

Interlude - Artistic Revolution #1

Greek Art

From childhood, you're familiar with the Egyptian "style"

It's:

- non-naturalistic
- based on religion
- analytic, representing from memory, as it were unfeeling in large part
- dominated by parts, not perhaps the whole the head, the feet, etc.
- static and conflicting
(always left) foot forward, no hint of movement



Micerinus and his Queen, Egyptian, ~1345 B.C.



Funerary Scene, Egyptian, ~1450 B.C.
Greek Art

The judgement at death:

Horus, sky god, always a head of falcon

Anubis, god of funerals, always head of jackal

Here, the heart is being weighed

Formulaic

The most influence, is that of Egypt

- a civilization of ~2000 years
- remarkable that the “style”, which is distinctive, was so consistent for so long

Art had a function and was tied to even the hieroglyphic writing

- The function was religious in nature
 - related to preserving what’s recognizable for the deceased
- Often followed strict formulae
 - The representation of people incorporated the features which are most apparent
 - It is not a rendering, but the result of analysis
 - Prized was an artist’s ability to imitate past formulae
 - innovation was not prized
- Certainly what you think of brings an image of stiffness and even rigidity

Notice what’s going on here with this door.

- Everything that is important about a figure is included
 - a facial profile, but eyes from the front
 - the instep of a foot (both are left here)
 - square shoulders



Portrait of Hesire, Egyptian, ~2770 B.C. a wooden door

But, not always...

Some Egyptian sculpture can be quite delicate and beautiful

- flattering and only the bare essentials
- Certainly paintings from nature are clearly recognizable and correct



Tree of Life, Egyptian, ~2500 B.C.



Geese, Egyptian, ~2500 B.C.
Greek Art



Portrait of Head, Egyptian, ~2500 B.C. limestone

There was a respect for nature and these depictions are to remind the deceased of pleasurable times

- **Look here: almost a paradoxical relationship**
 - the humans are symbolic...the king larger than the others according to rank, the odd posture
 - while the birds and the hunting cat are naturalistic
- **The formulae persist**

Mg., man's coloration is always darker than woman's



Fowling Scene, Egyptian, ~1450 B.C. limestone

Akhenaton

There was an attempt at change by Akhenaton and his wife, Nefertiti - Eighteenth Dynasty

- The old gods were eliminated
- A naturalness was introduced
a scene of domesticity
nearly one of relaxation



Nefertiti, Egyptian,
~1345 B.C.



Akhenaton and Nefertiti and children, Egyptian,
~1345 B.C.

The boy king, Tutankhamun returned to the old ways, old gods, old art

- erased any evidence of Akhenaton
- ~1000B.C., Egypt was overrun by Persians and dominated eventually by a rigid priest caste

Our heritage

Certainly, Greek...but they inherited from

- Egypt, Minoans in Crete, and Mycenaens on their own peninsula

The Minoans' had a sophisticated civilization and some art survives - possibly speaking a form of Greek
Especially intriguing is the Palace at Knossos and the fact that they disappeared!

An infatuation with the Bull, indeed a images of bull-fighting, or rather bull-dancing survives in many forms

Movement seems to be a common feature of Minoan Art

Un-stiff

- A relatively delicate approach to representing humans...unlike that of the Egyptians

The gesture is almost modern.



Blue Ladies, Minoan, ~1600B.C.?



Bull leaping, Minoan, ~1500B.C.?

The influence of Egypt on Greece is indirect

Egypt and Crete clearly traded

- Crete and near east - Assyria and Crete and Mycenae, the direct forefathers

This was a somewhat feisty culture

Colorful, builders of impressive multi-story houses

Warlike, marauders

On one pillaging trip, they lay siege to the city of Troy, said to be over the stolen princess, Helen

- ~1200 BC, raiders from the north invaded

These were the wars of Homer

complete defeat...and a dark ages that lasted for ~450 years on the Greek mainland



plaster head, Mycenaean, ~1345 B.C.

Greek Art



Orpheus fresco, Mycenaean, ~1300-125 B.C.



Mask of Agamemnon, Mycenaean, ~1500 B.C.

