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THE ART OF GREECE

In 1972 two great bronze warriors [pp. 4–5] were pulled from the sea off the Italian town of Riace. When they were first displayed in Florence, the large crowds who came to see them were filled with wonder and admiration. Although the life-size figures were created over two and a half millennia ago, these unexpected gifts from the ancient past spoke in a language still understood: the warriors possessed a godlike strength, yet they were also human. They come from the very dawn of the history of Western art. They are Greeks fashioned by Greeks, paradigms of the civilization that produced them.

The civilization of the ancient Greeks, whose city-states dominated the islands and coast of the Aegean Sea, is the fountainhead of Western culture. Before the Romans annexed Greece and sacked Athens in 86 B.C., the Greeks had established the disciplines of history, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, poetry, drama, music, and aesthetics. The images of human perfection the Greeks left behind in clay, metal, stone, and paint have remained touchstones for all subsequent Western art.

The ancestors of the Greeks lived in the valleys of a limestone mountain range rising from the Aegean Sea. In addition to farming and hunting, they fished, sailed, and explored; and, inevitably, they warred. Cultures rose and fell in relatively rapid succession (in contrast to the stable empire existing in Egypt), until the people now described as the ancient Greeks emerged about 1000 B.C. These were

*From: Art of the Western World, by Michael Wood,
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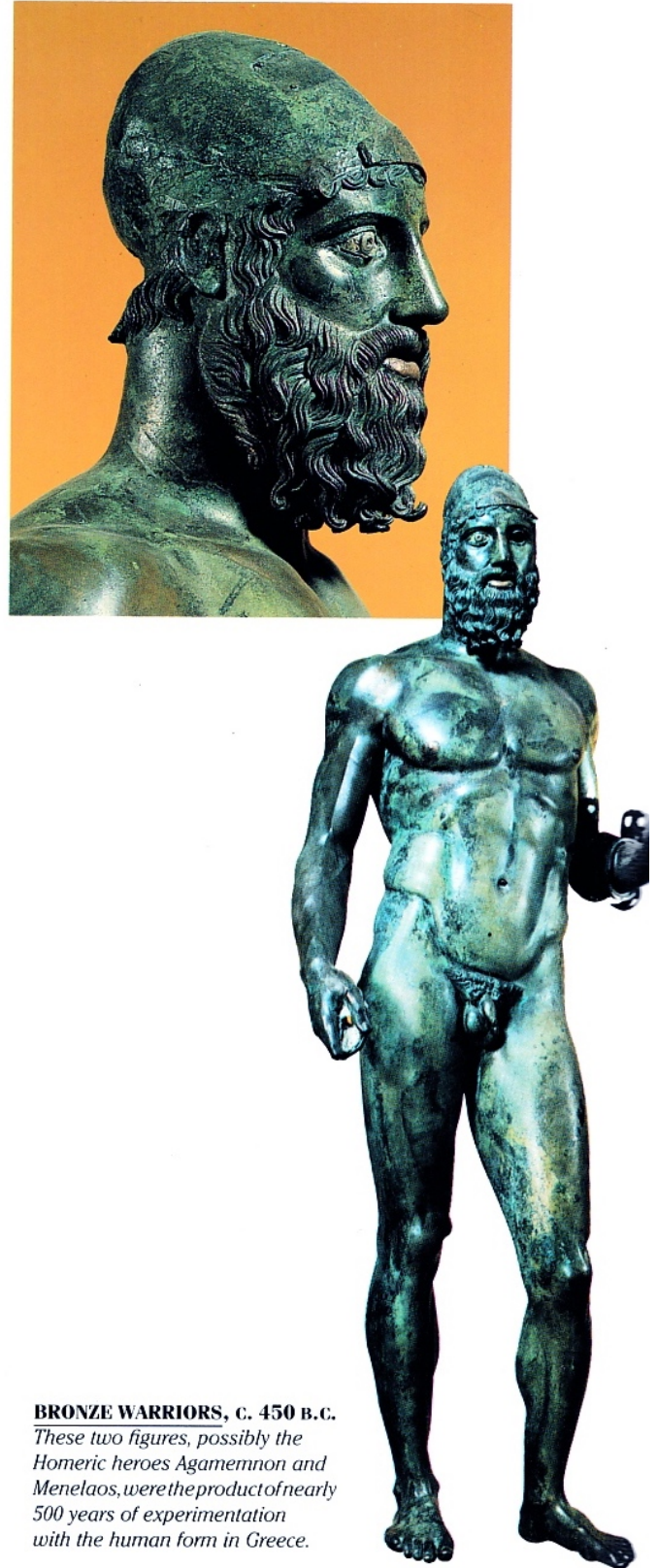
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a people who blended history and myth, who delighted in the discovery of scientific principles but who rejected dogma. Discourse, study, investigation, cogitation, and debate were important in their lives, as were wars, athletics, games, and contests. They were trained to use both their bodies and their minds. Winners of their athletic competitions were commemorated not only in sculptures like the Riace warriors, but in poetry as well. Indeed, great Greek poets like Pindar are now known largely through their odes to victorious competitors in the Olympic games. Pride, courage, strength, resourcefulness, honesty, and virtue made up the Greek ideal of manhood and were given expression in Greek art and philosophy.

During the five centuries before the Riace warriors were created, Greece had developed a seminal civilization. By 776 B.C. the Greeks had founded the Olympic games, which, revived in the nineteenth century, continue today as the world's most celebrated athletic competition. By the middle of the eighth century, they had set down in writing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the repositories of their myths and their history. Homer's epic poems were a fundamental inspiration for Greek art. During the eighth century Greek city-states (*poleis*) gained sufficient wealth to support thriving pottery industries. Athens manufactured huge funerary vases with stylized geometric decoration; other city-states, such as Corinth, produced their own indigenous styles, and the foundations were laid that transformed pottery making into a fine art. In this period the Greeks also began to experiment with monumental sculpture. The rigid, static *kouroi* (figures of nude young males) that marked graves or stood near temples were early experiments with the human figure during the course of Greek civilization.

Aristocratic patrons supported this early phase of Greek art. But by the end of the sixth century Athens had introduced democracy, spawning a dynamic balance of power among individual citizens. That democratic spirit and a temporary cessation of rivalry among the Greek city-states saved Greece from the Persian invasions of 490 B.C. and again in 479 B.C. Led by Pericles (c. 495–429 B.C.), Athens emerged as the dominant power among the city-states and entered its fabled golden age.

Pericles built Athens into the cultural and intellectual center of Greece. His lifetime inaugurated



BRONZE WARRIORS, c. 450 B.C.
These two figures, possibly the Homeric heroes Agamemnon and Menelaos, were the product of nearly 500 years of experimentation with the human form in Greece.

the classical phase of Greek art, which lasted until the Macedonians became the rulers of Greece about 338 B.C. The classical ideal had both aesthetic and political implications. As democracy balanced the needs of the individual with those of the group, classical art balanced interest in individual, natural, specific features with generalities, ideas, and norms, straining neither in one direction nor the other.

