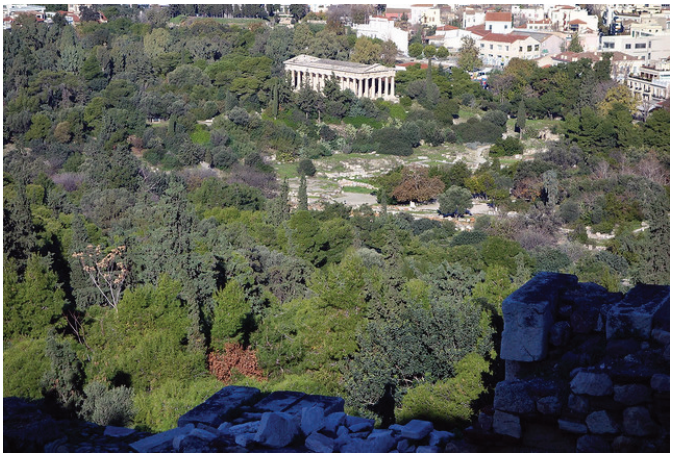


Phidias, Athena Pathenos, 447-32 B.C.E., this is a 3rd century C.E. copy known as Varvakeion found in Athens (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Since that sculpture doesn't exist any longer, we know somebody did that. We need to imagine this building not pristine and white but rather brightly colored, and also a building that was used. This was a storehouse. It was the treasury, and so we have to imagine that it was absolutely full of valuable stuff.

Beth: In fact we have records that give us some idea of what was stored here. We think about temples or churches or mosques as places where you go in to worship. That's not how Greek religion work. There usually was an altar on the outside where sacrifices were made and the temple was the house of the god or goddess, but with the Parthenon, art historians and archeologists have not been able to locate an altar outside, so we've wondered what was this building? One answer is it was a treasury.

Steven: It also functions symbolically. It is up on this hill. It commands this extraordinary view from all parts of the city, and so it was a symbol of both the city's wealth and power.



View of the Athenian Agora from the Acropolis (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: It's a gift to Athena. When you make a gift to your patron goddess, you want visitors to be awed by the image of the goddess that was inside and of her home.

Steven: This isn't any goddess, this is the goddess of wisdom, so the ability of man to understand our world and its rules mathematically, and then to express them in a structure like this, is absolutely appropriate.

Beth: Iktinos is a supreme mathematician. I mean we know that the Greeks even in the Archaic period before this were concerned with ideal proportions.

Steven: Pythagoras.

Beth: Or the sculptor Polykleitos, and his sculpture of the Doryphoros, searching for perfect proportions and harmony and using mathematics as the basis for thinking that through.

Steven: We have that here.

Beth: To an unbelievable degree.

Steven: What's extraordinary is that its perfection is an illusion based on a series of subtle distortions that actually correct for the imperfections of our sight. That is, the Greeks recognize that human perception was itself flawed, and that they needed to adjust for it in order to give the visual impression of perfection. Their mathematics and their building skills were precise enough to be able to pull this off.

Beth: Every stone was cut to fit precisely.

Steven: When we look at this building we assume it's rectilinear—it's full of right angles—and in fact, there's hardly a right angle in this building.

Beth: There's another interpretation of these tiny deviations—that these deviations give the building a sense of dynamism, the sense of the organic, that otherwise it would seem static and lifeless. The Greeks had used this idea that art historians call entasis before in other buildings for slight adjustments For example, columns bulge toward the center. This is not new, but the degree to which it's used here—and the subtlety in the way it's used—is unprecedented.

Steven: For instance, in those Doric columns, you can see that there's a taper and you assume that it's a straight line but the Greeks wanted ever so slight a sense of the organic. That the weight of the building was being expressed in the bulge, the entasis of the column, about a third of the way from the bottom. But in this case, every single column bulges only 11/16th of an inch the entire length of that column. The way that the Greeks pulled this off is they would bring column drums up to the site. They would carefully carve the base and the top and then they would carve in between.

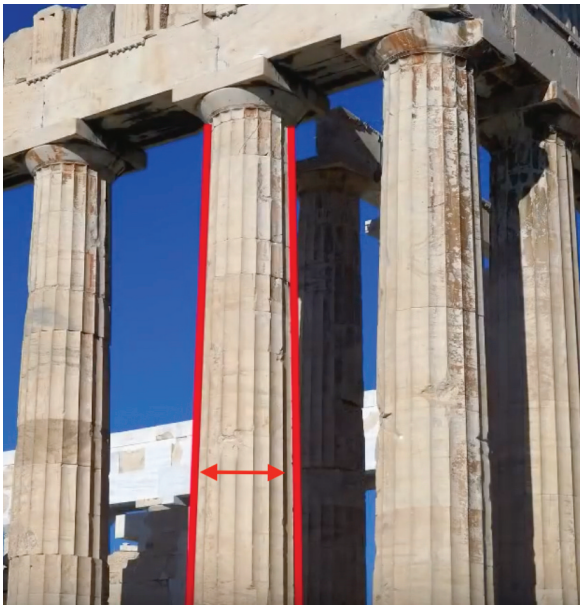


Diagram showing entasis, Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So we see this slight deviation in the columns, but we also see it not only vertically but also horizontally in the building.

Steven: That's right. You assume that the stylobate (the floor of the temple) is flat but it's not. Rain water would run off it because the edges are lower than the center.

Beth: But only very, very slightly lower.

Steven: Across the long side of the temple, the center rises only 4 3/8 of an inch, and on the short sides of the temple, on the east and the west side, the center rises by only 2 3/8 inches. But what happens is, it corrects: our eye would naturally see a straight line, seen as if it rises up at the corners a little bit, so it seems to us to be perfectly flat. The columns are all leaning in a little bit.

Beth: You would expect the columns to be equidistant from one another, but in fact the columns on the edges are slightly closer to one another than the columns in the center of each side.

Steven: Architectural historians have hypothesized that the reason for this is because the column at the edge is in the sense an orphan. It doesn't have anything past it. Therefore, it would seem to be less substantial. If we could make that column a little bit closer to the one

next to it, it might compensate and it would have an even sense of density across the building.

Beth: Placing of the columns closer together on the edges created a problem in the levels above. One of the rules of the Doric order is that there had to be a triglyph right above the center of a column or in between each column.

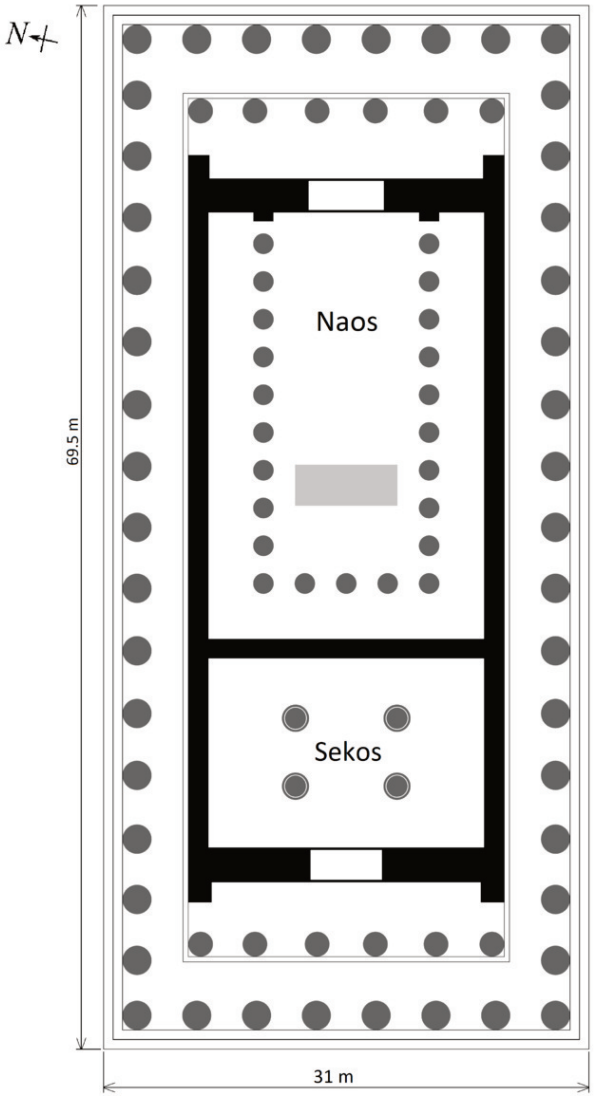


Capitals and triglyphs, Iktinos and Kallikrates, Parthenon (south facade), Acropolis, Athens, 447-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: But they also wanted the triglyphs to be at the very edge, so one triglyph would abut against another triglyph at the corner of the building. If in fact you're placing your columns closer together, you can actually solve for that problem. You can avoid the stretch of the metope in between those triglyphs that would result, but because the columns are placed so close together, they had the opposite problem, which is to say that the metopes at the ends of the building would be too slender. What Phidias has done—in concert with Iktinos and Kallikrates, the architects—is to create sculptural metopes that are widest in the center, just like the spaces between the columns, and actually the metopes themselves gradually become thinner as you move to the edges, so that you can't really even perceive the change without measuring.

Beth: The general proportions of the building can be expressed mathematically as X= 2Y + 1. Across the front we see eight columns and along the sides, 17 columns. That ratio also governs the spacing between the columns and its relationship to the diameter of a column. Math is everywhere.

Steven: If we look at the plan of the structure, we see the exterior colonnade on all four sides. On the east and west end it's actually a double colonnade and on the long sides, inside the columns, a solid masonry wall. You can enter rooms on the east and west only. The west has a smaller room with the four Ionic columns within it, but the east room was larger and held the monumental sculpture of Athena. It's interesting. The system that was used to create a vault that was high enough to enclose a sculpture that was almost 40 feet high was unique. There was a U-shape of interior columns at two stories. They were Doric, and they surrounded the goddess. The sculpture is now lost but the building is almost lost as well. Here we come to one of the great tragedies of Western architecture. This building survived into the seventeenth century and was in pretty good shape for 2000 years, and it's only in the modern era that it became a ruin.



Plan of the Parthenon (graphic: Io Herodotus, CC-BY-SA-4.0) <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b2/Parthenon_plan.png>

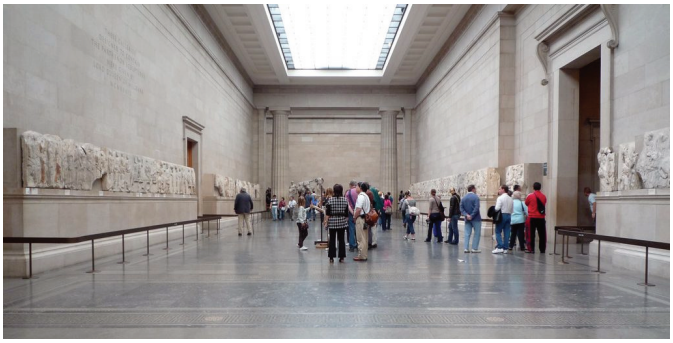
Beth: First it was as we know an ancient Greek temple for Athena, then it became a Greek Orthodox church, then a Roman Catholic church and then a mosque. In a war between the Ottomans—who were in control of Greece at this moment in history in the seventeenth century—and the Venetians. The Venetians attacked the Parthenon, the Ottomans used the Parthenon to hold ammunitions, or gunpowder. Gunpowder exploded from the inside, basically ripping the guts out of the Parthenon.

Steven: Then to add insult to injury, in the eighteenth century, Lord Elgin received permission from the Turkish government to take sculptures that had already fallen off the temple and bring them back to England. The lion's share of the great sculptures by Phidias are now in London. But Greece recently built a museum just down the hill from the Acropolis, specifically intended to house these sculptures should the British ever release them.



Leo von Krenze, Ideal View of the Acropolis, Athens, 1846, oil on canvas, 102.8 x 147.7 cm (Neue Pinakothek, Munich) (photo: Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Beth: Some have argued that Elgin saved the sculptures, as they would have been further damaged had he not removed them, but what to do about the future is uncertain.



Duveen Room, British Museum with Phidias (?), Parthenon Frieze, c. 438-32 B.C.E., Pentelic marble (420 linear feet of the 525 that complete the frieze are in the British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: At least one theory states that this building was paid for by plundered treasury from the Delian League, so there's a long history of contested ownership.

Beth: As we stand here very high up on the Acropolis overlooking the Aegean Sea, islands beyond and mountains on this glorious day, I can't help but imagine standing inside the Parthenon between those columns, which we can't do today.



Iktinos and Kallikrates, Parthenon (with contemporary scaffolding), Acropolis, Athens, 447-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: The site is undergoing tremendous restoration. There are cranes, there's also scaffolding to maintain the ruin and not let it fall into worst disrepair.

Beth: But if we *could* stand there—what would it feel like?

Steven: There is this beautiful balance between the theoretical and the physical. The Greeks thought about mathematics as the way that we could understand the divine, and here it is in our world.

Beth: There's something about the Parthenon that is both an offering to Athena, the protector of Athens, but also something that's a monument to human beings, to the Athenians, to their brilliance, and by extension I suppose in the modern era, human spirit generally.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=962&v=tWDflkBZC6U>

31. Phidias, Parthenon sculpture (pediments, metopes and frieze)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the British Museum, London.



Iktinos and Kallikrates, Parthenon (with modern scaffolding), Acropolis, Athens, 447-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: High atop the natural fortification that is the Acropolis in Athens is the sacred center of the city and some of the most celebrated buildings in all of western history. The most famous is the Parthenon, dedicated to the virgin goddess Athena.

Beth: We're talking about the fifth century B.C.E. in ancient Athens. This is a period we refer to as the Classical, the high point of Greek culture, and all of this comes right after an important Greek victory over the Persian Empire.

Steven: The Persians controlled an enormous area. Athens and in fact all of Greece, which was then divided into a series of distinct city states, was tiny in comparison. But miraculously Athens was able to decisively defeat the Persians in 479 B.C.E.

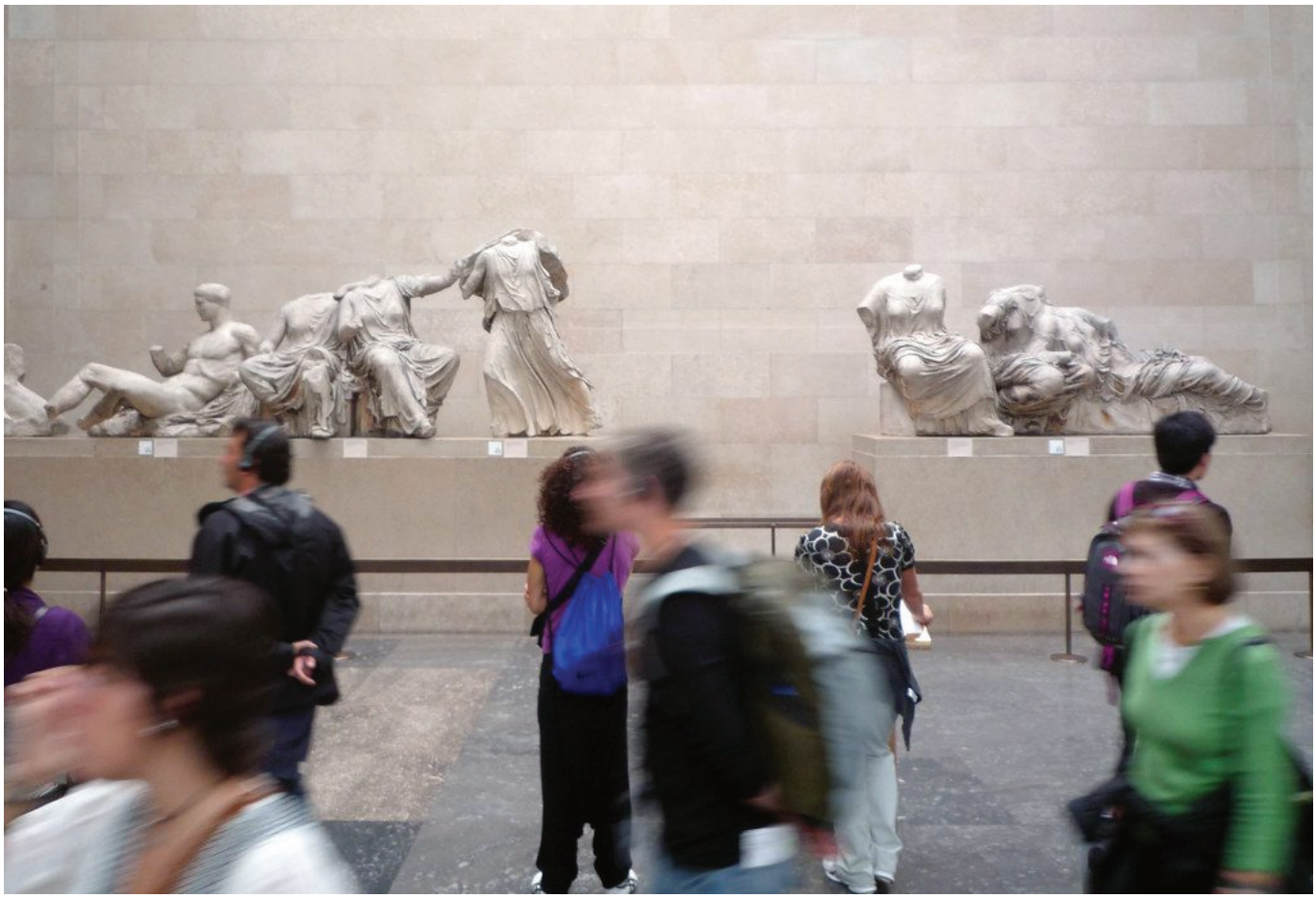
Beth: For many art historians the Classical period of ancient Greece is a result of the incredible optimism and confidence, some would say overconfidence, of the Athenians in this period after the defeat of the Persians.

Steven: And the Parthenon is often seen as the physical embodiment of that confidence, and while the building was constructed the sculptures, which are every bit as important as the building itself, took a few more years to finish.



West frieze (copy) in the sunlight, Iktinos and Kallikrates, Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens, 447-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So we're here in the British Museum, which houses together with the Acropolis Museum in Athens and a few sculptures in the Louvre, the vast majority of sculpture that was made for the Parthenon. These were overseen by the famous sculptor Phidias, and sometimes we refer to the style of the sculpture that we see here as "Phidian." There are three primary locations where we find sculpture on the Parthenon. Most obviously in the pediment, the triangular area at the very top of the temple, on both the east and west sides. Below that, there're spaces called metopes, in between triglyphs. And lastly, in the frieze—that is a band of continuous sculpture. The Parthenon is an interesting building because it combines both Doric and Ionic elements. The triglyphs and metopes are typical Doric elements, while the frieze is considered a typical element of Ionic temples.



Phidias, Parthenon, Detail of the East Pediment Sculpture (with visitors), pediment: c. 438-432 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: What we see here in London—or the examples in Athens or in Paris—are marbles that have lost all their color. And it's important to remember that all of these sculptures would have been very high up but were originally brightly colored and this would have helped their visibility. And that's especially true for the frieze, which would have been atop the interior colonnade and so would have been seen in shadow.

