

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 33 – Art and Portraiture - Greece

CLCS4007

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Survival of Greek Art

- ❑ Sculpture and portraiture – may be rendered in a variety of mediums, stone/marble and metals - gold, silver, bronze – ivory, e.g. Britannicus (*Suet. Div. Tit. 2.1*).
- ❑ Antiquarianism – focus on monuments and artwork from antiquity – problems of provenance and lack of context – trade in antiquities.
- ❑ Many earlier classical Greek statues survive only as Roman period copies – more original works of the Hellenistic period.

Conquered Art on Display

- ▣ Quintus Metellus plundered Macedonia in 148 BC.
- ▣ Built the Porticus Metelli on Campus Martius.
- ▣ This building housed Greek art as *spolia*.

“The ornaments of the city, the statues and pictures which were so numerous in Syracuse, he [M. Claudius Marcellus] transported to Rome... [he] began the decadence with which all places everywhere, sacred and profane, were plundered... the temple outside Porta Capena, dedicated by Marcellus, used to be frequented by foreigners because of the spender of their ornaments...” – Livy 25.40.1-3.

“For in no case is one who contemplates such works of art moved so much by admiration of the good fortune of those who have possessed themselves of the property of others, as by pity as well as envy for the original owners. And when opportunities become ever more frequent, and the victor collects around him all the treasures of other peoples, and these treasures may be almost said to invite those who were robbed of them to come and inspect them, things are twice as bad. For now spectators no longer pity their neighbours, but themselves, as they recall to mind their own calamities. And hence not only envy, but a sort of passionate hatred for the beloved of fortune flares up, for the memories awakened of their own disaster move them to detest the authors of it. – Polybius 9.10.7-10.

Survival of Pottery



Greek vases/pottery in museums



Greek pottery found in excavations

Sources on Greek Art

- ❑ Little in the way of detail contemporary descriptions of art and artists – some incidental references.
- ❑ Descriptions of later Roman period authors – e.g. Pliny the Elder *Natural History* (books 33-34); Pausanias *Description of Greece*.
- ❑ Inscriptional evidence quoted (notably by Pausanias).

Ekphrasis

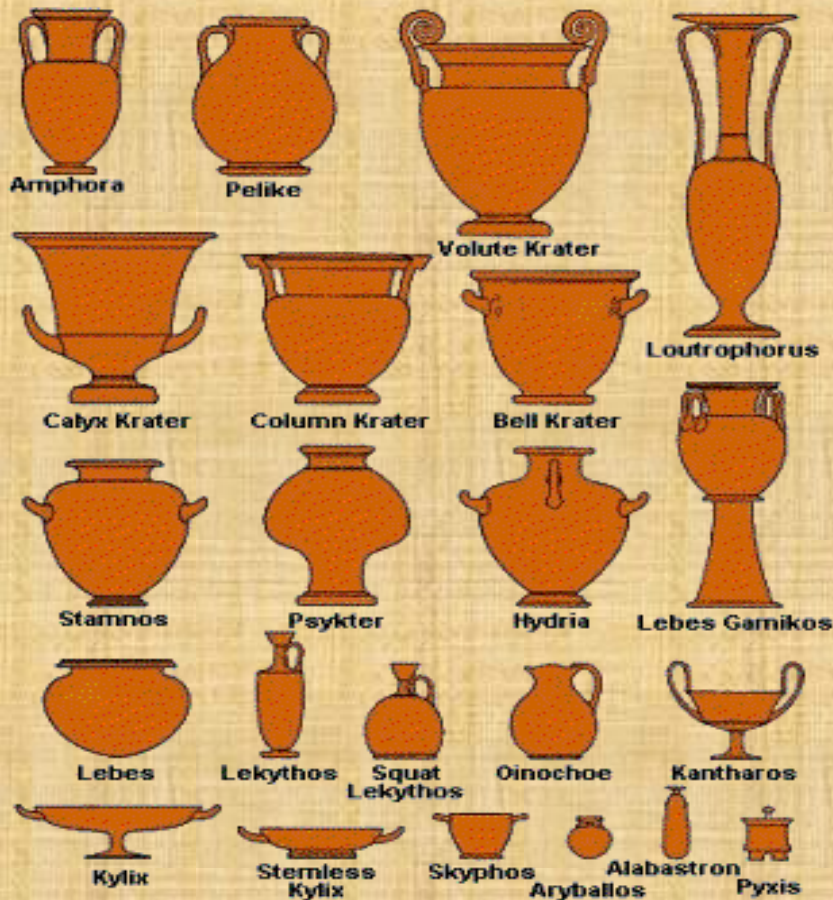
- ▣ Rhetorical descriptions of works of art.