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elsewhere, the formulas are fading



Assyrian Army besieging a
fortress, Assyrian, ~880 B.C.

- **Not quite Egyptian**
certainly some of the Egyptian attitude
a political 'document'

the first abstract art?

Quite possibly the Greek alphabet

- in the 8th century B.C., vowels were added to the Phoenician alphabet

Homer probably saw his own stories written down during his lifetime

This was the beginning of the means of thoughtful and uniform communication:
that is, scientific and philosophic communication.

The early images as Greece peeked out of their darkness came in the 8th century as well

- The Geometric Period

vases such as these are usually related to a funeral
even more stilted than Egyptian figures



Mourning of the Dead,
Greek, ~750 B.C.

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then, in the 5th century B.C.

Something amazing happened

- **muscles, tendons, ribs...**
sculptors working in marble discovered the human form
the Egyptian-like analysis was forgotten and people *looked*

Now, innovation was key

- **How accurate**
- **How precise**
- **How representative**
can a work of art be?

What was important was

- **what the artist, personally saw**
- **experimentation, so mistakes**
but not safe, like Egyptian art

Free-standing marble statues as a funerary monument, often boys representing the young Apollo - throughout the 6th century B.C.

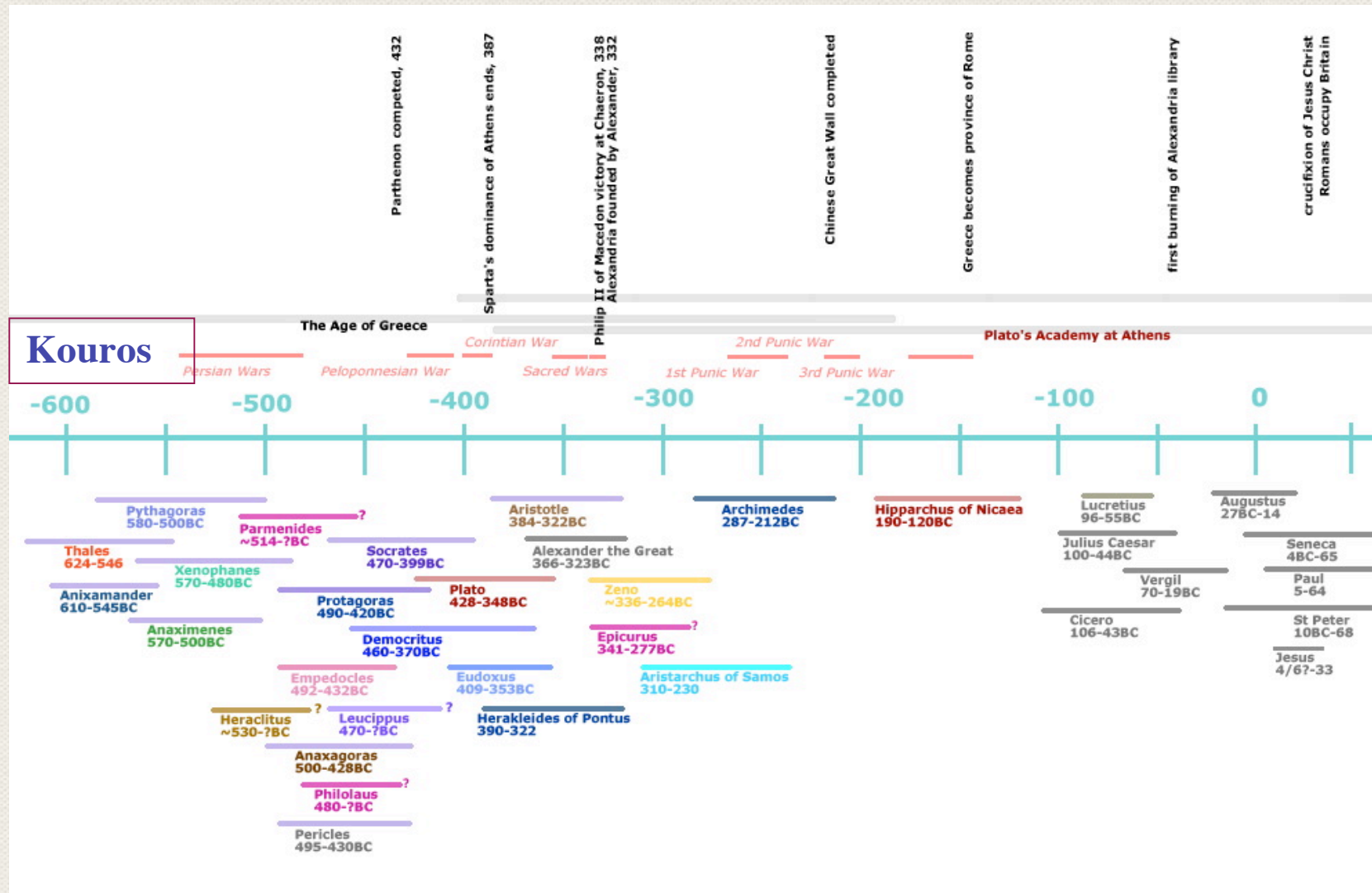


Kouros, Greek, ~6th century B.C.



Polymedes of Argos, Greek, ~615-590 B.C.

Representing the World begins in science and art.



Painting is gone

Painting was done on wood

- and so it did not survive

