

CHAPTER SEVEN



*Images and Political Identity:
The Case of Athens*

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Some Generalities

“Democracy, Empire, and the Arts in Fifth-Century Athens”: if this title refers to the connection between a specific political and social system and a specific artistic “culture,” the problem it poses can be approached from two different points of view. Focusing on fifth-century Athens, we can search for various products and activities of the arts and their functions in this specific polis, thereby envisaging art in relation to a single, limited, and specific political and social system. Or else, focusing on fifth-century arts as such, we can define a broader range of political systems and historical societies within which these arts had their functions, thus seeing political or social systems in relation to a specific artistic culture.

All this would be easy if artistic styles coincided with specific political and social systems. This, however, is an ideal constellation that does not correspond easily with the real conditions of Greek culture. Chronological or regional differences in artistic styles often do not coincide with political changes or differences. Conversely, many artistic phenomena as well as their changes over time are common to all of Greece, independent of specific political systems.

Monolithic concepts of culture tend to construct homogeneous cultural systems, divided into regional units and following each other in clear-cut homogeneous epochs. This approach, based on an a priori assumption, encourages simplistic views of structural unity that ignore or even suppress contradictory factors. A more dynamic and open concept should take into consideration that a society’s cultural manifestations and developments are multiple and often conflicting: sectors with long-term traditions, like religion or family structures, may

coexist with dynamic ones, like social values or artistic styles, all of these intersecting with political events and changes. This does not mean that individual cultural fields coexist independently, one beside the other; rather, all sectors interact with one another and are connected in the minds of the same people. Among these factors contributing to a society's "cultural makeup," one, such as religion, politics, or private life, may for a time rise to predominance and influence other fields more or less thoroughly, resulting in relatively uniform cultural attitudes. But on the whole, we should envisage complex interactions among various cultural factors, that is, not structural unity but multifaceted functional systems. In this sense we may ask whether fifth-century Athens used general forms of contemporary art, adapting them to her specific purposes, or created new forms that can properly be called specifically Athenian, democratic or imperial.

In Greek art, the early fifth century was a period of sudden and radical changes. Within one decade, 490–480,¹ artists created a new image of the human figure and a new concept of the human person that remained influential at least to the beginning of our own century. Some of the most impressive examples of this new art, which we still call "classical," were created in Athens. A few years earlier, this city had begun her revolutionary development toward democracy, and it remained the protagonist of democracy for two centuries. Hence we may reasonably ask whether classical Greek art was democratic art.

At first sight, the answer seems obvious. During this period all major works of art in Athens as elsewhere in Greece were public monuments and had their function in public spaces; moreover, those of Athens were mostly commissioned by the people's Assembly. There seems little doubt, therefore, that democracy was the ultimate cause or at least an important condition of artistic developments. Yet things are more complicated. In fact, the "artistic revolution" of the early fifth century was neither a specifically Athenian nor a specifically democratic revolution.

Generally, our view of fifth-century art is heavily influenced by Athens, not only because the literary sources are much richer and modern research has been much more active there than elsewhere, but also because of all Greek cities Athens had by far the greatest resources to invest in public monuments. This, however, explains primarily quantity, not quality. The question of whether classical art was essentially a creation of democratic Athens prompts us to ask further in what sense it was—or was not—specifically Athenian and democratic.

Without going into details, it is obvious that all essential features of the new formal system—above all the distinction between active and nonactive parts of the human body demonstrating the potential activity of the figure, the austere

faces signifying self-control and self-consciousness, the ideological simplicity of clothing and attitudes, and on the whole a new sense of time and space—were adopted immediately in all parts of the Greek and Greek-influenced world, from Xanthos to Motye, from Thessaly to Cyrene, in democratic as well as aristocratic or monarchic states.² The leading sculptors of the first generation were Onatas from Aigina, Hageladas from Argos, and Pythagoras from Samos, the latter working mostly in southern Italy. Pheidias of democratic Athens is not more “classical” than Polykleitos from Argos, the first theorist of sculpture, originating from and working for Peloponnesian aristocracies that fostered athletic ideals. Hence the general language of classical art was not tied to specific political conditions. Differences of style certainly existed, depending on collective tastes of individual regions or poleis, or even the preferences of individuals, but these were minor variations. The general “revolution” of the visual arts in the fifth century cannot be explained by the “miracle” of Athenian democracy.³

Obviously, this “revolution” is not merely an aesthetic phenomenon but part of a radical change of thought, mentality, and social values all over Greece.⁴ The rise of democracy has something to do with this change, although not in the sense of an immediate, straightforward, and exclusive interdependence of the two phenomena. Rather, *isonomia* (political equality) and democracy should be seen as particular aspects of this global change which, however, was far more encompassing than such political manifestations and affected aristocratic and monarchic societies as well.

In order to concentrate on Athens, then, I shall not ask whether and to what extent classical art as such was Athenian, democratic or imperial, but how classical art was used in democratic Athens, and whether in the use of art Athens’ specific conditions prompted specific differences from other cities.

Political Monuments: An Introduction

The Athenians made intensive use of images to create and strengthen political and social identity. This function of images developed in principle on two levels. On one, public monuments created political identity; on another, objects of social life, especially equipment of symposia and religious rituals, presented in their images the society’s ideal concepts and models. All this, however, was common practice in Greece. But within this framework there developed in Athens, on both levels, some characteristic features that were connected with the specific political and social conditions of this city.

Political monuments are not a new concern of classical archaeology.⁵ For more than a century, the iconography and historical circumstances of public monuments as well as their reconstruction have been investigated in Athens and

elsewhere.⁶ Following an intermediate period of pure art history in the first two generations of this century, scholars began to “rediscover” such monuments in the 1960s, paying special attention to their political and ideological messages and taking into account entire groups of public monuments, such as the votive monuments of the Persian Wars or historical paintings of the classical period.⁷ Categories of semiotics were employed moderately, for example, in analyzing the image of Athena Parthenos.⁸ The examination of votive practices of poleis, especially in the conflict between Athens and Sparta that resulted in a veritable war of monuments, offered better insight into the functions of political monuments.⁹ It represents a significant change of perspective, compared especially with the nineteenth century, that such monuments are not considered merely as material sources left from antiquity but as powerful factors in political conflicts. We should continue in this direction, asking even more comprehensively how monuments were used and how they worked in the reality of public life.

What, then, is the function and meaning of what we call a monument?¹⁰ To begin with, monuments are designed and erected as signs of power and superiority. As such, they are effective factors of public life: not secondary reflections, but primary objects and symbols of political actions and concepts. They may be disputed and even fought over, pushed through against possible resistance, or destroyed by a successful opposition.

Monuments have their place in public space. They mark its public character, claiming it and unfolding their effect in it. They inevitably address the community and, precisely because of their public nature, challenge it, provoking consent or contradiction; they do not allow indifference because recognition automatically means acceptance. They represent the public power of certain persons or ideological concepts. They proclaim a public message and demand its general and collective approval. In this sense monuments represent and create ideological identity; in fact, they are the concrete expression of such identity, be it of a whole community or of groups or individuals within this community, and their destruction signifies the annihilation of that identity. Toward the outside, they fence off their community and turn aggressively against foreign or hostile communities.

