

## CHAPTER 6

---

# THE FOURTH CENTURY: AN AGE OF THE INDIVIDUAL?

### FROM AIGOSPOTAMOI TO ALEXANDER

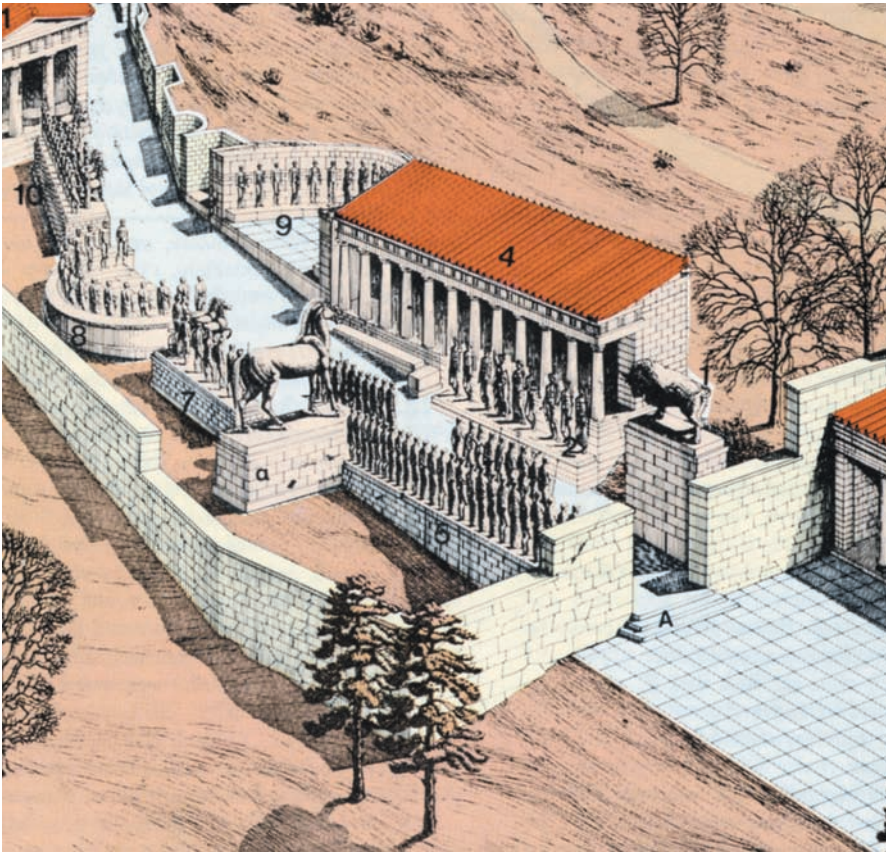
---

The end of 404 saw Sparta supreme in the Aegean and (an ominous precedent) its victorious admiral, Lysander, honored as a god by the Samian oligarchs he had restored to their island home. As a bonus, the Samians even renamed their annual festival to Hera the “Lysandreia.” At Sparta, Lysander dedicated two Nikai on eagles, trumping Paionios’s single Nike at Olympia (Fig. 106). This dedication is one of the very few Spartan ones during our period, but (importantly) it was personal, not offered by the state. Finally, at Delphi Lysander celebrated by dedicating a gold and ivory model of a warship (a present from his Persian backers) and a splendid victory monument, which he provocatively sited immediately before the Athenian one to Marathon (Fig. 122).

Made by Polykleitos’s sons and pupils and dominating the entrance to the sanctuary, this monument consisted of at least three dozen life-size bronzes arranged in two rows. Lysander stood triumphantly at its center, crowned by Poseidon and flanked by Zeus, Apollo, Artemis, the Dioskouroi, and his own soothsayer and pilot. Behind them stood his admirals, as silent witnesses to his success. Here and at Delos, where he returned control of Apollo’s sanctuary to the Delians, the message was clear. After three generations, Athenian control of the Aegean was over.

Yet although Lysander basked in his newfound glory, in the end the Peloponnesian War did no one any good. As the Viennese critic and essayist Karl Kraus once remarked, in every war,

At first, there’s the hope that one will be better off;  
Next, the expectation that the other guy will be worse off;  
Then, the satisfaction that he isn’t any better off;  
And finally, the surprise that everyone’s worse off.



122. Entrance to the sanctuary at Delphi in the late fourth century. Note how the competing multifigure dedications of bronzes line the Sacred Way inside the entrance to the sanctuary. Key: **A** Entrance to the sanctuary; **1** Bull, dedicated by the Korkyreans (ca. 470); **2** Dedication of the Arkadians (369); **4** Portico perhaps dedicated by the Tegeans (360s); **6** Aigospotamoi dedication of Lysander (403); **a** Trojan Horse, dedicated by the Argives (414); **7** Marathon dedication of the Athenians (460s?); **8** Dedication of the Argives (456); **9** Dedication of the Argives (369); **10** Dedication of the Tarentines (ca. 490).

Kraus's quip neatly describes Greece from 404 to Philip II of Macedonia's triumph over Athens and Thebes in 338 and Alexander's accession to the Macedonian throne two years later: Three generations of short-lived hegemonies, fratricidal intercity wars, ephemeral peace treaties, political instability, economic depression, a widening gulf between rich and poor, and last but not least, individual self-aggrandizement. For despite an upsurge in federalism and intercity leagues, this was also an age of big men who often transcended the polis or trampled upon it: of kings, tyrants, generals (often mercenary ones), and even financiers. And for the eastern Aegean, it meant a double change of master: the Spartans until 386 and the Persians (with Spartan connivance) thereafter – until 334 and the coming of Alexander.

Yet, as so often, adversity stimulated creativity. Culturally the fourth century was a golden age, particularly at Athens. For the Athenians had managed

to oust the Thirty Tyrants, to restore the democracy, and to recover their autonomy quite quickly after 404. Though still prone to faction and politically inspired litigation, the revived democracy proved to be remarkably stable, for the Thirty's excesses had discredited the city's oligarchs once and for all; literature flourished; and last but not least, the arts reached new heights, both at Athens and elsewhere. Some of the intellectuals and many of the artists were non-Athenians, but Athens was now their undisputed Mecca. Ironically, the city was now far more the "education to Greece" of Perikles's dreams than when he was alive.

Yet fourth-century Athens was also deeply nostalgic for its lost glories. Not only are the orators and even philosophers full of slighting comparisons between the present and the fifth-century past, but the city even went so far as write this nostalgia into law, canonizing Aischylos, Sophokles (Fig. 164), and Euripides as the three "classic" tragedians. Aristophanes's *Frogs* of 405, featuring a contest between Aischylos and Euripides over which one of them should be released from Hades to rescue the city from its present plight, is the first sign of this canonization, which the *dēmos* formally recognized in 386. Thenceforth the city entered one of their plays in the annual tragic competitions at the Great Dionysia to set a standard for the work of contemporaries. We shall encounter the trio's equally nostalgic commemorative portraits in Chapter 7. Aristophanes was similarly canonized in 339, and the inscribed records show that these annual revivals of the old classics often beat the newcomers.

Because of this canonization of the four titans, fourth-century drama survives only in pitiful fragments, but this was also the classic age of Attic prose: of the speechwriters and orators Lysias, Demosthenes (Fig. 173), Aischines, Lykourgos, and others; the political commentator, pamphleteer, and educator Isokrates; the historians Thucydides (see Fig. 165: he wrote perhaps as late as 395) and Xenophon; and the philosophers Plato (Fig. 133) and Aristotle. In art, it is also the age of the master architects Theodoros of Phokaia, Polykleitos the Younger of Argos (Figs. 167, 168), and Philon of Eleusis; the architect-sculptors Pytheos of Priene and Skopas of Paros (Figs. 136, 137); the sculptors Lysippos of Sikyon (Figs. 154–156, 166, 170), Kephisodotos (Fig. 131), Silanion (Fig. 133), Praxiteles (Figs. 140, 141), and Leochares, all of Athens; the sculptor–painter Euphranor of the Isthmos; and the painters Nikias of Athens, Pausias of Sikyon, Philoxenos of Eretria (cf. Fig. 158), Apelles of Kos (cf. Fig. 169), and Protogenes of Rhodes. A stellar array.

---

## CONCERNS AND OBSESSIONS

---

Fourth-century thinkers grappled endlessly with the burning issues of the day, greatly widening the scope of fifth-century inquiry, but achieved even less consensus than before. Four concerns in particular are relevant to us: government, religion, ethics, and the question of "reality."

## Government

The ongoing democracy/oligarchy/monarchy debate was only one facet of fourth-century political discussion. In the democracies, the major problem was how to reconcile powerful individuals and an egalitarian state, whereas in the monarchies, it was how to reconcile one-man rule and Greek standards of individual freedom.

Lysias and Demosthenes stoutly defended democracy against all comers; Plato constructed his oligarchic utopia of philosopher-kings and guardians (see Box 1. *Plato's Republic*); and Aristotle (a staunch monarchist) tutored the young Alexander the Great in enlightened kingship. Yet others, sickened by the endless fighting, promoted Panhellenism or at least intercity concord. Isokrates, after favoring first a dual Athenian–Spartan hegemony and then the mirage of a Common Peace, eventually tried to interest a succession of leaders in a Panhellenic crusade against Persia. The last and most receptive of these was Philip II of Macedonia, a northern Aegean kingdom hitherto on the fringes of Greek affairs. Isokrates was not to see his dream fulfilled, however. After Philip decisively beat Athens and Thebes at Chaironeia in 338, the aged pamphleteer, sick, disillusioned, and ninety-eight years old, starved himself to death.

As we shall see, fourth-century art addresses these concerns in numerous ways, ranging from the promotion of egalitarianism, elitism, or autocracy in civic, military, and royal portraiture to tendentious representations of democracy, peace, wealth, and other key political concepts (see Figs. 77, 131–3, 153–9, 164–6, 169–72).

## Religion

Although Euripides had treated Athens' divine patroness Athena more and more critically as the Peloponnesian War dragged on, the war did not cause a general crisis of faith, still less any sustained flight from traditional piety. In 399, the Athenians tried, condemned, and executed Sokrates not just for elevating his own inner "voice" above the city's gods, but also for tutoring such destructive figures as Alkibiades and some of the Thirty Tyrants, Kritias included. Yet on a broader front, the fifth-century enlightenment had done its work well. Some sophists had been agnostics or even atheists, and their relativism and skepticism had shattered the authority of the poets on matters religious. Responding to an increasing conviction that the divine should be autonomous and perfect, Plato invented his Demiurge or Divine Creator, and Aristotle his Unmoved Mover (!), but these were intellectual constructs of no consequence outside narrow philosophical circles.

Yet the war did spawn important new cults, as we have seen. The benign healing god Asklepios, introduced to Athens in 420 presumably in reaction to the plague (see Chapter 5), was destined for a great future there, at Epidaurus, and elsewhere (see Figs. 87, 138); and Lysander's victories of 405–4 inspired the first ruler and benefactor cult of a still-living man, which would resurface dramatically with Alexander.

### BOX 1. PLATO'S REPUBLIC

The *Republic*, set in the aged Cephalos's house in Piraeus, begins as an enquiry into the nature of Justice. Sokrates prompts the guests to come up with their own definitions. Justice is "giving everyone his due" (an extreme traditionalism/conventionalism), or "the rule of the strongest" (an extreme naturalism), or some sort of compromise between the two. *Nomos* (human law; convention) apparently conflicts irreconcilably with *physis* (nature). After revealing the weaknesses of each suggestion in turn, Sokrates proposes a different (but hardly revolutionary) approach: City first, individual second.

After sketching the city's evolution to the present day, he proposes a tripartite social structure of Guardians, Auxiliaries, and Producers. They will work together in harmony precisely because they mirror the three parts of the soul: Reason, Spirit, and Desire. We all possess these attributes in different measure, and it is the purpose of a good educational system to develop them: Nurture must fulfill nature. The Guardians will lead the city because of their powers of reason, developed by philosophy; the Auxiliaries will defend it well because of their warlike spirit; and the Producers will produce because they want to.

