

## GREECE – CULTURE

**Greek culture.** There is Greek *literature*, which is the fine art of Greek culture in language. There is Greek *history*, which is the study of the development of the Greek political and social world through time. Squeezed in between them, marked by each of its neighbors, is Greek *culture*, an expression, and little more, to indicate ‘the way a people lived,’ their life-style. As you will see, in the following syllabus, the ‘manner of life’ can indeed include the ‘products of the finer arts’—literature, philosophy, by which a people orients itself in its larger meanings—and the ‘manner of life’ can also be understood in terms of the chronological history of a people; but on the whole, and for our purposes here, ‘manner of life’ will tend to mean the way a people builds a society, arranges its eating and drinking habits, builds its places of worship, dispenses its value and ownership codes in terms of an economy, and arranges the ceremonies of marriage burial and social initiation. The course we outline below will touch on several main registers of ancient Greek culture, ‘the way it was lived.’

**Greeks as aesthetes.** The ancient Greeks were an aesthetic people, for whom the beautiful, or ‘sensuously attractive,’ was of the highest importance—in dress, in domestic architecture, in monumental architecture, in literature, and of course in the visual arts. (In this they were a different culture from, say, that of Canada or the United States, cultures in which attention to the arts has customarily been subordinate to affairs of state, business, or practical achievement.) Therefore, the Greek artistic achievement as a whole is the most meaningful vehicle of Hellenic influence on and importance to, the world.

**Culture and literature.** Some fine-tuning is needed here. Ancient Greek culture lasted for a millennium, from 1000 B.C. to the birth of Christ, and changed constantly through time as patterns of population change, institutions decay and are replaced, and artistic styles come and go. But there is more diversity to account for than appears in this statement of diachronic diversity. Greek culture is unusually rich at any given period of Greek culture. We will stress Athens in the classical period—fifth century B.C.—but there was a vividly different lifestyle in other *polises*—Thebes and Sparta, for example—to which we will pay little attention. We will try to give some sense of lifestyles in other regions than Athens and at different periods of Athenian history, but for simplicity’s sake, to repeat, the fifth century in Athens will be our default position.

**Suggested texts** Two physical texts will be useful possessions for the English language user of the following syllabus. I refer to James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (New York, 1997); and Mary Beard, *Classics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2000.) (Both of these books should be available at the bookstore, for a reasonable price, or at any good library.) The first book, that of Davidson, will survey classical Greek literature (history, culture) from a close up and personal perspective: eating habits, love making habits, money-saving and expenditure habits, intimate views of how the state works in the individual life. At the same time, in the midst of this provocative reading, you will find yourself transported to the true feel of living with the ancient Athenians, a trick rarely accomplished in classical scholarship. The second book, by Mary Beard, is short and sweet and yet held firmly together by concentration on the nature and fate of a single ancient Greek temple, at Bassae. You will marvel at how the complexity of the classical tradition can be unfolded from that one architectural document. To both of these texts you can easily add the individual volumes of the Loeb Classical Library—a complete facing-page set of translations of all significant texts remaining from Greek literature-- which provides facing (not very lively) translations, and in which every text you will take interest in here will be represented.

**Other Texts** For our work on Greek visual art, political life, sports, religion, farming, which will compose a large part of the class, we will use a variety of suggested texts, among them online work. In this increasingly diverse publishing world you will certainly find many valid reading solutions different from the assigned material given with each week’s discussion. You are here to educate yourself, and should feel free to use significant resources wherever you can find them. Counting on your resourcefulness, the creator of this course has not hesitated to include suggested texts which would be hard to find except in a good research library, nor has he hesitated not to go onto the online literature, which doubtless the student can peruse more skillfully than he. Of particular note, the visual materials, which are of special importance in Chapters 2 to 4, can easily be found at many sites on the internet, as well as in any comprehensive History of Western Art.

## Greek SCIENCE

**A view of the issue** Ancient Greek science assumes many forms: theories about the nature of the universe; observations and classifications of what is in nature; and practical programs like medicine, based on the understanding of the natural world.

**Milesian theories about the universe** Of the earlier Greek scientists we would think first of Thales (d. 545 B.C.E.), from Miletus on the coast of Asia Minor. (That coast, with its eastern exposure to influences from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Phoenicia, was productive for many early Greek thinkers, the scientist-philosophers Anaximander and Anaximenes, as well as Thales.) Thales was an observer of nature, who asked questions about what he saw—*what is the fundamental principle of all I see around me, he asked, how tall are the pyramids, how far are ships from the shore when we observe them out beyond us, what is the inner principle of magnetism that draws metal particles to a lodestone*—and who came up with answers both ‘fanciful’ and ‘spot on.’ His reasoning was often of the simplest and most satisfying kind: say, comparing to one another the shadows cast by a man and a pyramid, and therefrom calculating the height of the pyramid. He remains best known to us for his notion that water is the fundamental principle of physical reality, into which all other forms can resolve.

**Other early theories** Thales, from Asia Minor, was only one of a number of thinkers from that region, who speculated on the fundamental character of natural reality—thus creating a blend of science and metaphysics. Anaximenes (d. 525 B.C.E.) formulated the theory that the *infinite air* was the first principle, while Heraclitus (d. 475 B.C.E.) spoke of change and flux as the ultimate principles of reality.