From 480 to 323 B.C., Greece achieved a high point of civilization. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle

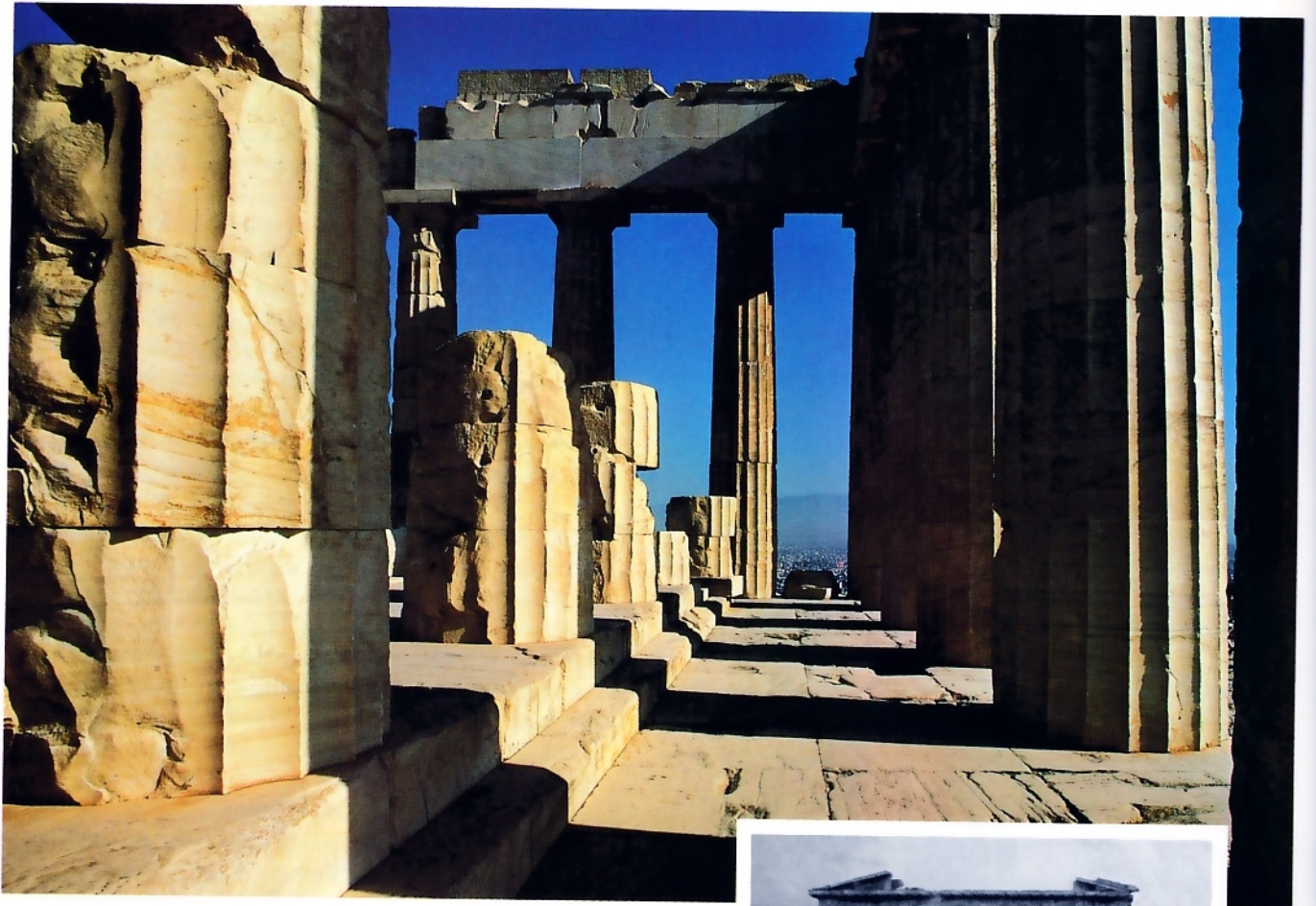


laid the cornerstones of Western philosophy. Herodotus chronicled the Persian wars and helped establish the discipline of history. Aeschylus and Sophocles refined Greek tragedy. All cultivated an outlook on life that was humanistic, antiauthoritarian, questioning, and undogmatic. They searched for ideals while recognizing human limitations and the importance of the individual.

The warriors from Riace reflect many of the same principles. Produced after roughly five hundred years of experimentation with the human form in Greece, they demonstrate the perfection achieved during the fifth century B.C., when reality and ideality reached a state of equilibrium. Perfectly proportioned according to an aesthetic standard, these warriors exhibit the ideal male body, with each part a measured and harmonious component of the whole, evoking the Greek reliance on measurement in the context of art. As Plato said, "If there are arts, there is a standard of measure, and if there is a standard of measure, there are arts; but if either is wanting, there is neither."

Here, then, is yet another basic aspect of Greek art: the Greeks thought about what they created in aesthetic terms; they had serious debates about what constituted art. Though many earlier civilizations produced objects that are now considered art, most previous cultures had not discussed them aesthetically (or there are no records). Objects were produced to have a specific function. A sculpture might represent a deity, mark a tomb, or serve as a votive offering. Pottery, though it might be embellished, was meant to hold oil or wine.

Undeniably, Greek art had similar functions. In fact, the Riace warriors may have been part of a larger group of figures, commissioned by the Athenians and dedicated to the sanctuary at Delphi to commemorate their victory at Marathon. But such functional roles did not prevent the Athenians from imbuing their creations with aesthetic ideals. Such purely aesthetic notions demonstrate a highly sophisticated culture, a culture that created and collected objects as art and that used art for self-expression and social understanding. Greeks asked themselves fundamental questions about their origins, about their destiny, about morality and government; and they used art in their quest. The search for beauty motivated their creativity, as did the traditional reasons for making art objects. Greek



philosophers took notions of beauty just as seriously as other fundamental philosophical issues. Plato's *Republic* states: "The man who has been properly nurtured in this area will be keenly aware of things which have been neglected, things not beautifully made by art or nature. He will rightly resent them, he will praise beautiful things, rejoice in them, receive them into his soul, be nurtured by them and become both good and beautiful in character."

"Beautifully made by art or nature." This is another key to appreciating the contributions of Greek civilization. Many earlier cultures, the Egyptian in particular, had produced a static art, built on formulas passed down from one generation to another. The early Greeks learned from their Egyptian counterparts, but they also began to incorporate visual and later emotional experience into their art.

