FROM DIVINE TO HUMAN: TRANSFORMATIONS AND INFLUENCES IN CLASSICAL GREEK ARTISTIC THOUGHT

KUTSAL OLANDAN İNSANA: KLASİK YUNAN SANAT DÜŞÜNCESİNDE DÖNÜŞÜM VE ETKİLER

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Abstract

The fifth century BCE stands out as a revolutionary period in Classical Greek philosophy, literature, and art, often regarded as a turning point and a golden age in the context of cultural history. The term classical originates from the outstanding artistic richness that emerged during this era in fields such as sculpture, painting, architecture, and theater. This artistic wealth, which becomes visible in the fifth century BCE, flourishes in the following Hellenistic period. The artistic revolution of this period is made possible by the rise of rational thought, which begins in the sixth century BCE but reaches its zenith in the fifth century BCE. This new rational perspective gradually replaces old mythological narratives with themes centered on human concerns. While many artifacts of the fifth century BCE reflect a synthesis of Pythagorean principles of mathematical proportion and Apollonian ideals of perfection, the philosophical inquiries of the Sophists and Socrates in the later part of the century begin to influence this revolutionary change. This philosophical shift directs art visibly towards human centered themes. It prompts artists, sculptors, and playwrights to explore both divine and human subjects within a new framework. This interdisciplinary study examines the transformation in Classical Greek artistic thought, tracing how divine representations in early artifacts, inspired by Eastern World, gradually give way to human centered themes. Analyzing this evolution within the philosophical, intellectual, and political context of the period, the paper seeks to clarify the complex relationship between emerging ideas and artistic innovations through selected examples of sculpture. By doing so, the research comparatively illuminates how mythological narratives evolved into human centered thought.

Öz

MÖ beşinci yüzyıl, Klasik Yunan felsefesi, edebiyatı ve sanatında devrimsel bir dönem olarak karşımıza çıkar ve sıklıkla kültür tarihsel bağlamda bir dönüm noktası, bir altın çağ olarak kabul edilir. Nitekim klasik terimi de bu dönemde beliren heykel, resim, mimari ve tiyatro gibi alanlardaki dikkat çekici sanatsal zenginlikten kaynaklanır. MÖ beşinci yüzyılda görünür olan bu sanatsal zenginlik takip eden Helenistik dönemde de etkisini sürdürür. Sanattaki bu devrim, MÖ altıncı yüzyılda başlayan ancak MÖ beşinci yüzyılda zirveye ulaşan rasyonel düşüncenin yükselişiyle mümkün olur. Bu rasyonel yeni düşünce sayesinde eski mitolojik söylenceler yavaş yavaş yerini insana dair olan konulara bırakır. MÖ beşinci yüzyılın çoğu eseri her ne kadar Pythagoras'ın matematiksel orantı ilkeleri ile Apolloncu mükemmeliyet ideallerini harmanlayan bir niteliğe sahip olsa da MÖ beşinci yüzyılın ilerleyen dönemlerinde Sofistlerin ve Sokrates'in felsefi sorgulamaları söz konusu devrimsel değişimi etkiler ve sanatı insan merkezli temalara doğru görünür şekilde dönüştürür. Böylece sanatçılar, heykeltraşlar ve oyun yazarları hem kutsal hem de insani konuları yeni bir çerçevede ele almaya başlarlar. Bu disiplinler arası çalışma, Klasik Yunan düşüncesindeki değişimi inceleyerek, Doğu'dan esinlenilmiş ilk yontu örneklerindeki tanrı tasvirlerinin zamanla terkedilip yerine nasıl insan temalarının geçtiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Dönemin felsefi, entelektüel ve siyasi bağlamı içinde söz konusu dönüşümü ele alan bu araştırma, yükselen fikirlerle sanatsal yenilikler arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi yontu sanatına ait seçilmiş örnekler vasıtasıyla netleştirmeyi amaçlamakta ve böylece mitolojik söylencenin insan merkezli bir düşünceye nasıl evrildiğini karşılaştırmalı olarak ortaya koymaktadır.

Introduction

The fifth century BCE represents a critical period in the history of Classical Greek art, philosophy, and literature, often regarded as a golden age that laid the foundation for Western artistic and intellectual traditions. During this period, art underwent a significant transformation, moving from the rigid and idealized depictions of earlier archaic sculptures to more naturalistic and human-centered representations. This transition was not merely a stylistic evolution but a reflection of deeper philosophical and intellectual developments that characterized Greek society at the time.

The research problem addressed in this study revolves around the question of how Classical Greek art transitioned from divine representations, influenced by Eastern traditions, to more human-centered themes, and what philosophical, intellectual, and cultural forces structured this transformation. This study, therefore, seeks to analyze the extent to which philosophical currents of the time—ranging from Pythagorean mathematical principles to the ethical inquiries of Socrates—shaped artistic expression in sculpture.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the intersection of art history, philosophy, and cultural studies. On this ground, it makes use of classical art historical methodologies to track stylistic and thematic developments in visual art, while also using philosophical analysis to understand how new ideas influenced artistic production. Major theoretical perspectives include the influence of Pythagorean mathematical principles, which emphasized harmony and proportion in artistic creation, and the Apollonian ideals of perfection, order, and rational beauty. Additionally, the study engages with interpretations of Sophistic and Socratic thought, which introduced ideas about human nature, ethics, and self-examination, concepts that gradually influenced artistic interpretations.

While many studies have analyzed those artistic developments of Classical Greek art, less attention has been given to how these changes were influenced by new philosophical ideas. This study, therefore, aims to fill this gap by exploring how Classical Greek sculpture evolved in response to intellectual and socio-political changes.

By integrating these perspectives, this research offers a comprehensive examination of the relationship between artistic innovation and intellectual transformation in Classical Greece. Through a comparative analysis of selected sculptures from this period, the study employs an interdisciplinary approach to demonstrate how Greek art served as a medium for intellectual and cultural dialogue, ultimately shaping the artistic legacy of Western civilization.

Eastern Influence on Greek Sculpture

Sculpture began with the use of clay and stone, followed by wood, and later progressed to materials such as ivory, marble, and eventually metal. In the Archaic Greek world, people initially depicted gods through unworked wood or rectangular stones, similar to the practices of "*the Amazons or the Arabs."*[1] Early examples like "The Juno at Thespiai and the Diana at Ikaria were formed in much the same way." Additionally, "*Diana Patroa and Jupiter Meilichios at Corinth and the earliest Venus at Paphos*" were little more than stylized columns. Gods such as Eros and the goddesses of beauty were envisioned as mere stones, while Bacchus was represented in the form of a column. According to Winckelmann, even during the finest periods of ancient Greece, the term "*column"* (kion) was synonymous with "statue". Over time, rudimentary heads without facial features were added to these stone figures (Winckelmann, 2006, p. 112).

The first major shift in sculpture took place when Daedalus,[2] known from Greek mythology, separated the lower sections of the column-like figures to represent legs. This change initiated a significant innovation in early sculptural representation. However, as working on stone figures was not yet developed, the earliest examples were made of wood. These early wooden sculptures were commonly used as idols or objects of worship, depicting crude and simplistic representations of gods. These wooden representations which were known as xoana (ksoana),[3] unfortunately, have not survived to the present day.

Roughly framing, the Greek sculptures from the Geometric Period (circa tenth–eighth centuries BCE) were quite rudimentary. As O'Donnell notes, these representations were much simpler compared to Egyptian examples (O'Donnell, 2015, p. 6).[4] However, by the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, also known as the Archaic Period, sculptures made significant advancements, producing more sophisticated works compared to earlier periods.

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1 This interaction is observed not only in sculptures but also in Greek architecture. Hence, the discussion is categorized under three main styles: first, the Doric style; then the Ionic style (with a mention of the earlier Aeolic style in some cases); and finally, the more ornate Corinthian style, which gained prominence during the Hellenistic period. Following these, during the Roman era, the Composite style emerged, blending elements of the Ionic and Corinthian orders.

2 According to legend, Daedalus, whose name means 'skillfully crafted,' is considered the first Greek sculptor. Often thought to have been an architect by origin, he is most famously associated with constructing the labyrinth for King Minos of Crete.

3 Winckelmann provides an intriguing detail regarding the early wooden sculptures. He recounts how Diagoras, a legendary figure from Antiquity known for rejecting traditional gods, used a wooden statue of Hercules as firewood to cook his meal when he couldn't find other fuel (Winckelmann, 2006, p. 116).

4 Excavations have revealed smaller terracotta figures found within graves or altars. However, as these were created as votive offerings, they have been regarded as decorative items rather than being classified under the Fine Arts.

By the fifth century BCE and the subsequent fourth century BCE, known as the Classical Period, some monumental changes in sculptural art occurred, thereby marking a golden age for Greek art.

Initially, the Greeks worked with limestone and sandstone, but they quickly learned to utilize the marble readily available in their environment, and made rapid advancements in carving this material. By the fifth century BCE, that is the peak of the Greek sculpture, bronze joined marble as a primary material for sculpture. Bonnard notes that the celebrated sculptors of Greek art, such as Myron, Polykleitos, and later Lysippos, were not primarily stone carvers but bronze workers (Bonnard, 2004, p.44).[5] However, very few of their original works have survived to this day. Most of the examples we have are the replicas of later periods. The primary reason for the loss of original bronze sculptures resulted from the reemployment of these artifacts in later periods. The materials made of bronze were melted down to make bells, coins, and, in more recent times, cannons for warfare.