**Aristotle and the classification of nature** Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) can represent the drive behind Greek scientific inquiry after the classical period. A pupil of Plato, and consequently well trained in logic, epistemology, and ethics, he was at the same time unrivalled in his attention to understanding the natural world, which he considered an unceasing marvel. Not only did he observe tirelessly but he classified: plants, body parts and functions, medical procedures, mechanical operations, astronomical phenomena. His contributions to later thought have often been undervalued, for he lacked tools or techniques needed for experimental study, but the largeness of his scope, in laying nature out for mankind to study, was a stimulus which even the great scientists of the 17th century took full advantage of, while to a mediaeval visionary, like Dante, Aristotle remained the ‘maestro di color che sanno,’ the ‘master of those who know.’

**Ancient Greek medicine** For Homer, who in his work makes mention of 150 different body parts—evidence enough of the early Greek interest in our bodies—disease was revenge from the gods, for our evil behavior, and only prayer and sacrifice could restore the harmony between humans and their creators. This view was soon exposed to an experimental light; empirical attention was devoted to the arts of healing. By 700 B.C.E. the first Greek medical school had been founded. The physician Hippocrates (470-360 B.C.E.), practicing on the island of Cos, matured the theory of the humors, arguing that when the balance among the four principal constituents of the body—blood, bile, black bile, and phlegm—became disturbed, disease resulted. The job of the physician was to prescribe medicines that restore the body’s balance. Among many later Greek physicians, Galen (d. 207 B.C.E.) stands out for his breadth—‘the best physician is also a philosopher,’ he believed—and the concrete observations he mastered from his adventures in surgery and vivisection. Galen’s word ruled in western medicine, for the next 1300 years.

### Readings

Clagett, Marshall, *Greek Science in Antiquity*, New York, 1955.

Nutton, Vivian, *The Healing Hand: Man and Wound in the Ancient World*, New York, 2004.

### Discussion questions

Did Greek scientists adopt the scientific method, in the sense given that expression during the 17th century in Europe? Explain.

Five hundred years separated Hippocrates from Galen. What kind of developments occurred between the two physicians, that enabled Galen’s empirical interventions to replace Hippocrates’ theory of humors?

How did the Milesian scientist/philosophers contribute to our concrete understanding of natural phenomena?

## Ancient Greek HISTORY

**Overview** The historical sense is less old than group memory, which we suppose coeval with the first organization of a society. Ancient Greek society opens to us in the Homeric epics, which though (especially the *Iliad*) they seem on the whole to be ‘historical’ are infused with imagination, creative design, and the interests of poetic technique. It would be hard to find other written work, between Homer and the fifth century, which was more narrowly ‘historical’ than Homer’s. The lyric poets, the Milesian philosophers, and above all the dramatists: all these writing groups processed the past, but as myth or imagination. It is first with Herodotus and Thucydides, in the fifth century B.C.E., that the genre of ‘history proper’ begins to be written in Greece. This genre, though inflected by interests of poetry, imagination, philosophy, is meant to memorialize (not simply archive) a swathe of the past of Athens (and other Greek colonies and city-states of the time.)

**Herodotus (484-425 B.C.E.)** Herodotus was the first Greek historian. In his *History* he recounted the events and pre-war build up of the Persian Wars, in which the Athenians, and some other city-states, discovered their identity and group pride by defeating an army and naval force much larger than their own. In the course of recounting this life and death struggle—which has many elements of drama and poetry in it—Herodotus stops often along the way, to tell us of the curious and unfamiliar customs of the regions—Egypt, Persia—through which his main narrative takes us. He thus becomes the anthropologist, too, a figure attractive to many historians to come.

**Thucydides (460.B.C.E.-398 B.C.E.)** Thucydides wrote his great work of history about the Peloponnesian Wars, that struggle that broke out, after the Persian Wars, between the *poleis* of Athens and Sparta, the two pillars of Hellenism against the Persian invasion. Taking off where Herodotus left off, Thucydides worked from a realistic, first-person inquiry sense of *Realpolitik*, from which, in a style that was always careful, dry and pithy, he created a work that contrasted sharply with the style of Herodotus. While Herodotus is out to celebrate the glorious achievements of Athens, and to do so in an often folksy and anecdotal fashion, Thucydides packs tense international relations into sharp dialogue and aphoristic commentary, cutting to the bone and taking care not to take sides.

**Other historians** Mention should be made of two later Greek historians. **Xenophon** (430-354 B.C.E.), a pupil of Socrates, is familiar to most students of the Greek language, who teethe on the *Anabasis* (370 B.C.E.), a thrilling account of the return of 10,000 Greek mercenaries—Xenophon was one of their generals—from Persia to Greece. As a practicing historian, Xenophon is known especially for his *History* of the declining Hellenism of the late fifth and early fourth centuries. **Polybius** (264-146 BC.E.), writing in another era, gives his attention to the early formative period of the Roman Republic, excelling in his accounts of events like the sack of Carthage by the Romans (146 B.C.E.). It marks Polybius’ work that he thinks in terms of admired models, like Philip of Macedon, from whom the reader can derive life-lessons.

### Reading

Luce, T. James, *The Greek Historians*, London, 1997.

Parmeggiani, Giovanni, *Between Thucydides and Polybius, the Golden Age of Greek Historiography*, Cambridge (Mass.), 2014.

### Discussion questions

What elements of Hellenic imaginative literature do you see in Herodotus? Has he anything in common with the view points of tragic (or comic) drama?

What is the difference between the attitude of Herodotus to Athens, and that of Thucydides? Do their attitudes differ because they wrote about different moments in Athens’ history?

Herodotus is called both ‘the father of history’ and ‘the father of lies.’ Which name do you think fits him better? Explain.

