Fourth-Century Styles in Greek Sculpture

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DEFINING THE FOURTH CENTURY

Should the fourth century be considered, at least in Greece and in the field of sculpture, as the logical continuation of the fifth, or as a break from previous conventions? Should it be called Classical or High Classical, or even post-Classical? Is it valid to bracket it between 400 and 331, as this book does, or should it be broken down into discrete phases, according to stylistic formulas?

If we take historical events as landmarks, some justification for the bracketing may exist. In 405 Athens suffered a major defeat at Aigospotamoi, and had to surrender to Sparta in 404, thus putting an end to the last phase of the lengthy and ruinous Peloponnesian War. To be sure, the Thirty Tyrants imposed by Sparta ruled only for a brief time, and as early as 403 Athens was able to reestablish a democratic regime that lasted until Demetrios of Phaleron seized complete power in 317. But the year 400 can be taken as an approximate date for the virtual disappearance of the city from the forefront of sculptural productivity. As Stewart sees it, continuity can be found only in "nonarchitectural relief: documentary, votive, and funerary."[13] At the other end, 331 marks the year of the Battle of Gaugamela, a site not far from the Tigris in Mesopotamia; this third encounter (after the Battle of the River Granikos in 334 and the Battle of the River Issos in 333) broke the force of the Persian resistance and can be said to have accomplished the original goal of Alexander's campaign: to avenge the Mainland Greeks and to liberate the Greeks of Asia Minor. It is, moreover, tempting to establish the symmetry with the date of the Battle of Actium, in 31 B.C.—which determined the end of the last Ptolemy, and thus the last descendant of Alexander's empire—and to bracket an exact 300-year span for the Hellenistic period.

Yet, as always, historical events as such seem to have little impact on sculptural production and style. Social circumstances can indeed influence types of sculpture

and iconographic formulas, and victory monuments can be erected for specific com-memorations, but no exact correlation can be established between "wars and kings" and stylistic development. Moreover, any focus on individual occurrences tends to imply that "the Greeks" were a monolithic unit, so that the defeat or victory of one city, even one as powerful as Athens, would affect equally the inhabitants of other poleis on the Mainland, let alone those of Asia Minor or Magna Graecia. That this is not the case can be shown by regional preferences and differences throughout the history of Greek art, and will become evident, it is hoped, by the end of this book.[14] Finally, should history still be considered important as providing secure dates in a sea of chronological approximations, other events could be chosen as significant: 394, when the Athenian fleet led by Konon could score a decisive victory over the Spartans at Knidos; 386, the Peace of Antalkydas (also known as the King's Peace) between Sparta and Persia; or 371, the Battle of Leuktra, which marked the end of Spartan supremacy and the beginning of the Theban hegemony. At the other end, 323, the year of Alexander's death, could seem more significant than 331, and is in fact taken by many as the true beginning of the Hellenistic period. Even Stew-art, who presumably writes on sculpture by style, as suggested by the titles to his chapters 8–13 (covering the span from pre-600 to c. 430), focuses on history for the fourth century, breaking it down into c. 430–c. 360 (ch. 14, "The Peloponnesian War and Its Legacy"), c. 370–c. 330 (ch. 15, "Late Classic"), and c. 340–c. 310 (ch. 16, "The Age of Alexander").[15] It is clear that no obvious decision can be made on purely historical grounds.

In stylistic terms, the situation appears even more fluid. To cite only some of the more recent opinions, we have already seen that Stewart thinks of "Late Classic" as spanning solely the middle decades of the fourth century. Harrison has made a case for extending the late fifth-century style down to c. 375, and this position finds many supporters.[16] As for nomenclature and conception, some scholars would consider "Classical" the production of both the fifth and the fourth centuries; some call "High Classical" the span c. 450–430; whereas others think of the phase 400–330 as deserving that title; and Borbein, in the subtitle to his major 1973 article, has given it the name "Nachklassik." Marcadé sees fourth-century sculpture as largely the "development" (in the mathematical sense of the term) of tendencies of the previous century that artistic personalities like Pheidias and Polykleitos had overshadowed; Blanche Brown (1973) writes about *Anticlassicism in Greek Sculp-ture of the Fourth Century B.C.*; and Pollitt acknowledges a continuum from the early fourth century to the late first, with a break at the end of the Peloponne-sian War.[17]

In view of these many, and often contradictory, opinions, it is important for me to set here the reasons for my choice of timespan and my definition of styles. As to the first, I take comfort in the fact that no advocate of historicity could deny that the year 400 B.C. (however reckoned by local calendars) did in fact occur throughout

the ancient world and gave place in turn to the following century. This is therefore a convenient starting point for my stylistic analyses, independent of any happening, whether historical, political, or social; in turn, the terminal date of 331 is again convenient, not only on ideological but also on practical grounds, since my *Hellenistic Sculpture I* (1990) began its survey from that moment. As for the second choice, I am convinced, as I have already discussed for the fifth century, that not one style but many coexisted during the period under consideration. I have, in fact, come to realize that stylistic trends ebbed and flowed almost from the very beginning, and this point needs further elucidation, as well as a slight digression into earlier artistic periods.