“Zeuxis, that best of painters, did not paint popular and common subjects such as heroes, gods or wars; but rather always tried to do something new... something unusual and strange... Among his other daring innovations Zeuxis represented a female centaur, who in turn was feeding twin centaur children, mere infants.”
– **Lucian** *Zeuxis*.

Pottery

Use of Pottery

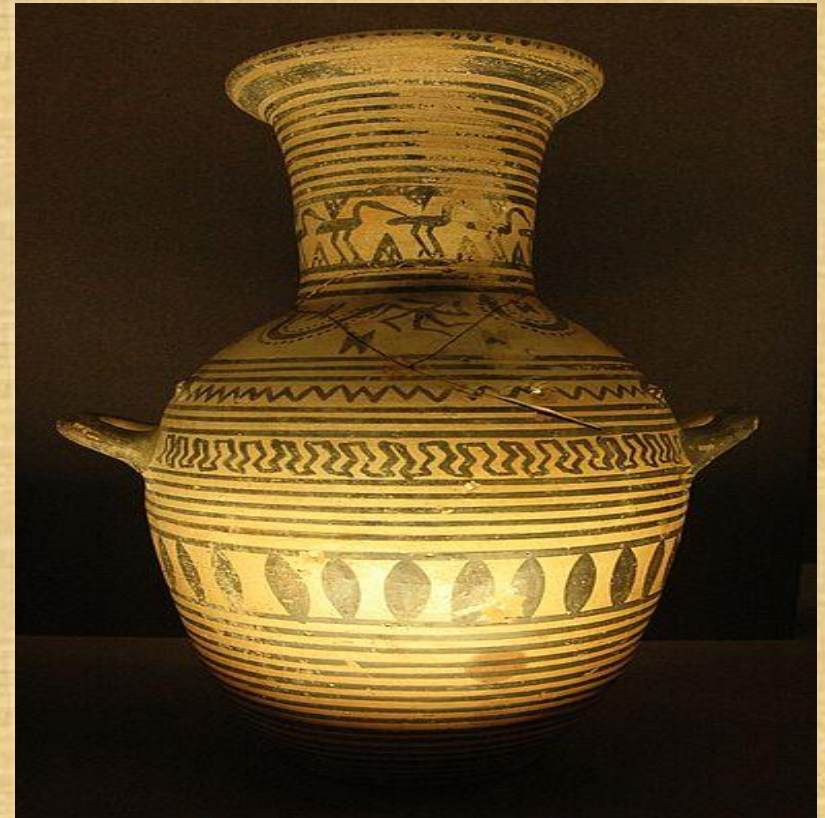
Common Shapes and Comparative Sizes



- Equipment for drinking parties - Krater – mixing bowl (for wine and water) - Kylix – drinking vessel (wide goblet with two handles) - Oinochoe – jug to pour the mixed wine.
- Adornment, containers of olive oil perfume.
- Ritualistic uses – *loutrophoros* for carrying water in bridal ritual, *lekythoi* as grave good.

Imagery on Pottery

- ❑ Difficulties - rounded surface, profile can appear irregular.
- ❑ Earlier pottery often simply shapes and lines, e.g. geometric.
- ❑ Mythic and Homeric scenes increasingly appear.



- Boeotian Hydria, c. early 7th century – Louvre.

