



CHAPTER 1

The Greeks and their Art

Tyler Jo Smith and Dimitris Plantzos

We start from the purpose of the Greek artist to produce a statue, or to paint a scene of Greek mythology. Whence this purpose came, we cannot always see. It may have come [...] from a commercial demand, or from a desire to exercise talent, or from a wish to honour the gods (Gardner 1914: 2).

1.1 Greek Art and Classical Archaeology

When Percy Gardner was appointed the first Lincoln and Merton Professor of Classical Archaeology at Oxford in 1887, the discipline was still largely in its infancy. His book entitled *The Principles of Greek Art*, written almost 100 years ago, demonstrates that classical archaeology of the day was as much about beautiful objects and matters of style as it was about excavation and data recording. Now, as then, the terms ‘Greek art’, ‘classical art’, and indeed ‘classical archaeology’ are somewhat interchangeable (Walter 2006: 4–7). To many ears the term ‘classical’ simply equals Greek – especially the visual and material cultures of 5th and 4th c. BC Athens. Yet it should go without saying, in this day and age, that Greek art is no longer as rigidly categorized or as superficially understood as it was in the 18th, 19th, and much of the 20th c. By Gardner’s own day, the picture was already starting to change. Classical archaeology, with Greek art at the helm, was coming into its own. The reverence with which all things ‘classical’ were once held – be they art or architecture, poetry or philosophy – would eventually cease to exist with the same intensity in the modern 21st c. imagination. At the same

A Companion to Greek Art, First Edition. Edited by Tyler Jo Smith and Dimitris Plantzos.
© 2012 Blackwell Publishing Ltd. Published 2012 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd.



time, there would always be ample space for some old-fashioned formal analysis, and the occasional foray into connoisseurship.

Greek art has been defined in various ways, by various people, at various times. Traditionally, it has been divided into broad time periods (Orientalizing, Archaic, Classical, etc.) dependent on style and somewhat on historical circumstances or perceived cultural shifts. As with most areas of the discipline, this rather basic framework has seen a number of versions and has encouraged further (sometimes mind-numbingly minute) sub-categorization. In fact, no chronology of the subject has been universally accepted or considered to be exact. Some (though by no means all) speak in terms of the Late Archaic, High Classical, or Hellenistic Baroque; others prefer the Early Iron Age or the 8th c. BC (Whitley 2001: ch. 4). Regardless of terminology, within these large chronological divisions the subject has routinely been taught, discussed, and researched according to a triumvirate much loved by the history of art: sculpture, architecture, and painting (normally including vases); and leaving much of the rest relegated to the ill-defined catch-all phrase of ‘minor arts’ (*Kleinkunst*): terracottas, bronze figurines, gems and jewelry, and so on.

But major versus minor is not the whole story. Some areas of Greek art have proved more difficult to assemble than others. For example, should mosaics be placed under architecture, viewed in relation to wall-painting, or, for lack of a better option, classified as ‘minor’ art despite their sometimes vast scale? Other objects, such as coins, have not always been considered ‘art’ per se, in spite of their stylistic and iconographic similarities with other artifacts, and their sometimes critical role in the dating of archaeological contexts. Alas, it is a hierarchy that we have all come to live with for better or worse. It encourages questions of quality, taste, and value, and these days even plays a role in debates over cultural property and the repatriation of antiquities. Did all objects of ancient Greek art have ‘equal’ value? How might such value be measured? Should we even try? Is it valid to speak of earrings and *fibulae* in the same breath as Skopas and Mnesikles? Is a Boeotian ‘bell-idol’ as much a ‘work of art’ as a life-size sculpture, or a mold-made Megarian bowl (Figure 1.1) as worthy of our attention as an Athenian red-figure vase? Where, if at all, shall we draw the line? Do altars, votive reliefs (Figure 1.2), and *perirrhanteria* make the A-list? What about roof tiles and gutters; or, indeed, the ‘lost’ arts of weaving and basketry? Is it simply the inclusion of figure decoration, both mythological and everyday, on such ritual or utilitarian objects that allows them to join the corpus? Surely, the answer must lie somewhere between design and function, material and process. It is reassuring to think that any of the above might constitute ‘Greek art’, from the stately, good, and beautiful to the mundane, lewd, and grotesque.



Figure 1.1 Megarian bowl from Thebes. Scenes of the Underworld. c. 200 BC (London, British Museum 1897.0317.3. © The Trustees of the British Museum).

