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Setting the Agenda, or Putting the Art into Heritage

The thing has a history: it is not simply a passive inertia against which we measure our own activity. It has a “life” of its own, characteristics of its own, which we must incorporate into our activities in order to be effective, rather than simply understand, regulate, and neutralize from the outside. We need to accommodate things more than they accommodate us.—Grosz 2001: 168¹

What Is Classical Art?

Classical art is a battleground. “Art” is worrying enough for archaeologists. “Classical” is a step too far. Why? Because both terms are value judgments, and the *value(s)* ascribed to artifacts that make the grade so inflationary as to be misleading.² “Real knowledge” comes not from antiquities that have been ripped from their original context, cleaned and reconstituted for display in galleries and glass cabinets. “Real knowledge” comes from antiquities that carry their dirt with them. Only if we can trace them back to where the ancients left them—better still, to where they used them—can we appreciate what these artifacts meant and did—give them back their agency.

Everything that is wrong with “classical art” is exemplified by two statues known as the “Tyrannicides” (Tyrant Slayers) in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples (1.1). Indeed everything wrong with classical art could be contained in the following caption: “The tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton by Kritios

and Nesiotes, 477–76 BCE, marble.” For a start, these are not the statues erected in the Athenian agora in the fifth century in honor of the men who killed the tyrant’s brother Hipparchus.³ Those were bronze.⁴ Nor are they by Kritios and Nesiotes, but by an unknown copyist working under the Roman empire—if “copyist” is the right word.⁵ Without the genuine article, the best we can be is optimistic. And anyway, Kritios and Nesiotes’s group was not the genuine article either. It too was a stand-in, after the original group by Antenor was stolen by the Persians in the sack of 480–479 BCE.⁶ Not that anyone, even in antiquity, worried that theirs was a replacement, any more than we worry that our Tyrannicides are Roman (although it makes it easier that we do not know enough about their Italian find-spot to reconstruct a rival context)⁷ or that they were admired in the Renaissance as “gladiators,” and restored as well as relabeled.⁸ The replacements stole the show. The caption is a tissue of lies: these Athenian heroes are pretenders.

1.1. “The tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton by Kritios and Nesiotes, 477–76 BCE, marble,” or rather a Roman version of that statue group, h 182 cm. National Archaeological Museum, Naples, inv. nos. 6009 and 6010. Photograph: © Hirmer Fotoarchiv, 671.9208.



But before we consign the Naples statues to the storeroom, let us think a bit harder about the nature of this artifice: not what their claims to authenticity obscure about the original groups in their original settings, for none of that is recoverable, but what their posturing reveals about the ways in which the intervening centuries have treated them and material culture more broadly—how it is that we have “classical art” to contend with in the first place. At what point do the Tyrannicides become “art”? And how easy is it to separate the possible answers to that question, and their competing definitions of what “art” is, from questions of “technology,” “politics,” “archaeology”? As we are about to discover, “classical art” is less a battleground than it is a moving target.

It makes sense to start our target practice in the present. Today, the lost Tyrannicides

of Kritios and Nesiotes, as represented by the Naples group, are a “set piece” on the “Greek architecture and sculpture” syllabus of the UK’s final-year secondary school examinations and a key moment in textbooks on Greek art by Susan Woodford, John Boardman, and Richard Neer.⁹ Although these scholars admit to working with a Roman version,¹⁰ they see its style as emblematic of early fifth-century production, arguing with it as though it actually were the bronze erected in 477–476 BCE, and thus one of the first sculptures, after decades of “kouroi,” to break free of the block and the frontal plane. I choose to spotlight Neer as he is a master of close reading and highly influential, in all sorts of respects, on my own thinking:

They charge forward with swords at the ready, bearing down upon their beholders. Their victim is not depicted but, instead, remains an ever-present absence: the war against tyranny has no end. Stylistically the group is a benchmark in the history of Greek sculpture. No earlier work so convincingly unites the depiction of subdermal musculature with that of vigorous movement. As Stewart puts it, “The Kritian group *literally* marks the birth-day of the classical style in Athens.”

Just as the Naples group cites the Kritian group that evokes the original dedication, so Neer cites Andrew Stewart, who is paraphrasing Brunilde Ridgway, mutually enforcing their art credentials.¹¹ He might be said to miss a trick in not mapping the victim’s “ever-present absence” onto the “absence” of the group itself, but can be forgiven his confidence: although the Naples statues are far and away the most intact versions to survive in the round,

images of the Tyrannicides on pottery, coins, and a marble throne, once owned by Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin (1766–1841), repeat their poses and confirm their identity (1.2, 1.3, 1.17, and 1.18).¹² Also, a fragmentary inscription, a chronicle or chronology from hellenistic Paros, dates the erection of the Kritian group precisely: the surety of locating it in a fixed time and place makes even an “echo” irresistible.¹³

If it is authenticity we are after, there is plenty here—more real knowledge than can be gleaned from the only actual remains of the group, bits of the statue base to Harmodius and Aristogeiton (usually associated with the Kritian monument but sometimes with its antecedent) found in the Agora in 1936.¹⁴ But there is “authenticity” and “authenticity,” and Neer’s description, requiring that we see beneath the skin of the Naples versions as if it were bronze, is too bold. Or is it? Is it worse than doing what other art historians do—reduce the group’s “vigorous movement” to a pair of static poses, and these poses to symbols of “political freedom” that are then identified in heroes throughout the visual record? This flattens Kritios and Nesiotes’s contribution to the history of style, ironing the subtleties of art into straight ideology.¹⁵

Back in 1956, when Reinhard Lullies and Max Hirmer collaborated on what would become one of the most widely translated and disseminated surveys of Greek sculpture, such was the premium on authenticity that Roman versions did not feature. In fact, the only role for the Tyrannicides was in a catalog entry for the early fifth-century statue from the Athenian Acropolis known as the “Kritios Boy” after purported stylistic similarities between it and the shadowy younger tyrant-slayer, Harmodius—and this despite the fact that