The Guardians are, in fact, philosopher-kings. Their education consists of Pindar's "hard climb to excellence," up a long developmental ladder that takes them from the physical world of appearances and objects, to the intelligible world of mathematics and geometry, and finally to the universals or Forms. Only at this last stage can they apprehend the Form of the Good. Knowing the Good in all its beauty, order, and harmony and by necessity following it (for no one does wrong willingly – another Sokratic axiom), they will then know and be able to administer Justice. They will dedicate their lives to philosophy and to promoting the public good, keeping their own individuality on the shortest leash possible (as at Sparta, though Plato leaves the comparison unstated).

En route, we learn that women can be Guardians too; that their education will equal the men's, exercising naked included (see Chapter 4 and Fig. 95); and that strict censorship will protect everyone from corrupting influences such as love poetry and illusionistic painting (see Chapter 5 and Figs. 108–10), which not only belong on the lowest rung of the ladder mentioned above, the world of appearance and illusion, but are actively dangerous, for they give poets and painters a power that must only be wielded by philosophers.

In fourth-century art, images of divinities are legion (see Figs. 138–41), and hundreds of votive reliefs also eloquently assert the continuing vitality of the traditional religion (see Fig. 87). For the burning questions were not whether the gods existed, but in what form, and whether human beings could

relate to them. Hence the special popularity of Asklepios, Dionysos, and Aphrodite (Figs. 87, 129, 140, 141, 150, 151), because health, wine, and love appeal to us all. But so does power. What of the exploits of Philip and especially Alexander (see Figs. 169, 170–72)? Were they *godlike*, divinely inspired, or even – ye gods! – actually, really, truly divine?

### **Ethics**

Sokrates had invented the study of ethics, but in Greece the question of how one should live was as old as Homer. Among the many fourth-century responses to it, one stands out because of its deep roots and wide currency, not least in Athens: an updated version of the “middling” ideal discussed in Chapter 1. This ideal now generated its own specialized ethical vocabulary. As well as being prudent and intelligent, the good citizen should be moderate, orderly, and self-controlled, while bravely and strenuously exerting himself on behalf of his city.

Meanwhile, Aristotle, a non-Athenian whose horizons were considerably wider than this (not least owing to his close relations with the Macedonian court), promoted the Magnificent Man (rich, noble, splendid, generous, “an artist in expenditure”) and the Great-Souled Man (“who claims much and deserves much; . . . an extreme in regard to his claim, but the mean by reason of its rightness”). Whereas the former “likes to furnish his house in a manner suitable to his wealth, since a fine house is a sort of distinction,” the latter “likes to own beautiful and useless things rather than profitable ones, since the former show his independence more.” So much for Athenian democratic moderation!

Fourth-century art vividly illustrates the strength of these competing ideals. Whereas Figs. 124 and 128 illustrate the “middling” Athenian citizen, Figs. 155 and 156 show the ultimate “great-souled” man, Alexander. Meanwhile, in much of Greece increasingly expensive houses and tombs, and an upsurge in privately dedicated portraits in sanctuaries, confirm the exhibitionist trend noted by Aristotle. Most Athenians still kept a low profile at home, but elsewhere houses became larger and their interiors began to boast pebble mosaics and even frescoes, even though they remained democratically austere on the outside. Precious metalware ousted red-figured pottery from rich men’s tables (see Fig. 130, where the host holds a fancy silver or gold drinking horn), and women began to wear gold jewelry again. Lavish grave goods were a central and northern Greek specialty (see Figs. 150, 151), but even in Athens, many tombs now boasted costly figured gravestones in marble (see Figs. 80, 124, 125, 128).

### **Appearance and Reality**

Fifth-century Greek thinkers had been obsessed with the problem of true Being, with the gulf between *nomos* (human law; custom; convention; culture) and *physis* (nature). What, if anything, lay behind or beyond the material world? Mathematics (Pythagoras)? Atoms (Demokritos)? Or another,

“real” reality (Parmenides)? Or was one’s personal perspective the only truth (Protagoras) and was Being merely a language game (Gorgias)? Did everything boil down to human judgment?

Fourth-century thought was just as fractured. Plato, a bitter enemy of Sophistic relativism, posited a system of transcendent Forms of everything from beds to justice (see Box 1. *Plato’s Republic*) – though he balked at Forms of mud and hair! Earthly beds, earthly justice, and so on, were mere second-hand copies of these Forms, which constituted the only true reality and were the only proper objects of thought, and thus of philosophy. (Artworks, being copies of copies, were even more deceptive and problematic.) Aristotle, reversing the procedure, asked what form was inherent in each piece of matter, thus reestablishing Being’s immanence in the physical world. And (to judge from the orators, the pamphleteers, and Xenophon’s and Plato’s Socratic dialogues) popular thought was totally confused, usually accepting the existence of fundamental principles of some kind but deeply unsure of their status beyond the purely conventional.

Contemporary artists were equally divided. Although Polykleitos’s pupils followed his principles “like a law” (as in the great victory dedications at Delphi, Fig. 122), others firmly rejected his hard-line idealism in favor of either realism (a minority: see Fig. 123) or a personal, subjective approach that sought truth in appearance – anathema to traditionalists such as Plato (see Box 1. *Plato’s Republic*). Lysippos explicitly pursued the latter course (see Box 1, Chapter 7. Pliny on Lysippos), and he and Apelles, both deft manipulators of proportion (*symmetria*), aimed to create not a categorical “truth” but (like Gorgias) a highly crafted illusion of grace and elegance – making them both much desired as portraitists (see Figs. 154–6). With them, the perceptual approach pioneered almost two centuries before by Euphronios and Euthymides (Fig. 8) finally triumphed across the board. And although some artists specialized in portraiture, the ultimate expression of the here-and-now (see Figs. 132–4, 153–9, etc.), others created images that concretized different levels of reality and concepts behind, above, and beyond the particular and palpable (see Fig. 131).

## ATHENS: CITY AND INDIVIDUAL

---

A mere nine years after the double trauma of the surrender to Sparta and the Thirty Tyrants, the Athenians again found themselves at war with the Spartans – but now leading a coalition of Sparta’s former allies and partners, fed up with Spartan arrogance and brutality. The monument that most clearly announces the city’s reinvention of itself in this period is Dexileos’s cenotaph in the Kerameikos (Figs. 124, 125). Its inscription tells us that it honors Dexileos son of Lysanias of the deme Thorikos, who was killed, aged 20, at the Battle of Corinth in July 394. One of the “five riders” who had distinguished themselves in the battle (which the Spartans won), Dexileos would have been buried with his compatriots in the public cemetery just outside the Dipylon gate of the city.



123. Persian noble. Silver tetradrachm (four-drachma piece) of Miletos, ca. 412–11 or later. Diam. 2 cm (0.8"). Oxford, Ashmolean Museum. The subject is perhaps the satrap Tissaphernes, who bankrolled the Spartan fleet at the end of the Peloponnesian War; his hooked nose and crafty smile are realistic touches.

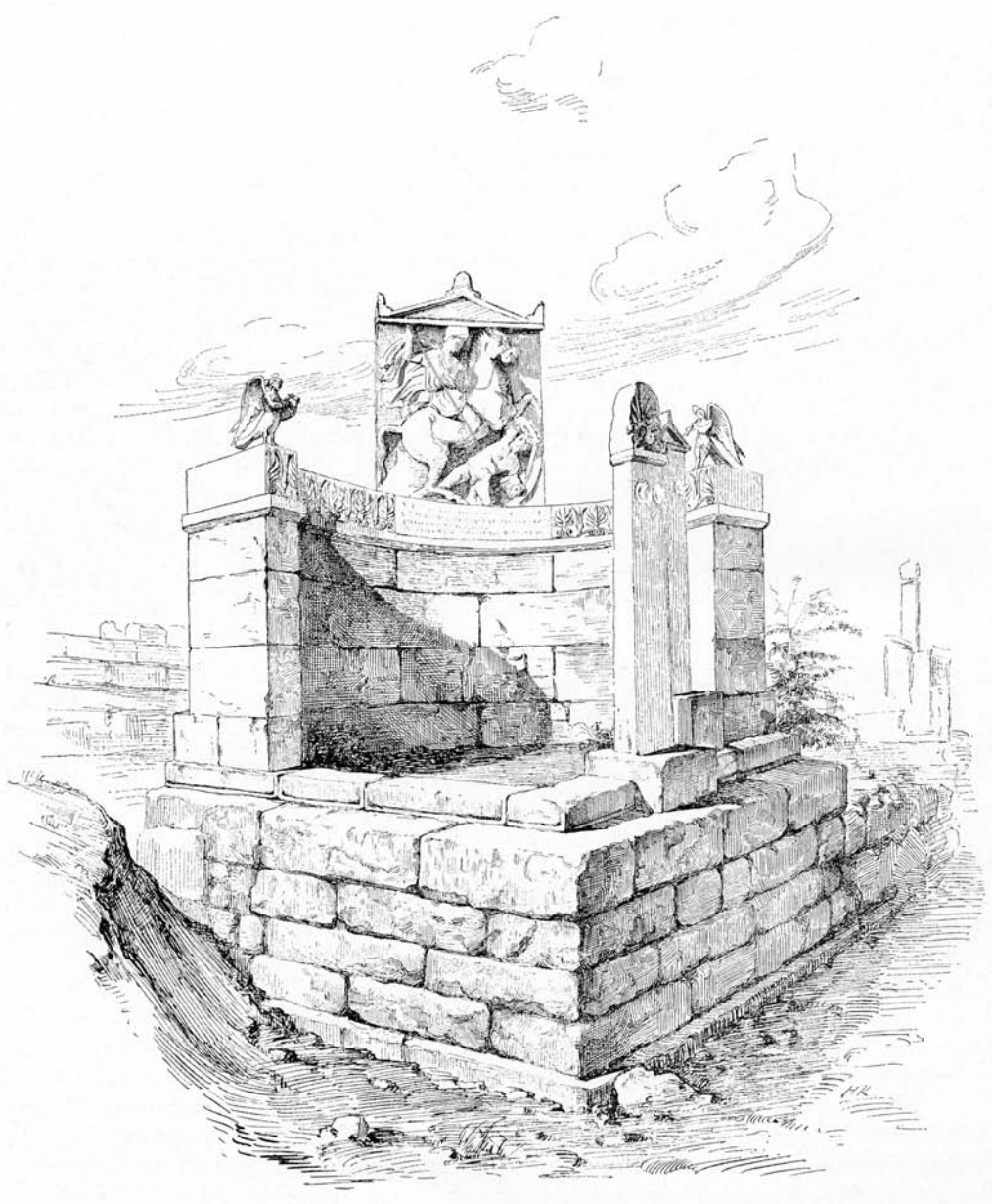
In his empty tomb were placed five small red-figured jugs, four of them with Dionysiac and Anthesteria-related themes (see Chapter 4), and one with a picture, appropriately, of the Tyrannicides (Fig. 126; cf. Figs. 5, 34). Fragments survive of the Athenian state memorial to the battle; they include a version of the scene shown on Fig. 124, with Dexileos's name duly listed among the dead. Moreover, by a unique coincidence, Lysias's eulogy for the fallen has also survived – an oration in direct line of descent from Perikles' famous Funeral Speech of 431, discussed in Chapter 3.

The relief shows Dexileos on his horse, towering over a fallen foe and thrusting down at him with his spear. This was added in bronze, as were Dexileos's helmet, his horse's reins and bridle, and his opponent's sword and sword-belt; the figures and background probably were painted as well. The relief stood on a tall, curving wall that closed off a triangular enclosure dominating the junction of three streets: the so-called Street of the Tombs, leading directly out of the city, and two side roads (Fig. 125). This wall ended in two piers topped by marble sirens, one playing a bronze lyre and the other (probably) the pipes. They added a note of eternal mourning to the ensemble, echoing the lamentations of Dexileos's family and Lysias's civic eulogy.





