

The Classical World

Aegean. Greece. Rome.

NOTE:

Just to make sure we start on the same page, the last couple of weeks covered a large time period. Prehistory to mostly around 1500 BCE.

While there were many more artworks than those I discussed, this class focuses on race, gender and sexuality so we laid the foundation for representations of and meanings of female figures.

This week we move into Classical Greece and Rome. We will see similarities and differences in the representations.

This sculpture to the right is from an island in the Aegean Sea. It is from a time closer to the end of the lecture last week, but an area closer to Greece.



Minoan Snake Goddess, 1600 BCE, from Knossos, Crete, 13"

NOTE:

The Minoan civilization flourished from about 2600 to 1100 BCE. The island of Crete and other small islands in the Aegean Sea indicate interaction with Near East and Egyptian civilizations.



Minoan Snake Goddess, 1600 BCE, this one is in the Brooklyn Museum



Notice the location of Crete to the Greek mainland. All the green parts are Greece today.

Description

1. This female figure is made of clay with color glaze.
2. She is holding a snake in each hand with arms outstretched.
3. She is wearing a crown with what appears to be an animal on top.
4. Her breasts are exposed.
5. Her waist is cinched with an apron-type piece over a layered skirt.
6. Between her breasts is a knot with a projecting looped cord.
7. Her face is stylized with fierce eyes.

We have already seen the exposed breasts in earlier work.

We have also seen humans paired with animals.

Scholars are not sure what exactly what this means and may be more than one meaning.



Minoan Snake Goddess, 1600 BCE, from Knossos, Crete, 13"

Symbols

1. Snakes

1. Associated with renewal of life as they shed their skins.
2. Snakes referred to as reborn dead.
3. Live close to the earth.
4. In the Minoan religion the snake was a protector of the house.

2. Breasts

1. We have already seen the exposed breasts connected to nurturing.
2. Some scholars suggest this was actually fashionable.

3. Sacral knot

The knot between her breasts is associated with holiness and was the most important Minoan symbol.

While there is inconclusive written evidence of the meaning, what do you think?



Minoan Snake Goddess, 1600 BCE, from Knossos, Crete, 13"

Classical Greece is dated from about 600 BCE (the end of the to Persian Wars) to 332 BCE (the death of Alexander the Great).

It began with great wars. First the Greeks and the Persians, then Athens and Sparta, but it was also a era of great political and cultural achievement.

It's usually divided into the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic Periods.

These are some things we attribute to classical Greece:

History— Herodotus

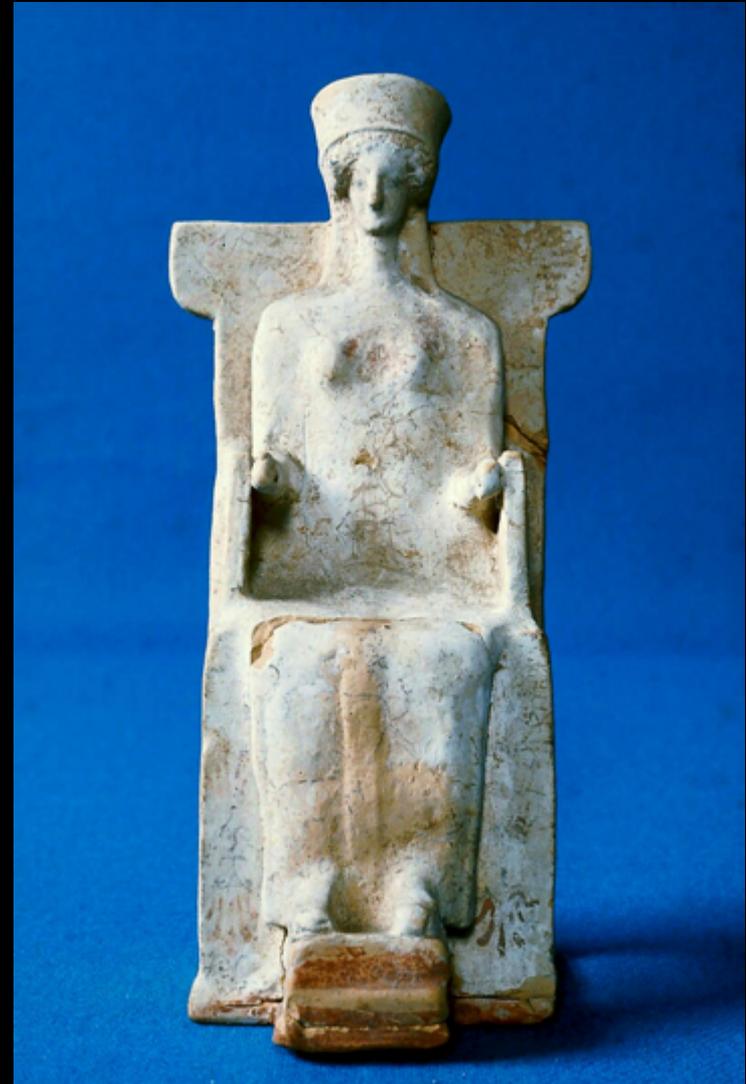
Medicine— Hippocrates

Philosophy— Socrates

Demokratia— 'rule by the people'

Architecture

Idealized male and female sculpture



Seated Goddess, Greece, 400 BCE

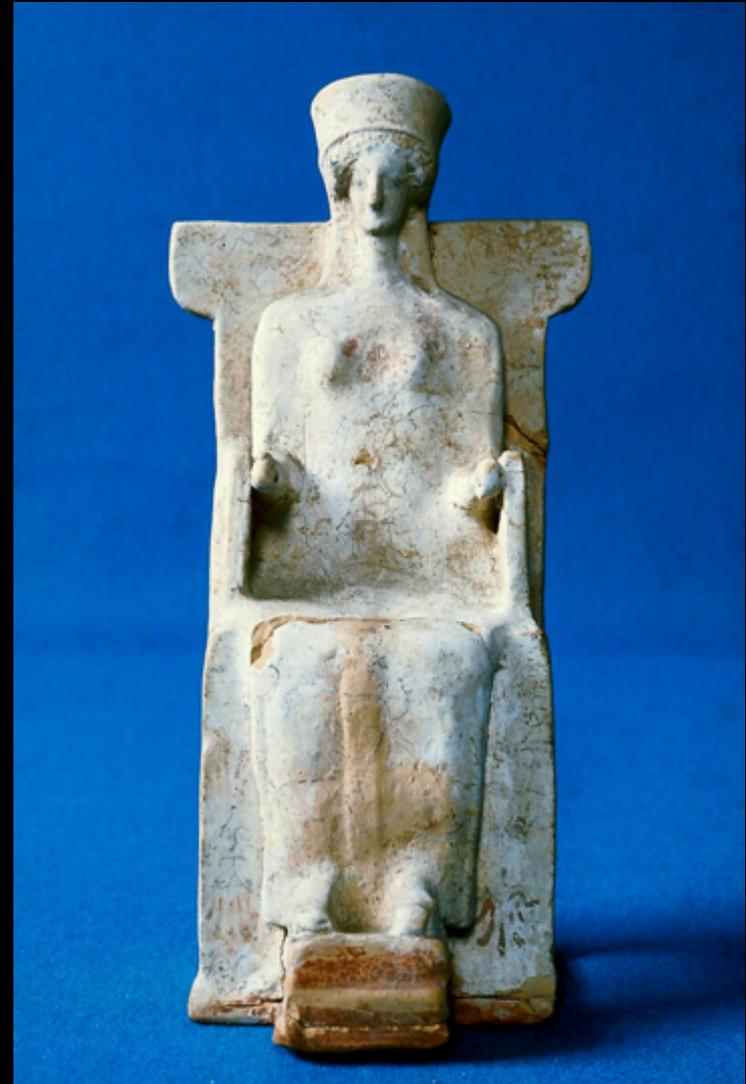
The early female goddess figure

has some elements that might remind you of earlier Mesopotamian and Egyptian art.

She also bears resemblance to some other sculptures we didn't talk about from the Cycladic Islands in the Mediterranean Sea. (see earlier map)



Marble female figure,
2600-2400 BCE,
24 $\frac{3}{4}$ " this one is
in the Met
Museum



Seated Goddess, Greece, 400 BCE

When looking at Archaic Greek art we see resemblances to Egyptian styles

Compare this one to the Egyptian statue below from 3500 years earlier.