Beth: When the Athenians approached the Parthenon on top of the Acropolis, they approached the west side and walked around either the north or south sides to the east where the entrance was.

Steven: And that means that they would have seen the west pediment first, and then the east pediment. This building is 2,500 years old and it has suffered terribly and so has the sculpture. And so what we're seeing is the result of the terrible abuse that this building has suffered over many centuries.

Beth: In many ways we're lucky that *anything* survives for us to look at. So let's start with the west pediment. The subject there is the competition between Poseidon and Athena to be the patron deity of the city of Athens.

Steven: But we know who wins, because the city is named after Athena and, sadly, almost nothing survives from the west pediment.

Beth: On the east pediment the story of the birth of Athena.

Steven: And so right in the center of the pediment, at its point, would have been the god Zeus giving birth to his daughter Athena, who was born full-grown from his head.

Beth: Sadly those central figures are lost. What we have on either side are the figures who were present, some of whom are reacting to the birth of Athena.

Steven: The pediment is traditionally read from left to right and it begins with the dawn, the god Helios at his chariot representing the rising sun.

Beth: Athena was born at sunrise, so this makes sense.

Steven: The baseline of the pediment functions as a horizon line. It's a brilliant interpretation of the space and it allows us to imagine the figures rising up.

Beth: And then we have the gods and goddesses on Mount Olympus present for the birth of Athena.

Steven: One of the figures that is in the best condition is the nude figure that we think is likely the god Dionysos, the god of wine. And if it is, he looks like he is appropriately lounging perhaps with a cup of wine in his hand.



Parthenon, Phidias, East Pediment Sculpture (Dionysus?), 438-432 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: That Greek love of the human body, particularly the male nude, and the articulation of the anatomy and the muscles of the body.

Steven: And while we see this figure at rest, the artist has been careful to represent his body in such a way that we know his strength.

Beth: As we approach the middle of the pediment where we would have seen the birth of Athena, it appears as though there's some acknowledgement of the action that's taking place in the center of the pediment. We have a standing figure who seems to be moving away as though in surprise at the event that's taking place.

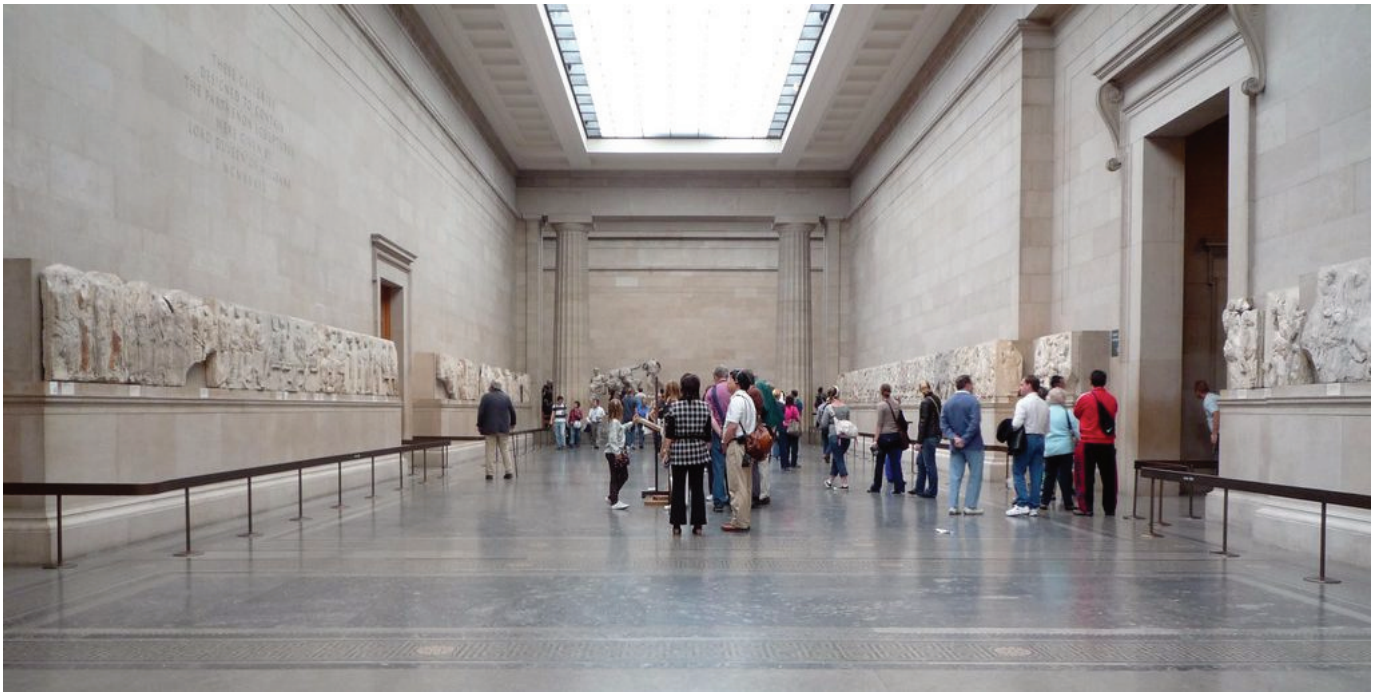
Steven: And the figure to her left, even though the head has been lost, seems taken aback. She seems to be directly reacting. Her body seems to be jerking away. And so there is this sense of the momentary.

Beth: Dionysos and the other seated figure perhaps haven't yet noticed the momentous event of the birth of Athena.



Phidias, Parthenon, Detail of the East Pediment Sculpture (Hestia, Dione, Aphrodite?), 438-432 B.C.E (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: On the right side, we have the famous group, the "Three Goddesses". And here we see the Greeks' extraordinary ability to render not only the human body but the forms of clothing that both obscure and reveal the body below it. For example, in the figure at the right, who is reclining, if you look at the way that the cloth wraps around her upper thigh it is bunched up and so we know the thigh is far below that cloth. At the same time, the torsion of that cloth reveals the musculature underneath.



Duveen Room, British Museum with Phidias (?), Parthenon Frieze, c. 438-32 B.C.E., Pentelic marble (420 linear feet of the 525 that complete the frieze are in the British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: But this isn't the way that drapery really looks. This is the Phidian style that we associate with this Classical moment in ancient Greece where the drapery acts almost like water flowing around the body.

Steven: Some of it is carved *very* deeply so that you get these black rich shadows. There's a nobility and a sense of luxury. These are beings without care. And then finally, at the extreme right corner, we have this brilliant form of a horse's head, which belonged to the chariot of the Goddess of the Moon.



Phidias, Parthenon, Detail of the East Pediment Sculpture (right side), 438-432 B.C.E (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And so on one side we have the rising of the day with Helios and his chariot. Here we have the end of the day, with the Goddess of the Moon.

Steven: And whereas the horses at dawn are full of energy, here the horse looks exhausted. Its mouth, its nostrils seem almost to be resting on the edge of the building.

Beth: Just below the pediment we find a band occupied by triglyphs and metopes, and on each of the four sides we find four mythic battles.



Steven: So each side of the building represents its own story, and here at the British Museum, the "Lapiths against the Centaurs." And all four of these stories are really stand-ins for the way that the Greeks saw themselves in relationship to their enemy, the Persians. That is, that the Greeks stood for civilization, for order, and the Persians to the east represented a kind of disorder, a kind of chaos and barbarism.

Beth: The story between the Lapiths (Greeks from mythology) and the Centaurs (half man, half horse) begins at a wedding, where the Centaurs have had too much to drink.

Steven: They weren't used to drinking at all and they decided to make off with the Lapith women. What we're seeing is the battle that resulted. In several of the metopes, the Centaurs are victorious. In one extraordinary metope, we see a Lapith who has been killed by a Centaur. The Centaur rises up on his hind legs in victory, and the Lapith, whose body is so beautifully rendered, lies below. The body even in its damaged state shows the nobility of the Greeks and the Greeks' love for the human body.



Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, metope with Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs, 447-32 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: In another metope we see the victorious Lapith, who has got a Centaur by the neck pulling him back, while the Centaur himself seems to be reaching to his back, perhaps to a wound inflicted by the Lapith. And what I'm struck by in both of these metopes is the way that the figures almost break the bound of the metope, creating diagonal forms that have an incredible amount of energy.



Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, metope with Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs, 447-32 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Look at how the beauty of that torso is highlighted against the rhythmic folds of the drape behind. This is clearly fiction. In the middle of battle, you don't have a perfectly splayed drape. But for the sculptor the subject was clearly the beauty of the body. Look at the way the Lapith's left leg pushes out at a diagonal as he tries to get a foothold to help support him as he pulls back the Centaur's body, almost like it was a bow. You get a sense of the enormous energy that's being expended here.

Beth: The center of this composition is empty, and the figures frame that center, creating these arcs that pull against one another.



Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, metope with Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs (oblique view), 447-32 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: This particular Lapith is virtually a freestanding sculpture (sculpture you can walk around) but the Parthenon is also rightly known for a shallower relief sculpture. It would have been seen not on the outside of the temple but just inside the exterior columns.

Beth: So let's go have a look at the justly famous frieze from the Parthenon. We should say that no one is entirely certain what the frieze represents, but there is a general consensus that the frieze represents the Panathenaic Procession–that is, an important yearly procession that went up the sacred way to the Acropolis in honor of the Goddess Athena.

Steven: And the procession would make its way to one of the most sacred objects in all of Athens, an ancient all of wood statue of the goddess Athena. This is extraordinarily rare. In almost every other ancient Greek temple context we see images from Greek mythology, we don't see representations of Greeks of their own day.

Beth: What we're seeing is an *idealized* image of the Athenians as though they projected themselves into the realm of the gods. And we know that the Athenians were incredibly self-confident. They had defeated the Persians against all odds and so this surely must have something to do with the way they imagined themselves on the frieze.

Steven: Close to the beginning of the frieze on the west front, you see preparations for the procession. Look at the two figures on horseback. Look how easily they ride on those horses that seem full of energy.



Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, frieze with Panathenaic Procession, 438-432 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, frieze with Panathenaic Procession, 438-432 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: The figure on the right pulls his horse back and leans back himself. The figure on the left turns back to look at him as his horse gallops forward. The naturalism in the movement here is an amazing artistic achievement.

Steven: This would have been brightly painted and in fact, the background would have been a brilliant blue.



Detail of horse head with holes for bridle, Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, frieze with Panathenaic Procession, 438-432 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And there were also metal attachments, where appropriate.

Steven: And in fact you can see three holes across the head of the horse on the right, which would have originally held the bridal.

Beth: Look at the figures. Their bodies are ideal and athletic. They move easily.

Steven: There's also great attention to the structures of the body itself. The people who carve this stone understood the musculature, understood the bone structure of the human body. There are 60 horses on both the north and the south side. There's incredible variety and rhythm as these horses overlap and move across this ribbon of stone.

Beth: Look at the overlapping legs of the horses, you can almost hear them galloping. But as animated as the horses are, the men themselves seem calm and noble.

Steven: We're seeing almost all of their faces in perfect profile, which the Greeks believed was the most noble way of representing a face. Their mouths were closed as a representation of their sense of calm and control. And these were attributes that the Greeks revered. And here, like on the metopes, we're seeing an expression of the Greeks' ability to control nature, to control these powerful animals.

Beth: The next group that we see are charioteers, and actually there was a chariot competition as part of the Panathenaic Procession.



Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, frieze with Panathenaic Procession, 438-432 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: In addition to the chariots, there are animals that have been brought for sacrifice. Now, as we wrap around the building towards the east end, the energy that had existed with the horsemen calms and slows, and then here the series of women who walk solemnly forward. We see large seated figures. These are the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus, but interspersed with smaller representations of standing humans.

Beth: And so we can differentiate the gods and goddesses from mortal humans by their size.

Steven: But it's extraordinary that the Athenians are placing themselves in the immediate company of the gods.



Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, frieze with Panathenaic Procession, 438-432 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: We see two figures, an older male figure and a younger smaller figure, the gender of which has been debated, and they seem to be folding a garment. We understand this as the peplos (woman's garment), which was regularly woven to clothe the sacred olivewood sculpture of Athena.



Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, frieze with Panathenaic Procession, showing Athena (center) and Hephaistos (right), 438-432 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And the figure immediately to the right is Athena, but she has got her back to the peplos. And look how beautifully she is rendered, even here in this badly damaged relief sculpture. You can see her easy stance on that chair.

Beth: We again see that very stylized drapery that clings to her right calf and her thighs and outlines her breasts, and cascades and bunches up at her hips.

Steven: I love the way Hephaistos turns around and looks back over his right shoulder to address her.

Beth: We should say that although there's general agreement that this is the Panathenaic Procession, there are many anomalies. For example, the fact that the Athenians are putting themselves together with the gods, and this has led art historians to look for alternative readings.

Steven: These sculptures are 2,500 years old. It's no wonder that there are persistent questions. No matter what is being represented here, there is consensus that these are some of the finest sculptures from Classical antiquity.

Beth: And so it's no wonder that the government of Greece and the Acropolis Museum are demanding the return of these beautiful marbles.

Steven: But it's such a complicated issue. When, in the early nineteenth century, Lord Elgin (a Scottish nobleman, soldier, politician, and diplomat) removed these marbles and transported them to London, he had permission from the Ottoman authorities.

Beth: But that permission was limited and interpreted very liberally by Lord Elgin.

Steven: What do we do with museums like the British Museum, like the Louvre in Paris, which are fundamentally the result of imperialism…

Beth: …when the countries in Europe were imperial powers and the objects were often taken forcefully or not entirely legally.

Steven: The question is, what do we do now?

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uF_W0jQ7bi0>

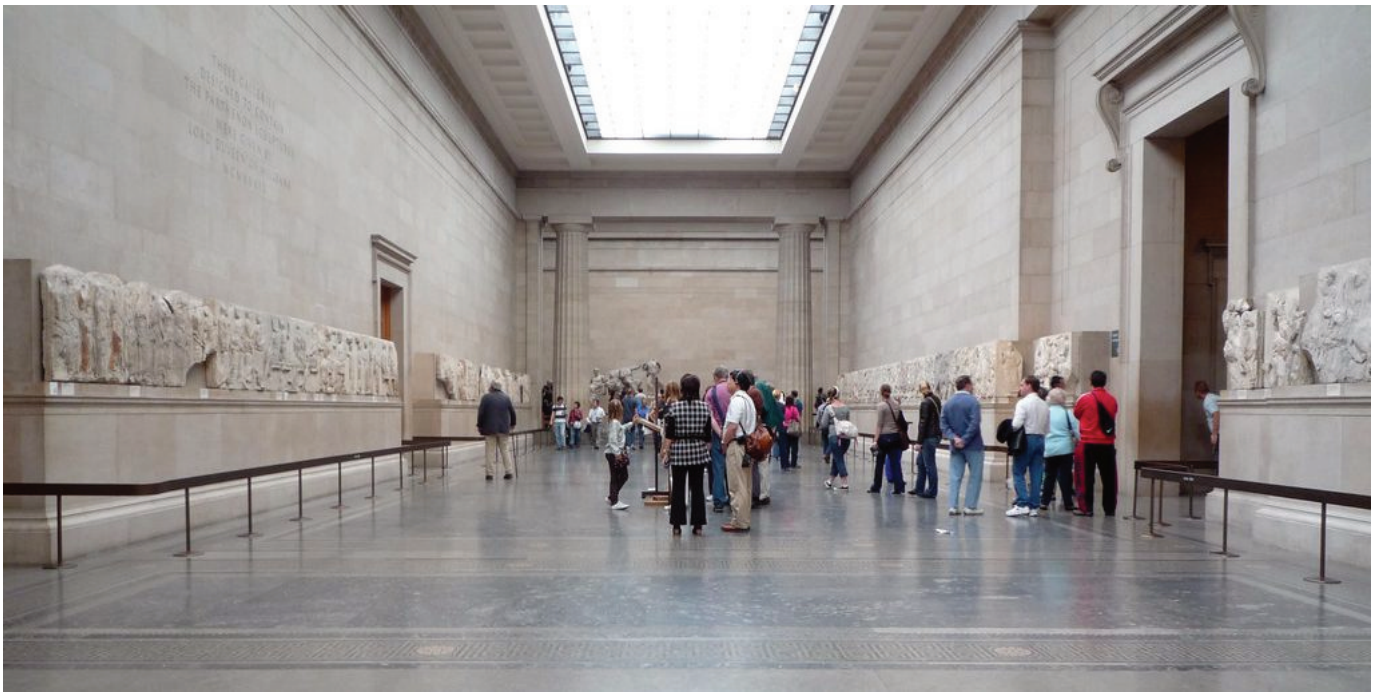


Phidias(?), Parthenon sculptures, frieze with Panathenaic Procession, showing humans (left) amidst gods (center/right), 438-432 B.C.E. (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

32. Who owns the Parthenon sculptures?

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Duveen Room, British Museum with Phidias (?), Parthenon Frieze, c. 438-32 B.C.E., Pentelic marble (420 linear feet of the 525 that complete the frieze are in the British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the British Museum.

Steven: We're in London at the British Museum, standing in a gallery devoted to the sculpture of the Parthenon.

Beth: This is a gallery that was designed to house these sculptures, which arrived at the British Museum in the early nineteenh century. Now we're looking at some of the most revered sculpture in all of Western art.

Steven: These sculptures were seen as the High Classical style that for hundreds of years we believed we could only hope to re-achieve. These sculptures and the building that it came from, the Parthenon, are more than 2,000 years old. But the controversy of how these sculptures ended up in London is more than 200 years old.

Beth: What we're looking at are sculptures that are divorced from the building that they came from, the Parthenon.

Steven: But they were integral to it and it's impossible to divorce the meaning of these sculptures from their original context.

Beth: Let's spend a minute looking at one of the panels from the frieze of the Parthenon, and thinking about why these sculptures and this classical moment of ancient Greece have been so revered in Western art. The sculptures on the frieze depict a procession, mostly of horses and riders.



Phidias(?), Parthenon West Frieze, Slab 2 (Horsemen), c. 438-32 B.C.E., Pentelic marble (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And look at the naturalism here. The artists have been examining the anatomy of the nude male, but also of the horse. Look at the way in which the man's thigh bulges out as it presses against the horse. You can see the concavity of the hip bone. Look at the way that the artist has carefully depicted the twisting of the body. The legs are moving forward, but the chest turns to face us.

Beth: We can see the ribcage, we can see the muscles in the abdomen, the muscles in the shoulders and the arms. That love of anatomy that we know from ancient Greek art. Whereas the horse on the right rears up and has a sense of passion and energy, the human figures have a calm nobility.

Steven: After the French Revolution, Napoleon Bonaparte seizes power. France had been expanding its territory, but under Napoleon, it begins a campaign to conquer much of Europe.