The character of monuments is particularly subject to historical change. It is defined by the sector of social life within which a community develops its identity, be it religious, political, economic, cultural, or otherwise. This means that very different objects, such as temples, statues of political heroes, banks, libraries, or sports fields can become monuments of their respective communities.

For all these reasons, it is a fact of considerable historical significance that in Greece from around 500 political monuments became a characteristic feature of

major cities and sanctuaries. The centers of public life were now occupied by symbols expressing political claims and by examples of political behavior for citizens to imitate. This suggests that these communities for the first time expressly and consciously developed a political identity—which is obviously connected with the fact that politics constituted a new sphere with its own standards, behavior patterns, and ideals.

Forerunners and Early Forms of Political Monuments

Before the sixth century the Greeks apparently did not know political monuments in the strict sense of the word. Certainly, from the eighth and seventh centuries poleis and tyrants erected public buildings and dedicated votive offerings which all had or could assume a political character. Above all, great temples of polis deities and large areas used as agoras must have strengthened collective identity, as well as expressed it. But all these structures served primarily concrete public or religious functions; none of them had the main purpose of conveying a strictly political message. Even the lavishly decorated treasuries at Delphi, the chest of Kypselos at Olympia, or the throne of Apollo Amyklaios at Sparta do not define explicitly the political identity of their dedicators; their themes remain within the sphere of panhellenic religion and myth, without referring to specific political claims, objectives, merits, or ideals, and thus without defining the specific identity of a polis.

A first step toward political self-representation seems to have been taken with the emergence of the *tropaion*.¹¹ From the late eighth century, successful or wealthy warriors after a military victory deposited their arms in one of the great sanctuaries as votive gifts.¹² But only from the middle of the sixth century, written sources inform us of *tropaia* erected on the battlefield by the victors to mark the place where they had put their enemies to flight. This probably corresponds to the actual development: trophies originated in the sixth century, not primarily as religious offerings to the gods by victorious warriors, but as a monumental, celebratory sign of victory set up collectively by the army on the place of its glorious success. An analogous measure, attested above all in post-Kleisthenic Athens, was the dedication of spectacular pieces of booty in great sanctuaries, resulting in veritable war monuments that referred to specific victories over specific enemies.¹³

At first, trophies, erected on wooden stumps, were obviously not meant for eternity. But as early as the middle of the fifth century, the ephemeral sign of victory changed to a lasting monument: parts of a column and a large ionic capital from about 450 were found on the battlefield of Marathon, presumably crowned by sculptural figures, perhaps a Nike group with a *tropaion*.¹⁴ This column seems

to be the remains of a monument for the famous battle, erected probably under Kimon.

In the decades around 500 several Greek states erected at Delphi and elsewhere large statuary groups that show a new political character.¹⁵ A remarkable example is the monument of Phokis, dedicated around 490 after the famous victory over the Thessalians, and representing Apollo, the strategoi of the cavalry and infantry, the seer Tellias, and the epichoric heroes.¹⁶ This clearly was not only a votive offering to the god but also a proud self-representation of a victorious state, celebrating a decisive political success. Similar monuments are known from cities as different as Tarentum, Phlious, and Apollonia in Epiros.¹⁷

A new wave of political monuments originated in the Persian Wars,¹⁸ representing many states with testimonies of their glorious deeds both in the panhellenic sanctuaries and in their own cities.

These observations reveal some basic aspects of the origins of political art in Greece. The sphere of politics detached itself more and more from other sectors, gaining increasing autonomy. Public monuments were erected deliberately to present famous achievements most effectively in public spaces. This reflects a society's efforts to develop its identity, decisively and in a very new way, in the public sphere. And such efforts, like the concept of equality appearing in burial customs,¹⁹ were common to states of very different geographical location and political order.

Athens, however, soon became the protagonist in this process. The collective identity of her citizens was concentrated first and most resolutely in the political sphere. The erection of political monuments was prompted by several experiences in different political domains, all enhancing the development of political identity: first, within the community and in opposition to tyranny, the identity of the "isonomic" citizens; then, toward the outside, against the Persians, Athens' identity as the champion of the Greeks; finally, in part against the resistance of her allies, Athens' identity as the dominating force in the Delian League.

Monuments of the Athenian Democracy

The history of Athenian political monuments begins with the statue group of the tyrant-slayers Harmodios and Aristogeiton (fig. 1).²⁰ This was the first truly political monument in Greece, without any religious function in the sense of cult or votive practice (the Tyrannicides' hero cult was celebrated at their tomb in the Kerameikos cemetery); it was set up in the Agora, in the center of political life, commemorating and celebrating the ideological founders of the new isonomic state. Familiar with the monuments of Washington, Garibaldi, or Bismarck that furnish our modern squares, we find it difficult to appreciate what an unprece-



Figure 1 The Tyrant-slayers, Harmodios and Aristogeiton. Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico.

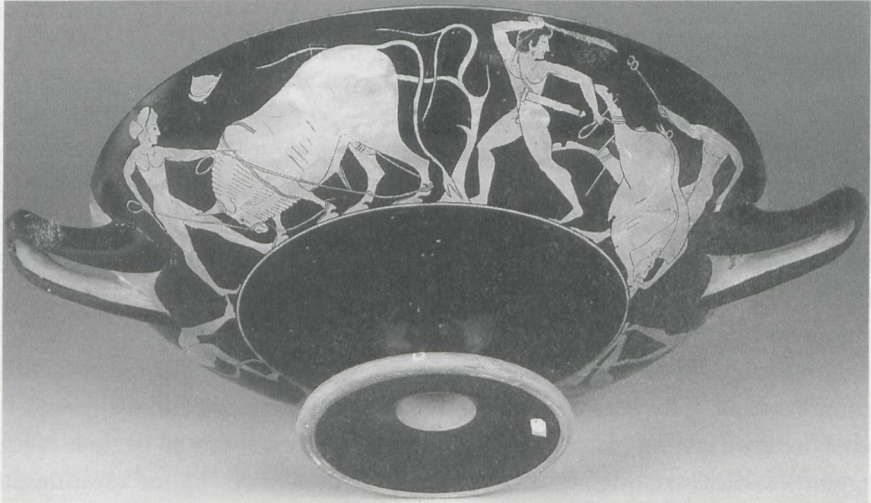
dedicated act the erection of this one was: neither cult statues nor votive dedications to a deity nor sepulchral statues, they did not belong to any traditional category of sculptures. Their meaning is revealed by their placement on the edge of the orchestra, the meeting place of the citizens' Assembly before the construction of the Pnyx.²¹ There the tyrant-slayers stood not only as praiseworthy heroes but above all as concrete examples of behavior for the citizens during the *ekklesia* and the *ostrakismos*. Its paraenetic character is particularly evident from the fact that this monument recognizes not a successful achievement but a political attitude. Since the citizens of isonomic Athens developed their identity in opposition to tyranny, Harmodios and Aristogeiton were supposed to encourage them to embrace the ideology of the Tyrannicides!