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APPROACHES TO THE FOURTH CENTURY

Because of its complexity—as transitional phase, as continuation of the achievements of the previous century, as harbinger of the multifaceted Hellenistic period—the span under consideration is one of the most difficult ones to analyze or, for students, to cover. Until quite recently, moreover, some key monuments had not received full publication and were thus imperfectly known. This is, for instance, one of the drawbacks of Brown's otherwise stimulating book (1973), which could not take into account the ongoing restorations of the Epidaurian sculptures from the Temple of Asklepios, or the new theories on the Maussolleion. A somewhat similar problem affects Stewart's *Skopas of Paros* (1977), which from its title seems focused on a single master but extends beyond his works to consider antecedents and consequents. Other publications concentrate on single monuments or, again, on individual sculptors. Finally, wide-ranging treatises can devote little attention to the fourth century. Among these I would single out Stewart's *Greek Sculpture: An Exploration* (1990), which attempts both a personal and an objective approach, dealing with the author's own interpretation of stylistic, cultural, and social trends, but adding objective lists of attributions culled from the ancient sources and other relevant testimonia.

Two more works deserve specific mention. As this text is being written, a book on the fourth century, by John Boardman, is in progress as part of the same series that has already given us surveys of Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic sculpture.[35] Because of the requirements of the established format, and because of its author, we can expect it to be comprehensive but brief, pithy and stimulating, authoritative without much discussion of alternative views, with copious and serviceable, albeit small, pictures. It will be extensively used, like its predecessors. The second publication is the very recent and beautifully illustrated volume by Todisco (1993).

To the extent that its compass is limited to the span of time here under review, Todisco's book achieves great depth, and, being thoroughly informed and up-to-date, it is invaluable; but its organization by masters, its generous inclusion of traditional attributions, even if tempered by critical comments, and its reliance on Ro-

man copies undermine its usefulness. In addition, Todisco concentrates on statuary in the round, thus making very limited use of architectural sculpture and funerary/ votive reliefs. The picture of fourth-century styles and subjects emerging from his pages seems slanted and amorphous.

To my mind, in fact, the most significant features of fourth-century styles are presently to be found in architectural sculptures. Certainly, those are the monuments providing the safest witness, since they are undoubted originals whose chronology can be supported by constructional and other evidence. In their geographic distribution, location on buildings, official sponsorship and public exposure, themes, and implied messages, such carvings are eloquent expression of the changing times and styles. In this book, they shall be studied not only per se, but also in contrast to comparable structures devoid of sculptural decoration, to highlight the possible reasons for inclusion or exclusion of figural embellishment from a civic monument. Although a roughly chronological sequence will be followed, geographic considerations will also determine groupings of buildings for discussion, so that comparisons may be more cogent and meaningful.

If the architectural picture is rich and complex, much less clearly defined is our understanding of free-standing sculpture. The fourth century is thought to have seen the emergence of great masters not only as men of genius in their field, but also as individual personalities whose lives and anecdotes attracted the attention of contemporaries and later sources. Whether or not this is the case will be discussed later, but in my opinion the styles of the great fourth-century sculptors—Praxiteles, Skopas, Lysippos—remain as nebulous as those of their fifth-century predecessors. We have only debatable originals by their hands, and the possible echoes of these masters' works in Roman copies are both inevitably distorted and unreliable, with attributions mostly based on brief mentions in later ancient writers or on modern subjective evaluations of a sculptor's style. Since agreement among scholars in the "attribution game" is notoriously rare, reconstructing a master's oeuvre is often an impossible task, which will be pursued here only insofar as hard evidence is available. To some extent, this skeptical approach is demanded as a corrective for the apparent confidence of handbooks and other publications on sculpture— Todisco's volume included.

It is the basic thesis of my book that many stylistic trends coexisted within the fourth century, some of them innovative but some traditional or even revivalist. Some styles certainly developed in what may seem like a coherent and logical sequence, based on iconographic precedents and quotations, and on the ancient belief that tradition is to be prized over originality. Yet we must beware of fabricating just such a sequence *because* it appears logical to us, arranging in coherent fashion what may instead have been scattered in time and space. Linear development may be as much a modern construct as an ancient tenet, and solely a scrupulous examination of the evidence should prevail. Only when a work has been placed as firmly as

possible within its proper time span can we hope to reconstruct its cultural and ideological context. The diffusion of Attic styles and the penetration of Greek forms and subjects in non-Greek areas of Anatolia will also play a major role in our survey, even if local significance cannot be confidently recovered.