Beth: It's against this background that the sculpture in this room is taken from Athens and makes its way to London. The other important context here is the interest in ancient Greek and Roman antiquities that just *explodes* in the eighteenth century. You have Napoleon not only conquering territories but bringing scholars with him to help him identify important works of art, important monuments, that he brings back to France to fill the new Musée Napoleon, which becomes the Louvre Museum. So you have this competition among European powers for the great works of classical antiquity.

Steven: So the man responsible for bringing these sculptures from Athens to London, Lord Elgin, was a Scottish nobleman. And he received an extremely important diplomatic mission. He became ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, from 1799-1803.

Beth: And he became ambassador at a critical moment when the British had just won a decisive battle in Egypt, so the balance of power shifted away from France.

Steven: So for the Ottomans, the French were out and the British were in. And Elgin was the primary representative of the British Crown, which gave him tremendous power. Now from the beginning, Elgin imagined that he could help develop the arts of Britain.

Beth: And what better way to do that than to furnish the British public with examples of this great moment in Western sculpture, the sculptures from the Parthenon? His first idea was to create copies, to make molds and to have artists draw. His motivation was certainly personal in terms of decorating his home in the antique style, but it was also generous, it was also educational.

Steven: He asked the British government for funding to help support this artistic endeavor. They declined, but Elgin went ahead anyway and he hired a team that he sent to Athens. Now the building had a long, complex history and was built as a temple to the goddess Athena, but then it had been turned into a church, and eventually it had been turned into a mosque. But the Ottomans also stored gunpowder there, and when they were attacked by the Venetians, the building exploded…

Beth: …leaving debris across the Acropolis. When Elgin's team wanted to begin their work they encountered some problems from the local Ottoman authorities. And so they asked Elgin back in Constantinople to secure for them a firman (a permit) which would allow them to do the work on the Acropolis. The very first firman or permit doesn't survive but the second firman has come down to us in translation. It describes what Elgin's men were allowed to do. It says:



Verneda Giacomo Milheau, The Bombardment of the Parthenon on September 26, 1687, 720 x 250 cm (Benaki Museum, Athens)

Steven: They were allowed to draw and they were allowed to cast, they were allowed to erect scaffolding.

Beth: And they were allowed to excavate. But the critical passage of this firman or this permit reads, "No one should meddle with their scaffolding or implements nor hinder them from taking away any pieces of stone with inscriptions or figures." And it's that last phrase that reads somewhat ambiguously. What happens is Elgin's men see an opportunity, through cajoling, through bribery, through using the power of Elgin's office to extend the interpretation of this firman enough to allow them to take sculpture from the Parthenon itself.

Steven: And the act of removing the sculpture was necessarily an act of destruction.

Beth: This is a difficult and expensive endeavor, and Elgin is laying out his own money to do this.

Steven: In fact, he's borrowing to be able to afford this project.

Beth: He took 247 of the 524 feet of the frieze. He took fifteen metopes out of 92 and he took seventeen sculptures from the pediment. Now we're just talking about sculptures from the Parthenon, there were many other things that he took.

Steven: By this time, he was in deep debt, and he offered to sell the sculptures to the British government.

Beth: He basically had no choice. Even storing them was enormously expensive.

Steven: The British government convened a parliamentary commission to investigate the circumstances of the acquisition and to determine the quality of the sculpture and to settle on a price.

Beth: Ultimately the government did decide that the sculptures were acquired legally and they paid Elgin £35,000, less than half of what he estimated his own costs to be.

Steven: But from the very beginning, there was real criticism leveled against Elgin for removing the sculptures from Greece and for the destruction that that necessarily caused.



Archibald Archer, The Temporary Elgin Room in 1819 with portraits of staff, a trustee and visitors, 1819, 94 x 132.7 cm (The British Museum, London)

Beth: And soon after the arrival of the Elgin marbles here in Britain, Greece finally achieves independence from the Ottoman Empire and these sculptures—and the Parthenon itself and the buildings on the Acropolis–become a symbol of national identity for the Greeks.

Steven: And the Greeks ask for the marbles back.

Beth: So where does that leave us today? The argument that Elgin's actions were illegal.

Steven: Although his critics state that in fact he exceeded his legal authority, there's also the argument that is persuasive for many, that Elgin, although doing damage to the building and to many of the sculptures, ultimately preserved the sculptures.

Beth: Before Elgin got there, the French were taking sculptures from the Parthenon. So you have not only the French taking things, you have tourists who are picking things up off the Acropolis or buying things from local inhabitants. Everyone wanted a piece of the monuments on the Acropolis.



Charles Heath, Temporary Elgin Room, The British Museum, 1825, etching, 11.6 x 15.5 cm (The British Museum, London)

Steven: But the counterargument there is strong also: Elgin actually destroyed the temple in part to remove the sculptures. The sculptures themselves suffered and in a number of cases were exposed to seawater. And the British Museum does not have an unblemished role in protecting the sculptures either. In the early twentieth century, they were responsible for an overzealous cleaning.

Beth: There's also another argument that's often made, that if the marbles were sent back, it would have a kind of ripple effect and so many of the objects that are in encyclopedic museums in the West, like the Louvre, like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, like the British Museum, would also need to be sent back to their place of origin.

Steven: The Greeks have built a beautiful modern museum designed especially to house these objects.

Beth: And we could finally have the opportunity to see them all together.

Steven: If they were returned, we would also see them closer to their original context, we could look out those magnificent glass windows to the Acropolis itself to see these objects in that brilliant Mediterranean sunlight.



Phidias(?), Parthenon, South Frieze, Slabs 43, 44, 45 with visitors, c. 438-32 B.C.E., Pentelic marble (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Another critical argument made for keeping the sculptures here is that the British Museum is a universal museum.

Steven: And so here it's possible to compare ancient Greek art with ancient Assyrian art, with ancient Egyptian art, with art from East Asia, with art from Africa. And there is real benefit to that.

Beth: You could say that the collections of the British Museum promote tolerance and cross-cultural understanding–that we understand the objects in the British Museum as being owned by humanity broadly.

Steven: Except that it just happens to be in the capital of one of the world's great former empires.

Beth: And an empire that committed violent acts against its colonies. And while the Greeks make the argument that the sculptures are a central part of Greek identity, there are those that argue that the Greeks of ancient Athens are completely different Greeks than the Greeks of the modern era.



Triglyphs, from Iktinos and Kallikrates, Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens, 447-432 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: But the Parthenon is distinct and it's different in part because it's not only deeply important to the Greeks, it has become deeply important to American culture, to British culture, to French culture, to a kind of global culture. What the ancient Greeks did in Athens in the fifth century has had the most profound impact on modern society that this culture has been embraced universally. The classical art historian and archeologist Mary Beard puts this just beautifully.

Beth: She wrote, "The debate that surrounds the Elgin Marbles forces us to face the unanswerable question of who can, and should, own the monument. Can a single monument act as a symbol both of nationhood and of world culture?" So how do we reconcile the universal meaning of these sculptures, the meaning that we've given them: that these sculptures stand for democracy?

Steven: And for the nobility of humankind.

Beth: How do we balance that with the fact that it was indeed the Greeks who made this incredible contribution to Western civilization?

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=646&v=QRH105_ztAw>



Iktinos and Kallikrates, Parthenon (West facade with crane), 447-432 B.C.E., Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Additional resources:

How the Parthenon lost its Marbles (National Geographic) <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/archaeology-and-history/magazine/2017/03-04/parthenon-sculptures-british-museum-controversy/>

The British Museum on the Parthenon sculptures <http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/statements/parthenon_sculptures.aspx>

The Acropolis Museum <http://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/content/museum-history>

William St Clair, Imperialism, Art & Restitution: The Parthenon and the Elgin Marbles <https://law.wustl.edu/harris/Conferences/imperialism/StClair_elgin_final_PAPER%20.pdf>

33. Plaque of the Ergastines

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Phidias (?), Plaque of the Ergastines, 445-438 B.C.E., Pentelic marble (Attica), 0.96 x 2.07 m, fragment from the frieze on the east side of the Parthenon (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Louvre, Paris.

Steven: We're in the Louvre in Paris, and we're looking at a fragment of the frieze from the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens, Greece.

Beth: Some of this frieze is in the Acropolis Museum, in Athens. Some of it is here, in Paris, and most of it is in the British Museum, in London. In fact, the scene just to the right is in the British Museum in London.

Steven: In this case, the word frieze refers to a band of sculpture that's about three feet tall, that wrapped around the entire Parthenon, just inside the first colonnade. It would have been really hard to see because it would have been in shadow. Here, we see no traces of paint, but originally, this would have been very brightly colored. We think that the background was blue. We think there were highlights of gold on the figures. They would have been garishly painted, to our eyes. It's important to remember that we would have been looking up at this. It would have been quite high, and so we're seeing it much closer than originally intended.

Beth: Historians generally agree that this represents the Panathenaic Procession. All the citizens of Athens gathered in a procession, made their way up the sacred way to the Acropolis, this high point in the city, where the great temple to Athena, the Parthenon stood.

Steven: Young women would have woven a woolen peplos to clothe the statue of Athena. These were specially regarded young women (called Ergastines) who came from leading families in Athens.

Beth: Now, the peplos, this garment, was not for the colossal sculpture of Athena that was inside the Parthenon, but this was for an ancient sculpture that was very sacred that stood in a temple right next to the Parthenon.

Steven: That's the Erechtheion.

Beth: And so, a new garment was woven and given to this ancient olive wood sculpture of Athena.



Phidias (?), Plaque of the Ergastines (detail), 445-438 B.C.E., Pentelic marble (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: The Panathenaic Procession, as represented in the frieze on the Parthenon shows not only the procession of these young women bringing the peplos, but also animals being brought for sacrifice; libations. All the things you need for an important ancient ceremony.

Beth: The interesting thing about the frieze is that it seems to show a contemporary event. That is, it's not a mythological event, which was normal decoration for a temple, but something from the civic life from Athens, and remember Athens is a democracy at this moment in the fifth century. The citizens of Athens look beautiful, noble, heroic.

Steven: Well, the nobility is so clear in this fragment. We see these women solemnly processing. They're interrupted by two male figures, but look of the clarity of the carving. There such solemnity; there such a sense of reverence.

Beth: Of dignity; one immediately gets a sense that this is a religious procession in honor of Athena, the goddess, the patron of the city of Athens.

Steven: This is the High Classical moment, and it's beautifully represented here. There's a sense of balance, of idealism. In fact, this kind of art was considered so perfect, that through much of the rest of Western history, we see more modern cultures looking back to classical Greece, and trying to achieve, again, what had been achieved in the fifth century B.C.E.



Phidias (?), Plaque of the Ergastines (detail), 445-438 B.C.E., Pentelic marble (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Phidias, who we generally think of as in charge of the sculptural program on the Parthenon, developed a style that we see here: very intricate folds following the forms of the body. We see the drapery style in flatter areas, and as the fabric moves around the breasts of the women, but also in the very curvilinear folds at the edges of the peplos, where it's folded over and belted, and still in other areas, where the fabric falls in very straight lines that might remind us of the fluting of a column.

Steven: The figures are standing in contrapposto, that is, for the young women, in general, their left leg is the weight bearing leg. Their right leg is moving forward, and we can see the knee breaking the fall of the drapery. There is this alternation between movement and the static.

Beth: Look at the gracefulness of the figure on the far right. Look at how she's walking to her right, but turns her body to the left, and seems to address a companion behind her. These figures may have carried ceremonial objects that they're offering to the male figures, or the male figures may be giving something to them. The precise narrative is unclear.



Phidias (?), Plaque of the Ergastines, 445-438 B.C.E., Pentelic marble (Attica), 0.96 x 2.07 m (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: In fact, some art historians even question whether or not this is the Panathenaic Procession. It's important before we end, to acknowledge the fact that the Greek government has asked that both the British Museum and the Louvre return these marvels to Greece. Just at the foot of the Parthenon, the city of Athens has built a magnificent new museum to house these sculptures should they ever be returned.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zU9qSQi1E68>

34. The Erechtheion, Acropolis, Athens

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



The Erechtheion, 421-405 B.C.E., Classical Period, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Athenian Acropolis.

Steven: At the top of the Acropolis in Athens adjacent to the Parthenon, the largest building, is a small complex, an elegant building called the Erechtheion.

Beth: This is an Ionic temple, in contrast to the Parthenon, which is largely Doric. We notice the Ionic features immediately, the columns are more slender, there's a decorative detail and fineness, and the scroll shapes that we associate with the Ionic order in the capitals.

Steven: We're approaching the Erechtheion from the east side, and from this angle the building looks fairly traditional. We see six columns, the rightmost of which is a reconstruction. Now originally, all of the Ionic columns on this temple were even more decorative. There was glass inlaid, there was gold around the bases and in the capitals. It must have been a glorious sight.

Beth: We could refer to this building not as the Erechtheion, but instead as the Temple to Athena Polias, that is Athena as the protector goddess of the city of Athens. On this east end was a room that held the ancient statue of Athena that was said to have dropped from the heavens, and it was made of olive wood, it was very simple, it was nothing like the statue just across the way sculpted by Phidias. So you have this real contrast because with the Erechtheion we have this highly decorative building that's very elegant, but which housed a very severe and plain statue of Athena, but across the way in the severe, Doric temple of the Parthenon we had an enormous, highly decorative sculpture of Athena.

Steven: If you were to enter into the east side you would walk into a relatively shallow cella, this room that would have been the shrine to this olive wood sculpture of Athena, but this is a much more complicated building than that.

Beth: Right, because normally in a Greek temple you expect to see symmetry.

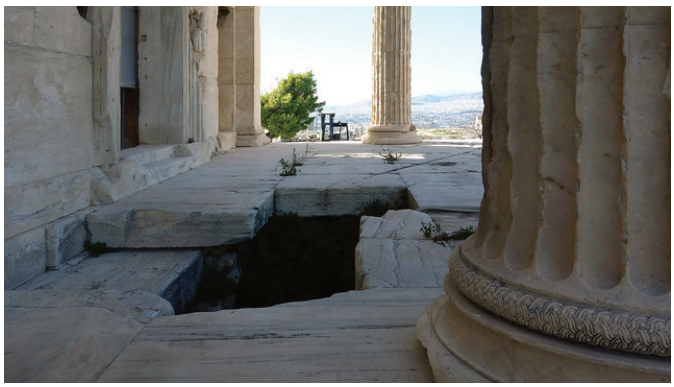
Steven: In this case, the earth drops down and the building itself is sandwiched into a very tight space between the foundation of the old temple to Athena that the Persians had destroyed and the sheer cliff at the edge of the Acropolis, and yet the architect invented a very elegant solution. Instead of a temple that has six columns on both the east and the west, what the architect has done is to swing the back colonnade around to the north. If we walk down a set of stairs, that brings us to an area dedicated to Zeus and much of the great north porch. So we've just walked down a narrow, steep flight of stairs, but originally there was a broad staircase that brought us down to a precinct associated with Zeus. He was the divine judge of a contest between a god and a goddess to see who could be the patron of the city of Athens.

Beth: And in a contest judged by the earthly king, Erechtheion…

Steven: …the mythic figure.

Beth: Hence the name of this temple, the Erechtheion. Erechtheus asked each god to offer a gift to the people of Athens, and he would be the earthly judge. Athena offers an olive tree, a symbol of peace, of fertility, and just here on the west side was the location of that tree offered by Athena.

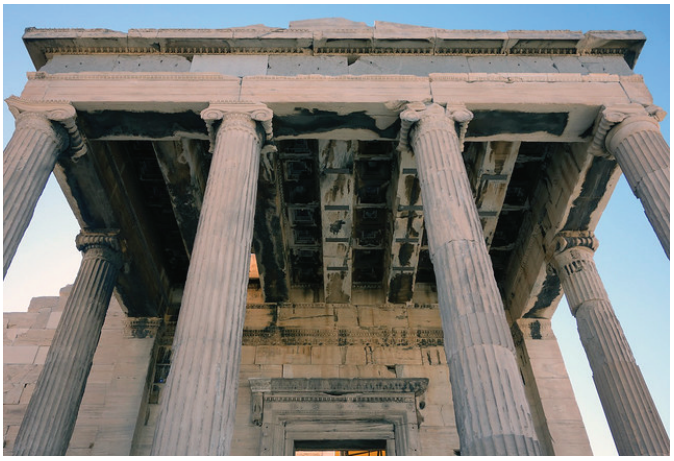
Steven: In fact, the modern Athenians have replanted that tree in that spot, and for Poseidon's part, he took his trident and struck a rock and from it came a spring of salt water; he is the ruler of the seas. In fact, if you look at the north porch of the Erechtheion, you can see that in the roof there's a hole, there's a window, and according to tradition, this is where his trident came down from the sky and struck the bedrock from which the spring of saltwater came. If you look at the base of the porch, you can see that there's some missing stone, which allows you to see the actual mark in the bedrock. So this temple, the Erechtheion, was a complicated place. It had to hold not only the sculpture to Athena, but also these preexisting shrines.



North porch paving gap, the Erechtheion, 421-405 B.C.E., Classical Period, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: The building is an elegant solution for the problem of a site that is serving multiple functions.

Steven: So the architectural problem was a complex one. How do you build a building in a constrained space between an important ancient site that is being commemorated, the old temple to Athena, the side of the cliff, on multiple levels, and for multiple purposes?



North porch, the Erechtheion, 421-405 B.C.E., Classical Period, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: When we look up at the north side, we can see that the architect used a blue marble in the frieze area, and that sculpture would have been in Pentelic marble, which was whitish or cream colored and would have been just beautifully offset against that blue marble.

Steven: In fact, the entablature of the north porch is incredibly detailed, and because the entablature is so high on columns that are much higher than on the other sides, you have a continuity that's created by the carving that surround this building that allow the building to feel unified.

Beth: But the real treat that everyone comes to see is the so-called "Porch of the Maidens" on the south side.

Steven: Let's go take a look. As we walk around, let's stop here on the west side of the building because you have a clear view of the different levels. On the left you see the very tall north porch, on the right, the Porch of the Maidens, but in between you see engaged or half columns, and those columns allow for a kind of symmetry with the east porch.



The Erechtheion (west side), 421-405 B.C.E., Classical Period, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So we're standing now with our back to the Parthenon looking at the south side of the Erechtheion at the glorious Porch of the Maidens, with its famous six caryatids. Six female figures who seem to be holding up the porch, and reminiscent of kore figures from the Archaic period.



South Porch, the Erechtheion, 421-405 B.C.E., Classical Period, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: They have taken the place of columns and they make explicit the relationship between the vertical column and the human body.

Beth: In Greek architecture, we have a post and lintel system, verticals are posts and lintels are horizontal members that go across, and the vertical elements, the columns, correspond in a way to the verticality of the human body.

Steven: This isn't the first time that there have been caryatids in Greek architecture. The Siphnian treasury at Delphi incorporated female figures, but that was Archaic, and here we have the human body and the drapery handled in the High Classical manner.