The function and context of ancient objects and monuments are crucial elements in the story of Greek art, and they place our subject on firm archaeological footing. The Greeks made little if any ‘art for art’s sake’. Even their most profound and aesthetically pleasing examples served a utilitarian purpose. Sanctuaries have produced abundant material remains, in some instances resulting from years of excavation. It is also worth noting that at many locations around the Greek world, evidence of the ancient built environment has been (more or less) visible, above ground, since antiquity. Panhellenic sites on the Greek mainland, such as Delphi and Olympia, fall firmly into this category. They have yielded everything from monumental architectural structures to large-scale stone sculptures, to bronze figurines, tripods, armor, and other objects suitable for votive dedication to the divine. Less well-known sanctuaries, such as the Boeotian Ptoon, have contributed a large number of Archaic kouroi. At Lokroi in southern Italy, a unique cache of terracotta votive plaques has been uncovered at the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore. The Heraion on Samos and the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta have preserved rare examples of carving on ivory and bone, and in the case of the latter, thousands



Figure 1.2 Attic marble votive relief from Eleusis. Cave of Pan . 4th c. BC (Athens, National Museum 1445. Photo: Studio Kontos/Photostock).

of tiny lead figurines in the form of gods, goddesses, warriors (Figure 1.3), dancers, musicians, and animals. Cemeteries and tombs located all around the Greek world have been equally important in preserving visual and material culture. In addition to informing us about burial customs, demography, and prestige goods, the *necropoleis* of the Kerameikos in Athens have been the single most important source for Geometric pottery (e.g. Figure 3.2), and the painted tombs at Vergina (Figure 8.4; Plate 8) the best surviving evidence for wall-painting of any period. Arguably, most of our current knowledge about Boeotian black-figure vases (e.g. Figure 4.3) stems from the excavations of the graves at Rhitsona conducted by P.N. and A.D. Ure early in the 20th c. The ongoing exploration of many sites confirms their importance as producers or consumers (or both) of ancient Greek art and architecture, and through this lens continues to advance our knowledge of society, religion, the economy,



Figure 1.3 Lakonian lead figurine of a warrior, from Sparta. 6th–5th c. BC (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of A.J.B. Wace, 1924 (24.195.64). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence).

and so on. For example, Miletos in Ionia has been confirmed as an important center for the production of East Greek Fikellura vases (Cook and Dupont 1998: 77–89; Figure 4.9); Morgantina in central Sicily gives us the earliest known tessellated mosaic (Bell 2011); and Berezan (ancient Borysthene), a small island on the north coast of the Black Sea, offers an excellent case study of Greek interaction with the nearby (Scythian) population through a combination of domestic dwellings, pottery styles, and burial methods (Solovyov 1999).

In recent year there has been a surge of publications designed to address the ‘state of the discipline’ and, in some cases, to challenge the ‘classical’ status quo (cf. Dyson 1993; Osborne 2004; Oakley 2009). Others, including articles, books, and conference volumes, have attempted whole-heartedly to thrust Greek art and classical archaeology into the 21st c., bringing in methods and ideas more at home in the (frankly, more progressive) disciplines of anthropology or art history (e.g. Donohue 2005; Stansbury-O’Donnell 2006; Schmidt and Oakley 2009), on the one hand, and cultural history or reception studies on the other (e.g. Beard 2003; Kurtz 2004;

Prettejohn 2006). Their authors have represented various ‘schools’ or approaches, among them Cambridge, Oxford, continental Europe, and the United States (Meyer and Lendon 2005). Such daring, which is commonplace in most scholarly fields, might be met with suspicion amongst a classics establishment still grappling with issues such as the relationship between art, literature, and history, or the question of ‘lost originals’ that might unlock the mysteries of the great artistic masters once and for all. It is satisfying to think that we are still quite a long way from having heard the last word about ancient Greek art.

