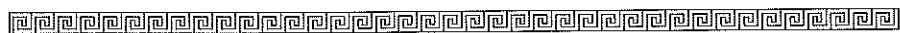


the fruit-bearing fields  
 that now, in alternation,  
     yield mankind  
 yearly sustenance from the ground  
 and now, again, resting  
     withhold their strength

...  
 treading in the footprints of his father's father,  
 Praxidamas—  
     for he, victorious at Olympia,  
 first brought the Aiakidai garlands from Alpheos;

...  
     come, Muse, direct  
 upon this clan  
 the glorious breath of song—  
     for when men have passed out of our midst  
 poems and legends  
     convey their noble deeds. . . .

1–25; translated by Frank Nisetich, *Pindar's Victory Songs*.  
 Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.



## The Visual Arts

Greek painters and sculptors shared a fascination with both the human and the divine. Throughout the decades of change and growth that mark the fifth century, the plastic arts reveal a powerful drive to organize the world in accord with harmony, balance, and proportion. During the fourth century, Plato, in the blueprint for the ideal society he described in his dialogue *The Republic*, would identify justice as the condition that is obtained when all parts of the soul and state are in balance. The connections Plato posited between beauty and truth underlay much of the Greek view of the world throughout the Classical period.

Greek painting and sculpture achieved what they did within the constraints posed by a variety of conventions. Bronze and marble, the customary materials for sculpture, were difficult to work with and did not lend themselves to naturalism. The two generations or so that followed the Persian wars mark a period of transition during which Greek artists begin to emancipate themselves from the canons of the Archaic period, as a spare austerity comes to distinguish Classical styles from those that had gone before. Some of the changes may have had to do with a rejection of eastern influences in the wake of the bitter conflict with Persia; the ties with the Near East that were so conspicuous in Archaic styles now seem more tenuous. The visual arts also become less static during these decades, and action becomes important. Conveying a strong sense of movement in a still medium is no small achievement. Some of the most outstanding artists of these decades managed despite the constraints of their craft to build a sense of anticipation and excitement.

To be sure, the tranquility of Archaic sculpture persists in some of the work of this period. It is evident, for example, in the bronze charioteer dedicated at Delphi in the 470s by Hiero's brother Polyzeus after his victory in the chariot races at the Pythian games. The eerie stillness of the body and the garment that falls from it in perfect folds show precisely the discipline and self-control that Pindar celebrated in the aristocrats who carried off prizes in these events.



Figure 6.3. This bronze charioteer from the Sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi (c. 475 BC) originally stood in the car of a four-horse chariot; it has survived because an earthquake cast it into an ancient drain.

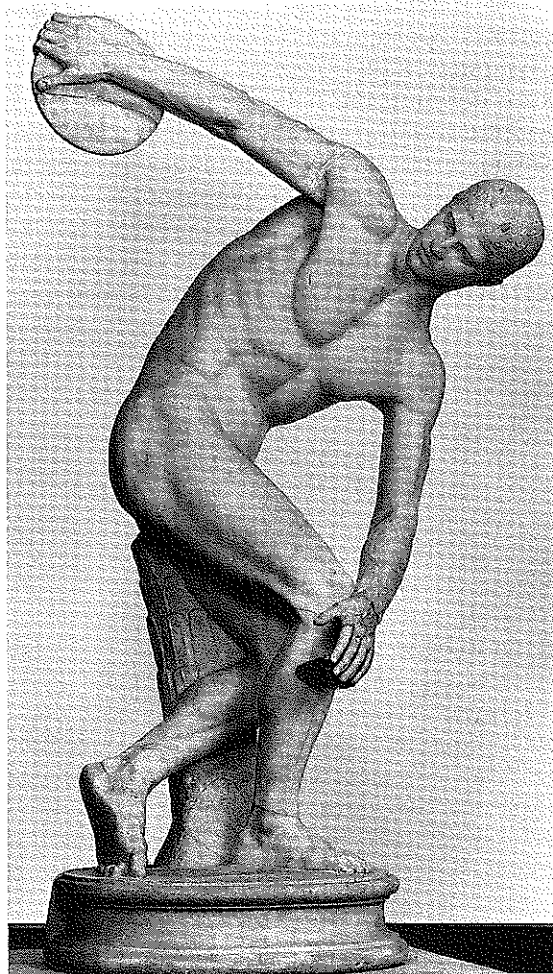


Figure 6.4. Roman copy of the *diskobolos* or "discus thrower" by Myron. Scholars recognized Myron's statue as the model for the Roman copies because of a passage by the second-century AD author Lucian that describes the original work in detail.