## GREECE-ART

### ARCHITECTURE

#### The Greek Temple

**What is a Greek Temple?** A Greek temple is the sheltering architectural building, located within a sanctuary or holy precinct, which evolved into the Greek community's place of worship. These pregnant sites can be found widely scattered throughout the Greek world, and densely placed at appropriate settings within the Greek city-state. (Appropriate? Temples were located in places traditionally associated with this or that deity, or, given a newly chosen site, in places suitable for a new house of the god—on a mountain top close to the home of Zeus, on a promontory over the sea, fitting for a home to Poseidon, or in the forest, in a locale natural for a tribute to the huntswomen goddess, Artemis.) Needless to say—and we can trace major changes through all cultures' architectural histories—there were many *stages* of temple construction in Greece. In the earliest stages, probably in evidence from 600 B.C. on, temples began to be constructed in stone, replacing wood and mud brick structures preceding them on the same site. (By the nature of the case we cannot verify the pre existence of these wooden predecessors, but there are good reasons to suppose that throw away materials like wood, stone, or clay were the initial god houses for the Greeks, and that as they consolidate the character of their religious beliefs, the Greeks accordingly consolidated the form of their temples. There are, though, competing theories of the source of the ancient Greek pre-temple temple. One theory is that Mycenaean architecture, which flourished in the Archaic Age of Greece, and which dominates in the great fortresses of Mycenae and Tiryns, in the Peloponnesus, provided the initial impulse for the Hellenic temple architecture. A second view is that Egyptian art was the inspiration for at least many elements of the Greek temple, like the Ionic order columns, which clearly work off of Egyptian floral motifs.)

**How did Greek temples change over time?** The earliest temples were in a style called Doric—from a traditional name for the earliest settlers in Hellas—constructed originally at Corinth, and marked by strong somewhat squat columns. The Corinthian style of temple architecture came into presence in the fourth century B.C., and was called Ionic when the Ancients began to analyze their own art history. Although the Corinthian column, and many of the details of capital, architrave, and frieze, differed more or less sharply from the Doric model, the overall structure, of all early Greek temples, was roughly the same. There were, however, changes through time, as well as variations within each style. It is important, here, to look at photos which bring out those changes. Take, for example, the Temple of Hera at Paestum (550 B.C.), the Parthenon in Athens (447-432 B.C.) and the Temple of Apollo at Didyma in today's Turkey, begun in 313 B.C. Both of the first two temples were Doric in style, the third features massive Ionic columns.

**Who made the Greek temples?** By the classical period, the fifth century B.C., major temples such as those on the Acropolis at Athens, were created by noted architects. Ictinus, contemporary with the renowned *archon* Pericles, was noted for his head architect role in the creation of the Parthenon, the central structural brilliance on the Acropolis, or the Temple of Bassae in the Peloponnesus, and for an important temple at Eleusis. Phidias served as the master administrator, and artistic director of the art work on the Parthenon, while Kallikrates, a distinguished architect and 'city planner' in Athens, served as a third leading force in the making of the Acropolis-temples, most prominent of Athenian projects.

**The Acropolis and Parthenon.** It is worth considering the setting of the Acropolis-Parthenon project, for it is an example of the most ambitious effort to be found among the city-states of Greece. By the time construction began, on an Acropolis already housing various sacred structures, Pericles had proven his superior leadership, building, with the island states of the Aegean, a military alliance which gave Athens pre eminence in Greece. Pericles put himself in overall charge of construction of the Parthenon, the cost of which, for the first year's work, was 5000 talents (some 3 billion dollars at today's rate). The project took fifteen years, was largely financed by money from the treasury of the Delian League—Athens's naval alliance—and involved the quarrying of 20 thousand tons of marble from Mount Pentele. Who made the Greek temple? Pericles? Iktinos? Or Iannis who quarried the marble and dragged it down from the mountain?

**What went on in the Greek temple?** The broad answer is that the temple was largely a storage area, and not a place for the rituals of worship. (Rituals—prayers and sacrifices—would normally take place outside the temple, in the sanctuary precinct.) The temple itself, of course, was an *overwhelming* storage area. The structure would be

oriented toward the East, so that the rays of the morning sun came in through the giant front door of the structure, incrementally lighting more of the *cella* (or *naos*), the nave of the building, until the cult statue itself, which was at the far western end of the nave, was touched or even covered with light. In addition to the cult statue, which loomed over the hall around it, there were typically an altar, tables for votive offerings, and personal treasures dedicated to the deity enshrined there. ...It would be worth concluding our effort, to describe the awe evoked in the temple, by including a passage from the Greek traveler Pausanias. He is describing the cult statue of Athena in the Parthenon.

*The statue itself is made of ivory, silver and gold. On the middle of her helmet is placed a likeness of the Sphinx ... and on either side of the helmet are griffins in relief. ... The statue of Athena is upright, with a tunic reaching to the feet, and on her breast the head of Medusa is worked in ivory. She holds a statue of Victory about four cubits high, and in the other hand a spear; at her feet lies a shield and near the spear is a serpent. This serpent would be Erichthonius. On the pedestal is the birth of Pandora in relief.*

### Readings

Mikalson, Jon, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Chichester, 2010), pp. 1-51.

Fullerton, Mark, *Greek Art* (Cambridge, 2000). (This text is the basic assignment for Weeks 2,3,4, and is to be read over that period of time, for it will shed light on aspects of Greek religion and art that are launch pads for our course.)

### Discussion questions:

Do you see a peculiarly fitting relation between the form of the Greek temple and the nature of the religion practiced in it? Gothic cathedrals, in mediaeval Christian tradition, might seem to be extending spires toward heaven. Does the Greek temple in any comparable way suggest the meanings internal to its form?