Beth: Most obviously, you can see the contrapposto pose, you see their knees pressing through their drapery, the shift in their hips, the sense of movement here, but that sense of movement is balanced by a pull of vertical lines in their drapery that gives them at the same time a sense of stability so we don't feel like the porch is going to fall down.

Steven: Especially since their locked legs, not their free legs, but the legs where the drapery completely hides the anatomy of the leg, that is so columnar, and that's towards the outside, creating a sense of stability.

Beth: And confounding the human body with a column.

Steven: I love how they seem to be in procession, they're certainly looking towards the Parthenon.

Beth: They remind me of the Panathenaic procession, that annual religious procession where the Athenians would come up to the Acropolis and present a new woven garment to the olive wood statue of Athena that was housed here.

Steven: Now we don't know who these figures are. There have been lots of theories. In fact, the ancient Roman architect and theoretician, Vitruvius, suggested they represented Greek people that had sided with the enemy, the Persians, during the Persian war and had been captured by the Athenians. The men had been killed, the women enslaved and forced to wear their royal garments in expression of their lasting humiliation.

Beth: But really we don't know.

Steven: We have no idea.

Beth: We do know that their elegance matches its Ionic order, the decorative moldings, the colored glass and stone that was used here, the effect must have been very rich and very different from what we see today.

Steven: But we talked about the symmetry between the east porch of the building and the half columns on the west side. Here there's a symmetry between the six caryatids on the south porch and the six columns on the north porch. And so, although we have a building that is very disparate…

Beth: ...that enclosed the shrines of different Greek gods and goddesses...

Steven: ...this building beautifully expresses the ability of Greek architects during the High Classical period to unify disparate purposes in a complex terrain.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=484&v=3ebYvMC12HI>



Caryatids, South Porch, the Erechtheion, 421-405 B.C.E., Classical Period, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



View of the east porch, the Erechtheion and the Parthenon beyond, 421-405 B.C.E., Classical Period, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

35. Caryatid and Ionic Column from the Erechtheion

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the British Museum, London.

Steven: We're in the British Museum, and we're looking at one of the Caryatids from the Erechtheion from the Acropolis in Athens.

Beth: Yes!

Steven: That's a lot of information.

Beth: And a Caryatid is a human figure acting as a column.

Steven: She looks like a column.

Beth: She does, her drapery falls in what almost looks like the fluting of a column, those vertical ridges.

Steven: And because she stands in contrapposto with one weight bearing leg, which is the one that looks like a column, and one free leg so that the knee juts forward that drapery is allowed to fall completely free of the body below. There is a very subtle and very sensitively handled sway to her body, right? The contrapposto is not just in the legs, but even in the hips, which you can't actually see, because of all the cloth, but which are referred to.

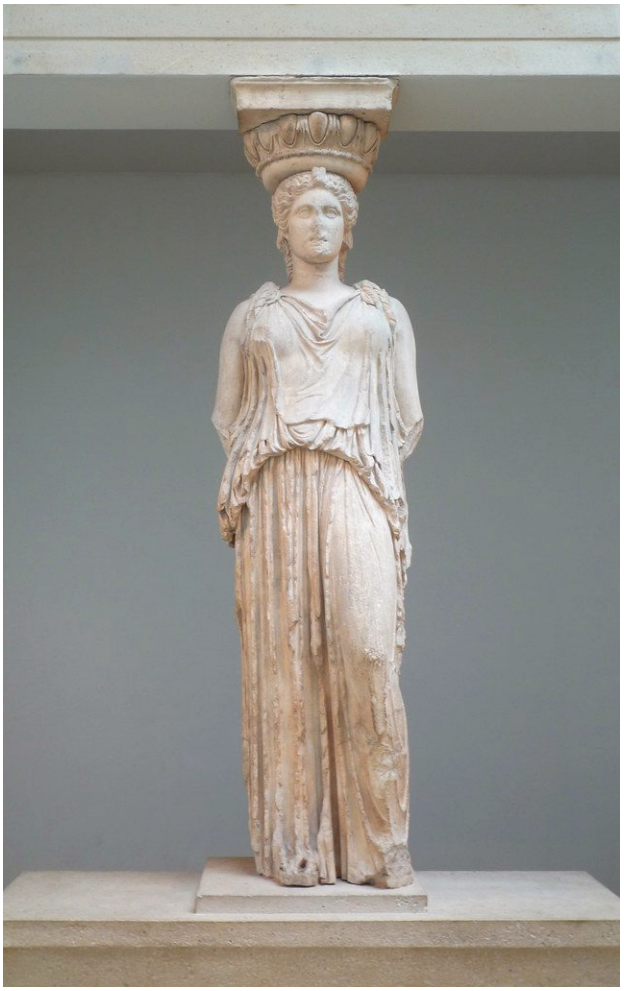
Beth: We have this nice circular form around her hips…

Steven: …where the peplos just bunches.

Beth: Right, that tunic that she's wearing, and that pools down around her waist, falling from her breasts in a very graceful way.

Steven: It's interesting because we're talking about the sway of the body, but by the time you get up to the capital, up to her head, she's straightened out, and she has to be. You know, you can really get a sense of the specificity, the weight, the thickness of the cloth. You know, the way a peplos (a female garment worn in ancient Greece) worked, it was pinned at the shoulders, but you can really get a sense that this is not a very thin fabric, it's got a certain heaviness to it.

Beth: Kind of weight to it.



Caryatid (South Porch), Erechtheion on the Acropolis, Athens, marble, 421-407 B.C.E., Classical Period (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Caryatid (bust), Erechtheion on the Acropolis, Athens, marble, 421-407 B.C.E., Classical Period (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: It's interesting, if you look at the porch where this came from, there are six caryatids altogether, four facing forward, and the two on the right oppose the two on the left in terms of the contrapposto, I believe with the weight-bearing leg on the outside always to make it feel more stable. This is a sort of sensitivity to…

Beth: …harmony, balance.



South Porch, Erechtheion on the Acropolis, Athens, marble, 421-407 B.C.E. (Mnesicles may have been the architect) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Yeah, absolutely.

Beth: And there's a nobility to her that is very much what we've been seeing when we also looked at the Parthenon sculptures. Again, we're in fifth-century B.C.E. Greece, the Classical era, with that same sense of ideal perfect beauty, and nobility, and monumentality.

Steven: But I also find it really interesting, this idea of conflating an architectural element with the human body because that's something that is a very ancient idea, and here it's done in the most direct way. Later the Romans will talk about architecture in terms of the human body. Not only in terms of scale, but also in terms of proportion. And here, it's taken to the most literal extreme.

Beth: And within the same room is the fabulous Ionic column, also from the Erechtheion, which is very graceful, and grows more slender as it rises toward the top, with the lovely Ionic capital, with decorative carving underneath. But having this column here is a really important reminder of the scale of those buildings in the Acropolis, because when you're standing in the Museum, you forget the scale of these buildings on top of a hill in Athens.

Steven: How big these buildings were!

Beth: Here in London, there's a nice skylight above it, which begins to give you a sense of what it's like in natural light to see the stone.



Caryatid (South Porch) and Ionic Column (North Porch), Erechtheion on the Acropolis, Athens, marble, 421-407 B.C.E., Classical Period (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And this is, as you said, an Ionic column, which is a much more slender, much more graceful column than the heavy Doric, the massiveness that we see in the Parthenon, which is just across the way on the Acropolis. You know sometimes—and I think this is a little sexist—this order, the Ionic, is referred to as the more feminine.

Beth: Right, more elegant, more graceful, more decorative.

Steven: And, of course, the female figures are replacing the actual columns, so there is a kind of the synthesis of those two.

Beth: And the lovely fluting that makes this wonderful play of light and dark across the column.

Steven: Fluting and, unlike the Doric, there's a base. The column doesn't rise directly out of the stylobate. There's this sort of footing, and of course, that beautiful scrolled capital.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X872rmThCF8>



Ionic Column (North Porch), Erechtheion on the Acropolis, Athens, marble, 421-407 B.C.E., Classical Period (British Museum, London). Mnesicles may have been the architect (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Temple of Athena Nike, 421-05 B.C.E., marble, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

36. **Temple of Athena Nike**

ON THE ATHENIAN ACROPOLIS

Katarzyna Minollari

The temple of Athena Nike (Athena as a goddess of victory) is the smallest temple at the Acropolis in Athens, placed at its southwest corner, at the edge of a high cliff (see images above). Its construction was completed in the year 420 B.C.E., during the so called High Classical Period, according to the design of Kallikrates (the same architect who was responsible for the construction of the Parthenon). The temple by Kallikrates replaced an earlier small temple, which got completely destroyed during the Persian Wars (a series of conflicts between the Greek city-states and the Achaemenid Empite of Persia, from 499-449 B.C.E.) .

The spot, highly vulnerable to attack but also well placed for defense, was very appropriate for the worship of the goddess of victory. There is some archaeological evidence, that the location was used for religious rituals already in Mycenaean age (Mycenaean was a period of early Greek history, roughly from 1600 to 1100 B.C.E.). Mycenaeans also raised the first defensive bastion on the spot; its fragments are preserved in the temple's basement.



Temple of Athena Nike, 421-05 B.C.E., marble, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

An Ionic gem

The temple of Athena Nike was built in the Ionic order of beautiful Pentelic marble, a stone prized for its golden-white color. It has columns at the front and back but not on the sides of the cella (the interior chamber of an ancient Greek temple); this kind of floor plan is called an amphiprostyle. Because of the small size of the structure, there are only four columns on each side. The columns are monolithic, which means that each one of them was made of a single block of stone (instead of horizontal drums, as it is in the case of the Parthenon).

This small and elegant structure is sometimes called the pearl of the Acropolis, since it was designed and decorated with great care. For example, interestingly, its side columns have volutes (the scrolls that distinguish an Ionic capital) both in the front and at the side, in order to create a pleasant view from any viewpoint. The Greeks considered their temples as a kind of monumental sculpture, which was supposed to be viewed from all sides and experienced in connection to its surroundings. The Romans later had a different concept—for them, the frontal view was most important (for example, the Roman Temple of Portunus).



Temple of Athena Nike, 421-05 B.C.E., marble, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Another interesting detail is that the columns of the temple of Athena Nike are not as slender as those of many other Ionic buildings. Usually the proportions between the width and the height of an Ionic column was 1:9 or even 1:11. Here the proportion is 1:7—and the reason for that choice might have been the intention to create a harmonious whole with other buildings nearby. The temple of Athena Nike stands just next to the Propylaea (below), a heavy, monumental gateway to the Acropolis, built in the Doric order (columns of the Doric order are heavier and simpler than Ionic and Corinthian columns). To visually counteract this massive structure, the architect may have decided to widen the columns, otherwise the building might feel out of place, and too delicate in contrast to the neighboring architectural mass of the Propylaea. We know that the ancient Greeks were very aware of mathematical ratios while constructing architecture or creating statues, feeling that the key to beauty lies in correct proportion.



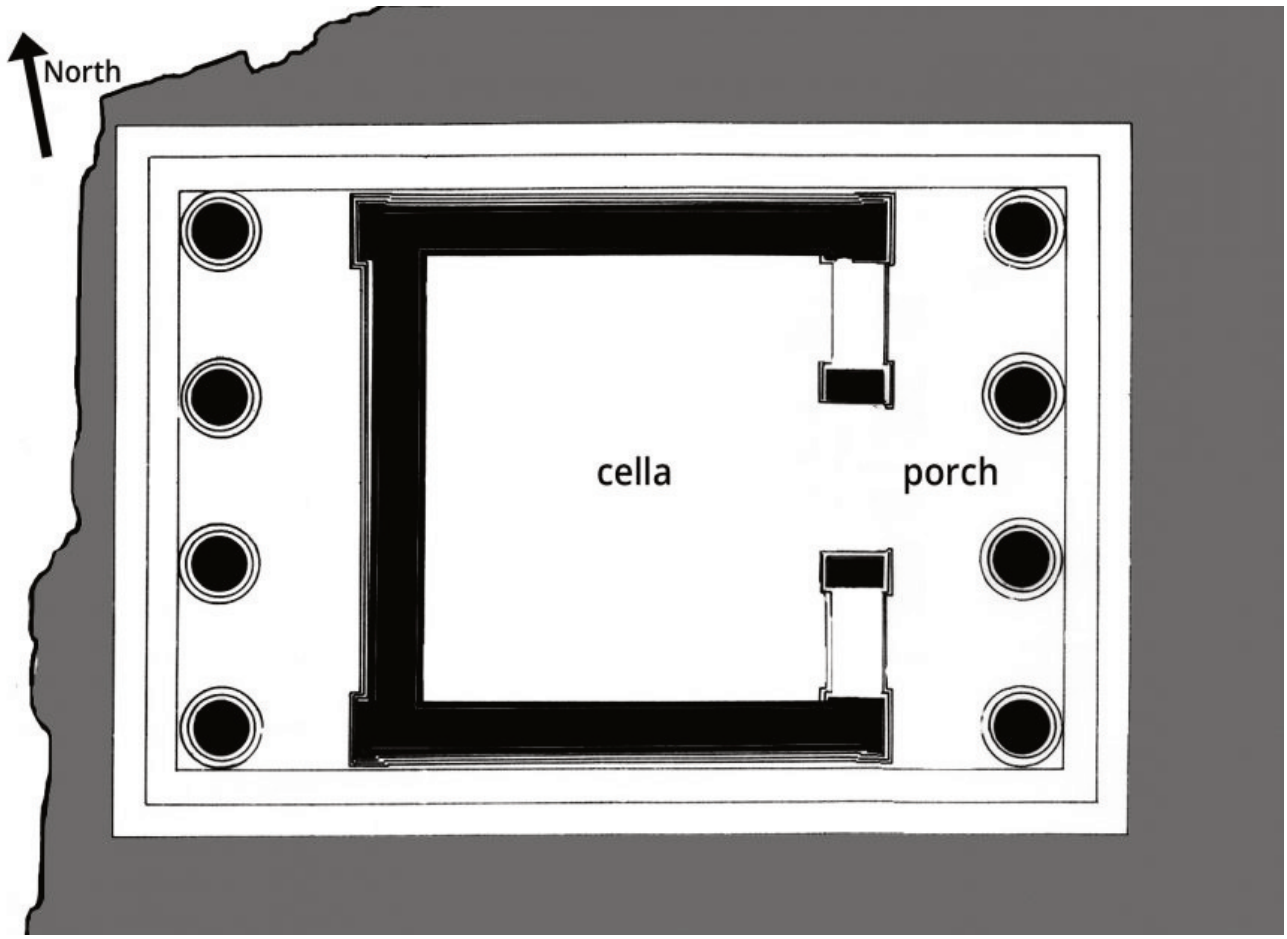
Mnesikles, The Propylaea, 437-32 B.C.E., marble, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Victory

The temple of Athena Nike, as with all Greek temples, was considered a home of the deity, represented in its statue, and was not a place where regular people would enter. The believers would simply perform rituals in front of the temple, where a small altar was placed, and could take a glimpse of the sculpted figure of the goddess through the space between the columns. The privilege of entering the temple was reserved for the priestesses, who held a respected position in Greek society. As the name suggests, the temple housed the statue of Athena Nike, a symbol of victory. It probably had a connection to the victory of the Greeks against the Persians around half a century earlier. Nike usually had wings, but in this case we know that the statue had no wings, hence it was called Athena *Apteros* (without wings). The ancient Greek writer Pausanias later explained that the statue of Athena had no wings, so that she could never leave Athens.

The history of this architectural monument has been quite tumultuous. In the fifth century C.E. the temple was converted into a Christian church, then in the seventeenth century it was completely dismantled by the Ottoman Turks who needed its material to build fortifications. The temple was later reconstructed after Greece regained independence in 1832. In the 1930s the building was restored again. Very recently, new concerns about the structure's integrity prompted a new conservation project. First, a team of specialists completely dismantled the temple. Each of its parts was examined and mended, and eventually the entire building was reassembled using the original pieces, with some fill wherever it was needed. These additions can be easily recognized since they are of a lighter color than the original marble.

The temple of Athena Nike featured beautiful sculptural decoration,



Amphiprostyle plan of the Temple of Athena Nike



Temple of Athena Nike, 421-05 B.C.E., marble, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

including a typical continuous Ionic frieze, which on the eastern side represented a gathering of gods. On the southern wall, the sculptor decided to show a battle between Greeks and Persians, and on the remaining sides, battles between Greeks and other warriors. Sculptures on the pediments, almost entirely lost, most probably depicted the Gigantomachy (an epic battle between the gods of Mount Olympus and the Giants) and Amazonomachy (a battle between the Greeks and the Amazons, a tribe of female warriors). Best known are reliefs from the outside of the stone parapet that surrounded the temple at the cliff's edge. These represented Nike in different poses



Nike Adjusting Her Sandal (detail), south side of the parapet of the Temple of Athena Nike, Acropolis, Athens, Greece, c. 410 B.C.E., marble, 3′ 6″ high (Acropolis Museum, Athens)

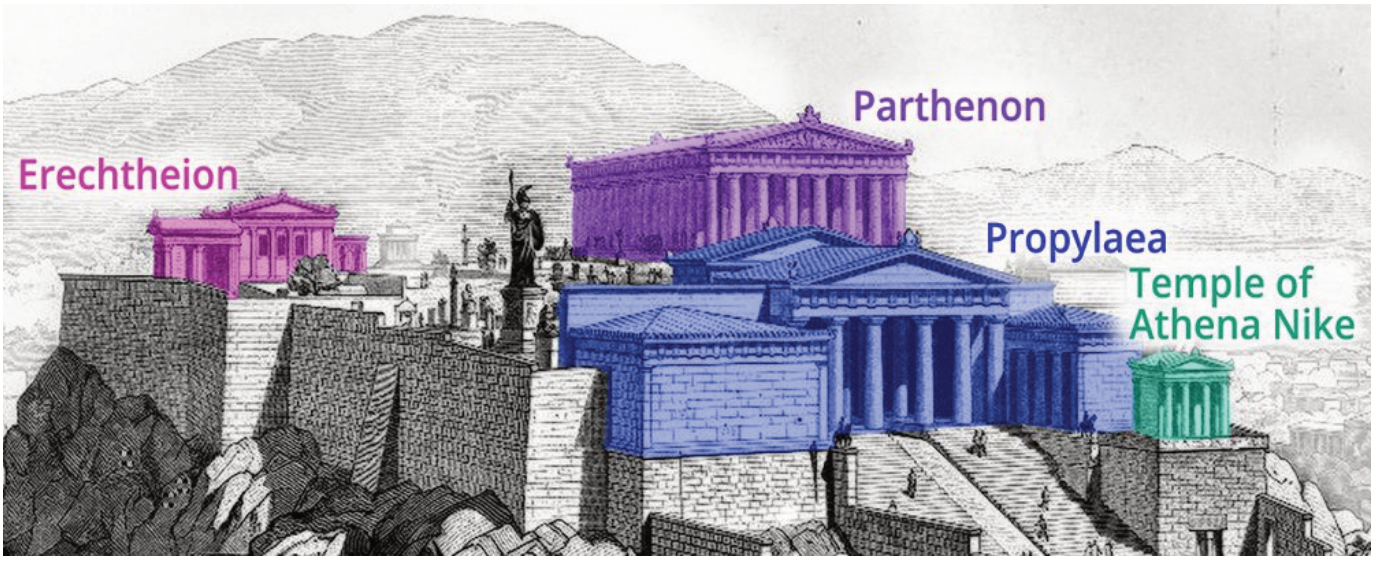
and could be admired by people climbing the stairs to the Acropolis. Most famous of these is the *Nike Adjusting Her Sandal* (above), which presents the goddess in a simple, everyday gesture, perhaps adjusting her sandal (or maybe taking it off) as she prepares to enter the sacred precinct. Whatever she is doing, the relief is still charming in its elegance and simplicity. Both *Nike Adjusting Her Sandal* and parts of the frieze can be admired today at the Acropolis Museum.