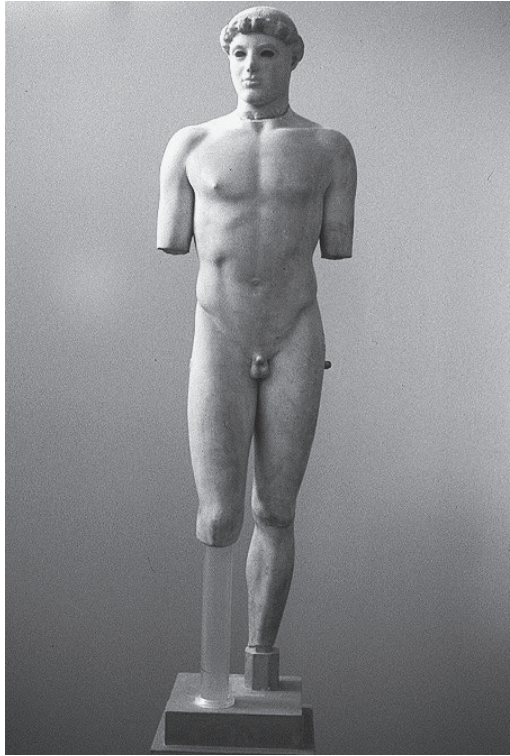


1.2. Pitcher (oinochoe) with the Tyrannicides, from the grave of Dexileos, Athens, c. 400 BCE, ceramic (red figure), 16 × 14 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 98.936. Photograph: © [2017] Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Kritios was famed in antiquity as a bronze-worker (1.4).¹⁶ If anything it is this statue, its torso discovered in 1865 and its head in 1888, and its claims to be the last of the “kouroi”—one of the first sculptures to be more than “man-shaped,” but young, alert,



1.3. The Tyrannicides, right side of the Elgin Throne, fourth century BCE, marble, h × w × d: 81.5 × 70 × 66 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. no. 74.AA.12. Photograph: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California.



1.4. The Kritios Boy, after 480 BCE, marble, h 117 cm. New Acropolis Museum, Athens, inv. no. 698. Photograph: Jeffrey M. Hurwit.

as though aware of its body—that gives the Tyrannicides their standing.¹⁷ The year before Lullies and Hirmer’s publication, and in the wake of Antony Raubitschek’s catalog of dedications from the Acropolis, including several statue bases bearing Kritios and Nesiotes’s signatures,¹⁸ there was an eagerness to expand the corpus. It was proposed that the Delphi Charioteer too was made by Kritios or his school (2.1).¹⁹ In this climate, his star was rising.

Was this when the Tyrannicides shifted in status from honorific statues to artworks; once the stylistic analysis long practiced by connoisseurs of sculpture, gems, and painting had been theorized in the second half of the nineteenth century to become “attribution studies,” supporting archaeology’s claims to be a scientific discipline, and, simultaneously, turning Kritios into Canova?²⁰ This new rigor undoubtedly changed classical antiquity. Indeed without

it, we would *have* to put the Naples statues in the museum-store: they were not recognized as “Tyrannicides” until 1859, by the same scholar who eventually linked the ancient literary testimony about Polyclitus’s Doryphorus (Spear Carrier) to the statue type that now bears its name (1.5).²¹ Today, the Doryphorus is regularly seen as the maturation of the classical style, as scholars continue to worry about exactly when and why Greek sculptors left abstraction behind in favor of the more naturalistic modes of representation that underpin Renaissance practice.²² In the future, the gradually swelling number of original bronzes found by fishermen and underwater archaeology may change the parameters of this discussion yet again,²³ but for the moment, the Tyrannicides and Doryphorus rank among classical art’s most eloquent proponents. When Neer discusses the bronze found off Cape Artemision in the 1920s (1.6), he writes, “we can be sure that whoever made it had looked at Harmodios and Aristogeiton.”²⁴

But if post-Enlightenment thinking gave rise to classical art and archaeology as we know it, where does that leave the Renaissance? Before being outed as Tyrannicides in the nineteenth century, the Naples statues were already known, first as part of the antiquities collection in the Palazzo Medici-Madama in Rome, and then, later in the sixteenth century, in the Palazzo Farnese, where they joined a swelling cast of statuary including the Farnese Hercules (1.7 and 1.16).²⁵ Competition with other Roman collections, such as those of the Borghese and Ludovisi families, not to mention the papacy (the supply of antiquities to the Farnese collection benefiting in 1534 when Alessandro became pope), made this display more important, turning the acquisition of ancient sculpture into a

prerequisite of power.²⁶ Catalogs and engravings of this sculpture put “classicism” on a stronger footing, with courts throughout Europe commissioning copies and casts of the finest statues, especially those in the Vatican’s Belvedere Courtyard (a statue court commissioned by Pope Julius II in 1503), and exchanging them as diplomatic gifts.²⁷ Classical art was already ideology. And it was already the subject of scholarly inquiry. The “canon” was expanding all the time—and statues were just the tip of the iceberg. The relevant fragments of the hellenistic inscription from Paros were actually acquired early in the seventeenth century in Smyrna (Izmir) by agents working for Thomas Howard, the Earl of Arundel (1585–1646), who was busy amassing his own antiquities for his house on the Strand in London. He had already benefited from a license to excavate in the Roman forum.²⁸ The inscription was deciphered and published almost immediately in John Selden’s catalog of the collection (1628–29), “the first direct study of classical archaeological material by an Englishman.”²⁹

How did the Naples statues function in this environment? For all of the “rebirth” innate in Renaissance self-fashioning and its fashioning of antiquity, the Tyrannicides were dead, or at least lost in translation, enlisted, along with other versions of Greek works, to reemerge from Rome’s soil (the Dying Gaul being another—1.8),³⁰ to fight a Roman cause as “gladiators.”³¹ This gave them a nobility of their own, and one that legitimized, almost, the loss of limbs that the passage of time had inflicted. Both had suffered serious injury, “Aristogeiton,” as he would become, having lost his head as well as his arms, penis, toes, and part of his mantle, and “Harmodius,” his penis, arms, and parts of his legs and base.³² Prior to

restoration, it was “Aristogeiton” that was more famous, evidence perhaps of the relatively low esteem accorded to Harmodius’s expressionless face, features today understood as “archaic” in style.³³ When in 1550 Ulisse Aldrovandi compiled his



1.5. The Doryphorus, Roman version, second to first century BCE, of a statue made by Polyclitus in 450–440 BCE, marble, h 198.12 cm. Minneapolis Institute of Art, inv. no. 86.6. Photograph: Minneapolis Institute of Art.



