

# *Analysis of Sculpture Art in the Context of Ancient Greek Society and Culture*

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**Abstract:** This essay examines the profound impact of ancient Greece's social and cultural milieu on its sculptural art forms. The sculptural and architectural arts of ancient Greece were the result of their society, religion, politics, and philosophy being fully embodied. Both the form and content of their artistic creations were significantly influenced by philosophical thought, especially the spirit of humanism and conceptualism. Ancient Greece's religious theological beliefs significantly influenced its artistic style, with images of deities and mythological stories emerging as major themes. At the same time, the democratic system of Athens encouraged artistic expression and innovation. Ancient Greek sculpture and architecture, with their pursuit of rationality, harmony, and beauty, demonstrate the ancient Greeks' profound understanding of the human spiritual and material worlds, revealing how the social and cultural environment of ancient Greece influenced and shaped the morphological characteristics of their sculptural art, and how these characteristics became a significant cornerstone of Western art.

## **1. Introduction**

This paper will examine how social conditions shaped and influenced the genesis and development of art in ancient Greece. Art does not arise in a vacuum; it is a product of its social, cultural, and historical context and also shapes and influences these elements. Social context, policy, economics, and culture all influence the production, presentation, comprehension, and appreciation of art. This is the "cultural soil" of art, literature, and music, which fluctuates in texture and composition over time and space. In *Meditations on the Wooden Horse*, it is stated that "the many formal characteristics of primitive art are frequently described in such a way that each form conveys a specific meaning, but none of them can be properly comprehended if each is viewed as a mere form." [1]

Frequently, the artwork reflects the social environment of the artist, as in *The Life and Death of Images*. "The mountains, forests, and rivers that surround our homes are always present, as are the portraits, graffiti, and standing stones in the midst of inhabited communities. However, nature has not contributed more to the worship of natural beauty than sculpted representations and the perception of beauty." [2]<sup>0</sup>In addition to culture, this includes geography, economic conditions, and policies. Figure 1 from the Soviet Union could not have been created without the proper materials, context, and mental and emotional stimuli. After experiencing the initiation of conflict, people find new perspectives and inspiration in their works of art. Edward W. Said argues that "authors are not mechanically propelled

by ideology, class, or economic history; however, I believe that authors exist in their own societies, shaping their history and social experience to varying degrees, and are in turn shaped by their history and experience." [3]



Figure 1: 'Statue of the Battle of Lejeuve'

In ancient Greece, sculpture was not only a work of art, but also an interpretation and reflection of the country's social structure, religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and historical events. Each sculpture reflected the life and ideas of the ancient Greeks and was regarded as a "social text" here. When we observe the statue in Figure 2, we experience not only the aesthetic beauty of its form, but also the cultural message and historical memory it conveys.



Figure 2: 'Athena Vavakeion'

Understanding ancient works of art can be difficult for most people. Art appreciation is a form of 'cultural capital,' and the degree of comprehension and appreciation can serve as a measure of social class. It is comparable to a Texas farmer who has never heard strings attempting to comprehend Vivaldi's Four Seasons; he may not be able to appreciate the nuanced horn variations, but that does not prevent him from enjoying the melody.

In Greek and Roman art, sculpture served as a unique cultural symbol. "The earliest sculptures in ancient Greece were carved from wood using the totem pole technique. Although the Greeks eventually supplanted wood with stone, some of the characteristics of the early wood sculptures, such as the "classical grin," were carried over. This distinctive expression can be seen on numerous ancient sculptures." [4]

## 2. Ancient Greek Sculpture under the Influence of Social Culture

### 2.1 Ancient Greek Sculpture under the Influence of its Natural Environment, Human Context and Social Structure

Ancient Greece had a unique natural and human environment. In comparison to other ancient civilizations, this one was not an agrarian society, but rather a commercial one. This particular socioeconomic structure had a significant impact on the art forms of the region.

As depicted in Figure 3, ancient Greece was situated in the southeastern region of Europe, encompassed by the Aegean, Mediterranean, and Ionian Seas and possessing unique geographical characteristics. This economic environment facilitated intellectual and cultural exchanges with other ancient civilisations, thereby introducing a wealth of foreign knowledge, such as the first Olympic Games held at Olympia in 776 BC, which was a foreign import. The first Olympic Games, which took place in Olympia in 776 B.C., were both a product and a catalyst of cultural exchange.