Additional resources:

Greek Gods and Religious Practices on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History <http://www.metmuseum.org/ toah/hd/grlg/hd_grlg.htm>

Acropolis Restoration Service website <http://www.ysma.gr/en/athina-nike-completed-interventions>

Acropolis Museum <http://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/content/temple- athena-nike>



Reconstruction diagram of the Athenian Acropolis

37. Nike Adjusting Her Sandal, Temple of Athena Nike, Acropolis, Athens

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



View of the Temple of Athena Nike, 421-05 B.C.E., marble, Acropolis, Athens (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Acropolis Museum, Athens.

Steven: When you walk up this sacred way to the Acropolis, right before you go through the gate house (the propylaea), you see a small, beautiful Ionic temple, the Temple to Athena Nike.

Beth: And inside it, as is typical of Greek temples, was a sculpture of the goddess of Athena Nike: that is, an Athena associated with victory and battle. Nike means victory.

Steven: This is a very constrained space, and at some point people were worried about falling off, and so they added a railing—a parapet—and it was carved with a series of small figures. In fact, the parapet itself is no more than about four feet tall.

Beth: And so a parapet is a kind of railing, and a space where you can walk, but these didn't face the people on the inside, these faced the walkway up.

Steven: What we see carved in fairly high relief are a series of Nikes, that is, winged figures of victory.

Beth: The most famous one is the "Nike Adjusting Her Sandal."



Nike Adjusting Her Sandal, from the south side of the parapet of the Temple of Athena Nike, Acropolis, Athens, Greece, c. 410 B.C.E., marble, 3′ 6″ high (Acropolis Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: I've never been clear whether she's taking her sandal off or putting her sandal on.

Steven: I think she's taking it off. I think she's undoing the knot, and the sandal will slip off. And that's because she will be walking on sacred ground.

Beth: So we have a figure that's by definition "off balance." She's lifting one foot up to undo the tie on her sandal. She's got her other leg bent, she leans forward, but her left arm comes up to help her balance, and you can see the wing just behind her left arm.

Steven: Actually, there's two wings if you look. And it's a good thing she's got them because, presumably, it's those wings that are helping her maintain her balance. Yeah, it's so interesting because in the High Classical period, we see a great deal of attention paid to making figures seem, relaxed and even and balanced.And yet here we have somebody as you said, who is inherently awkward.

Beth: So if you think, for example, back to the Doryphoros, the quintessential Classical sculpture, there is a sense of one side of the body balancing the other in contrapposto. And you're right, here we have an intentional interest in the form that's out of balance.

Steven: Now this dates to about 410, and so we're on the other side, of the century, and we can see that the artist has taken the Classical handling of the relationship between the body and the drapery, and accentuated it.

Beth: And by the "Classical" treatment of the drapery, you're referring to the style of Phidias, whose work we see in the sculptures of the Parthenon. Where we have drapery that clings to the forms of the body and creates very intricate folds.

Steven: But not quite this revealing. This is among the most erotic works of art that we find on the Acropolis.

Beth: In the figures in the Parthenon, for example, the pediment sculptures, we see the drapery following the forms of the body and cascading around it.



Phidias, Parthenon, detail of the East Pediment Sculpture (Hestia, Dione, Aphrodite?), c. 438-432 B.C.E., marble (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: You can see that especially in the so-called "Three Goddesses."

Beth: Exactly! But here, there's a sense of that drapery being transparent, where we can really see the nude body underneath it.

Steven: Well look at the way her left thigh is exposed, her breasts are exposed, her abdomen is so transparent to us, but then look at the way that the folds gather on her arm, just beautifully and actually you can see that the artist has created little peaks in that drapery, giving us a sense of the weight of the cloth.



Nike Adjusting Her Sandal (detail), from the south side of the parapet of the Temple of Athena Nike, Acropolis, Athens, Greece, c. 410 B.C.E., marble (Acropolis Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Her right shoulder is nude, but her left shoulder is clothed. We have access to the body in either case. And then we see what art historians call "chain folds," as though, if you imagine holding up a chain in the way that it drapes, and falls down with the pull of gravity, drawing attention with the shadows there to the space between her legs. There's clear eroticism here. The "Nike Adjusting Her Sandal" is only one of many panels along the parapet. In another panel we see two Nikes, or Nikai, coaxing an animal to sacrifice. And in other panels we see Nike figures, who are offering trophies to a military victory.

Steven: So all of this, within the context of the Acropolis, within the context of the Parthenon, the importance of military victories. And not long after not only did the victory of the Persians, but also the very destructive war with Sparta, the Peloponnesian War.

Beth: Right, and Sparta being Athens' long-time nemesis.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4HXrb8cPQI>



Nikes leading a bull to the altar, from the parapet of the Temple of Athena Nike, Acropolis, Athens, Greece, c. 410 B.C.E., marble, 3′ 6″ high (Acropolis Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

38. Grave stele of Hegeso

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Grave stele of Hegeso, c. 410 B.C.E., marble and paint, from the Dipylon Cemetary, Athens, 5′ 2″ (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

Steven: At the end of the fifth century B.C.E.—the end of the very brief period that we call the High Classical moment—there was a resurgence of funerary sculpture in Athens.

Beth: In fact, we're standing in a room in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens that's filled with grave markers, most of them in the form of what art historians called stele, or upright slabs decorated with relief sculptures.

Steven: Not so different from what we in the modern world would recognize as a gravestone.

Beth: Exactly. Interestingly, there was a disappearance of this type of monument during that High Classical moment, and then we see it reappear.

Steven: What we do have in the High Classical moment is most of the great sculptors working on the sculptural program of the Parthenon and the other buildings of the Acropolis. But we see private sculpture begin to re-emerge. That is, sculpture that is not part of a program of the state.

Beth: Exactly. Before the Classical period, in the Archaic period, there were kore and kouros, the male and female figures that were set up by the elite Greek families as funerary markers, but during the period of democracy in Athens, the state was primary and not wealthy families.

Steven: You see this resurgence especially in the cemeteries just outside of the city gates of Athens.

Beth: That's where this particular sculpture was found, which is called the grave stele of Hegeso. Hegeso is the woman who is shown seated, opening a box of jewelry presented to her by her servant, and examining a necklace, which is no longer there, but which was once represented in paint.



Grave stele of Hegeso (lower section), c. 410 B.C.E., marble and paint, from the Dipylon Cemetary, Athens, 5′ 2″ (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: There is such a precise rendering of the chair that she sits on.

Beth: Don't forget women's sphere was the home. Women were not allowed to be citizens of Athens. Hegeso is shown in a domestic setting. We see plasters on either side and a pediment above, on which we see an inscription that says, "Hegeso, daughter of Proxenos." Women in ancient Greece led very circumscribed lives that were defined by their relationships with men: first their fathers, then their husbands.

Steven: But I think that what I find most compelling is its quiet reverence. This is so much in keeping with the tradition of the High Classical that we see in Parthenon sculpture.

Beth: So this is a style that resembles very closely the kind of carving that we see on the figures on the Parthenon Frieze. Drapery that very closely follows the form of the body that creates elaborate folds and swirls that have a visual interest in their own right. The drapery that bunches up between her two arms and around her belly and between her breasts are beautiful passages of sculpting.



Grave stele of Hegeso (detail), c. 410 B.C.E., marble and paint, from the Dipylon Cemetary, Athens, 5′ 2″ (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Her foot is resting on a foot rest so that there is no part of her is actually touching the ground. We see beautiful representation of her foot foreshortened and wearing a sandal. Look at the very delicate veil that falls to the right of the shoulder or the way in which the drapes around her legs fall on the far side of the chair. And yet the drape by her waist falls on this side of the chair. So although we have this very shallow space, we have the full width of the body. For all of this really vivid carving, this is a quiet image that is absolutely appropriate to the solemn mood of a grave stele.



Grave stele of Hegeso (detail), c. 410 B.C.E., marble and paint, from the Dipylon Cemetary, Athens, 5′ 2″ (National Archaeological Museum, Athens) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUzsxLi43gE>

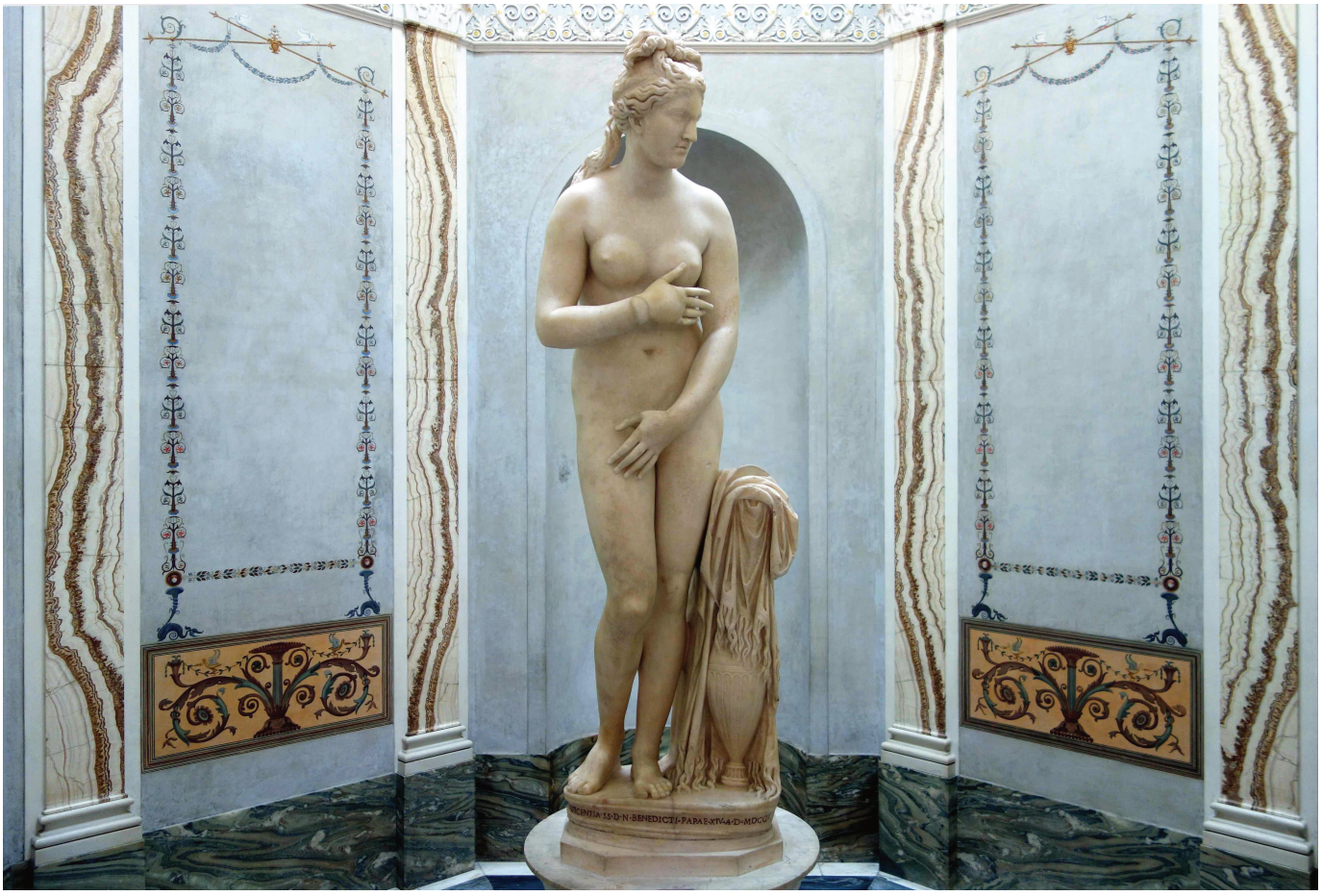
PART VI

Late Classical

39. Capitoline Venus (copy of the Aphrodite of Knidos)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Capitoline Venus, 2nd century C.E., marble, 193 cm (Capitoline Museums, Rome) (Roman copy of the Aphrodite of Knidos, a 4th century B.C.E. Greek original by Praxiteles) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Capitoline Museums.

Steven: We're in the Capitoline Museums in Rome, and we're looking at a copy of an extremely famous Greek sculpture.

Beth: This one is known as the Capitoline Venus, but we know the original as the Aphrodite of Knidos, and it dates from the fourth century B.C.E.

Steven: It was sculpted by Praxitiles, who is one of the most famous sculptors from ancient Greece, and Praxitiles' sculpture is known to be the very first example of a full-scale, fully-nude woman.

Beth: More than fifty copies of Praxitiles sculpture survived, so it was clearly a very popular sculpture among the Ancient Romans.



Capitoline Venus, 2nd century C.E., marble, 193 cm (Capitoline Museums, Rome) (Roman copy of the Aphrodite of Knidos, a 4th century B.C.E. Greek original by Praxiteles) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And there are copies in marble. The original was in marble, but there are also copies in bronze. The ancient Roman writer Pliny tells us the story of its origin. Praxitiles made two versions of this sculpture and offered them for sale to the city of Cos. One of them was nude, and one of them was fully clothed, and Cos, thinking that it was more proper to take the clothed one, did so, and the Island of Knidos instead bought the nude, which became *far* more popular.

Beth: The people of Knidos built a special sanctuary for her that was in the round.

Steven: Now, throughout history, this sculpture has also come to be known as the modest Venus because it shows the woman, although nude, loosely covering herself.

Beth: This seems like a bit of false modesty, getting out of her bath and seeming to cover herself.

Steven: Well, this is the goddess Venus, who's the goddess of love and beauty but also of sexuality, and there are stories that date back to antiquity of men falling in love with her and mistaking her for flesh and blood.

Beth: What's interesting to me is that here in the Capitoline Museum, she's in a round room, very much like the sanctuary at Knidos. There's nothing else in this room to distract us from viewing her. She is presented to us as the epitome of beauty, but female nudity was really new in ancient Greek art, and that's one reason for her fame. Ancient Greek art was about, for many centuries, the *male* nude.

Steven: When we think of the Western tradition in art, we think of the female nude primarily, but for the ancient Greeks, as you said, starting with the Archaic period, full-scale nudes of young men were common. These were call kouroi, and you would have a kouros, a single, male nude, nude from head to toe, standing straight and quite forthright, *not* covering himself in any way, and these were considered extremely dignified, and in some ways, they are not especially sexual. What's so interesting is that this figure is much more sexualized in the act of covering herself.

Beth: There were earlier female figures in ancient Greek art, but they weren't nude. There was the female varient of the kouros called a kore, and those were often draped in very beautiful, ornate clothing, so this was a real novelty when Praxitiles did this.



Capitoline Venus, 2nd century C.E., marble, 193 cm (Capitoline Museums, Rome) (Roman copy of the Aphrodite of Knidos, a 4th century B.C.E. Greek original by Praxiteles) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: It's interesting to remember that this sculpture was probably painted initially, and would have been perhaps even more lifelike. It reminds us also of the special quality of sculpture that it exists in the round as we do. It takes up space, as we do. It does not require illusion as painting does. Just one technical note: since this sculpture was originally made in marble, it was designed to have a third leg, that is, a third stabilizing form to create a tripod to help support the extraordinary weight of the stone. In this case, that extra bit is carved to look like a vase or a pitcher that's been covered with a cloth. It seems to have just slipped off her. So this idea of both revealing and covering is central to the sculpture.

Beth: Pliny, who writes about Praxitiles' sculpture of Venus writes about how he surpassed even himself when he carved this figure in marble.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI07zaDpnJU>

40. Lysippos, Apoxyomenos (Scraper)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Lysippos, Apoxyomenos (Scraper), Roman copy after a bronze statue from c. 330 B.C.E., 6′ 9″ high (Vatican Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Vatican Museums.

Steven: In ancient Greece, people did not use soap and water to wash, they used oil. And we're seeing a sculpture called the "Scraper" or the "Apoxyomenos" by Lysippos, which shows just that. This is an athlete whose body is now covered with perspiration and dust. And what he's doing is he's washing himself, first by covering his body with oil, and then using a strigil to scrape all the grime off with the oil.

Beth: Lysippos was one of the most famous sculptors from the fourth century B.C.E. But, of course, we're not looking at the actual work by Lysippos of the Apoxyomenos. We're looking at an ancient Roman copy of marble of what was a Greek bronze original.

Steven: But even though it's a copy, it can give us a tremendous amount of information. Lysippos is known for having changed the proportional canon that we associate with the high Classical tradition

in Greece. This is the fourth century, and what Lysippos has done is to elongate the body and to reduce the size of the head.

Beth: And it's very obvious, when you compare this with a fifth-century sculpture from the Classical period by Polykleitus, who was the sculptor who established that canon.

Steven: In the Doryphoros, if you look at Polykleitus' sculpture, and you measure the size of the head, the length of the body is seven heads tall. But Lysippos has added a full head's worth of length. So, if you were to measure this, this is eight head-lengths tall. And because the head is smaller, and the body is taller, it gives us a sense of, as we look up at this sculpture on a podium, that the figure is even taller than he is.



Lysippos, Apoxyomenos (Scraper), Roman copy after a bronze statue from c. 330 B.C.E., 6′ 9″ high (Vatican Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And Lysippos has done some other view things. He's reached the figure's arm into space, where the figure is scraping the oil from his body. And by doing that, he breaks out of the frontal orientation of Classical sculpture and makes us want to move around the figure so can see it from different directions.

Steven: That's right. There is, perhaps, a fairly ideal position to view this sculpture from: his front left. But nevertheless, I can't see his chest, so I do want to move around. Now, this was a bronze originally, so that tree trunk was not there in the original sculpture. It wasn't necessary. Bronze has enough tensile strength, so you don't need that. And you can see that there's actually a fragment of a couple of bridges that were meant to first support the marble arms, which have broken and then been repaired. But, nevertheless, even in the original bronze, I would have wanted to walk around this.

Beth: No question.

Steven: But even though Lysippos is introducing these very new innovations—again, this change of the proportion of the body, this breaking of the frontal plane of the sculpture—he's still very much embedded in the great Greek tradition of representing the nude athlete, this idealized human body.