The setting of a monument is an integral part of its function; hence the location of the tyrant-slayers is a salient and innovative feature, to be explained by the specific situation of isonomic Athens. More precisely, this monument's historical significance is twofold. First, in politics, these images must have served the needs of citizens who, confronted with the new responsibility of taking decisions on their whole political order, may have felt insecure and helpless; lacking adequate preparation, they had to learn new behavior patterns—for which Harmodios and Aristogeiton, protagonists of the new order, provided helpful models. Second, as a testimony of historical structures, this monument appears as the most significant symbol of this very political order. For if it is correct that the state of Kleisthenes, creating a sphere of politics as an almost autonomous domain, was the first political system that did not grow slowly and more or less unconsciously from Archaic times but was constructed almost completely from scratch by a conscious intellectual act, then the setting of a visible symbol in the central public space appears as the clearest indication of this new political consciousness.

The equivalent of the tyrant-slayers on the level of myth was Theseus.²² His introduction into political art by the early isonomic state was well calculated: while the fame of Harmodios and Aristogeiton probably was mostly limited to Athens, monuments outside Attica evoked the glory of this widely known hero. Precisely in the first years after Kleisthenes a new sequence of Theseus' youthful deeds, equivalent to those of his great model Herakles, appears on Athenian vases (figs. 2a, 2b) and on the Athenian treasury at Delphi.²³ In the present context, two points should be stressed. First, while Herakles, the principal hero of Archaic Athens, represented the panhellenic ideals of the upper class,²⁴ Theseus was chosen as a patriotic hero. Second, this hero was less an aggressive warrior than a protagonist of the domestic order which in those years seems to have been the main concern of Athenian self-confidence. It was only after the Persian Wars

that Theseus changed into a protagonist against foreign aggressors. In the Theseion, the new center of Athenian imperial identity, he was depicted fighting against centaurs and Amazons, assuming a role he allegedly played also at Marathon. A third painting, alluding to Athens' dominion of the sea, showed him recovering Minos' ring from his father Poseidon.²⁵

Later, under the full-grown democracy when the realm of political activities



Figures 2a, b Cycle of the deeds of Theseus. Red-figured kylix. London, British Museum.

expanded greatly, there apparently emerged a need for models of broader significance, representing Athenian citizenship as such. This perhaps is the reason for the increasing frequency in vase painting of the Eponymous Heroes of the Athenian tribes.²⁶ Even in the Agora, the monument of the Tyrant-slayers was supplemented by a nearby statue group representing the Eponymous Heroes, probably erected under Perikles.²⁷ Like the tyrant-slayers, these statues did not have any religious function—the various tribes attended the cults of their heroes separately in their own districts of the city; rather, as a community of heroes on the Agora, they represented the citizen's community in its political subdivisions. In addition to the initial and individual act of tyrannicide, political identity was thus created by evoking collective consciousness of the polis' political organization. In this case too, in addition to its general significance, the monument served a special function. The pedestal of the Eponymous Heroes was used for putting up public announcements, such as lists of citizens liable to military service, initiatives for new laws, or court cases. The monument's shape fits this function well: a fence of stone beams was installed, certainly not only for the people's comfort while they were reading the announcements (as assumed by some scholars) but primarily to prevent tampering with those texts. In a city that had become far too big for oral transmission of such information, it must have been vital to have a central place for public announcements. It should be no sacrilege against classical art to assume that this was the main reason for erecting this monument: the heroes of the ten tribes stood there as the symbols of the community and its political order, sanctioning its public acts.

The force of collective egalitarianism in the fifth century is demonstrated above all by the disappearance of aristocratic grave sculptures which were so prominent in Archaic Athens. This striking change in burial customs seems to have been misinterpreted by those scholars who connect it with an alleged law, of Kleisthenes or his immediate successors, restricting funerary expenditure.²⁸ From Cicero we know only of a law "some time after Solon,"²⁹ and its content is not easily understood as a reference to sculptured grave markers. More importantly, the end of sepulchral sculpture in Attica did not come abruptly, as we should expect in the case of legislation, but gradually: after large numbers of kouroi and stelai on tombs of the late sixth century, scattered latecomers occur until ca. 490–480³⁰ which can be explained only as a result of collective self-restriction. If so, the importance of the phenomenon becomes even clearer: the end of proud self-assertion on the part of the elite was caused not by a political law, possibly proposed by a particular political group, but by general social self-control.³¹

As a further consequence, this process encouraged the creation of new po-

litical spaces.³² The new Boule of the 500 was given a new Bouleuterion, perhaps the first example of a type that was to become very successful, and, above all, although perhaps somewhat later, the *ekklisia* was transferred to a new meeting place on the Pnyx. Even topographically, the domain of politics now occupied a space of its own.

Monuments of the Persian Wars

In the long run the ideology of *isonomia* and democracy seems to have been an insufficient base for the patriotic self-confidence and political identity of normal Athenian citizens. Not much democracy is visible in Athenian state monuments of the fifth century. The principal idea of the new political order was equality—an ideal that was not easy to swallow for a society as competitive as the elite of Archaic Greece, especially if this meant including the demos. The “agonale Mensch” of Jakob Burckhardt was not well equipped mentally for the egalitarian demands of the new epoch. Therefore, if the citizens had to be equal, at least their state had to be superior to others. Moreover, by strengthening patriotic feelings and turning energies against outside rivals and enemies, interior tensions could be overcome more easily. This seems to be the reason why in Athens, as in other cities, most political monuments celebrate military victories. Obviously this corresponded to the mentality of the majority of Athenian citizens. Some of them might have thought that democracy was the essential basis for such successes, but the glorious results overshadowed this basic structure.

Already the young state of Kleisthenes founded its self-confidence upon a famous military victory over the united forces of Chalkis and Boeotia in 506, celebrating it with a conspicuous votive offering on the Akropolis.³³ This dedication, displaying the chains of the prisoners of war together with a bronze four-horse chariot and a celebratory epigram (fig. 3), was much more than a traditional act of gratitude toward the city’s goddess; it was also a spectacular self-assertion of the dedicators. So, contemporaneously with the beginnings of political monuments, votive gifts in the great sanctuaries could assume the character of explicit political manifestations.³⁴

The great moment of new political self-confidence and identity were of course the wars against the Persians. The problem that immediately arose in this situation was the emergence of two partly conflicting identities: a panhellenic identity, opposed to the barbarians, and a polis identity, competing with other Greek states. The erection of monuments reflected this development and was part of the process itself.³⁵

It is striking how systematic the practice of erecting political monuments became soon after its introduction. Panhellenic solidarity of course had to be

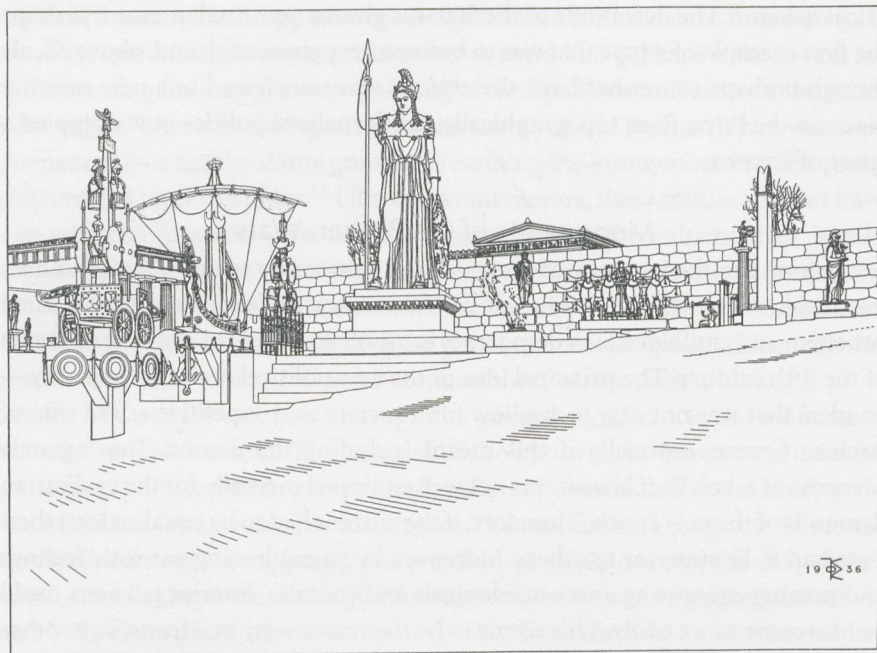


Figure 3 Political monuments of the Athenian Akropolis. Athena Promachos and (background right) victory-quadriga from Chalkis and Boeotia. After G. P. Stevens, *Hesperia* 5 (1936) 494, fig. 44.