Archaeological records indicate that life-sized or larger stone statues were not found in Greece before the seventh century BCE. As is well known, early epic examples such as *Gilgamesh*, *Enuma Elish*, and *Kumarbi*, along with their introducing the concept of a pantheon dominated by male gods, demonstrate the significant influence of Eastern cultural traditions on the Greek world. It is, therefore, understandable that the sculptures, created from the mid-seventh century BCE onward, similar to the examples of epics, bear similarities to Eastern examples. When the increasing interactions between the Greek and Eastern worlds from the seventh century BCE are considered, the inspirational effect of the eastern artifacts in Archaic Greek sculpture comes to be more understandable. According to Richter, this interaction intensified after 672 BCE, when Egypt conquered Assyria, and it was reinforced by mercenaries and settlers traveling from Ionia and Caria to Egypt during the same period (Richter, 1969, p. 56). Winckelmann, however, argues that significant interaction was only possible after the reign of Pharaoh Psammetichus I (c. 664–610 BCE). He notes that before Psammetichus, foreigners were not allowed to enter into Egypt and the Greek scholars who visited Egypt during this time primarily aimed to study the Egyptian system of governance (Winckelmann, 2006, p. 113).

We have no particular reason to debate the exact timing of this interaction. However, as evident from the epics, we know that the interactions date back much earlier. Regardless of when and how it began, the influence of Eastern cultures such as Phoenicia, Assyria,

[5] All translations of the cited work to English are my own.

and Egypt became apparent in early Greek sculptures, especially starting from the seventh century BCE, when Greek colonies also began to grow.[6] On the other hand, it is also essential to note that Anatolian civilizations, such as the Hittites and Phrygians, played a significant role in influencing Greek artistic philosophy as well.

The results of this interaction can be observed in two aspects: on one hand, in the variety of materials used for creating sculptures; on the other, in certain themes that emerged in Archaic Greek art. For instance, the use of ivory and bronze became prevalent thanks to the connections established with the Near East, including regions like Egypt, Syria, and Phoenicia. Homer, for example, mentions sword hilts, scabbards, and beds made from ivory. Similarly, motifs specific to the East, such as *"lotus and palmette,"* and mythical and animal figures like sphinxes, panthers, and lions, which were common in the arts of Eastern countries, began to appear in Archaic Greek art (Richter, 1969, p. 297). However, depictions of monstrous creatures started to diminish after the sixth century BCE. Additionally, figures began to be adorned with gold over time, similar to the Egyptian examples.

When specifically referring to Egypt, it is, however, important to note that its historical range covers a wide timeline including Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, as well as the various dynasties within the Egyptian world. The vast timeline of Egyptian civilization, encompassing a rich and diverse body of sculptures and reliefs, therefore displays historical differences as well.[7] Within this framework, when referring to Egyptian influence on Greek sculpture, it should be underlined that the focus is primarily on the foundational similarities seen in the earliest examples.

Kouros and Kore Sculptures in Ancient Greek Art

The influence of the East on Greek sculpture is clearly visible in the two fundamental depictions that marked the early Greek art, particularly during a time when interactions with the East were increasing. From the sixth century BCE onwards, two prominent representations emerged in Greek sculpture: the male (kouros) and female (kore) figures. These sculptures, which were primarily found in regions such as Attica, the Peloponnese,

6 Martin Robertson notes that the influence of the East, particularly Egypt, is also present in early depictions on vases. Figures shaped in black are painted in brown tones, similar to Egyptian examples, to highlight the skin color (Robertson, 1959, p. 46).

7 The depictions in Egyptian sculpture are remarkably diverse and cannot be reduced to a single category. For instance, the *Seated Scribe* statue, dated to circa 2600–2350 BCE and discovered during excavations at Saqqara, serves as a testament to the sophistication of ancient Egyptian sculpture. Depicted seated with a loincloth, holding a papyrus scroll and seemingly engaged in writing, this exceptional piece exemplifies the advanced artistic and technical skill of its time.

Boeotia, and the Aegean Islands, clearly reflect Egyptian influence, especially in their depiction style. The figures are block-like, standing stiffly and frontally, similar to the artistic manner seen in Egyptian art.[8]

The importance of anatomical knowledge for sculpture is evident, but it was rather limited in Egypt since dissection and study of the human body were prohibited. For instance, embalming, which required the removal and preservation of internal organs, and hence known by them, remained a highly secretive craft passed down from father to son. As a result, the depictions of the human body in Egyptian art lacked realistic anatomical accuracy. Facial features like the nose and ears were often depicted disproportionately, a characteristic that was also noticeable in the depiction of sphinxes. Additionally, features like high cheekbones, small chins, flat and wide feet, and minimal variation in toe lengths were typical.

Although the Greeks would later succeed in creating more proportional and refined sculptures, early Greek representations, in this context, especially those influenced by Eastern examples, remained block-like and lacked detailed anatomical realism.

The Nicandra Kore found at the Artemis Temple in Delos is one of the earliest examples of the kore (maiden) sculptures from the Archaic period, dating back to around 580 BCE. Another early example is *The Berlin Kore* (fig. 1) (Richter, 1969, p. 65), also dating to approximately the same time, clearly exhibits Eastern influence in its block-like form. The figure is identified as female, with her long, braided hair and head accessories. These early statues—kouroi and korai—are often compared to ksoana (wooden idols) due to their simplified and rigid forms.

[8] The *Auxerre Kore*, not depicted at life-size, is one of the early examples dating back to circa 640–630 BCE and clearly displays Egyptian influence. This influence is evident in its frontal representation, the positioning of one hand at chest level, and the wig-like hairstyle adorning its head. In some similar statuettes, unlike the fully dressed female figures typically seen in sculpture, the female body is portrayed in the nude, deviating from the norm.


(Fig.1)


(Fig.2)

Another example is *The Samos Hera* (fig. 2) (Neer, 2010, p. 35), dating to around 560 BCE, features a tube-shaped body and a tunic extending to the ground. Although the head is missing, the female character is indicated by the figure's breasts. However, the hips are less defined, giving the sculpture a somewhat lifeless appearance, that is much like a *"log turned into a woman"* as described by Bonnard (Bonnard, 2004, p. 49).

One notable feature of these sculptures is the difference in the depiction of woman (kore) versus man (kouros). While male figures are typically depicted nude, female figures are portrayed fully clothed in garments such as peplos or chiton (fig. 3) (dating to circa 535 BCE) (Neer, 2010, p. 35),[9] which highlights cultural attitudes towards modesty and the role of gender in archaic Greece.

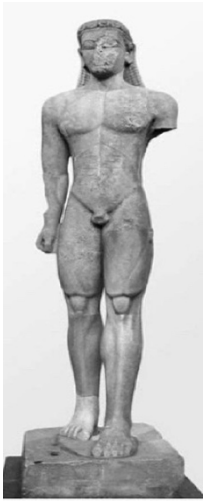

(Fig.3)

The korai were originally painted in vivid reds and blues, and their characteristic poses often show one arm raised and bent at the elbow, while the other holds their garment. Later examples from the late Archaic period, such as those found at the Acropolis, often

9 The copy next to the statue presents the Kore as restored.

depict korai with smiling expressions, braided hair, and holding flowers or fruit, typical of the common depictions of the time.

As mentioned above, another example of early sculptures influenced by Eastern traditions is male (kouros) figures. These male representations which typically were discovered in sanctuaries dedicated to Apollo, were, therefore, often identified as Apollo by archaeologists. They were usually depicted as young and nude male (The Sounion -Votive Kouros- dating to circa 600-575 BCE) (fig. 4) (Neer, 2010, p. 24).



(Fig. 4)

Although clothed examples have been found in the sixth century Ionian contexts, the predominant form of kouroi is nude. As argued above, although we know that these figures were initially named Apollo, there is little evidence to firmly support this identification. Therefore, over time, scholars have reached a consensus that kouroi were primarily used as votive offerings or memorial monuments rather than representations of deities. A similar debate surrounds the kore sculptures. Based on inscriptions, some female figures (kore) have been interpreted as representing goddesses, priestesses, or even Persephone. However, the prevailing scholarly view today acknowledges that most of the female figures, like their counterparts kouroi, depict mortals and were commonly used as grave markers or offerings.

Before the seventh century BCE, no examples of kouroi have been found. In the typical male sculptures, the eyes were often depicted as large, almond-shaped, and slightly protruding from their sockets (fig 7-8), while facial features were rendered with simple lines. Although their male bodies were depicted with greater accuracy —since nude athletes competing in games provided a great opportunity for the observation— (Winckelmann, 2006, p. 196),[10] their representations still fell short of full anatomical realism. Kouroi were

[10] Gymnasiums, where youths wrestled naked and participated in other competitions, were also places people visited to admire the beauty of young men. For artists, these spaces served as schools where they could observe and study the beauty of the human form. The daily opportunity to see nude bodies sparked their

generally characterized by narrow waists, flat abdomens, broad shoulders, and firm, compact hips. This athletic and youthful depiction, in particular, may have caused some archaeologists to associate these figures with Apollo, interpreting their powerful forms as symbolic of divine strength.