124. Gravestone of Dexileos son of Lysanias from the Kerameikos cemetery, Athens, 394–3. Marble; ht. 1.40 m (4'7"). Athens, Kerameikos Museum. Dexileos's helmet, spear, and horse's reins and his opponent's sword were added in bronze. The inscription states that he died in 394, aged 20; another, on the official Athenian war memorial, says that he died at the battle of Corinth.



125. Dexileos's family burial plot, ca. 390.

So this cenotaph was deliberately positioned where it would catch the attention of everyone leaving the city. Ostensibly a private memorial, it performed a decidedly civic function. It showcases Dexileos as an exemplary young Athenian, one of those who *have always* sacrificed themselves for the city and *will always* continue to do so. As Lysias noted with high rhetoric, these men followed a great Athenian tradition that included the victors over the Amazons (see Figs. 39, 60, 101) and the Persians (see Figs. 25, 103) and

those who had driven out the Spartan occupiers and their stooges less than a decade earlier:

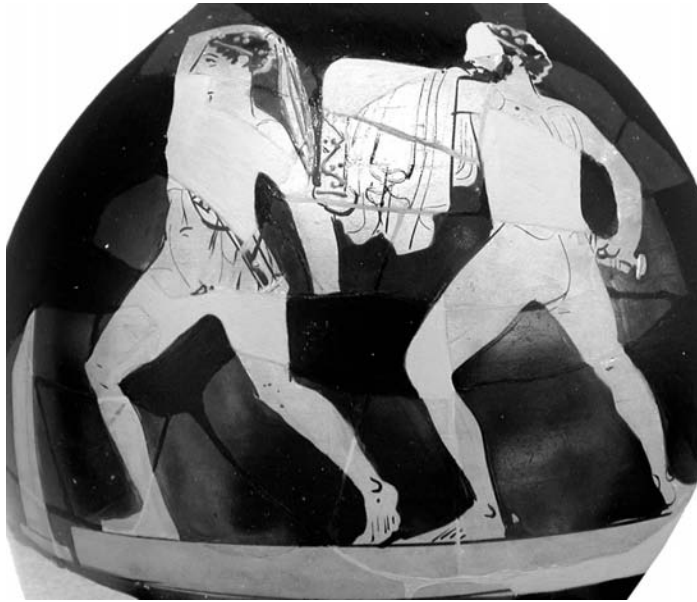
These men, both in their life and in their death, are enviable; for first they were trained in the virtues of their ancestors, then in manhood they both preserved that ancient fame intact and displayed great prowess of their own. The benefits they have conferred on their country are many and splendid; they restored the broken fortunes of others, and kept the war away from their own land. They closed their lives with a death that befits true men, for thus they repaid their country for their nurture and are justly mourned by those who reared them . . . But why chafe now at a fate so long expected? Death neither disdains the wicked nor admires the virtuous, but is evenhanded with all. Their memory can never grow old, while their honor is every man's envy. Their nature constrains us to mourn them as mortal, but their valor compels us to praise them as immortal.

So it is not surprising that Dexileos's duel pointedly echoes several of the metopes from the Amazonomachy on the Parthenon's west side (see Fig. 60), and Dexileos himself strongly recalls the Parthenon riders (see Figs. 54, 55), though the carving is harder and the relief much higher, as if the sculptor were putting him in quotation marks for our benefit. In the tomb below, the little Tyrannicides jug (Fig. 126) expressed the hope that when he arrived in Hades these archetypal freedom fighters (see Figs. 5, 34) would welcome him as a latter-day Athenian hero in their own mold. For (to quote Lysias again), they and their compatriots had been

. . . the first and only people at that time to drive out the despotic rulers of our state and to establish a democracy, believing the liberty of all to be the strongest bond of agreement. By sharing with each other the hopes born of their perils they acquired freedom of spirit in their civic life, and created law for the purpose of honoring the good and punishing the evil.

Finally, the prominent inscription, with its unique attention to the date of Dexileos's birth (414) and death (394), implicitly absolves him from any involvement with the two oligarchic coups of 411 and 404. As a member of the equestrian class he was naturally suspect here, because despite Perikles' reforms the cavalry was still dominated by the aristocratic and often pro-Spartan elite.

This may not be the only note of anxiety in this otherwise stridently patriotic composition, which on closer inspection looks more like a ballet than a battle. Dexileos, in particular, is completely inorganic. His torso is twisted to flatten it against the relief, and an emphatic, undeviating chasm divides him and his opponent, whose ultrahard, naked body, dramatized by his frontal pose, highlights Dexileos's heroism in besting him. Moreover, the scene's omissions are just as telling as what it includes. The setting is completely indeterminate; Dexileos is utterly emotionless; the only armor in sight is his bronze helmet; and the ugly reality of battle with edged weapons – the ghastly butcher's yard of ancient Greek warfare – is totally effaced, for his spear stopped short of his opponent's body, leaving it whole and unpierced.



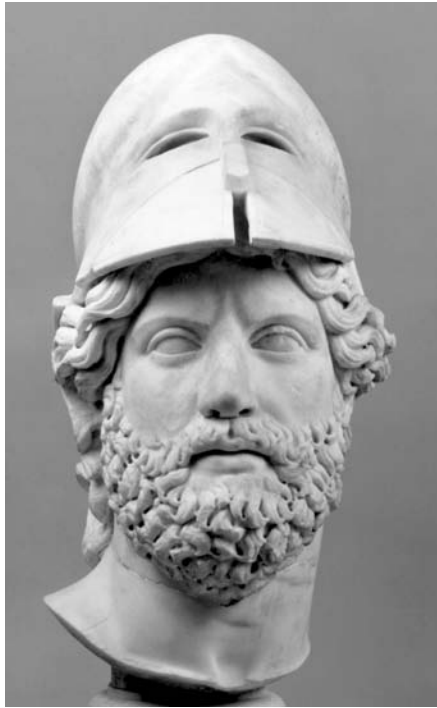
126. The Tyrannicides. Athenian red-figure wine jug (oinochoe) from Dexileos's burial plot, ca. 400–395. Preserved ht. 14 cm (5.5"). Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. Compare the statues by Kritios and Nesiotes, Figs. 5, 34.

So this relief is no straightforward dispatch from the front but a superbly realized fictionalization and idealization of war. It sanitizes battle, injury, blood, and death and re-describes them metaphorically as a chance encounter of two young men on the road to glory. Contrived like a frozen ballet, a kind of superclassicism, to glorify a fleeting moment of success in the hour of defeat, does it betray a shiver of anxiety about whether Athens's revival would last, and whether the city could sustain the cost? For war and plague had halved its population;<sup>1</sup> its empire and tribute were gone forever; and its former subjects never completely trusted it again.

Almost immediately after this battle, stunning news arrived from Asia. The Athenian admiral Konon, a survivor of Aigospotamoi now commanding a Persian fleet (for Athens still had no proper navy of its own), had annihilated the Spartan fleet off Knidos. Upon his return, Konon used part of the spoils to rebuild the city's fortifications, including the Long Walls and those of Piraeus (Map 3; Fig. 31). Ecstatic and grateful, and even hailing the victory as reversing the defeat of 404 (which it did not), the Athenians honored him publicly with a bronze portrait in the Agora – the first after the Tyrannicides (Figs. 5, 34; the Themistokles and Perikles, Figs. 37 and 56, were private commissions).

Many more honorary portraits were to follow Konon's, as the balance of power between city and individual began to shift inexorably in favor of

1 For comparison, imagine the effect of 25 million war dead on the United States, or 5 million on Britain or France; in modern times only Russian World War II losses even come close.



127. Head of an Athenian general or hero (Roman copy); bronze original, ca. 350. Marble; ht. 42 cm (16.5"). Berlin, Staatliche Museen. The original would have been a full-length statue.

the latter. The few copies that survive (Fig. 127: the originals are all lost) are little more than clones of the Perikles (Fig. 56). When bestowing this signal honor, the *dēmos* evidently took pains to ensure that its lucky recipients were represented as ideal democrats, just like him.

Meanwhile, private citizens eagerly promoted their own democratic credentials, civic solidarity, and commitment to moderation, ostentatiously tuning out the factionalism and litigiousness in which many of them, as voters, jurors, and city functionaries, must eagerly have participated. As we have seen, not only do the orators present a vivid image of the perfect “middling” Athenian – prudent, intelligent, self-controlled, moderate, orderly, and so on – but also the several thousand fourth-century Athenian gravestones that survive throw this image (literally) into high relief. They showcase the family/*oikos* as never before in Greek sculpture, but do so in a manner that now makes it the nucleus of the democratic city.

Although (or perhaps because) the very act of erecting a costly gravestone violated the strict egalitarianism of the Periklean period, the cast of characters on these gravestones is strikingly uniform, indeed quite depersonalized, individualized only by inscriptions on the architrave (Fig. 128). These are prosperous farmers and businessmen, a new middle class that had risen from



128. Gravestone of Thrases and Euandria from the Kerameikos, Athens, ca. 350. Marble; ht. 1.60 m (5'3"). Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

the ruin of defeat, proud of its hard-won prosperity and perhaps somewhat anxious about maintaining it. Families are close-knit and tranquil; the men are thoughtful, dignified, well groomed, and tastefully dressed; the women mature and self-possessed; and the children obedient and well behaved. Only the occasional slave betrays a hint of emotion, by staring out listlessly from the ensemble or cradling his or her head dejectedly in one hand.

So these gravestones created what sociologists call an “imagined community” – *imagined* because most of its members never knew each other (Athens and Attica were too big for that) and a *community* because its members clearly conceived of it as real fraternity despite the actual inequality, exploitation, fragmentation, and dissension that prevailed in real life. Invoking a more profound reality behind the urban hubbub, they proclaimed a deep, horizontal comradeship sustained by the four Athenian charter myths explored in Chapter 2 and by a democracy that had withstood all assaults from both within and without. And because the cemeteries were situated directly along the roads radiating out from the city gates and the rural parishes or *demes*, these reassuring images were the first that anyone saw when approaching Athens or its satellite communities, and the last that any Athenian saw when leaving home.

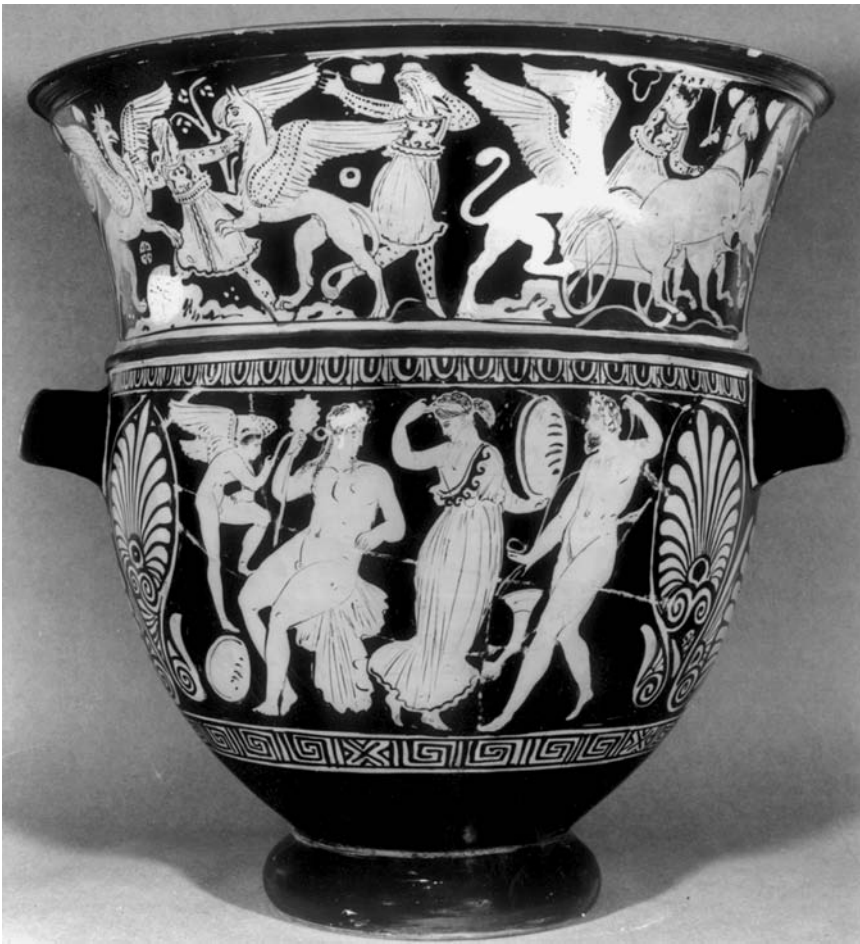
Painted pottery, always sensitive to private concerns, presents a more nuanced picture. White-ground lekythoi disappear (Fig. 121: replaced by carved marble ones), as do, on red-figure, many time-honored departure and battle scenes – the Trojan War, Gigantomachy, and Centauromachy included. What remains is largely cultic, romantic, or fabulous, and Dionysos and Aphrodite – two great personal divinities and cosmic forces to whom everyone could relate – figure prominently.<sup>2</sup>

