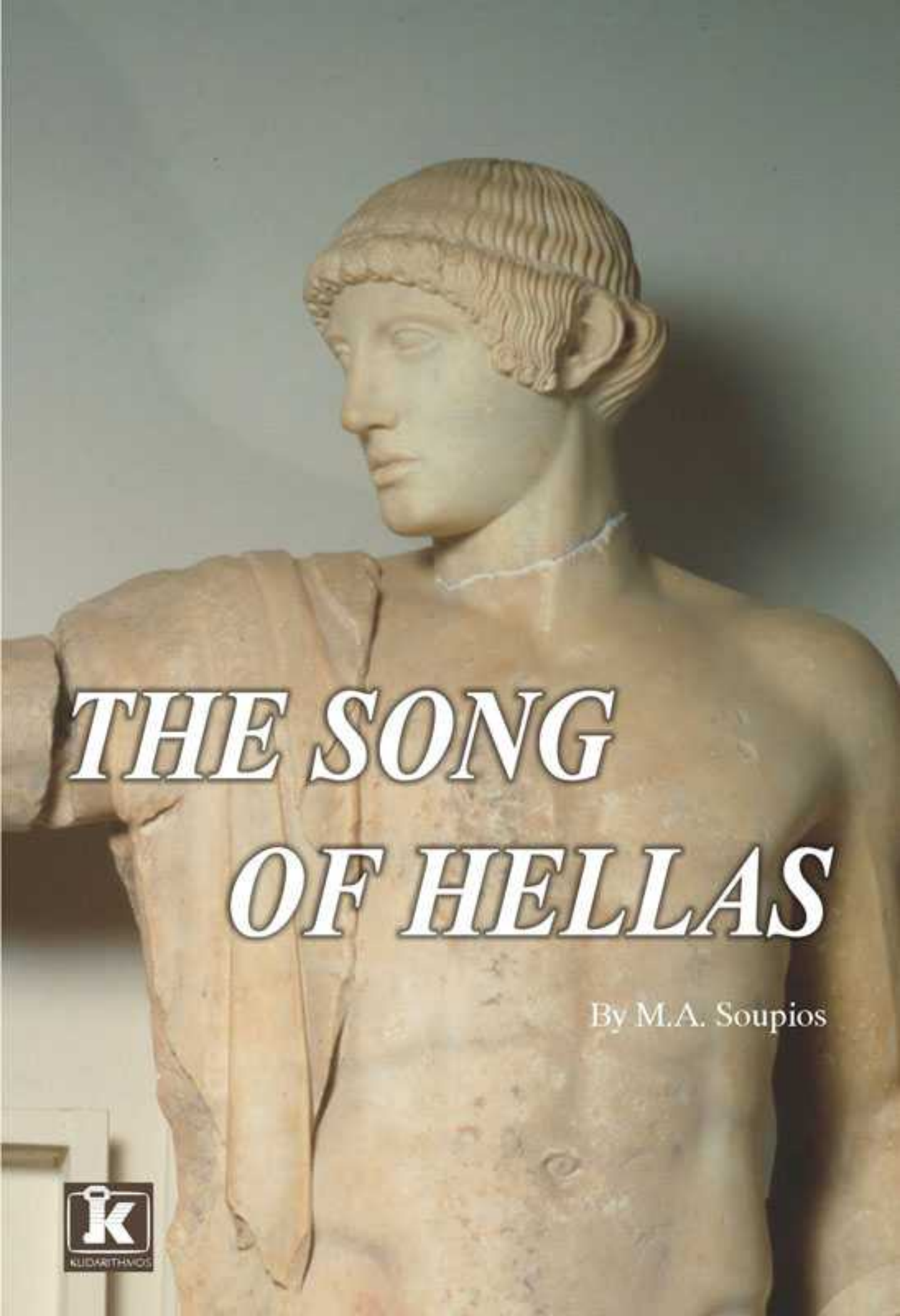

THE SONG OF HELLAS

By M.A. Soupios

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Preface

The most impressive feature of the modern era is its astonishing record of scientific and technological achievement. These triumphs have altered all contemporary life, allowing each of us to engage routinely in activities which a century ago would have been the stuff of dreams. One affect of these accomplishments, however, has been a strong tendency to view modernity in ahistorical terms, as enjoying a moment without parallel, precedent, or even foundation. Not surprisingly, this perspective has encouraged a tendency to assert that the past is no longer capable of speaking to the present. According to this view the ancients, including the Greeks, cannot possibly be pertinent to the modern world given the massive disjunctures of time and place. After all, what possible affinities could exist between a people who prospered 2500 years ago and a civilization that has landed men on the moon and solved the riddle of the double helix?