There are two further issues that should be addressed by way of introduction. Though seemingly quite different, they are each related to the study of Greek art and, in turn, to one another: (*classical*) text and (*archaeological*) theory. As a sub-field of classics, classical archaeology and thus the study of Greek art has been forever dependent on a good knowledge of Greek and Latin languages and literature (Morris 1994). Alongside this has come the expectation of using that knowledge to inform the objects and monument themselves, and to read the archaeological record. Thus, we would rarely, if ever, speak of the Athena Parthenos, a gold and ivory cult statue designed by the sculptor Pheidias, without referencing Pliny or Pausanias, or of the Athenian red-figure hydria in Munich portraying the Sack of Troy (*Ilioupersis*) without mentioning Homer or Vergil (Boardman 2001a: fig. 121). Since the time of Heinrich Schliemann and Sir Arthur Evans, such authoritative ancient texts have confirmed the existence and location of ancient places, and inspired the discovery of new ones. But these days the classical texts no longer uphold the unchallenged authority they once did (Stray 1998; Gill 2011), and classical archaeologists are increasingly following the lead of others, albeit slowly, in applying more scientific rigor and theoretical questioning to the process of exploration, recording, and the presentation of information. Theory, the stuff of ‘other’ disciplines, has not readily been accepted or welcomed, however, by Greek art’s ‘arm-chair’ archaeologists, who for generations have relied more heavily on their training in classics, and in fact viewed it as both a backdrop and a necessity. Such disconnect between the various parties involved culminated a few years back in a healthy debate between two scholars (both of whom appear in this *Companion*!) regarding the contribution of Sir John Beazley (1885–1970), the renowned expert on Greek vase-painting, initiated by an article entitled, ironically, ‘Beazley as Theorist’ (Whitley 1997; Oakley 1998). But as the current volume makes perfectly clear, Greek art cannot and should not be tackled in a uniform manner, and there remains ample room for a number of approaches, both old and new. There is legitimate space for multiple views. Indeed, a *Companion* such as this one combines the state of our knowledge with the state of our interests.

1.2 Greek Art after the Greeks

What then is ‘Greek’ about Greek art? And how much of it is ‘art’? For the Greeks, ‘art’ (*techne*) was craft and artists (*demiourgoi*) were by and large thought of as artisans: good with their hands and not much else (though famous ones, like Pheidias, came to be respected for their political power and the money that it made them). As many of the contributors to this publication explain (chiefly in Chapters 31–35 and 37), much of what we appreciate as ‘Greek art’ today, or have done so in the past, has been elaborated, embellished, and reinvented. In short, it has been *translated* by the crucial intervention of Rome and the Middle Ages, not to mention the systematic efforts of Western European elites in early modernity.

Not that this makes Greek art less ‘authentic’ or less ‘significant’ than it ought to be. As a cultural phenomenon, the arts of ancient Greece deserve our attention today perhaps more than ever, since we now know that an Archaic kouros or a scrap of the Parthenon marbles can carry much more than the sensibilities of their own era. As the Renaissance was gradually discovering the thrills of classical antiquity (Trigger 1989: 27–72; Shanks 1996), and as German intellectuals and Victorian aesthetes were struggling to decipher ‘the glory that was Greece’ (Jenkyns 1980; Eisner 1993; Marchand 1996), new cultural strategies regarding the conquest of the past were beginning to unfold. Familiarizing oneself with Greek and Roman art meant appropriating classical culture at large and, for the Western privileged class, this proved a commodity they could not resist. Bringing the Parthenon marbles ‘home’ to England in the early 19th c., for example, was much more than a case of treasure hunting (though Lord Elgin may have hoped for a good return on his investment when he sold the marbles to the British Museum in 1817). Turning the ‘Parthenon’ marbles into the world-renowned ‘Elgin’ marbles brought Western artists and intellectuals face to face with what original Greek art really looked like, an honor some of classical archaeology’s eminent forefathers had not lived long enough to know. The idea that, in a matter of years, a copy of the Parthenon frieze would adorn Hyde Park Gate in London (Figure 1.4), complete with a true-to-form Ionic colonnade, suggested that the ‘Greek revival’ was more than a feeble whim of the upper classes, wishing to embellish their country estates with quasi-Grecian charm. It was a strong intellectual movement. In effect, Greek art was becoming the *modern* signature of the West.

Meanwhile, back in Greece, a tempestuous War of Independence (beginning in 1821), fueled by the ideological and material support of Romantic Philhellenism (as Decimus Burton was putting the final touches to Hyde Park Gate, Lord Byron lay dying in Missolonghi), gave birth to a fledgling



Figure 1.4 London, Hyde Park Gate, designed by Decimus Burton with a free version of the Parthenon frieze designed by John Henning, 1825 (photo: D. Plantzos).