Black-Figure Technique

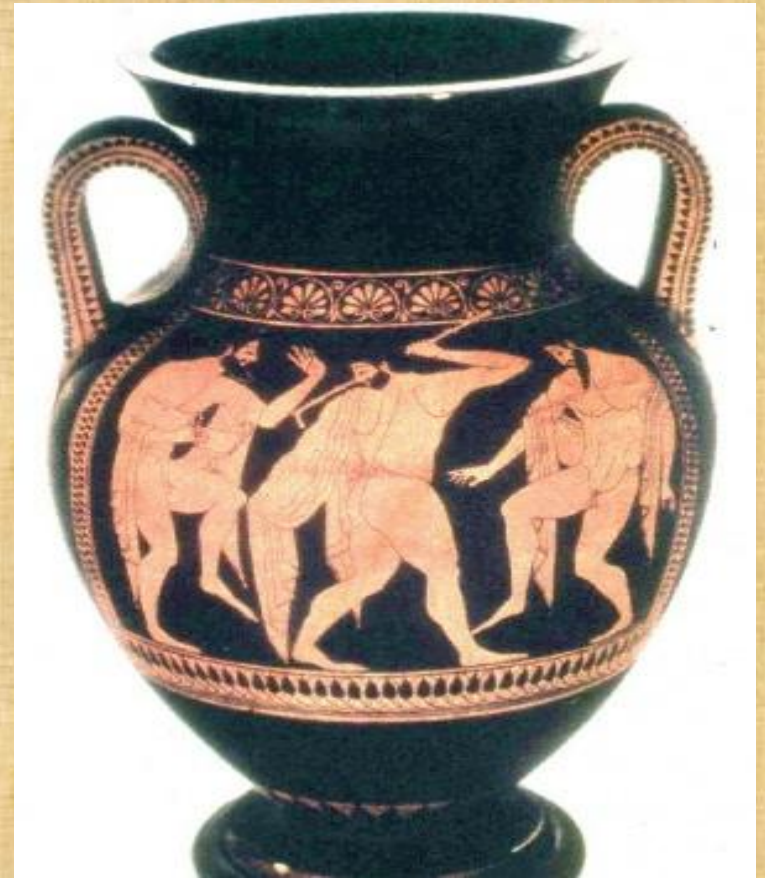
- ▣ Artist first paints figures in a silhouette.
- ▣ Contours and inner markings incised, removing paint.
- ▣ White and purplish-red colour added.
- ▣ Image (right) – Ajax lifting body of Achilles.



- “François Vase” – c.570-560 BC – Museo Archeologico, Florence.

Red-Figure Technique

- ❑ Reverse of black-figure technique, painting background instead of figures.
- ❑ Brush, no need for harsh engraving.
- ❑ Invented c. 530 BC.
- ❑ Foreshortening – reducing or shortening figure, to convey illusion of three dimensional space.



- Euthymides (contra Euphronius) – c.510-500 BC – Glyptothek, Munich.

Painting

- ▣ Greeks often painted on walls and wooden panels - little survival.
- ▣ Detail often dependent on literary descriptions.
- ▣ After 5th century BC vase painting becomes more of a minor art.

“Herakleides of Macedon should be noted. He started his career painting ships and after the capture of King Perseus [168 BC] he migrated to Athens where he was active at the same time as Metrodoros, the latter was both a philosopher and a painter and had a great reputation in both disciplines... L. Paullus, after conquering Perseus, made a request to the Athenians that they send him the most respected philosopher available for the education of his children and also a painter to adorn his triumphal procession, the Athenians selected Metrodoros, professing he was the most outstanding man for both requirements...”
– Pliny *NH* 35.135.

Material for Painting

“The Greeks call this red earth "miltos," and give to minium the name of "cinnabaris," and hence the error caused by the two meanings of the same word; this being properly the name given to the thick matter which issues from the dragon when crushed beneath the weight of the dying elephant, mixed with the blood of either animal, as already described. Indeed this last is the only colour that in painting gives a proper representation of blood.” - **Pliny NH 33.115-116.**

Painting on Sculpture



“Alexander Sarcophagus” from
Sidon – c. late 4th century BC

Statues and Portraits

Greek Notions of Artistic Development

- ▣ **Diodorus** records Telchines of Rhodes as inventors of various arts (5.55); and Crete as the origin of bronze and iron-working (5.64).