Ancient Greece comprised more than one hundred city-states, of which Athens was the most potent and well-known and was known as the "capital of Greek learning." The city-state was relatively small, with a population and territory unmatched by modern states. Athens had approximately 300,000 residents, who could be divided into three primary classes based on their political and legal status: slaves, physicians, and citizens.

Religion played a significant role in ancient Greek civilization as a source of artistic inspiration and inspiration. Greek mythology was an abundant source of inspiration for Greek art, propelling it to its zenith. Cultural exchanges brought with them a multitude of foreign stories of the gods and deities, which were frequently articulated in the temples and sculptures that served to glorify the gods and communicate the religious ideas of ancient Greek society. The ancient Greeks expressed their reverence for the gods through works of art, which also reflected their cultural and social values.



Figure 3: Map of Greece

### 2.2 The Influence of Multiple Functions and Positions in Artistic Society on the Art of Sculpture in Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece's climate influenced the development and expression of its art forms. In contrast

to the Dutch, who created their paintings indoors, the Greeks preferred to work outdoors, and climate and geography had a profound impact on their social structure and cultural expression. Born free, the ancient Greeks were economically independent, and slavery provided them with an abundance of leisure time. This meant that artistic creation was more than a strictly aesthetic activity; it was interconnected with every aspect of social life.

The creation and appreciation of works of art were not universal activities; they relied on the labour of other populations. "The group creates a self-image with which its members identify. The collective's identity depends on the individuals who comprise it coming to identify themselves." [5] As a significant aspect of art, religious ritual profoundly influenced the content and form of Greek art. The polytheistic Greeks produced numerous statues of gods and mythological tales. These works of art were employed not only for religious rituals, but also to show reverence for the gods and to beseech for blessings. Figure 4 in the Parthenon, for instance, is a representation of the ancient Greeks' reverence for their patron deity Athena.



Figure 4: The Parthenon's restored image of Athena

In the realm of politics, art also plays a crucial role. Ancient Greek politicians utilised public art, such as sculpture and architecture, to communicate political messages and strengthen the collective identity of citizens. "Phrases, books, characters, and histories all have the capacity to organise and give meaning to diverse attitudes and experiences." [6] Sculpture and architecture in public spaces frequently depict ancient Greek heroes and significant events as a means of proclaiming the city-state's grandeur and values.

Art was also a symbol of affluence and social status. As a display of their affluence and taste, wealthy citizens and aristocrats would commission artists to create works or decorate their residences with fine art. Artists, in turn, attained prominence and social standing through their work, reflecting the importance of art to social standing and class identity.

### **3. Sculpture in Ancient Greece under the Influence of Society, Religious Theological Beliefs, Political Formations and Philosophy**

#### **3.1 Ancient Greek Sculpture under the Influence of Philosophy**

Ancient Greek philosophy had a profound impact on their sculpture, which created an idealised expression of the majesty of the human body. The humanist view of Protagoras that "man is the

measure of all things" emphasised the value and dignity of the individual and suggested that man is the measure of all things. This concept is reflected in the research and shaping of the human figure in sculpture. Ancient Greek sculptors were devoted to the proportions and dynamics of the human body, and they created works such as Figure 5 by depicting the natural beauty of human movement. The sculptors skillfully depicted the musculature and movements of athletes in these works, demonstrating the dynamic beauty of the human body in motion.

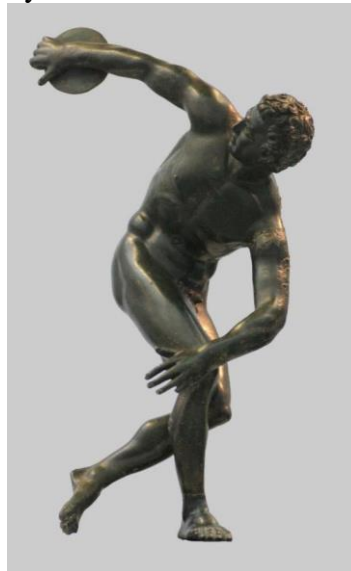


Figure 5: 'The Discus Thrower'