Two aspirations are contained in the pages of this book. First, an effort is made to present an assessment of the contributions to Western Civilization made by the Greeks in areas such as science, art, politics, and philosophy. Next, there is a suggestion that the Greeks may yet be serviceable to modernity, that certain of their insights and approaches may still illumine the human condition. This is not to suggest the Greeks devised some canonic template valid for all time. No ancient people can furnish us with a ready supply of answers—not even those most responsible for lending the West the bulk of its unique culture. But what the Greeks are able to do is remind us that truth must be pursued regardless of inconvenience or controversy; that the Good, the True, and the Beau-

tiful are mysteriously coextensive; and, above all, that a child-like wonder is humanity's greatest virtue.

These are the crucial attitudes requisite for a vibrant culture. They allow a people to rub the dust from their eyes, enabling a view of life that is clear and whole. As such, they collectively constitute a life strategy that no society, however advanced technologically, can afford to ignore. It is for these reasons that we must continue to keep faith with our Hellenic patrimony. Failure in this matter would not only involve cultural dereliction, in the end it would contribute to an abandonment of culture itself.

Chapter III

The Plastic Vision

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty—this is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" —John Keats

Introduction

If one hundred randomly chosen, non-expert individuals were asked what first came to mind upon hearing the phrase, "Ancient Greece," a significant number would no doubt respond by referring to the major figures of Greek philosophy and literature—Homer, Socrates, and Plato, etc. Still others, perhaps the majority, would offer images of art and architecture. They might not know the precise chronology or even the correct names of such famous works as the Parthenon, Porch of the Maidens, or the Aphrodite of Melos, but their selection of these and other masterpieces would clearly express the undeniable truth that we tend to envision Hellenic civilization aesthetically.

As it turns out, this tendency to conjure aesthetic imagery at the mention of ancient Greece, however reflexive and unschooled it might be, is in truth a valid assessment of who and what the Greeks were as a people. The Hellenes were deeply moved by the "mystery of the beautiful" in a way beyond what is evident in any other ancient civilization. In fact, it can be argued that this aesthetic per-

spective was a universal cultural lens brought to bear by the Greeks on every facet of life. We find aesthetics reflected in their moral theory where the terms "good" and "beautiful" function synonymously; in the scientific speculation of the Ionian Greeks whose *arche* (first principle) presumes a harmonious and orderly "one" behind the flux of experience; in political theory where balance and proportion are seen as the key to social stability; and in medical doctrine where a measured equivalence (*isonomia*) between key bodily substances is requisite for good health.

All of which indicates that unlike modern man who has elected to cloister his art in museums and galleries, narrowing thereby the function of art to a kind of spectator sport, the Greeks made the aesthetic moment a ubiquitous feature of life. The painting, architecture, and statuary of ancient Greece were not intended as isolated amusements for a few connoisseurs—indeed, all Greek art was "public," private collections being virtually unknown until Roman times. These works were instead part of a conscious strategy to harness the culturally constructive energies of beauty. As such, the aesthetic activities of the Greeks became an integral part of *paideia* (education, enculturation); a conscious attempt to actualize the ideal in man.

In what follows, the major formulae and principles governing Greek art will be presented. First, however, a brief survey of the evolution of Greek art along with some of the exegetical issues surrounding that development.

The Evolution of Greek Art

The exemplary role of Greek art in Western culture naturally led scholars to scrutinize the various phases of its history and development. Of particular interest in this regard, given the radically un-

precedented achievements of the classical period, was the search for origins: Was Greek art an autochthonous cultural phenomenon or were external forces operative at various points in the progression toward the high classical?

A key figure in the examination of this question was Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), the father of German Classicism and the founder of modern art history. Winckelmann was an unqualified philhellene whose enthusiasm for everything Greek proved as normative as it was dogmatic. Indeed, Goethe, commenting on the influence of his scholarship, delcared the 18th century, "The Century of Winckelmann." In Winckelmann's opinion, the aesthetic accomplishments of the Greeks were an autonomous cultural development that manifested itself sequentially in a series of distinct artistic periods. This was not a notion unique to Winckelmann—similar ideas of phased evolution are also found in Vico, Turgot, Saint-Simon, and Comte, among others. What distinguishes Winckelmann is his attempt to apply this cyclical logic specifically to the history of art. So employed, this scheme suggests a steady progress of artistic maturation from primitive aniconic representations (wooden and stone objects without representative essence), to iconic forms (works with specific theistic identities), to full figural monuments portrayed in anthropomorphic terms (Winckelmann 1:196-8). Significantly, Winckelmann does not allow for foreign influence in the evolution of this art. While he does acknowledge the resemblance of Egyptian sculpture to works of the Greek archaic period, he specifically rejects the idea of imitation (1:199). This assertion is not based on some lack of familiarity with non-Hellenic art (Winckelmann's massive study, The History of Ancient Art, contains an extensive analysis of Egyptian, Persian, and Phoenician antecedents). What we find instead is simply a Hellenocentric bias; a series of factually unconfirmed assertions that