Even all of the classical sculpture did not survive the middle ages, as it was often bronze and melted

Almost all of what we have is in precise Roman copies

- Except for some worn murals, we have vase painting

Of two sorts: black figure and red figure
during the time of Pythagoras



Neck Amphora, *Exekias*, Greek, ca 540 B.C.

Greek Art



Calyx Krater, *Euphronios*, Greek, ca 515 B.C.

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“The greatest discovery...a tremendous moment in...art...”*

The painter Euthymedes, in 510 B.C.

- painted it like he saw it

foreshortening...actually painting a foot from the front

the shield is not painted according to what your memory first brings up

rather, from the side, as it would be actually seen

But, figures are still painted in outline, as in Egypt

and sparsely ‘decorated’...minimal lines,

enough to do anatomical justice



* E.H.Gombrich
The Story of Art

The greatest book on art.

Greek Art

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The real action came with the defeat of the Persians

After decades of battle

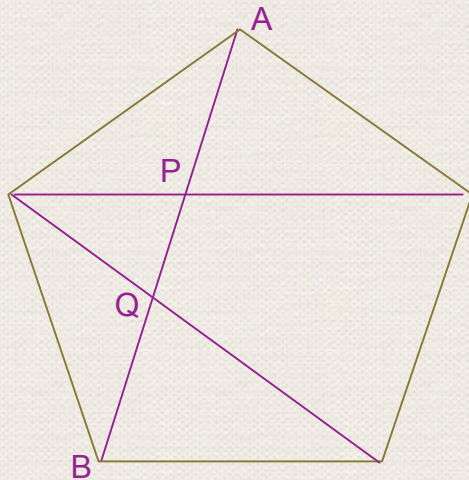
- begun by Ionian cities rebelling in 499 B.C.
Persia took years to round the Aegean
- In famous battles at Marathon (490 B.C.) and Thermopylae (480 B.C.)
Xerxes was defeated
- But, Athens was abandoned and burned to the ground

However, the patriotic spirit was intoxicating

- Pericles, the victorious general and statesman initiated a building/arts campaign
This was the beginning of the Classical Greek period that we all think of when we think “Greek”
It was also the solidification of the Greek form of democracy to which we’re indebted
- It was the time of
Socrates, Parmenides, and in the later stages, Plato