With this fundamental innovation—looking at and refining nature—the Greeks set into motion a

PARTHENON, c. 447–432 B.C. *Built from Pentelic marble set on a limestone base and erected on the site of an earlier temple destroyed by the Persians, the Parthenon utilized parts of the old building in its construction.*

process that would change with each generation and would reflect new interpretations of the world and of humanity. From their art, then, much can be learned of the Greeks' philosophic and aesthetic beliefs. A monument such as the Parthenon [pp. 2–3] is more than a beautiful remnant of a lost past. It is, instead, the physical embodiment of the ideals, hopes, and realities of ancient Greek society, which remain embedded in modern Western civilization.



TEMPLE OF HERA II, c. 460 B.C. *The site of this temple, Paestum, Italy, was inhabited until the 11th century A.D., when it was abandoned. It was not until the 18th century that Greek ruins such as the Temple of Hera were discovered there.*

The Parthenon rises on the Acropolis, the sacred outcropping dominating Athens. An icon in the history of architecture, the Parthenon was built as a temple and dedicated to the virgin goddess Athena Parthenos, daughter of Zeus and the patron and protector of Athens.

Although building the Parthenon took only about fifteen years (447–432 B.C.), an exceptionally short time, it involved hundreds of workmen from all over Greece. One of the most ambitious building projects of the ancient world, the construction of the Parthenon, with its teams of builders and artists' workshops and the huge expenditure in both gold and labor, can be compared to the rising of the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages, built with the tithes and energy of the faithful.

Time and man have treated the Parthenon harshly. This pure white marble structure was transformed into a Christian church dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the thirteenth century and then into a Moslem mosque about 1458. Its ultimate degradation occurred in the seventeenth century, when the conquering Turks used it as a powder magazine, subsequently exploded by Venetian artillery. In addition, throughout its history its sculpture has been pillaged.

Although the Parthenon is called a temple, its function was very different from modern sacred architecture. Today's places of worship enclose the faithful and create a holy sanctuary. The Greeks worshiped differently: their altars were in the open

air, and their religious rites were performed outside. In the walled rooms behind the row of columns, Greek temples enclosed large cult statues and treasuries in which gifts and offerings to the gods and goddesses were safeguarded.

Consequently, Greek temples are not closed structures but open ones; their space is delineated by a screen of columns articulating their boundaries while exposing, through the spaces between the columns, the sanctuary of the deity and the room that housed the treasure. Greek temples are welcoming—they are less about mass than about light-filled space—and they do not exclude with monolithic walls, as do some Romanesque and modern buildings.

That the Parthenon is one of the world's greatest buildings is not an accident but the result of centuries of refinement in the building of temples in Greece. First made of mud and wood and then built of stone, with the post-and-lintel construction technique of the earlier wooden structures, the Greek temple emerged through a series of almost imperceptible developments.

An ancestor of the Parthenon, the Temple of Hera II [p. 7] is set near the Mediterranean Sea at Paestum, one of the many Greek colonies that thrived in southern Italy. Built about the middle of the fifth century B.C., the basic style of the building—fluted column, pediment, roof, and carved architectural embellishment—formed many of the essential components of Western architecture until the middle of the twentieth century. The Greek architectural canons denoted stability, authority, and permanence, and as such they came to enunciate the public persona of government and financial institutions all over the Western world.

There are subtle but notable differences between the Temple of Hera II and the Parthenon. The former is heavier and squatter, and is imposing through its weight and mass. The large columns thicken in the center as though compressed by the weight of the structure they support. (This thickening of the columns in the center, called entasis, is probably a stylistic convention derived from the actual bowing of the wooden columns of earlier Greek temples.)

The Parthenon, in contrast, is the culmination of the development of the Greek temple; all its parts, even in its ruinous state, form a sublime whole. Its

height, width, columns, mass, open space, and relation to its surroundings express a sense of order and peace. Its authority is powerful but not intimidating, and the logic of its construction is immediately clear.

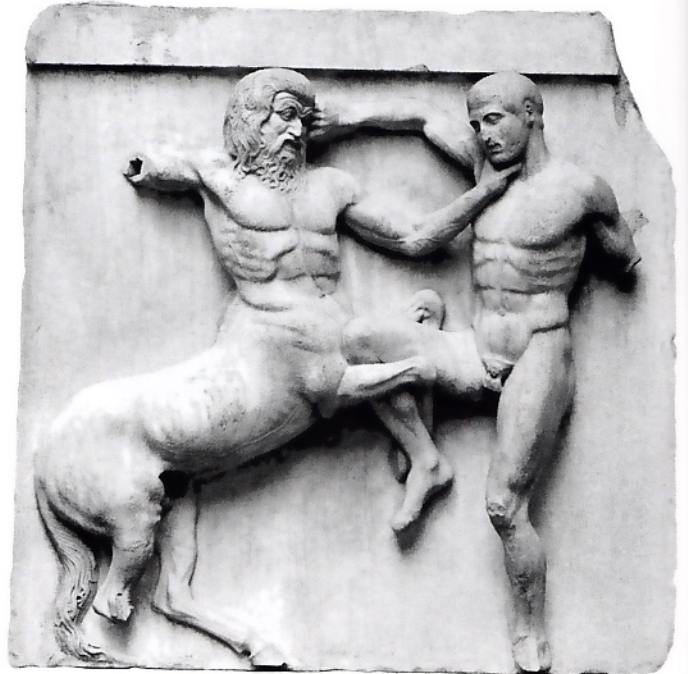
Because there has been so much damage and loss, it is impossible to know the exact nature and scheme of the Parthenon's sculptural program. It is known that the pediments, the metopes (the space between two blocks with vertical grooves in the frieze of a Doric order), and the central block carried sculpture, much of it painted in colors. The balance between the geometry of the architecture and the organic shapes of the sculpture originally must have been one of the most splendid features of the Parthenon.

The principal sculpture, by Phidias, which is now lost, was the colossal cult statue of Athena. Probably over thirty feet high, the imposing gold-and-ivory-embellished goddess standing in her dimly lit sanctuary could be seen through the great columns from outside the building.

THREE GODDESSES, FROM THE PARTHENON, C. 435 B.C.

In 1812, these and other fragments of the Parthenon's pediments were removed to England, where they remain today.

BATTLE OF LAPITHS AND CENTAURS, METOPE FROM THE PARTHENON, C. 440 B.C. *The metopes of the Parthenon may be the earliest carved decoration on the building, each one of the ninety-two depicting a battle scene.*





GIRL WITH DOVES, C. 450 B.C. *In antiquity the dove symbolized love and constancy, an appropriate meaning for this stele, the Greek word for "standing block" or "gravestone."*

There appears to have been an overall program for the sculpture, aimed at glorifying not only Athena but also Athens. A number of the metopes depict the battle between the centaurs—wild and brutal half men, half beasts—and the Lapiths, a tribe of peace-loving men. The Lapiths' triumph in the bloody conflict was seen by the ancient world (and later by the Renaissance) as a victory of civilization over barbarity; for the Athenians, the Parthenon centaurs surely evoked memories of their enemies, especially the Persians, who had conquered Athens not long before.