The bell-krater in Fig. 129 is a case in point. Athenian trade now focused on the northern shores of the Black Sea, the source of most of the city’s grain, and everyone knew that the Amazons had once inhabited them. Many of these pots were exported to the Crimea and adjacent lands, part of a lucrative trade that also sparked interest in a peculiarly northern theme: the fight between the Arimasps and griffins. Popularized in an epic fantasy by Aristeas of Prokonnesos, the Arimasps reportedly lived between the Don and the Volga, and incessantly battled with the local griffins for control of their gold. As Prometheus had warned the hapless Io in Aischylos’s *Prometheus Bound*:

Now hear another  
Grim sight you must encounter. Beware the silent hounds  
Of Zeus, the sharp-beaked griffins; and beware the tribe  
Of one-eyed Arimaspsian horsemen, on the banks  
Of the River of Wealth whose waters wash down gold.

On the vases, the Arimasps have two eyes and dress like Amazons in pseudo-oriental attire. The griffins – ancient symbols of power and wealth that even

2 Asklepios had no mythology as such, so the vase painters ignored him.



129. Arimasps fight griffins, and Eros, Dionysos, and his retinue. Athenian red-figure mixing bowl (“Falaieff” bell krater) attributed to the Griffin Group, ca. 350. Ht. 43 cm (16.9”). Paris, Louvre.

had appeared on the helmet of Athena Parthenos (Fig. 69) – combine lions’ bodies with eagles’ heads and wings.

Aristeas alleged that he met the Arimasps on a sightseeing tour of the Volga undertaken in a Dionysiac trance – in other words, stoned! Yet Dionysos and company (Eros now included) appear on Fig. 129 probably as much for their obvious relevance to the vessel’s function as a wine bowl. From northern gold, they suggest, flow other pleasures too.

Dionysos rightly has been called the god of the fourth century, along with Aphrodite, whom we shall meet again shortly. Euripides had defined his character and powers for all time in his *Bacchae* of 406, and the wealth of images of him by late classical sculptors and painters amply attest to his enormous popularity. As in Fig. 110, in Fig. 129 the god, youthful, naked, and soft, sits gazing languidly at his entourage – an uncanny mixture of physical



effeminacy, mysterious allure, and subliminal power, just as the unsuspecting Pentheus sneeringly described him in Euripides' play:

You are handsome, stranger, for women's taste –  
The goal, I see, that brings you here to Thebes.  
Your curls are long and cascade down your cheeks  
Seductively, so you're no wrestling man.  
And your complexion is so white that you  
Must keep it from the sun, and hunt indoors,  
Beguiling Aphrodite with your looks.

Meanwhile, a satyr and maenad caper about the god in carefree abandon. In such scenes the satyrs never have an erection and always behave themselves, whereas the women, absent-minded in their ecstasy, often let their garments slip from the shoulder, carelessly revealing a breast. For Dionysiac ecstasy (literally, "standing outside oneself") unashamedly bursts the confines of classical decorum:

O Thebes, O nurse that cradled Semele<sup>3</sup>  
Be ivy-garlanded, burst into flower  
With wreaths of lush, bright-berried bryony,  
Bring sprays of fir, green branches torn from oaks,  
Fill soul and flesh with Bacchos' mystic power;  
Fringe and bedeck your dappled fawnskin cloaks  
With woolly tufts and locks of purest white.  
There's a brute wildness in the fennel wands –  
Reverence it well. Soon the whole land will dance  
    When the god with ecstatic shout  
    Leads his companies out  
    To the mountain's mounting height  
    Swarming with riotous bands  
Of Theban women leaving  
Their spinning and their weaving  
Stung by the maddening trance  
    Of Dionysos!

Dionysos was above all a god of carefree happiness, peace, and plenty – a welcome palliative for troubled times. He is omnipresent even when he is not represented personally. Pulsing through every living thing, he is the sap in the branch, the juice in the grape, and the wine in the cup (Fig. 130), the milk and honey in the cakes, and last but not least the blood and semen in the body. As Euripides' Bacchic chorus chants:

The son of Semele, when the gay-crowned feast is set  
Is named among gods the chief;  
His gifts are joy and union of soul in dancing,  
Joy in music of flutes,  
Joy when sparkling wine at feasts divine

3 Dionysos's mother.



130. Symposium. Athenian red-figure mixing bowl (bell krater), ca. 350. Ht. 42.5 cm (16.75"). Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. A flute girl entertains the young symposiasts, who recline in order of rank from left to right; at far right, the host pours wine from a fancy gold or silver drinking horn imitating the forepart of a griffin. Bunches of grapes hang from the food-laden tables in the foreground.

Soothes the sore regret,  
Banishes every grief,  
When the reveler rests, enfolded deep,  
In the cool shade of ivy-shoots,  
On wine's soft pillow of sleep.

...

Take me, O Bromios, take me and inspire  
Laughter and worship! There our holy spell  
And ecstasy are welcome; there the gentle band  
Of Graces have their home, and sweet Desire.  
Dionysos, son of Zeus, delights in banquets;  
And his dear love is Peace, giver of wealth,  
Savior of young men's lives, a goddess rare!

For the fourth century craved peace and plenty above all. When the Dexileos monument (Figs. 124–126) and the Konon (compare Fig. 127) were unveiled, in 393 or 392, peace was on everyone’s mind and ambassadors were busy shuttling to and fro. Yet the fighting continued, and though it finally stopped in 386 at Persian instigation, another war with Sparta began only a few years later. This one lasted till 371, with another brief interruption in 375, again on Persian initiative, when the hopeful Athenians dedicated an altar and cult to Peace (Eirene) in the agora. In 371, when hostilities finally ceased, or in 362, when many of the Greek states signed a (predictably short-lived) Common Peace, the Athenians supplemented this altar with a bronze group of Eirene and Ploutos or *Peace Nurturing Wealth* by Kephisodotos, known in several fine Roman copies (Fig. 131). Now on a roll, they had even convinced much of their former empire to join a defensive alliance under their leadership (but not control), the Second Delian Sea League.

By this time the matronly Eirene’s character was well established. In the eighth century, the poet Hesiod had given her an epithet, “blooming,” and a genealogy, making her the daughter of Zeus and Themis (Custom) together with Law and Justice. In the fifth, Pindar and Euripides had glossed all this by calling her “child-nurturer” and (as we have seen) “wealth-bringer,” and Aristophanes had put her on stage in his *Peace* of 421 together with two companions, the “harvest-breasted” Peace-and-Plenty and the “myrrh-sweet” Peacework, though none of them had speaking parts. In 388 his last extant comedy, *Wealth*, added Ploutos to the dramatic roster – though as the goddess Demeter’s son, not Eirene’s.

Kephisodotos registered much of this in his sculpture, not only by giving Eirene a scepter and Ploutos a brimming cornucopia, and by stressing the intimacy between the two, but also more subtly, through Eirene’s hairdo, pose, and dress. For an alert spectator would notice that this caring mother goddess, with her long tresses and heavy, woolen Doric peplos (by then quite old-fashioned), strongly recalled Demeter, Ploutos’s real mother, as visualized in the art of Periklean Athens. Figures such as the gorgeous, “harvest-breasted” young women of the Parthenon frieze, the Caryatids of the Erechtheion (see Fig. 111), and fifth-century vases (see Fig. 58) provide a wider context. On the other hand, the group’s new intimacy and tenderness herald the complete realignment of Athenian sculpture soon to be achieved by Kephisodotos’s own son, Praxiteles.

So Kephisodotos’s point was twofold – and clearly directed at an “in” group of Athenians mindful and proud of their glorious past, who could connect and feel privileged thereby. Athenian commerce was flourishing, the good times had returned after fifty years of bad, and (as Dexileos’s memorial, Fig. 124, had already intimated) sculpture itself also was making a fresh start with a Pheidian revival, the first “official” neoclassicism in Athenian and Western art. Mutually reinforcing, they proclaim an Athenian renaissance based not on imperialist aggression but on peaceful coexistence, cultural superiority, and commercial acumen. Meanwhile, Isokrates, Demosthenes, and others were busily trumpeting Athens’s claims to cultural overlordship of Greece, and



131. Eirene carrying Ploutos, by Kephisodotos of Athens (Roman copy); bronze original, ca. 370–60. Marble; ht. 2.01 m (6'7"). Munich, Glyptothek. Eirene's right arm, both of Ploutos's arms, and the jug are restored. Eirene originally held a scepter in her right hand and a cornucopia (together with Ploutos) in her left.

were actually describing its citizens as “mild,” explicitly striving to repudiate an imperialist mindset that had brought nothing but disaster.

Yet, when the peace of 371 eventually was signed, the Thebans withdrew in a huff, and when the Spartans invaded to bring them to heel, they decisively defeated them, killing one of the two Spartan kings and 400 of the 700 Spartiates with him. The balance of power had shifted once again. Sparta’s decline was now all but irreversible, a Theban hegemony had begun, and another round of conflicts was in the offing. The Messenians soon threw off the Spartan yoke, and the Arkadians seceded from the Peloponnesian League, federated, and dedicated their own monument at Delphi provocatively opposite Lysander’s (see Fig. 122). These events also spawned a rash of tendentious personifications. The Thebans, for example, commissioned a Tyche (Fortune) carrying Ploutos, presumably to publicize their city’s newfound preeminence and perhaps in passing to score a point off the Athenians as well. From Pausanias’s description, it copied the Eirene closely. Such works continued to adopt the magnificent deportment and heavy, columnar draperies of the Pheidian style, pretentiously investing themselves in borrowed authority.

But what goes up can (indeed will) also come down, and Tyche in particular was a notoriously fickle goddess. The Thebans had nothing new to offer in place of Athenian culture or Spartan discipline, and when their charismatic leaders Pelopidas and Epaminondas were killed a few years later, they too soon found themselves overstretched, embattled, and eventually embroiled in an unwinnable war for control of Delphi: the so-called Third Sacred War of 355–46. The only real victor in this dreary conflict was a canny, ruthless newcomer, and certainly no democrat: King Philip II of Macedonia.