collectively discredit what has been termed the "ancient model" (see Bernal 75-120), i.e., a belief espoused by the Greeks themselves, that many of their cultural foundations were derived from semitic sources, particularly Egypto-Phoenician. The archeological record, fragmented and uneven though it is in many respects, does indicate oriental influence in the development of Greece's plastic vision. But the interpretive "tyranny" of Winckelmann's Teuto-Hellenism simply denied this indebtedness. Among German intellectuals, these perspectives remained dominant well into the 19th century until challenged by the irreverent heterodoxies of men like Heine and Nietzsche (Bultler 5-7).

Modern research has successfully liberated itself from much of the polemical and tendentious thinking of the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, our understanding of the historical development of Greek art presents a far more balanced portrait of the inter-cultural relationships between Hellas and the Eastern peoples. We see this for instance in the manner in which contemporary art historians approach the foundations of Greek art. Most now begin their analysis with a consideration of the so-called Cycladic art of the early Bronze Age (c.3000 B.C.).

The term, "Cycladic" means, "those in a circle" referring to a cluster of small Aegean islands including Paros, Amorgos, Keros, and Naxos situated around Delos, the sacred island of Apollo. We know very little about the early inhabitants of these islands, but they were certainly not "Greeks" as we understand that designation and were most likely immigrants from Asia Minor (Richter 1987, 15 and Higgins 53).* Working with stone tools, primarily emery

* Renfrew (39) argues that the early inhabitants of the Cycladic Islands could have come either from western Anatolia or from mainland Greece, but Thucydides had no doubts—they were Carians (1.4 and 1.8).

and obsidian, these people created a series of fascinating figural sculptures, the most sophisticated occurring during the Keros-Syros period (2700-2200 B.C.).

Though of extreme antiquity, Cycladic art reflects an abstract, geometric quality which makes it appear intriguingly modern. The vast majority of the idols are small female representations carved in marble. They have almost always been retrieved from grave sites and the statues themselves are often executed in a manner suggesting funereal significance—reclining posture, arms folded over the chest, head tilted backward.

Apparently Cycladic art became quite popular with other groups living on the fringes of these islands. Large numbers of the sculptures were exported to Crete, and significant finds have also been made on mainland Greece, particularly in the vicinity of Attica. Experts now agree that the art of the Cyclades exercised an important influence on both the Minoans (Crete) and on the Helladic or Bronze Age culture of Greece (Getz-Preziosi 34).

As important as these foundational influences surely were upon the earliest developments of Greek art, of far greater significance was the "Orientalizing Revolution" of the 9th and 8th centuries B.C.. During this period East met West in a series of economic and cultural exchanges that proved pivotal to the future development of Hellas. Greek trading sites were well established at Al Mina on the Orantes River by the 9th century (Boardman 1988, 38-39). Footholds such as those in Asia Minor exposed the Greeks to a wide range of new artistic themes and motifs, especially Syrian and Phoenician; Hellenic art between the Geometric (900-720 B.C.) and Archaic periods (620-480 B.C.) clearly bespeaks such influence. It should also be noted, of course, that the Eastern peoples ventured west. This is particularly true of the ubiquitous Phoenicians who established commercial stations throughout the Mediter-

ranean and may actually have circumnavigated the continent of Africa as early as 600 B.C. (Hyde 233).

The origins of monumental sculpture (i.e., large-scale statuary) among the Greeks is also related directly to oriental contacts. Herodotus tells us that before the reign of Psammetichos I, Egypt had been closed to foreign settlement, but in return for their service as mercenary troops, a group of Ionian Greeks and Carians were granted two parcels of land on opposite sides of the Nile (2.154). These arrangements provided the Greeks with a first-hand opportunity to study Egyptian culture, including their venerable artistic conventions. Not coincidentally, the first appearance of Greek monumental art occurs shortly after the establishment of these colonies in the mid-7th century B.C.

