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Architectural Sculpture: Messages? Programs? Towards Rehabilitating the Notion of 'Decoration'

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Intention and attention

The term "architectural sculpture", which defines the general topic of this volume, is a neutral definition of a concrete phenomenon in the visual arts, lacking any further cultural interpretation. If one looks, however, for some more specific terms indicating the cultural significance of this phenomenon, we find a whole range of notions that lead towards various sectors and levels of cultural theory and practice. In traditional aesthetic views, works of architectural sculpture are subsumed under the general category of *decoration*; according to iconological approaches, they are conceived as iconographic *programs*; from a political point of view they may even be seen as expressions of *ideological systems* or vehicles of political *propaganda*. Finally, in the conceptual vocabulary of semiotics and cultural communication they may be understood as *messages*, serving to glorify, commemorate or establish a collective *identity* among viewers of architectural monuments.

Mostly, such terms are adopted more or less superficially, following fashionable modes, with little concern for the theoretical implications of vocabulary. Sometimes, however, such notions are adopted with strong emphasis, as for example in the rigorous semiotic interpretation of the Athena Parthenos by Burkhard Fehr, in the search for *Bildprogramme* by Heiner Knell, Manfred Oppermann and David Castriota[1] – and on the other hand in the recent affirmation of the notions of *kosmos* and ornament by Clemente Marconi.[2] This last approach comes near to my own efforts to revive the term *decoration* as a basic category of art historical analysis.[3]

No doubt, the most fruitful approach to ancient architectural sculpture was the attempt to analyse its iconography in terms of public manifestation and communication. Indeed, only from this perspective can the political and social content of public monuments in their concrete historical situation be uncovered.

Nevertheless, this point of view implies some basic problems concerning the communicative functions that are thereby implied. All approaches that take such images seriously as "messages" or "programs" or "propaganda" presuppose an *intensive* situation of visual communication: authors and artists aiming *intensely* to influence and persuade their specific audience with their visual concepts, and viewers deciphering equally *intensely* such concepts, either accepting or refusing the suggestions and admonitions of such ideological, propagandistic messages. Yet, if we consider the real situation of viewers confronted with such images, some very obvious irritating facts emerge that seem to oppose this idea of intensive messages directed at intensive viewers.

First, there is the position of the viewers facing architectural sculpture.[4] The well-known locations of decoration in temple architecture – small friezes above the columns, metopes below the roof, and pediments even higher up in the architectural system – all demand that viewers engage these figural compositions from an extremely steep angle. In the temple of Zeus at Olympia, in the Parthenon (Fig. 5.1–2) and in the Hephaisteion at Athens, to name only three of the most elaborately decorated temple buildings of Classical Greece, the metopes and the friezes were even placed within and behind the colonnade where they were obscured, indeed almost concealed, from sight by the shadow of the roof. Of course, some understanding was possible. In the case of the Parthenon frieze encircling the temple's cella in the shadow of the entablature (Fig. 5.3), for example, viewers would have recognized that a religious procession was being represented; in case they did not identify its precise meaning they could have concluded from the general context that the scene shown was the Panathenaic procession. But the conditions of observation certainly did not allow a viewer to identify, say, ten groups of horsemen differentiated

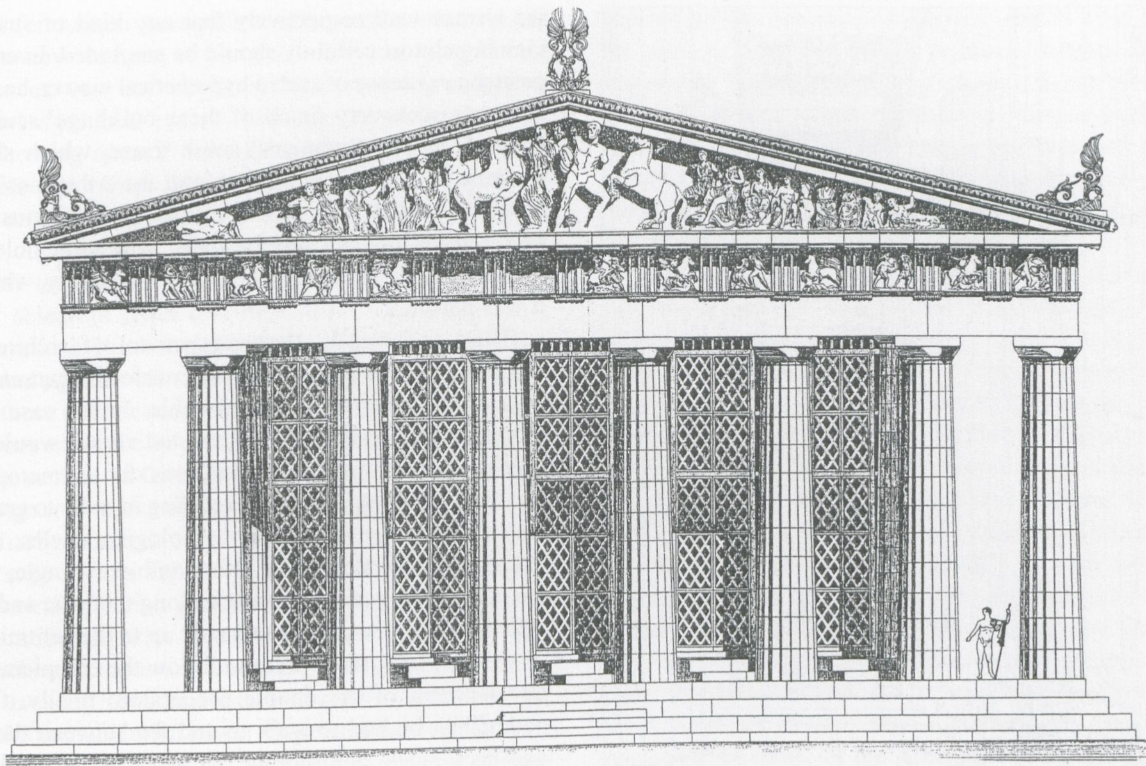

Fig. 5.1 Parthenon, west front. Athens, Acropolis (reconstruction). Drawing after L. Schneider – C. Höcker, Die Akropolis von Athen (1990) 119, fig. 130.