Despite their aesthetic appeal, these early archaic sculptures did not yet demonstrate the balance and harmony associated with the later Pythagorean ideals of the fifth century BCE, when Greek sculpture would reach its zenith. In the male (kouros) figures, the arms typically hung straight and close to the body, with fists often clenched. It was a stylistic feature reminiscent of Eastern influences, particularly Egyptian models. Similarly, the legs showed little indication of movement, though the left leg was usually positioned slightly forward. This frontal focus, emphasizing the head, torso, hips, and legs when viewed from the front, dominated kouros design. According to Bonnard, this stance might have held *"ritual significance"* in the Egyptian context, but in the Greek world, no clear justification for this pose exists. Furthermore, from an anatomical perspective, Bonnard argues that positioning one leg forward does not have *"a significant impact on muscle dynamics"* in the figure (Bonnard, 2004, p.53).

In addition to the standing sculptures, there were also seated depictions among archaic sculptures (*Offering of Khares* from Didyma dating to circa 550 BCE) (fig. 5) (Neer, 2010, p. 34), where the influence of Eastern traditions is evident.

(Fig. 5)

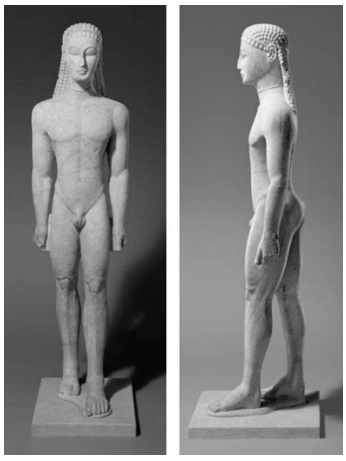
These seated figures were portrayed in a rigid, front-facing posture, emphasizing their frontal view, much like their standing counterparts. The seated sculptures generally displayed feet placed closely together and hands extending downward past the knees, often depicted as clenched fists. These characteristics aligned closely with Eastern sculptural

imagination, enabling them to internalize the ideals of physical perfection. Winckelmann 2006, 196-197. The word *'gymnasium'* originates from the ancient Greek word *gymnos*, meaning naked.

styles. Moreover, the figures were typically covered in thick fabric, with the garments represented in a simplified manner. The parts of the clothing that covered the feet often included subtle folds, a detail that, according to Richter, was likely derived from Assyrian sculptures (Richter, 1969, p. 56).

To summarize, although there were seated examples, standing sculptures were far more prevalent in the Archaic period, and these often lacked a sense of motion. The representation of joints and muscles was still unrealistic, with common inaccuracies such as disproportionately placed ears.

However, there were notable distinctions from Eastern examples as well. For instance, *The Samos Hera* (fig. 2), as mentioned above, despite its lifeless appearance, displayed a more defined spine and waist contour when viewed from behind. These were the features which were absent in earlier or Eastern sculptures. Similarly, *The New York Kouros* (fig. 6), dated to circa 590–580 BCE, and *The Votive Kouros* dated to circa 600-575 BCE (fig. 4), introduced innovations absent in both Persian and Egyptian sculptures. Unlike the short-skirted depictions, which were typical of Eastern art, these kouroi were portrayed fully nude. This shift was a groundbreaking innovation in Greek art, as it emphasized the human form in its wholeness. Another difference was in the treatment of space between extremities. While the spaces between arms and legs in Egyptian sculptures were often filled for structural stability, the Greek sculptors introduced voids, creating a sense of openness and depth.



(Fig. 6)

Furthermore, *The New York Kouros* (fig.6) (Neer, 2010, p. 25) pioneered a new approach by standing independently without the support of a back pillar, which was typically used in Egyptian sculptures. This innovation allowed the kouros to be viewed from all angles, thereby making them move beyond the one-dimensional frontal perspective dominant in Eastern art.

Another significant distinction in early Greek sculptures was the absence of animal-headed depictions among their representations of gods and goddesses. As is well known, post-Homeric Greek thought visualized deities exclusively in human form. In this reading, although the early Greek sculptures relatively showed similarities to Eastern traditions, their humanlike (anthropomorphic) depiction of Greek gods set their art apart from the Eastern convention, where animal-headed figures, like in Egyptian or Mesopotamian cultures, were prominent.[11]

Before exemplifying the transformations of the sculpture taking place in the fifth century BCE, it's also essential to emphasize another distinctive feature of archaic kouroi; that is their facial expressions. Specifically, the subtle smile often seen on their lips —a feature commonly referred to as the *archaic smile*— (*The Anavysos Kouros* dating to circa 540-515 BCE) (fig. 7) (Neer, 2010, p. 43) and (a Kouros head from Attica dating to circa 540-515) (fig. 8) (Richter, 1984, p. 58) was a groundbreaking innovation of the period.

(Fig.7)

(Fig. 8)

This enigmatic expression provided the sculptures with a sense of life and individuality, making it a hallmark of Archaic Greek sculpture. It reflected an attempt to bridge the rigidity of earlier forms with a blossoming exploration of emotional depth, which would later be fully realized in the examples of Classical art.

Bonnard notes that the enigmatic archaic smile of kouroi sculptures has been a subject of extensive debate among most of ancient art historians. From this point of view, some experts have argued that this characteristic smile was not a deliberate artistic choice but rather a result of "*technical ineptitude*" (Bonnard, 2004, p. 51). According to these interpretations, crafting a smiling mouth was considered simpler than depicting a static, neutral expression. Bonnard, however, offers a more symbolic explanation. He posits that

[11] When it comes to Jewish tradition, the situation is entirely different. According to Mosaic law, depicting God in human form was strictly forbidden, and therefore making sculpture was a prohibited art form.

if the kouroi indeed represented the god Apollo, their smiles could embody "*the divine privilege of eternal happiness symbolizing a reflection of the blissful life exclusive to the gods*" (p. 52). This interpretation elevates the smile from a mere technical solution for a problem to a deliberate artistic expression of divine contentment.

By the late sixth century BCE, around 510 BCE, this archaic smile disappeared, marking a stylistic shift. Whether its origins reside in technical limitations or symbolic intent, the prevailing discussion seems to be highlighting the evolving sophistication of Greek sculpture in this period of time.

Transformations the Sculptures Underwent

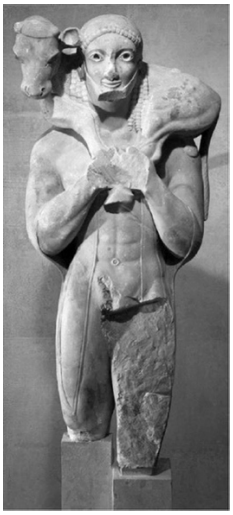
From the late sixth century BCE, a wave of transformation began to unfold, accelerating in the fifth century BCE. This shift demonstrates how sculptors and their creations were profoundly influenced by the intellectual atmosphere of the time. Numerous artifacts from the early fifth century BCE have survived to the present day. A significant reason for the preservation of many artifacts particularly from the Attica is related to the 480 BCE Persian destruction of the Athenian Acropolis, after which the Athenians buried these objects in trenches.

When comparing the artifacts from the Late Archaic period (circa 540–480 BCE) to earlier examples, some prominent differences seem to have emerged, such as those seen in the *Apollo* figure —bronze— dated to circa 500 BCE (*Apollo from Piraeus*) (fig. 9) (Neer, 2010, p.37). Robertson highlights that the first quarter of the fifth century BCE marks a definitive break from archaic traditions, coinciding with the period of increased tension from the Persian threat (Robertson, 1959, p. 121). To put it differently, during this period, nationalism was on the rise, and the idea of being Greek was idealized and clearly reflected in the works of the time.

(Fig. 9)

Superficiality, which was a characteristic of earlier periods, was now replaced with increased anatomical precision. Fingers were no longer depicted homogeneously in length, arms gained dynamism, and while the left leg remained forward, both legs were portrayed with more realistic shaping. Additionally, chest formations broadened, and details such as hips, collarbones, and neck muscles were rendered with greater accuracy and prominence.

However, there were some earlier examples such as *The Calf Bearer* dating to circa 560 BCE (fig. 10) (Neer, 2010, p. 115), which technically signals the transition period and clearly exemplifies these evolving styles.