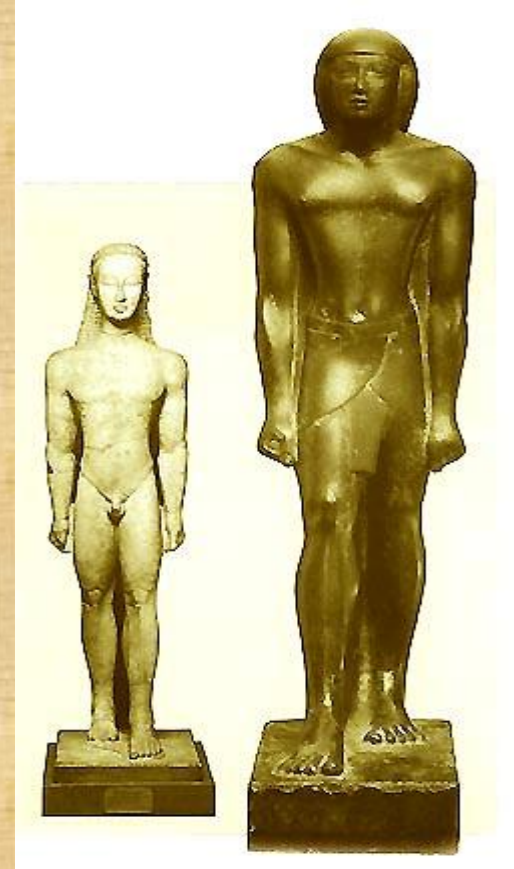
“Daidalos was an Athenian by birth... he was the discoverer of many devices that contributed to the development of art... In the production of statues he excelled all other men... he was the first to represent the eyes open and the legs separated as they are in walking, and also to render arms and hands as if stretched out...” – (4.76).

Early Greek Statues

- Large figures of people being carved in mid-7th century BC.
- Inspiration from Egypt – adoption of technique, drawing outlines, chiselling to corresponding depth.
- Emphasis on symmetry and repetition of shapes.



• **Kouros** -
Metropolitan
Museum, New
York.



• **Bakenrenef** -
Museum of
Fine Art,
Boston.

Increasing Naturalism

- ▣ Increasing experimentation by Greek artists.
- ▣ Increasing change in pose – move away from rigid look – turned head, shifted weight.
- ▣ Bronze-statues, wax model technique, allowing experimentation.
- ▣ Kritios boy buried after destruction of Athens by Persians.



• Kritios Boy – c. 480 BC.

Classical Sculpture



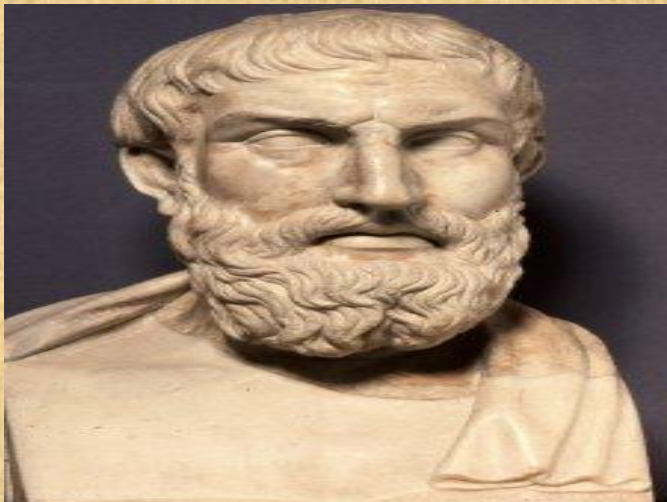
- ❑ Doryphoros "Spear-Bearer" – made by Polykleitos, Roman copy.
- ❑ Alternation of tensed and relaxed limbs – *contrappasto*.



- ❑ Venus Genetrix – Louvre, Paris, Roman copy of Greek original.
- ❑ Clothed but with suggestion of body beneath.

Hellenistic Sculpture

- ▣ Nudity the norm for Heroes, gods, and distinguished mortals – utilised by Hellenistic kings.
- ▣ Realism of expression, also emphasis on athletic – Pergamene sculpture.
- ▣ Character representations, e.g. bearded, gruff philosopher.



Epicurus bust, British Museum, Roman copy



“Hellenistic Ruler” statue
– National Museum, Rome

Bibliography

- ▣ Woodford, S. (1982) *The Art of Greece and Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ▣ Pollitt, J. J. (1990) *The Art of Ancient Greece: Sources and Documents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.