While there are many similar stylistic similarities, one important difference is that this Greek statue is not a god or ruler.

It's a young boy.

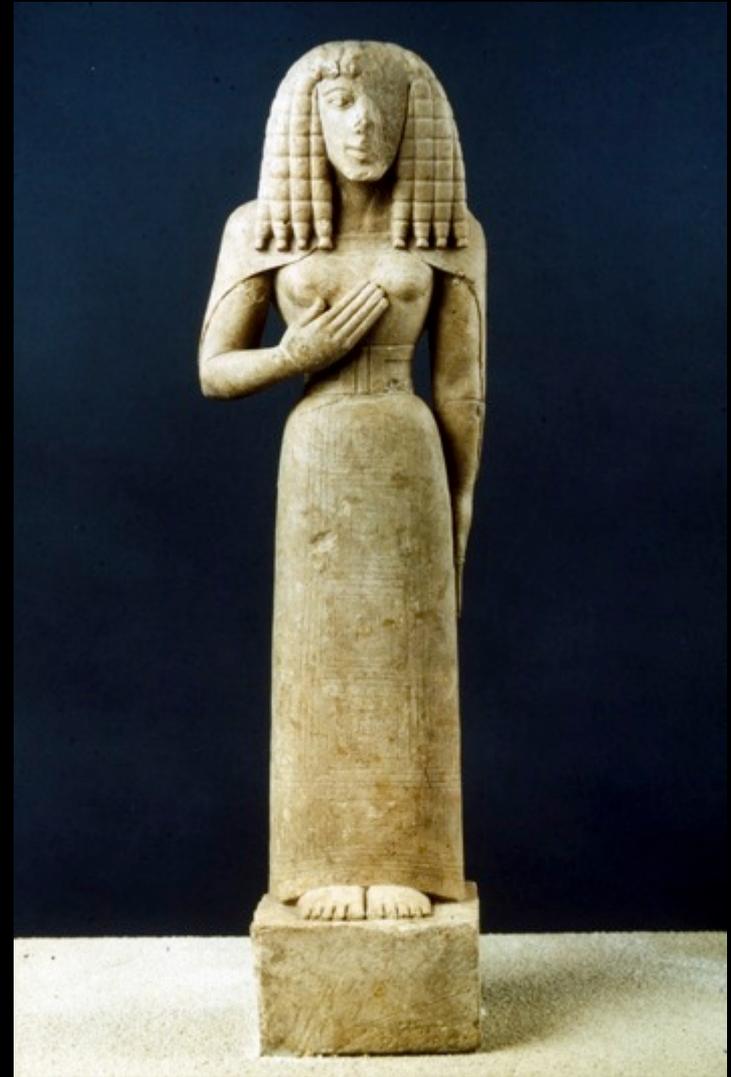


Kourous (young man), Greece, ca. 580 BCE

Archaic Greek statues of females are also found. These are called Kore, or young female figures.

Scholars suspect these statues, which were often life sized or larger, were used as votive offerings in sanctuaries and as funeral monuments.

The main difference between the male and female figures of this time is that the males are completely nude while the females are clothed.



Kore, Greece, ca. 640 BCE

Gods in the image of man

Much Greek art is based on Greek history and myths.

The Greek gods and goddesses were imagined in human form with human weaknesses and god-like strengths.

One reason that is given for so much figurative art from Greece (that's art of the human figure) is that the Greeks didn't believe in life after death the way the Egyptians did.

Only the gods and goddess had immortality.

Life on earth was it. You lived. You died. That's it.

They actually invented the phrase— man is the measure of all things.



MYRON, *Diskobolos (Discus Thrower)*. Roman marble copy after a bronze original of ca. 450 BCE, 5' 1" high. Museo Nazionale Romano—Palazzo Massimo alle Terme.

Archaic to Classical style in Greek Art

Between the *Kouros Boy* and *Apoxomentos* to the right, the style changed. In a few hundred years, Classical Greek Idealism occurred in sculpture.



Some people may say Classical Greek sculpture is 'realistic.' But the word we use is 'idealistic' because all figures are young, muscular, an ideal of perfection. Not what most real people look like.