(Fig. 10)

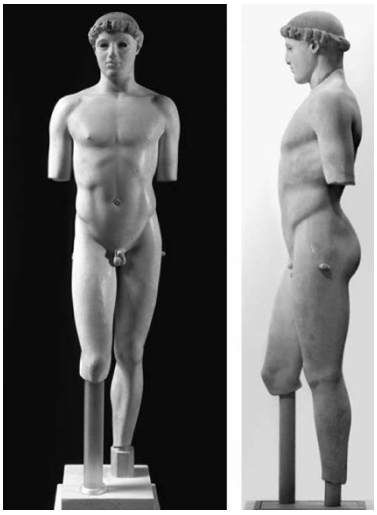
This figure, presenting a man carrying a calf, proves how their mastery deviated from the kouroi traditions. Although his left foot was positioned forward, as a reminiscent of kouros sculptures, some notable differences appeared as well. Unlike the youthful and beardless kouroi, *The Calf Bearer* was depicted with a beard, suggesting maturity and individuality. Another key distinction was in the posture and interaction within the figure: the arms, rather than remaining fixed to the sides as in kouroi, engaged dynamically with the calf, holding it across his shoulders. However, the rest of the body still exhibited a certain rigidity, as though *"unaffected by the weight of the burden"* (Bonnard, 2004, p. 60). While reflecting the persistence of archaic conventions, this transitional piece also introduced the gradual movement towards greater naturalism and emotional expressiveness in Greek sculpture.

The Aphaia Temple on the island of Aegina in Greece, dating back to the sixth century BCE, offers another significant example of changes in Greek sculpture. Particularly, the temple's friezes depicting the Trojan Warriors illustrate the transitional level in art, where, although the upper parts of the bodies were still static, asymmetry slightly came to be visible. This shift allowed for more dynamic representations as the scenes of squatting or

half-kneeling of figures brought movement to the limbs. Moreover, the reliefs on the west and east pediments, which were carved at different times—approximately from 490 BCE and 480 BCE—, depicted the gradual evolution in artistic philosophy during this period. Compared to the more naturalistic and expressive figures on the east pediment, attributed to the later phase, the earlier west pediment depicted more archaic lines.

As the fifth century BCE progressed, these changes became even more obvious. Sculptures such as Kritian [Kritios] Boy (fig. 11) (circa 480-475 BCE) and the Charioteer of Delphi (circa 478 BCE) exemplify the shift from the rigid, stylized representations of the seventh and early sixth centuries to more natural, proportional depictions of the human form. In relation to the changes taking place during this time there is an agreement among the scholars who state that these sculptures, with their increased naturalism, reflected the pride and confidence of the Greek people following their victory over the Persians at the Battle of Marathon (490 BCE). This triumph was seen as a pivotal moment in the rise of Greek nationalism, and therefore was reflected in the idealized representations in art from this period on. In other words, the victory over the Persians played a key role in fostering a sense of collective Greek identity and pride, which was mirrored in the art of the time, emphasizing both physical harmony and human dignity.

The most significant aspect distinguishing this period from the early Archaic period is the gradual emergence of more natural representations of the human body. Harmony and proportion came to be focal points in sculpture during this transitional phase. For instance, movement was introduced to the head and one leg, and thereby making them move away from the rigid, front-facing kouros figures of the earlier period. While the shoulders continued to be portrayed frontally, the upper torso and head began to turn slightly to the side, creating a more dynamic composition. *The Kritian Boy* (fig. 11) (circa 480-475 BCE) (Neer, 2010, p. 51) exemplifies this transitional phase. One leg bears the body's weight, while the other is positioned forward, with the head turned slightly to the side. The knees are depicted at differing heights, reflecting the natural shift in weight between the supporting leg and the relaxed one. This subtle depiction of movement marked a departure from the static poses of earlier kouros figures, illustrating the evolution of Greek sculpture towards more lifelike and balanced representations.

 (Fig. 11)

Thus, the sculptures of this transitional period, which we can describe as a bridge between the eras, gained a dramatically more realistic approach compared to earlier works. The static, rigid, uniform, and block-like depictions of older sculptures were replaced by representations that infused the body with movement and introduced emotional nuance, though little, which subsequently resulted in a more flexible and expressive style. Friedell describes this emerging style as characterized by *"a deliberate precision and sharpness, revealed through the rigidity of its lines and the sharpness of its movements, embodying a youthful vigor"* (Friedell, 1999, p. 204).[12] Additionally, the pride and grandeur fostered by newly appearing Greek nationalism began to manifest visibly in these artifacts, thereby reflecting the cultural and ideological shifts of the time.

However, the pivotal transformation that marked the era had not yet occurred. The true revolution in artistic philosophy would emerge in the later stages of the fifth century BCE.

Towards a Golden Era

Before exploring the differences that arose in the later stages of the fifth century BCE, it is essential to first acknowledge Pericles's significance in the Classical Greek world. Pericles, who was an Athenian statesman, orator and general, was influential in shaping the artistic, intellectual, and political developments of this period, which is often referred to as the Golden Age of Athens. Understanding his influence enables us to grasp how multiple cultural factors contributed to the evolution of new sculptural forms.

[12] All translations of the cited work to English are my own.

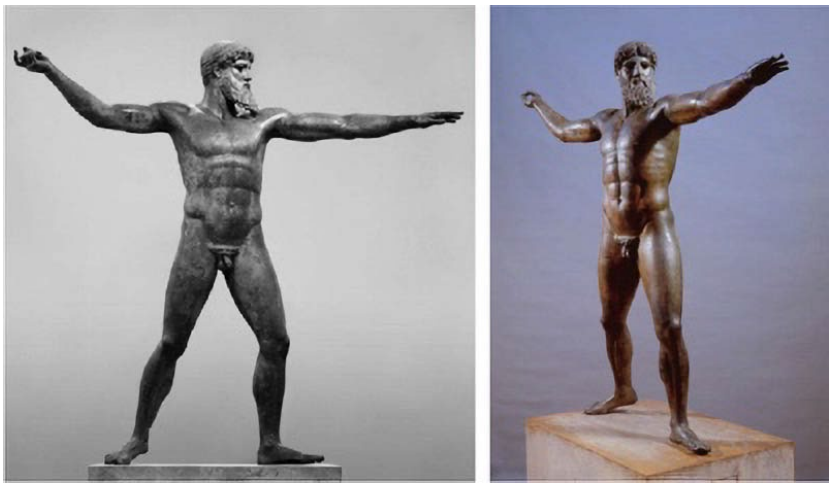
Under Pericles's leadership (461–429 BCE), a surge in nationalist sentiment, having appeared after the Persian Wars, became more widespread. The increase in nationalism during this era manifested itself as a central concern of Greek intellectual life, finding expression not only in the sculpture of the period but also in its tragedies. During this period, along with rising nationalism Athens became a nucleus of enlightenment. Democracy,[13] which was introduced as a promising form by Cleisthenes in 507 BCE, reached its zenith during Pericles's time. Flourishing of democracy, which coincided with a remarkable proliferation of literature and art, solidified Athens's position as the cultural center of the Classical Greek world. Pericles's patronage attracted lots of thinkers, statesmen, architects, and tragedians, all of whom contributed significantly to this transformative era.

Among Pericles's well-known friends there were Protagoras, a leading figure among the Sophists; Pheidias, the architect behind iconic works such as the sculpture of Zeus at Olympia and the Athena sculpture in the Athenian Acropolis; and Anaxagoras, a pluralist philosopher. The arrival of philosophers, scientists, and artists into Athens during his time was particularly significant as their collaboration under Pericles's protection did not only enrich Athens's cultural atmosphere but also directed the route of intellectual development. While it would be an exaggeration to claim that their ideas immediately overturned traditional beliefs, their presence undoubtedly originated a process of questioning some long-held religious and moral convictions, thereby marking the beginning of deep changes, and laying the foundation for the intellectual and cultural shifts that would define the Classical Age.

During this golden age of literature, philosophy, and art; the sculptures of the period inevitably reflected a deep transformation. They embodied the defining ideals of Classical Greek culture, centering around the Pythagorean emphasis on mathematical proportionality and the Apollonian pursuit of perfection. Although divine figures, mythological narratives, and traditional motifs remained prominent in artifacts, the anthropocentric worldview emerging under Pericles's support gradually began to assert itself. This shift introduced a subtle yet discernible focus on human experience and individuality, marking the early stages of a new artistic and intellectual perspective.

[13] Regarding the etymology of the word democracy, *demos* translates to 'the people' while *kratos* means 'power' or 'rule' (Tanilli, 2012, p. 9).

This revolution was based on incorporating idealized human movement into the sculptures, crafted with extraordinary skill. It represented Apollonian idealism and the Pythagorean principles of harmony and proportion. *The Poseidon* sculpture (or Zeus, as some sources suggest), dating to circa 470-450 BCE (fig. 12) (Neer, 2010, p. 86-113), is one of the greatest examples illustrating this transformation. Depicted in mid-action, the figure steps forward, its right arm raised, seemingly poised to hurl a spear.



(Fig. 12)

According to Richter, this sculpture represented a groundbreaking integration of anatomical accuracy and monumental form, "*with all parts co-ordinated and with a new majesty,*" thereby granting the sculpture a newfound monumentality (Richter, 1969, p. 100). O'Donnell further emphasizes that *The Poseidon* achieved perfect arrangement between anatomy and movement. The naturalism in its pose along with the god's imposing gaze created a dramatic dynamic with the viewer, as if drawing them into an intimate, almost confrontational relationship with the divine. This was an experience intensified by the perceived trajectory of the spear (O'Donnell, 2015, p, 11-12). This innovation set the stage for the Classical period's long-term legacy in art and sculpture.