Does there seem to be any overall 'administration' of Olympian religious practice? This question may sound absurd! Is there a Greek Vatican? A Supreme religious court? The answer is basically no, but then what assured uniformity of practice, from one temple site to another? Was there a completely autonomous priesthood in each *temenos*?

What function did light play in disclosing the cult statue in the Greek temple? Was the semi-darkness, which much of the time enclosed the cult statue, a protective device to enhance awe? Why did most of the actual worshipping take place outside the temple itself?

## SCULPTURE

**Sculpture and the Greek temple.** Ancient Greek sculpture belongs to the same creative impulse as the ancient Greek temple. However Greek sculpture was only in part a co-product of Greek temple architecture. The period during which Greek sculpture was created on actual works of Greek architecture would be the 5<sup>th</sup> century classical period, and would involve sculptural works on metopes and pediments as well as on the extensive friezes we find on temples dating from the mid sixth to the mid fifth century. Of those ornamental sculptural works, whose *raison d'être* is to complement the temple, we find a blindingly skillful fusion with the temple, so radiant that in instances like the sculptures of the Parthenon, or of the Nike Temple on the Acropolis, the sculptural work is a seamless whole with the temple itself. (The Parthenon frieze, subsequently called The Elgin Marbles, for Lord Elgin dismantled the frieze from its pediment in the 18th century and transferred it to the British Museum, would be a central example of the brilliance of the welding of sculpture and architecture.)

**Non-temple sculpture.** A great deal of ancient Greek sculpture was created independent of temple architecture, and for those examples—early bronzes, archaic *kouroi* (youthful male) and *kourai* (maidens), free standing life sized sculptures often found in temple precincts, fourth and third century 'genre' sculptures like the Hermes of Praxiteles (320 B.C.) or The Dying Trumpeter (230 B.C.)—for those examples any aesthetic alliance with Greek temple architecture would be hard to formulate.

**What are the landmarks of this sculpture?** To attempt such a formulation, to reach toward an aesthetic which would be in common both to Greek temple creations and to further domains of Greek art—like ceramics or

painting—would be to start this Greek culture syllabus on the right course, looking for the characteristic traits of ancient Greek culture; we will look for that unity as we advance and when we conclude. If we look at the developmental curve of free standing Greek sculpture, that is sculpture not part of temples, we see that it changes dramatically in character from the earliest remaining examples to the work of Hellenistic sculptures.

**Greek naturalism.** Look, for starters, at the Man and Centaur sculpture in bronze from 750 B.C. This example, of work in the geometric style, is a starkly abstract reminder of the kind of Near Eastern stylized art which was to generate many visual themes in subsequent Greek sculpture. This style, however, marks off sharply from the life-sized sculptures in stone which begin to spring from Hellenic workshops after 650 B.C. The creations we call *kouroi* (youthful nude standing males) and *kourai* (clothed standing maidens) pick up the stiff frontality of contemporary Egyptian culture, and speak for the aesthetic values of an age truly called Archaic, and soon, by the early decades of the fifth century, to transition off into free standing sculptural works of an entirely more ‘naturalistic’ cast, like the dying warrior (480 B.C.) or the Poseidon (460 B.C.) found in the sea off the Temple of Poseidon at Sunium.

**Trends in sculpture history.** Among these rapidly transitioning phases of Greek sculpture one struggles to see a pattern; and yet the ‘sense of the cultural movement,’ which is passing through social as well as art life, is that of increasing ‘naturalism’ in literature, the visual arts, even in philosophy, where concrete efforts are being made to identify the ‘material composition’ of reality. (To put ‘naturalism’ at the apex of this movement is doubtless a byproduct of our own cultural comfort with realism in the arts, a byproduct challenged in our own times by such art movements as Modernism in painting—Braques, Picasso—which make the abstract and often starkly non-representational—remember the bronze Man and Centaur from 750 B.C.—seem to be the center of mankind’s visual universe.) If we go beyond the consummate works of the mid-fifth century sculptors we may jump sharply ahead into such work as the coy statue of Aphrodite of Cnidus (360 B.C.) which is created in the era of Plato, Xenophon, and Menander. In that statue we have gone into a world profoundly different from that of the *kourai* of the Archaic Age, some of which were still under creative production not much more than a century earlier, and examples of which abound at Greek sanctuaries throughout the Mediterranean world in the fifth century B.C. ‘Finally,’ if we want to skim examples of this trend toward ‘naturalism’ in sculpture, and then beyond it, into the attitudinal coyness of our Aphrodite, we will find ourselves looking at sculptural work like The Dying Trumpeter (230 B.C.) which fully represents the Hellenistic comfort with the depiction of heartfelt emotions, often enough tinged, as here, with the hue of sentimentality.

**Is a single Hellenic aesthetic emerging, as we peruse works of ancient Greek temple construction and sculpture? Are we finding a Greek signature on the creations?** This question is rendered difficult by the obvious fact that the Hellenic artistic sensibility is in constant change, from era to era. In temple architecture we careen from the massive Doric columns of Paestum in sixth century Italy, to the perfect Doric harmonies of the Parthenon, to the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The correlative history of Greek sculpture, from an Archaic *kouros* to the Dying Trumpeter, will track a sequence of style and worldview changes which are easily as dramatic as any in the realm of architectural history. Would we like to say that a celebration of light, harmony, the deeply human, pervades the high point works of the fifth century, both in temple architecture and in sculpture? Such an assertion would correspond to the overall evaluation, in Western culture, of the progress, peak, and decline of the visual arts in the Hellenic world. Anything like such an assertion would rely on tried and true belief that Humanism surges to the fore with the mid-fifth century genius, and that this is the moment to which our attentions turn as to the absolute center of the Hellenic achievement. Clearly this would be a culturally loaded way of seeing Greek visual art.