Kouros (young man),
Greece, ca.
580 BCE



Apoxomentos, (this is a sculpture of an Olympic Athlete), also considered a god. Greece, ca. 320 BCE

The Greeks believed the male figure was the ideal of beauty

Most of what we know of Greek Art comes to us in Roman copies.

I mentioned earlier that the Romans loved Greek art but most of the originals were bronze and melted down for other uses—usually war. Or if they were marble, broken.

Two bronze statues was discovered off the coast of Italy in 1972.

These bronze statues represent Greek Classical style:

Ideal. Rational. Mathematical
Symmetrical. Intellectual. Balanced



*Riace Bronze Warriors, (460-450 BCE)
Bronze, about 78"*

Early Greek Art and the Female Body

Here are two more female figures completely clothed .



It's hard for us to imagine but the original statues were painted. The artists painted them to look more like real people. We see them now as mostly white because over time, the paint wore off. You can still see a little paint on these.

Peplos Kore, from the Acropolis, Athens, Greece, ca. 530 BCE. Marble, approx. 4' high. Acropolis Museum, Athens



Kore, from the Acropolis, Athens, Greece, ca. 520–510 BCE. Marble, approx. 1' 9 1/2" high. Acropolis Museum, Athens.

Goddesses of Greece and Rome

The Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses was large. Some of the most important goddesses are represented in the art. Each has a mythic story and a function in the lives of people.

Athena—(Roman Minerva) Goddess of wisdom, poetry, art, and war strategy. Daughter of Zeus and born from his forehead fully grown, wearing battle armor.

This massive sculpture of Athena is located in an exact replica of the Greek Parthenon in Nashville. The sculptor, Andre Lequire, did a lot of research to make the image as authentic as possible to the original sculpture.

Notice the scale and paint.



Athena Parthenos, a replica of what the original Athena looked like. Parthenon, Nashville, Tennessee.

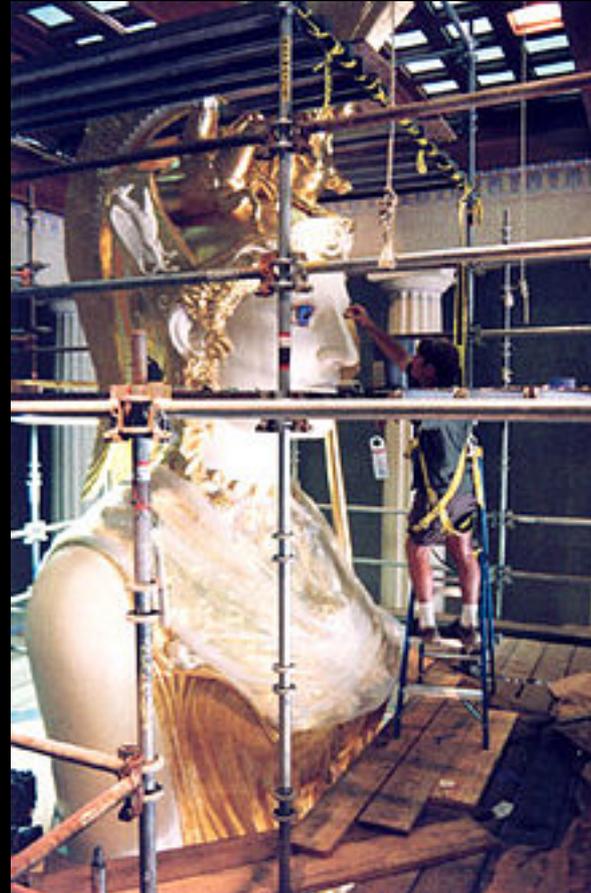
Andre LeQuire working on the reproduction in Nashville

LeQuire worked on this statue for many years.

A massive statue of the goddess Athena was originally located in the Parthenon in Athens Greece.

Athena was considered the protector of the city of Athens.

The statue in Nashville allows us to imagine what the original looked and felt like.



Athena

Because most original Greek sculptures were destroyed what we have as examples come from the Roman times.

This Roman copy of a Greek original shows how Athena was represented.

Standing in the classic contrapposto pose with one leg bent and hip shifted, she wears a crown and holds a shield with one hand and a small statue of the goddess Nike in the other. An image of Medusa is on her breast.