Another notable shift observed during this period was the emphasis on capturing the "*emotion*" not only in the posture and "*attitudes of the figures*" but now also in their facial features revealing *"pain, surprise, fear, and exaltation"* (Richter, 1969, p. 100). This development marked a significant leap in the artistic portrayal of individuality and emotional depth. Therefore, in the following periods, the gradual emergence of personal sculptures and busts reflecting distinct identities and expressions would no longer come as a surprise.

In this context, the shift in facial expression highlighted the growing sophistication in Greek sculpture, where physical realism and idealized form were increasingly complemented by subtle expressions that conveyed character, mood, and even inner life.

The route from collective and archetypal representations to individualized depictions set the foundation for the portraiture tradition that would flourish in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Myron's *The Discobolus* (The Discus Thrower)

Dated to around 455 BCE, Myron's *The Discobolus*, the Roman copy of which has survived to the present day, is one of the most iconic works of the Classical period, embodying the *revolution of movement* in Greek sculpture. This masterpiece, which marked a significant departure from earlier kouroi and divine representations, also marked the beginning of a new era in Classical sculpture as it depicts a human athlete engaged in a moment of athletic action.

The Discobolus (fig. 13) belongs to the mid-fifth century BCE, which, as argued before, was a time of considerable intellectual and cultural transformation in Greece. The period witnessed the rise of Sophist philosophy, Socrates, and their focus on human-centered thought and knowledge. Although these thinkers' ideas gained popularity later in the century,[14] their emphasis on humanity and individual potential shaped the artistic atmosphere of the time. However, while we can assuredly state that the intellectual atmosphere of the fifth century BCE was increasingly reflected in the works of sculptors during this transformative century, the thematic and technical foundations of these changes were primarily in the Apollonian and Pythagorean traditions.

In this context, Myron's masterpieces *The Discobolus* and also *The Marsyas,* while fundamentally drawing inspiration from Apollonian idealism, represent a groundbreaking innovation for its time. During this period, alongside the depiction of non-divine figures influenced by the popularity of athletic competitions, significant technical advancement was achieved in sculpture. Beginning in the fifth century BCE, a style known as *Contrapposto* (counterpoise) (Boardmann, 1993, p. 103)—characterized by the balance of the figure's posture around its center of gravity—gained momentum. This technique allowed for the most refined depiction of movement within the human form. Myron's *The Discobolus,* on this ground, depicts the athlete (dating to circa 460-450 BCE) (fig. 13) (Neer, 2010, p. 89) at the critical moment just before throwing the discus, presenting the body in dynamic asymmetry.

[14] The influence of Sophist and Socratic thought, whether positive or negative, is most evident in the tragedies of Euripides and the comedies of Aristophanes within the art of drama.


(Fig. 13)

The figure leans forward, its right foot firmly fixed to provide support, while the right arm, holding the discus, arches backward to gather force. Meanwhile, the left arm and leg counterbalance the motion, creating a harmonious flow of energy through the body. The head turns slightly toward the weight-bearing leg, and a sense of motion flows across the entire sculpture, illustrating a rhythmic refinement that characterizes this era's technical and artistic mastery.

Thus, depictions emphasizing the sense of movement became increasingly dominant, particularly in the sculptures of athletes which were influenced, as stated above, by the commonly practiced athletic competitions. With Myron, the deliberate balance was achieved through the consideration of asymmetry as a fundamental element of movement. This balance and harmony, which became possible through contrasts, came to be a defining principle of Classical Greek art. The shift in artistic vision, as emphasized above, would later manifest widely during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Bober highlights the importance of balance and harmony in a different context, particularly, in relation to the depictions on the Parthenon friezes. According to him, the sculptors followed a principle known as *isocephaly*, whereby all the figures, regardless of their being human or animal, seated or standing, were depicted with heads at the same height (Bober, 1999, p. 115). Despite this uniformity in head height, hierarchical differences were highlighted by varying the sizes of the figures. This approach was also seen in Egyptian art, where gods, kings, and queens were depicted as larger and more elaborately adorned figures, while others were rendered smaller and less prominently.

As highlighted earlier, one of the most significant features emerging in the fifth century BCE was the central emphasis on idealized, perfect representations that embodied balance and harmony. A key factor strengthening the concept of *ideal reality* in this period was the cultural and spiritual importance of those athletic games. According to Watson, the

sculptures of athletic male bodies were carved with perfect precision because the champions of these games were celebrated as individuals blessed with divine strength. These games, in this regard, symbolized the bestowal of divine support, and depicted perfection as a characteristic of those endowed with godlike powers. The sculptors, while striving for realistic depictions of details like "*muscles, hair, and genitalia*," also combined the finest features from various individuals to emphasize both beauty and divinity within the representations (Watson, 2005, p. 143). Myron's *The Discobolus,* as a prototypical example, therefore, was not only a symbol of physical perfection but also a manifestation of Apollonian rationality and self-control. This sculpture stood for the ideals appreciated in Athens, where individuals, emulating the gods, were encouraged to exercise control over their passions since it was deemed a vital virtue.

The Apollonian rationalism[15] evident in such works also served for a civic purpose, and thereby aiming at reinforcing the societal values. These sculptures symbolically educated citizens to submit to "*eunomia"* which meant the public wellbeing protected by the laws. However, as Bober notes, this expectation of lawfulness was rooted in the voluntary will of the citizens, ultimately elevating the individual's contribution to the democratic community. Thus, the ideals celebrated in these sculptures accentuated both the collective order and the value of individual activity (Bober, 1999, p. 116).

In this context, two critical aspects deserve attention. First, while Myron's *The Discobolus* initiated a focus on the human figure, it simultaneously integrated idealized elements of reality, divinity, and perfection. This combination reflected the intellectual spirit of the time, where Pythagorean proportions, Apollonian order, deliberate restraint, and early glimpses of Socratic rationality were united around the concept of an idealized reality. Second, a technical consideration emerged. Unlike the motionless, timeless representations of archaic art, Myron's *The Discobolus* brought the figure to life, implanting it within the fluidity of time and situating it within a specific moment. However, as Bonnard notes, this

[15] Nietzsche, in his reflections on the dichotomy of Apollonian and Dionysian forces, articulates that under the dominion of Apollonian rationality, beauty triumphs over the inherent sufferings of life. He observes that individual pain is transcended through the sublime glorification of appearance's eternity, effectively denying suffering as an inherent aspect of nature. In this framework, Nietzsche associates sculpture, a medium rooted in the visual, with the Apollonian impulse, while connecting music, a non-visual art form, with the Dionysian. He emphasizes the contrast between these two drives, often describing them as existing side by side in a state of profound conflict. This enduring association between sculpture and the Apollonian is significant even today. Ideals of form, posture, harmony, and beauty in art are deeply influenced by Apollonian notions of perfection and balance. Myron's Discobolus, for example, embodies these ideals. Despite focusing on the human subject, it integrates notions of divinity, perfection, and measured rationality into its portrayal, positioning human qualities within broader, idealized metaphysical principles (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 114-125).

depicted motion is less about a continuous action and more about a "*frozen slice*" of an idealized moment. Consequently, the sculpture did not portray objective reality but rather an idealized, momentary representation of it. Bonnard also adds that the realism in such examples stemmed from the sculptor's ability to capture and solidify faithfully the essence of the observed body. When the sculptor exercised selective judgment, choosing elements from reality to depict, they embraced the path of "*classicism*," helping them become a classical artist (Bonnard, 2004, p. 61-62). Therefore, along with *The Discobolus*, while the sense of movement entered the sculptural tradition, it did so within the confines of classical perfection.

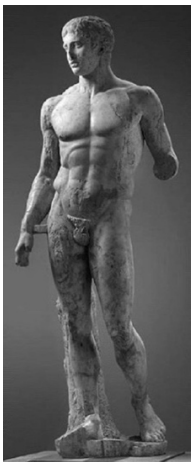
Polykleitos and *The Doryphoros* (The Spear-Bearer)

Myron's *The Discobolus* may have marked a significant turning point in Classical Greek sculpture, but it was with his contemporary Polykleitos (480-420 BCE) that the art form truly reached its pinnacle of sophistication. Polykleitos brought a deeper focus on human characteristics in his works. This shift marked a departure from an emphasis on divinity, as sculptures of the time gradually began to exclude their obvious godliness within their works. In relation to this transformation, from this era onward "*there were fewer gods depicted in human form, but far more humans elevated to a divine stature*" (Bonnard, 2004, p. 64). This evolution reflected the flourishing of humanism that would define Greek Classicism since the sculptures of this era projected a noble pride in the faithful demeanor of both human and divine actions.

Similar to Homer and Hesiod, who long ago loosened religious and mythological themes into a literary framework, Classical sculptures gradually separated themselves from strict traditionalism. Even in their greatness, these works began to contain a more human centered attitude, complying with the intellectual and artistic currents of their time. Polykleitos's masterpieces in general, *The Doryphoros* (dating to circa 450-440 BCE) in particular, therefore, symbolized this amalgamation of humanism and idealism, while demonstrating the evolving character of Classical Greek art as it moved toward a more refined and realistic representation of the human experience.