demonstrated in places of shared significance. The great monuments of the anti-Persian alliance were thus set up in the three great panhellenic sanctuaries: after the battle of Salamis a statue of Apollo with a ship's acroterion at Delphi, after Plataea the tripod on the serpents' column in the same sanctuary, a colossal statue of Zeus at Olympia, and a statue of Poseidon at the Isthmos.³⁶ Individual cities, however, chose two different and even opposite places to manifest political identity. Within their own polis they sought to strengthen the patriotic feelings of their citizens; places to set up such monuments were the Agora and the city's main sanctuary. Toward the outside they had to compete with other cities, and since competition presupposes a common place as well as a common public, such monuments were almost all set up in the same panhellenic center, at Delphi. In several cases, this bipolar structure of political representation resulted in double monuments erected at the same time at home and on the stage of panhellenic competition: around 480 the Phokians set up two monuments representing the struggle of Apollo and Herakles over the tripod, one at Delphi, the other in their own sanctuary at Abai;³⁷ two decades later, the Argives celebrated

their victory near Oinoe, together with Athens over Sparta, with large sculptural groups of the Seven against Thebes and the Epigonoï, both at Delphi and in their Agora.³⁸

Again, Athens soon became the protagonist in these practices. At home, three public spaces developed into a panorama of glorious military achievements: the Akropolis, the Agora, and the state cemetery of the Kerameikos, i.e., the public spaces of gods, citizens, and the dead.³⁹ No other polis created so systematically an ideological topography of its political identity, based on the memory of its glorious achievements, almost a public monumental physiognomy directed both toward her own citizens and foreign visitors.

In the Agora, monuments were erected for various battles against the Persians.⁴⁰ Some of their epigrams have been preserved, both in literature and on fragments of their pedestals. What the monuments themselves looked like remains obscure; perhaps they consisted of stelai with names of fallen warriors. This would accord with a stele erected in the Agora of Samos after the battle of Lade in 494, containing the names of those who had fought against the Persians.⁴¹

Better known are the three herms erected after the capture of Eion in 476 for Kimon and the other strategoi, a particularly conspicuous monument (fig. 4).⁴² Its character was both religious and political, as in other cases in this early phase of political monuments: the pillar form followed the Archaic tradition of images



Figure 4 The "Eion Herms." Red-figured pelike. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

of Hermes, while three famous epigrams proclaimed that the Athenians had erected these herms as a political honor to their victorious citizens and generals, and that this monument was intended to inspire the Athenians to endure the hardships of war for the common cause.

These herms were placed in the northwestern corner of the Agora, together with many other, in part older, images of that type, which gave the area the name of "The Herms." This placement offers a key to understanding the significance of the herms.⁴³ It has been rightly assumed that before the Persian Wars the city wall ran just north of the Agora; hence in Archaic times the most important gateway, the predecessor of the Dipylon and the Sacred Gates, must have been located precisely beyond this northwestern corner.⁴⁴ Set up on the borderline between inside and outside, the herms of the Agora therefore protected the community's public space, initially perhaps the whole area of the city, later the political center. This explains how they could become honorary monuments of military victories. It was their old religious function of protection that was now turned in a political sense against a specific external enemy: the Persians were to be expelled concretely and symbolically from Athens' public space.

Later monuments in the Agora prove that the Persian Wars were instrumental in enhancing political and patriotic identity. Three phenomena seem essential here. First, the achievements and glory of contemporary politics were emphasized more and more openly in such monuments. The best example is the famous "Painted Stoa" (Stoa Poikile), erected around 460 by the circle of Kimon and adorned with a great cycle of paintings that combined two great deeds of mythical ancestors with two contemporary Athenian victories: the expulsion of the Amazons by Theseus' Athenians, the fall of Troy with considerable participation of an Athenian contingent, the triumph of Marathon under the leadership of Kimon's father Miltiades, and a battle near Oinoe, where Athens had recently won her first spectacular victory over Sparta.⁴⁵

Second, a new aspect is introduced into political self-representation by the fact that the celebration of the Persian Wars was not confined to the aftermath of the event itself but continued in the Stoa Poikile several decades later. Other Greek states praised their contributions against the "barbarians" in monuments immediately after those battles—but Athens continued this habit over the next generations, thereby creating a sort of historical physiognomy of the city that demonstrated her superiority over her rivals. This attitude resulted from an unparalleled need of legitimation for permanent hegemony; not accidentally, the only possible candidate for a similar perpetuation of the Persian War glory is Sparta.⁴⁶

Third, accordingly, these achievements of the recent past became worthy of

memory and took on a dimension of glory comparable to the great deeds of the heroes of myth, as the cycle of paintings in the Stoa Poikile illustrates. This shows a new kind of self-confidence of the present in comparison with the overwhelming mythical past.⁴⁷ The discovery of history in classical Greece is a discovery not of the past but the present. A similar sequence of Athenian glorious accomplishments from mythical times to the present day was created in the funeral orations at the state burials in the Kerameikos. Other cities too used their patriotic myths for present-day political aims, but none of them, as far as we know, perhaps again with the exception of Sparta, developed its political identity so decisively as an ideological system of myth, history, and actuality.

This systematic character of patriotic myths is even more evident in two other monuments that were placed not in the Agora but in the second area of political self-representation: on the Akropolis. Already in the 450s the shield of the colossal Athena "Promachos" showed a mythological scene, the battle of Theseus and the Lapiths against the centaurs.⁴⁸ Soon afterward the Parthenon was decorated with a comprehensive mythological apparatus, containing the four great myths of Greek self-defense against foreign enemies: giants, centaurs, Amazons, and Troy.⁴⁹ The traditional interpretation of these myths sees them as predecessors and metaphors of the Persian Wars. But, without opposing this view, I sense that this program has a much broader meaning: it represents a range of polar oppositions and threats to the Greek way of life that were repelled by Greek, especially Athenian, heroes: blasphemous giants, brutal semimonsters, aggressive females, and Orientals as hybrid cultural antipodes.