The specific works involved here are the so-called kouros/kore (male/female) figures of the Archaic period in Greek art. Even the most cursory analysis of these sculptures and their Egyptian prototypes illustrates an undeniable affinity. By far the most characteristic unifying feature is a strong sense of rigidity and tension: arms hanging straight at the sides of the body, feet positioned side by side or one foot slightly advanced, torso and head locked into a mechanical frontal stance. In addition, these works express a dominance of vertical axis obviating any suggestion of motion, all of which contribute to an almost two-dimensional quality in these figures (Buitron-Oliver 23).

With few exceptions, these canonical features of Egyptian art dominate Greek aesthetic standards for roughly two hundred years (Richter 1988, 1). About the only innovations made by the Greeks during this period were the formulaic use of male nudity and the elimination of the rear support struts typical of Egyptian sculpture

(Boardman 1993, 52).* The Egyptian hegemony was not to last however, and by the year 480 B.C. we discover a series of remarkable artistic innovations among the Greeks that formally announce the end of static effigy.

Few individual works of art can claim the sort of significance justly assigned the "Kritios Boy." Above all, it marks the precise moment of Greek artistic manumission from the frozen paradigms of Egypt. The lifeless, cubic monotony that had guided oriental taste for millennia was now consciously suppressed by the Greeks in favor of a new style that would become increasingly lively, accurate, and natural (Pollitt 1972, 43).

In particular, the Kritios Boy marks the beginning of kinesthetic experimentation among the Greeks, i.e the incorporation of movement into the aesthetic presentation. Unlike Egyptian works that remain eternally the children of the quarry, Greek sculpture now conveys an unprecedented energy and suppleness signaling the human form's historic emergence from its rocky chrysalis. Specifically, the Kritios Boy includes a series of subtle weight shifts as indicated by the asymmetry of shoulder stance and by the gentle tilting of the head. Traditional frontal posture is replaced by a bold reassignment of weight to the left leg anticipating the full contrapposto (in Greek, *chiasmus*) of Polyclitus' later masterpiece, the Doryphoros. Even the facial expression is altered, the archaic smile displaced by a new contemplative gaze. In short, by the early 5th century B.C., the Greeks rendered the icy idiom of Egypt obsolete. No longer will their statuary serve as symbols of human reality—the Greeks will now create "living" beings out of stone (Lullies 7).

The revolution in marble achieved by the Kritios Boy serves as a prelude to one of the most spectacular eras in human history—the

* In addition, the Greeks added that enigmatic grin known as the "archaic smile."

fifty-year period (*pentekontaetia*) that has come to be called the "Golden Age" of Greece. The outpouring of optimism and promise permeating the Greek world during these years, and particularly at Athens, was no doubt related to the triumph over Persian forces at Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea. Flushed by these victories, the Greeks experience an "exaltation of national sentiment" that nourish their achievements in literature, poetry, philosophy, politics, and art. Nowhere do the bright rays of this Hellenic summer shine more brilliantly than at Athens. Militarily secure and financially empowered as a result of her usurpation of the Delian League, the city of Pericles strides forth to meet its "High Destiny," and, in the process, indelibly alters the history of art (Buschor 10-11).

The reverence Western man has legitimately felt for the classical artistic achievement is based on a depressingly meager sampling of original works. In fact, the few undisputed originals from the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. are chiefly decorative pieces from various temples and were considered by the Greeks themselves as merely "architectural" (Gardner 80). Free-standing statuary, particularly works in bronze, enjoyed first rank in the protocols of Greek art. Tragically, many of the masterpieces of the great craftsmen fell victim to those dual monuments of human ignorance—the melting pot and the lime kiln. Consequently, the vast majority of what we see in our museums today are Roman copies of Greek originals, few of which presumably approach the splendor of their Hellenic antecedents.

Accordingly, our analysis of classical art is of necessity a composite enterprise in which a handful of original works (chiefly metopes, friezes, and pediment statuary), Roman representations, and references in Pliny and Pausanias, serve as components. On the technical side, the portrait presented collectively by these sources indicate an ongoing mastery of the human form including unparal-

leled attention to musculature and bodily proportion; a conscious attempt to transcend the "particular" by expressing the defining essence of a given character or subject (*ethos*); and an inspiring loftiness and serenity sometimes termed "Olympianism" by art historians. Two of the great masters of these hallmark features were Polyclitus, an Argive sculptor specializing in athletic presentation, and above all, the Athenian, Phidias. The latter, generally acknowledged as the impresario of the Periclean beautification project, also created several huge cult-statues including the chryselephantine Zeus at Olympia, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, a work described by Pliny as unrivaled in the history of art (34.19.54 cf. Pausanias 5.11.9).