1.6. Zeus or Poseidon, found at the bottom of the sea off Cape Artemision, north Euboea, c. 470–460 BCE, bronze, h 209 cm. National Archaeological Museum, Athens, inv. no. X 15161. Photograph: © Hirmer Fotoarchiv, 561.0429.

1.7. Maarten van Heemskerck, *The Loggia of the Palazzo Medici-Madama with Antique Sculpture*, c. 1532–36, pen and ink, 21.1 × 29 cm. Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. no. 79 D 2 a, fol. 48 recto. Photograph: © bpk / Kupferstichkabinett, SMB / Volker-H. Schneider.

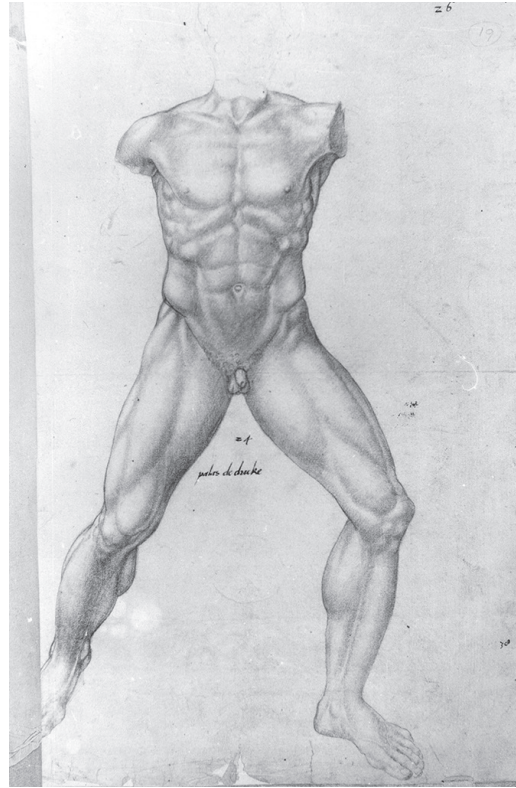


1.8. *The Dying Gaul/Gladiator*, from the Gardens of Sallust, Rome, Roman version of a Pergamene original, marble, h 93 cm. Capitoline Museums, Rome, inv. no. MC0747. Photograph: © Hirmer Fotoarchiv, 671.9347.



landmark text of the ancient statues to be seen in more than ninety collections in Rome, he described him, then still in the Palazzo Madama, as “very beautiful,” his lack of head and arms notwithstanding.³⁴ Renaissance draughtsmen sketched him for his strong chest and stance: an exemplary body in an artistic arena (1.9).³⁵

Even unknown soldiers could fight classical art’s cause. But classical art was a moving target even then. By the time that German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann saw “Aristogeiton” in 1756, the statue had long been in the Grand Salon of the Palazzo Farnese, where it and its errant companion were part of a “gladiator” installation known in some of the palace inventories as the Horatii and Curiatii, a reference to Rome’s early history that made their Italian indoctrination complete and may well have contributed to French painter Jacques-Louis David’s recreation of the encounter on canvas two decades later (1.10).³⁶ They were mercenaries in a campaign devoted to making Rome the world’s cultural capital. They had also been restored: “Aristogeiton” now had a “splendid” head, but a head that, unlike his left arm and cloak, which had originally belonged and been reattached, was alien, thought by Winckelmann to resemble a “young Hercules.”³⁷ He had been literally rejuvenated to suit his new context. Photos taken at the end of the nineteenth century, a century after the move to Naples—post-1859, the “big reveal,” and the statues’ reunion—show an ancient, alien head (the same head that Winckelmann admired?) still in place (1.11).³⁸ James G. Frazer’s 1898 discussion of the Tyrannicides illustrates them anyway, adding that although Aristogeiton’s head is erroneous, “it is a fine head . . . resembling in fact the head of the



1.9. *Aristogeiton*, from *The Cambridge Sketchbook*, Trinity College Library, Cambridge, R.17.3, 1550–62. Photograph: Warburg Institute, London.

Hermes of Praxiteles (1.12), whereas the head of Harmodius is entirely archaic.”³⁹ Even then, the latter’s features weigh heavy. His companion’s Herculean qualities are more mercurial. He is now similar to a statue excavated at Olympia in 1877, as what counts as a “masterpiece” keeps changing.⁴⁰

Eventually this head is removed and the rightful one put in its place—although this is not the original either, indeed it is not even ancient, but a cast taken from a rather damaged head found in 1922 in the Vatican storeroom.⁴¹ In 1957 this Vatican head was united with its body, a high-quality marble torso discovered in 1937 at the foot of Rome’s Campidoglio that confirmed Aristogeiton’s identity (1.13).⁴² Bit by bit, we muddle toward the Tyrannicides of our textbooks, a patchwork of old, new, and plaster pieces. How does their visual

1.10. Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of the Horatii*, 1784, oil on canvas, 330 x 425 cm. Louvre, Paris, inv. no. 3692. Photograph: © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Gérard Blot / Christian Jean.



1.11. The Tyrannicide group, Naples, as James Frazer would have seen it late in the nineteenth century. Photograph: akg-images / Fototeca Gilardi.



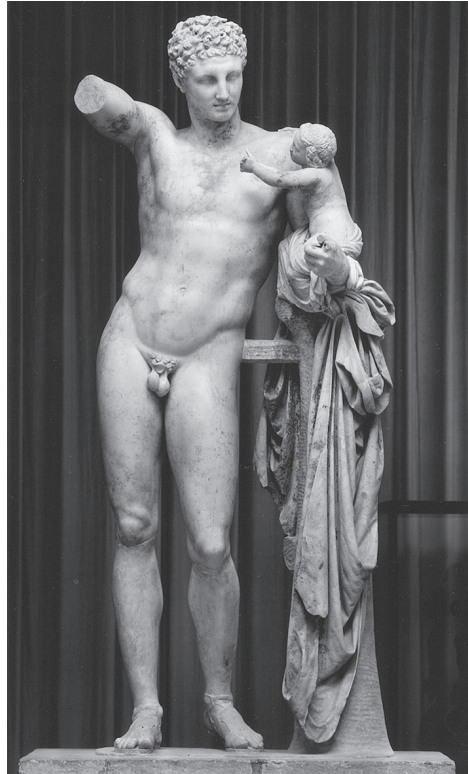
impact and authority as ancient sculpture compare with the statues studied by Aldrovandi, Winckelmann, and Frazer?