Taken together, these myths constitute a manifold, almost complete panorama that defines Greek identity against various opposite worlds. This corresponds to a basic structure of Greek thought that defines values in polar oppositions: kosmos versus chaos, humankind versus animals, men versus women, Greece versus Orient, culture versus primitiveness, self-control versus hybrid and brutality, freedom versus slavery.⁵⁰ These myths therefore are more than mirrors or metaphors of the Persian Wars: they constitute a cosmic-historical panorama within which these wars receive their interpretation and significance. In developing and using paradigmatic myths in such a global system, Athens probably again was unique.

The Parthenon, of course, covers a much broader range of themes, constituting the most systematic program of Athenian self-presentation, including, besides the defeat of hostile forces, the evocation of the city's own patriotic traditions. Significantly, even in this most complex symbol of Periklean Athens not much stress is placed on democratic values. The pediments show the religious and mythical traditions of the city: the birth of Athena and her contest with Po-

seidon for Attica, surrounded by local divinities and heroes; and the frieze selectively represents the community of citizens in the Panathenaic procession, with the majority of the participants being noble young men in the functions of horsemen and charioteers.⁵¹ Democracy seems to be more an implicit condition than an explicit theme of Athenian self-confidence.

The third area that developed into a monument of historical self-representation was the state cemetery in the Kerameikos. Beside extensive areas of family graves, from the fifth century a separate political cemetery was reserved for public burials⁵²—another symbol that politics had become a domain of its own, an autonomous space in a concrete as well as metaphorical sense. In the course of time the collective graves of the fallen warriors with their lists of names and relief decorations formed a sequence of achievements from the past down to the present, another historical physiognomy, a façade of glory in front of the main entrance to the city.

All three public spaces where the citizens came together for their most important common concerns—in the Agora for political decisions with their fellow citizens, on the Akropolis for religious rites with their goddess, and in the Kerameikos for collective burials with their dead—were adorned with and defined by monuments that were supposed to foster a strong political and patriotic identity in all those who participated in these public manifestations.

At Delphi Athens expressed no less systematically her ambitions toward the other Greek poleis. After Salamis the Athenians built there a wonderful stoa to exhibit the captured ropes of Xerxes' bridge over the Hellespont.⁵³ After the foundation of the Delian League, they erected a striking monument celebrating the battle of Eurymedon: a bronze palm tree with gilded fruits and a gilded palladion on top.⁵⁴ A third Athenian monument at Delphi, right at the entrance of the sanctuary, was even more ambitious. Supposedly made from the booty, it glorified the battle of Marathon, representing the commander Miltiades with Apollo and Athena, the heroes of the ten Attic tribes, and three other Attic heroes, Theseus, Kodros, and supposedly Philaios, the ancestor of Miltiades.⁵⁵ In such cases there is almost no difference between a religious votive offering and a political monument. The message of the Athenian votive group in Delphi does not differ fundamentally from that of the Marathon painting on the Athenian Agora or the statues of the Eponymous Heroes in the same place.

As for the impact of such monuments on the Athenian public, the epigrams of the Eion Herms proclaimed the aim to inspire the Athenians, now and in the future, to endure the hardships of war for the common good. The same exemplary character is obvious in the tyrant-slayers' images. This must have been a feature of most political monuments.

On the other hand, such monuments must have been rather challenging for visitors to the Agora.⁵⁶ Public images of contemporary fellow citizens were considered an extraordinary honor and looked at with great suspicion. This attitude, which originated in the egalitarian ideology of democracy, is well attested for the fourth century but certainly goes back to the early times of Athenian *isonomia*. The celebratory representation of Miltiades in the Marathon painting is said, although in a later source, to have caused debate and alternative proposals in the Assembly,⁵⁷ and Plutarch reports that the proposed award of an honorary wreath to Miltiades was rejected with the argument that the battle had been won by all Athenians.⁵⁸ The Eion Herms were praised in the fourth century as examples of good political practice because they celebrated all ten strategoi without naming any of them.⁵⁹ And the Tyrannicides, considered the first honorary images set up to contemporaries, were succeeded only in the early fourth century by those of Konon and other politicians.⁶⁰ Even then, there existed a law prohibiting honorary statues near these founding heroes of democracy,⁶¹ and a series of rules established a clear hierarchy of such honors.⁶² Such rules, supervised by the Assembly, indicate the criteria by which people judged these monuments when visiting the Agora.

Unfortunately, much less is known about the impact of political monuments in panhellenic centers like Delphi. The concentration of most monuments along the sacred way made them conspicuous not only to common visitors but especially to the official delegations of poleis from the whole Greek world who certainly made known in their cities the "messages" they perceived. Public control will have watched suspiciously even votive offerings in those sanctuaries; this may explain why the Pythia forbade Themistokles to dedicate Persian spoils at Delphi.⁶³

The Athenian monuments for the Persian Wars testified first and foremost, although implicitly, to Athens' claim to superiority in Greece. This is why in the Stoa Poikile the glorious representation of Marathon was complemented by the Oinoe painting, celebrating a victory over Sparta. Soon such monuments would announce this claim, in surprisingly explicit forms, also to the allies in the Delian League.

Monuments Concerning the Delian League

The first aggressive monument of Periklean policy against Athens' allies was the statue of Athena Lemnia, celebrating the institution of cleruchies (Athenian settlements on confiscated territory) after the departure of new settlers to the island of Lemnos around 450 (fig. 5).⁶⁴ This was much more than an ordinary votive offering after a successful undertaking; it was a political monument of consider-

Figure 5 Athena Lemnia. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen.



able ambition, larger than life size and executed by the famous Pheidias. Although apparently dedicated by the clerouchs themselves, it was surely not financed by the poor emigrants but by the Athenian state, quite probably at the instigation of Perikles himself.

This highly important monument was placed in an equally important position, at the entrance to the Akropolis, within the Propylaia, to the left. Later the connection with Perikles was stressed by setting up his portrait statue next to it. In the early 440s, at the very time when Perikles proposed the project of a panhellenic congress to discuss the rebuilding of the sanctuaries destroyed by the Persians,⁶⁵ the statue of Athena Lemnia as protectress of his imperialistic policy

also marked his new emphasis on the Akropolis and the start of his building program to embellish the sanctuary.

At the same time, outside the Akropolis he gave another signal of his building plans, through the statue of Hermes Propylaios, created by Alkamenes (fig. 6).⁶⁶ Rightly dated to the 440s, it must originally have been made for the Old Propylaia.

Hermes Propylaios and Athena Lemnia marked the occupation of the Akropolis by Perikles: Hermes outside defining the religious sphere, Athena inside emphasizing its political character and making clear that the building program was inseparably connected with Athens' domination of the Delian League. The representatives of the allies, who had to come to Athens every fourth year to participate in the celebration of the Panathenaia, entered the Akropolis under the eyes of this Athena. Surely they will have reported to their fellow citizens how openly Athens proclaimed her imperialist ambitions.