In images where the purely divine was no longer the only subject, idealism was interwoven with a sense of motion that carried continuity. As is recalled, Myron's athlete (fig.13) did not represent continuing motion but rather an idealized moment frozen in time. But when it was about Polykleitos's mastery, he came up with a noticeable sense of unbroken movement. Therefore, his *The Doryphoros*, surviving only through Roman copies like Myron's *The Discobolus*, demonstrated how the act of walking evolved from a picture into a depiction of natural movement. *The Doryphoros,* a nude male (fig. 14) (Neer, 2010, p.

152), who is carrying a spear on his left shoulder (the spear carrying arm is missing in the addressed figure), captured the motion with his extended right leg leading the way, while the left foot, slightly lifted off the ground, conveyed an unbroken continuation of movement.



(Fig. 14)

In this sculpture, the naturalness of movement was flawlessly supported by a sense of mathematical aptitude, which, therefore, was adopted almost as "*law*" by the sculptors in later periods (Stewart, 1997, p. 93). However, it is essential to remember that Polykleitos, like his contemporary Myron, also depicted an idealized figure that was in tune with the trends of their era which was characterized by the merging of Apollonian idealism with Pythagorean mathematical harmony.

In light of this background, it could be argued that unlike the static and monolithic forms of archaic examples, motion in this period was depicted with a new measure. As is recalled, the innovation of *contrapposto*, that is the mathematical balancing and proportionality of weight moves, was a hallmark of the fifth-century BCE sculpture. With Polykleitos, this balance became more precise and refined since the weight-bearing leg and the opposing relaxed leg established a harmonious balance. Bonnard refers to this new perfect balance as a "*new rhythm*:" "*The lines connecting the two shoulders, the two hips, and the two knees are no longer horizontal; they contrast with one another. On the left side, the lowest knee and hip are met by the highest shoulder in the opposite direction.*" This interplay of oppositional yet harmonious forces represents the technical and aesthetic advances of Polykleitos's art (Bonnard, 2004, p. 65).

Polykleitos, who is frequently referred to as a prototypical example of Pythagorean mathematical harmony in artistic representation, proved this detailed proportionality, balance, and symmetry nearly in all his works. It is for this reason Friedell posits that one could study human anatomy simply by studying Polykleitos's sculptures. He further notes, Polykleitos *"measured the proportions of a finger to another finger, the fingers to the*

surface of the hand, the surface of the hand to the wrist, the wrist to the elbow, and the elbow to the arm, that is; the proportions of every limb to the next." In doing so, he developed the proportions of the human body via the metrics. This formalization into numerical terms illustrates "*a Pythagorean endeavor, or even an Eleatic one, as the true being here is not the transient flux of physical appearances but the undeniable essence underlying them, comprehensible only through pure thought and abstraction*" (Friedell, 1999, p. 224-225).

In this regard, another piece of art by him, *The Diadumenos* dating to circa 430 (fig. 15) (Vermeule, 1969, p. 5), similarly demonstrates this perfect proportionality. Viewed through this perspective, Polykleitos, who used "*a mathematical formula (kanon) to create the perfect representation of the human figure,*" emerged as a pivotal sculptor representing the harmonious, orderly, and idealized spirit of his era with systematic correctness (Boardman, 1985, p. 205).


(Fig. 15)

His significance was further accentuated by his authorship of the treatise titled *Kanon* (rule or measure in Greek), which methodized the proportional and systematic philosophy of the period. It is for this reason that his *The Doryphoros* is also known as *the Kanon*, suggesting his long-term influence on the structured ideals of Classical art.

The Transformation Heralded by Pheidias

Another important sculptor of the same century was Pheidias (c. 490-430 BCE). Much like his contemporaries, his original works, often decorated with valuable materials, have been lost, damaged or stolen. Our knowledge of his masterpieces mostly relies on Roman-era replicas or some ancient explanations. For instance, details of *The Athena* sculpture, which depicts the goddess in a triumphant post-war plot, have been pieced together through references such as the "*Varvakeion Statuette*" and the writings of Plutarch and Pausanias (Davison et al., 2009, p. xxii).

Like his contemporaries, Pheidias made monumental contributions during the intellectual renaissance led by Pericles. His colossal works, including the sculpture of *Athena Parthenos* in the Parthenon (*the Varvakeion Athena* dating to circa 438 BCE) (fig. 16) (Neer, 2010, p. 100), *Athena Promachos*, and *The Zeus sculpture* at the Temple of Olympia, are considered as peak representations of Classical Greek sculpture. *The Zeus* sculpture, standing 14 meters tall with its base, is even recognized as one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.

(Fig. 16)

Beyond his delicately crafted sculptures, the decorations and reliefs of the Parthenon are also attributed to Pheidias, his pupils, or sculptors working under his supervision. However, on the basis of the views particularly expressed by Plutarch; Callicrates and Ictinus should be recognized for their architectural roles in the Parthenon's creation. While it is unlikely that Pheidias created every sculpture and relief within the Parthenon, substantial evidence, according to Richter, suggests the involvement of other sculptors. Nevertheless, the dominant consensus keeps highlighting Pheidias's influence on the artistic grandeur of the monument. Therefore, Pheidias is commonly regarded as the primary supervisor who directed the entire project and likely "*sketched*" its initial "*designs,*" ensuring coherence and excellence throughout the works (Richter, 1969, p. 116).

For the goal of this paper, it is, however, essential to highlight one critical point regarding the innovation Pheidias brought about. What sets Pheidias apart from his contemporaries is that he was not contented with merely idealized depictions. He filled his works with a new sense of realism, gradually separating them from the supernatural. As Bonnard argues, Pheidias aimed "*to explain events as they are*" (Bonnard, 2004, p. 67). While the depiction of gods could still be seen as fundamentally supernatural, his

sculptures began to shift away from the traditional characteristics that had long been defining Greek art.

Certainly, Pheidias was often inspired by some well-established subjects of his time such as gods, goddesses, centaurs, chariots, and sacrificial animals. However, he moved beyond such plots and also figures like Athena, Dionysus, Zeus, Hephaestus, and Ares by incorporating representations of Athenian citizens alongside deities, as exemplified on the Parthenon frieze. His works, in this sense, paralleled the themes, which were explored by the well-known playwrights such as Sophocles and Euripides, who, like Pheidias, did not confine themselves to traditional subjects but sought to introduce new elements into their tragedies. This connection highlights a shared intellectual atmosphere among the artists, sculptors, and the playwrights of the era, influenced by the enlightenment encouraged by leaders like Pericles, who was closely associated with Pheidias.

As for the shared intellectual atmosphere, it could be stated that both Sophocles and, to an even greater extent, Euripides embraced a human centered approach in their plays, much like Pheidias, who brought a new human dimension to his sculptures. Yet, Pheidias's approach, compared particularly to that of Euripides, seems to be weaker in relation to the radical reinterpretation of traditions that Euripides would very soon achieve in his tragedies. In this reading, we cannot claim that Pheidias shared Euripides's revolutionary attitude. When considering the broader evolution of Greek sculpture, the transition from idealized depictions to more realistic portrayals and depicting human subjects alongside gods in sculptures, such as portraits, busts, and statues of individuals would only gain prominence starting in the fourth century BCE.

Despite everything, Pheidias can be regarded as a turning point in Classical Greek art with both his mastery and the innovations he initiated. His sculpture of *Athena Lemnia* (*The Lemnian Athena*) (fig. 17) (Protzmann, 2006, p. 271), for instance, represents a revolutionary portrayal of the goddess. Athena is represented with her helmet removed, her head uncovered, symbolizing a departure from traditional portrayal. In this depiction, Pheidias depicts the goddess holding her helmet in one hand and using her spear simply as a supporting prop. In other words, contrary to conventional narratives, Athena is not depicted in her challenging warrior persona anymore. According to Bonnard, Athena appears to be relaxed, as if preparing to "*devote herself to peaceful pursuits,*" stepping away from the strife of war. Pheidias, who portrayed the gods not as distant or untouchable figures but as figures close to nature and humanity, thus, conveyed a more immediate, tangible reality. According to Bonnard, this is the unique realism of Pheidias (Bonnard, 2004, p. 75).

(Fig. 17)

Pheidias, who played a significant role in the sculptures, reliefs, and friezes of the Parthenon, instilled his pioneering perspective into the depictions found on the temple's iconic frieze. While approximately 128 meters of the original 170-meter-long frieze has survived to the present-day, its pieces are now exhibited across locations such as the Acropolis Museum in Athens, the Louvre in France, and the British Museum in England. This frieze, while containing traditional elements like gods, centaurs, and goddesses, also depicts scenes from the lives of Athenians. This inserted detail reflects a groundbreaking innovation in Classical Greek art, marking the first instance of such a departure from mythological narratives. In this sense, Pheidias, who did not limit himself to mythological storytelling, made the lives of Athenians a focal subject of his work. However, despite the aspects that distinguish him from his contemporaries, it should be emphasized that Pheidias still exhibited characteristics that were rooted in his time. For instance, even though Athenian citizens are depicted alongside the gods, they are not portrayed as ordinary individuals. Instead, they are represented through idealized physical forms and expressions, perfectly incorporated with the divine figures. Thus, the representation of the ideal, as mentioned before, remains as a defining feature in Pheidias's creations as well, and thereby reflecting both his mastery and his era's artistic ideals.