The Greek sculptor, Phidias, is given credit for this massive sculpture originally made of ivory and gold.



The Varvakeion Athena reflects the type of the restored Athena Parthenos: Roman period, 2nd century (National Archaeological Museum of Athens).

Goddesses Greek and Roman

Artemis—(Roman Diana) Virgin goddess of the hunt. Also associated with childbirth, virginity and protector of young girls.

Artemis was one of the most venerated of Greek deities and continued in Rome. Often depicted as the huntress, she is shown with the deer and cypress, both considered sacred to her.



Apollo and Artemis, Greek, 470 BCE, Louvre Museum

This is a painting on a plate.



Artemis, Marble Roman, 2nd century., Louvre Museum

Goddesses Greek and Roman

Artemis—(Roman Diana) Virgin goddess of the hunt. Also associated with childbirth, virginity and protector of young girls.

In this version of Artemis as the Lady of Ephesus, we see the goddess in her 'mother goddess' image.



Depicted with arms outstretched as if welcoming her worshipers, legs are enclosed in a pillar-like structure covered with animals. She wears a crown and the round forms have been interpreted as breasts or eggs



Ephesian Artemis, Roman, 2nd century.

Goddesses Greek and Roman

Demeter—(Roman Ceres) goddess of agriculture, fertility, sacred law and the harvest. Another mother goddess, she is also connected to life and death and connected to earlier earth-goddess.

In both these sculptures Demeter is seated and clothed. The one to the right shows her seated on a throne.



Demeter, from the pediment of the Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens, Greece, ca. 520–510 BCE. Marble, approx. 1' 9 1/2" high. Acropolis Museum, Athens.



Demeter of Knidos, 350 BCE. Marble, approx. 60" high. British Museum, London

Goddesses Greek and Roman

Hera—(Roman Juno) goddess of goddesses, women and married to Zeus. Known as the queen of the gods.

Hera is often represented with animals she considered sacred; the cow, lion, and peacock. Often enthroned and crowned with the *polos* (a tall crown worn by several great goddesses, she sometimes holds a pomegranate (emblem of fertile blood and death).



The Barbarini Hera, Roman copy of a Greek original. The Vatican



The Campana Hera, Roman copy of a Greek original. Louvre, Paris

Goddesses Greek and Roman

Nike—(Roman Victoria) goddess of victory, known as the winged goddess of victory.

Almost always depicted with wings, she is also associated with speed and strength as well as victory.



This version of Nike was carved into a temple at Ephesus

Head and arms broken off. The statue originally had them.



Nike alighting on a warship (Nike of Samothrace), from Samothrace, Greece, ca. 190 BCE. Marble, figure approx. 8' 1" high. Louvre, Paris

Goddesses Greek and Roman--Aphrodite

Aphrodite—(Roman Venus) Goddess of love and beauty and married to Hephaestus.

Statues of Aphrodite nude proliferated in late Greek art.

Based on the Aphrodite of Knidos, fourth century BCE, by Praxiteles, it was the first major work to show the goddess nude.



The goddess of love is shown as if surprised from her bath. She reaches to cover her breasts and pubis in a gesture of modesty. Her attempt to cover herself both conceals and accentuates her sexuality.

Aphrodite (Venus), Roman copy 2nd century of a Greek original 3-2 century BCE. MET Museum
NOTE: this one has arms broken off.



PRAXITELES, Aphrodite of Knidos.
Roman marble copy after an original of ca. 350–340 BCE. Approx. 6' 8" high. Vatican Museums, Rome.

IMPORTANT—Aphrodite

Based on the Aphrodite of Knidos, fourth century BCE, by Praxiteles, similar images proliferated in Greek art.

With this representation of the female goddess we see the meaning of the female body change. Idealized and nude, the female body is now something to look at.



PRAXITELES, *Aphrodite of Knidos*. Roman marble copy after an original of ca. 350–340 BCE. Approx. 6' 8" high. Vatican Museums, Rome.

Goddesses Greek and Roman-

I've shown you a number of images of Greek goddesses. Take some time to consider the images of women we saw last week and compare to these.

What are some of the similarities and some of the differences?

Some associations with the female body continue and now we see some different ones.

What about style? How have styles changed?