Early in the Renaissance, when the ancient fragments that had contributed to the fabric of Rome throughout the medieval period began to be taken more seriously, broken sculptures were intriguing despite, if not because of, their breakage, the pock-marked Pasquino group and the Belvedere Torso (figs. 5.6 and 9.5) being a case in point.⁴³ But the more these sculptures influenced contemporary art practice and antiquaries obsessed about their subject matter and their original appearance, the more sculptors saw fit to learn from them by laying hands on them, taking them back to their roots, not by stripping accretions but adding attributes. Even in a museum

context, substitutions continue, those made in the name of knowledge not necessarily more authentic than those made for the sake of gladiatorial spectacle and rivalry between Rome's grand families. Frazer already appreciated the statues as "the finest and most perfect reproduction of the group."⁴⁴ What does Aristogeiton's "improved" head add? So clumsy is the join between it and the torso that permanent decapitation might have been preferable.

Where the head is crucial is in making Harmodius and Aristogeiton different ages. For all that the fragments of the statue base support the claims that they were honored for a political act that liberated Athens and led to their martyrdom, some ancient sources give a more personal motive for their actions. According to Thucydides, Harmodius was a boy "in the flower of his youth," Aristogeiton his older male lover, and Hipparchus, the tyrant's brother, a seducer who threatened their union.⁴⁵ In other words, Harmodius and Aristogeiton were models of the kind of male-male desire that has been central to the admiration of Athenian cultural production from at least Winckelmann's writings, as well as "splendid specimen(s) of ancient art."⁴⁶ Stewart writes, "the group implicitly puts the homoerotic bond at the core of Athenian political freedom and urges us to do the same."⁴⁷ But not if we cannot look both figures in the eye and see an older bearded man shoulder to shoulder with his clean-shaven beloved or "eromenos," the paradigm of pederasty familiar from sympotic pottery (1.14) and from Plato. The head discharges the group from its service to Rome and restores a spark that is peculiarly Athenian.

Perhaps it was the group's erotic frisson over and above any militant message that made the ancient patron of the Naples



1.12. The Hermes of Praxiteles, c. 340 BCE or a Roman version, found at Olympia, marble, h 215 cm. Archaeological Museum, Olympia. Photograph: © Hirmer Fotoarchiv, 561.0638.



1.13. Aristogeiton, Roman version of figure after the Tyrannicide group by Kritios and Nesiotes, found at the foot of the Capitoline Hill, marble, h 180.5 cm. Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini, Rome, Sala Macchine, inv. no. 2404. Photograph: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini, photo Zeno Colantoni, © Roma, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali—Musei Capitolini.

1.14. Side A of a two-handled cup from Boeotia showing a bearded man courting a boy, c. 520 BCE, ceramic (black figure), 11 × 19 × 13.5 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 08.292. Photograph: © [2017] Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



statues commission them. Or perhaps this culturally specific erotic frisson limited the type's appeal among Romans. Lucian, writing under Rome in the second century CE, places Kritios and Nesiotes's Tyrannicides in the company of Myron's Discobolus (Discus Thrower) (1.15) and Polyclitus's Diadumenus (Ribbon Binder) (8.23), both of these fifth-century bronzes that are as famous now, through later marble versions, as they were then. But Lucian wrote in Greek, with a lively interest in deconstructing and augmenting the allure of Greece's cultural heritage. His text is also titled *The Lover of Lies*.⁴⁸ Although fragments of ancient plaster casts of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton types were found in excavations at Baiae in 1954, suggesting that they were well known in ancient as well as modern Naples, compared to the Diadumenus and Discobolus, relatively few marble versions survive.⁴⁹

The existence of ancient casts of the Tyrannicides and of other famous Greek sculptures in what was presumably a sculptors' workshop at Baiae suggests that they were "art" under the empire already. Under the empire, elites had the time and money to consolidate a relationship with Greek cultural production that began in earnest with Rome's expansion east in the mid-Republic. Statues and paintings

were paraded in triumphal processions, together with exotic trees and captives, and displayed in temples and porticoes.⁵⁰ In time, their glamour gilded the private sphere too, upping the demand for hellenic artifacts, real and reproduction, and creating a trade or "market." Processes of selection and deviation led to hierarchies of artifacts and semantics of style that changed Roman, and indeed Greek, painting and sculpture forever. Whatever the Tyrannicides had become, their transfer from the Agora to the Roman villa or bathhouse radically revised their ontology.