nation-state, modeled on an imagined ancient Greek paradigm. The Bavarian aristocracy which was called in to supply the new state's elite brought Neoclassicism in its luggage, albeit a rather academic, sterile version of a once vibrant movement. Public buildings were designed *à la grecque* as a matter of course and soon enough local versions of this 'traditional' architecture would follow, to such an extent that today Neoclassicism is thought of as 'typically Athenian' (Figure 1.5). As the Greek economy became increasingly tourist-based during the 20th c., a heritage industry, catering primarily for the country's dollar-bearing visitors, created colloquial versions of 'Greek art'. The world was being reminded of an old debt – one that multiculturalism and globalization threatened to erase as we reached the beginning of the 21st c. (Figure 1.6). Classical archaeology, then, has been a product of modernity's systematic attempt to colonize 'its' Greco-Roman past, as well as one of this effort's most able agents (Dyson 2006; Damaskos and Plantzos 2008). Greek art comes to us burdened by its own afterlife. Its 'decolonization' cannot mean a utopian return to an idealized 'authentic' state, sadly comprehensible only to the Greeks themselves. This *Companion*, thus, is an attempt to outline the ways



Figure 1.5 Athens, the building of the Academy designed by Theophile Hansen, with free-standing statues of Athena and Apollo by Leonidas Drosis, 1859–1887 (photo: D. Plantzos).



Figure 1.6 Athens, ‘Greek art’ replicas on sale in one of the city’s souvenir shops, 2011 (photo: D. Plantzos).

Greek art may be assessed, through its traditional categories imposed by the Enlightenment's analytical vigor, as well as through presenting more recent attempts to understand both its content and its significance in the present.

1.3 A Companion to Greek Art

The current publication, a collaborative effort joining scholars of various nationalities, career stages, and specializations, is designed with a variety of aims in mind. Its division into several parts is intended to guide readers through a narrative that is, on the one hand, factually oriented and technically detailed, and, on the other, thematic, contextual, and historiographical. The authors have been selected to represent not only their various areas of expertise, but also for their different perspectives and approaches. The main agenda is neither to replace the accepted handbooks of Greek art and archaeology (on which so many have been lovingly reared), nor to present a unified voice or visual vocabulary of the classical past. Rather, the aim is to provide an updated account of a subject which has, in many respects, become too large for a single author to tackle. The combination of ongoing archaeological discoveries in the Greek world – the Riace bronzes from the sea off the coast of southern Italy (Plate 4); the heroon at Lefkandi on the island of Euboea (Figure 6.1); the Polyxene sarcophagus found near Troy (Pedley 2007: fig. 6.70), each readily spring to mind – *and* of the plethora of updated methods applied to both field and library research necessitates a team of master-builders. The popular view of Greek art, and of the 'classical world' in general, continues to be influenced by the media (both print and visual) through coverage of everything from the Athens Olympics in 2004 to the opening of the New Acropolis Museum in 2009. In this vein comes a seemingly unbridled enthusiasm for stories concerned with the 'return' of antiquities, from the more serious legal aspects to mere common-room gossip. At the same time, the massive discovery of archaeological material (including vases, votives, sculpture, etc.) beneath the modern city of Athens during the extension of the city's underground metro, starting in the early 1990s, necessitated large-scale 'rescue' excavations and confirmed that there is more than enough yet to be unearthed from Greek soil itself (Parlama and Stampolidis 2001). Advances in archaeological science and experimental archaeology, relevant to dating, material, and technology, also find their place in modern discourses about Greek art. An important breakthrough occurred a little over a decade ago, when the expertise of palaeontology was applied to the visual and material remains of ancient Greece, causing us all to rethink the origins of Greek myth and the creation of fantastical creatures in the visual arts (Mayor 2000).

In **Part II: 'Forms, Times, and Places'**, readers are provided, first and foremost, with an overview of art types, including the materials and techniques used in their manufacture. The periods of focus span from the Geometric