Probably the free-standing sculpture that conveys the most dramatic sense of movement to come was the so-called *diskobolos* ("discus thrower") of the Athenian sculptor Myron, who was known for his striking realism: Admirers commented that a bronze cow of his on the Acropolis could easily be mistaken for the real thing. Though the bronze *diskobolos* Myron made around 460 does not survive, a variety of Roman copies enable us to appreciate the pent-up energy the athlete is about to unleash as he hurls his arm forward leaning into the throw.

The relief sculpture with which Greeks adorned their temples offered still greater opportunities for storytelling. One key example is the temple of Zeus at Olympia, completed between 470 and 456 BC just when the dramas of Aeschylus were defining the Attic stage. Excavations have brought to light remarkable sculptural groups on the portions of the temple known as the pediments—the elongated triangular spaces under the roof that sat atop the columns and cried out for decoration. In the temple of Zeus, each pediment extended for over 80 feet from left to right and rose in the center to a height of 10 feet. The west pediment celebrated the triumph of order and civilization over the animal-like barbarism represented by the Centaurs, who in their characteristic drunkenness had sought to disrupt the wedding of the hero Peirithoos to Deidameia only to find themselves worsted in the melee by Peirithoos and his friend Theseus. In the center of the relief stands a figure whom most scholars identify as Apollo upholding the principles of civility.

The east pediment portrayed a more complicated story—an episode in the life of Agamemnon's ancestor Pelops, who won his bride Hippodameia in a chariot race arranged by her father Oenomaus, an event associated with the beginning of the Olympic games. Numerous figures in the scene depicted on the temple have survived, including one of the most remarkable individuals depicted in relief sculpture, a pensive seer who even before the race has begun knows what is going to happen (Figure 6.5b). (Although the race was fixed, Pelops managed to defeat the duplicitous Oenomaus, who was killed, and marry Hippodameia.)

Grave stelai also provided an important venue for relief sculpture. Although most commemorated the deaths of men, women and girls were depicted on their tombstones as well. One of the best preserved funerary reliefs of the fifth century offers a tender portrayal of a little girl holding her pet doves. This poignant reflection of the dead child makes clear that for all their preoccupation with war and civic engagement the Greeks could also feel private losses deeply.

Thousands of vases survive from the Classical period. Neither vases nor works of sculpture are easy to ascribe to any particular artist; by convention, painters are often known simply by the subject matter of their most memorable works or the places where they were or can be found (e. g., the Berlin painter, the Pan painter). Like sculpture, vase painting of the earlier fifth century was focused on the human figure, to which the curving surfaces of the vessels lent a sense of movement and grace. Even more than in drama, in which actors' faces were covered by masks, the possibilities of facial expression are limited by the medium, and character portrayal is weak; we are often given a clear sense of what the *dramatis personae* of the vase are experiencing at the moment in time the artist