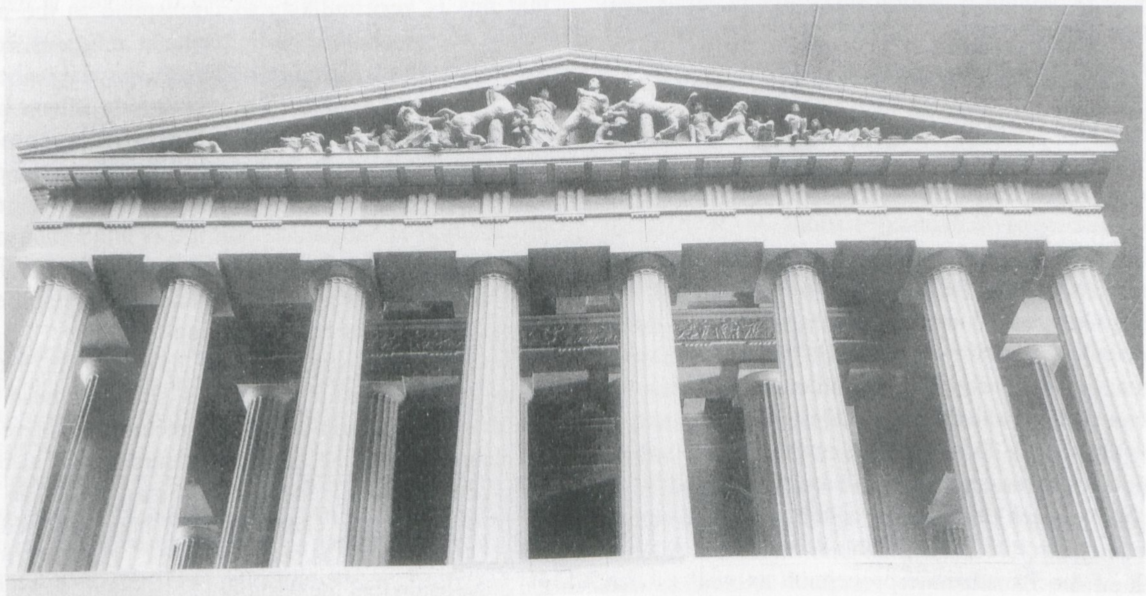

Fig. 5.2 Parthenon, west front. Athens, Acropolis (model). Model: Skulpturenhalle Basel.

only by minor variations of clothing or attributes and thus to conclude that they were representatives of the ten Athenian *phylai*. Nor would they have been able to so easily identify the two *hipparchoi*, distinguished only by their beards among the host of youthful riders. Even so, these *were* crucial elements for the meaning of this ritual and its participants. Even steeper was the angle from which the Nike temple parapet was to be seen by visitors who approached the acropolis by the Great Ramp to the north of the temple's bastion.[5]

Second, architectural sculpture never corresponds with the functional spaces of buildings. Functional spaces in this sense are understood as the pathways of dynamic movement (formal processions as well as informal

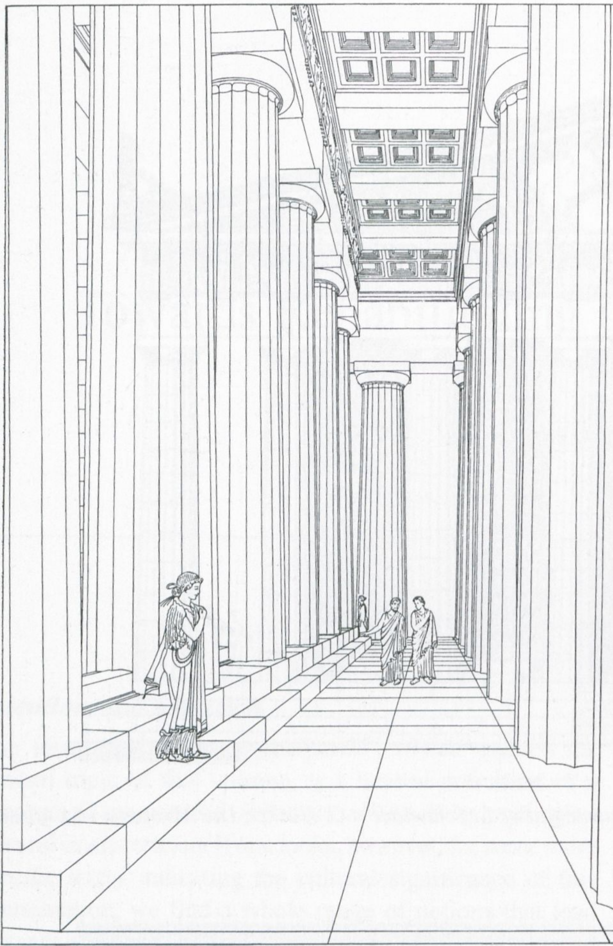

Fig. 5.3 Parthenon. Peristasis. Athens, Acropolis (reconstruction). Drawing: Anastasios Orlandos.

approaches) on the one hand and, on the other hand, zones of static presence of ritual manifestations. At Olympia, for example, paths of ritual movement can be reconstructed from the description of Pausanias when combined with the results of excavation. These paths wind in tortuous bends from one cult place to the other – while the spaces of static sacrifices, victory celebrations and other ceremonies must have been situated chiefly around the great altars and in front of the temple facades.[6] Yet, none of these spaces where potential viewers might have moved or stood, were suited for thorough observation of the primary temple's architectural decoration. As for the Parthenon in Athens, the path of the Panathenaic procession as well as that of normal visitors led along the temple's northern side, while the altar itself was situated even further to the north-east, in front of the Erechtheion. Few visitors will have surrounded the Parthenon's south side. (Christian iconoclasts thought this side was so unimportant that they left the centauromachy metopes undestroyed.[7]) At Delphi, the sacred way passed the treasuries of Siphnos and Athens along one side, giving access to a platform in front of these buildings, thus allowing the observation of their rich decoration on three sides. On the fourth side however, the buildings were so near the *peribolos* or the terrace wall respectively that any kind of sustained viewing almost certainly should be precluded. Even if we posit the existence of such a hypothetical viewer, he would not have seen very much of these buildings' sculptural decoration. The Siphnians' south frieze, which showed the rape of women at an altar, and the Athenians' north metopes, which showed the Heracles cycle, must have been almost hidden from the sight.[8] The same holds true for the Archaic metopes of the Sikyon treasury, wherever it was placed.[9]

Third and finally, the arrangement of architectural sculpture on its architectural setting made its *comprehensive* perception extremely uncomfortable. In the case of the Parthenon, for example, an interested viewer would have been forced to complete several turns: for the metopes, he had to walk around the whole building in order to grasp the conceptual coherence of the mythological cycles; for the frieze, he had to start twice at the south-west angle, within the colonnade, proceeding once along the west and north side and once along the south side up to the central scene on the east side, all in order to follow the complementary development of the double procession; finally, for the pediments, he had to walk to and fro between the front and back sides, confronting the two basic mythological manifestations of the city-goddess Athena. This kind of movement is what each of us suggests when we teach our courses, that is when we try to avoid confusion and to make the concept transparent – but rarely do we realize that this is very unlikely to correspond to the normal behaviour of ancient participants in religious cult, or to the average walking patterns of everyday visitors to the acropolis. Certainly, the front façade, where normal viewers must have gathered, offers a coherent view of the birth of Athena, the gigantomachy where she played a decisive role, and the main ritual in her honour, the presentation of her *peplos*. But this is only *one* aspect of this complex monument – the conceptual organisation of which was not really orientated towards the viewer's normal movements and perceptions.

Recent experiments seem to have shown that even under these difficult conditions such as these many details of high-up positioned architectural sculpture could be distinguished; the original colours would also have increased visibility.[10] Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that in many cases it would have required great effort to "read" such iconic "messages". It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the traditional placing of architectural decoration in metopes, friezes and pediments was not very helpful for intensive viewing.