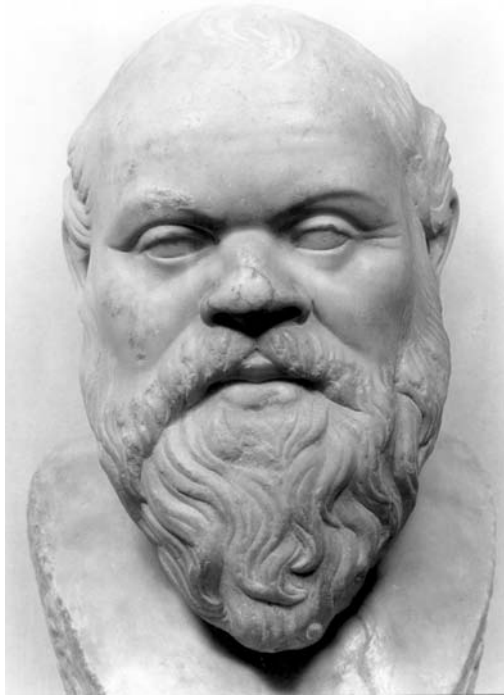
---

## PHILOSOPHICAL ALTERNATIVES

---

Greek philosophers had long been involved in politics; only a few had disdained it entirely. In 386, Plato (ca. 429–347 B.C.), no friend to democracy, founded his Academy, about a mile northwest of Athens’s Dipylon Gate, in an area sacred to the hero Akademos. He called it a *thiasos* or religious association, a clever move that protected him and his pupils from the charge of introducing new gods that had entrapped Sokrates. Endlessly ridiculed by the comic poets, it was not, as some have claimed, a philosophical “city outside the city,” but a school for the training of statesmen and (he hoped) philosopher-kings. It eventually contained a gymnasium, a Mouseion (sanctuary of the Muses), a library, and residential facilities. Plato’s *Republic*, published probably around 380, was its first textbook (see Box 1. *Plato’s Republic*). Over a dozen fourth-century rulers and would-be rulers (most of them later vilified as tyrants) were educated there; and it was from there in 367 and again in 361 that Plato himself set out to school the Syracusan tyrant Dionysios II in statecraft – a fruitless task, as it turned out.

A head of Sokrates known in many Roman copies (Fig. 132) dates to this period and has been connected with a torn papyrus from Herculaneum



132. Head of Sokrates (Roman copy); bronze original, ca. 390–70. Marble; ht. 37 cm (14.6"). Naples, Museo Archeologico. The original would have been a full-length statue.

citing two eminent Athenian historians to the effect that “they [the Academy?] dedicated a bronze portrait mask of Sokrates, on which was written ‘[S?]otes made it,’” and “he [Plato?] told them [the Academy?] to dedicate at Athens a bronze portrait mask . . . beside the Mouseion. . . .” So was this mask dedicated in the Academy as some kind of a talisman: an ever-present reminder of philosophy’s founding hero?

Figure 132 shows the great philosopher as Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Plato all describe him, and (presumably) as the mask worn by the actor who impersonated him in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* had depicted him. He looks like the satyrs Silenos and Marsyas (see Figs. 110 and 129), with an ugly, lecherous countenance that totally belied the “great soul” within. This is the Sokrates of Plato’s earlier dialogues such as the *Ion*, *Euthyphro*, *Charmides*, *Protagoras*, and *Meno*: the “gadfly” of Athens and ironic deflator of sophist and citizen alike. Some of the copies, however, intensify the expression by narrowing the eyes and pursing the lips, as if Sokrates were straining to conquer the satyric mask that the gods had allotted him. Unfortunately, there is no way to tell whether these touches are authentically fourth-century or are Roman embellishments.

So was this portrait simply trying to recreate the dead Sokrates’ real face, using this clichéd comparison with a satyr as its model? Was it making

a pedagogical point, that the wise, benevolent teacher Silenos had been reincarnated in the individual that the Delphic oracle had called “the wisest man on earth”? Was it making a philosophical point, exploiting the disjunction between the satyric mask and Sokrates’s true nature in a Platonic manner in order to emphasize the gulf between appearance and true reality, and the mendacity of the former? Or (finally) was it making a political point, challenging the fundamental values of the classical city, particularly the conviction that external appearance reflected inner character? For as Paul Zanker has remarked, “If the man whom the god at Delphi proclaimed the wisest of all could be as ugly as Silenos and still a good, upstanding citizen, then this must imply that the statue’s patron was casting doubt on that very system of values. We have to look at this statue of Sokrates, with its . . . Silenos face against the background of a city filled with perfectly proportioned and idealized human figures in marble and bronze embodying virtue and moral authority.”<sup>4</sup>

Alternatively, did it cover more than one of these bases, or even all of them together? We shall revisit this problem shortly.

When Plato died in 347, a Persian pupil of his, a certain Mithradates, commissioned a posthumous portrait of him from Silanion, a specialist in the genre; he set it up in the Academy, dedicating it to the Muses. Again, many copies survive of the head (Fig. 133), but none of the body. The pronounced forward tilt of the neck suggests that Plato was shown seated, like the bearded patriarchs of the Athenian gravestones (Fig. 128) and later philosophers.

Plato’s portrait is easier to interpret than Sokrates’s. His biographers describe him as handsome, modest, orderly, and dignified, and the comic poets ridicule his perpetually serious expression; his facial type also appears on the gravestones, complete with puckered brow and lined forehead. So Mithradates was presenting his master as a classic “middling” Athenian: prudent, restrained, self-controlled, moderate, orderly, and of course intelligent and thoughtful. Yet the specific setting of the Academy and the dedication to the Muses (patrons of the arts and of education) would have nuanced this reading somewhat. In the *Republic*, Sokrates singles out these and other key characteristics as essential for the philosopher, especially for one guiding a state:

“Do you agree, Glaukon, that we have now been through a list of traits which all go together, and which the mind must have if it’s to grasp reality fully and completely?”

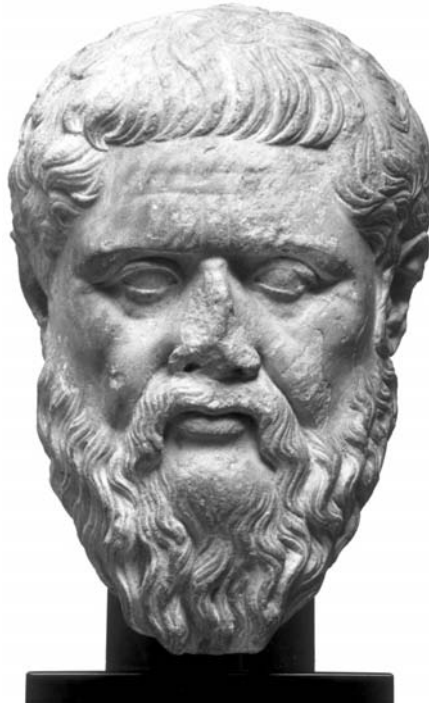
“Yes, certainly it must have them all.”

“Can you then possibly find fault with an occupation for the proper pursuit of which a man must combine in his nature a good memory, readiness to learn, breadth of vision, and versatility of mind, and be a friend of truth, justice, courage, and discipline?”

“The god of Blame himself could find no fault here.”

“Grant, then, education and maturity to round them off, and aren’t they the only people to whom you would entrust your state?”

4 *The Mask of Sokrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1995): 39.



133. Head of Plato by Silanion of Athens (Roman copy); bronze original, ca. 340. Marble; ht. 35 cm (13.8"). Munich, Glyptothek. Photo: D. Widmer, Basel. The original would have been a full-length statue.

This largely conventional catalogue of virtues suggests that Plato's portrait (Fig. 133) was transgressing no boundaries – indeed that his and his followers' vision of the ideal leader was at root deeply conventional, unlike their vision of the ideal government. So perhaps the Sokrates (Fig. 132) did not present him as a social revolutionary after all but merely as a latter-day Silenos, wise and great-souled beneath his satyric mask.

At least one Hellenistic philosophical school did offer itself as an alternative to the polis, but in our period the only philosopher to do so firmly and consistently was Diogenes the Cynic (414–323 B.C.; Fig. 134). This “Sokrates gone mad” (as Plato called him), cantankerous, destitute, and living naked in a barrel, proclaimed himself to be a “citizen of the world” (*kosmos*). According to him, only the wise man can be free because he alone understands virtue; all other men are slaves in fact, if not in law. Because the conventions of society are arbitrary, the sage rejects them; private property, wealth, marriage, and social status – the Greek city's social foundations – are irrelevant. His city is the *kosmos*, and he is at home everywhere and nowhere.

Diogenes' portrait may postdate his death by many years, and when he walked the streets he considerably wore a thong, but the statue's debt to



Sokrates (Fig. 132) and its emphatic rejection of civic convention (contrast, e.g., Figs. 58, 84, 88, 118, 128) are clear.

## RETHINKING THE GODS

---

By 400, many Greeks would have felt very differently than their predecessors about the Olympian religion.

To begin with, many of them no longer believed that the stories of the poets (Homer and Hesiod in particular) were literally true, for they were blasphemous and self-contradictory. Reason dictated that gods do not fornicate and lie; imprison, fight, and cuckold each other; or die. Theognis had grumbled about all this already in the sixth century (see Chapter 1). In Euripides's *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, the heroine declares that Artemis could never demand human sacrifice as the Taurians believed, for the goddess of purity (see, e.g., Figs. 51, 78) could not be hypocritical or evil; and in his *Herakles* the hero states flatly (demolishing Greek tragedy's very foundations and even – with typical Euripidean irony – his own existence):

I don't believe the gods condone unlawful love.  
Those bondage stories are unworthy, too;  
I can't accept them; nor that any god  
Is tyrant of another. A true god  
Needs nothing. Those are poets' stupid myths.

So (second) the divine must be eternal, inexhaustible, omnipotent, omniscient, and self-sufficient, and therefore perfect, rational, and just. But both divine anthropomorphism and divine reciprocity are hard to reconcile with this package, because by definition a body is born, ages, and dies, and cannot be in two places at once; and how can a transcendent, impersonal, self-sufficient force that “needs nothing” take account of human needs or care for individuals? For above all, fourth century men and women wanted to *connect*. Hence the popularity of Dionysos, Aphrodite, and Asklepios (see Figs. 87 and 129): personal divinities offering satisfactions that the others could never match.

But (third) as a result, traditional religious practices – sacrifices, prayers, votive offerings, cult statues, and so on (see, e.g., Figs. 69 and 87–9) – remained acceptable, indeed more desirable than ever. For they both concretely expressed one's desire for a personal relationship with the gods, and also could serve a purer piety focused on divinity as such, whatever its form or needs. As Plato put it:

Some of the gods [i.e., the sun, moon, and stars] we see clearly and honor them; but of the others, we set up likenesses or images, which we worship. And though these images are lifeless, we believe that the living gods are well disposed and grateful to us on this account.

So paradoxically, offerings of this kind now became both a duty and a quasi-symbolic gesture, because recognition of divinity as such entailed not only



134. Statuette of Diogenes the Cynic (Roman copy); bronze original, ca. 300. Marble; ht. 54.6 cm (21.5"). Rome, Villa Albani. Only the head, torso, upper arms, and right thigh are ancient.

that one must honor it, but also that if one had any brains at all, one could not take the form of these honors literally.

Greek artists – heirs to an entrenched tradition of anthropomorphism, dependent upon the Olympian religion for their livelihood, and servicing a largely nonintellectual clientele – could hardly devote themselves to addressing most of these concerns directly. As a result, most fourth-century images of the gods are resolutely conservative.

One could, of course, put old wine in new bottles, as at the Erechtheion and Bassai (see Chapter 5; Figs. 111–16). At the Arkadian town of Tegea around 340, the sculptor-architect Skopas tackled this task afresh. The temple that had housed the archaic idol of the city goddess, Alea Athena (Fig. 135), had burned to the ground in 395, and it took the Tegeans half a century to save enough money to replace it. Their diligence was amply rewarded. When



135. Statuette of Alea Athena from Tegea, ca. 500. Bronze; ht. 13 cm (5.1"). Athens, National Museum. Probably a version of the cult statue of Alea Athena by Endoios of Athens (ca. 525–500), which escaped the fire that destroyed the goddess's archaic temple in 395 and was installed in Skopas's replacement building around 330 (see Fig. 137).

Pausanias visited Skopas's temple five hundred years later he deemed it "far superior to all other temples in the Peloponnese on many grounds, especially for its size."

Following Iktinos's example at Bassai, Skopas chose the severe Doric order for the temple's exterior, but elongated the columns somewhat in order to make the building higher and more elegant. Its pedimental sculptures celebrated the exploits of Tegean heroes: the female boar-hunter Atalanta and the colonizer Telephos (Fig. 136). Their battered fragments show Skopas crafting a new heroic mode to fit the century's enhanced sense of personhood. Strongly muscled and with massive, cubic heads and craggy features, the figures seem to burst with energy, indomitably pursuing their goals. As at Bassai, carved porch metopes took up these themes and added more.