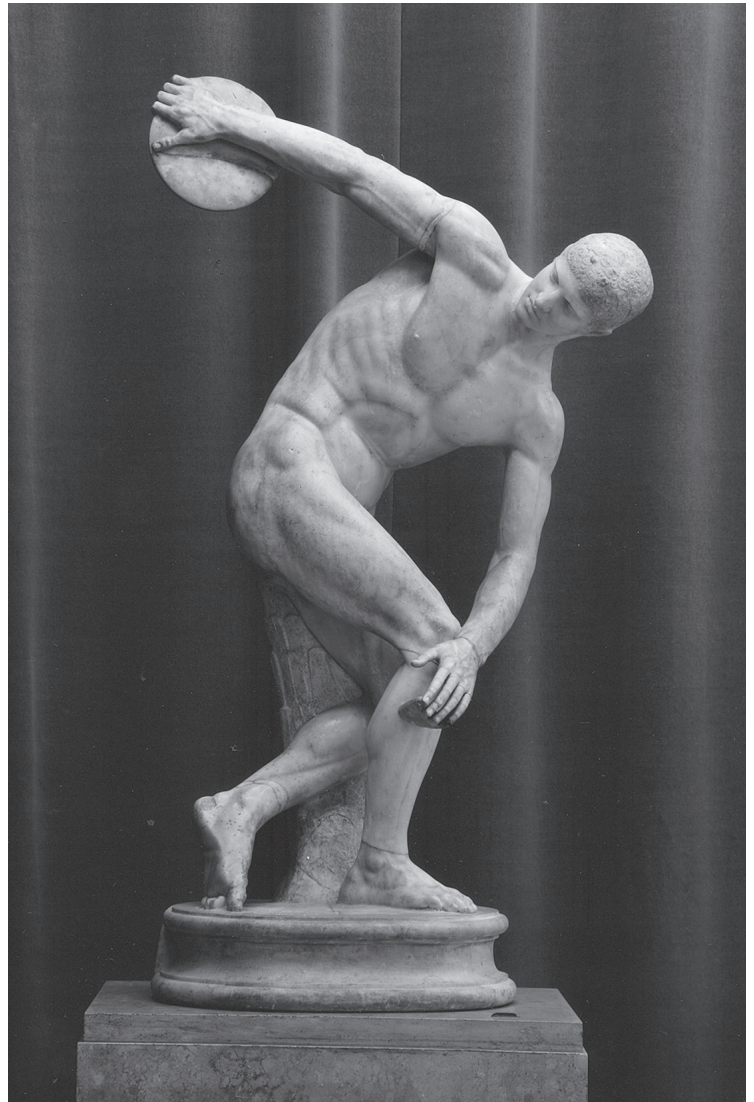
This transference also made them objects of intrigue. What were these objects back in their original contexts? Who made them? And how did they fit into a chronology that could then account for, and quantify, Rome's ownership of the world and its contents? What did Rome do to them, and they do to Rome? The elder Pliny's *Natural History*, dedicated to Titus, who became emperor shortly before the author's death, leads the way here, and to explore these questions draws on technical treatises by Greek sculptors and painters, and on the collecting and cataloging practices of hellenistic courts, which were already realizing that knowledge was power.⁵¹ For anyone who thinks that there is no art without art history, the elder Pliny's encyclopedia is a watershed. Even when he makes mistakes, such as ascribing Antenor's Tyrannicides to Praxiteles, he is doing what nineteenth-century specialists were doing, and engaging in attribution.⁵²

But Pliny is more than this. He is a mine of information and model for Winckelmann. He is also the reason why Renaissance scholar Aldrovandi, the author of an ambitious "natural history" of his own, exercised his method of direct observation on statues as well as on geological and

biological specimens.⁵³ Pliny is fundamental for making Rome's treatment of Greek art the paradigm for our treatment of Greek art. Until recently, when Roman "copies" like the Naples group were rebranded "versions," and given a productive part to play in Rome's relationship with Greece, he was also fundamental for making Roman art stale and derivative.⁵⁴ When Pliny first mentions them, the Tyrannicides normally attributed to Antenor, "the first portrait-statues erected at Athens" (an accolade that strengthens their claims to authenticity), are said to have gone up in the year the kings were driven out of Rome (510–509 BCE).⁵⁵ This is the kind of (mis)appropriation of material culture for personal, national ends that has come to define "the classical."

Classical Art in Context

This book is about this misappropriation, the translocations of Greek and Roman objects that have allowed them to grow, for good or bad, into the classical art we know today; it is a book about the "classical" and about "art," about "classical art" as a collocation. How these words come to be combined into this partly fixed expression is not an easy story to tell. As the Tyrannicides have shown, the life story of classical art, as epitomized in one object, is already a story told by many objects, not to mention lacunae, and is less a straightforward, evolutionary narrative than an oscillating, contested narrative that can shift in meaning within a single place or author. Add more sculpture, or other genres of Greek and Roman material to the mix (paintings, gems . . .), and what classical art is, or does, becomes more fickle. What qualifies for inclusion? When does "classical



art" become everyday object or political symbol, natural history, science, evidence? Set it next to antiquities from beyond the Greek and Roman world, and "classical art" comes under greater pressure. It has unique qualities, but what about unique value, virtues, vices? Its consistency depends on the answers. Yet its consistency is hard to fix: it is, as our opening paragraphs acknowledged, undoubtedly a thing of conflict.

The conflict it carries must be met head-on. For sure, the Tyrannicide group

1.15. The Lancellotti Discobolus, Roman version of a statue conceived by Myron, c. 460–450 BCE, found on the Esquiline Hill, marble, h 148 cm. National Museum, Rome, Palazzo Massimo, inv. no. 126371. Photograph: © Hirmer Fotoarchiv, 561.1086.

of our textbooks is an imposter, shaped and soiled by centuries of investment. But to turn a blind eye to this build-up is to turn down the opportunity both to understand our scholarship and our museums and to provide crucial commentary on a visual and aesthetic language of art that is too often taken for granted.⁵⁶ It is also to miss the birth of what we now call “classicism,” and of archaeology as a discipline. Not that “birth” is quite the right word here, any more than it is the right word for the emergence of “art” or even “classical art” as a species or genus. This is not a book about the biography of an “art” born in Rome or in the Renaissance or Enlightenment (whatever its parameters are)⁵⁷ because, as the Tyrannicides have also shown us, “art” was not invented, not suddenly and definitively at least. Whenever a statue group is set next to a second statue group, or gem or painting, there is an invitation to engage in the kinds of close, visual analysis that have defined “art history,” to rate them in terms of their material, style, and so on. This is not to say that Larry Shiner or Paul Oskar Kristeller are necessarily wrong to identify the “fine arts” as an eighteenth-century phenomenon, although they are not without their critics;⁵⁸ it is that we have become unduly obsessed with this “Art” (with a capital) category, and the extent to which ancient terms such as τέχνη and “ars” do or do not map onto it. Philology and academic “systems of the arts” can tell us only so much, as indeed can the social role of the artisan/artist. Whether an object is chiefly of aesthetic or functional value is liable to change overnight dependent on its context.