The well-preserved depiction of horsemen (dating to circa 442-438 BCE) (fig. 18) (Richter, 1969, p. 116) on the Parthenon frieze stands as a clear proof for Pheidias's artistic skill. While there is no settled agreement among scholars regarding whether the scene represents a ceremonial procession, it is strongly believed to depict a procession in honor of the goddess Athena as the Parthenon was constructed in honor of Athena following the Greek victory in the Persian Wars. The detailed portrayal of 60 horses in this scene

illustrates both the dynamic energy and the meticulous technique of Pheidias's work, thereby strengthening further his significance in Classical Greek art.

(Fig. 18)

However, there are notable details worth focusing on in this depiction, the horses are not arranged in a single line but are presented side by side or intertwined, and each is represented with careful detail, from their flowing manes to their hooves, from their nostrils to their muscles and veins. Each horse is distinctive, and the presence of small holes near the horses' heads suggests that there once were the harnesses and straps in the original representation. The riders, with their athletic, broad shoulders and powerful physiques, complete this outstanding portrayal within an idealized framework. While the horses are represented with an almost untamable dynamism, their riders are illustrated as calm and composed, embodying balance, determination, and control over the wild energy of their horses. This dynamic contrast develops the sense of power and order central to the composition.

But the energy conveyed in this section is contrasted by other parts of the frieze. For instance, one section exhibits a group of women walking calmly, while another, where the gods are portrayed, shows an air of tranquility and respect. These contrasts underline the frieze's combination of divine and human elements, a groundbreaking innovation in Classical Greek art. Additionally, by placing gods and humans side by side, as stated before, the work marks a significant departure from earlier artistic traditions.

The section depicting the gods, having unfortunately worn and eroded over time, provides limited details for observation. Nonetheless, the folds of their garments richly prove the skill of the sculptor, Pheidias, and possibly his assistants. These folds of the garments, with the interplay of light and shadow within them (fig.19), provide a continuous sense of motion, thereby enhancing the dynamism, and creating a delicate, rhythmic fluidity.

However, the primary distinction in relation to the depiction of gods offers more than his artistic mastery since the significant improvement in Pheidias's work seems to be related with his portrayal of the gods in their highly humanized postures despite their divine

grandeur. One such example is the portrayal of Ares, the God of War, seated among the gods (from left to right: Hermes, Dionysus, Demeter, Ares, Nike, Hera, and Zeus) (fig. 19) (Neils, 1999, p. 7).


(Fig. 19)

In this scene, Ares appears as if calmly sitting on a bench among friends, and engaged in a conversation with them. His pose expresses a remarkable blend of divine and human. His back arches slightly backward at the abdomen, creating a curve in the front, while his arms rest forward, one pulling his right knee closer to him. This relaxed pose of Ares represents a unique blending of divinity and humanity, a hallmark of Pheidias's innovative artistry, illustrating his ability to transcend traditional representations of gods by introducing relatable human qualities into their depiction.

Although Ares retains his idealized form as a strong, young, and noble god, Pheidias represents him not with a fierce warrior essence but with a tranquil and serene demeanor. Standing beside the gods (though partially incomplete on the left side, fig. 19), human figures are also depicted. While these humans are represented smaller than the gods, thereby reflecting their lower position in the hierarchical order, Pheidias creatively presents gods and humans side by side. Moreover, towards the end of the frieze, the gods are seen among humans which suggests that the gods complete the human figures on a shared platform. In this way, Pheidias's gods, despite their magnificence, are portrayed with a gentler, more approachable demeanor, symbolically bridging the divine and the human.

Pheidias undoubtedly created idealized, magnificent depictions of divine figures, influenced by the Apollonian worldview of his time. However, alongside this, he also initiated the beginning of a significant shift. Additionally, while the warrior Athena, similar to Ares, retained her majesty, she also successfully embodied serenity and peace. Correspondingly, the traditional "*powerful and wealthy Zeus image*" was attempted to be reconciled with a higher understanding of the god, that is as a protector and generous god much like the idealized notions possessed by figures such as Socrates and Pericles (Bonnard, 2004, p. 69).

As widely acknowledged, in the sixth century BCE, the Pre-Socratic philosophers displaced the Greek gods from their cosmic roles. In the following century, the Sophists, in turn, challenged their (the Greek Gods) place within the city-states, while Socrates redirected the focus from ancient mythological frameworks to a world governed by universal truths, and which he believed resided inherently within all humans. Pheidias, who grew up within the intellectual atmosphere of the Greek Enlightenment and supported by leaders like Pericles, was aware of these transformations. Despite having portrayed the gods and goddesses with magnificence, he nonetheless moved beyond traditional mythological depictions and embraced new representations in his works.

What particularly stands out within this context is that Pheidias marked a turning point in Classical Greek artistic thought. His works demonstrated a clear departure from the Archaic period influences of the early fifth century BCE, and marked the peak of the Classical era. While he retained elements of Apollonian rationality and idealism, as did his contemporaries, he also filled his art with new perspectives, thus shaping the course of Greek sculpture in revolutionary ways.

Following Pheidias, a distinct shift towards naturalism and simplicity became evident in the development of Greek sculpture. The depictions in art gradually became less grandiose, while gods were often portrayed alongside heroes or semi-divine figures, human figures began to appear more frequently in the subsequent works of art. Athletic figures with idealized bodies slowly gave way to more relaxed, simple poses, often depicted with a sense of ease or leaning against a support. This transition clearly reflects the growing influence of Sophists and Socratic thought towards the end of the fifth century BCE as the focus on humanity and human like qualities within the ensuing era began to be reflected more in the visual arts.

The Hellenistic Period: An Era of Inevitable Change

The winds of change that began in the late fifth century BCE became unquestionably evident during the Hellenistic Age (323–31 BCE). This period met the decline of the traditional Greek city states and the rise of monumental artifacts like the great libraries and museums of Alexandria and Pergamon. However, it also faced an extraordinary cultural synthesis extending across Anatolia, Egypt, Persia, and even India, thereby embodying a fusion of Eastern and Western cultural traditions. However, it was additionally an age where there was a widespread despair urging the people to seek for new alternatives to ease the great disillusionments felt within themselves. Therefore, the Socratic schools, responding to the existential challenges of the time, began crafting new philosophies which aimed at

offering salvation and which more or less set the stage for the eventual development of Christian thought.

Since this age includes numerous changes, important for the ensuing centuries and worth studying across different context, the crucial point worth underlining for the goal of this study, briefly, is as follows: as is recalled, the transformation in sculpture began in the late fifth century BCE as divine representations in art began to subtly embrace a new dimension of reality, reflecting aspects of the human world. However, by the Hellenistic period, naturalistic and realistic depictions became dominant in Classical Greek art. This shift was not only driven by political changes but also by the increasing interest in human centered themes, which had been inspired by the philosophies of Socrates and the Sophists. The influence of the old Homeric religious ideals, therefore, diminished significantly during this time. Although myths and mythological figures such as Pan, Eros, Apollo, and Aphrodite continued to be depicted, the traditional Greek worldview based on myths and gods began to lose its prominence. In their place, the tangible realities of the human experience became more visible in artistic expressions.

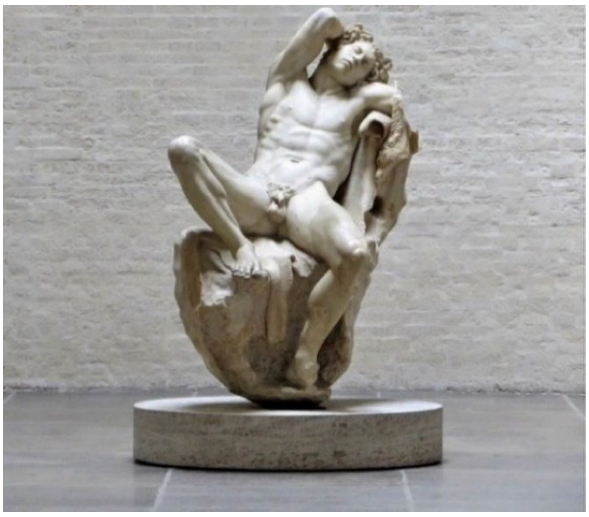
Moreover, the Hellenistic period introduced some further innovations in sculpture which enhanced its ability to capture the complexity of emotions, thoughts, and the realities of the world, and thereby marking a significant departure from the earlier, more idealized forms of representation. In this reading, the Pythagorean principles of proportion and Apollonian idealism that characterized the fifth century BCE art gave way to more naturalistic representations. Monumental divine figures, while making room for an expanded variety of sculptures and subjects, gradually diminished. The integration of regions like North Africa into the Hellenistic world, especially after Alexander the Great, introduced depictions of diverse ethnicities, including portrayals of African individuals.

While the magnificence of the human form inherited from the preceding era persisted, the focus shifted to greater naturalism, emphasizing credible body language and facial expressions. The sense of movement became more pronounced in sculptures, replacing static and conventional motifs with dynamic and emotionally rich representations. Old traditional religious and divine imagery was gradually replaced by the depictions of ordinary life. In such circumstances, themes from the experiences of children, the elderly, peasants, and the impoverished as depicted in *the old woman* dating to second century BCE (fig. 20) (Bober, 1999, p. 140) came to be prominent.