At the same time as these developments in the plastic arts were unfolding, major achievements were also being recorded in painting. Typically, when thinking of Greek art we tend to restrict ourselves to architecture and sculpture, forgetting that the Hellenes were also avid painters who typically painted their statues as well as various portions of their temples. This sort of conceptual neglect is understandable given the fact that time and the elements have been particularly harsh in denying us virtually all illustration of Greek pictorial art other than vase painting. This lack of legacy should not however obscure the fact that already by the second half of the 5th century, the Greeks displayed a firm command of foreshadowing, linear perspective, and color overlay techniques (Kuels 60). It should also be noted that the talents of the great masters of this medium—Apollodorus, Polygnotus, Zeuxis, Apelles, Protogenes—were widely acknowledged as comparable to the major artisans in other fields and that certain of their works became the stuff of legend, e.g. the painted portico of Athens, the murals at Delphi, the portrait of Alexander at the temple of Artemis (Ephesus), and the famous Aphrodite Anadyomene (Aphrodite Rising

from the Sea), the thematic ancestor of Boticelli's "Birth of Venus." Indeed, by the 4th century, painting had become so much a part of Hellenic culture that it was included in the educational curriculum at Sicyon, a major center for this art form (Pliny 35.76-77 cf. Seneca Epist. 88.18). Painting terminology even finds its way into certain aspects of Plato's epistemological arguments (e.g. Phaedo 69b, Rep 365c, 583b, 602d).

Thus far, most of our assessment has centered on the grand style of the era known as the high classical. During the late classical era (4th century) many of the previous period's conventions continue but with important modifications. Two of the outstanding figures of this new era in Greek art are the virtuosi sculptors, Praxiteles (370-330 B.C.) and Lysippus (360-315 B.C.). The former is perhaps the most famous sculptor of all time among the Greeks (Gardner 140), much of his reputation being based upon an ability to convey tender sensuous quality in his work. This "softness" represents a distinct departure from the robust athleticism of the high classical period. No longer do we see the sharply contoured and mathematically precise musculature of a Polyclitus (see below), but are instead presented with visibly softer, less "taut" lines that lend a certain warmth and elasticity to the marble.

Although Praxiteles produced many highly acclaimed sculptures, none is more famous than the Knidian Aphrodite, a work described by Pliny as "known all over the world" (34.19.70). The original has long been lost, but excellent copies can be seen today at the Vatican Museum.

According to tradition, this statue had a famous model whose immodest reputation probably contributed to the work's fame. She was Phryne, a *hetaera* or concubine (who also posed for Apelles' painting of Aphrodite emerging from the sea), with whom Praxiteles was reportedly involved romantically. The work caused a

sensation by displaying the goddess nude—a major break with 5th century proprieties. To the best of our knowledge there were no nude representations of female subjects prior to the 4th century. During the high classical period the Greeks used diaphanous drapery as a mechanism for revealing female anatomy (e.g., Nike fastening her sandal, Acropolis Museum, Athens). This allowed for the suggestion of nudity while still remaining within the parameters of Hellenic moral sensitivities. Praxiteles may have been one of the first to dispense with this strategy, a move apparently well received by the Greeks of his time. A clothed version of the same Aphrodite executed by Praxiteles for the citizens of Kos was reportedly far less popular.

In addition to portraying female nudity, the 4th century sculptors also initiated a series of stylistic experiments and in this regard Lysippus played a key role. In his day, Lysippus was acknowledged as the successor to the great athletic art produced by Polyclitus. Unlike his predecessor, however, Lysippus apparently preferred a sleeker, more sinewy musculature and as a result, he altered the famous canon of Polyclitus to lend his statuary a taller, less bulky appearance (Pliny 34.19.65, cf. Plato, Sophist 235 and Diodoros 1.98.7). Specifically, this alteration was accomplished by elongating the torso and reducing the head size. The effect is well seen in the Apoxyomenos (athlete scraping himself with a strigil), a favorite statue of the emperor Tiberius who had the original removed from the public baths to his bed chamber (Pliny 34.19.62), and particularly in the statue of Agias on display at the Delphi Museum.