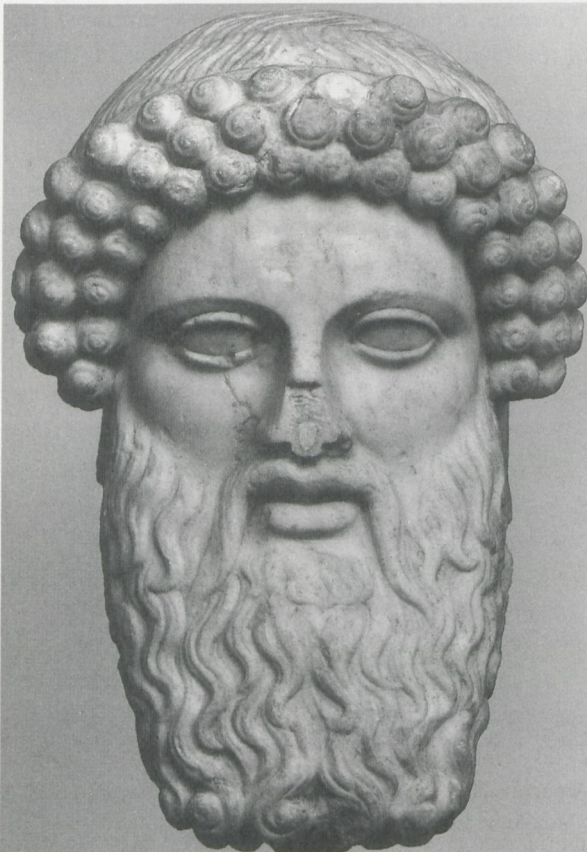


Figure 6 Hermes Propylaios of Alkamenes.
Munich, Glyptothek.

Soon afterward an allied state documented its suppression by Athens with a monument on its own territory. In the Heraion of Samos the most important votive monument of the fifth century was a group by Myron, showing Herakles' introduction into Olympus.⁶⁷ The curved pedestal supported three over-life-size figures: Zeus standing in the middle, Athena on one side, both turning to Herakles coming from the other. The group has been interpreted convincingly as a monument celebrating Athens' victory over the Samian revolt in 440, commissioned probably not by Athens, for it was not usual to dedicate monuments in the sanctuaries of other cities, but by the pro-Athenian party of Samos which thereby openly proclaimed its political allegiance. In this monument the Samian Hera did not appear at all but the goddess of Athens played a prominent role: its message was unmistakable.

Other cities avoided open conflict with Athens. At Ephesos, in the sanctuary of Artemis, a monument was erected in these same years, the early 430s, perhaps as a direct answer to the statuary group in neighboring Samos: the famous Amazons, made by Polykleitos, Pheidias, Kresilas, and some other sculptor(s) (fig. 7).⁶⁸ These Amazons did not represent dreadful oriental enemies, as in Athens,



Figure 7 The Ephesian Amazons. "Amazon Mattei": Tivoli, Villa Adriana; "Amazon Sciarra": Berlin, Staatliche Museen; "Amazon Sosikles": Rome, Museo Capitolino.

but highly venerable figures, symbolizing the city's own traditions and identity.⁶⁹ Having found asylum in Ephesos, they testified to the age and the protective force of the sanctuary of Artemis. The date of the sculptural group has tentatively been connected with the dedication of the temple, 120 years after its foundation.⁷⁰ However this may be, the Ephesian and Samian monuments, dedicated around the same time, reflect two possible political attitudes toward Athens. While the Samian group expresses submission, the Ephesian Amazons represent an act of self-assertion against overpowering Athens: the Ephesians claimed to possess a sanctuary with a myth at least as old and venerable as that with which arrogant Athens dominated the scene. They even challenged Athens, where artists from all over Greece were attracted by the allies' money that financed Perikles' buildings,⁷¹ by inviting to Ephesos the most famous sculptors of the age: not only Pheidias from Athens but also his great rival Polykleitos. So at least once the Ephesians demonstrated that Athens, acting as the center of the world, was not that unique!

Even this impressive monument, however, could not really compete with Athens, where the most ambitious temple project since Archaic times, the Parthenon, was almost complete, and the unprecedented chryselephantine statue of Athena Parthenos was dedicated in 438. A year later, the rebuilding of the entrance of the Akropolis was initiated with the new Propylaia of Mnesikles, followed by the temple of Athena Nike, the figural decoration of which reflects the atmosphere of the great victories of the middle 420s.⁷² Proof that this temple was planned together with the Propylaia has at last freed us from the old controversy about its initiators. The building indeed was part of Perikles' program, and even if the figural decorations were created only after his death they could not stand in complete opposition to the original concept.⁷³

The Nike temple's decoration follows but extends the program of the Parthenon. The eastern pediment showed the fight between the gods and the giants, the western pediment another mythical battle, perhaps against the Amazons.⁷⁴ In any case, these must have been selections from the myths of the Parthenon that recorded the victories of the Greek, especially the Athenian, kosmos over threatening enemies. The middle acroterion on the roof, known from an inscription, represented the fight of Bellerophon against the Chimaira.⁷⁵ This too is a Greek hero's victory over a dangerous foreign monster, emphasizing again, though with a different accentuation, the classical confrontation between Greek ideals and the menace from opposite, outside forces.

The friezes illustrate historical themes:⁷⁶ on the south side fights against the Persians, probably not a specific battle but the Persian Wars as a whole (fig. 8); on the western and northern sides Athens' fights against contemporary Greek ene-



Figure 8 Greeks fighting Persians. South Frieze of the temple of Athena Nike in Athens. Athens, Akropolis Museum.

mies in the decades after the Persian Wars, perhaps differentiated between Peloponnesians and central Greeks. The themes of the Parthenon were thus taken up but continued into recent historical times, creating a mythical-historical sequence as in the cycle of the Stoa Poikile and in the funeral orations. In allegorical form, the same theme is developed on the parapet.⁷⁷ Relief decoration, turned toward the outside, facing the city, repeated the same motives on all three major sides: Athena seated on a rock, surrounded by Nikai celebrating victories (figs. 9a, 9b). The Nikai are setting up *tropaia*, decorating them with Greek and oriental armor; they glorify victories against the Persians as well as against Greek enemies, as represented in the fighting scenes on the friezes; other Nikai are sacrificing bulls—according to one recent interpretation, at the festival of the *Oschophoria*; in my own opinion, more likely in an ad hoc victory celebration, typical after successful battles. This crowd of attractive girls celebrating victories seems to illustrate most suggestively the high spirits prevailing in Athens in these years.

An important point in this context is picture-language. These are not realistic scenes of a sacrifice, not only because it is executed by divine girls but also because the erection of *tropaia* and the offering of sacrifices could not have taken place at the same time. Nevertheless, they are drawn together effectively in this composition, just as the multiplication of the Nikai represents the great number of Athenian victories. Similarly, on a contemporary vase a victorious musician is surrounded by four Nikai who, according to their inscriptions, indicate his successes in various competitions.⁷⁸ Art has here created a new “conceptual” picture-language for celebratory messages of which there are further examples in this period: personifications of *poleis* and other political entities, and of abstract political notions; allegorical motives, such as handshakes between deities representing treaties between specific *poleis*; or state deities conferring honorary crowns to men of merit.⁷⁹ The emergence of such a political picture-language



Figure 9a Nikai with bull. Parapet of the temple of Athena Nike in Athens. Athens, Akropolis Museum.