The metopes of the battle between the Lapiths and the centaurs vary in quality, but the best ones

embody sculptural principles and forms that became the preoccupation of subsequent Western sculptors. In the hands of the creators of the metope illustrated here [p. 8], violent struggle has become dance, as the figures float across the surface of the relief. The battle has been elevated to art. The clash between realism and geometric form, so much a part of earlier figurative art, has become, like the Parthenon itself, a balance and harmony that can only be termed classic.

Much the same can be said of the large, deeply cut statues that occupied the Parthenon's two pediments [p. 8]. Three figures, identified as Leto, Artemis, and Aphrodite, celebrate the dynamic potential of the human form. Here drapery no longer covers form but reveals it, and the bodies assume a palpability and grandeur equal to the building they grace.

The influence of the Parthenon was vast because it stood as a symbol for civilization and rationality. Its sculpture was highly public—the official manifestation of city and cult, a statement of the ascendancy of Athens and the Athenians. But the same elevated art is found also in more private works, such as a gravestone relief [p. 9] produced about the time of the Parthenon sculpture. The depiction of a young girl bidding farewell to her doves is both tender and sad as it expresses the spirit and charm of a long-departed child.

The Greeks were masters of architecture and sculpture, but they also excelled in painting. Although no large-scale works in fresco survive, something of what Greek wall painting looked like can be gleaned from later Roman painting. However, important paintings do survive in considerable number on ceramic ware found throughout the Greek world: over twenty thousand pots are known. Used for storing oil and water, for drinking wine, for holding food, and for many other daily needs, these vessels were transformed by skillful potters and painters into some of the most splendid objects of the classical world. Vase painting expressed almost the whole range of the stories and images that interested the Greeks. Images of men and gods, of violence and happiness, of games and war are among the many subjects the Greeks could contemplate as they ate or drank or participated in religious rituals. Much of our knowledge of Greek civilization and myth comes from these pots.



EXEKIAS, DIONYSUS CUP, c. 550–525 B.C.

Like a number of other Greek artists, Exekias was both a master potter and a painter. His many surviving vases reveal a refined and vigorous draftsman with an original approach to composition and narration.

The power of divine magic appears on many painted vessels, but seldom more charmingly than on the *Dionysus Cup* signed by the painter Exekias about 550–525 B.C. [p. 10]. A footed vessel with two handles and a wide bowl suitable for aerating wine, the cup tells a story about Dionysus, who, after his capture by pirates, terrified them by flooding his ship with wine, causing a great vine to sprout from the mast, and creating illusions of wild beasts. So frightened were the pirates that they leapt from the ship into the sea, where they were instantly transformed into the dolphins shown leaping about the rim of the cup, in a pattern that, like the boat, sail, and vine, echoes the basic shape of the vessel.



The *Dionysus Cup* is painted in the black-figure style: black figures on reddish orange clay ground. In this technique, the silhouette-like black figures (with white faces if

EUPHRONIOS, KRATER, c. 515 B.C. *The painter and potter Euphronios (c. 520–505 B.C.) signed six vases as a painter, all of the elevated quality of this Krater.*



GREEK POTTERY



The human orientation of ancient Greek culture, combined with a refined sense of design and technique, helped produce an artistic level in Greek pottery unparalleled in the history of Western art. Greek pottery is notable for its various shapes, as well as for exploiting the material—a particularly iron-rich clay that yielded an intense orange-red and deep black when fired.

they are women) were defined and decorated by lines incised into the surface of the pot. The black-figure style was rapidly replaced, toward 500 B.C., by its negative: red figures set against a black ground, giving the artists a chance to paint the faces, bodies, and drapery with a brush rather than incising them. The result is a slightly less decorative but more complex set of images.

Both the black- and red-figure techniques were used to depict the mortal and divine tragedies that the Greeks found so compelling. Such tragedy on a heroic and divine scale is seen within the small compass of a vessel by the painter Euphronios [p. 10], made about 515 B.C. and used for mixing wine and water. Here is an example of the monumental nature of the subject matching the grandeur of the vessel's shape. The body of a fallen warrior, Sarpedon, son of Zeus, is carried from the field of battle by the twins Sleep and Death under the supervision of Hermes. Somber action is given weight and power by the great inert body of Sarpedon and the bending winged figures who struggle to lift him. The scene, with its grid of animated figures subtly echoing the shape of the pot, is raised to a level of seriousness and pathos seldom equaled in Western art.

Greek figurative art is especially vivid in the form of freestanding sculpture, which had a long development. In fact, Greek myth provides the name of the first Greek sculptor, Daedalus of Crete, who fashioned a cow to disguise the wife of King Minos so that a bull would copulate with her and the infamous Minotaur could be procreated. Daedalus's name is associated with the beginnings of monumental sculpture in Greece.

From the seventh century to the end of the sixth century B.C., monumental sculpture took the form of the *kouros* (nude male youth) and *kore* (draped maiden). Long thought to represent only deities, it is now known that many of these proud, confident, faintly smiling but generally stiff symbols represented mortals. This reflects the fundamentally human orientation of Greek art: "Although there are many marvels in this world," wrote Sophocles in *Antigone*, "the greatest marvel of all is man."

Greek athletes were the models for these figures, which were placed on pedestals outside temples as votive offerings or set as memorials on gravesites, where they represented gods, Homeric heroes, or warriors. Some are engraved with inscriptions such as the poignant lines found at the base of a *kouros* from Attica [p. 12]: "Stop and grieve at the tomb of the dead Kroisos, slain by wild Ares in the front rank of battle." Modeled after Egyptian sculptures, the *kouroi* followed established conventions. One foot placed before the other, arms at the sides, facing forward, the *kouroi* were based on received knowledge rather than visual analysis.

Women did not play a prominent role in ancient Greek society, and the figure of the *kore* from this period is schematic, with emphasis on generic forms of dress rather than having any real physicality. The *Peplos Kore* [p. 12], one of a series of maiden figures which were buried after the Acropolis was destroyed by the Persians in 480 B.C., is a wonderful exemplar of the type. Recovered from the rubble, the *kore* has traces of the paint that embellished her hair and dress, adding to her decorative as well as lifelike appearance.