The temple's cella was more innovative and, following the example of the Erechtheion, far richer (Fig. 137; compare Figs. 111, 112). Here Skopas completely rethought his models, capitalizing on the much higher ceiling (50% higher) that the building's taller exterior columns and somewhat greater

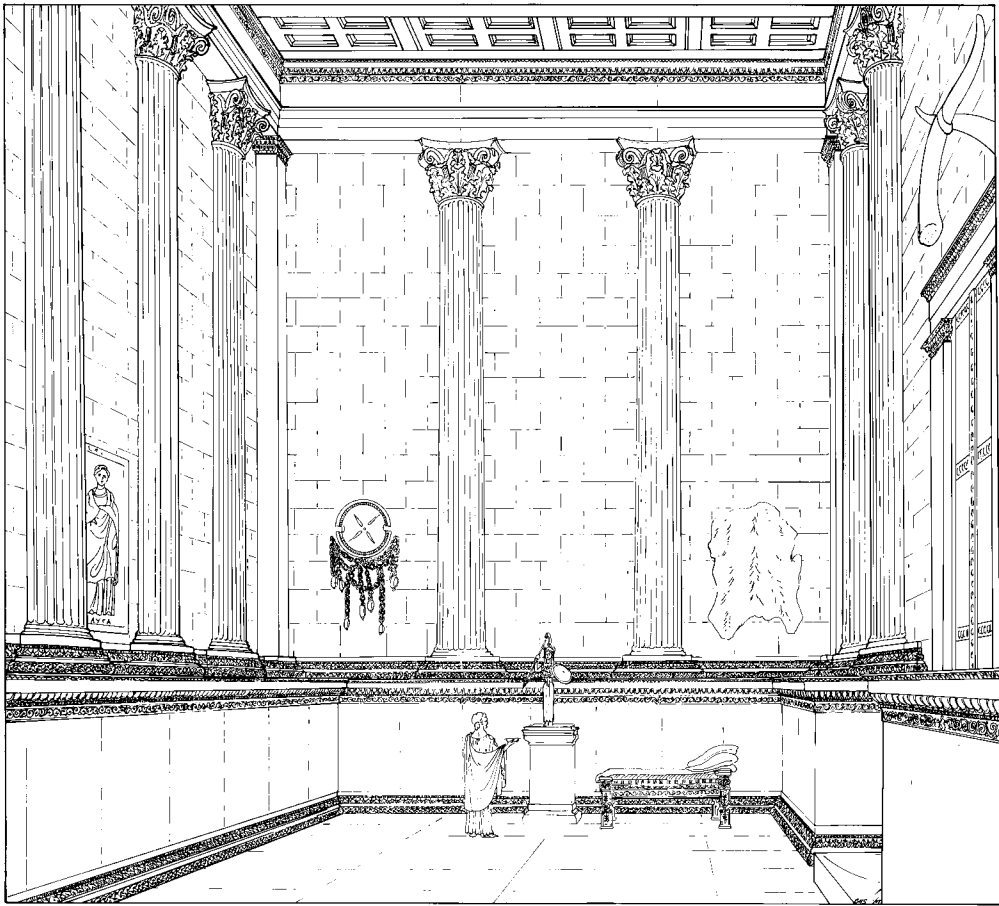


136. Telephos, from the west pediment of the Temple of Alea Athena at Tegea, ca. 340–30. Carved probably by Skopas's workshop. Marble; ht. 31.4 cm (12.4"). Tegea Museum. Wounded by Achilles in the left thigh, Telephos has fallen to the ground – like Dexileos's opponent, Fig. 124.

size had given him. Eliminating Bassai's rear chamber and replacing its Ionic half-columns (see Fig. 115) with Corinthian ones, he pushed them back against the cella walls and (probably) mounted them on a continuous podium, whose crowning molding was located somewhat above eye level. The resulting space was both strongly unified and also less fussy and cramped than at Bassai, for these modifications both simplified it and tripled its usable volume. Finally, Skopas redesigned the Corinthian capital, eliminating its interior spirals and reinvigorating what remained.

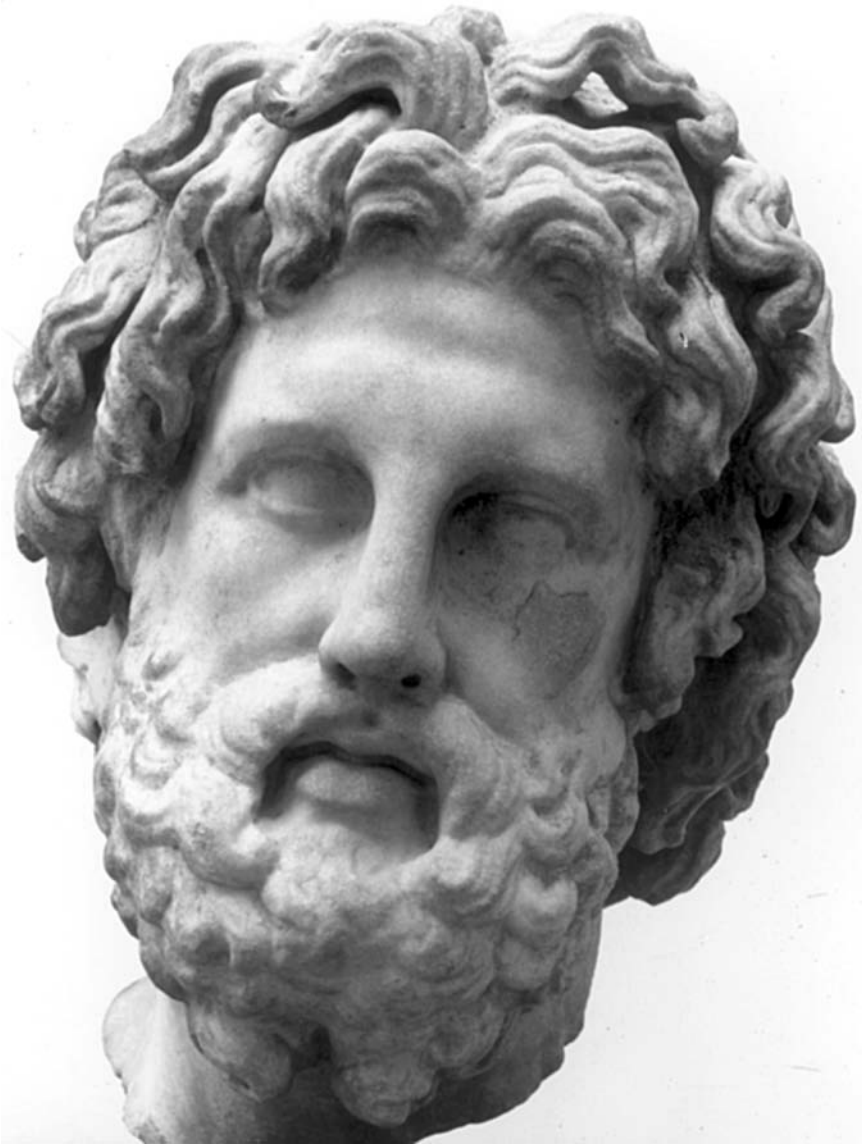
But these brilliant innovations merely provided a frame and backdrop for the pious votives within, diligently listed by Pausanias. These included ancient trophies from the heroic exploits shown in the pediments and spoils from Tegea's past wars with Sparta, that former colossus now rapidly dwindling to second-rate status (Fig. 137). Finally came the archaic idol itself: An exquisite work of ancient piety at the heart of the entire ensemble, nested like a precious jewel in a magnificent and elegantly crafted setting.

While Skopas was busy with all this, others sought to establish a direct personal connection between divinity and attention-hungry worshiper. This



137. Reconstruction of the interior of Skopas's temple of Alea Athena at Tegea, ca. 330. Marble, with a wooden ceiling; ht. of room, 10.2 m (33'5"). Endoios's cult statue of Alea Athena (compare Fig. 135) stands at center. The votive offerings, listed by Pausanias, are (from left to right) a picture of Telephos's mother Auge; the shield of the Tegean heroine Marpessa and the chains that the Spartans had carried into Arkadia to enslave the Tegeans, but were forced to wear instead after their defeat; Athena's sacred couch; and the hide and tusks of the Kalydonian Boar, whose death at the hands of Meleager and Atalanta was shown on the temple's east pediment.

tactic worked amazingly well in the case of the caring healer-god Asklepios (Figs. 87, 138), whose cult was now mushrooming throughout Greece, but less so with Olympians such as Athena. The bronze Athena in Fig. 139 is clearly indebted to Pheidias, particularly to the Parthenos (see Fig. 69); she also once held a spear and shield in her left hand and a Nike in her outstretched right one. In order to stress her engagement with us, however, and her continuing benevolence toward us, she has abandoned the majestic, commanding posture of her Pheidian models. Instead, she relaxes her body and gently inclines her head in our direction, just like Asklepios. Such weakness in so masculine a deity is all but fatal. Athena was too tied in Athenian hearts to their years of greatness in the fifth century to bear such tinkering with in the fourth.



138. “Blacas” head of Asklepios from Melos, ca. 330. Marble; ht. 58.4 cm (1’11”). London, British Museum.

---

### **PRAXITELES STEPS IN**

---

The sculptor who most successfully tackled these issues, however, was Kephisodotos’s son Praxiteles. Aphrodite, Dionysos, and their respective entourages accounted for over a third of his recorded output, and his portraits (often of women) equaled them in number. His marble Aphrodite of Knidos, known in many large-scale copies (Fig. 140) and hundreds of miniatures, is often hailed as the classic example of how to reconcile divine perfection and self-sufficiency with the new demand for divinities that care. Together with



139. Athena from the Piraeus, ca. 350. Bronze; ht. 2.35 m (7'7"). Piraeus Museum. Probably she held an owl in her outstretched right hand, and a spear and shield in her left.



140. Aphrodite of Knidos by Praxiteles of Athens (Roman copy); original, ca. 350. Marble; ht. 1.62 m (5'4"). Munich, Glyptothek. The statue is a reduced version of Praxiteles' over-life-size original and deviates from it in minor details.



**BOX 2. PLINY ON THE KNIDIA  
(NATURAL HISTORY 36.20–22)**

Superior to all the works, not only of Praxiteles, but indeed in the whole world, is the Venus which many people have sailed to Cnidus in order to see. He made two statues and offered them for sale at the same time; one of them was represented with the body draped, for which reason the people of Cos, whose choice it was (since he had put the same price on both), preferred it, judging that this was the sober and proper thing to do. The people of Cnidus bought the rejected one, the fame of which became immensely greater. Later King Nicomedes wished to buy it from the Cnidians, promising that he would cancel the city's whole debt, which was enormous. They preferred, however, to bear everything, and not without reason. For with that statue, Praxiteles made Cnidus famous.

The statue's shrine is completely open, so that it is possible to observe the image of the goddess from every side; she herself, it is believed, favored its being made that way. Nor is one's admiration of the statue less from any side. They say that a certain man was once overcome with love for the statue and that, after he had hidden himself in the shrine during the nighttime, he embraced it, and that it thus bears a stain, an indication of his lust. There are other statues in Cnidus by illustrious artists, a Dionysus by Bryaxis and another Dionysus and an Athena by Scopas; and there is no greater testimonial to the quality of Praxiteles' Venus that, among all these works, it alone receives mention.

the Doryphoros (see Figs. 71, 72), it counts among the most influential images in the history of art [see Box 2. *Pliny on the Knidia*]. The entire history of the female nude in antiquity and thereafter is predicated upon it.

Housed on a windy crag high above the Mediterranean in a colonnaded rotunda that perhaps symbolized her universal power, the Knidia stood on a three-foot-high base and was an imposing seven Attic feet tall. We encounter the goddess just after her birth in the sea-foam off Cyprus, or perhaps during her journey through the Aegean. (Hence her cult title: Euploia or "Of the fair voyage.") She has just taken a bath and is about to put on her cloak, standing stark naked for the first time in major sculpture since the seventh century (contrast, e.g., Fig. 62).