(Fig. 20)

This evolution also brought a vivid expressiveness to the art. For instance, the physical strain of battle or the anguish of sorrow began to be captured through body language, which became a mirror of inner emotions. The sculptures of this era, therefore, embodied a lively and emotional storytelling approach, capturing the full range of human experience.

Another good example of the transition is *The Barberini Faun*, a sculpture dated to the third century BCE (fig. 21) (Gl 2018). While inspired by the image of the Satyr from Greek mythology, the distinctive aspect of this piece is the striking naturalism conveyed through the figure's body language. Depicted in a state of exhaustion, the faun is shown sleepy, with the expression on his lips and face harmonizing faultlessly with the relaxed posture of his body.



(Fig. 21)

Undoubtedly the muscular and idealized body in this anonymous work retains the typical elements of the Classical period. However, the emphasis on naturalistic representation depicts the transition emerging in the Hellenistic art. This blend of realism

and emotional depth reflects the era's shift towards capturing more lifelike and relevant human experiences.

It seems that facial expressions and the gaze now reflect the emotions of the soul. Human emotions and thoughts along with joys and sorrows are colorfully depicted in the art of this era, integrating life into art itself. Busts of philosophers, sculptures adorning monuments and tombs, statues honoring conquests, and portraits of rulers and significant people, therefore, became widespread during the Hellenistic period.

Furthermore, while gods were increasingly portrayed with human features, rulers began to take on divine attributes, which was also a point learnt from the cultures of the East. Following the end of the Hellenistic era (31 BCE), interest in Hellenic art and culture persisted during the Roman Empire. When Rome became a center of Hellenic art in the first century BCE, many Greek artists continued their craft there. The influence of Greek art and culture sustained particularly during the reigns of emperors Augustus and Hadrian.

Conclusion

Through a comparative analysis of selected sculptures primarily from the fifth century BCE, along with examples from the Hellenistic period, this interdisciplinary study demonstrates how the philosophical shifts influenced the visual language of Greek sculpture, leading to a synthesis of rationalism and artistic expression.

The transformations observed in Greek sculpture from the fifth century BCE onward highlight a deep evolution in artistic and cultural tendencies. Dominant to this shift was the increasing emphasis on the human form, human emotions, and their place in a changing intellectual landscape. The rigid and traditional styles, which were influenced by Eastern conventions, began to dissolve during the Classical era. However, the dominant approach of the fifth century Greek sculpture relied primarily on the Pythagorean principles of proportion, harmony, and balance, combined with Apollonian ideals of perfection. As this study has demonstrated, the mathematical precision of Pythagorean principles, combined with the Apollonian ideals of balance and order, played a crucial role in shaping sculptural aesthetics. Myron's masterpiece *The Discobolus and* specifically Polykleitos's *The Doryphoros*, with their contrapposto stance, exemplify this synthesis, achieving both technical mastery and a philosophical engagement with harmony and proportion.

While early depictions began to incorporate elements of human expression and individuality, the full embrace of human emotion and individuality in sculpture became more apparent toward the end of the fifth century and into the fourth century BCE by the philosophical contributions of the Sophists and Socrates. These thinkers, encouraged

sculptors to explore greater emotional depth, psychological realism, and human individuality in their work. The Sophists' emphasis on rhetoric and subjectivity, alongside Socrates's inquiries into ethics and virtue, shaped an artistic environment that moved away from rigid idealization towards a more dynamic and expressive portrayal of the human form. This intellectual shift was also reinforced by the democratic ideals of Periclean Athens, where public sculptures and architectural projects represented artistic excellence along with rationalism, and human potential.

The Hellenistic period, which embraced a naturalistic and dynamic sense of artistic thought, brought an even more obvious change in the scope and content of sculpture. Representations of the human body became increasingly realistic, often revealing defects, emotions, and everyday life. Instead of mythological themes or deities, the physical realities of the human world began to be included in artistic narratives. Although the Classical ideals of perfection and order persisted, they were enriched by a new aesthetic that embraced naturalism, complexity, spontaneity and emotional tone, marking a significant evolution in the portrayal of the human figure and its relationship with the world.

A key finding of this study is that Greek sculptors were not merely artists but intellectual contributors who actively engaged with and reflected the evolving philosophical discourse of their time. This transformation, shaped by philosophical thought, also acted as a catalyst for new ways of understanding and representing the human experience in art. Ultimately, the sculptural achievements of the fifth century BCE laid the foundation for Western artistic traditions, demonstrating how art and philosophy were closely related in shaping culture and identity.

Summary

This study employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating art history, philosophy, and cultural studies to examine the evolution of Greek sculpture during the fifth century BCE, a period often considered a Golden Age of artistic and intellectual transformation. By bringing these fields together, the research provides a deeper understanding of the connection between artistic innovation and intellectual transformation in Classical Greece. While many studies have explored the stylistic developments of Classical Greek art, less attention has been given to the philosophical undercurrents that shaped these transformations. This study, therefore, aims to fill this gap by examining how intellectual and socio-political changes influenced the evolution of Classical Greek sculpture.

In this light, the research problem guiding this study revolves around the question of how the transition from divine to human-centered themes in Greek sculpture reflects intellectual and socio-political shifts in Greek society. Through a comparative analysis of selected sculptures from the fifth century BCE in particular, the study seeks to explore the role of philosophical currents—ranging from Pythagorean mathematical principles to Socratic ethics—in shaping artistic expression in sculpture. It demonstrates that this artistic transformation was not merely a matter of stylistic evolution but a deep reflection of the philosophical and cultural currents of the time.

The fifth century BCE, which was marked by intense transformations in philosophy, literature, and art, laid the foundation for the long-term legacy of Classical Greek culture. It is, therefore, understandable that the term *classical* is linked with the extraordinary achievements realized in this period, particularly in sculpture, painting, architecture, and theater. The richness of artistic

expression during the fifth century BCE was deeply intertwined with the rise of rational thought. While the seeds of an intellectual revolution were sown in the sixth century BCE by natural philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, who sought to explain the origins and principles of the universe without relying on mythology, it was in the fifth century BCE that rationalism truly reached its peak. In this period, a new way of thinking began to challenge and replace the mythological narratives that had long dominated Greek culture.

However, the transition from divine to human-centered themes in Greek sculpture was a gradual evolution rather than a sudden rupture. In the early stages of Greek art, sculptures were heavily influenced by Eastern styles, particularly Egyptian art, which emphasized rigid postures and idealized representations of the divine. However, as rational thought gained momentum in the fifth century BCE, Greek sculpture began to evolve, incorporating more naturalistic depictions of the human form.

This shift was a reflection of the intellectual currents shaping Greek society. During the Classical period the widespread motif, reflected within the works of art, was rooted in the synthesis of Pythagorean and Apollonian ideals. Pythagoras's mathematical principles, which emphasized harmony and proportion, had a deep influence on artistic production. The Pythagorean principles were integrated with Apollonian ideals of perfection, balance, and order. Therefore, the sculptures of the fifth century BCE, such as those created by Polykleitos and Myron, included a remarkable naturalism and dynamism not seen in the eastern sculptures. Polykleitos's *The Doryphoros*, for example, demonstrates how he skillfully employed the technique of contrapposto, a technique that introduced a sense of movement and liveliness to the human form. This innovation enriched the realism of the sculpture while reflecting a deeper philosophical engagement with the balanced human body. Similarly, the representations of gods and mythological figures underwent significant changes during this period. While the earlier works of art often emphasized the supernatural and divine qualities, the examples from the late fifth century BCE onwards began to include a greater sense of humanity by decreasing the dominance of some supernatural features. This blending of the divine and the human themes can be regarded as the evolving artistic sensibilities of the time, as well as the influence of the contemporary philosophical thought that was prominent at the time.

Beyond the influence of Pythagorean principles, the rise of philosophical inquiry led by the Sophists and Socrates played a critical role in redefining artistic expression. The Sophists, who placed emphasis on rhetoric and human subjectivity, encouraged a more individualistic and dynamic portrayal of human figures in sculpture. Socrates, with his inquiries into ethics, virtue, and the nature of the human soul, further reinforced this trend. Additionally, particularly under Pericles, the democratic developments executed in Athens, shaped an environment valuing human achievement. Public sculptures and buildings, such as those on the Acropolis, were both artistic masterpieces and symbols of rationalism, democracy, and human potential.

One of the key findings of this study is that as the fifth century progressed, the emergence of new philosophical inquiries came to have further impacts on sculptors and opened new paths for their artistic representations, as they began to experiment with expressions of emotion, psychological depth, and realistic movement.

The findings of this study accentuate the strong interconnection between art and intellectual transformation in Classical Greece. Rather than being an isolated domain, Greek sculpture was not separate from the philosophical and socio-political currents of its time. By tracing the stylistic and thematic shifts in sculpture through the lens of philosophy and cultural studies, this research shows how artistic development was both a reflection and a stimulus of intellectual change. The blend of rationalist ideals with artistic mastery not only defined the aesthetics of the Classical period but also influenced subsequent artistic traditions in Western history.

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