There is another important point to consider here. Namely, that the themes of architectural sculpture often do not testify to a strong intention of transmitting very specific messages. An overview of the repertoire of Greek temple decoration shows a clear and certain redundancy of stock themes. In late Archaic times, the fight between gods and giants was adopted by very different political powers and protagonists; these included, for example, the *polis* of Megara for its treasury at Olympia, the Peisistratids in

Athens for the new Acropolis temple, and the Alcmeonids for the new temple at Delphi.[11] Obviously, political differences were not fought out by contrasting programs and messages but, rather – and far more importantly – by showing oneself to be in agreement with common concepts and values. In the Parthenon three of the four myths on the metopes appear again as iconographic tropes on the cult-statue of Athena Parthenos, and in most of the later temples of Classical and Hellenistic times we find a selection from this repertoire – gigantomachy, centauromachy, amazonomachy and Ilioupersis – repeated again and again, with variations in composition and style but without major conceptual differences.[12] In view of the enormous multiplicity and the rapid changes of imagery in other sectors of Greek art, the communicative appeal, challenge and impact on the viewer in these cases, at least, seems rather limited.

To support this argument, think of Pausanias, in his overwhelmingly rich description of remarkable works of figurative art, who is notoriously very reticent about architectural sculpture.[13] Obviously, this genre was rarely suited to excite his intensive attention. As we shall see, the limited communicative power of architectural sculpture is only one side of the coin – but a side that must be taken seriously if we want to move beyond easy and fashionable assumptions.

Towards a system of artistic genres

Such preliminary, and rather trivial, observations may become more comprehensible if we try to see architectural sculpture within the whole *system* of artistic genres. Of course, to establish such a kind of system would be an enormous task – here I can only point out a few preliminary characteristics.[14]

Crucial for a theory of artistic genres would be to establish specific relationships *between* the following four fields:

- functions or tasks of works of art, e.g. cult statues, sepulchral images, architectural decoration, symposium equipment, coined money for trade, seals for testifying identity, etc.
- iconographic themes, e.g. mythological events, historical battle-scenes, everyday genre, etc.
- modes of representation, e.g. narrative, descriptive, symbolic, synthetic or selective, etc.
- types of artistic techniques, e.g. round sculpture, relief sculpture, wall painting, vase painting, bronze chasing, terracotta modelling, gem engraving, etc.

Some examples may serve to demonstrate the specific status of architectural sculpture within this specific framework. Sculpture in the round has its primary theme in cult statues for the gods. These images are sculpted in their full corporeity: obviously as objects of cult practice they are to evoke a kind of "real" imaginary "presence". No myth, no action, few attributes: just the "person". It is only in late antiquity, that in the context of cult a god appears whose essence consists not only in what he "is" but also in what he "does": Mithras, slaying the bull and saving by this deed the world, as it is represented in hundreds of cult reliefs is the most obvious example.[15] As a rule, however, all cult images in Greek and Roman temples, in contrast to Christian churches, were fully three-dimensional sculpture by which the god or goddess was made "present" for participants of cult.

Wall painting – in both fresco and panel – was a major significant element in the frame of architecture. Indeed, some buildings give the impression that the display of large paintings was (one of) their main purpose(s): e.g. the Lesche of Knidos at Delphi with Polygnotos' murals covering the whole walls; the Stoa Poikile in Athens which was even named after its famous cycle of panel paintings; and, last but not least, the Pinakotheke on the Athenian Acropolis where the function as a banquet hall was merged with that of a gallery of paintings.[16] In such cases, we hear of paintings with very specific, unusual and complex themes, like the Ilioupersis and the Nekyia in the Knidians' Lesche at Delphi, the myth-historical cycle comprising the battle of Marathon and of Oinoe in the Stoa Poikile, or the cycle in the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios at Athens with an equestrian battle of the Athenians near Mantinea, the Twelve Gods, and Theseus with Demos and Demokratia.[17] Such paintings were full of "serious" political or religious significance, transmitted in large compositions of unusual iconographic motives, often with great numbers of figures that did not belong in the normal iconographic repertoire; and they were to be viewed in places which facilitated long, comfortable stays. This is especially true of stoas where these paintings were displayed at eye's level and could be gazed upon with more attention and leisure.

Architectural sculpture, above all, lacks the "representational autonomy" that we see in large scale wall-painting. Rather, it is embedded in major architectonic contexts to which it is subordinated. In Greek temples, sculptural and painted figure decoration is mainly inserted in those "empty" zones that lack tectonic function: metopes between the triglyphs, friezes above the architrave, pediments beneath the roof.[18] High above eye-level, most architectural sculpture could not be observed at close range – which, of course, was not caused by an explicit intention of withdrawing them from the observer's view, but rather was normal due to their situation. Corresponding to its subordinate status and its limited visibility, the themes of architectural sculpture are much less complex than those of mural paintings. And, as we have seen already, these themes are often taken from the stock repertoire of mythology. Indeed, even the less familiar themes of the Parthenon are a most "normal" choice in that they provide a sculpted frame for this state cult: the central collective ritual in honour of the goddess, and her two basic myths, her miraculous birth and her victorious contest for her country.[19]

Thus, the genre of architectural sculpture presupposes and requires a much less intensive communicative intercourse than other genres.[20] The semiotic concept

of commissioners and artists with strong and specific conceptual programs – who intend to impose their interests by emphatic messages on a broad audience of viewers that expose themselves intensively, either enthusiastically or critically, to such programmatic interventions – seems to have its roots in modern concepts of political movements and parties, founded on specific political programs that are developed and deployed by means of emphatic political indoctrination. The corresponding term of this concept is "propaganda", a word that springs from a post-antique situation, namely the aggressive missionary project of Christianity, from which it was transferred to the strategies of 20th century politics. Historically, this is an anachronistic notion which has no basis in the political and social structures of Greek antiquity.[21] Certainly, it overburdens, by far, the communicative function and significance of architecture and its decoration in ancient Greece.

The paradox of high meaning and low communication: the treasury of Sikyon at Delphi

Still, there can be no doubt that most architectural sculptures in Greece do not lack cultural, social and political meaning. Every serious and penetrating interpretation of architectural decoration has led, and will lead, to further rich insights regarding meaningful motifs and compositions that gave these buildings an explicit significance. In order to offer a concrete attempt at interpreting one specific set of images, I will try to sketch briefly what I think are some of the basic concepts behind the metopes of the so-called treasury of Sikyon at Delphi.[22]

The surviving metopes from this building – which still waits for a definite reconstruction and historical attribution – preserve various myths belonging to various mythological cycles: the ship Argo and the episode of Phrixos, both from the myth of the Argonauts, the Calydonian boarhunt, the Dioscuri with the Apharetids, Europa seated on the bull, and Bellerophon. Obviously, there is no unity of mythological narrative here.[23] Nor is there a local reference to the city of Sikyon or a genealogical connection with Sikyonian rulers of the period. The only common denominator that has been observed – if the incomplete preservation of the metopes allows for such a conclusion – is a negative one: the absence of Homeric themes. This has been explained by the antagonism of Sikyon towards Argos which induced the Sikyonian tyrant Kleisthenes to forbid the recital of Homeric poems.[24] But this explanation is rather weak, for the impact of Homer on early Greek art is generally not very strong, and in any event this negative argument would not explain the specific positive significance of those myths that have, in fact, been selected for the treasury's decoration. In the absence of specific local or genealogical references, a more general point of view imposes itself.