Figure 9b Athena and Nike, decorating a tropaion. Parapet of the temple of Athena Nike in Athens. Athens, Akropolis Museum.

with special iconographic motifs and a specific compositional syntax is closely related to the creation of political monuments in this period. An architectural equivalent to this ideological “hymn to Athenian superiority” is the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios in the Agora, built in these same years and pronouncing the claim of “liberty” in the center of the “freest of all Greek cities”—with a similar whirling Nike on the roof.⁸⁰

On the Nike parapet elements of this picture-language are adopted for the most euphoric victory celebration in classical Greek art. Here we sense almost physically the effusive atmosphere and the enthusiastic optimism that so often dominated politics in Athens. Moreover, this euphoric state of mind seems to have been infectious. We find the same high-spirited style in a contemporary monument, the famous Nike on an eagle, on top of a 9 m-high pillar, set up in Olympia by Athenian allies, the Messenians and Naupaktians, to celebrate the victory over Sparta near Sphakteria in 425 (fig. 10).⁸¹

All this originated in but was not bound to Athenian conditions. After the Peloponnesian War victorious Sparta gave a harsh response to the monuments of the defeated Delian League. At Sparta, the commander Lysander dedicated two Nikai on eagles, thus outdoing the monument at Olympia;⁸² at Amyklai, among other votive offerings a tripod was erected that was supported by a figure of Sparta, thus making use of the new picture-language of state personifications;⁸³ and at Delphi, Lysander surpassed the Athenian ex-voto representing Miltiades between Apollo, Athena, and Athenian heroes by a much larger monument showing himself between the gods and heroes of Sparta, accompanied by twenty-eight commanders of the allied fleet.⁸⁴

In Athens the soldiers of the allied Spartan army who had fallen in 403 against Thrasybulos were even buried in the state cemetery of the Kerameikos, the heart of Athenian patriotism. No wonder that Thrasybulos, after recovering from this defeat, reacted by erecting a huge trophy beside this document of Athens' humiliation.⁸⁵

Vase Painting

Beside the public sphere of political monuments with their explicit messages there was, at least equally important, the whole sphere of social, religious, moral, and mental values and attitudes. The richest source—and far from sufficiently exploited—among the visual arts for such phenomena is vase painting: preserved in tens of thousands of specimens and therefore accessible by statistical methods, it offers an incomparable repertoire of themes and is rather precisely datable. A systematic investigation of Athenian vases could result in a complex history of Athenian social mentality, as it developed from decade to decade. In



Figure 10 The Nike of the Messenians and Naupaktians. Olympia, Museum.

accordance with their functions, Athenian vases were not a medium for political messages but emphasized more personal themes. Yet they mirror not only individual interests of vase painters and the purchasers of their products but also the themes of social discourse during the important occasions when they were used, especially the symposium.

Vases with figural representations cover a much wider range of themes than public monuments, and are of a different character. This becomes particularly evident when vase painting chooses the same subjects as monumental art. Systematic investigations of this phenomenon are almost completely lacking, but some examples may demonstrate the nature of this discourse within the private sphere.⁸⁶

The experience of the Persian Wars prompted various reactions that were expressed on different occasions, and therefore in different kinds of works of art. While Aeschylus emphasized in his *Persians* the religious and moral aspects of this conflict, and the mural painting in the Stoa Poikile praised the exemplary bravery of the Athenians and their protagonists, vases show more personal attitudes (fig. 11).⁸⁷ Beside heroic encounters, there appear extremely negative depictions, the most disgusting on an oinochoe where a Greek with an erect penis, held in his hand like a pistol, approaches a man in oriental costume who offers himself for the sexual act.⁸⁸ Such scenes did not occur in dramatic performances nor in public monuments, but we can imagine that people who had appreciated the "official" view in the theater and on the Agora could make quite different statements in the evening during the symposium. Mentalities change according to occasions.

Different attitudes are also reflected in myths. The painting of the fall of Troy in the Stoa Poikile stressed the moral implications of the victory of Greeks over mythical Orientals, while the Vivenzio hydria, painted immediately after the sack of Athens in 480, evidently expresses compassion with the conquered city through its mourning women (figs. 12a, 12b).⁸⁹ And while on public monuments the Persians for centuries remained the exemplary enemies of the Greeks, vase paintings of real and mythical Persians show a radical change of attitude from an extremely negative to an almost utopian image of otherness in the late fifth century.⁹⁰

In this sense painted vases were, beyond the realm of politics, an effective medium of a discourse on complex themes of collective relevance. However, although produced for a long time exclusively in Athens, they are not exclusively Athenian phenomena, for they were traded and appreciated all over the ancient world, especially by the Etruscans with their very different political and social

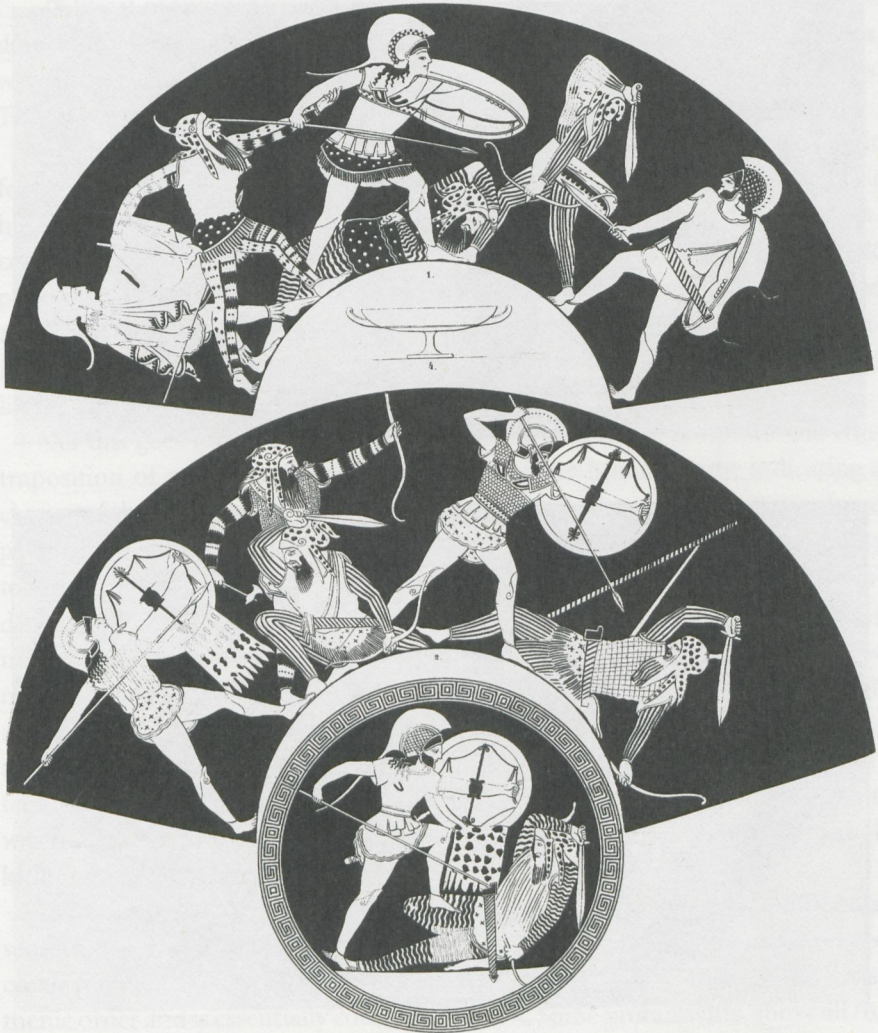
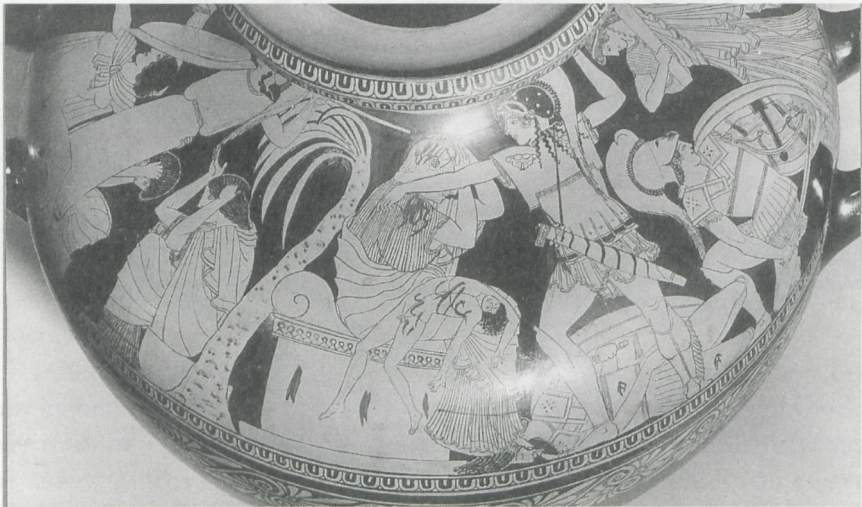