Beyond these proportional innovations, Lysippus also experimented with sculptural scale. Among the more than 1,500 pieces he reportedly produced during his lifetime, there were enormous variations in size. We know, for example, that he was responsible

for a colossal statue of Zeus at Tarentum that stood 40 cubits high (cubit = the length of the forearm or approximately 18 inches). Efforts such as these seem to have had a direct influence on the Rhodian School including Chares of Lindos who cast the famous Colossus of Rhodes. At the other extreme, we have examples of Lysippic "statuettes" such as the Heracles Epitrapezios (tabletop Heracles), a miniature piece less than 12 inches in height, a copy of which is on display in the British Museum.

Modifications of classical canonicity such as these suggest that Lysippus stood between two artistic epochs, that he was a transitional figure pointing toward a new era in Greek art. This observation is powerfully corroborated by the degree to which "pathos," a hallmark of Hellenistic art, comes to replace "ethos," a characteristic feature of the high classical. The art of the mid-5th century sought intentionally to mute the passions, to foster a sense of sublime repose befitting the dignity and grace of the gods. The works of the late classical period however, increasingly make provision for the role of emotion. Specifically, facial expression undergoes a dramatic transformation. The ethereal countenance characteristic of the Parthenon statuary is replaced by a new descriptive realism portrayed by arching eyebrows, parted lips, and expressive deep-set eyes. Lysippus and his older contemporary Skopas lead the way in these emotive innovations and in so doing, they serve as prelude to the Hellenistic period.

The "Hellenistic Age" refers to the period between Alexander's death (323 B.C.) and the absorption of Greece by Rome—typically marked by the latter's victory over the Achaean Confederacy (146 B.C.). The many sociopolitical transformations typifying this era are mirrored by a series of new artistic developments. For one thing, there is a dramatic expansion of portraiture art. During classical times there were very few examples of such work—the bust

of Pericles by Kresilas is a rare and noted exception. During Alexander's lifetime however, this genre began to receive royal patronage, with certain master craftsmen receiving exclusive privilege, e.g. Lysippus enjoyed a sculptural monopoly vis-à-vis Alexander (Plutarch 1986, 3.4.1). Later, a host of powerful potentates—Ptolemies, Seleucids, Antigonids, Attalids—would sponsor a wide-scale expansion of such art, which reaches its peak at Rome where portrait sculpture was extremely popular.

Another new feature of Hellenistic art is the dramatic expansion of subject matter. Classical art generally restricted its repertoire to the lofty figures of mytho-religious traditions; these characters alone were deemed fit for artistic representation. In marked contrast, Hellenistic art is committed to representing the more banal rhythms of everyday life and as a result, a host of new figures crowd the aesthetic scene—statesmen, generals, poets, philosophers, orators. Along these same lines, the art of this period actively seeks to express the sentiment and experience of real people engaged in genuine life enterprise. On an unprecedented scale, the range of human emotions—joy, anger, despair, misery—are explored artistically where before only the serene majesty of the gods had been portrayed.

In sum, the Hellenistic period engenders an art that fundamentally alters the aesthetic landscape of Greece. In some sense, the movement from ethos to pathos was an inevitable corollary to a new *zeitgeist* that signaled the autumn of Hellenic civilization. This development should not imply however, that Hellenistic art is nothing more than the last gasp of a decadent culture. There is much here that is vivid, clever, often bold, but it remains part of an era governed chiefly by "artistic reminiscences" (Ridgway 7). In viewing these works, one has the distinct impression that the Greeks no longer trust themselves to attempt a representation of the spiritual;

they seem to be compelled as a result to represent everything else, including the mundane and the pedestrian. Would Polyclitus have committed his genius to creating a statue of a drunken old woman (Munich, Glyptothek)? Would Phidias have arranged the Parthenon frieze with the cluttered baroque of the Great Altar of Pergamum? Gone is the precisioned restraint and judiciously understated energies of the high classical.

Technically, these works remain thoroughly competent, but the artistic aspiration is now entirely different. The quest for the eternal has ended; the Hellenistic masters can no longer dream the Phidian dream.

The Principles of Greek Art

The evolution of Greek art was not a spontaneous growth lacking in pattern and value. From the outset, there were a series of recurring principles that guided and nurtured the development. One of the most important of those precepts involves the Hellenic need to impose order upon the flux of experience—a need to banish the chaotic, to dispel the irrational, to grasp the enduring reality in a world swirling with change (Pollitt 3). This instinct for cosmos (order) manifests itself continually in Hellenic culture. We see it embedded in Greek scientific thought, their language, and, in particular, it explains their adoration of mathematics, especially geometry. In the Hellenic pursuit of order, this discipline served as the supreme methodology because nothing more clearly revealed the hidden truth of the universe than the logic and system of the mathematical sciences. Pythagorean insistence that all of nature was "number" was not the idiosyncratic musing of an isolated sect (Heath 1:67-8). It expressed the "volksgeist" (spirit of the race) of the Greek peoples.