The Calydonian hunt (Fig. 5.4) represents an example of great collective enterprises with heroic participants from various cities.[25] This was a relevant ideal for Archaic societies and played out in contemporary history; the Sacred War of the united Delphic amphictyony against Phocis in the early 6th century B.C. is only the most well known example. Given the affinity of hunting and warfare in Archaic times, the common hunt for the boar of Calydon became a mythological model of joint war campaigns. Unfortunately, the crew of heroic hunters who must have attacked the beast from the neighbouring metopes on both sides is lost. As in contemporary vase-painting, they should be imagined as compact groups with uniform attacking attitudes.[26] Analogous compositions appear in depictions of fights between groups of heavily armed warriors, thus testifying not only to the affinity of hunting and warfare but also to the general ethos of coordinated actions, of cohesion and of solidarity, all of which were important for Archaic societies.[27]

On the other hand, the ship Argo (Fig. 5.5) enhances the significance of far-reaching ship expeditions, of trade, of conquest of land or piracy, yet another great theme of the Archaic age. Here, too, the collective spirit of mythical participants coming from all parts of the Greek world had its counterpart in contemporary overseas expeditions. Of the few preserved figures on this metope, the Dioscuri on horseback, significantly positioned outside the ship, represent the aristocratic cavalry ideals while Orpheus with his Kithara responds to the exigencies of ritual and cultic festivity that were maintained during all ambitious enterprises.

The cattle raid of the Dioscuri Kastor and Polydeukes and the Apharetids Idas and Lynkeus (Fig. 5.6) again testifies to values that were esteemed in early Greece. The famous conflict between the two pairs of brothers does not play any role in this relief; on the contrary, they appear as a unified group of ideal youths, equipped with lances like noble warriors who drive their prizes along in the most civilized way. Violent robbing of cattle was still very common in these times, often causing enmity between neighbouring *poleis* and ending in open military campaigns. Therefore, stealing cattle was appreciated as a virtue of manliness that was anticipated by famous heroes of myth: by Achilles as the great model of singular courage – and the pairs of brothers, represented on the Sikyonian treasury, as legendary examples of coordinated solidarity.[28]

Less obvious is the significance of Europa carried off by Zeus as a bull (Fig. 5.7). Probably, however, this myth refers to the violent abduction of brides by their bridegrooms, a basic motif in the Archaic concept of marriage. Another myth of analogous significance often represented on Archaic vases and other objects, Peleus conquering Thetis, lays more stress on taming the wildness of the young woman for her future obligations as the mistress of the house and mother of children.[29] Europa, on the other hand, is a beautiful woman who consents to be carried off by an animal embodying the most powerful kind of untamed virility and encapsulating the highest and mightiest of all bridegrooms.

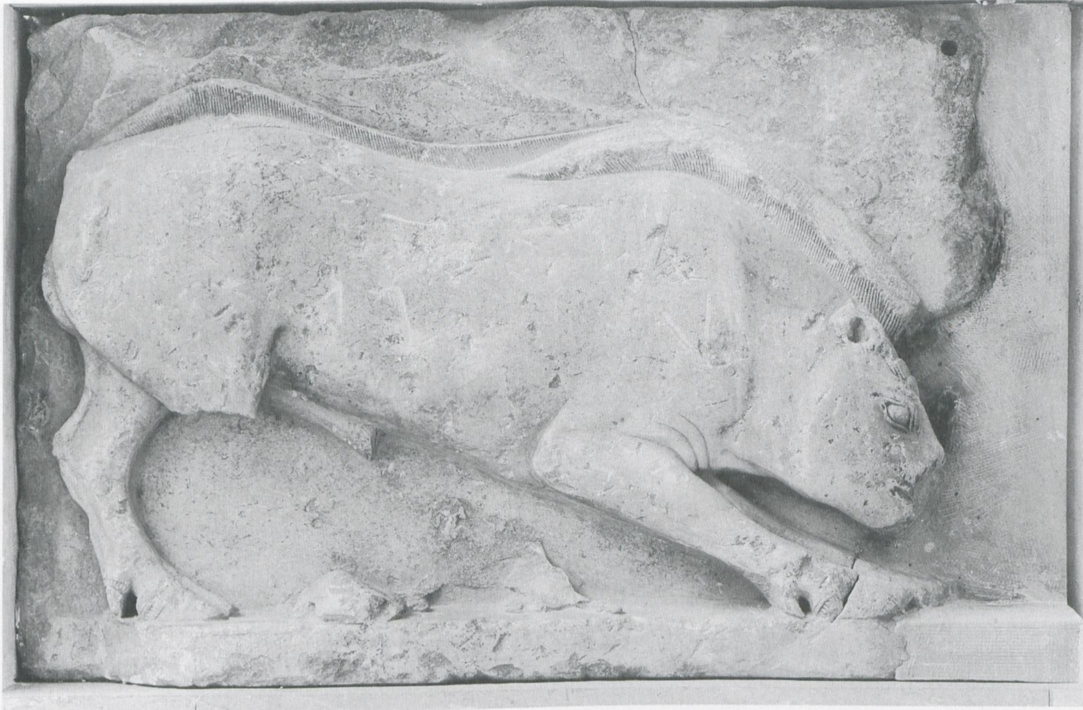

Fig. 5.4 Calydonian Boar. Metope of the Sikyonian treasury. Delphi, Sanctuary of Apollo. Photo: Archäologisches Institut der Universität Heidelberg: Photosammlung.

Fig. 5.5 The Dioscuri and Orpheus. Metope of the Sikyonian treasury. Delphi, Sanctuary of Apollo. Photo: Archäologisches Institut der Universität Heidelberg: Photosammlung.

In addition to these scenes, tiny fragments of two further metopes attest to representations of Bellerophon and Phrixos. While the myth of Phrixos (Fig. 5.8), belonging to the Argonaut cycle, is otherwise unknown in Archaic iconography, Bellerophon is among the foremost heroes in early Greece.[30] His prominent role in this period is certainly not to be explained by his Corinthian origin since he is represented in various regions of Greece. Rather, Bellerophon is chosen as a mythical prototype of those adventurous aristocrats of early Archaic times

Fig. 5.6 The Dioscuri and Idas. Metope of the Sikyonian treasury. Delphi, Sanctuary of Apollo. Photo: Archäologisches Institut der Universität Heidelberg: Photosammlung.

who advanced to the most distant regions of the world where they had to face every sort of unforeseen danger. In such circumstances, they had to rely on extraordinary qualities like inventiveness and cleverness – and, most importantly, they depended on the exceptional favour of gods. Bellerophon had received, as a gift from Poseidon, the miraculous winged horse Pegasos for his fight against the terrible monster Chimaira. But before he could mount his steed he had to tame it by his own force and skill with the aid of Athena who gave him the technology – the bridal – to do so. This story made Bellerophon a formidable example for the famous expeditions to "the end of the world" which were so highly esteemed in Archaic times. The ride of Phrixos on the ram with the golden fleece may have had a similar significance.

All of these myths refer to basic ideals of political communities established in the 6th century B.C. After the founding phase of Greek *poleis* during the ninth and seventh centuries, many Greek cities developed into communities of middle-class aristocrats which – notwithstanding all sorts of diverging interests and internal conflicts – were led by a certain spirit of commonness. In Athens, this spirit was proclaimed again and again by Solon, and in spite of its author's desperation, this idea resulted soon afterwards in the common effort of the Athenian citizen-body to erect marvellous temples, to establish a new agora, and to contribute rich offerings to the common sanctuary of Athena on the acropolis.[31] Similar developments can be observed in many other cities in the same period. At the same time, cooperation between leading aristocrats of different cities developed into far-reaching inter-*polis* connections. It is this concept of *communitas* that is exemplified on various levels in myth: communities of great coalitions like the Calydonian hunters operating in mainland Greece and the Argonauts with their far-reaching overseas expedition; smaller groups of noble cooperating *hetairoi* like the Dioscuri and the Apharetids; last but not least the family, constituted by the abduction of brides, prefigured in the myth of Europa.