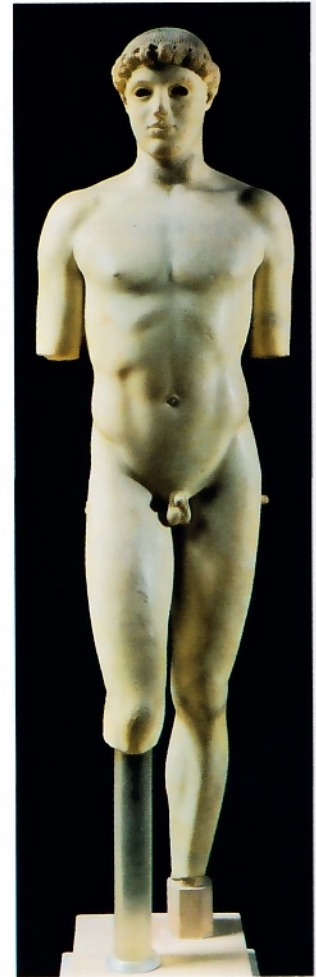
KOUROS, c. 540 B.C. *This life-size figure of a male youth reflects an increased knowledge of anatomy, gained from watching athletes and warriors while they practiced*

About 530 B.C., the time of the *Peplos Kore*, Greek sculptors also began experimenting with bronze casting to produce large-scale figures. But these, as well as their marble counterparts, deviated little from well-established types.

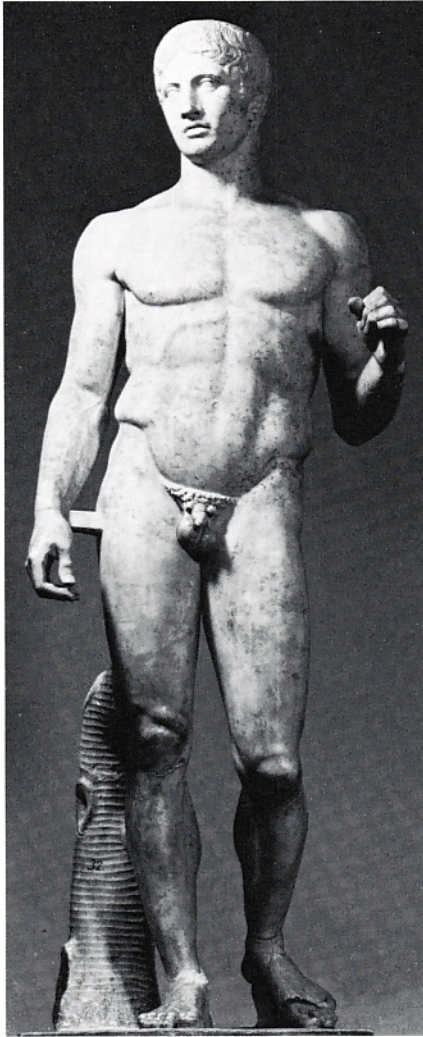
Despite their reliance on conventions, over the centuries sculptors looked closely at real human forms to better understand anatomy. They introduced subtle variations in pose and musculature in



PEPLOS KORE, c. 530 B.C. *Depicting a priestess or a member of a religious cult, the Kore shows Eastern tradition through her dress, which indicates the statue's origins among the master sculptors of the eastern Greek center of Ionia.*



KRITIOS BOY, c. 480 B.C. *Found on the Acropolis, this statue was probably damaged by the Persians during their raid on the Acropolis in 480 B.C.*



ROMAN COPY OF THE DORYPHORUS OF POLYCLITUS, c. 440 B.C. In constructing his ideal man, Polyclitus was probably inspired by Pythagorean theories of mathematics.

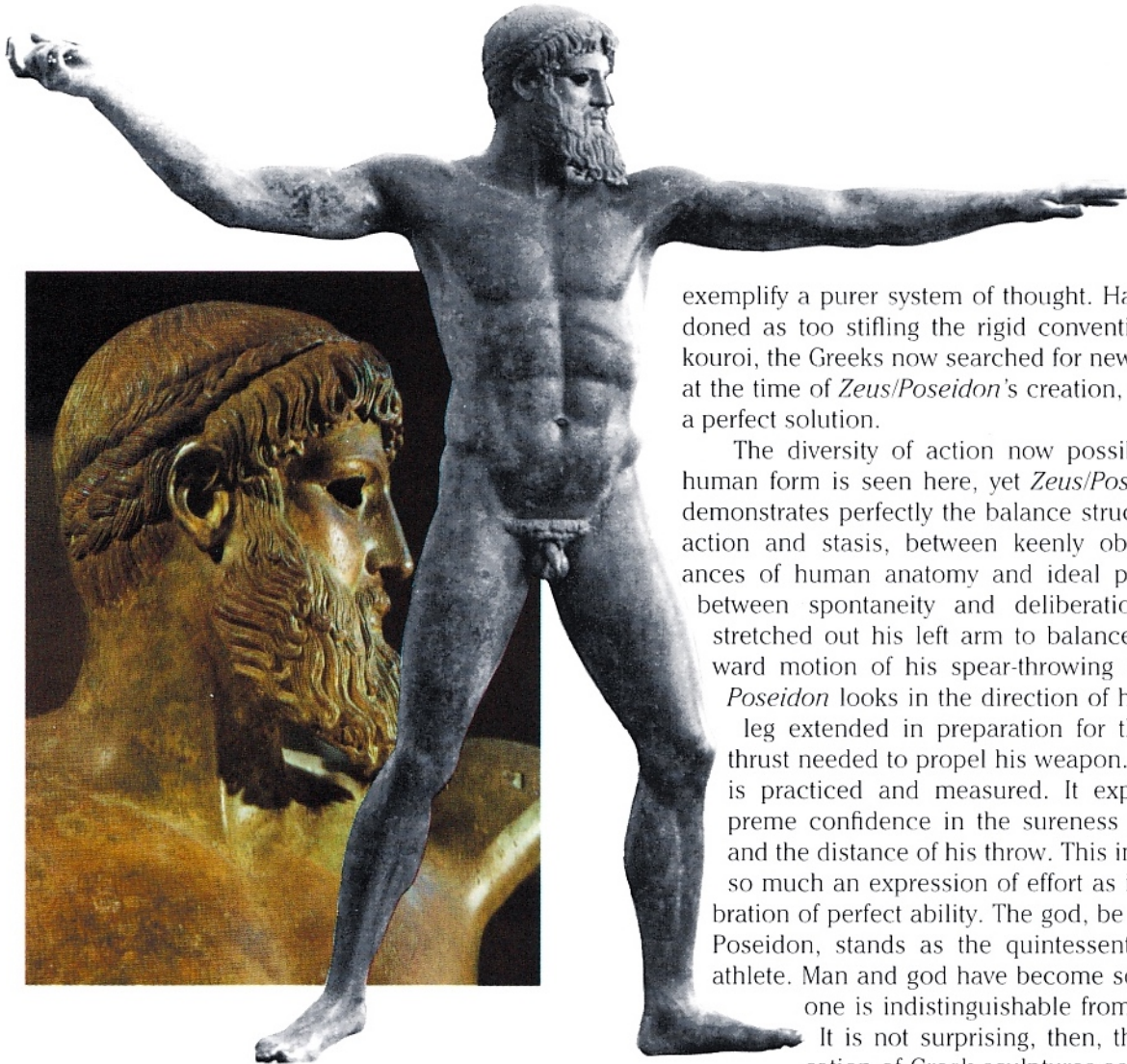
the kouros figures. About 480 B.C. the sculptor Kritios created a figure that abandoned the kouros figure type almost entirely. The *Kritios Boy* [p. 12] is the culmination of countless earlier attempts to introduce anatomical realism within the framework of the kouros. Free from the strict, static codes that had inhibited earlier sculptors, the *Kritios Boy* seems relaxed, fresh, and more convincingly human than any of his predecessors.