Beth: And, of course, Lysippos' figure stands in contrapposto, which was invented by the Greeks in the Classical period.

Steven: It's such a gorgeous example of contrapposto, and of the body as a whole. Look at the musculature. We really feel the power of this athlete, even though it's presumably now after his exercises.

Beth: From sources, we hear that Lysippos was associated with Alexander the Great, the great military leader that conquered Greece and spread Greek ideas throughout the Mediterranean. And he's said to have sculpted Alexander. Too bad none of those sculptures survive.

Steven: We're seeing this sculpture in the Vatican, because antiquities were treasured by Renaissance popes, and subsequently. But of course, we're looking at a structure that is pagan, and pagan in its celebration of human achievement, in human beauty, as opposed to the spiritual. But it is striking to see this sculpture in such a religious institution.

Beth: And so many ancient Greek and Roman sculptures all around us here in the Vatican museum.

Steven: One last detail, which is the room in which the sculpture is displayed apparently was a room that Leonardo da Vinci occupied briefly. Leonardo, of course, represents a stepping stone back to this reverence for the body, even within the Catholic tradition.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X872rmThCF8>



Lysippos, Apoxyomenos (Scraper), Roman copy after a bronze statue from c. 330 B.C.E., 6′ 9″ high (Vatican Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

41. Lysippos, Farnese Hercules

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Lysippos, Farnese Hercules, 4th century B.C.E. (later Roman copy by Glycon) (Archaeological Museum, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Archaeological Museum in Naples, Italy.

Steven: We're in Naples at the Archaeological Museum, looking at one of the most famous sculptures from all of antiquity.

Beth: It was discovered in the Renaissance during archaeological excavations in Rome of the Baths of Caracalla.

Steven: This is the so-called Farnese Hercules and it gets that name because it was excavated by the Farnese family. They had been looking for building materials to take from ancient sites to build a new

palace, but what they found in the Baths were an extraordinary array of ancient sculptures.

Beth: We can reconstruct the original site for this colossal sculpture. There were mosaic floors, walls made of different colored marble. It was an incredibly luxurious bathing complex, used by thousands of Romans every day and it was decorated with hundreds of sculptures, many of them colossal, like this one.

Steven: These were really complex structures, these bathing facilities. There were the baths themselves. Some were cold, some were hot. There were rooms for transition from one temperature to another. There were places where one could exercise and this sculpture makes perfect sense in this environment. This is a place where you would go to work out, where you would go to exercise. You could look at this wildly muscular figure and have a bit of a goal.

Beth: Many of the sculptures that were found in the Baths of Caracalla were not the typical, ideal, athletic copies of Greek sculptures that we think of, but they were especially bulky, like the Hercules that we see here.

Steven: We know that some successful Greek athletes would sometimes dedicate sculptures to Hercules in a way thanking him for their successes.

Beth: He was a symbol of strength and heroism.

Steven: You can see that here, but there's also irony in Lysippos' treatment, because even as we see this wildly powerful figure, this incredible musculature, we also see a figure that is exhausted.



Lysippos, Farnese Hercules, 4th century B.C.E. (later Roman copy by Glycon) (Archaeological Museum, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: He really is. He leans almost his full weight on a club that's propped up under his arm, so you're right, there is an irony between the brute strength of his articulated muscles and the languorousness of his pose.

Steven: Look at the way in which that abdomen is articulated. Look at the strength of his right shoulder, of his right upper arm. It's really massive.

Beth: He thrusts his right hip out, so that he can fully lean his weight on his left side.

Steven: There is this marvelous contrapposto, although the legs seem to be somewhat reversed, but I love the way his torso slouches over as he leans and there's this overemphasized turn of that torso.



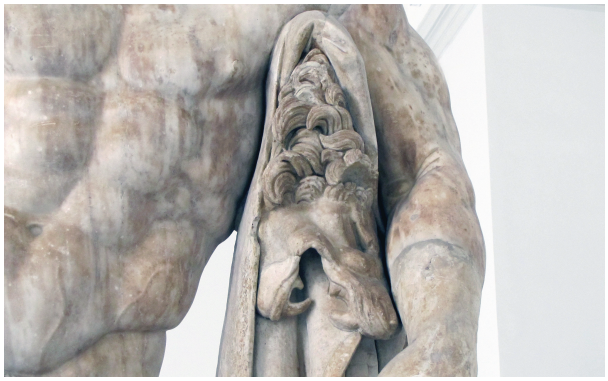
Lysippos, Farnese Hercules (detail), 4th century B.C.E. (later Roman copy by Glycon) (Archaeological Museum, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: But the club doesn't look like a very secure support.

Steven: No, the whole thing is slightly precarious.

Beth: It seems as if Lysippos and Glycon, who copied Lysippos' sculpture and there are more than 80 copies of sculptures of the weary Hercules that have survived, but it does seem as though he's calling our attention to Hercules' hands and Hercules is famous as a hero who became a god and who these amazing exploits, the 12 labors of Hercules. I'm noticing the open left hand and the way that the right hand is brought behind his back, so we really want to move around the sculpture to see what's in his right hand.

Steven: That's right. The artist has set us up so that we absolutely want to walk around. The left hand is not original, that's been lost. So what we're seeing is a plaster reconstruction, but the right hand is original and if you walk around the sculpture, you actually see that he's holding the apples that he would have gotten from one of those labors, the labor the apples of the Hesperides. This is all part of the legend of Heracles, the Greek figure who the Romans would call Hercules. What happened was, Heracles— this brute of a man—in a fit, killed his children. Heracles was the son of a god and a human, and therefore a hero. The gods of Mount Olympus punished him by making him subservient to a king. He had to perform whatever deeds this king asked of him for 12 years. This was his punishment. The king asked of him tremendously difficult tasks, the first of which was the killing of the Nemean lion. If you look carefully, just draped over the club, you can see the pelt of that lion that he slayed. This sculpture is actually referring to two of those labors.



Lysippos, Farnese Hercules (detail), 4th century B.C.E. (later Roman copy by Glycon) (Archaeological Museum, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: One of the things that seems a little strange as we look up at him is how small his head is. This is something that Lysippos, the Greek sculptor —

Steven: The original sculptor —

Beth: That this was based on, was known for, was changing the cannon of proportions that existed during the Classical period in Greece in the fifth century where there was more of a sense of harmony and balance between the parts of the body. Lysippos created a new set of proportions, where the figure was taller, the head was smaller, and they gave the figure a new sense of elegance.

Steven: Elegance and also of height. Here, it's married, of course, with this increased bulk. The other thing that Lysippos is so well known for, which you mentioned earlier, is the way in which he begins to break out of the more restricted space that Classical figures had generally occupied, so that by extending, for instance, that left hand, by moving that right hand behind his back, he really does invite us to understand this sculpture in the round, as opposed to seeing it as a frontal object. The thing that strikes me most, though, about this sculpture, is the way in which we can understand his feeling of exhaustion and the way that's contrasted against the potential energy and power of that body.

Beth: The things that we're talking about, the new cannon of proportions, the way that we're asked to move around the sculpture, not only do I want to walk behind it to see what's in his right hand, but I also want to walk to the place where he is looking down to, so we can look up at his face and see the expression, the sense of empathy we have for him. These are all things that are typical of the Hellenistic period of ancient Greek art that this copy was based on.

Steven: Clearly, something that the Romans really appreciated.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-Yv4mp5yp8>



Lysippos, Farnese Hercules, 4th century B.C.E. (later Roman copy by Glycon) (Archaeological Museum, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BYNC-SA 2.0)

42. The Alexander Sarcophagus

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum.



The Alexander Sarcophagus, c. 312 B.C.E., Pentelic marble and polychromy, found in Sidon, 195 x 318 x 167 cm (İstanbul Archaeological Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: We're in Istanbul at the Archaeological Museum looking at one of their great treasures, the Alexander Sarcophagus.

Elizabeth: Now, a sarcophagus is a thing in which you bury a body.

Steven: So, a really big stone coffin. This stone happens to be the marble that the Greeks loved to use.

Elizabeth: Yeah, this is Pentelic marble, one of the highest quality marbles valued for its clarity, its strength, and its ability to carve up very well.

Steven: It's a soft stone. You can really get fine details, and one of the most incredible things about this sarcophagus is just how *crisp* it is. It's in incredible condition.

Elizabeth: It was found quite late in Sidon, in a royal necropolis. Now, a necropolis is basically a city of the dead and a royal necropolis is a city of dead kings and their families.

Steven: This city, the city of Sidon, which is in present day, Lebanon had been a major Phoenician city. It was a major trading port. They've been very wealthy. Now, Phoenician city states have controlled much of the eastern and southern Mediterranean.

Elizabeth: And the Phoenicians, they may not sound familiar to you but one of their most famous colonies will be, and that's the colony of Carthage in modern-day Tunisia.

Steven: Which we know because of their famous war against the Romans.

Elizabeth: The Punic Wars. Particularly, the second Punic War with Hannibal who crossed the Alps with his elephants.

Steven: Now, archeologists have tried to figure out whose tomb this was, and there is some consensus that this tomb belonged to the King of Sidon. It's just a spectacularly large and expensive and beautiful tomb.

Elizabeth: The quality of workmanship is extraordinary.

Steven: And it's interesting that this sarcophagus is actually in the shape of a Greek temple.



The Alexander Sarcophagus, c. 312 B.C.E., Pentelic marble and polychromy, found in Sidon, 195 x 318 x 167 cm (İstanbul Archaeological Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Frieze, battle scene, the Alexander Sarcophagus, c. 312 B.C.E., Pentelic marble and polychromy, found in Sidon (İstanbul Archaeological Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Elizabeth: Greek temple or Greek treasury. One can think about the massive temple structures across Asia Minor, Greece or in the Classical period, one can think of the Siphian Treasury in Delphi. It has a lot of architectural details. We can see the egg and dart motif. We can see meanders and akroteria–those are the decorative elements on the ridge of a temple we normally get. Someone's taken a lot of care to make this look very architectural. It's highly intricate in detail before you even get to the friezes

Steven: But let's get to the friezes because those are the stars.

Elizabeth: The friezes are remarkable. They're outstanding relief carving, and they have two stories. One is a battle scene.

Steven: Let's start there. What we see is this incredibly complicated interlacing of figures that are carved with a tremendous naturalism.

Elizabeth: Incredible emotion and pathos. One figure that immediately jumps out is the man on horseback and his head is covered with a lion's skin, which makes him almost immediately identifiable to us.

Steven: This is Alexander the Great. The man who conquered pretty much all of the known world. Alexander the Great starts off by conquering the Greeks, consolidating his power and then turning that combined force against the Persians in the east.

Elizabeth: The Persians were still this remarkable empire despite the defeats that they had suffered at the hands of the Greeks in the fifth century. They were still this empire that controlled large parts of Asia, and they were a force to be reckoned with and Alexander against all odds, took on the empire and attempted to conquer it, which he did.

Steven: And art historians have speculated that the scene that's being represented in this frieze is the Battle of Issus, which was one of the most decisive battles where Alexander routed a much larger army of the Persians.



Detail of Alexander, the Alexander Sarcophagus, c. 312 B.C.E., Pentelic marble and polychromy, found in Sidon (İstanbul Archaeological Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Elizabeth: First of all, you have Alexander in a very prominent location. He had been fighting Persians but it's also the central figure that's led many art historians towards this interpretation.

Steven: And that central figure would be the King of Sidon, and he was appointed to that position by Alexander after that battle.

Elizabeth: Also we clearly have Persians here.

Steven: Now, how do we know they're Persians?

Elizabeth: Oh, that's always a good question. Because yes, we have to plain name that barbarian or how do you identify the barbarian? Greeks, or Macedonians who are also dressed like Greeks, they look very particular. They generally have a lot of drapery but they have exposed legs. Anyone who's wearing trousers is generally, a good tip-off. If you've got trousers on, you're a barbarian.

Steven: The other hint is their headwear. They're wearing Phrygian hats.

Elizabeth: Exactly, these Phrygian caps, which are kind of floppy are very well known. We'll see them throughout all of ancient art. Also, you notice their arms are covered. They're wearing many more clothes, and they also even seem to have identifiable shoes.

Steven: The other issue is of course, they're losing… but before we go any further, let's go back to Alexander and figure out how it is that we can recognize that this is him. He's wearing a lion's hat. That's a reference back to claims that he had descended from Herakles (the mythic Greek hero Herakles wore the skin of a Nemean lion).

Elizabeth: The other reason why people often identify this figure as Alexander is because of the Alexander Mosaic (c. 100 B.C.E., Archaeological Museum, Naples).

Steven: And art historians believe that that mosaic and possibly this frieze had a common source: a famous painting that is now lost to us.



Alexander Mosaic, detail with Alexander, c. 100 B.C.E., tessera mosaic from the House of the Faun, Pompeii (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Elizabeth: And so that has allowed scholars to feel quite comfortable in identifying this figure as Alexander.

Steven: The other issue is simply the nobility with which Alexander is represented and with which the victors are represented here. If you look closely to Alexander, he is large on his horse. The horse is rearing back and he holds his hand back. Clearly, he had originally held a spear. That spear was probably made out of bronze. It, like all of the horse's bridles and other weapons, have been removed, but we can see that that spear would have been slaying the man who is desperately trying to get off his horse, which has fallen. But Alexander's horses are not always in the dominant position. Look at the nude figure that is coming up against an enemy on horseback.

Elizabeth: He's got his right arm thrown back over his forehead and his left arm is reaching up. You can see his enemy, the Persian on the horse, his right arm back, ready to strike him. You almost feel it's inevitable that this Greek is not going to survive this battle

Steven: But his bravery is extraordinary. I can just make out a shadow in between his fingers. I think he must have originally been holding a sword of some sort.

Elizabeth: And so, the Greeks who have fallen are also remembered in a heroic manner.



Fallen archer, the Alexander Sarcophagus, c. 312 B.C.E., Pentelic marble and polychromy, found in Sidon (İstanbul Archaeological Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Now look at the figure that's just below him. That's an archer. You can see him drawing back a bow, pointing with his left hand. He's taking aim but what's really remarkable is if you look at his leggings, there are clear traces of the original paint. This is such a great reminder that the pristine white marble that we take for granted as being Greek is absolutely inaccurate in a lot of cases. These sculptures were painted.

Elizabeth: We know that there was yellow, red, purples and blues and a bit of violet and variations within those major colors but what you can see here is this pattern almost of a harlequin design on his trousers but his shoe also has a red tint to it. You can start to visualize colors back in and that would have made the composition even more dynamic, the strife, the struggle in the battle even more real to the viewer.

Steven: If you look at the dead body just to right of the archer, you can actually see the wound in his side and red paint that has been used to express the blood.

Elizabeth: And that's something we also see on the other side in the hunt scene, where the lion is being pierced and we can see red, also his blood, pouring down.

Steven: Let's go look. On the reverse side, instead of a battle, we see a hunt.



Frieze, hunting scene, Alexander Sarcophagus, c. 312 B.C.E., Pentelic marble and polychromy, found in Sidon (İstanbul Archaeological Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Elizabeth: Hunting scenes are very well known in the ancient Near East. You can think of major Assyrian reliefs from Ninevah, things that are in the British museum.

Steven: And at the center of the hunt, is this massive lion that is attacking a horse.

Elizabeth: Lion hunts were very significant parts of kingship, so including a hunting scene would be very typical of a monument created for a king. But there's something else that's very striking. We have Greeks and Persians, but they don't seem to be fighting each other.

Steven: No, they're working together.

Elizabeth: Rather odd, isn't it? Considering what we've just seen?

Steven: It is so central to the political aim of Alexander's enormous empire.

Elizabeth: Alexander does aim for something that's very different from many of kingdoms in the past in this part of the world. He wanted to create an empire where the Greeks soldiers and his army, the Macedonian soldiers would intermarry with local women along the way to solidify the base of the empire.

Steven: And this must have been important to the Phoenicians, who wanted to be on an equal status with the Greeks.

Elizabeth: It also shows that people who are not specifically Greek use Greek iconography, Greek motifs, clearly, the sculptural traditions of the Greeks. And what we often see to be clear ethnic boundaries or political or cultural boundaries are actually a bit more fuzzy.

Steven: But this sculpture is not fuzzy at all. There is a clarity that reminds us that this is not long after the high point of Greek Classicism in the fifth century. There is a kind of drama, there is a kind of energy that is new, and we know with hindsight that this is moving towards what we will call the Hellenistic style.

Elizabeth: You really see the movement particularly, by looking at the cloaks and the capes. We have a Greek figure here on a horse, and you can see the yellow paint that would have been there, but the cape is waving back, and so it really adds this phenomenal movement.



Detail, Alexander Sarcophagus, c. 312 B.C.E., Pentelic marble and polychromy (İstanbul Archaeological Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Or look at the way that the Persian's sleeves are rising up. I can really get a sense of the movement of his body and the way in which the cloth is responding just a moment later.

Elizabeth: Exactly, and he also has his arms pull back, so you can reimagine the bow and arrow, which would have been made of metal. You can see that tension that's being created in his arms to almost send the arrow out towards the lion to help in this great hunt to kill this amazing beast.

Steven: One of the details I find most compelling in terms of energizing the scene and giving a sense of time and movement is the rider of that central horse. The horse is moving up and down quickly, and you can see that his shirt is wafting up because his body has moved down very quickly.

Elizabeth: And that continues all the way across the relief even to this final figure at the end. We have this isolated group of a Greek and a Persian fighting a stag. The Greek is pulling back on the stag's massive horns, and you feel the movement coming actually less from the Greek figure, who almost looks a little bit static with his arm and his upper body, but in fact, through the Persian figure: he has an axe and he is about to swing it down and hit the stag right in the chest. That kind of movement helps your eye come all the way back in but it also conveys the dynamic nature that permeates this entire side. We can see how these two sides are related in terms of their organization, but also the two stories that they're telling. We see the Persians going from the enemy to being allies, to being incorporated into a larger world.

Steven: This larger narrative is important because it may give us insight into Alexander's larger political aims, but this sarcophagus itself is also just a treasure. It is so rare that we have early fourth-century Greek carving at this level that is in this kind of pristine condition.

Elizabeth: Often art historians have held up fifth-century Athens as the pinnacle of artistic creation in the Greek world, but I think at looking at something like this, you can see that there is no element of what art historians might have traditionally termed "decline." What you have here is a changing ethos, a changing aesthetic, which will come to be fully developed and defined during the Hellenistic period.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxiaae0HIBs>



Detail, Greek and Persian fighting a stag, Alexander Sarcophagus, c. 312 B.C.E., Pentelic marble and polychromy, found in Sidon (İstanbul Archaeological Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

PART VII

Hellenistic

43. Barberini Faun (satyr)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Glyptothek, Munich.



Barberini Faun, c. 220 B.C.E., marble (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Dionysus, the god of wine, didn't like to be lonely. He was surrounded by satyrs and by maenads. He loved to party.

Beth: And you can't party alone.