How far these themes formed a coherent political "program"[32] is a matter of definition: What is a "program"? What is "coherent"? And how would our notion of "political," be understood by those living in the Archaic period? Of course, the question is affected by the fact

Fig. 5.7 Europa on the bull. Metope of the Sikyonian treasury. Delphi, Sanctuary of Apollo. Photo: Archäologisches Institut der Universität Heidelberg: Photosammlung.

that the metopes are only partially preserved and thus can only be tentatively reconstructed. But what we do have adds up to an ensemble of basic notions of Archaic *polis* ethos and ideology in which a strong conceptual coherence cannot be denied. True, there is no specific "Sikyonian" focus in these myths, nor does the presumed avoidance of Trojan themes involve a strong concept of local identity. But in a broader sense, these themes reflect an aristocratic *kosmos* of social roles and behavioural patterns with which the political community of Sikyon – if the treasury was indeed built by this city – could identify. It makes good sense, then, that a set of visual tropes that emphasize the social foundations of communities appears on a building of an important city, in the context of a panhellenic sanctuary; here, above all, the individual representatives and collective processions of Greek cities came together, constituting the audience of such "visual spectacles".[33]

Nothing, therefore, in this constellation of myths is without meaning. Yet, these metopes must have been placed, as were those of other Delphic treasuries, not only at the front but also at the back sides of the building – whatever it looked like – where they cannot have been easily visible and where the chance of impressing a wide audience would have been limited. There seems to be no escape from an irritating paradox: a high degree of cultural significance and, at the same time, a rather low degree of direct, communicative impact. Both of these conflicting phenomena seem certain. How may this be explained?

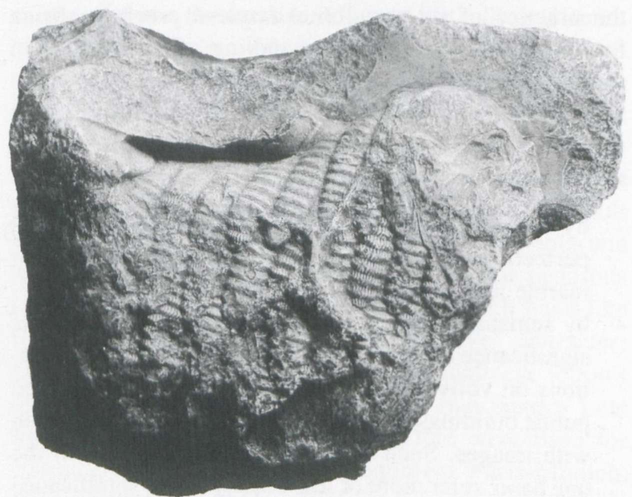

Fig. 5.8 Fragment of a metope of the Sikyonian treasury. Delphi, Sanctuary of Apollo. Photo: Archäologisches Institut der Universität Heidelberg: Photosammlung.

Towards a theory of semantic decoration

As we have seen, the problems of a contextual interpretation of architectural sculpture arise mainly from the assumption of an emphatic communication between the authors and the viewers of such visual messages; that is, by an

excessive attention to subjects, techniques and situations of communication. If we want to avoid the anachronisms and paradoxes inherent in this concept, we must put the architecture and its sculptural equipment itself – that is the *cultural object* as such – to the fore.

In this sense, a new object-orientated approach may be developed from the notion of "decoration."[34] Not, of course, in the sense of the poor cliché in which this term is normally adopted in our scientific language; that is, in the sense of pure formalism, implying an obvious lack in "deeper" content. The power of this notion consists in the double sense of the Latin term of "*decor*" which implies on the one hand the concept of formal "adornment" and on the other hand the ideal of conceptual "appropriateness."[35] The first of these aspects revolves around aesthetics, the second one includes semantics. The following sketch might present a preliminary step towards what might be developed into a theory of "decoration".

All products, and particularly all artefacts of cultural function – objects, buildings, spaces – have to be given a specific form which not only corresponds to the exigencies of their practical use but also makes their specific character visibly recognizable. Those objects that are fundamental for cultural life – temples and sanctuaries, public buildings and places, houses and tombs, ritual tools and symbols of social rank – must distinguish themselves from the surrounding world of normality by qualities and signs that enhance their cultural importance and significance. Such distinction may be conveyed, on the one hand, by its contingent context: the place of its preservation and the practice of its use; for example a precious shrine for religious relics and the handling of such relics in meaningful rituals.

On the other hand, an object may be distinctive by its own qualities. In principle, there are two levels on which such distinction can be achieved:

- by aesthetic elements: precious materials, technical perfection, rich decoration; for example temples of marble loaded with architectural ornament;
- by semantic elements: inscriptions that proclaim the significance of an object, for example donors' inscriptions on votive-offerings or honorary inscriptions on public buildings; or, most importantly here, decoration with images. Such iconographic motifs may, on the one hand, refer more or less closely to the significance of the object; for example relief scenes of sacrifice on public altars. But they may also, more generally, enhance and emphasize the object's importance or significance.

Thus, the basic sense of the notion of "*decor*" is: to convey cultural emphasis and "value" by aesthetic and semantic exaltation. This double aspect is best expressed in the word "significance" which comprises "importance" as well as "meaning". Architectural sculpture, above all else, distinguishes public buildings, enhancing their cultural significance by aesthetic beauty and semantic meaning.

Regarding the figural motifs of architectural sculpture, the concept of "*decor*" helps us understand the choice of themes. The semantic aspect of this notion means – far from the deteriorated modern connotation of meaningless formalism – that the themes of decoration must be "appropriate" to the character of the building. This seems like a relatively open parameter, which nevertheless does not mean total freedom. On the one hand, this idea does not limit decoration to specific tasks of communication: neither to specific indications on the building's practical functions nor to specific messages of ideology and identity. This is why an emphatic orientation towards a specific audience and its possibilities of perception is not required.[36] On the other hand, this parameter does not allow every kind of simply "beautiful" subject to be represented. The themes of architectural sculpture outlined above "make sense". As an "appropriate" decoration they need not to be very specific. This is shown by the various gigantomachy pediments of late Archaic times or by the amazonomachy, centauromachy and Ilioupersis cycle of the Classical and later periods. But the general religious and ethical convictions and attitudes that are implied by these themes, are deeply rooted in Greek mentality. In this sense they constitute an omnipresent set of norms even if they were not perceived as direct, compelling "messages".