NOTE:

Contrapposto pose— a standing pose that appears natural and relaxed. Weight is on one leg while the other is bent. This causes the standing hip to shift up creating a beautiful 'S' shape to the figure. The Greeks invented this pose.



PRAXITELES, *Aphrodite of Knidos*. Roman marble copy after an original of ca. 350–340 BCE. Approx. 6' 8" high. Vatican Museums, Rome.

Sexuality in Ancient Greece

The concept of homosexuality did not exist in Ancient Greece. Middle aged men married young women and they also partnered with young men.

Known as Pederasty, this practice is celebrated in art and poetry.



This piece of pottery, used for drinking wine has the image of a older man and his male beloved, 5th century BCE.

Sexuality in Ancient Greece

The couple composed of two men was socially accepted if it was 'asymmetrical.' The difference in age being one but also the idea that one person would be more passive, the other more active participant.

It is believed this practice was part of indoctrinating young men into Greek life. In addition to sexual relations, intellectual and moral roles were reinforced.



Red Figure kylix (vase for drinking wine), c 475 BCE,

Sexuality in Ancient Greece

Scholars disagree on when these practices began and ended. But Greek culture is not the only one to practice Pederasty.

Most of the Greek artwork is either vase or pottery painting, or frescoes (wall paintings).



Red Figure kylix
(vase for drinking
wine), c 475
BCE, Apollodoros .
This image shows
two women
together.



This painting was on a vase from Athens.
Depicting an older and younger man.
5th century BCE

Sexuality in Ancient Rome

When Rome conquered Greece, they took more than the artworks. Many of the ideas and philosophy was incorporated into Roman thought.

From early times in Rome it was considered normal for a man to desire and pursue boys.

Pederasty mostly lost its function as a ritual part of education, as in Greece and was instead seen as something driven by sexual desire. It was also seen as competing with desire for women and eventually phased out.



This relief sculpture of Jupiter abducting Ganymete from the 1st century CE

The myth is often seen as reinforcing the socially acceptable practice of Pederasty. Ganymete, “the loveliest born of the race of mortals” was carried up to the heavens to be Zeus’s wine pourer. From the Iliad., Homer.

Rome-

Beginning in the eighth century B.C.E., Ancient Rome grew from a small town on central Italy's Tiber River into an empire that at its peak encompassed most of continental Europe, Britain, much of western Asia, northern Africa and the Mediterranean islands.

Military conquests led to its cultural growth. Greece came under Roman rule in 146 BCE.



After 450 years as a republic, Rome became an empire in the wake of Julius Caesar's rise and fall in the first century B.C.E. The long and triumphant reign of its first emperor, Augustus, began a golden age of peace and prosperity.

Personification and the female

The female figure here has been interpreted as a personification of Peace, as Venus and as a personification of the Earth.

It is a scene of human fertility and abundance. The central female figure is solid and holding two babies on her lap.

On each side are personifications of the land and sea, both also represented by females.



Female personification (Tellus—the Earth), panel from the east facade of the Ara Pacis Augustae, Rome, Italy, 13–9 BCE. Marble, approx. 5' 3" high.

This relief sculpture is from the Ara Pacis of Augustus. An altar for blood sacrifice, it depicts various images to support ways Augustus brought Peace to Rome.

Personification and the female

NOTE:

Personification means the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something nonhuman, or the representation of an abstract quality in human form.

It's important you understand this visual device. It's used a lot in art and personifications are often in female form.



Female personification (Tellus—the Earth), panel from the east facade of the Ara Pacis Augustae, Rome, Italy, 13–9 BCE. Marble, approx. 5' 3" high.

The end of the Roman Empire

Rome eventually began to collapse under the weight of it's own size.

Invaders from outside the empire and fighting from within, weakened it's strength.

Constantine emerged from power struggles after the death of Marcus Aurelius as sole emperor of a reunified Rome in 324 CE.

He moved the Roman capital to the Greek city of Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople (we call it Istanbul). Constantine made Christianity (once an obscure Jewish sect) Rome's official religion.

Next week we look at what happens to women in the Christian Era as well as comparisons to other beliefs as well.



Byzantine Icon of the Virgin Mary, c. 600 CE, St. Catherine's Monastery, Egypt.