This is more of a rallying cry than it sounds. The context privileged by specialists of Greek and Roman sculpture today, if not

the single stratigraphic event that is (we like to pretend) archaeological context, is the sculptor’s workshop where the sculpture was commissioned and made,⁵⁹ or the place of this sculpture within the development of an ancient discourse of “art history.”⁶⁰ Not only does this latter emphasis, itself in part a reaction to Shiner and Kristeller, come with similar problems to those explored above (when was “art history” invented?), but, like art, “art history” is also often something else—not only “religion,”⁶¹ but, in the case of Pliny’s *Natural History*, panegyric, moral diatribe, cosmology.⁶² More than this, it cannot be reduced to the written word. If there is “art history” in ancient Rome already, it is the sum of the selection processes and display decisions of generals, proud homeowners (some more interested in their acquisitions’ authenticity and aesthetics than others), devout temple-goers, and power-crazed politicians, as well as of Pliny and his literary peers. And we must not ignore the selection that comes of serendipity. The Plinian context is but one way of making sense of a series of factors, not all of them edifying or mutually massaging.

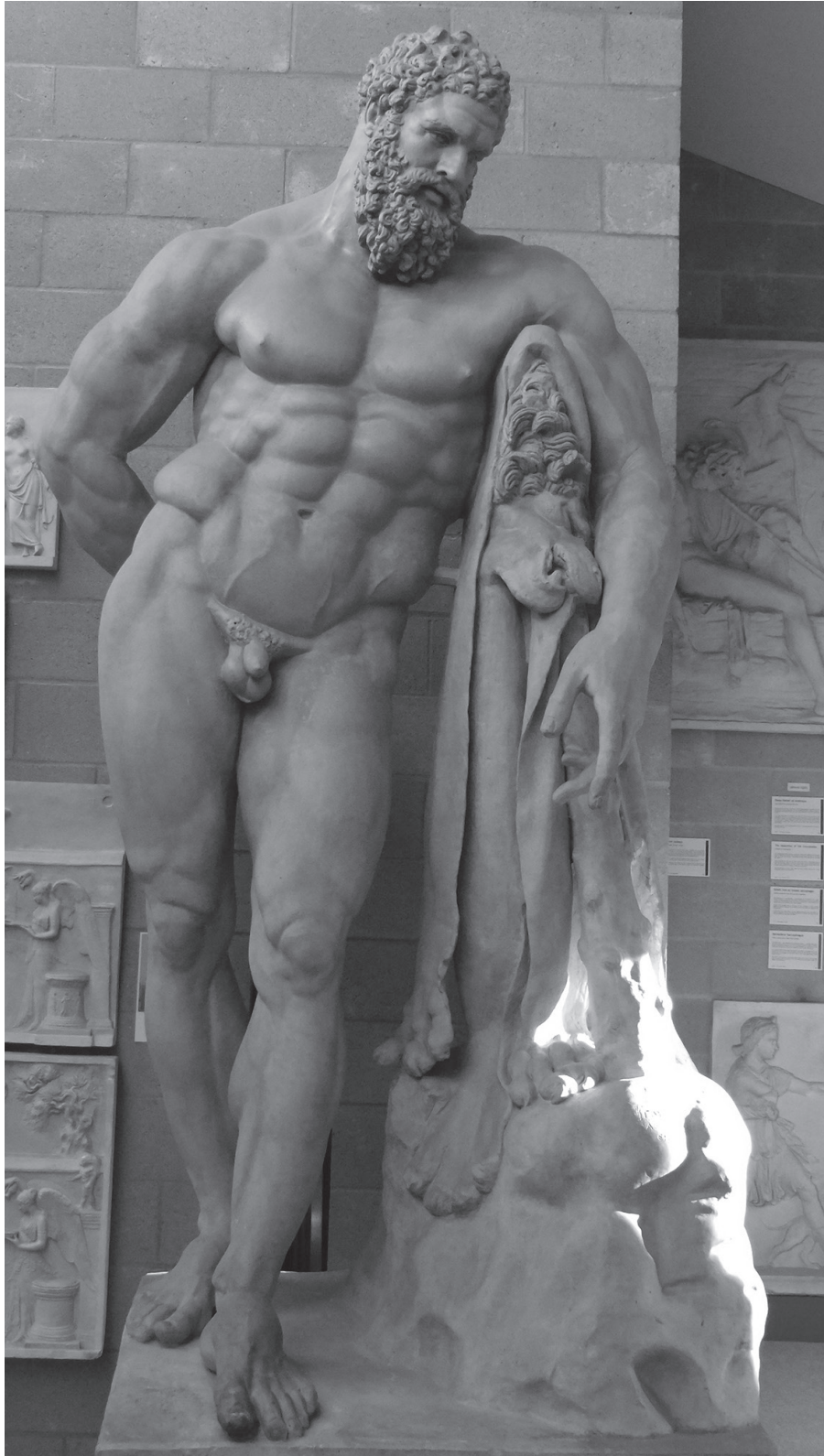
By “context,” this book primarily means “display contexts,” with all of the plurality and emphasis on object over text that that brings with it. It may have started with the fractured statue group that is the Tyrannicides, but its interest from here on is in having its story rub up against other stories, in putting artifacts together, and in understanding how people from antiquity to the present, from ancient “patrons”⁶³ to Renaissance *pezzi grossi* to English gentlemen, industrialists, and modern curators, put artifacts together, assembling and reassembling them to create meaning. “Classical art” is just one of the categories to come out

of these assemblages and their constituent narratives, but, for our purposes, it is the driver. These acts of assembly are more than chapters in the reception of “classical art,” more than instances of “art collecting.” “Classical art” was made, not born; it could not exist without them.⁶⁴

It is the weight of this “more than” that made it imperative for this book to open with the Tyrannicides, whose history takes us back to a time before hellenistic court culture. In 1981, Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny published their influential *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500–1900*, a work that has created a canon of its own, a selection of sculptures, most of them fourth-century or later in style, stars of a narrative that makes Rome the primary focus and collectors its protagonists (1.16).⁶⁵ Collecting classical art remains a hot topic, with scholars of all periods raiding the archives to understand how individuals in places as diverse as Rome, Seville, and Los Angeles came to acquire Greek and Roman artifacts, and what these artifacts contributed to their social standing and the societies in which they lived: “collectors and collections, 100 BCE–100CE,” “the Palace of Lausus at Constantinople and its collection of ancient statues,” “antiquities collections in Renaissance Rome, c. 1350–1527,” “sculpture collections in early modern Spain,” “why the English collected antique sculpture, 1640–1840,” and so on.⁶⁶ For all that these studies result in a rather fragmentary picture, there is sometimes a suggestion that if we joined the dots, we could map a single phenomenon.⁶⁷