Steven: No, you can't party alone. And of course, those satyrs would become tired sometimes, after they drank a bit too much. And that's exactly the subject of the Barberini Faun that we're looking at.

Beth: Now, a satyr is not a human being. He may look human to us, but he's, in Greek mythology, part animal, really.

Steven: That's right. He's a sub-human. The hierarchy of the gods were the gods of Mount Olympus at the top. Then you had heroes that were half divine and half human. Then you had humans. And then you had subhumans, and even below that, monsters. A satyr would be a subhuman. And if you look really closely, you can tell that, although he looks quite human in most ways, he's got a tail, pointy ears, and sometimes this is even represented with hooves.

Beth: Yeah, you can see the tail actually coming from behind his left thigh. That's where I first noticed it.

Steven: And for the Greeks, these particular subhumans, the satyrs, were half civilized and half wild. And so it was a wonderful way to express the uncultivated, the kind of barbaric qualities of human nature.

Beth: His name is the Barberini Faun. He's not really a faun. He's really more a satyr. But he's called the Barberini Faun because when he was discovered in Rome, near the Castel Sant'Angelo in 1625, the pope at the time was from the Barberini family. And everyone recognized how spectacular this figure was. And the pope said, well, I officially declare this to be part of my family collection.

Steven: He wanted to do that because it was so important, not only as just a stellar example of sculpture, but we think that this actually dates to the third century B.C.E. And that it is an original Greek sculpture.

Beth: Although it's always very hard to tell whether something is a Greek original or a later Roman copy.



Barberini Faun, tail (back), c. 220 B.C.E., marble (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Barberini Faun, foot and knee (restored), c. 220 B.C.E., marble (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: It could be a terrific copy. We do know, though, that at least a portion of it has been restored. And you can see those restorations quite clearly in the lower part of the left thigh and almost the entire right leg and foot.

Beth: So this spectacular sculpture ended up here in Munich when it was acquired by Prince Ludwig of Bavaria in the early nineteenth century. Quite a sculpture to add to his collection for his new museum.

Steven: It's an amazing thing to think that this was likely found in the moat of Hadrian's Tomb, in what is now Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome. I imagine people were vying to purchase this.

Beth: It's incredibly erotic. This figure has his legs spread. He's in a drunken, half sleeping, half awake state.

Steven: We can see that in his body. On the one hand, it's absolute exhaustion. He is just dead tired. But on the other side, you can see the agitation of his body. There's tension there. Look at that right leg, the way it's pushed up. Now, that part is a restoration. But we know that that's pretty much the placement because of the rock on which it sat.

Beth: And you can see from his face, too, that there's a combination of exhaustion and restlessness.

Steven: Well, look at that face. It is just spectacularly sensitive. And I love the fact that it's not symmetrical. His head is pushed over to the side. And if you look at his cheek straight on, you can see that gravity is compressing the right side of his face and it's expanding the left side. And so there really is this intense naturalism, this observation of the elastic qualities of the human body.



Barberini Faun, front view, c. 220 B.C.E., marble (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Barberini Faun, face, c. 220 B.C.E., marble (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Now, we're in the Hellenistic period, where ancient Greek artists are expanding their subject matter. So we don't just have the heroic ideal, athletic nudes that we saw in the Classical period. But here, the artists are exploring more emotional states, more varieties of subject matter.

Steven: That's right. Sometimes this is even referred to as the Hellenistic Baroque, because of its willingness to remove the reserve that we associate with the high Classical period before.

Beth: He's certainly not reserved in any way.

Steven: No, not at all. So what are the other accoutrements? What are the other symbols that identify him as a satyr? As if the tail and the ears and the wanton abandon quality wasn't enough, you can see that he's laid out a leopard skin. He's on a rock, and it's certainly protecting him from the roughness of the rock. And you can see that he's even keeping his heel on it. It's softer, and he's rolled it up a little bit under his arm, so that it functions somewhat like a cushion.



Barberini Faun, pelt, c. 220 B.C.E., marble (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Although it is a little bit hard for you to imagine him walking up to this rock, laying down the leopard skin, and then somehow lying on it.

Steven: No, it's a conceit.

Beth: It is.

Steven: So you said that this is Hellenistic, and it certainly is, in so many ways. But it is clearly informed by the Classical tradition that had come before it.

Beth: In terms of its treatment of the human body and its attention to musculature and anatomy.

Steven: Absolutely. And I think that's really clear in the torso.

Beth: We can see the folds of his flesh in his abdomen, or the careful articulation of the muscles in the shoulders and the armpit. This is an amazing understanding of human anatomy.



Barberini Faun, side of torso, c. 220 B.C.E., marble (Glyptothek, Munich) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: But it is also a little bit off-kilter. You can see that the ribcage is pushing a little bit to his left. And so the whole thing has a gentle turn to it, making it even more complex.

Beth: There is a turn in the torso, and we see that in other ancient Greek sculptures, like the Belvedere Torso. And although this was found 100 years after Michelangelo, or a little bit less, you can see how that kind of twisting and torsion in the body was something that Michelangelo would pick up on.

Steven: I think if Michelangelo had ever had the opportunity to see this, he would have absolutely loved it.

Beth: No question.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQ63wu7lsXo>

44. Dying Gaul and Ludovisi Gaul

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at two Roman collections, the Capitoline Museum and the Palazzo Altemps.

Steven: We're in the Capitoline Museum, looking at one of their most important sculptures, the Dying Gaul.

Beth: This sculpture, I think, is so interesting, because of the deep humanity that the sculptor depicted. This is the man at the moments just before his death.

Steven: You can see how powerful he was, but he's now losing his strength, he can barely hold himself up. You can see that he's bleeding from a wound in his side. A sword lays beside him, broken. Two horns lay beside him; he was a trumpeter.



Dying Gaul (Roman), 1st or 2nd century C.E. (copy of 3rd century B.C.E. Hellenistic bronze commemorating Pergamon's victory over the Gauls likely from the Sanctuary of Athena at Pergamon), marble, 93 cm high (Musei Capitolini, Rome) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And you can see the pain and agony clearly on his face.

Steven: It's fascinating, because you have the beauty of the body, but also its destruction.

Beth: It is impossible to stand in this gallery and not feel empathy. We're in the gallery filled with gods and goddesses and other figures from Classical antiquity, but none of them display the depth of emotion that we see here in the Dying Gaul. Now, this was found here in Rome, on the grounds of the Palazzo Ludovisi (a villa built on an ancient Roman site) in the seventeenth century, and it was found along with another sculpture—the so-called Ludovisi Gaul (Palazzo Altemps)—that's also here in Rome, but in a different museum.



Gaul killing himself and his wife (The Ludovisi Gaul), 1st or 2nd century C.E., Rome (copy of 3rd century B.C.E. Hellenistic bronze commemorating Pergamon's victory over the Gauls likely from the Sanctuary of Athena at Pergamon), marble, 211 cm high (Palazzo Altemps, Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

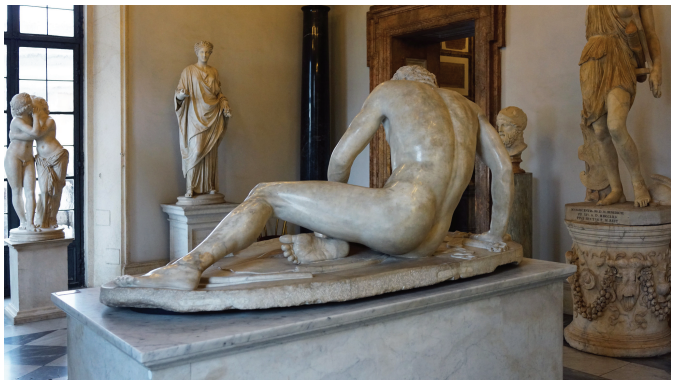


Map of Mediterranean, showing Rome and Pergamon.

Steven: And this is important, because we believe that those sculptures were originally made to be shown together, not here in Rome, but in Pergamon, close to the coast of what is now Turkey, but what was then an important capital in the Hellenistic world.

Beth: We think that they were part of a unified monument with, likely, many other figures. Now, these are Roman marble copies of what were bronze originals.

Steven: So let's untangle that a little bit. Sculptures in bronze were made for a monument in Pergamon that were seen as important enough to be copied in marble by the Romans (in the first or second century C.E.). They were lost in antiquity and then found in the seventeenth century, and are now in two separate museums in Rome.



Dying Gaul (Roman), 1st or 2nd century C.E. (copy of 3rd century B.C.E. Hellenistic bronze), marble, 93 cm high (Musei Capitolini, Rome) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: We believe these two sculptures form part of a monument memorializing a victory of the Pergamon kingdom over Gaul. (The Gauls were a people from Europe outside of the Hellenistic sphere.)



Gaul killing himself and his wife (The Ludovisi Gaul), 1st or 2nd century C.E., Rome (copy of 3rd century B.C.E. Hellenistic bronze), marble, 211 cm high (Palazzo Altemps, Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: But generally, when we think of a military victory being memorialized in sculpture, we think of the victors being shown triumphantly, something that speaks clearly of their valor. Instead, what we have here is a sympathetic portrait of the defeated.



Detail showing torc, Dying Gaul (Roman), 1st or 2nd century C.E. (copy of 3rd century B.C.E. Hellenistic bronze), marble, 93 cm high (Musei Capitolini, Rome) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: In fact, we don't think that the victors were shown at all in this monument—that it only focused on those who were defeated, on the Gauls, and this figure is easily identifiable as a Gaul because of his long hair, the ring that he wears, or torc, around his neck (this metal ring may have been a marker of high rank), and his mustache.

Steven: We've taken a taxi from the Capitoline Museum over to the Palazzo Altemps, which is another museum in Rome, the one that holds the other part of this sculptural group, known as the Ludovisi Gaul.



Gaul killing himself and his wife (The Ludovisi Gaul), 1st or 2nd century C.E., Rome (copy of 3rd century B.C.E. Hellenistic bronze), marble, 211 cm high (Palazzo Altemps, Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: This is a difficult sculpture. This is a dramatic image of a man who's killed his wife and is committing suicide himself.

Steven: We think that this might have been one of the chieftans, who's killing himself rather than allowing him and his wife to be captured.

Beth: So this is difficult, not only because of the gruesome subject matter—this suicide and murder—but also, it's just over-the-top in so many ways. It's what art historians sometimes refer to as the Hellenistic Baroque.

Steven: After the restraint of Classical Greek art, the Hellenistic becomes operatic, it becomes dramatic. Here we see sculptures that are pushing beyond the boundaries of their pedestal, where we have limbs that are lifted. There's a compositional freedom that is absolutely new to Greek sculpture.

Beth: The figure of the Gaul, clearly identifiable by his mustache, by his thick, wavy hair, is striding forward into our space.

Steven: Look at the way that his left arm runs down and visually connects with her left arm, creating this serpentine line.



Detail of 'serpentine line,' Gaul killing himself and his wife (The Ludovisi Gaul), 1st or 2nd century C.E., Rome (copy of 3rd century B.C.E. Hellenistic bronze), marble, 211 cm high (Palazzo Altemps, Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: What's interesting is that, as we stand in front of the sculpture, in the direction that the figure is striding toward, we can only see his face in profile.

Steven: If we want to see his face frontally, we have to turn to the left so that we can no longer see the sword, and then we can see his full face, although only obliquely. He seems to turn away from us in shame, humiliated by his defeat. Seen separately, the Dying Gaul is so quiet and so full of human sympathy. This sculpture elicits a very different kind of reaction: it's a kind of unrestrained drama. I wonder if we would see the Dying Gaul differently if these sculptures were still together.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=in6iDVnTw-k>

45. Nike (Winged Victory) of Samothrace

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Louvre, Paris.

Steven: We're in the Louvre at the top of one of the grand staircases. And we're looking at the "Nike of Samothrace," that dates to the second century C.E., or after Christ.

Beth: So we're in the Hellenistic period. And the sculpture is nine feet high, so it's really large.

Steven: It's called the "Nike of Samothrace" because it was found on the island in the north of the Aegean, which is called Samothrace. It was found in a sanctuary in the harbor that actually faces in such a way that the predominant wind that blows off the coast actually seems to be enlivening her drapery.

Beth: So she never stood on the prow of a real boat.

Steven: No, she stood on the prow of a stone ship that was within a temple environment.



Detail of draped torso, Nike (Winged Victory) of Samothrace, Parian marble (figure), c. 190 B.C.E. 3.28 m high, Hellenistic Period (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Nike (Winged Victory) of Samothrace, Lartos marble (ship), Parian marble (figure), c. 190 B.C.E., 3.28 meters high, Hellenistic Period (Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So she's the goddess of victory. She's a messenger goddess who spreads the news of victory.

Steven: In fact, there are some reconstructions of what the sculpture would have originally looked like that show her as literally a herald with a horn. This is an image that will have an enormous impact on Western art. But you had mentioned the Hellenistic before. And so

gone is all of that very reserved, high Classical style. And in its place is a kind of voluptuousness, a kind of windswept energy that is full of motion and full of emotion.

Beth: I feel as though she moves in several directions at the same time. She's grounded by her legs but strides forward. Her torso lifts up. Her abdomen twists. Her wings move back. One can almost feel the wind around her, whipping her, pulling back that drapery that flows out behind her, swirling around her abdomen, where it really reminds us of the sculptures of hundreds of years earlier on the Parthenon frieze.

Steven: Yes, exactly. But instead of the quiet, relaxed attitude of the gods on Mount Olympus, you have instead this sense of energy and a goddess that's responding, in this case, to actually natural forces.

Beth: The environment.

Steven: Absolutely, just as we would stand there, very likely having the wind whip around us.

Beth: And that drapery that clings to her body and creates so many creases and folds that play against the light, and the different texture of her wings– the marble is really made to do so many different things in terms of texture.

Steven: So here is a culture that has studied the body, celebrated the body, and then is willing then to use the body for tremendous expressive force.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPM1LuW3Y5w>

The sculpture was unearthed in 1863 after its discovery under the direction of Charles Champoiseau, the French Vice-Consul to Turkey. Please note that the theoretical reconstruction of the Nike as a trumpeter mentioned in the video has been largely abandoned; the monument is now thought to have been part of a fountain possibly commemorating a naval victory.



Nike (Winged Victory) of Samothrace, Lartos marble (ship) and Parian marble (figure), c. 190 B.C.E. 3.28 m high, Hellenistic Period (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

46. The Pergamon Altar

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Model of the Pergamon Altar, Altar: c. 200-150 B.C.E., 35.64 x 33.4 meters (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation held in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.

Steven: I love Greek sculpture. I love the Archaic. I love the Classical and all of its restraint and harmony. But I have to tell you, I really love the Hellenistic. And the reason I do is because of two fragments from a great frieze from Pergamon. One has Athena at its center, and one has Zeus.

Beth: And I can see why you love these sculptures. They combine what's most wonderful about ancient Greek sculpture—the love of the body. But also the sense of expressiveness and drama, which we associate so much with the Hellenistic.

Steven: The Hellenistic refers to the last period of Greek art, the last phase of Greek art after the death of Alexander the Great. Now Alexander, whose father had been a king in northern Greece, in Macedonia, had been able to conquer all of Greece, and ultimately, conquer an enormous territory well beyond Greece's original borders.

Beth: And in so doing, he expanded the influence of Greek culture across a much wider area.



Detail with Alexander the Great, Alexander Mosaic, c. 100 B.C.E., tessera mosaic from the House of the Faun, Pompeii (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Athena frieze looking up, the Pergamon Altar (Gigantomachy), c. 200-150 B.C.E. (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: That's right. He, in a sense, Hellenized this area, or made it Greek. His expanded territory reached from the ancient civilization of Egypt all the way to the border between Persia and India to the Indus Valley itself. It was an enormous territory. But after he died, his empire was divided among his four generals. And one of those generals saw a hill top near the coast of Turkey, which he believed was an important defensive position, and there founded the garrison of Pergamon that became, ultimately, the kingdom of Pergamon.

Beth: And those are the people that built this fabulous altar and sculpted this fabulous frieze. So what's going on here is a battle between the giants and the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus. We're witnessing a celestial battle of enormous proportions.

Steven: This is the great mythic battle, where the giants battle the Olympian gods for supremacy of the Earth and the universe. So let's take a close look at it. Let's start with the fragment that has Athena at its center. She is graceful and beautiful, even as she battles a ferocious giant, a Titan.

Beth: It's clear who's going to win. Athena looks totally in control. She's grabbed Alcyoneus by the hair, pulling him out of the Earth, disempowering him. His mother, on the other side, completely unable to help him. Although she's wild with fear over what's about to happen to her son.

Steven: Look at the way the artist, whoever it is, has actually constructed this image. My eye starts with Athena herself, where her head would have been. My eye rides down that beautiful arm until it's grasped almost tenderly by Alcyoneus. It continues around his elbow, and then across his face, and down his chest. I notice that one of Athena's snakes is biting him on his right side. My eye then sweeps down that gorgeous curve that is his body, his torso, that leads into his leg. But it's slowed down by almost the staccato of the intersections of the deeply carved drape that belongs to Athena. And of course, that all leads us right back to Alcyoneus' mother.

Beth: So it's as though Athena, this powerful, in control goddess, is bracketed on either side by these passionate, wild figures who are being defeated. And at the same time, Athena is being crowned by winged Nike, who comes from behind with a the crown for her head. So there's really a sense here of figures coming from behind, of figures coming from below, of something that's completely in flux, something that's completely in motion with an incredible sense of drama.

Steven: It's as if the entire surface of this marble is swirling in a kind of counterclockwise motion around Athena's shield, which is at its very center. It is full of diagonals, which activates the surface. It is full of the deepest carving that creates this brilliant contrast between the highlights of the exposed bodies and the dark shadows behind them.



Zeus Frieze, looking up, The Pergamon Altar (Gigantomachy), c. 200-150 B.C.E. (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: But what's also amazing to me is the complexity of the positions of their bodies. Athena, who moves toward the left, keeps her arm to the right. And then Alcyoneus lifts his head up, twists his shoulders. His legs spill back behind him. And we're really talking about virtuoso sculpting here of the human body.

Steven: Imagine what this would have looked like when it was painted. We think so often about Greek sculpture as being just this brilliant white marble. But we have to remember that all of this was brilliantly painted. Let's take a look at the fragment with Zeus at its center.

Beth: Like Athena, he seems composed and totally in control. Even as he rushes forward, we have no doubt that he is the victor here.

Steven: So Zeus is an enormously powerful figure. We have this beautiful exposed chest and abdomen and this wildly, almost living drapery that seems to whip around his legs. And he is taking on not one, but three giants at the same moment.

Beth: But luckily, he's the king of the gods. So he's got things like eagles and thunderbolts to help him out.