Assignment:

Fullerton, Mark, *Greek Art* (Cambridge, 2000). (This text is the basic assignment for Weeks 2,3,4, and is to be read over that period of time, for it will shed light on aspects of Greek religion and art that are launch pads for our course.)

Discussion questions:

From what you gather about Greek sculpture, do you feel its development moves in tandem with the development of Greek history in the broad sense? Or is this just metaphorical talk? Is historical development too broad a theme to be correlated with something as specific as the development of an art tradition?

Why are the classical Greek temples structures so profusely ornamented with sculpture? Do architectural structure and sculptural decoration fit together well? Do they—as, say, on the Parthenon frieze or the Nike Temple on the Acropolis—reinforce one another? How does this relationship work itself out in contemporary world religious edifices?

Are you comfortable with our viewing sculpture (and next week pottery) as expressions of ‘culture’ rather than only as expressions of ‘art history?’ Does art seem to you to spring from the same foundations as daily life, religious worship, and military action?

## POTTERY

**Developments in pottery history.** The fact is that the curve of development of Greek pottery, and of the painting decorating it, closely follows the curve of development in the other arts. We go back, as we did with the development of the temple, or of sculpture, to breakthroughs, in the Archaic Age of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, into what we must recognize as a new humane, naturalistic, and ‘realized’ form of expression. (There we are again, repeating a pretty typical Humanist account of the movement of Ancient Greek culture, a movement taught us, in the early modern eras of our own culture, to view as consummated in the great works of the fifth century B.C.)

**Pottery trends.** We have mentioned a ‘geometric’ bronze sculpture, of a man and a centaur about to fight, dating from the mid 8<sup>th</sup> century. This work belongs to an art period of which we might want to say, that it prioritizes linear, often stark juxtapositions of forms, or, in the case of the pottery beginning to proliferate at the time, functional and often linear vessels designed each for a particular purpose—*amphoras*, for the burial of human ashes, and later for wine and oil transport; *aryballoi* for perfume jars; *kraters*, for wine or water storage. The juxtaposition of figures on the *aryballos* of the Ajax painter, from the early 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., will convey the geometrical notion. The *aryballos* in question is only 2 7/8 inches in height—which will give an idea of the finesse of the work, which depicts a stylized band of animals around the neck of the tiny vase, and on the side full height warrior portraits. For a tall counterpoint, to this miniature perfume jar, contrast the Dipylon amphora (750 B.C.) from the Dipylon Cemetery in Athens. This five foot tall amphora served as a carrier for funeral ashes, and in its height, and intricacy of geometrical designs and stylized figures, would have served as a forceful indicator of the wealth and status of the cremated. The archaic mode of this work is qualified in a signal innovation: the potter attaches his name to the work, in contrast to the anonymity of earlier workers in geometric pottery.

**Pottery and painting.** Jump from where we are to Exekias, a potter-painter of the early sixth century, a renowned artist known for his numerous reworkings of themes from Homer’s epics, *The Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Look at his black figure amphora of Ajax and Achilles playing checkers, at a rare moment of downtime in the course of the Trojan War. (The black figure designs, with red backgrounds, gave the painter room for sharp profiles, while the red-figure paintings, which were a few decades later to win the pottery vogue in Athens, allowed for more illumination and volatility in the depiction of the figures.) The figures are stylized but full of life, edgy, intent; no longer the formal and relatively expressionless presences we see on geometrical pottery.

As we see in the case of Exekias, painting and pottery developed hand in hand, and that will continue to be so until the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., when wall painting sprang out from Hellenistic cultures, and provided a freeing up of new imaginative figural powers, no longer tied to the pottery vehicle. Perhaps the perfect mating, of pottery and painting, occurs during the 5<sup>th</sup> century, in which (480 B.C.) we come on exquisite, and fully felt, scenes like the Douris painter’s Eos and Memnon, a small kylix, 10 inches in diameter, on the interior of which is painted a scene of the goddess of Dawn, Eos, lifting her dead and defeated son, whom Achilles has killed and stripped. The emotion of the bereaved mother, and the total extinction of her lifeless son, who lies in her arms, deploys a dignified pathos which may serve as a brief symbol for us, here, for the special purity of achievement of painting and pottery in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

**Wall painting and the aryballos.** From this point on we could follow the development of Greek painting on a course apart from pottery—a course leading toward dramatic Hellenistic wall paintings of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Or we can leave our tale at the point where painting was still an appendage of pottery, where it still finds itself in, for example, the white ground lekythos work of the so-called Reed painter, at the end of the fifth century B.C. We need to concentrate on the figure of the forlorn young man, sitting between two other figures, revealing in a few lines how

profoundly he feels the death incinerated in the jar he decorates. We could hardly be more impressed, with the velocity of Greek cultural change, than by thinking from this point back three centuries to the modes of archaic potter artists like the maker of the perfume jar aryballos at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

Assignment:

Fullerton, Mark, *Greek Art* (Cambridge, 2000). (This text is the basic assignment for Weeks 2,3,4, and is to be read over that period of time, for it will shed light on aspects of Greek religion and art that are launch pads for our course.)

Mikalson, Jon, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Chichester, 2010), pp. 206-226

Beazly and Ashmole, *Greek Sculpture and Painting* (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 1-53.

Discussion questions:

Is there such a thing as a minor art, or do all arts equally represent the culture they spring from? Does Greek pottery seem to you to express important aspects of Greek culture? Do the changes in Greek pottery, from age to age, reflect parallel changes in Greek society itself?