The notion of "*decor*" implies a certain, but still relative, independence and autonomy of the artistic object in relation to the subjects and situations of visual communication. In Greek architecture, as Clemente Marconi has shown in an important article, the sculptural decoration and other adornments of temples were termed *kosmos*, which means "ornament" but at the same time points to the more general idea of comprehensive good "order".[37] The Latin term "*ornamentum*", which is analogously used for artistic equipment of buildings and places, also implies connotations of social and moral values.[38] Both of these notions mean more than a pleasant or impressive impact on the perception of an audience: they define an aesthetic and ethical order that, to a certain degree, is self-sufficient. Thus a temple, with all its meaningful decoration, *is a value in itself.*

Of course, this value – conveyed by splendour of materials and beauty of workmanship as well as by meaningful inscriptions and images – is perceived by the eye. It is visual. But this does not mean that such objects are intentionally and specifically conceived with deep acts of perception, or for emphatic communication with specific viewers, in mind. The direct, communicative and informative function of such objects was low. Indeed, every viewer of an Archaic Greek amphora knew, without the aid of an inscription, that a fully armed woman with an aegis and a helmet was Athena while a bearded man with a trident was Poseidon[39]; and every participant in an official sacrifice in one of the compitum sanctuaries of Rome knew, without consulting the reliefs on its altar, that this rite was performed by four magistrates sacrificing a bull and a pig.[40] Thus, no viewer had to look

at these inscriptions and images in order to be informed or convinced of something he didn't know or agree with before. In fact, inscriptions and images serve rather to mark, to define and to confirm *objectively* the specific value and significance of these objects.

Interaction with images in antiquity was different from our interaction with images in contemporary society. Our attitudes are conditioned by the experience of museums, that is, by special places where autonomous "art" objects can be separated from the complexities of social life, reserved for intensive contemplation and exposed for an optimum view with the viewer being freed from all other involvements and thus free to concentrate on deciphering, interpreting and responding to the work of "art". In antiquity there was no such institution like the modern museum, no corresponding notion of autonomous "art", and no autonomous situation of perceiving and responding to those artistic creations.[41] Images of all kinds were part of the real world, and the practice of cultural intercourse was to *live* with them in the frame of social life. Images were mighty factors of this social world, to be respected by living men but also present and powerful in their own right.

Towards the "Reliefbild"

Only late in Greek art and, above all, in Roman art did new tendencies arise that led towards using architecture as an effective screen for visual messages. This process still awaits thorough investigation. Thus, what I am going to sketch here is just an indication of the questions that are to be raised.[42]

The extreme poles of this process can be marked by the juxtaposition of the Parthenon and the Ara Pacis. The Classical Greek building presents us with an incomparable amount of images. But these images exert a rather limited impact on the viewer due to their rigorous integration into the architectonic structure where they are allowed only in spaces of non-tectonic function: metopes, friezes, pediments. Conversely, on the Ara Pacis (Fig. 5.9), the unprecedented relief decoration covers parts of the altar itself (four small parallel friezes) and the entire outer walls of the enclosure (massive relief panels depicting mythological scenes, allegorical compositions and the two grand religious processions on top of equally expansive floral compositions). While the Parthenon figurative sculpture is removed by architectonic preconditions to a high position, far from the viewer's eye, the reliefs of the Ara Pacis present themselves in large size just little above eye level. Here, the spectator as such is definitely taken into consideration.

The decoration of a Classical temple is obviously governed by a strong concept of architectonic order. All parts that were conceived as "active" elements of this tectonic structure, had to be shaped in their "pure" form: columns as columns, walls as walls, entablatures as entablatures, roofs as roofs. Only the few free gaps between these elements offered space for decoration. Later, in Hellenistic and Roman times, architecture was no longer conceived as an interplay of active forces, energy and weight, but as a geometric structure of vertical and horizontal elements. Within this new concept the walls changed into neutral surfaces which presented themselves a loci for various kinds of relief decoration.

The development between these two opposite concepts can be traced along several lines including several different types of monuments.

First, sepulchral monuments. The strength of Classical models in the fourth century B.C. may be deduced from two monuments of Lycian dynasts, both standing in Greek traditions. The Nereid monument at Xanthos demonstrates most clearly how strongly the Classical tectonic canon was still observed in the years around 400 B.C.[43] The architectonic structure, a huge podium supporting a temple-like sepulchral building, is adorned with a traditional pediment and a narrow frieze on the entablature; even the double frieze on top of the pedestal does not cover the surface but crowns it like a decorative fillet in a manner not so different from the wall friezes around the Siphnian treasury at Delphi or the Panathenaic frieze around the cella of the Parthenon. The same holds true for the multiple friezes of the Mausoleum of Halikarnassos.[44] Very different is the use of architectonic surfaces on Roman sepulchral monuments: an exedra monument from Rome (Fig. 5.10), erected *ca.*40 B. C. and tentatively attributed to P. Ventidius Bassus, had its curved inner side, as well as its plain outer walls, entirely covered with large-scale relief compositions exalting the deceased's military glory.[45] In a similar fashion, the tomb building of the Iulii at Glanum in Southern France, with its multi-figured compositions of mythical and contemporary hunting and battle scenes that expand over the whole pedestal, shows how fast this practice spread through the provinces.[46]

Another type of monument that was receptive to relief decoration are statue pedestals. The famous Classical cult statues of Athena Parthenos on the Athenian acropolis and of Nemesis in Rhamnous were erected on low pedestals which were adorned on their front sides with band-like figural friezes of subordinate "decorative" character; the late 4th century B.C. base from Mantineia follows this type.[47] Much more ambitious are two famous Late Republican pedestals of large size that were used for statue groups: the censor's monument Paris-Munich, from around 100 B.C., which is covered on one side with a censor's activities and, on the three other sides, with a triumphal marine *thiasos*, probably celebrating a victorious sea campaign;[48] and the spectacular blocks of dark stone from the Capitoline hill, covered with Victories and relief armour that probably belong to a famous statue group set up in honour of Sulla by the Mauretanian king Bocchus in 91 B.C.[49] In both of these monuments, the pedestals present an almost self-sufficient ideological system in their relief decoration which can be understood even without fully comprehending the free-standing figures that they supported.

Quite extraordinary was the adoption of relief sculpture

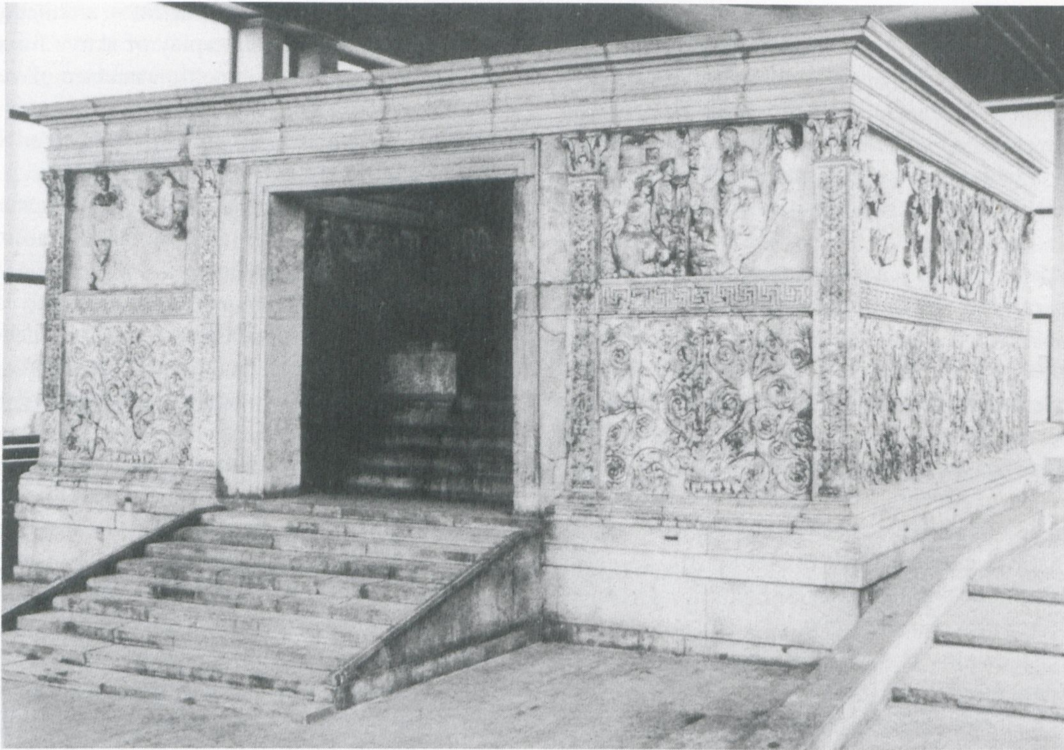

Fig. 5.9 Ara Pacis, west side. Rome. Photo: Archäologisches Institut der Universität Heidelberg: Photosammlung.