In bringing some of these fragments together and splicing through them in new ways, this book’s *longue durée* approach will highlight continuities and

discrepancies: the value of classical art as a category resides in the realization that it has evolved over two millennia. Whatever combination of erudition, aspiration, and greed characterized the Farnese family’s admiration of the antique, they were involved in an activity that elites all over Europe understood as being about the satisfaction of certain symbolic needs, about investing in shared cultural capital. They were “art collectors.” But what about the returning war heroes who displayed their swag of Greek artifacts in processions and in temples? Was their “symbolic need” commensurate? Were Roman temples “art collections,” or “museums,” or neither?⁶⁸ Scholars are split on this, with some going as far as to suggest that even prehistoric communities “collected.”⁶⁹ But to argue over these weak and strong options is again to obsess about genesis, and cannot be done in abstraction. To count the assemblages in Rome’s temples as “collections” is trivially true, and trivially false; it is an issue that can only be given the attention it deserves by insertion into wider practices and discourses of display and preservation. “Collecting” of anything, anywhere, can only be given the attention it deserves by insertion into these wider practices and discourses. Starting with the Tyrannicides offers us a useful way into this broader terrain, prior to the narrowing that comes of the Renaissance’s investment in ancient Rome, and ancient Rome’s investment in hellenistic cities such as Alexandria and Pergamum, as paradigmatic of their own cultural systems. No one would call the Persian theft of the Antenor group in 480–479 BCE an “act of collecting.” Yet, as we will discover, its exile in the Persian city of Susa did more than any subsequent episode to give the Tyrannicides the “art” label.



1.16. The Farnese Hercules, cast of a Roman version of a statue conceived by Lysippus in the fourth century BCE, displayed early in the nineteenth century in the sculpture gallery of Sherwood Lodge, Battersea, and from 1850 in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, painted plaster, h 315 cm. Museum of Classical Archaeology, Cambridge, inv. no. 277. Photograph: © Museum of Classical Archaeology, University of Cambridge.

The Art of Longing

Ask what we know about Antenor's Tyrannicides and the answer is, very little: erected somewhere between 510 and 480 BCE,⁷⁰ these statues were bronze,⁷¹ and innovatory, renowned for being the first portraits in Athens, in a space, the Agora, that was unaccustomed to statuary. If one wanted to see statues in Athens at this period, one went to the Acropolis or the cemetery.⁷² Yet the appearance of these extraordinary statues is something of a mystery:⁷³ as we have already noted, the images on pottery, coins, and the Elgin Throne pay homage to their successors, which may or may not have resembled the originals; it is the successors that Aristophanes alludes to so graphically.⁷⁴ It is not until imperial Rome, centuries after they are rescued in the hellenistic period and restored to the Agora, that Antenor's statues get a look in, and by then, it is as though they are the replicas, not ousting their stand-ins, but striking a pose next to them. When Pausanias sees them side by side, he observes, Antenor made "the old ones," but the τέχνη belongs to Kritios.⁷⁵

The "extraordinary" status of the Antenor group, and of the Tyrannicides in general, owes a lot to its sojourn in Susa. Before its disappearance, it was a bold dedication, an "unclassifiable monument," no less, that commemorated an act that was as much about sex as it was about politics.⁷⁶ It was a unique contribution to an area of the city that was only then, at the end of the sixth century, acquiring the buildings to declare it the seat of democracy.⁷⁷ But after the theft, the group was an icon, its honorands elevated in status from suitably glamorous spokesmen for the democratic space around them, to freedom fighters, whose blow to tyranny now hit Persia too,

making its message one of nationhood.⁷⁸

The Kritian group stepped into the breach, acquiring immediate interest from being a souvenir, which, by virtue of its allusion to something bigger and braver than itself, was given the symbolism to serve as a totem on countless other objects. In Athens itself, Panathenaic prize amphorae, usually thought to have been produced for the festival of 402 BCE, are the most interesting, deploying the statue group on the shield device of Athens's patron deity, Athena (1.17).⁷⁹ In the Mysian city of Cyzicus, the group featured on the obverse of coins, with only a tiny tunny fish beneath its feet to confer any local significance (1.18).⁸⁰ For Cyzicus, the Tyrannicides were a marker of allegiance as well as appropriation, of membership of the Delian League and of independence against the Persian empire.

The Tyrannicides proved a transferable victory salute to be made, especially, after periods of oppression: 402 BCE, immediately after the fall of the Thirty Tyrants, who briefly controlled Athens after its defeat in the Peloponnesian War, being a case in point. But this transferability, reproducibility, also made them art,⁸¹ liberating them from their site-specific context (for surely no one would see this separation of statue from original context as delimiting of ancient meaning) and enabling them to strut the Mediterranean, not only as ambassadors for Athens, but as advocates of image-making's new interest in action. Perhaps tracing the impact of their poses on the representation of heroes such as Theseus and Hercules is more productive than we first thought, indicative rather of their change in status from "unique contribution," to icons, to iconography, and of an appreciation of style as an instrument of the artist, "a language with an internal order

1.17. Close-up of the Tyrannicides on Athena's shield on a Panathenaic amphora, 425–400 BCE, ceramic (black figure). The British Museum, London, inv. no. 1866,0415.246. Photograph: © The Trustees of the British Museum.



and expressiveness.”⁸² Certainly the longing that results from the theft—its exposure of a gap between experience of the original group and any narrative it might inspire—makes the Tyrannicides possessable and personal in ways that have a lot in common with the desire implicit in art collecting.⁸³

Why steal the Tyrannicides? They were not the only statues taken by the Persians: texts tell us that the Persians also took a statue of Artemis and a bronze figure of a female water-carrier dedicated by Themistocles, when he was in charge of the waterworks in Athens.⁸⁴ Not only had Themistocles fought at the Battle of Marathon and been instrumental in building Athenian naval power, but he had supposedly paid for the bronze out of fines he had levied for the diversion of public water.⁸⁵ It is poetic justice that the Persians should have pilfered a piece

whose *raison d'être* was theft, erected by Athens's most dangerous politician, just as it is poetic justice that their attraction to the Antenor group should expose them as tyrants. Yet in reality, these “preferences” were presumably more random, or, if not random, then owing to the value of the material.⁸⁶ If ransacking the Agora was the game, then the choice of booty was limited.