Does Greek pottery seem to you primarily functional—serving a purpose—or primarily aesthetic? Or are the two aspects of ceramic art inter related, so that what is beautiful is at the same time useful?

Does painting seem to be derivative from ceramic ware in Greece? Of course the Greeks and the Myceneans before them surrounded themselves with painting—on frescoes and walls--but was ancient painting, in the sense of design and portraiture, a derivative of ceramic art?



## ANCIENT GREECE - Religion

### ORIGINS

**Olympians and the Divine** What is the historical origin of the Greek gods, those initially twelve potent Olympian figures whom the Greeks worshipped as the divine itself, and to whom they turned, throughout their history, for help and hope?

**Homer and Hesiod** The poets Homer and Hesiod both write from the belief in an earlier stage of their religion, in which the Olympian gods emerge as relatively civilizing and creative forces on the front line of the establishment of meaning in the cosmos.

**Iliad and Odyssey** For the most part Homer takes his gods into the narrative of his tales—The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—making gods and mortals into intimate friends and enemies with one another, and activating plot by means of ‘divine mechanisms.’

**Theogony** Hesiod, in his *Theogony*, composed in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and thus probably 100 years later than Homer, tracks the origins of the Olympians back to their own more primitive ancestors. The origin of the cosmos would in fact be pre Olympian; would be the mating of Ouranos (sky) and Gaia (earth), who would in their turn be replaced by their children Kronos and Rhea, Titans and elements of a pre-Olympian set of ruling powers. (By some Greek accounts Rhea was seen as the mother of the Olympian gods and a beneficiary of widespread worship in her own right.) The overall gist of this genealogy is clearly to set the stage for a generation of reason and order, the Olympian generation. The Olympians come off as correlatives to the human, and though in Homer the Olympian gods play every sort of game with their mortal colleagues, the gods are nonetheless of high order power, shrewdness, and beauty. It is only fate which overrules the Olympians, but against **that** iron power nothing created is effectual.

**Olympian map of the gods** The Olympian pantheon will have been a world organizing map in the mind of its believers. The personalization of natural forces—as we enforce it through mapping a Poseidon behind the roar of the sea, a Zeus in the thunder, an Hephaestus in the forge, a Hermes in the power of speedy communication—will be a way of organizing the world and drawing it close to consciousness. A narrative view of the world will form the framework of daily experience.

**Sacred Spaces and Qualities** Apart from the mapping and personalization issues, the Olympian pantheon will have promoted the tendency to sacralize places and qualities (like beauty, power, strength), and thus to hallow many regions of psychology and topography. Much in the world becomes sacred by its proximity to the Olympian, and though the sacralization in question is deeply anti-scientific, and will take according revenges on the anti-technical way Hellenism unfolds, that sacralization builds and grows from imagination that will pervade Greek culture, and lend it its unique stamp.

### WORSHIP

**Varieties of religious worship** As we address these questions we realize, at once, that there were multiple forms of religious belief in Ancient Greece. As recently as the fifth century B.C., to which we have been devoting attention, there was a symbiosis of private cult religion with the official ‘state’ religion devoted to the Olympian gods.

**Local cult sites** The Olympian gods were the largely divine but partly human presences that the Greek mapped against the sky, acquiring order through this man-created GPM. The worship of these deities was specific to particular cult sites, and varied through the centuries, but was on the whole conservative and relatively simple. Worship was typically carried out inside a sanctuary (*temenos*) in which stood the temple, with its cult statue and before it its altar; while disposed around the sanctuary, which found itself either in the city or in the countryside, there would be religious-use outbuildings and perhaps a sacred grove. Though there was no official priesthood—just as there was no canonical text of origin (except for the Homeric epics which in a sense served as theological touchstones)—there was an officiant at any religious worship. This individual would supervise the sacrifice and libations that were devoted to a particular deity, and guarantee the authentic character of the hymns and praises that celebrated the god in question, thanking him/her for gifts from above. In the course of this sacrificial service—which

drew its beauty from the aura of ‘giving up’—the worshippers would eat the meat and entrails of the sacrificed goat (or sheep or oxen) and set aside the fat to burn as incense for the honored god of the precinct.

**Religious cult traditions** Parallel to this public worship, which we know from Homer on—the Greeks sacrificed before sailing to Troy, the shepherd Eumaios sacrifices in honor of his master, Odysseus--there is an ancient and largely subterranean cult religious tradition. This cultic tradition plainly speaks to the need, among the Greeks, to worship in direct connection with their emotions—which were more or less ritualized away in the official religion. (This is a guess. Perhaps an error. The Abrahamic religions, which in time developed somewhat later than Greek polytheism, instituted a new level of interiority, which is hard to find a parallel for in what we understand of the Olympian religion. We seem to find, in the Olympian religion, a rhetoric of rite and sacrifice which excludes forms of interiority we can account for.)

**Dionysian religion** Many of the themes of Greek cultic religion center around the worship of the god Dionysus, who is regularly associated, in Greek experience, with wilderness, the wild in the human person, ecstasy induced by wine, and the phallic, for Dionysus is in all his faces connected with fertility and with that generative power of the body which is sublimated off, in Olympian religion, into stylized forms, in which fundamental human concerns are ‘aestheticized.’ The Dionysian element was normally either locked out or stylized in the presentations of the Olympian religion. Normally but not always. In Euripides’ play *The Bacchae*, the forces of an unleashed Dionysian female cult overturn the representative of the state. In that play we see King Pentheus of Thebes humiliatingly driven into cross dressing by the women of his city, who drive him from his power and leave him helpless in a tree!