Figure 11 Greeks fighting Persians. Red-figured kylix of the Painter of the Paris Gigantomachy. Rome, Market (Basseggio).



Figures 12a, b Iliupersis. Red-figured hydria of the Kleophrades-Painter. Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico.

structure. Even so, it was certainly not by chance that this lively discourse of images originated in Athens.

Conclusion

Was all the art discussed in this chapter specifically Athenian, imperial or democratic? And if so, in what sense? The answer depends on whether we focus on Athens and its monuments or on political art as such.

Political monuments were confined neither to Athens nor to isonomic or democratic states at all. Political identity, the general theme of such monuments, was expressed from the early fifth century by states with various constitutions. They followed in principle the same practices and spoke the same language.

The phenomenon of political monuments is closely connected with basic features and attitudes of classical art, culture, and mentality. I can sketch this here only with some short remarks. Explicit identity was an important new concern of this epoch. It appears on various levels: as individual identity in realistic portraits as well as personal behavior, e.g., of Themistokles who "always wanted to behave in his own way";⁹¹ as polis identity in public monuments; as Hellenic identity against the "barbarians" in many manifestations, both iconic and literary.

All this goes together with the basic feature of classical sculpture: the contraposition of active versus nonactive parts of the human body, indicating a change of the entire "system" and the whole concept of man and nature; it aimed primarily at showing explicitly the body's own forces, especially a figure's ability to stand upright and move by its own energy, and implied connotations like self-determination and responsibility. At the basis of this attitude stood the radically new mentality expressed by Xenophanes:⁹² not the gods have given all things to men, but men themselves have found everything in the course of time. Although at first sight such phenomena seem to go well together with democracy, they are attested in states of very different character. It was a broad change of cultural patterns that formed the basis of the Athenian development toward democracy but was not bound to these specific political tendencies and ultimately affected all kinds of society in Greece.

Within this general frame, Athens was a special case. Political monuments, secular as well as religious, were used here in an explicit and systematic way to create political identity. This practice is attested from the beginning of the Kleisthenic order and is essentially connected with it. Some monuments, above all the group of the tyrant-slayers, stress the values of *isonomia* and democracy and show to what extent politics had become the focus of the citizen community.

Yet such monuments are remarkably rare. Much more emphasis is given to Athens' glory in the Persian Wars and its predominance in Greece. Political mythology too concentrates on these themes. The Athenians' collective identity was composed of various elements. Among these, *isonomia*, with its egalitarian demands, was of course an indispensable basis of the citizens' political role and thus of civic identity, but it was a concept of potential rights, of necessary conditions, more than of positive achievements. In the foreground of Athenian pride and self-assertion stood those concrete heroic accomplishments in war that ac-

corded so well with the traditional agonistic values. Since the principal aim of political monuments was to ensure the identification of the citizens not with the underlying principles but with the most acknowledged aspects of their state, military superiority as guarantor of public and private prosperity proved more attractive.

Most elements of political art, iconographic motifs as well as components of picture-language, are not exclusively Athenian. But in many respects Athens appears to have played a leading part. Political monuments in the public space of an agora are known from various sites, but the Athenian tyrant-slayers are apparently the first and certainly the most programmatic example. Monumental victory memorials made from war booty were dedicated in sanctuaries by various states, but none as spectacular and specifically commemorative as the Athenian dedications from Chalkis on the Akropolis and from the Persians at Delphi. From the Archaic period, many cities connected myths and contemporary history to express political claims, but fifth-century Athens used this combination to create particularly complex and global concepts. Public spaces were laid out and differentiated everywhere in Greece from the origin of poleis, but democratic Athens created a particularly complex public topography. State burials were conferred to single persons in various poleis, but the concentration of collective and individual graves in the Athenian state cemetery, forming a façade of glory, a historical physiognomy of the city, at its main entrance, was unique in Greece. Monumental works of art were used everywhere in Greece to adorn public areas and buildings, but the Athenians adopted art in uniquely systematic and ambitious ways to define the specific character of public spaces. As a result, by monumentalizing and perpetuating with works of art the glory of her great citizens and their famous achievements, Athens gradually developed into a monument of her own historical identity.

Athens' only possible rival in this respect may have been Sparta. Pausanias' description gives an impression of Sparta's complex and ambitious historical topography, focused also on the city's glory in the Persian Wars.⁹³ Critical investigation is needed to make clear to what extent these sites were authentic testimonies of classical Sparta rather than retrospective glorifications by later centuries. But, Thucydides' comment on the modest appearance of late-fifth-century Sparta notwithstanding,⁹⁴ many of these memorial sites—less magnificent than their Athenian counterparts but effective places of memory—may well testify to Sparta's political identity as the great rival of classical Athens.

Since most Athenian political monuments seem to have been stimulated less by democracy than by empire, the need for legitimation must have been partic-

ularly strong in the latter sphere. This must be the reason why Sparta in this respect appears as Athens' only possible rival.

Ultimately, in all these manifestations a psychological factor must have been at work. The sheer quantity and the ambitious scale of artistic achievements in Athens should not only be explained by a surplus of financial resources—which of course was an indispensable factor—but also understood as a qualitative feature. Clearly, the citizens of Athens, more than those of other cities, felt an unprecedented need to create political identity by way of public monuments. Moreover, they surrounded themselves in their private sphere, especially in the form of painted vases, with an immensely rich discourse of themes related to their social, religious, moral, and mental values. I suggest that such artistic intensity was a result of the “adventure” on which Athenian society had embarked in the fifth century.⁹⁵ Their path led them, almost irresistibly, into a political order without precedent and into dominion over an empire of incomparable extension; theirs was a balancing act without net that must have created an ambivalent state of collective psychology, between euphoric self-assertion and profound self-doubt, in which all themes of social import were discussed, represented, celebrated, and questioned without end. In this psychological sense, the background to Athenian art of the fifth century was not so much democracy or empire as such but the intense and risky character of Athenian politics in this age of unprecedented opportunity, accomplishment, and challenge.