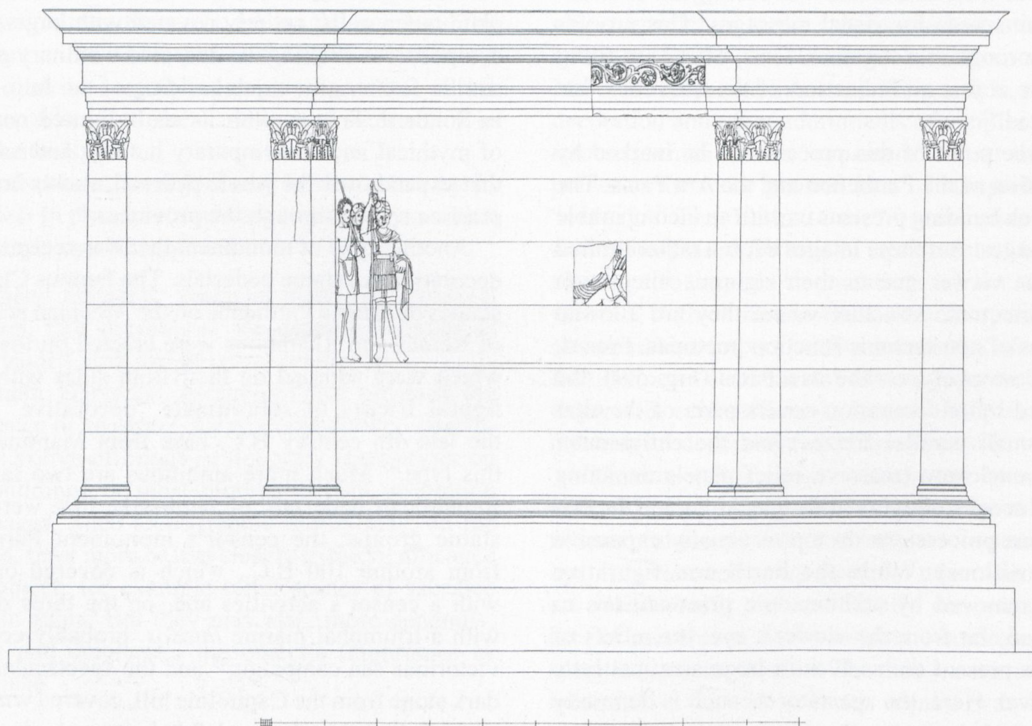

Fig. 5.10 Exedra Monument. Rome. Drawing after Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts 89, 1974, Abb. 16, 17.

in the so-called Monument of the Bulls at Delos, a gigantic hall built for the display of a victorious admiral's ship, probably dedicated by Demetrios Poliorketes after the battle of Salamis in 306 B.C.[50] Around this magnificent votive-offering, there ran on both long sides a huge frieze in very high relief 50m long and more than 1.60m high that was made up of Nereids and Tritons. The ship was thus surrounded and accompanied by

these vigorous figures as in a semi-mythical triumph procession. In its monumentality, this much-neglected frieze can be considered as a worthy predecessor of the gigantomachy frieze of the Great altar of Pergamon with its explosive fighting groups.[51] On both monuments, the relief depictions are no longer additional elements added to a block-like architecture at a great height as a means of structural decoration and articulation. Rather, they are autonomous compositions, little above eye-level, almost obscuring the tectonic surface, and therefore impressing the spectator with immediate vividness.

Even more innovative was the continuous frieze of the Great altar's inner court, displaying the adventurous story of Pergamon's founding hero Telephos.[52] This narrative band, too, was very different from the traditional entablature friezes of Greek architecture. With its considerable height of 1.58m it took up the principles of pictorial figure-in-landscape representation. Its display at eye-level for visitors walking through the altar court's porticoes corresponds to the spectator's position in the famous Classical stoai with panel paintings. Also from Pergamon, probably from the entrance gate to the precinct of Athena, come the first examples of rectangular relief compositions; these represent mythological scenes like the Trojan horse (Fig. 5.11).[53] While their original location has not yet been ascertained, they must have been inserted, perhaps framed by *aediculae*, somewhere on – or slightly above – eye-level into the walls. Here, we are at the origins of what might be called a "Reliefbild". In the Ara Pacis, where the entire walls are used for the display of monumental rectangular and frieze-like compositions, these possibilities are exploited to the greatest possible effect.

There also developed in Hellenistic times an analogous kind of smaller decorative relief panels – "Schmuckreliefs" – which were inserted into the interior walls of sumptuous buildings.[54] Their themes cover a broad range from divinities and myths to idyllic scenes. Unfortunately, almost no contextual evidence is preserved that might give us a sense of how these reliefs were integrated into walls, but it is almost certain that they were exposed, without architectural framing by cornices or pilasters, in more or less plain surfaces. The origins of such panels are again attested in later Hellenistic times, while their peak is reached in late republican and early imperial Rome. Obviously, this phenomenon is similar to the grand relief decoration on the outside facades of state buildings and monuments.

How far Roman art might go in this use of architectonic surfaces for the display of narrative scenes is best shown by the column of Trajan. The third century B.C. column monument of C. Duilius was adorned with the ships' prows of the defeated fleet of Carthage which were fixed at the plain shaft; by this, Rome followed the Greek custom of fixing spoils at columns of temples and single monuments.[55] Contrary to this practice (in which the architectonic structure of the column was left undisturbed) the victorious

Fig. 5.11 Making of the Trojan horse. Relief from Pergamon, Sanctuary of Athena. Photo: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung Neg. Nr. PM 869.

Fig. 5.12 Arch of Trajan. Benevento. Photo after Franz Josef Hassel, Der Trajansbogen in Benevent (1966) Tafel 2.

aspect of Trajan's column is made visible by a spiral band of relief scenes, following a pictorial tradition, thus covering the surface of the shaft with countless pictorial scenes.

And yet, with all these new developments, the old tradition of decorative relief sculpture that articulated the structure of architecture, was never abandoned. Temples and sepulchral buildings continued to be adorned on the entablature with band-like friezes.[56] Now, however, in face of the dominating force of "Reliefbilder", small friezes became, in a new sense, "decorative". They comprised emblematic motifs like weapons, sacrificial instruments, symmetrical figures (real or ideal) engaged in cult activities, and so forth. Their repetitive character and regular rhythm makes them easily perceivable and understandable, notwithstanding their small size, from a great distance. By this, such friezes differ markedly from the great panel reliefs presenting multi-figured scenes of complex political and religious significance.