The Knidia's cloak was colored purple; her hair-band would have been painted also, her jeweled armband inlaid with real stones, and her water-jar probably gilded.<sup>5</sup> Her lips were gently rouged and her eyes and eyebrows

5 Her headband and armband may have been love charms, but I cannot pursue the implications of this here.

painted as well; and contrary to over a century of scholarship, scrutiny of the Munich copy (Fig. 140) and some others has shown that Praxiteles' colorist, the great painter Nikias, discreetly indicated her pubic hair and genitals. Probably her body was lightly waxed so that the crystalline Parian marble would gently soak up and return the light, recalling the ethereal skin of the goddess herself. Perhaps it was tinted as well, to accent its major transitions.

Praxiteles probably intended his Aphrodite to be as definitive a statement in her own way as Polykleitos's Doryphoros (Figs. 71, 72): an icon of female perfection, a goddess in marble to match a hero in bronze. Not only was her finish exquisite (which is why the copies are so capricious, for no one would have been allowed to take molds of the original for reproduction), but also her proportions and pose were just as carefully contrived.

As with the Doryphoros, the Knidia's proportional scheme itself is lost, but the copies suggest some basic equivalences. The height of her head, for example, equals the distance from her chin to the level of her nipples, from nipple to nipple, perhaps from nipples to navel (her slight stoop has compressed her abdomen), and from navel to genitals. Praxiteles based her pose on the Doryphoros, but flexed her body a little at the waist; unified it by an S-curve that runs from head to toe; and created a strong contrast between her "closed" right side and "open" left one, to which she now turns her head. These subtle changes create a very particular relationship between spectator and goddess, as we shall see.

The Knidia's glance, the sources tell us, was "melting" and her smile was "proud, a grin that just parts the lips." Though the copyists failed to do justice to these subtleties, they do faithfully catch her averted head and sideways glance. This was quite new in the genre (compare the Parthenos, Fig. 69) and is one of the keys to the statue's meaning and impact. For whereas the naïve spectator would see only a beautiful, naked goddess, nonchalantly averting her head from him, an astute one would recognize that all this suggests a *second* visitor to the shrine: Someone off to the right at whom she looks and smiles. Her modest gesture and slight stoop suggest that she is responding to our gaze, but her sideways glance and smile invite him ever closer. The penny drops. Is our rival her irascible, implacable lover: the blood-soaked, man-slaughtering . . . Ares?!

This teasing strategy of simultaneous invitation and (quite decisive) rejection is precisely the strategy of the love triangle – a ploy well known to Greek tragedy (e.g., the *Agamemnon*) and comedy too. Like the goddess's sheer size and cultic setting, it affirms her independence from us, even as her nakedness and alluring posture hold out the tantalizing possibility of a relationship. We recognize this particular game at once. It is exactly that of the *hetairai* (literally, "female companions") or courtesans: those beautiful, independent, clever, and witty "women of the world" whom we met briefly in Chapter 4. And as it happens, Greek tradition held that one such hetaira, Praxiteles' own mistress Phryne, indeed modeled for the statue.

Phryne was among the handful of fourth-century "big ticket" hetairai. Superstars at the very top of their profession, they regularly inspired ruinous infatuation among the men they dated. One tell-all book on them even alleged

that Phryne became so rich that after Alexander razed the walls of Thebes to the ground in 335, she offered to rebuild them. The catch was that the Thebans had to erect the following inscription: “Alexander may have knocked these down, but Phryne the hetaira put them up again.” They refused. And in Praxiteles’s case, a number of anecdotes have Phryne playing exactly the same game with him as the Knidia does with us – a case of art copying life, or of life copying art?

According to one long-lived tradition, one infatuated Knidian even took all this literally [see Box 2. *Pliny on the Knidia*]. Confusing goddess and image, he tried to rape the latter, leaving an ugly stain on its thigh. Driven mad by the goddess, he then threw himself into the foaming sea below – the very element that had given her birth and provided her cult’s sailor devotees with their livelihood.<sup>6</sup> Psychologists have had a field day with all this, but for our purposes it amply demonstrates this besotted individual’s misunderstanding of the Knidia’s true message and the magnetic attraction that she exercised on everyone who encountered her.

Yet not all the shrine’s visitors were men. Because Aphrodite was literally the apotheosis of female sexuality, women frequently prayed and made dedications to her. The appeal of this Aphrodite-as-hetaira to “working girls” is obvious – and Knidos, a busy seaport on the cusp between the Aegean and Mediterranean proper, was prostitute heaven. But how did she speak to “ordinary” Greek women – chaste daughters and wives, but also desirable and desiring brides? Many of their dedications and prayers appeal for “affection” (*philia*) from men – the domesticated counterpart to the *erōs* inspired by the hetairai. From this perspective, the Knidia seems basically didactic. Embodied and active in the world, and caught bathing just like a mortal woman, she would have shown them how to kindle this affection. In behavior, deportment, and grooming they must acquire some of the skills of the hetaira, according to their age, station, and particular needs.

But the Knidia has also been described as “absentminded” and “aloof.” There is some truth in this: The balance is a delicate one and depends upon how one evaluates the copies and texts. For not all the Olympians did relate to humans – at least, not all the time. The spectacular Hermes and Dionysos discovered in the temple of Hera at Olympia in 1877 (Fig. 141) is a case in point. It continues to inspire heated controversy. Is it an original by Praxiteles himself, as Pausanias thought (or was told); a work by his sons, pupils, or “school” (his grandson Praxiteles included); or a later copy or even free version of one of the master’s lost works? Whatever the truth, it shows beyond dispute how these sculptors responded to the new fourth-century sense of divine self-sufficiency.

More than seven feet tall and standing on a four-foot high base, Hermes pays no attention to us at all. Although his body is absolutely frontal, his gaze drifts languidly toward the baby Dionysos, though their eyes do not meet. Dionysos’s own attention is fixed upon a bunch of grapes (attested by Roman

6 The tale, a variant of the Pygmalion story grafted onto a variant of Hephaistos’s attempt to rape Athena, has deep roots in Greek myth. Killjoys promptly tried to dismiss it as a salacious etiology or explanation after the fact to account for a flaw in the marble.



141. Hermes carrying the infant Dionysos, by Praxiteles or one of his pupils, ca. 340–300. Marble; ht. 2.15 m (7'). Olympia Museum. The god probably held a bunch of grapes in his right hand; parts of his legs are restored.

versions of the composition) once teasingly dangled before him by his divine mentor. Our own eyes travel endlessly round the oval path generated by these gestures and glances.

Though Praxiteles adapted his composition from Kephisodotos's Eirene (Fig. 131), its clever substitute of grapes for scepter and its weight shift from left leg to right makes it even more self-contained. In fact, where not confrontational it seems entirely closed. These two immortals are completely wrapped up in their own thoughts; they inhabit a dreamy Elysium far removed from our world and its cares. It is here that the sinuous Praxitelean S-curve, stronger even than the Knidia's (Fig. 140), reveals its full potential. It implicitly dematerializes the body by endowing it with a harmonious rhythm beyond our everyday experience, so that its response to gravity – its contrapposto – no longer furnishes the sole point of departure for the composition.

So like Plato's heavenly beings in his late dialogue the *Timaeus*, these two Olympians are now "able through their surpassing excellence to keep company only with themselves; they need no-one else, and are completely self-sufficient as acquaintances and friends." And as one of Aristotle's pupils shrewdly remarked, "it is eccentric to love god, for who can love what is remote and unknowable?" Soon, the philosopher Epikouros (341–270) was to formulate all this into a creed of wide appeal, affirming that "God dispenses no benefits; he is self-sufficient, heedless of us, indifferent to the world, untouched by rights or wrongs" and "that which is sublimely happy and immortal experiences no trouble itself nor does it inflict trouble on anything else, so that it is not touched by passion or partiality. Such things are found only in the weak."

So this was how one brilliant practitioner of the sculptor's art – Praxiteles himself – ultimately solved the paradoxes of Greek anthropomorphic religion. As the gods withdrew into solipsistic self-sufficiency, all that remained for mortals was to contemplate their bliss, and to attempt as far as possible to imitate it here on earth.

---

## DRAMATIC ECHOES?

---

It is time to shift focus and to return to the city – specifically to the western Greeks, who have received little attention so far in this book (see Fig. 30). From around 400, however, a vigorous output of red-figured vases thrusts them into the artistic limelight once more and enables us to revisit a theme from Chapter 2: the relation of text – specifically drama – and image.

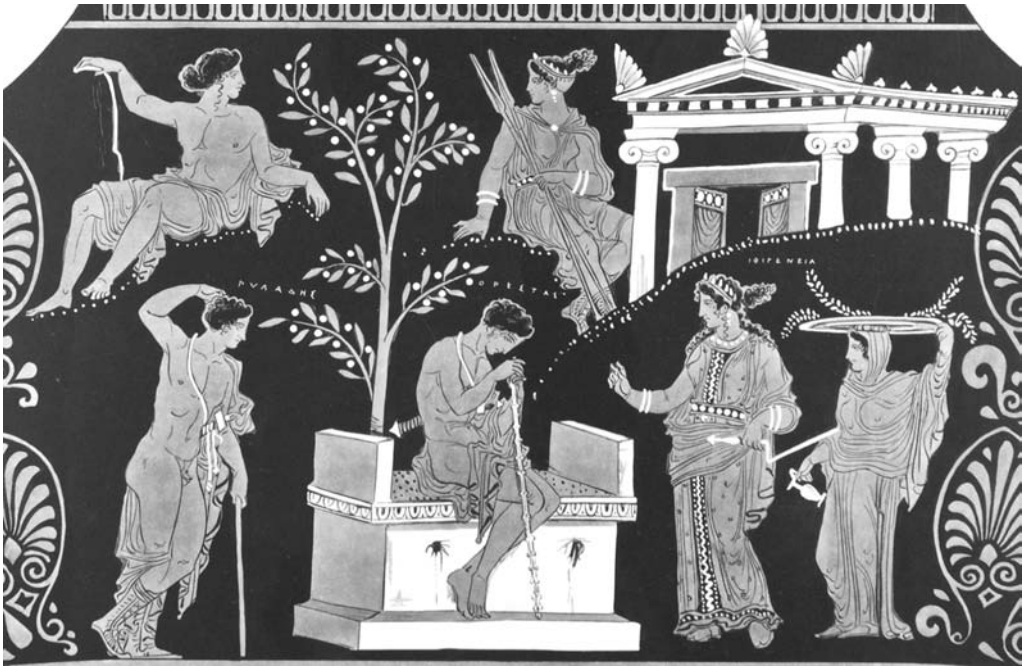
Until the 420s, the south Italian and Sicilian cities had imported almost all their red-figured pottery from Athens, but then this trade began to collapse. This is hardly surprising, because when the Peloponnesian War began, the Spartans promptly threatened to execute any merchants from Athens caught sailing off their coast – a deterrent to even the most intrepid entrepreneur. Soon the flow of Attic imports all but dried up, and local red-figure schools emerged that in some cases were to endure till the end of the fourth century. Some of the pioneers were probably Athenian refugees from the great plague of 430–26 who successfully ran the Spartan blockade.

The western Greek pictorial repertoire overlaps with that of Athenian red-figure but is far from identical to it, and many vases were now made exclusively for the grave. Funerary scenes (visits to the tomb and so on: compare Fig. 121) are joined by a vast array of mythological ones that often seem to allude to death and the afterlife. Stories treated by the Athenian tragedians, especially Euripides, and scenes from comedy are particularly popular. The former are often connected with the following story from Plutarch's *Life of Nikias*, describing the aftermath of the Sicilian disaster in 413:

Most of the Athenian prisoners perished in the quarries from sickness and their wretched diet . . . but a few were rescued because of their knowledge of Euripides, for it seems that the Sicilians were more devoted to his poetry than any other Greeks living outside the mother country. They learned even the smallest fragments of his verses from every stranger who set foot on the island, and took delight in exchanging these with one another. At any rate, there is a tradition that many of the Athenian soldiers who had returned home safely visited Euripides to thank him personally for the deliverance that they owed to his poetry. Some of them told him that they had been given their freedom in return for teaching their masters all they could remember of his words, while others, when they took to flight after the final battle, had been given food and water for reciting some of his lyrics.