through to Hellenistic times. Inevitably, some authors make mention of earlier artistic developments of Greek prehistory and the Bronze Age (c. 3000–1100 BC), as well as the later ones of the Romans. Here, as throughout, the book covers the expansive geographical scope of ancient Greece, its mainland and islands, and its areas of trade and settlement beyond: from Magna Graecia in the west, Cyprus, Anatolia, and Syria in the east (and much farther beyond by Hellenistic times), the Black Sea in the north, to Egypt and Africa in the south. In the opening chapter (2) by Waugh, the chronology of Greek art, including how it has changed and developed over time, as well as the topographical realities of the region, including its climate, are presented in an effort to set the stage for what follows. The subsequent cluster of chapters (3–12) takes, in turn, the larger categories of Greek art, from decorated pottery (Mannack, Paspalas), through sculpture (Damaskos), architecture (Yeroulanou) and its sculpture (Palagia), painting (Plantzos) and mosaics (Westgate), luxury arts (Boardman/Wagner), and terracottas (Burn), to coins (Callataÿ). Although most authors provide us with an updated introduction, an overview more formal than thematic, and mostly chronological, there is no particular ‘corpus’ being presented or addressed here. It should become immediately clear that style and description retain a place in the history of Greek art, and that mastering the basics remains a critical step. This section concludes with two chapters intended to demonstrate that the objects and monuments of ancient Greece did not exist in a vacuum; they were made by people, used by people, and sometimes even discussed by them. Thus, Hasaki (Chapter 13) summarizes some of the better-understood details of the working conditions of the artisans and the tools at their disposal. Such a vital element both shapes and supports our current familiarity with the discipline, and informs our future discoveries. Lapatin (Chapter 14) concludes this part of the book with an exploration of the ancient authors, and how their opinions and observations continue to be relevant to our studies today.

Having introduced the main types, styles, and materials of Greek art, the authors of **Part III: ‘Contacts and Colonies’** establish the complex links between the Greeks and their neighbors. The chapters (15–19) span the world outside Greece proper, and are thus divided into geographical units: Egypt and North Africa (Weber), Cyprus and the Near East (Hodos), Asia Minor (Köse), the Black Sea (Bouzek), and Sicily and South Italy (Marconi). Each contributor deals with the material and visual evidence for Greek art produced or discovered in their respective region from the Archaic through the Hellenistic periods. Other issues, such as important centers of trade and contact, colonization and settlement, and non-Greek influences on Greek objects and images, are also discussed. Inevitably, these chapters have a stronger archaeological perspective than some others, and several authors use an overtly material culture approach. It is not surprising that the topics of hybridity and ethnicity factor in here, as does a more obvious historical framework than in

other sections of the *Companion* (i.e. who colonized where, when, and why). Also strongly felt throughout this part is the importance of context (religious, domestic, funerary) over style or quality. There is more than one mention by these authors of unfinished imports, raw materials, and itinerant craftsmen.

Part IV: ‘Images and Meanings’ dwells on classical archaeology’s time-honored tradition of dealing with Greek art as if it were a *language*, a codified system of signs available to our reading skills. The sub-disciplines of ‘iconography’ and ‘iconology’ – the study of the ways images are conceived in order to communicate with their audience and the content of that communication – have long been employed in order to help modern viewers understand crucial aspects of Greek life through their supposed reflection on to art: religion and politics (Lissarrague; Manakidou), war and peace (Shapiro), work and play (Lynch; T.J Smith), sex and gender (McNiven), age and death (Neils; Oakley), sameness and otherness (A. Smith; Cohen). Using the wide variety of available evidence, Chapters 20–29 explore such fields based on the traditional linguistic approach. The large amount of emphasis placed by several of these authors on Athenian black- and red-figure vases should be justified from the outset as a product of the diversity of the images, on the one hand, and the vast quantity of surviving examples (the result of both ancient demand and modern state of preservation) on the other. As is apparent throughout, ancient textual sources are especially appealing to iconographers as well. Chapter 30 (Whitley) adds a cautionary note, reminding us that the Greeks may not have seen their ‘art’ as a language in the first place. Readers, then, are given the tools they may need in order to work their way through Greek culture’s visual and material remains in order to make sense of them.

The final section of this *Companion*, **Part V:** ‘Greek Art: Ancient to Antique’, explores the histories and mechanisms of classical reception, and the way Greek art was reshaped through the agency of later cultures, from Rome and Byzantium (Squire; Kaldellis) to the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and beyond (Deupi; Blundell). Museum exhibitions in the 20th c. (Tzortaki) and the microcosm of universities (Dyson) are each explored regarding their endorsement of Greek art as a global cultural paradigm. The cultural property debate is also allotted space in this section (Lekakis), being one of the most pertinent concerns facing the discipline at present. A final chapter (Stylianopoulos) awakens us to exactly how far Greek art research has come in an age of data portals and ‘webliographies’, without yet surrendering printed excavation reports, travel accounts, or archival resources. At the end of this journey, it is hoped that every student of Greek art may be encouraged to describe and to draw (two of archaeology’s most fundamental skills), to read and translate both ancient and modern languages (without the aid of Google Translate or the like), to become familiar with scientific methods and theoretical models, to engage with social and cultural history, and indeed to navigate with an equal share of ease and pleasure the archaeological site, the museum, the library, and the *apotheke*.