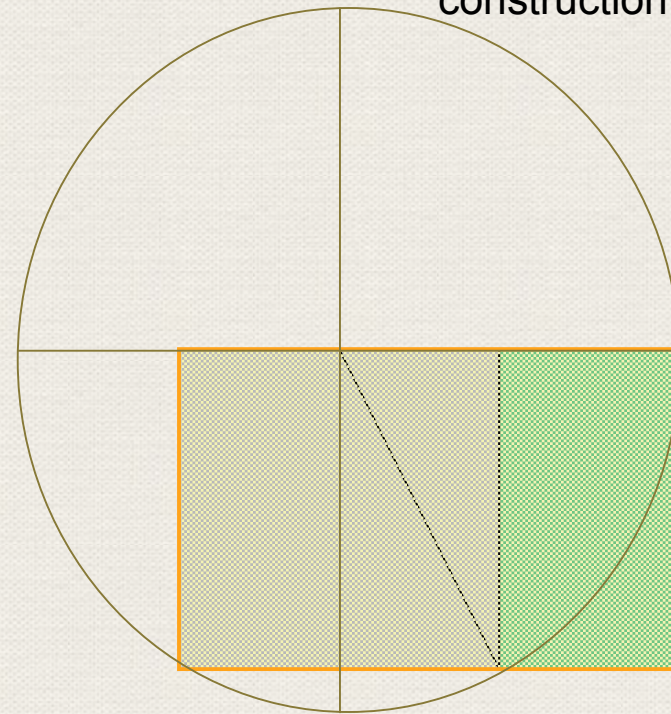
By this time, reliance on Proportion was explicit...and known to be psychologically pleasing

the dodecahedron was special (universe) even in Pythagoras' time. Take a pentagon face...



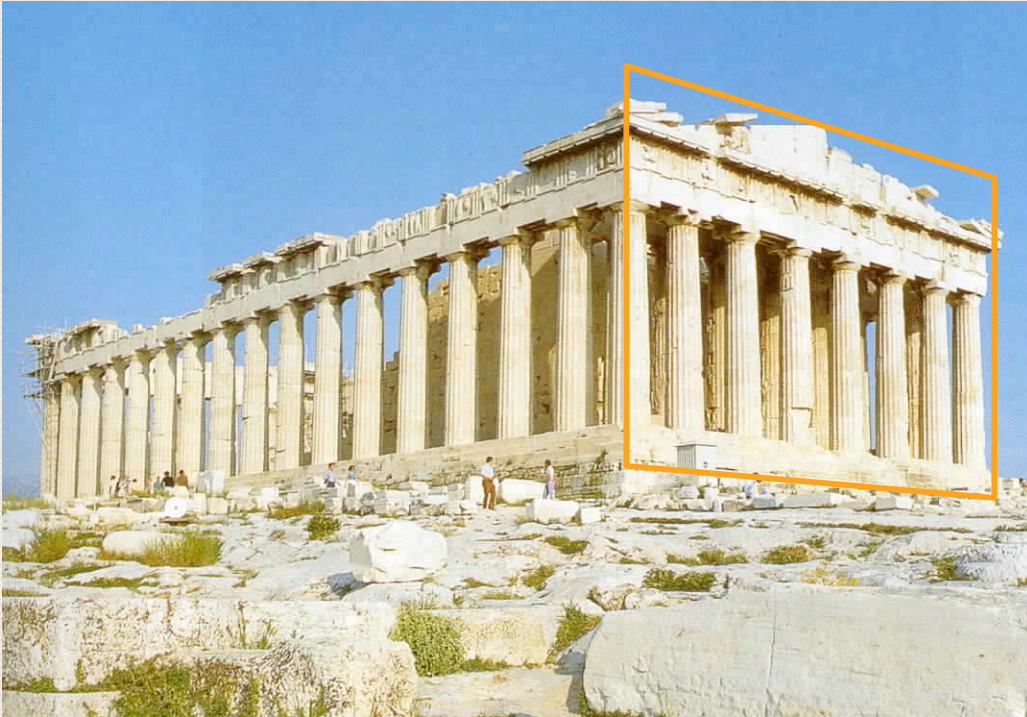
“divine proportion (Kepler): $\frac{AP}{PQ} = \frac{AQ}{AP}$
 $= (1 + \sqrt{5})/2$
 $= 1.61803$ ”

another construction...



“Golden Rectangle”...an especially pleasing (tested!) shape

Classical Doric architecture



The Parthenon was constructed after 480 B.C. (while Socrates was a child) by Pericles

Look at the columns - the taper at the top and the almost **muscular** structure. Perfectly suited to hold the roof of this perfectly proportioned building.

a part of the reason this building is so pleasing?

the Golden Rectangle.