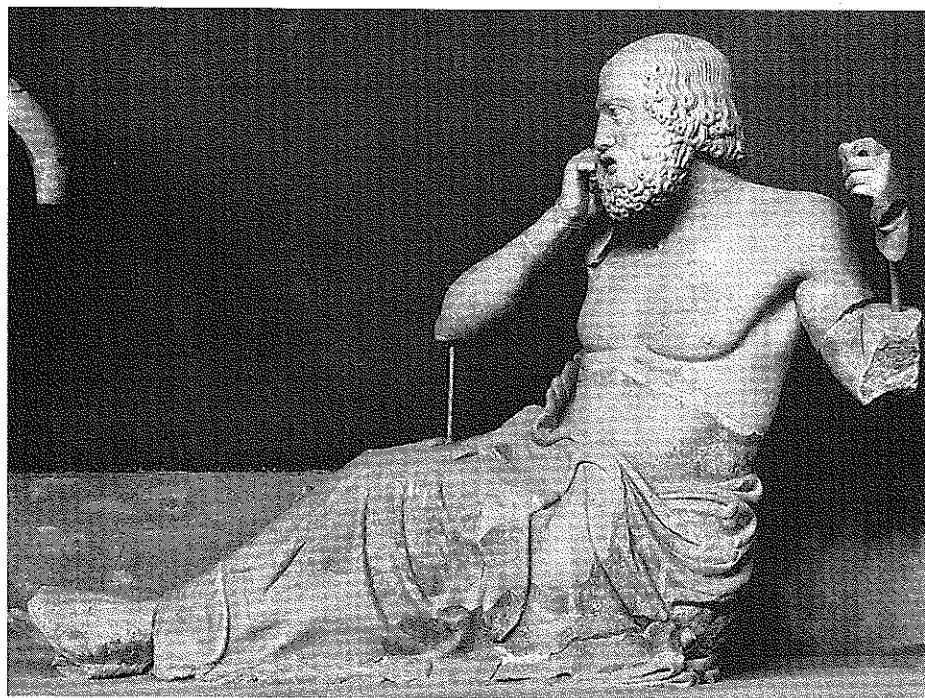
a



b



**Figure 6.5a.** The pediments of the temple of Zeus at Olympia (c. 460 BC) show scenes from Greek mythology. The east pediment (a) tells the story of the chariot race between Pelops and Oenomaus, king of Pisa. The west pediment (b) depicts the melee that ensued when Peirothoos made the mistake of inviting the barbarous centaurs to his wedding.



**Figure 6.5b.** This marble statue of an elderly seer is the third figure from the right in the reconstruction of the east pediment. It represents a dramatic blend of naturalistic and stylized elements.



**Figure 6.6.** This marble grave relief, from Paros, dates from about 450 BC and stands today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

has chosen to capture, but little understanding of who they have been over their lifetimes, what their driving anxieties or concerns were. The figures on Greek vases are portrayed in action, not contemplation—they almost never appear to be posing for the artist—and we ask ourselves not only, “What are they thinking? What are they feeling?” but also frequently, “What has just happened, and what will happen next?” As in the Archaic period, classical vases frequently took their subject matter from mythology, as in the fine vase in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston depicting on one side the murder of Agamemnon and on the other that of his murderer Aegisthus.

Unlike sculpture, however, painting was as likely to treat mundane scenes of daily activities as it was to portray deeds of epic proportion. Vases have provided social historians with a wealth of information about how people spent their time at work and at play, showing women and men in a variety of activities; shoemakers, blacksmiths, agricultural workers, and other laborers are portrayed going about their tasks. We are indebted to vases for images of domestic space and

the depictions of women from all social groups. Vases that were used at drinking parties for mixing and drinking wine frequently show prostitutes entertaining men. Some women are shown playing pipes, others are engaged in various stages of flirtation, and some scenes are frankly pornographic. Common prostitutes were often slaves. A woman of higher status who nevertheless mingled with men and received pay for her services was known as a *hetaira*. Such women were likely to be metics (see pp. 163–164), either ex-slaves or freeborn, who—like male metics—gravitated to Athens because it was a commercial center. A few of these women, like Aspasia, the common-law wife of Pericles and the most famous hetaira of all, participated actively in the intellectual life of their male associates. In contrast, many paintings on vases used by respectable women depict wedding scenes, or women visiting tombs or sitting at home spinning wool or adorning themselves, often in the company of other women.

## OIKOS AND POLIS

The Greek polis comprised *oikoi* ("families," "estates," or "households," each with a male head). The *oikos* was the primary unit of production, consumption, and reproduction. Citizens became members of the polis not directly as individuals, as they do in most modern states; rather, they first had to be accepted as members of an *oikos*.

### Family Membership

When a baby was born in Attica the father decided whether to raise or expose it. He doubtless evaluated the newborn's health as well as the financial impact of raising another child. Most sons were raised, because male heirs were the normal means of perpetuating the lineage, and it was of great importance that families not die out. The offspring of a daughter was considered to belong to her husband's family, not her father's. As boys grew up, their labor was considered valuable. Moreover, they were expected to support their aged parents, bury them, and look after their tombs. Parents placed less value on girls, who lacked earning power and whose children would belong to a different family. Though the eldest child was normally raised regardless of its sex, some historians have conjectured that as many as 20 percent of newborn Athenian girls were abandoned in places like the local garbage dump. Slave dealers collected a few of the exposed infants and turned them over to wet nurses to be raised and sold as slaves. Most exposed infants, however, died, and exposure quickly became infanticide.

In Athens, after a baby boy was accepted as a member of his father's family, he needed to be approved by his father's quasi- or pseudofamily: A boy inherited membership in his phratry ("brotherhood") and deme ("city ward or country village") from his father. The father introduced and enrolled his baby in his phratry and vouched for him as being his own and born of an Athenian mother.