Beyond its significance as a means of probing the mystery of Being, mathematics was also seen by the Greeks as intimately related to beauty. This may sound like quite a leap to us, but unlike modern man who has compartmentalized his life into a collage of disjointed moments, the Greeks brought an integrated vision to life that specifically commingled ontological (being, existence) and axiological (value, worth) elements. The Real, the True, the Beautiful, and the Good were all, in some ultimate sense, consubstantial in the Greek imagination and the common thread uniting them was the "rational" which the Greeks understood chiefly in mathematic terms. This explains why Plato insists that measure and proportion are the true essence of beauty (Philebus 64e, Timeus 31c cf. Plotinus, Ennead 1.6.1), and why modern authorities often refer to a mathematical rhythm operating at the heart of Greek artistic expression (e.g., Bowra 154).

The idea that numbers somehow stood behind the mysteries of beauty is clearly illustrated by the concept of "symmetria." The term refers to the commensurability of parts within an artistic whole and specifically mandates the application of number, ratio, and proportion as central to aesthetic experience. The acknowledged master of this concept was Polyclitus who fashioned a series of sculptures consonant with the mathematical thinking of his age. One of his works, in particular, came to exemplify these premises beyond all others, and as such enjoyed canonical status in antiquity—the Doryphoros (spear-bearer). For years researchers have attempted to decode Polyclitus' formula in an effort to explain the wonderful symmetry and balance achieved by this work. A variety of explanations have been proposed, including a modular system, a fractional system, an arithmetic mean, a geometric mean, and the golden section (Moon 38).

Polyclitus' accomplishment, his ability to create faithful representations of the human form by employing abstract mathematical formulas, captures in a fundamental way, the essence of Greek aesthetic sensitivities. This accounts, no doubt, for both the Doryphoros' canonicity and for the fact that it became one of the most heavily replicated statues of antiquity. Moreover, the symmetrical perfection of such mathematically attuned works may also explain the extra-Hellenic appeal they enjoyed. Long after the close of Greece's classical era, standing figures of the Buddha displayed in Northern India continue to speak of their indebtedness to Polyclitus and the marriage of number and beauty (Boardman 397).

The role of mathematics in the creation of Greek art is not something the average viewer of a classical statue would find obvious. The subtlety with which science is blended with stone creates an impression so natural, so reflexive that the complex measurements and intensive calculations necessary to create the effect are entirely concealed. All of which testifies to an extraordinary sophistication of artistic technique among the Hellenes.

The use of number in Greek art reflects a keen aesthetic sense, but it does not indicate a slavish devotion to mathematical formula. The Greeks instinctively recognized that an art based exclusively on number would succeed only in producing a mechanical parody of beauty. For this reason, they demonstrate a consistent willingness to go beyond the constraints a complete mathematical accuracy would impose. In essence, the Greeks devised a series of measures that consciously depart from geometrical fact in order to preserve geometrical effect (see Goodyear 19), and in so doing, reveal the profundity of their aesthetic competence.

The tendencies to which I allude are best expressed in the meticulous optical adjustments the Greeks incorporated in their architecture. These are the so-called *alexemata* (compensations, better-

ments) observable in many of the most famous surviving temples at Athens, Sunium, Corinth, Paestum, etc.. Careful measurement by modern scholars reveal these refinements in the stylobates (temple platforms), entablatures (upper portion of a temple including the frieze, cornica, and architrave), gables, and cellae (inner chambers of a temple). Perhaps the best known of these alterations is the gentle swelling (*entasis*) of the center portion of a column (see Vitruvius 3.3.13). Without this adaptation, the vertical line of the column would appear concave instead of straight resulting in a disruption of visual symmetry. What is important here is that this and similar variations in the pure mathematics of a given edifice are not the product of mason error or of settling; they are consciously conceived, systematically executed adjustments aimed at achieving premeditated aesthetic effects.