This is an acknowledged affect. Studies show that this particular shape is inherently “pleasing”. Much architecture uses it, eg. the United Nations Building.

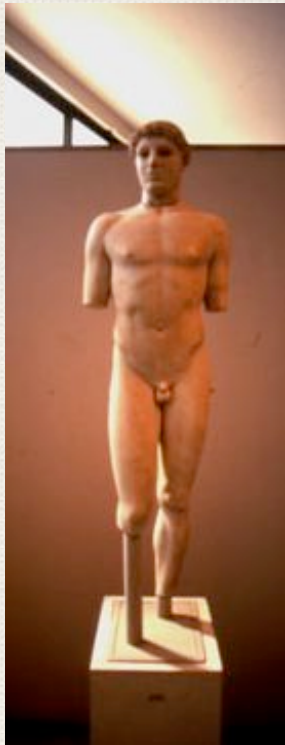
Revolution

There was an explosion of creativity in the mid-5th century

- The program was, initially, faithfully representing the world (people)
- and it became, eventually, representing an ideal world

It's not difficult to "feel" a sort of Platonism here.

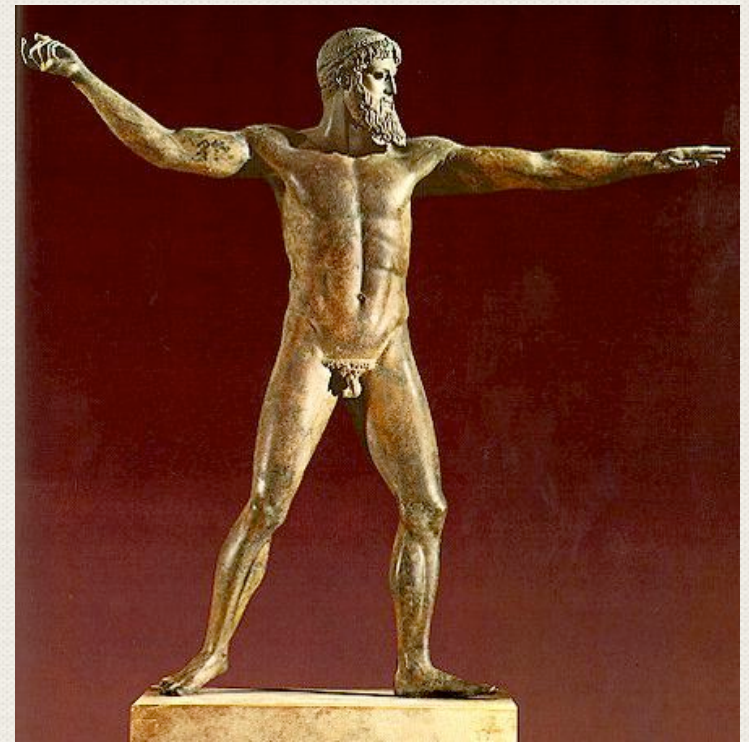
Examples abound:



Kritos' Boy, Greek, ca 490-80 B.C.



Charioteer, ca 475 B.C.



The Poseidon of Artemision, ca 460 B.C.

Named sculptors gained reputation

...and individual styles



Discobolos, Myron, ca 450 B.C.



model, Athena Parthenos,
Pheidias, ca 5th B.C.

Pheidias was commissioned by Pericles

- to build the Parthenon
- create the 40' high statue of Athena

plates of ivory on a wooden core
solid gold drapery and ornaments

In the athlete, Myron has imitated the Egyptian pose, but given it purpose and a sense of motion totally foreign to his professional ancestors.