**Dionysus and the sub conscious** One version of the Dionysian backstory defies anything except a handbook account—for it takes ‘myth’ into regions of the social sub-conscious. It shows us how much more deeply embedded in individual worship Dionysus was than were the Olympians.

*Dionysus (in his incarnation as Zagreus) is the son of Zeus and Persephone; Zeus gives his inheritance of the throne to the child, as Zeus has to abdicate due to Hera's anger over a child being born by another mother; the Titans are enraged, and under Hera's instigation decide to murder the child. Dionysus is then tricked with a mirror and children's toys by the Titans who murder and consume him. Athena saves Dionysus' heart and tells Zeus of the crime; he in turn hurls a thunderbolt on the Titans. The resulting soot, from which sinful mankind is born, contain the bodies of the Titans and Dionysus. The soul of man (Dionysus factor) is therefore divine, but the body (Titan factor) holds the soul in bondage. Thus it was decreed that the soul returns to the body ten times during its life-cycle.*

**Dionysus, mystery religions, Christianity** One message of this non-Olympian phantasmagoria, is that the birth of Dionysus represents the persistence in the human of a soul element which can enter and leave the body. This backstory links to the cults of Dionysus, which flourished especially in Eleusis, from where we learn of the growingly powerful Eleusinian mysteries, which merge ultimately into later mystery cults, at the intersection of late Greek culture and the Roman Empire, in the last two centuries before Christ. Into the increasing diversity of Greek religious practices, especially into the new cult milieu which presses forward from the 4th century B.C. on, we see merging influential cults like Orphism, later Mithraism, and then, still in a loose continuity with the mystery cults of Dionysus, the salvation cults (like the Gnostics) which compete with the nascent Christian Church in the early centuries after Christ’s death.

#### *SCEPTICISM AND CRITIQUE*

**Philosophical skepticism** Throughout the development of Greek religion there was a tradition of skepticism and philosophical critique. We all know that the accusers of Socrates made much of his alleged disrespect for the gods. That charge was a serious one, perhaps the most damning brought against him. At the very end of the fifth century, when the Athenian *polis* had passed its moment of greatest public brilliance, a major victory (The Persian Wars) fading into history, a major loss (The Peloponnesian Wars) in their immediate present, the Athenians felt the fragility of their *polis*, and the need to reaffirm its official belief foundations. Scepticism and doubt about the old values were everywhere. It might be added that into this uneasy cultural climate entered the influence of the Sophists, those itinerant teachers of knowledge, and of ways, as the dramatist Aristophanes constantly illustrated, of making ‘the worse appear the better reason,’ the new rhetoric replace the old legal securities that such as Solon, already in the sixth century, had fought to safeguard. These Sophists seemed to the man on the street to be sowing

the belief that any belief goes. The Athenian on the street was made anxious by these widespread developments, and Socrates was one of the victims of this climate.

**Religion and Belief** What level of religious belief do we find as we cruise from Homer through the lyric poets to Greek tragedy in the fifth century, and then to Plato and Aristotle? On the whole we find little challenge to the claims of the Olympian (or cult) religions. We may feel that, for Homer, the gods occasionally appear as human playthings, that for Hesiod a stiff genealogical account of the gods takes the place of real belief, that for the tragedians--Aeschylus in the *Oresteia*, Sophocles in *Antigone*, Euripides in the *Bacchae*--the gods and their world serve as ways of talking about morality and destiny on the purely human level, but for all that these gods remain principle mainstays of order in the universe.

**Milesian thought** When we step aside from the literary artistic portrayal of the gods, to the burgeoning traditions of philosophical thought which are flourishing from the sixth century on, in parallel with the Olympian worship, we note that the Gods are largely ignored, to be replaced by independent thought at grips with the uncertainty of the universe. It is at this point, with say the Milesian thinkers of Asia Minor—Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes—that the Greeks begin to envisage a world in which ‘gods’ play no part, or in which the role of the gods is questioned to the roots. What happens when Thales proposes *water* as the fundamental world substance, and attributes the universe we know to consequences of condensation and evaporation, or when Anaximenes essentially does the same thing with the key principle of ‘*air*’ or ‘*the cosmic infinite*’? What happens is that we take a step into proto-science, we shift our vocabulary of explanation away from the gods. Contemporary to these Milesians is another fifth century thinker like Anaxagoras, who has retained his fame for suggesting that the gods are anthropomorphic creations. It is he who suggested, boldly, that if horses had/have gods, they would be gods in the form of horses. Such thoughts as these are clearly directed against the main religious current of Greek worship.

**Plato and Aristotle** When it comes to Plato and Aristotle in the fourth century, we will have to say that at the summit of speculative thought, the Greeks retain the framework of the Olympian divine but use it as a vehicle for theology rather than practical worship. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato speaks of the ambience of the divine gods, and of the journeys of the soul in the direction of the Empyrean.

Many and wonderful to see are the orbits within the heavens and the blessed gods constantly turn to contemplate these as each busies himself with his special duties. There follows whoever will and can [this includes good human souls], for envy has no place in the company of heaven. But when they proceed to the divine banquet, they mount the steep ascent to the top of the vault of heaven; and here the advance is easy for the gods' chariots, well balanced and guided as they are, but the others have difficulty

**Aristotle and the gods** For Aristotle, god is pure act, the order of the cosmos at the stage where it is the possibility of all that is. *Metaphysics* has gobbled up theology, though the *metaphysics* Aristotle built was to pass on, influentially, to the greatest theologians of the Middle Ages—Averroes, Avicenna, Thomas Aquinas.