Plato's theory of ideas had a significant impact on the ancient Greeks' conception of image creation. According to him, a world of ideas exists beyond the world of the senses, and this world contains the true and eternal essence or model of all things. These concepts exist independently of any particular substance or human concept; they are the objects of knowledge and wisdom. The world of the senses is merely an imperfect and variable replica of the world of ideas in time and space. The world of the senses is variable, relative, imperfect, and illusory, whereas the world of ideas is constant, absolute, flawless, and real. Ideas are models or examples of the nature of things, the foundation for the existence and knowledge of all concrete things, a universal and necessary being, and they comprise the essence and fundamental principles of all things. Therefore, our criteria for knowing and evaluating objects are concepts."

Under the influence of Plato's conceptualism, Greek sculptors pursued idealised images of the human body rather than actual individuals. They created many noble, harmonic, and idealised depictions of gods and heroes, such as the Parthenon sculptures by Phidias. The sculptures in the temple are meticulously crafted, reflecting harmony and proportion, and exhibiting unparalleled beauty from every vantage point. Under the influence of conceptualism, this pursuit of symmetry and proportion reflects the ancient Greeks' search for perfect harmony in the world of ideas.

### 3.2 Ancient Greek Sculpture under the Influence of Religious Theological Beliefs

Unquestionably, the ancient Greek belief system had a profound impact on their sculpture and architecture. Their diverse religious cults, which included Zeus, Hera, Apollo, and Aphrodite, are evident in their works of art.

Myth, as the ancient Greeks' contemplation of scientifically unexplainable problems, "is a "force," so to speak, the power and direction of an individual or a group of people, that is, a profoundly concrete, figurative force of identity." [7] It began with the veneration of natural forces. As philosophy

and literature evolved, they progressively affected the ancient Greeks' religious theological beliefs and profoundly influenced the country's sculpture art. These spirits were depicted as anthropomorphic, human-like creatures, making them easier to comprehend and embrace. Simultaneously, mythology reflected the social milieu of the time, and this influence permeated not only the themes and images of the sculptures but also the artistic manner and inventive techniques. "Mythology arose during a period when precise knowledge was scarce. Historically, Westerners believed in the Blessed Isle, the heavens, the Northwest Passage, and the southern continent." [8] In ancient Greek society, Zeus, Apollo, and Athena were worshipped. They were designated symbolic and personality attributes that reflected their appreciation and reverence for nature, ethics, and society. These deities were given to life through sculpture and became the subject of artists' work. For instance, "the statues of Zeus at Olympia and Athena at the Parthenon are examples of the idealisation of deities whose postures, facial expressions, and ornamental details reflect the dignity and majesty of divinity." [4]

In addition, the mythology of ancient Greece was a significant source of inspiration for sculptors. The Iliad and Odyssey Figure 6 of Homer were a bountiful source of inspiration for subsequent Greek art. Artists brought mythological landscapes and characters to life with their attention to minute detail and realism. Laocoon and His Sons is an illustration of this, a tragic scene from the Trojan myth that conveys veneration for the power of the gods through the meticulous depiction of its figures.

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Figure 6: 'Laocoon and His Sons'

The ancient Greeks' religious theological beliefs not only influenced the subject matter of sculpture, but also influenced its style and technique. To better reflect the divinity and transcendence of the gods, "between economic relations and artistic style, there was also the intervention of ideological structures, a complex imaginative displacement of class roles and their needs, capable of influencing the specific spheres that provided the main themes for art one by one, whether religious, mythological, or civic life." [9] The sculptors sought to idealise the human form by emphasising the sculpture's proportions and symmetry, as well as its dynamic expression and sense of life. They made their sculptures appear more vivid and lifelike through careful handling and subtle adjustments to light and shadow. This pursuit of perfection and attention to detail reflects the profound influence of ancient Greek religious theology on their sculpture.

In ancient Greek society, the realms of existence and spirituality differed significantly from those

of modern society. Their world and way of life were comparatively straightforward, whereas modern society's existence and spiritual world appear to be more complicated. This distinction makes their artistic approach more straightforward and natural than contemporary art.