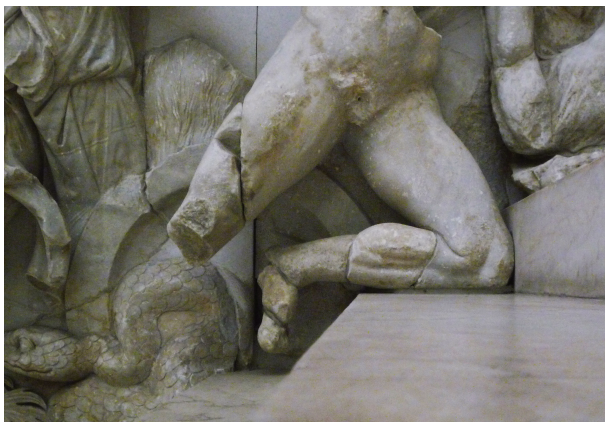
Steven: That's right. If you look at the upper right, you can see that an eagle, Zeus' emblem, is taking on the elder Titan. As the eagle is preoccupying that giant, Zeus is able to turn his attention to the giant at his feet, who is on his knees and is shortly going to be vanquished. You can see that on Zeus' other side, he has just finished putting away a giant who almost seems to be sitting on a rock. He's got stuck in his thigh what looks like a torch, but is actually the way that the Greeks represented Zeus' thunderbolts.

Beth: Ouch. That has to hurt.

Steven: It does. There's a sense of heroism, a sense of balance, even as there is a sense of the momentary and a kind of excitement that really pulls us in. The story of the gods and the giants is a story that was really important to the Greeks. It was really a set of symbols that spoke of the Greeks fear, but also optimism that they could overcome chaos.

Beth: So this battle is really a metaphor for the victory of Greek culture over the unknown, over the chaotic forces of nature.

Steven: Right. It also represents their military victories over cultures that they didn't understand and that they feared. Let's walk up the stairs of the Great Altar into the most sacred part, where the fire, presumably to Zeus, would have been lit and where sacrifices might have been offered. You had mentioned earlier that the figures seem to almost spill out away from the wall. That's most clearly seen as we walk up the stairs. There are moments when the figures that are carved in this high relief actually rest a knee on the stairs—and actually enter our space. For instance, one of the sea nymphs, whose legs actually end in the tail of a great serpent, coils her tail on one of the stairs. There is this wonderful way in which they literally pour out into our world.



Stairs at left, the Pergamon Altar, c. 200-150 B.C.E. (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And so this whole drama is unfolding around us, moving into our space. And it must have been an amazing thing to have seen.

Steven: One of the questions that comes to mind is why are these sculptures here in Berlin? And the answer can be found in the political ambitions of Prussia at the time. They very much wanted to be the equal of the French and the British. And that meant, in part, to have great museums that express the civilizations of the past, so they could be, in a sense, the inheritors of the great classical tradition, which was so revered in the nineteenth century. Berlin, in some ways, wanted to be the new Rome.

Beth: And so one of the great things about being in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin is that instead of just putting what remains of the frieze on wall, they've reconstructed the altar and as much of the frieze as possible. And so we really get a sense of what this was like in the city of Pergamon, in the third century B.C.E.



Stairs at right, the Pergamon Altar, c. 200-150 B.C.E. (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Left of stairs, the Pergamon Altar, c. 200-150 B.C.E. (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Right. And so if this was the third century, we would be on the Acropolis, this hill top, in the city of Pergamon, about 20 miles from the coast, in what is now Turkey. We would walk up this hill. And we would find the Altar of Zeus surrounded by a great library that is reported to have had 200,000 scrolls, a garrison for soldiers, a royal palace for the king.

Beth: And so this whole drama is unfolding around us, moving into our space. And it must have been an amazing thing to have seen in the second century B.C.E.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3SIooVHV8E>

47. Apollonius, Boxer at Rest (Seated Boxer)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Palazzo Massimo, Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.

Steven: Almost always, when we look at Greek sculpture, we're looking at Roman copies—we're looking at marble copies of what had once been bronze, but bronze is expensive and it's reusable. So, for the 2000 years since these objects were made, there was ample opportunity for them to be melted down. But once in a while, we find a Greek original.

Beth: We're looking at the Seated Boxer, a Greek Hellenistic sculpture from about 100 B.C.E. Hellenistic refers to the period after Alexander the Great.



Detail with head, Apollonius, Boxer at Rest, 1st century B.C.E. (may be a copy of a 4th century sculpture), bronze, Palazzo Massimo, Museo Nazionale Romano (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: This is the last phase of ancient Greek art because the Hellenistic will end when the Romans conquer Greece. Because it's bronze we have an opportunity to understand how the Greeks constructed their large scale sculpture. This is lost-wax casting, and it would be chased, so you could actually carve into portions. We can see that especially in the beard and in the hair, so those lines are cut into the surface.



Detail with swollen ear, Apollonius, Boxer at Rest, 1st century B.C.E. (may be a copy of a 4th century sculpture), bronze, Palazzo Massimo, Museo Nazionale Romano (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So the sculpture is hollow in other words.

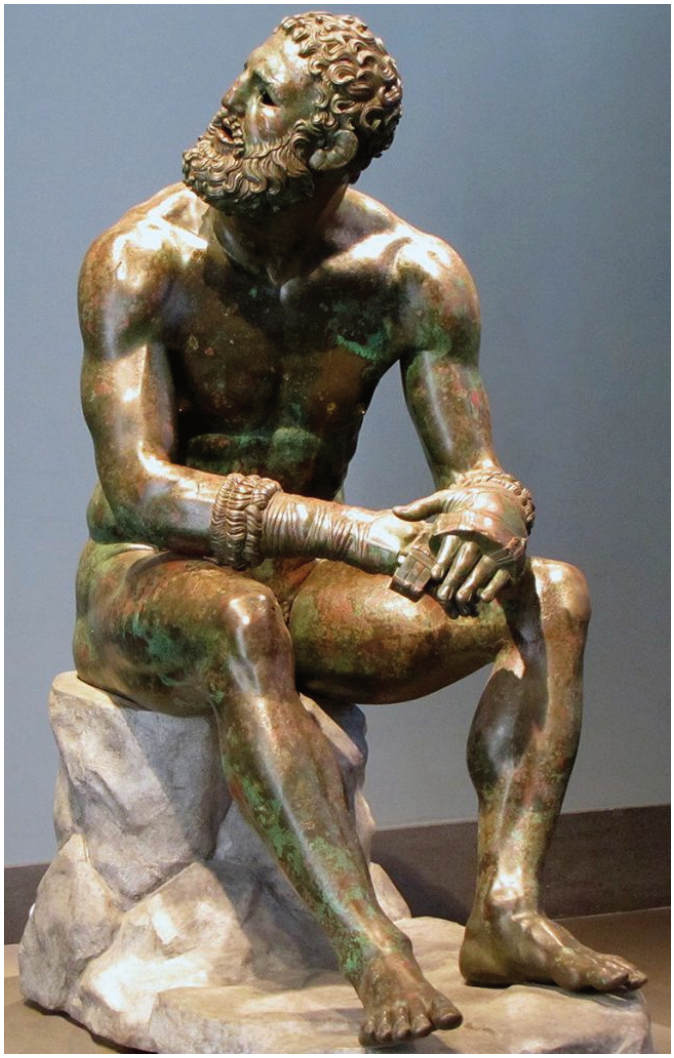
Steven: Well we can see that if you look into the eyes, if you look into the mouth, you can see the hollowness. Now, originally there would have been eyes, they're missing. They probably would have been ivory or some sort of glass paste, something reflective and highly polished, but yes, we can see that this is quite thin. If we knocked on it, it would ring like a bell.

Beth: A few moments ago, as we were looking at it, there was someone standing in the very place that he seems to be looking, and I almost felt like he was in actual dialogue with the beholder.

Steven: He has that tremendous sense of presence, doesn't he?

Beth: He does. During this Hellenistic period, we see a real expansion of the subject matter that we usually think of as Greek art. Usually we think about ideal, beautiful, nude, athletic, young figures.

Steven: This is an athletic figure, but he's not young and he's not beautiful in the traditional sense.



Apollonius, Boxer at Rest, 1st century B.C.E. (may be a copy of a 4th century sculpture), bronze, Palazzo Massimo, Museo Nazionale Romano (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: When I look at him I find parts of him beautiful, but his face is certainly not.

Steven: The beauty comes from our understanding of his life, of his suffering. Instead of through the elegance and perfection of his body, he's muscular, he's powerful, but he's defeated.

Beth: Yeah, there's definitely a sense of pathos—this sculpture engages us emotionally.

Steven: The artist has been careful to make sure that we feel sympathy. He's inlaid copper into parts of his face where he's defined wounds so that the copper functions almost as a more red color against the bronze, and we can see him bleeding.

Beth: Boxers in ancient Greece focused mainly on the head, on the face, and that's why his body still looks so very beautiful and perfect. When I said before that I still find him ideally beautiful, I was thinking about the incredible muscles in his torso. He's still really thin and athletic, but the face is such a contrast and also his hands all wrapped in leather. The face and the hands ground him in a kind of reality of a moment.



Detail of wrapped hands, Apollonius, Boxer at Rest, 1st century B.C.E. (may be a copy of a 4th century sculpture), bronze, Palazzo Massimo, Museo Nazionale Romano (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: That's especially true with his posture. You can see that he's not simply seated, his torso is collapsing, his head is down, he's looking up but you can feel the exhaustion. You can also see the way in which his body has been beaten, the broken nose, the gashes in his face and look at his ear which is swollen and distorted.

Beth: We rarely see seated figures in the Classical period in Greek art; the figures are standing, they're noble, they exist in the world in that heroic way. Just by virtue of just being seated there's a humility and humanity to the figure.



Detail of foot, Apollonius, Boxer at Rest, 1st century B.C.E. (may be a copy of a 4th century sculpture), bronze, Palazzo Massimo, Museo Nazionale Romano (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: There's also an informality. His right leg is out and up on the heel. His left leg is splayed out slightly under the weight of his arm. This is a man who would like to lie down. This is a period in Greek art when there really is an interest in pathos, in moving beyond the heroic, moving beyond the traditional subjects of the ancient world and really beginning to explore a much wider variety. It's fascinating. It is this incredibly sophisticated moment.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvsSPJoJB3k>

48. Alexander Mosaic from the House of the Faun, Pompeii

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Alexander Mosaic, c. 100 B.C.E., tessera mosaic from the House of the Faun, Pompeii, 8′ 11″ x 16′ 9″ (the mosaic may be based on a lost painting by Philoxenos of Eretria, The Battle of Issus, c. 315 B.C.E.) (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.

Steven: In baseball, in soccer, sometimes sports announcers will look for the turning point of the game. And the scene that we're looking at—a battle, not a sport, and in fact, one of the most important battles in ancient history—is at that particular turning point, the moment when the great ruler of Persia turns and flees under the onslaught of the great Greek general Alexander. (Note: scholars continue to debate whether the mosaic depicts the Battle of Issus, in 333 B.C.E or Gaugamela, in 331 B.C.E.)

Beth: Darius, the king of the Persians, has just ordered his troops to retreat.



Alexander Mosaic, detail with Darius III's Chariot, c. 100 B.C.E., tessera mosaic from the House of the Faun, Pompeii (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: So there's tremendous tension at this moment because we have this reversal of momentum. We can feel, still, the momentum that is moving in from the right because we can still see the Persian guards' spears facing towards the Greeks. But just at that moment, one of the largest objects in this mosaic, the chariot, is being spun around. And the tension and the torsion that's required for that is creating this tremendous sense of dynamism.

Beth: On the ground, we see the wounded and the dying.

Steven: One of my favorite details is the reflection of one of the Persian soldiers in his own shield.

Beth: He's looking at himself fallen in battle, perhaps about to die. I think my favorite part is the horse that's part of the team leading Darius's chariot. Almost all four hooves are off the ground. As it's being pulled toward the left, its head turns to the right.

Steven: There is this almost frenetic quality to this image.

Beth: And you have a sense of confidence when you look at Alexander's face as he heads toward Darius. Darius looks fearful as he gestures toward Alexander. It looks to me as though Darius is almost pleading for the lives of his soldiers.

Steven: Well, there is a look both of surprise and worry and of seeking compassion. I think that that's exactly right. Alexander is known ultimately for his compassion, at least towards Darius's family.

Beth: And Alexander is the great Greek general, the founder of an enormous empire.

Steven: Well, that's right. He not only unifies Greece, but he will then move south into Egypt. He moves east into Persia, and he gets to the Indus Valley itself. So he puts under Greece's control an enormous area of the known world. And all of these details are rendered in tiny pieces of stone and glass.



Alexander Mosaic, detail with Alexander, c. 100 B.C.E. (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So we're looking at a mosaic that we think is based on an ancient Greek painting. We hope it's based on an ancient Greek painting because almost nothing of ancient Greek painting survives. And Pliny talked about how amazing Greek painting was.

Steven: Well, it's true. When we think of Greek art, we think of Greek sculpture. We might think of Greek architecture. Perhaps we think of Greek vase painting. But you're absolutely right. In the ancient world, literature tells us that what the Greeks did better than anything was wall painting. We just don't have any.

Beth: So maybe this gives us some idea.

Steven: But I do find it really interesting that the mosaic is almost empty at the top and is so much weighted down towards the bottom. Especially when we remember that this was based on a painting that would have been on a wall. And so this was intended to be seen vertically, at least initially. At least, that's our best guess.

Beth: Art historians link this mosaic to a literary description of an ancient Greek painting by an artist named Philoxenos. And in this literary source by Pliny, Philoxenos is said to have created a painting of the Battle of Alexander and Darius.

Steven: But here's the problem. There were probably lots of paintings of that subject.

Beth: And we know for certain that there, for example, was a woman artist who painted this subject in ancient Greece, as well.

Steven: This was an incredibly important confrontation between these two generals, between these two civilizations. I'm sure there were many more.

Beth: But this is what we have, and this is what was found. And we have it because of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 C.E., which preserved under a layer of volcanic ash the city of Pompeii.

Steven: Including this mosaic.

Beth: This was found on the floor between two peristyles, that is, between two open courtyards that were surrounded by columns in the largest and most elaborately decorated mansion in Pompeii, often called the House of the Faun after a bronze sculpture of a faun that was found there. (The original mosaic was uncovered at the House of the Faun in 1841 and moved to Naples two years later. A replica mosaic was installed at the House of the Faun in 2005.)

Steven: And the mosaic itself is of extraordinary quality. So it's not surprising that we find it in such a lavish environment as the House of the Faun. There are apparently a million and a half pieces of stone and glass that make up this mosaic.



Alexander Mosaic replica, installed 2005, House of the Faun, Pompeii (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And the quality is not just in the fineness of the materials, but in the incredible naturalism of what we see here, which is what the ancient Greeks were known for. We have forms that, even with these tiny pieces of stone, we have a sense of modeling, of the use of light and dark to create a sense of three-dimensional forms. If we look at the horses or the faces of the figures, we see the turn of the face, the anatomy of the body.

Steven: And look at the foreshortening of the animals—for instance, of the horses.

Beth: That ancient Greek knowledge of the human body, of how it moves through space, is so clear here.

Steven: And of course, all of this speaks to the Romans' regard for the achievement of ancient Greek art.

Beth: Sometimes it seems as though everyone in Pompeii wanted to imitate the ancient Greeks, to own copies of ancient Greek sculptures, ancient Greek paintings. There was a real mania, as in Rome itself, for ancient Greek culture.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51UA1T89MzU>



Alexander Mosaic, detail with dying horse, c. 100 B.C.E., tessera mosaic from the House of the Faun, Pompeii (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

49. Laocoön and his sons

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Athanadoros, Hagesandros, and Polydoros of Rhodes, Laocoön and his Sons, early 1st century C.E., marble, 7'10 1/2" high (Vatican Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Vatican Museums in Rome.

Steven: We're standing in an alcove of a lovely courtyard in the Vatican and we're looking at Laocoön. This man, Laocoön, was a Trojan priest. He knew that the gift (the "Trojan Horse") that had arrived outside of the gates of the City of Troy from the Greeks, their enemies, was in fact a trick, and he tried to warn the city.

Beth: The gift was a wooden horse filled with Greek soldiers.

Steven: A goddess who was a protector of the Greeks didn't like this.

Steven: To punish him, she sent serpents to strangle him and his sons. So it's interesting, when this sculpture was unearthed in the sixteenth century, it was immediately hailed because we thought it linked up with literature that we have from the ancient world, from ancient Rome, from Pliny.

Beth: Pliny, the ancient Roman historian, wrote that he had seen a sculpture of this subject in the Emperor's palace.

Steven: In the eighteenth century, an important early connoisseur and art historian, a man named Winklemann, was absolutely convinced that this dated from the fourth century B.C.E.

Beth: From the Classical period.

Steven: That's right. It lived up to every desire that antiquarians had for a sculpture that could really be located.

Beth: So then the problems emerge. One problem is that the sculptors that Pliny names can be traced to the first century, not to an earlier period. Pliny also says that this was carved out of a single block of marble, which it isn't.



Detail, son, from Athanadoros, Hagesandros, and Polydoros of Rhodes, Laocoön and his Sons, early 1st century C.E., marble, 7'10 1/2" high (Vatican Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Then to further complicate things, we just need to look at the sculpture. This is a sculpture that is full of dynamism. His body is writhing, there's agony, those serpents are muscular. There's a power here and all of that energy we associate not with the Classical period in ancient Greece, but instead with the Hellenistic, that is with the third or the second century.

Beth: In fact, this is very similar in style to the figures that we see on the Altar of Pergamon, in the way that the figures move into our space and interact with us.

Steven: Even the sense of agony, the sense of tragedy that is so dramatic, all the theatricality here, all the emphasis on the diagonal, on the serpentine, all of these things, we see on the great Altar of Zeus at Pergamon, and really, it fixes this style in the Hellenistic (third or second century B.C.E.).



Detail, son and serpent, from Athanadoros, Hagesandros, and Polydoros of Rhodes, Laocoön and his Sons, early 1st century C.E., marble, 7'10 1/2" high (Vatican Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: The word you used was "serpentine," and I think that that's a great word to think about the sculpture and the figures of the Renaissance that were inspired by it. The figure twists in space. His legs move to his left. His torso moves to his right. His head moves back toward the left. It's a figure that twists on itself and is so expressive in the body that you can see how it would be so important for Michelangelo.

Steven: As with so many ancient sculptures, especially complicated ones like this, it was found in fragments. Although it is organized and the limbs are in the position we think they belong, we could be wrong—especially concerning Laocoön's right arm.

Beth: This has been reconstructed a number of different ways, but the way that we have it now with his arm moving back behind him is the one that art historians agree on now. One of the things that people have noticed about this sculpture is not only the terrible pain—the agony expressed by the figures—but also the simultaneous sense of beauty that we contemplate in the figure's body.

Steven: So that tension is a result of the fact that we're enjoying the beauty of this sculpture even as the sculpture is depicting great pain, great tragedy, real agony.

Watch the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3cwGCezgSQ>



Detail, Laocoön, from Athanadoros, Hagesandros, and Polydoros of Rhodes, Laocoön and his Sons, early 1st century C.E., marble, 7'10 1/2" high (Vatican Museums) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

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