**Philosophy and theology** Philosophy, in other words, will prove out as a region where the Greeks were able to sustain their belief in supersensual forces, without committing to the practice of day to day Olympian worship.

**Stoics and Epicureans** Finally it should be added that when we come to the Stoics and Epicureans—Zeno, Epicurus—in the fourth century B.C. and onward, we are among Greek thinkers and moralists for whom the universe is composed of particles in motion, the gods are forgotten except as mainstays for morality, and successful moral behavior becomes a sufficient effort for the human.

**Discussion questions:**

Does what we call Greek mythology seem to you to be a living element in Greek worship of the gods, or is 'mythology' a literary creation developed by later cultures looking back on the behaviors of the Olympian (and other) gods? What is the history of Greek mythology itself?

State religions, like the Olympian, usually have to address issues concerning the afterlife. Do you see any evidence of concern for that issue among the expressions of Olympian religion in Athens—or more generally in ancient Greek culture?

Would you say that the Olympian religion was a religion of consensus, without great power to insist on its practices? Or was this religion, which grew up without a Bible or a priestly caste, actually strictly coercive? Was there a penalty for disregarding the religion?

What was the religious view of Plato and Aristotle? Were they believers who took religion into metaphysics? Or, non-believers, who used the religion of their culture as metaphors of thinking?

Was the Olympian religion concerned with what was in people's souls, as we say, or only with what they did in ritual practice?

As you understand the practice, why was animal sacrifice the chosen means of ritual worship in ancient Greece? Were the Greeks one with other ancient peoples in their devotion to this religious practice?

Can you imagine a fifth century B.C. worshipper being an adherent both of the Olympian religion and of a mystery cult? Would there have been a difficult tension between these two allegiances?

Was the Olympian religion concerned with what was in people's souls, as we say, or only with what they did in ritual practice?

Was Homer a kind of Bible for the fifth century B.C. Athenians? Can you see how the two epics of Homer provide models of behavior and practice for later generations?

**Reading suggestions:**

Hesiod (8th Century B.C.), *Theogony*

Buxton, R., *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 1-55.

Euripides, *The Bacchae* (405 B.C.)

Allen, Reginald, ed., *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle* (1950)

Mylonas, George, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton, 1961), pp. 224-285.

Burkert, Walter, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 1-82.

## Greek PHILOSOPHY

**Two groups of thinkers** From ancient Greek philosophical thought there remain to us two different blocks of creativity, that of the Milesian hylozoists in the sixth through fifth centuries, B.C.E. and that of the three fifth-to-fourth century thinkers--Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle--of whom Socrates was the teacher of Plato, while Aristotle was the pupil of Plato.

**The Milesian philosophers** Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes usually get first attention in this group. They were speculative materialists, living on the coast of Asia Minor, whose thinking appears to have been triggered by observations of nature or natural phenomena. Contemporary with the early Greek historians, lyric poets, and political theorists like Solon and Pericles, these Milesian philosophers probed to the causes of the observable world, and theorized fruitfully over the ways events play out in human environments. We usually attach a tag, to each of the Milesians, identifying a key principle by which he chose to interpret phenomena: Thales (624 B.C.E.-546 B.C.E.) worked around water, a subject omnipresent on the Asia Minor Coast; Anaximenes (6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.E.) attended to the principle of the infinite air, a formative substance, from which his thinking inclined to derive the principal forms of matter; Anaximander (610-546 B.C.E.) theorized that 'the undefined,' to *apeiron*, was the material substrate from which the cosmos is formed. In each case, the key concept chosen became a wedge for inquiry into the labyrinthine paths by which the first principle generates a meaningful universe.

**Socrates and Plato** A subtle and complex progression of ideas joins the three philosophers—Socrates (469-399 B.C.E.), Plato (428-348 B.C.E.), Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.)—who write off the end of the classical moment of ancient Greek culture, and who ultimately offer very different interpretations of the interrelations among morality, analysis, and the intelligibility of the world. Socrates, still part of an oral and ethically inquiring social context, throws his weight behind dialectical argument, and thought chains by which the listener in conversation is led to discover the truth from within his own responses. Plato, whose thought interlocks with that of his teacher, Socrates, readily moves the discussion into epistemology and political theory, unfolding through a vast series of dialogues a theory of ideas whose reality occupies meaning on many levels of human being. His universe crackles with metaphors for insight and super sensuous awareness. Aristotle, instinctively analytical, carries the Platonic thought tradition into scientific researches and social/aesthetic inquiries, opening paths, in metaphysics and literary theory, which still jump out of the classroom into our daily lives.

**The character of Greek philosophy** If any single trait joins together the main traditions of Greek philosophy, it is restless and free-spirited inquiry, robustly addressing the essential questions of life: what are we made of? how should we act? where are we going? Western civilization still lives these inquiries, and in ways set down for us by Greek thinkers.

### Readings

Freeman, Charles, *Egypt, Greece, and Rome*, Oxford, 1996.

Nightingale, Andrea Wilson, *Spectacles of Truth in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge, 2004.

### Discussion questions

Make an effort to see the connections between the Milesian and the Socratic-Platonic movements in philosophy. Has the Milesian movement contributed to the shaping of Western thought?

Do you see in ancient Greek philosophy a potential for the development of scientific thought? Is Milesian thought promising for the disclosure of the ways nature works?

Is ancient Greek philosophy manifestly related to the poetry and the political thinking of the Greeks? Is Homer, who dominated all subsequent Greek thinking, in a recognizable sense a philosopher?