### 3.3 Ancient Greek Sculpture under the Influence of Social Attitudes

The artistic orientation of the ancient Greeks was influenced by their knowledge of the human psyche and body. The natural and unpretentious aesthetics of their works of art reflect their appreciation for the natural flow of life. For instance, the depiction of the human body in Homer's epic poems and Aristophanes' comedies is intended to elicit a sense of delight rather than obscenity.

The natural attractiveness of the human body is celebrated and depicted in its totality in ancient Greek sculpture. Sculpture investigated the dynamic aesthetics of the human body while adhering to the depiction of reality. Miron's Discus Thrower, for instance, celebrates humanity and life by depicting the natural beauty of the human body in motion.

The ancient Greeks believed that through dance and chorus they could create a man with civic dignity, freedom, and simplicity. Greek culture cultivated man through dance and chorus; taught him gesture, movement, and all the elements associated with sculpture; formed him into a procession that amounted to a living relief; made him a spontaneous actor, performing with enthusiasm, for the sake of interest, for his own amusement, alternating between the movements of a sprinter and the gestures of a dancer with civic pride, seriousness, and freedom. The dance is one of the mind, of modesty, and of dignity. The dance imparts posture, movement, garment pleats, and composition to the sculpture; the motif on the Badenon band is the celebration of the procession of the goddess Athena, and the sculptures at Afgalea and Butlam are inspired by the dance of Bilic [in honour of Apollo]. [10]

It is noteworthy that ancient Greek society did not scrutinise or experience excessive humiliation regarding the various body parts. In their culture, nudity did not elicit strange responses. The concept of chastity did not evolve into a controversy over disgrace. As a consequence, their sculptures were more realistic, and there was no need to be bashful or humiliated about displaying human bodies.

The social context of ancient Greece gave their sculpture a distinctive element. Their artwork demonstrates the pursuance of the natural beauty of the human form, without the need for embellishment or concealment. These elements reflect the ancient Greeks' comprehensive comprehension of life and human nature, which gave ancient Greek sculpture its enduring fascination and served as a crucial foundation for Western art.

Changes in society had a substantial effect on ancient Greek sculpture. For instance, the beginning of a new culture coincided with the rise of prose, drama, and early philosophy during the fifty years following the Battle of Salamis [480-479]. Art shifted abruptly from accurate imitation to gorgeous creation. Aristocles, the Aegean sculptors Onatas, Canakos, Pythagoras of Lycium, Calamis, and Ageladas all imitated natural forms. [10] These characteristics eventually became essential pillars of Western art and had a profound impact on the evolution of later art.

## 4. Conclusion

Ancient Greek sculpture and architecture was a highly integrated art form that incorporated a variety of social values, religious theological beliefs, political formations, and philosophical concepts. Ancient Greeks developed a comprehensive comprehension of the human spiritual and material world in their pursuit of rationality, harmony, and beauty, which is reflected in the creation of this art form.

The form and content of ancient Greek sculpture were profoundly influenced by philosophical thought, particularly the humanism of Protagoras and the conceptualism of Plato. Using the human scale, the ancient Greeks depicted the proportions and dynamics of the human body to demonstrate the natural beauty of its motion. The pursuance of idealised images and the creation of numerous

noble, harmonious, and idealised depictions of gods and heroes reflected the ancient Greeks' devotion to the realm of ideas.

The influence of ancient Greek religious theological beliefs on sculpture and architecture is also noteworthy. They worshipped a plethora of gods and deities, whose images and mythological stories inspired artists' creations. The ancient Greek temples and sculptures were endowed with the dignity and magnificence of the gods, and their design and creation reflected awe and reverence for their authority.

The political structure of ancient Greece, primarily the democratic system of Athens, had an effect on the country's artistic output. The ancient Greeks were accorded respect for their rights and dignity, which gave them greater artistic licence and innovation. This spirit of innovation was fully reflected in their sculpture and architecture, which were replete with originality and individuality in their themes and forms.

In conclusion, the sculpture and architecture of ancient Greece reflect the coexistence of social values, religious and theological beliefs, political forms, and philosophical concepts. The origin and evolution of this artistic expression not only reveals the ancient Greeks' profound comprehension of the spiritual and material world of humanity, but also their eternal pursuit of rationality, harmony, and beauty.

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