The master

Polycleitus

- “wrote the book” on sculpture and the ideal form
kanon (or canon), it specified precisely the proportions necessary in order to perfectly represent the human body
- Doryphorus
a tour d’force, the weight on one foot, etc.
fit the formula for symmetry:

Architect

- theater at Epidaurus

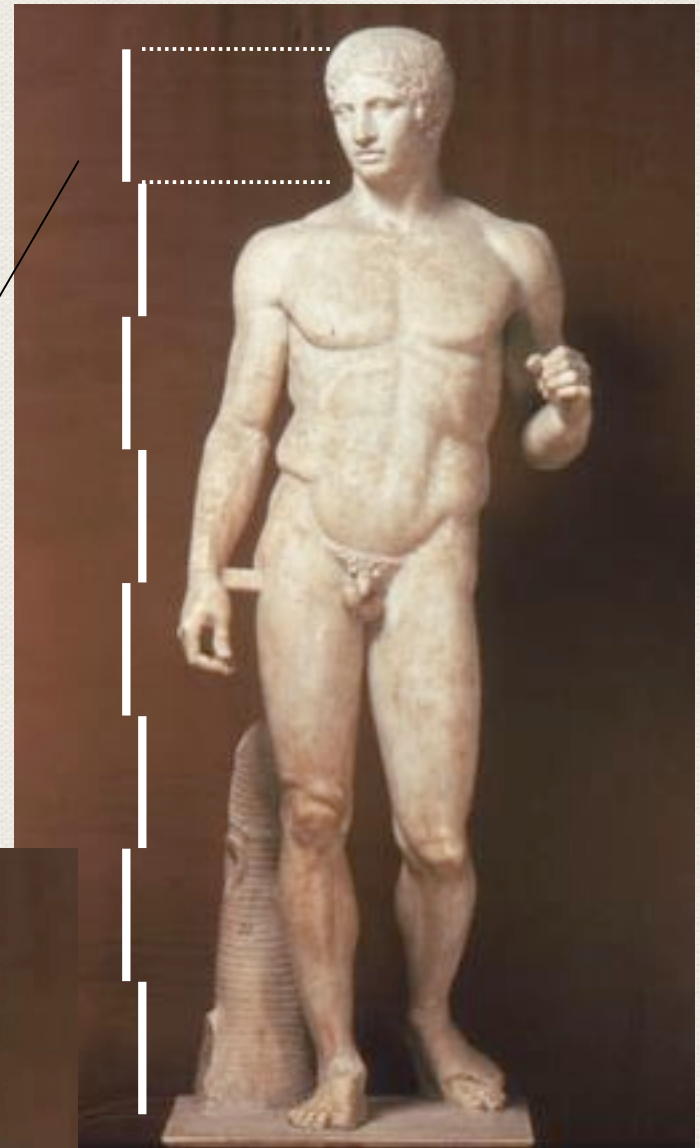


Theater at Epidaurus, *Polycleitus*, ca 440 B.C.
still used today. Upper part added 2nd B.C.

Greek Art

head, $1/8$ of height

crown-eyebrows, $3/8$;
eyebrow-chin, $5/8$



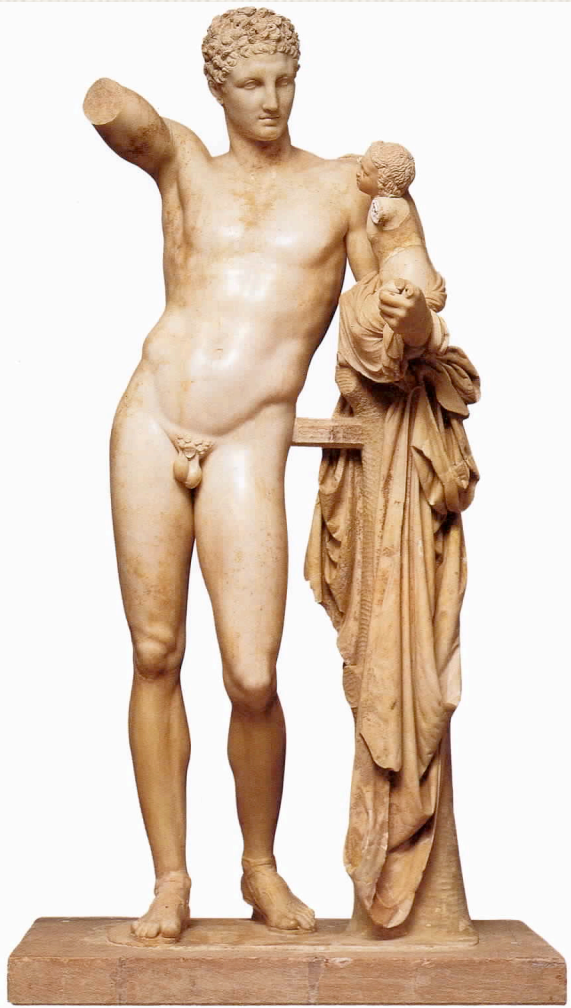
Doryphorus (spear bearer),
Polycleitus, ca 440 B.C.