How consciously these two types of reliefs were adopted together is best demonstrated by the arch of Trajan at Benevento (Fig. 5.12). There, the great programmatic panels celebrating the emperor's political achievements are framed by small decorative friezes: one of them depicting in repetitive form the victor's triumphal procession, the others presenting in emblematic symmetry cult personal and ideal goddesses of victory in religious activities, adorning candelabras and sacrificing bulls. Quite definitely, however, this "decorative" character does not imply a lack of significance. They just aim at a different sort of impact. While the large panel reliefs convey complex ideological messages, the decorative friezes create an atmosphere of festivity and celebration, a sort of "visual sound".[57]

Looking back from this perspective to architectural sculpture of Archaic and Classical Greece, the paradox of its "decorative" character appears with particular clearness: high meaning and low communication. Roman monuments were on the way of solving this problem.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Philipp Kiernan and Peter Schultz for controlling and anglicizing my text.

Notes

1 Fehr 1979–1981; Knell 1990; Oppermann 1990; Castriota 1992. Recent approaches: Marconi 1994; Ridgway 1999; Osborne 2000; von Hesberg 2003; Marconi 2004; Marconi, in press.

2 Marconi 2004.
3 Hölscher 2004, 21–23.
4 On this issue see Ridgway 1999, 74–102.
5 As is well known, the famous relief frieze of the temple's parapet was not turned towards the interior of the precinct but to the outside, high above the access path.
6 Hölscher 2002a.
7 On the destiny of the metopes in early Christian times see Holtzmann 2003, 243. For alternative explanations see Boardman 1985b, 214; Schneider and Höcker 2001, 209–210.
8 Siphnian treasury: Bommelaer 1991, 123–126 with fig. 42. Athenian treasury: *ibidem,* 133–138 with fig. 49.
9 See below pp. 58–61.
10 V. Brinkmann has shown this by his studies on the coloring of ancient sculpture and by his paper given at the Athens conference.
11 Treasury of Megara at Olympia: Herrmann 1972, 102. Peisistratid (?) temple on the Athenian acropolis: Knell 1990, 39–42; Hurwitt 1999, 121–124. For the date see ultimately Santi 2004. Alcmeonid temple at Delphi: Knell 1990, 43–51. Bommelaer 1991, 181–183. Marconi 1998.
12 Thomas 1976; Ridgway 1999, 150–166.
13 See Ridgway 1999, 12–19 on Pausanias and other literary sources.
14 I do not know of any systematic attempt at a serious "Gattungsgeschichte" of Greek art.
15 In earlier periods only the great relief from Eleusis has sometimes been interpreted as a free-standing cult relief; here too, one might explain this by a holy action: the gift of grain, given by Demeter to mankind. But this is hypothetical; see ultimately Micheli 2002.
16 Lesche of Knidos at Delphi: Kebric 1983; Stansbury-O'Donnell 1989; Stansbury-O'Donnell 1990; Bommelaer 1991, 202–204. Stoa Poikile in Athens: Hölscher 1973, 50–84. Pinakotheke on the acropolis of Athens: Hurwitt 1999, 195–196.
17 Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios: Hölscher 1973, 116–119; Palagia 1980, 50–60.
18 Rodenwaldt 1923, 25–27 and passim.
19 On the themes of architectural sculpture see the discussion in Ridgway 1999, 143–183.
20 This, of course, does not mean that architectural sculptures were not perceived at all: see the famous lines in Euripides, Ion 184–218. Zeitlin 1994; Ridgway 1999, 9.
21 A critical discussion on the term of "propaganda" will be presented by Emanuel Mayer.
22 de la Coste Messelière 1936, 1–233; Szeliga 1986; see Knell 1990, 18–23; Bommelaer 1991, 118–12; Köhne 1998, 29–44.
23 The Argonaut myth has been assumed to be the common denominator of the Sikyonian metopes by Schefold 1993, 262.
24 See Herodotus 5, 67. Schindler 1987, 58–60; Knell 1990, 18–23.
25 Schnapp 1997, 268–317. See my forthcoming book on early Greek myth representations, chapter on the Klitias crater.
26 E.g. Schnapp 1997, fig. 229, 232, 237, 238, 242, 257, 265, 266, 269, 271, 276.
27 Lorimer 1947; van Wees 2000.
28 *LIMC* I (1981) Achilleus Nr. 389 (A. Kossatz-Deissmann); Schefold 1993, 137.
29 *LIMC* VII (1994) Peleus Nr. 47–190; Schefold 1993, 132–133; Reeder 1996, 340–352.
30 See Hölscher 1999, 20–27.
31 Hölscher 1999, 27–29.
32 Ridgway 1999, 82–94, with a sceptical view, opposing Marconi 1994, with introduction by S. Settis, both arguing forcefully and convincingly in favour of coherence.
33 Marconi 2004.
34 For a first, very preliminary sketch, see Hölscher 2004. A full discussion of these arguments will be presented in a book on "Visual Power in Ancient Greece and Rome" (Sather Lectures Berkeley, Spring 2007).
35 On the concept of "*decor*" see Horn-Oncken 1967; Pollitt 1974, 341–347; Perry 2005 cf. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* IV 206–210 s. v. *décor*; 235–248 s. v. *decus*.
36 I hope to demonstrate in the book on "Visual Power" (n. 34) that the role of the audience, far from being an anthropological universal, is often anachronistically misconceived in recent approaches.
37 Marconi 2004.
38 *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* IX 1008–1016 s. v. *ornamentum.*
39 Simon 1976, fig. 72.
40 Scott Ryberg 1955, 55–63, esp. fig. 30.
41 The assumption of ancient equivalents to the modern concept of the "museum" is one of the most tenacious anachronisms of Classical archaeology. For a short remark in this regard see Hölscher 1994, 878–879. For this, too, see "Visual Power" (n. 34).
42 Still important is Rodenwaldt 1923.
43 Coupel and Demargne 1969; Childs and Demargne 1989.
44 Jeppesen 2002; See Ridgway 1999, 20 who speaks of "glorified moulding". In some sense exceptional are the 6th to 4th century sarcophagi from Asia Minor, Cyprus and Sidon, characteristically from the periphery of the Greek world, with their walls covered with reliefs.
45 Von Sydow 1974.
46 Rolland 1969.
47 Athena Parthenos: Kosmopoulou 2002, 112–117. Nemesis from Rhamnous: Kosmopoulou 2002, 130–135. Mantineia base: Kosmopoulou 2002, 147–150.
48 Kähler 1966; Stilp 2001.
49 Hölscher 1980.
50 Marcadé 1951; Bruneau and Ducat 1983, 138–140.
51 Heilmeyer 1997; Radt 1999, 168–180; Rodenwaldt 1923, 89–90.
52 Heilmeyer 1997, 67–194; Rodenwaldt 1923, 93–95.
53 Schober 1940, 160–164; Radt 1999, 161.
54 Rodenwaldt 1923, 96–103 called them "Reliefbilder". Froning 1981 speaks of "Schmuckreliefs".
55 Plinius, *naturalis historia* 34, 20.
56 Grüßinger, forthcoming. The Greek forerunners of such "decorative" friezes go back to the 4th century B. C.: Hiller 1960; Ridgway 1999, 79.
57 See Hölscher, forthcoming.