The motivation for embellishments such as these has traditionally been explained as an attempt to "correct" certain optical illusions that occur while viewing large architectural structures. It may also be that the Greeks engaged in these refinements for aesthetic reasons beyond the imperatives of visual correctness. For instance, it seems the Greeks harbored a certain distaste for perfectly straight lines which they found monotonous and dull (Penrose 107).[*] By incorporating a series of carefully calculated irregularities into their works, the Greeks could gently manipulate the eye, softening thereby the lines of their buildings, lending them a less rigid, more abstract quality. These adjustments may explain why Greek temples, notwithstanding their massiveness, convey "lightness" and "vibrancy" (Goodyear 87, 211), and why various experts ascribe

[*] Appearances notwithstanding, there is hardly a straight line to be found anywhere in the Parthenon.

"dynamic" and "lifelike" qualities to certain Greek architecture (see Mavrikios 224, in Bruno).

A second major principle of Greek art, and for that matter, of Greek civilization in general, is summarized by Protagoras, a 5th century sophist, who proclaims "Man is the measure of all things." This declaration bespeaks the "severely anthropocentric" orientation employed by the Greeks to distill everything in life to human terms and collaterally, to make man himself the locus of all value and worth. To a considerable degree, this humanistic narrative was uniquely Hellenic and constituted a major point of demarcation between Greek and non-Greek. At the same time, this human-centeredness also explains much about artistic approach and priority among the Hellenes.

This is why, for instance, nature is accorded little attention by Hellenic artists. No one who has been to Greece can fail to appreciate the natural splendor of the land—the brilliant sunrises, the rugged beauty of the mountains, the magnificent blue waters of the Aegean. Despite these stunning vistas, the depiction of nature is denied high priority in Hellenic aesthetics. This is not to suggest the Greeks were insensitive to natural beauty. The poetry of Alcman, Alcaeus, and Theocritus indicate otherwise, as does the care exercised by the Greeks in selecting sites for their shrines and temples (e.g. Sunium and Delphi). Still, the protocols of Greek art militate against assigning "landscape" high station in the aesthetic hierarchy. For the Hellene, the proper focus of art was man, and in some fundamental sense, man alone (Kitto 52; Pollitt 1972, 5; Carpenter 68; Bowra 147).*

* The beauty of nature is not ignored by the Greeks, but the central interest of their art was almost always the human form; nature served as the frame with man as the picture (Grube 269).

The humanistic ethos also explains why we find so little theriomorphic representation in Greek art (i.e., deities portrayed in animal form), notwithstanding its ubiquity among the older Eastern cultures. The Egyptians and Babylonians, for instance, saw nothing inappropriate in displaying the gods in this manner, but the Greeks apparently viewed such representation as unsavory or at least inconsistent with the dignity and honor of the gods. By the 8th century B.C. the Greeks abandon virtually all theriomorphic motifs replacing them with a thoroughly anthropomorphized scheme (Stewart 1:44).

The decision to employ the human form as the icon of divine essence was perhaps the greatest contribution of Greek art to world culture. For one thing, it announced a historic elevation of human status in which the godhead was humanized. Man alone, according to this depictive logic, was worthy of bearing the image of god. As a result, the gap between heaven and earth was narrowed; an anthropomorphised theology produced an apotheosized humanity. In other words, the gods were made more human, and men were made more divine. Moreover, by cloaking mankind in the mantle of divinity, the Greeks infused their art with an exhortative idealism that invited men to reach for heaven and appropriate their spiritual inheritance.

It is this idealism, beyond any other precept of Greek art that reveals the soul-landscape of the Hellenes. In particular, it is the art of the high classical era that reflects this principle with greatest force and purity, doing so in a variety of ways. On one level, the dictates of idealism were expressed negatively through the exclusion of any subjective, mercurial, and transitory elements. This is why Greek sculpture says so little about the age, rank, origin, and background of its subjects (Lullies 24). Instinctively, the Greeks

THE SONG OF HELLAS

There is no denying the generosity with which early commentators treated the ancient Greeks. No other people received more praise for their courage, their curiosity, and their genius. Too often, though, these adulations were excessive and operated in neglect of accuracy. Accordingly, more recent scholars are to be commended for having tempered our enthusiasms for the Greek Miracle; for reminding us that far from being a race of demi-gods, the Hellenes were in many respects "all too human."

Today there is a new challenge. We no longer need concern ourselves with retrieving the Greeks from some Olympian height – quite the contrary. The present task is to remedy a distortion born of neglect and misrendering that has minimalized much of the Hellenic legacy. This book seeks, therefore, to remind its readers that there is more to the Greek patrimony than a handful of sculptures and a collection of polytheistic folktales. Specifically, it attempts to trace the journey of an audacious little people who forever altered the course of world history by daring to unleash the energies of the human spirit.

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ISBN 960-209-786-8

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