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The quest for Perfection – the Ideal –

...continued, unabated

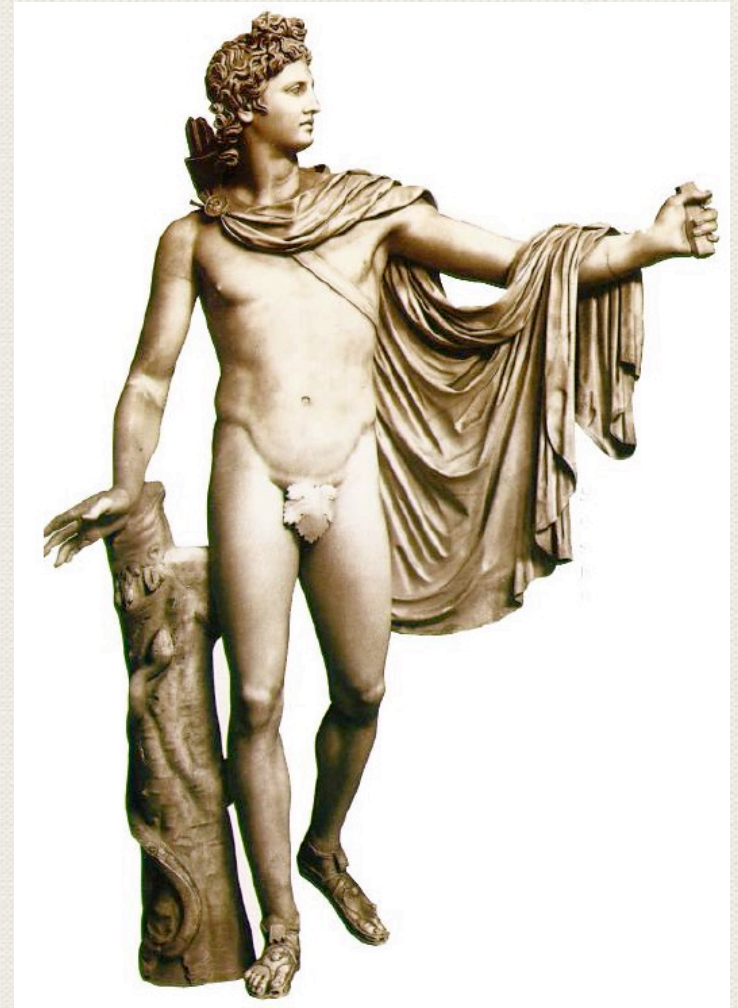
- While recognizably human skin, muscles
...um, nobody looks like this



Hermes with young Dionysus,
Praxiteles, ca 340 B.C.
Greek Art



Cnidian Aphrodite, *Praxiteles*, ca
350-40 B.C.



Apollo Belvedere, ca 350 B.C.

to an extreme



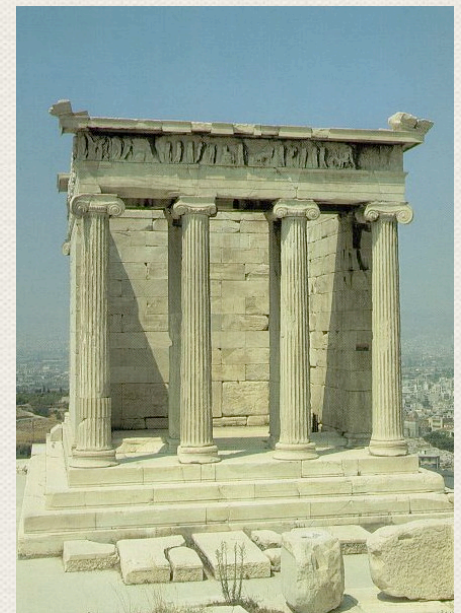
Goddess of victory, around
Temple of Victory, ca 408 B.C.