Called the first beautiful nude in art, the *Kritios Boy* inaugurates the Greek classical age of sculpture. His features are naturally integrated into the rounded perfection of his now-turned head. His

body is based on a sensitive analysis of how muscles work in the human body, but that analysis is distilled into a canon of perfect proportions in aesthetic terms. Like the many other classical works that were to follow, the *Kritios Boy* exists somewhere between the real and the ideal. His face manifests a new inward reflectiveness, a pensiveness that affirms a life of the soul. His perfectly proportioned body is more naturally muscled; moreover, his body responds as a real body would to an extended leg. This simple but consequential change altered the rigid symmetry of the kouros and gave figurative sculpture the potential for fluidity and grace, for a cohesion that moves the figure into the realm of our own experience.

For the next century, sculpture would be refined and advanced by the new awarenesses represented in this figure. During the fifth century, standing figures not only changed appearance but also subtly changed in function. Though still commemorative, as the kouros had been, the sculptures reflected individuals. The victors in games and warriors and their actions became more distinctive and less constrained by type. Furthermore, as artists explored various theories of measure and proportion, aesthetic questions alone could prompt the production of a work. Such was the case with the famous *Doryphoros* (spear carrier) by Polyclitus [p. 13], the fifth-century sculptor who had written a book on measurement and proportion. Now known only through numerous Roman copies that testify to its fame, the *Doryphoros* established thicker and more compact proportions for the ideal male than those in the Riace warriors or their equally famous near-contemporary, the figure variously described as *Zeus* or *Poseidon*, of 470–450 B.C. [p. 14].

One of the masterpieces to survive from classical Greece, this figure was found in the sea near the Greek city of Artemision. As with many great works, the sculpture strikes a balance, but here the balance is between extremes not only of action and inaction but also of the specific and the general, the momentary and the timeless. Distillation, not description, is at the heart of this work. Here the sculptor proved in a sublime manner that human actions as well as human proportions can conform to the universal principles of mathematics. The entire configuration describes no single moment in the sequence of spear throwing but is a seamless and



ZEUS (OR POSEIDON), c. 470–450 B.C. *Produced roughly twenty years after the Kritios Boy, Zeus hurling his (now lost) spear (or Poseidon throwing his triton) shows how brilliantly fifth-century B.C. Greek sculptors solved the problem of portraying the human form in action. Found in the sea off the coast of Artemision, the Zeus/Poseidon is one of the finest Greek bronzes known.*

streamlined fusion of mathematical principle and human form.

No more compelling essay on the Greek belief in governing principles can be found. Lovers of beauty, order, simplicity, and rationality, the Greeks not only wished to see the parts of the body conform to the whole but also saw that the body itself could

exemplify a purer system of thought. Having abandoned as too stifling the rigid conventions of the kouroi, the Greeks now searched for new ones, and at the time of *Zeus/Poseidon*'s creation, they found a perfect solution.

The diversity of action now possible for the human form is seen here, yet *Zeus/Poseidon* also demonstrates perfectly the balance struck between action and stasis, between keenly observed nuances of human anatomy and ideal proportions, between spontaneity and deliberation. Having stretched out his left arm to balance the backward motion of his spear-throwing arm, *Zeus/Poseidon* looks in the direction of his aim, his leg extended in preparation for the forward thrust needed to propel his weapon. His action is practiced and measured. It expresses supreme confidence in the sureness of his aim and the distance of his throw. This image is not so much an expression of effort as it is a celebration of perfect ability. The god, be he Zeus or Poseidon, stands as the quintessential human athlete. Man and god have become so alike that one is indistinguishable from the other.

It is not surprising, then, that identification of Greek sculptures as mortals or deities remains difficult, and athletes generally are known only by virtue of their action: the *Discobolus* (disc thrower), the *Charioteer*, and so forth.

Whether athlete or god, these figures embody a vigorously competitive spirit. Often dedicated to winners of games or competitions, the sculptures of the classical period are triumphant and supremely self-confident. But during the fourth century B.C., this mood began to change. Between 431 and 404 B.C. Sparta supplanted Athens during the Peloponnesian War. Sparta, however, was not capable of leading Greece and soon sank into a state of corruption. The Greek poleis were in decline and were absorbed into the Macedonian empire in 338 B.C.

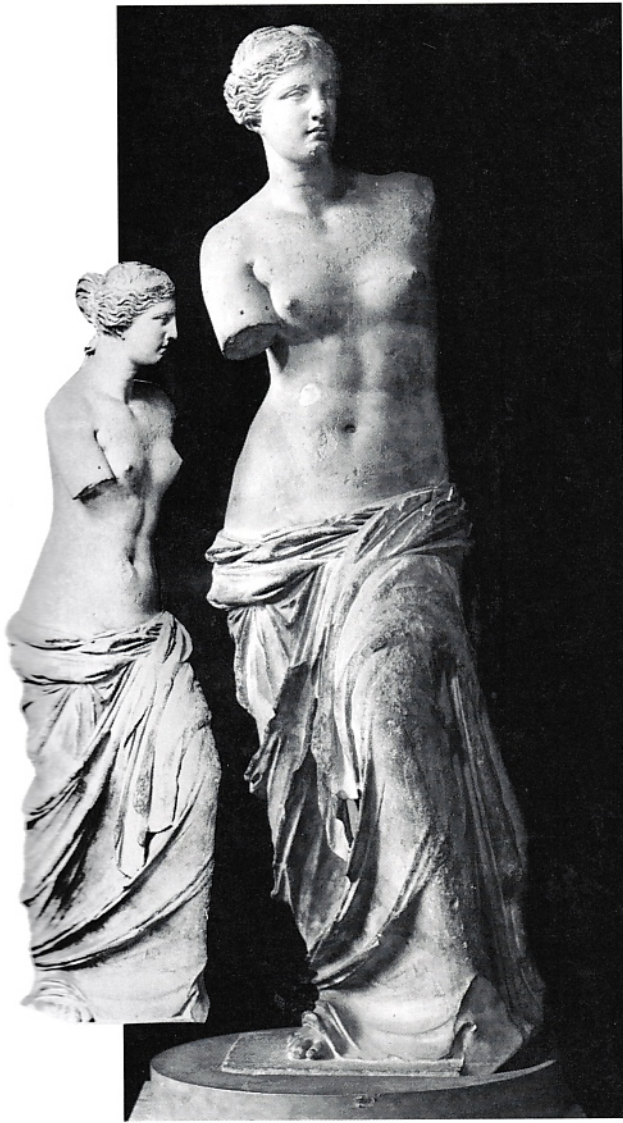
A new imperial age, that of Philip II of Macedonia and his son, Alexander the Great, emerged. Alexander's brief but glorious rule united the fractious Greek city-states and expanded the Greek (Hellenistic) empire. With the fall of Athens and the demise of the city-states, classical Greek art was