This story shows that in 413, actual *texts* of Euripides had yet to reach Sicily, or at least were not readily available there – a situation that would soon change. In Athens the book trade was flourishing, and this “reading culture” soon swept the Greek world. Attic comedians mention books among the staples of the Agora (in the same breath as garlic, onions, and scent!), and in Plato's *Apology*, Sokrates remarks that Anaxagoras's *Physics* could be picked up there for a drachma. Xenophon even records an exchange between the philosopher and a bookworm who prides himself on buying absolutely everything available, from Homer and the poets to medical and even architectural treatises. Fifth-century Attic vases often show schoolboys and even girls reading from scrolls (Fig. 93), and on a part of the Pronomos krater not shown in Fig. 110, the poet Demetrios holds one while another leans against his chair.

By then, books were being exported to the Black Sea colonies, and in Aristophanes's *Frogs* of 405, Dionysos casually remarks that he had taken Euripides's *Andromeda* to sea with him. Later in the same play, which revolves around a poetry contest between Aischylos and Euripides, the chorus jokes that the whole audience has texts of their plays in hand. The revivals of Aischylean, Sophoklean, and Euripidean tragedy that started in 386 and of Aristophanic comedy in 339 could not have taken place without such texts. Indeed, by 330 so many bloated and inaccurate ones were in circulation that the statesman Lykourgos had official editions made (see Chapter 7). Aristotle (whose nickname as a student in Plato's Academy was “Bookworm”) could not have written his *Poetics* without these texts, and in his *Rhetoric* he discusses at length the differences between texts written for oral delivery and those meant for reading only.



142. Iphigeneia, Orestes, and Pylades among the Taurians. Redrawing of an Apulian (south Italian) red-figure mixing bowl (krater) attributed to the Ilioupersis Painter, ca. 350. Ht. of picture, 24 cm (9.5"). Naples, Museo Archeologico. The scene probably illustrates Euripides' *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*: Iphigeneia, at center right, addresses Orestes (seated on the altar), while Pylades and (above) Apollo and Artemis look on.

As for the western Greeks, although all their classical-period literature has perished, the vases occasionally show men and women reading from scrolls, and a boom in theater-building there, in Macedonia, and in Ionia presumes the widespread diffusion of dramatic texts throughout these regions during the fourth century. At Syracuse, the earliest theater, where in the 460s Aeschylus had presented his *Persians*, was a traditional rectangular/trapezoidal one (compare Thorikos, Fig. 18), but by the third century the new “clamshell” type (see Figs. 163–7) had prevailed.

So it is not surprising that fourth-century western Greek vase-paintings sometimes parallel literary texts quite closely. Whereas earlier Greek artists had represented traditional myths (see, e.g., Figs. 40, 41) rather than particular poetical versions of them, these pictures sometimes look suspiciously like book illustrations. Because the tales treated by the Attic dramatists, especially Euripides, are particularly popular, some see them as actual illustrations of western Greek tragic performances, and a few real optimists have even used them to reconstruct lost or fragmentary plays. So do the pictures in Figs. 142, 143 illustrate Euripides' *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* (for the plot, see Chapter 5, Box 1), the Iphigeneia myth in some generic, popular form, or something of both?

Before we decide, there is one observation to make. Whereas many comic scenes on western Greek vases clearly illustrate real plays, for they include the



143. Iphigeneia, Orestes, and Pylades among the Taurians. Campanian (South Italian) mixing bowl (bell krater), ca. 320. Ht. 32 cm (12.6"). Paris, Louvre. The building resembles a fourth-century theatrical scene building, so the scene probably illustrates Euripides' *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*: Orestes and Pylades stand between Artemis (left) and Iphigeneia (right).

stage itself (see Fig. 144), none of the supposed tragic ones (Figs. 108, 142, 143) does so. This distinction seriously undercuts the latter's claim to illustrate real tragic performances.

The krater from which Fig. 142 is taken was made in the great south Italian city of Taras (modern Taranto), which boasted Orestes as one of its founders. Presumably chosen for this funerary vase because of the hero's impending death by sacrifice and then miraculous escape from it, the scene shows the first encounter between Orestes, Pylades, and Iphigeneia, all identified by inscriptions. Iphigeneia, sworn as Artemis's priestess to sacrifice all castaways to the goddess, addresses the captive Orestes, who is still incognito. Moved by sympathy for him, she offers to spare his life if he will take a letter to Argos telling her friends that she is alive and well. Orestes stoically insists that he should be the one to die and that Pylades, his friend and fellow captive, should take the letter. Iphigeneia eventually agrees, promises him a sumptuous burial in compensation (!), and goes into the temple to get the letter.

On the pot, the scene is rendered in "Polygnotan" stacked or bird's eye perspective (compare Figs. 51, 52), and the temple and its altar are rendered in "Agatharchan" orthogonal perspective (compare Fig. 108). Although the perspectives of temple and altar are blithely independent of one another, both items project vigorously from the picture plane (a requirement for theatrical scenery, as we have seen) and specify the locale quite adequately. In the upper



register, Artemis chats with Apollo as a laurel tree buds between them. In the lower one, Pylades stands at left while Orestes sits disconsolately on the altar, gruesomely speckled with blood. Iphigeneia, carrying the temple key, addresses him, accompanied by a slave girl who holds a jug and a large tray of branches.

Does the picture illustrate the play? At first sight, no. The hills, temple, tree, and presiding divinities evoke reality, not theatrical scenery. Moreover, whereas actors in the theater would be fully clothed, Orestes and Pylades are naked but for their cloaks and shoes, and still wear their swords – an impossibility if they are captives, as in the play. These features can be explained only if the painter wanted us to understand his picture primarily as a heroic encounter from the world of myth, not as a specific scene from Euripides' drama.

But even so, we still need the play (specifically, lines 467–642) to make sense of the picture. For the tale is unknown before Euripides. He may have invented it and (because the mythical world is preliterate) he surely introduced the device of the letter – a favorite gambit of his (compare his *Hippolytos*). According to tradition, Artemis had whisked Iphigeneia off to Taurica *to be a goddess*; here, however, she is clearly a priestess, as in the play (*Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, line 34). The temple's open doors show that she has just left it and sent her attendants back inside it (*IT* lines 467–71); the slave girl's water-jug refers to Iphigeneia's comment that she does not sacrifice the victims herself, but only sprinkles the lustral water over their hair (*IT* 622); and even Apollo's presence is explicable by Orestes' remark that it was the god's oracle that sent him to Taurica in the first place (*IT* 85–92).

Without these clues – indeed without knowing the play itself – the picture makes no sense, because Orestes was only a child when Agamemnon decided to sacrifice Iphigeneia, and according to the traditional version of the myth the two never met again thereafter. So those who had *not* seen or read the play simply could not have understood the picture. How, then, do we explain the latter's realistic setting? Presumably, as in the Shakespeare scenes popular with nineteenth-century artists, both painter and public wanted an illusion of reality, of real-life drama, not a representation of a representation.

Comedies (Fig. 144) were different, because – as the comic poet Antiphanes ruefully quipped (see the Introduction, pp. 18–19) – their plots were blatant fictions invented for the occasion. Getting the joke depended upon understanding the scene, for which the fantastical costumes and masks were essential. These items were typecast character by character, so that one could instantly recognize master, slave, cuckold, philanderer, wife, daughter, nanny, whore, and so on from the getup they wore. After all this, to include the stage and props was a no-brainer. They add to the fun, whereas a straightforward, everyday setting would only have dampened it. Indeed, these pictures do something more: They construct the viewer *as a theatergoer*, silently echoing that often boisterous interchange between cast and audience that ancient and modern comedy both thrive on. Like the comedies themselves, they emphasize their own particular status as fictions.



144. Scene from a comedy. Paestan (South Italian) mixing bowl (calyx krater) signed by Assteas, ca. 350. Ht. 37 cm (14.6"). Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung. On a wooden stage, two men pull a miser off his treasure-chest.

So Figs. 142 and 144 stand at the threshold of the rich western tradition of text illustration. In contrast to their Athenian predecessors of Figs. 10, 40, 41, 51, 119, and 120, which are the products of an essentially oral culture, they are *text-dependent*. They could not have come about without texts, and they presume a literate public.

But do the losses outweigh the gains? In Fig. 142, unless we know the plot, all we see is a typical suppliant scene with people standing around chatting in a rather boring way. Only the inscriptions make them individually identifiable, and even then the picture generates only puzzlement unless one knows the specifics of Euripides's play. The same is true of Fig. 144, where no inscriptions are included and the scene has never been identified. In both cases, only by knowing the plot in detail can we know more than the characters in the picture; match our knowledge against theirs; understand the crisis (*krisis*) that they face; and enjoy envisioning the result. Contrast, for example, Fig. 10, where the action is self-evident and the tension palpable even if one does not know that the warrior is Hektor; or Figs. 40, 41, 44, 45, 51, 119, and 120, where the traditional myth supplies everything we need, to the same effect.

A second Iphigenia krater, painted in Campania a generation later (Fig. 143), goes even further. For the temple of Fig. 142 it substitutes a building



145. Iphigeneia, Orestes, and Pylades among the Taurians (Roman copy); original ca. 330. Detail of a fresco from the House of the Cithara Player at Pompeii; ht. of detail, ca. 1 m (3'4"). Naples, Museo Archeologico. Iphigeneia, partially visible at top right, emerges from Artemis's temple to interrogate the two bound captives, ready for sacrifice on the altar at right. The picture, most of which is badly damaged, probably copies a Greek fourth-century painting.

with a projecting porch at each end that looks suspiciously like the wooden scene-building of a typical fourth-century Greek theater (compare Fig. 108, possibly an excerpt from Euripides' *Medea*). The statue of Artemis stands in the left-hand porch, Iphigeneia in the right-hand one, and the naked Orestes and Pylades in between. The scene must refer to lines 989–1055 of the play, when Orestes has revealed his true identity to Iphigeneia and the two are plotting to steal the statue. Yet not only is the latter life-size and placed incongruously in front of the “temple” door (otherwise it would be invisible and the scene incomprehensible once more), but the two heroes are again naked, again wear swords (and now hold spears also), and stand on a bumpy ground line. This painter too could not bring himself entirely to abandon mythical “reality” and



146. Iphigeneia, Orestes, and Pylades among the Taurians (Roman copy); original ca. 330. Detail of a fresco from the House of L. Caecilius Iucundus, Pompeii; ht. 1.18 m (3'10"). Naples, Museo Archeologico. Iphigeneia emerges from Artemis's temple to interrogate the captive Orestes and Pylades. Orestes's elbow is visible at far left, showing that the picture, most of which is badly damaged, copies the same Greek original as that illustrated in Fig. 145.

the outdoors for the stage, but simply conflated them, with none too happy results.

These vases, however, leave one with a skewed impression of fourth-century painting. For this was the great age of Greek painting on wall and panel, of the master painters Euphranor, Nikias, Pausias, Apelles, and Protogenes. These works now are lost entirely except for some frescoes in Macedonian tombs and the inevitable Roman reproductions. To stick with the Iphigeneia legend (though the pictorial repertoire was of course vast and certainly not confined to Euripides or the theater), two battered Pompeian versions of

the same scene, Iphigeneia coming out of the temple to interrogate the bound Orestes and Pylades (*Iphigeneia among the Taurians* 467–9), give an inkling of just how grand these pictures could be (Figs. 145 and 146). Yet they also warn us not to take them too literally as copies, for Iphigeneia's pose and clothing are different in each.

This still tentative adaptation of the pictorial repertoire to the status of text illustration presages the text-and-image compositions of the Hellenistic period and, eventually, the entire tradition of western book illustration from the Roman Empire onwards. But all this lies well beyond our horizons. It is time to turn to Macedonia, Philip, and Alexander.