- **Do folds ever do this?**
virtuosity maybe becoming a feature?



Temple of Victory, ca 408 B.C.

- **Both Acropolis temples**
examples of the Ionic form
columns now, slender and
almost too light for their job

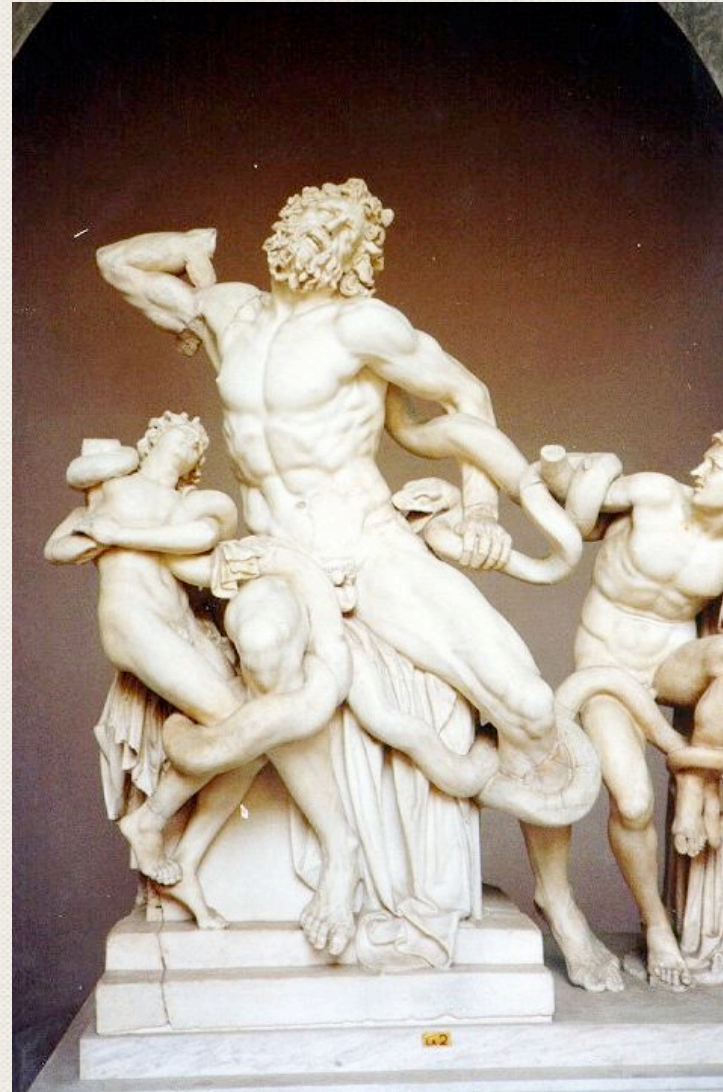


Erechtheion, ca 420-405 B.C.

and beyond.

Detail is now extreme

- more than natural musculature
 - extreme pain evident
- the rather cold, distant countenance is gone



Laocoon and sons, ca 175-50 B.C.

what changed

In science (philosophy)

- We encountered the beginning of rational thought;
- the shrugging off of myth as acceptable explanation;
- the belief in a knowable world and the beginnings of developing the tools necessary to decipher that world;
- the initiation of mathematics as a language for describing the world.

In the art that we've seen,

- We saw a democratization of artistic expression;
- an enthusiastic and nearly frenzied effort to learn to represent nature as it is; and
- the need to represent the ideal in the human body.

“Rational” comes from the Latin *ratio*, meaning proportion

- we've inherited a bit of this unconsciously, perhaps that to be rational is to seek proportion, and yes symmetry
- the lesson for this period is that while the world is populated by items of individuality they represent a common Ideal and that Representation in this period means the attempt to dig out that Ideal