transformed. It became eccentric and individualized, following no single ideal but yielding to the subjective impulse of artist or patron. Though still great, it was, in a sense, a poignant and moving postscript to the golden and enduring art that had come before.

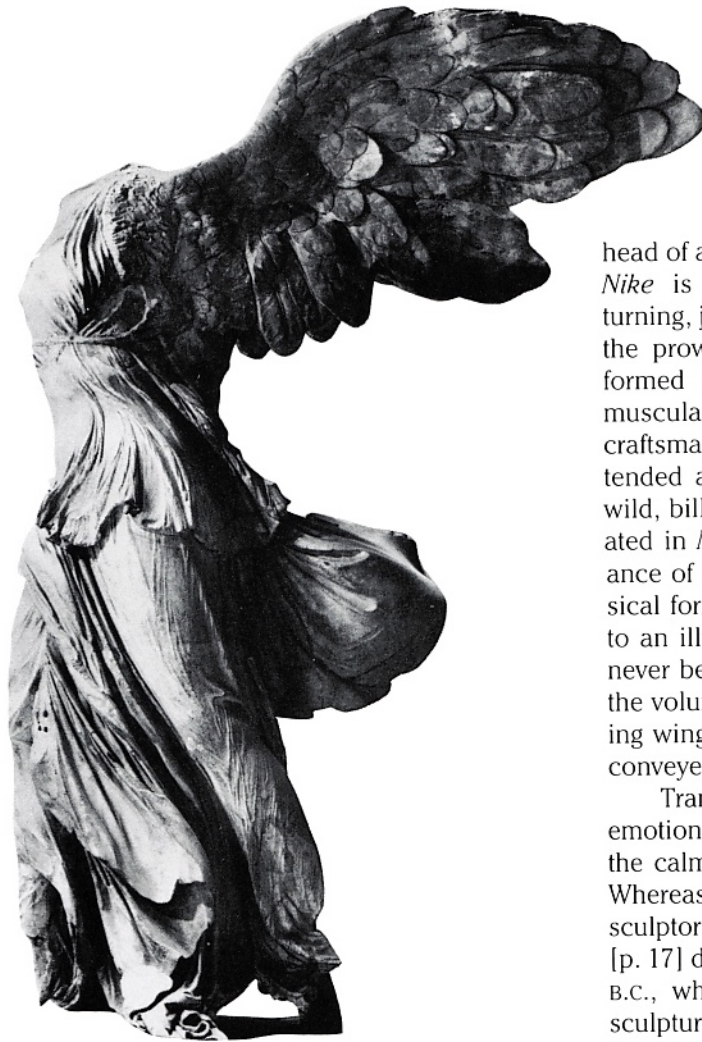
In the Hellenistic period, c. 323–327 B.C., extremes of all kinds occurred. Philosophers evolved diametrically opposing views: Epicurus founded a new philosophy of pleasure, while Zeno espoused the restraint of stoicism. Great strides were made in mathematics and astronomy, as Euclid proposed his enduring theories of geometry and the astronomer Aristarchus of Samos advanced a refined heliocentric theory (that was all but forgotten or ignored in the West until the time of Copernicus). Greece continued to suffer political decline, and, one by one, Greek possessions fell to Rome. In 212 B.C. Syracuse was sacked, and in 146 B.C. Corinth and Carthage fell; finally, in 86 B.C., Athens was lost to the Roman general Sulla.

Fittingly for a period of upheaval and change, the arts were again transformed. Sculpture reached a high point of sensuality and complexity of emotion; the images became more expressive, and a transitory, often charged feeling supplanted the timeless placidity of the earlier period. Sophistication in anatomical considerations was joined by a new appreciation for texture, sensuality, grace, and voluptuous action. It should come as no surprise that in this era, when constraints were removed and artistic freedom flourished, artists suffered the earliest recorded torments of creativity. Apollodorus, a sculptor from the Hellenistic era, was nicknamed “the Madman” for consistently smashing his works out of sheer frustration.

This period of sensuality saw the female nude join the male nude as a preeminent art form. Toward the end of the classical era, in about 340 B.C., Praxiteles produced a nude Aphrodite for a sanctuary in Cnidus. Endlessly copied, this Venus helped spawn a whole host of sensual goddesses during Hellenistic times, of which the *Venus de Milo* [p. 15] is the best known. Her serene expression, high breasts, and calm pose establish her as a descendant of Praxiteles' classical work. But her soft and turning body, with its complex pose and luxurious sensuality, has gone beyond the austerity of classicism and belongs to the Hellenistic age. As Venus



VENUS DE MILO, SECOND OR FIRST CENTURY B.C. *Though among the most famous of ancient Greek sculptures, the Venus de Milo still stirs controversy over the date of its origin. While the type can be dated back to the fourth century B.C., the curving body and sensuous form have caused many to place this work in the late Hellenistic period.*



NIKE OF SAMOTHRACE, c. 190 B.C. Found on the island of Samothrace in 1863. Nike is believed to commemorate the victory of the Rhodians over Antiochus III of Syria, c. 190 B.C.

moves, the drapes appear to slip from her body, exposing her voluptuous flesh. Her body seems pliant, inviting touch and invoking a delicate carnality. A specificity of time, place, and mood has been added to the ideal of beauty inaugurated by the classical sculptors. Venus and many other figures like her kindled an interest in the female nude that, though abandoned during the antimaterialistic period of the Middle Ages, was taken up again with enthusiasm in the Renaissance and remains part of our artistic heritage.