More important for our story than the question of Persian motivation is the tradition that surrounds the repatriation of the group.⁸⁷ According to Pliny and Arrian, Alexander the Great was responsible for sending the statues back to Athens—an attribution that makes sense given the claim that his war against Persia was a revenge campaign for Persian atrocities done in Greece, including “the profanation of the temples.”⁸⁸ But Seleucus I, who fought with Alexander and founded the

Seleucid dynasty, and his son, Antiochus I, whose administration of the satrapies east of the Euphrates gave him control of Susa, are given the credit elsewhere, neither of them particularly involved in cultivating a relationship with Athens.⁸⁹ What is at stake in these divergent traditions, if not the nature of kingship? It is as though “art” has become “heritage,” and “heritage” a diplomatic issue.⁹⁰ Valerius Maximus is most effusive when he describes how, en route back to Athens on the orders of Seleucus, the statues received special treatment by the Rhodians who set them on sacred couches—not for their aesthetic qualities this time, but for reasons of what they remembered (“*memoria*”), memory that “possesses so much reverence in such a tiny quantity of metal.”⁹¹ Here, the Tyrannicides are not simply “symbolic media,” but “physical traces” of the past, “impinging sensuously and physically at a fundamental level.”⁹² They have the kind of agency and charisma now associated with museum artifacts.

Admittedly, these divergent traditions are in texts written under the Roman empire, a world that was exploring the ethics of its own confiscation of Greek artifacts, and of emperors making some of the most famous of these artifacts more notorious by pocketing them for their private palaces. Such problems of retrospection cannot be ignored: they are an inevitable part of putting material culture next to literary culture, and acquisition and display practices next to descriptions of practice: later, for example, we shall see multiple generals at multiple points in Rome’s history being awarded the dubious honor of introducing Greek art into Rome. Arguably, if it is “art collecting” *sensu stricto* that one wants to find, one needs to find collecting discourse.



1.18. Stater of Cyzicus with Tyrannicides above tunny fish, c. 400 BCE. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 04.1343. Photograph: © [2017] Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Back in the fifth century, the erection of additional statues in the area around the Kritian group seems to have been severely restricted.⁹³ It took until 394–393 BCE for public honors in Athens to include the grant of portrait statues, and for bronze statues (those of the Athenian general Conon and his covictor at the naval battle of Knidos, Evagoras, the king of Cypriot Salamis) to be erected in the Agora—Conon said explicitly by Demosthenes to have been “the first man so honored since Harmodius and Aristogeiton” and to have “ended no insignificant tyranny.”⁹⁴ His honorary decree drew a further link, claiming that Conon had “freed the Athenian allies.”⁹⁵ Placing this pair of statues together in front of the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherius (the Liberator) worked—by attraction—to make them “like” the Tyrannicides.⁹⁶

Within two decades, other honorific statues have joined the gathering (those of Iphicrates, Chabrias, and Conon’s son, Timotheus), radically transforming the cityscape.⁹⁷ Yet a public decree from 314–313 BCE grants Asander of Caria a statue anywhere *except* alongside Harmodius and

1.19. Casts of the Peplos Kore, the original of which was found on the Athenian Acropolis, c. 530 BCE, h 118 cm, one of them painted to give an idea of the statue's ancient pigment. Museum of Classical Archaeology, Cambridge, inv. nos. 34 and 34a. Photograph: © Museum of Classical Archaeology, University of Cambridge.



Aristogeiton.⁹⁸ What this meant in real topographical terms is difficult to determine, but there was clearly a cordon of sorts around the Tyrannicides, the existence of which makes the erection of two gold statues of foreign rulers Demetrius Poliorcetes and his father, Antigonos I, “directly adjacent” to them in 307 BCE particularly momentous.⁹⁹ As with Conon and Evagoras before them, their actions, in this case their expulsion from Athens of Demetrius of Phaleron and their restoration of “democracy,” made them tyrant-slayers also, and assured that next time a public decree prevented someone from erecting a statue in that area, it mentioned their statues as well as those of Harmodius and Aristogeiton.¹⁰⁰ By the end of the third century BCE, statues of Alexander, Philip, the Ptolemies, Lysimachus, and Pyrrhus may have infiltrated the circle, all of whom could claim to have helped

free the city.¹⁰¹ Certainly in 43 BCE, Julius Caesar’s assassins, Brutus and Cassius, are awarded bronzes next to the Tyrannicides, “as though following in their footsteps.”¹⁰²

There are also Antenor’s statues to consider, back, competing with their successors to mark out a space reserved for a subset of honorands: liberators(?). Together, these two Tyrannicide groups are the compass, inscribing an arc around themselves that only some individuals can permeate. Did everyone see their relative merits as Pausanias was to see them? How did their bronze bodies look next to the gold of the Antigonids? Did the Antigonids appear more Greek, and all of them more like a single class of objects, once the outliers that are the Roman portraits (with veristic faces?)¹⁰³ were added? And how did those that made the cut compare, in collectivity terms, to other manmade assemblages in ancient

Greece, the sixth-century BCE marble maidens or “korai” with their “look-at-me” dresses that had once graced the Acropolis (1.19), the carefully placed dedications along the sacred way in the Sanctuary of Delphic Apollo, or the votives inside Corinth’s Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore?¹⁰⁴

These questions are impossible to answer with any certainty: Pausanias is our main source for this kind of judgment call, and Pausanias is viewing in, and through, a Roman Greece, centuries after the korai have been smashed by the Persians. But they are questions worth asking

nonetheless, if only to place later periods’ handling of classical artifacts into a new context, out of the straitjacketing that is our classification of their classifications. Seeing what this handling shares with what the Greeks and their enemies were already doing with Greek sculpture in the fifth century is to see that what makes an artifact worthy of special status is never easily delineated. How could it be? For where would that leave longing? The next chapter takes a broader fifth-century landscape as its point of departure to rethink the hellenistic period’s contribution to our story.