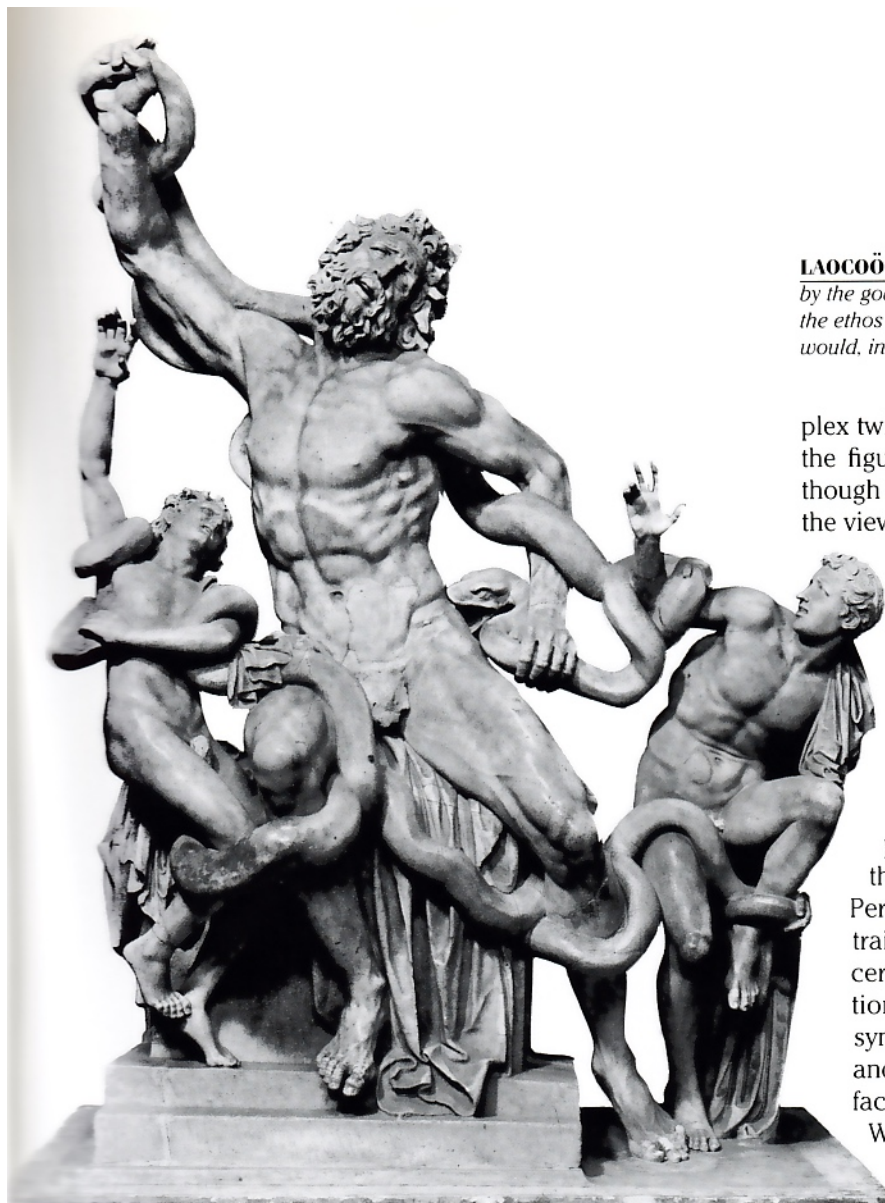
The *Nike of Samothrace* [p. 16] is another example of Hellenistic sculpture. Originally set at the

head of a fountain to commemorate a victory at sea, *Nike* is shown spread-winged, wind-swept, and turning, just at the moment when she has landed on the prow of a ship. The marble has been transformed into fluid drapery enveloping a soft yet muscular and active female form. Displaying craftsmanship and artistry, the sculptor has extended a thin membrane of marble to describe a wild, billowing cloth, still tugged by the breeze created in *Nike's* wake. The quiet, contemplative balance of action and reaction that bounded the classical forms by earlier sculptors has given way here to an illusion in which the senses are engaged as never before. The texture of the flesh, the feathers, the voluminous chiton, the sound of the great beating wings, and the flutter of the robe are all vividly conveyed.

Transition, struggle, movement, tension, and emotion in the Hellenistic period have supplanted the calm, stable, harmonious world of classicism. Whereas a single moment was captured by the sculptor of *Nike*, the maker of the *Laocoön Group* [p. 17] described an epic struggle. Carved about 150 B.C., when Greece was a satellite of Rome, the sculpture was greatly admired by the Romans. Pliny the Elder considered it the finest sculpture in antiquity, and when it was rediscovered fourteen



HEAD OF A BERBER, c. 350 B.C. Found at the Temple of Apollo at Cyrene, this head, which originally contained eyes made of glass, was part of a life-size statue.



LAOCOÖN GROUP, c. 150 B.C. *The fate of Laocoön, punished by the gods for having tried to protect the Trojans, anticipates the ethos of the redemptive powers of human suffering that would, in Christian times, become the basis for a new religion*

plex twists and turns of the snakes intertwined with the figures in violent physical exertion; moreover, though frontal in view, the subject is handled so that the viewer knows what goes on in the back.

In the era that marked their decline as a political power, the Greeks began to record more often than before what they themselves actually looked like, and portraiture emerged. Most of the sculpted likenesses that are extant reveal pensive faces described in conventions that have their roots in idealized types, but which gain conviction from the subtlety and power of the emotion expressed and from the skill with which the features are specified. Perhaps one of the most beautiful of these portraits is the *Head of a Berber* [p. 16]. Though certain conventions for the hair and the proportions of the head are clearly followed, the idiosyncratic set of the eyes, the turn of the brow, and the fullness of lips in this handsome young face belonged to an individual, not to a type.

When much of Greek artists' efforts went from a balanced style to excessive stylization during the Hellenistic period, it was portraiture that retained the strongest sense of purity, saved from excess by the demands of realism.

In all of its manifestations from the earliest periods to the latest, ancient Greek art searched for a greater understanding of humankind and the forces that govern it. It was an experimental, flexible art that, within the thousand years of its existence, grappled with the many problems of representing man and the world. By so doing, it drew the perimeters of most of the subsequent history of Western art. Objectivity, subjectivity, realism, idealism, the representation of the figure, narrative, and many other tenets of Western art were introduced and nurtured by the Greeks. It was left to the Roman world to preserve and disseminate this important heritage.

hundred years later in 1506 on the Esquiline Hill in Rome, it was once more a sensation, affecting profoundly the work of Michelangelo and scores of Renaissance artists. Produced in an age fascinated by images of struggle, by tension, and by theatrical portrayals of death in battle, the *Laocoön Group* retells the story of the Trojan priest who warned his fellow Trojans not to bring the wooden horse into Troy. Seeking to thwart him, the gods sent two huge snakes who swam ashore and slowly entwined and killed Laocoön and his two sons. Their doomed struggle gave the sculptor an unparalleled opportunity to demonstrate his skill at composing the com-