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### PROJECT

## Vision, Figuration, and Image from Theater to Romance in the Ancient Greek World

I explore certain facets of visual culture in ancient Greece through some persistent themes and preoccupations found in literary genres from the archaic and classical periods (particularly Homer and the dramatic stage) to the world of late antiquity (prose fiction), as these intersect with the figurative arts, notably sculpture and painting. There is an enduring fascination with the power of images, the feats of artisans, and the prestige of the figurative arts, with a premium placed on the quality of the "beautiful" - in social, political, ethical, aesthetic, rhetorical, psychological, and, increasingly, in erotic terms. Yet each aspect must be viewed against changing horizons of expectations, not just regarding the development of artisanal techniques and the expansion of visual fields in both public and private life, but also in theoretical terms, even with respect to the nature and functions of representation itself and the conceptualization of such notions as appearance, imitation, resemblance, image, and counterfeit or copy, as these relate to each other and to an idea of "reality" itself. Despite Plato's resistance, Greek culture remains until the end one of spectatorship, public performances, and visual display of every sort. All these activities increase, in fact, in scale and significance from the Hellenistic period on, reaching extravagant heights of material splendor and developing new concepts and practices, such as phantasia (imagination) and a growing conviction that while art imitates nature, nature also imitates art. My own interest is directed towards exploring the uncanny powers of imaging and of figuration through a whole range of visual experiences that, beside works of art, also includes dreams, visions, phantoms, epiphanies of gods, and theatrical scenes of mimetic reenactment. What draws these disparate phenomena into the same force field is primarily their role as agents of mediation that derive from an enduring set of imaginings in a culture, which gave gods human form and used the image of the body both to separate and cross the ontological lines that distinguish the animate from the inanimate, the illusion from reality, the dream from the waking state, the evanescent from the eternal, the self from the other, the living from the dead, the mortal from the immortal, and the past from the present.

### Recommended Reading

Zeitlin, Froma I. *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Culture*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996.

- "Visions and Revisions of Homer in the Second Sophistic." In *Greek Identity in the Second Sophistic*, edited by Simon Goldhill, 195-266. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

- "The Artful Eye: Vision, Ekphrasis, and Spectacle in Euripidean Drama." In *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*, edited by Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne, 138-96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

## The Erotic Lures of Mimesis: Text and Image in the Ancient Imaginary and Beyond

My larger project explores certain facets of visual culture in ancient Greece through some persistent themes and preoccupations found in literary genres from the archaic and classical periods (particularly Homer and the dramatic stage) to the world of late antiquity (especially erotic prose fiction), as these intersect with the figurative arts, notably sculpture and painting. There is an enduring astonishment (*thauma*, *ekplêxis*) at the power of images and the feats of artists, along with the prestige of the figurative arts, that puts a premium on the quality of the "beautiful" in social, political, ethical, aesthetic, rhetorical, psychological, and, increasingly, in erotic terms. Yet each aspect must be viewed against changing horizons of expectations, not just regarding the development of artisanal techniques and the expansion of visual fields in both public and private life, but also in theoretical terms, even with respect to the nature and functions of representation itself and the conceptualization of such notions as appearance, imitation, resemblance, image, and counterfeit or copy, as these relate to each other and to an idea of "reality" itself. Despite Plato's resistance, Greek culture remains until the end one of spectatorship, public performances, and visual display of every sort. All these activities increase, in fact, in scale and significance from the Hellenistic period on, reaching extravagant heights of material splendor and developing new concepts and practices, such as *phantasia* (imagination) in contrast to *mimesis* (imitation), and a growing conviction in some quarters that while art copies nature, nature also copies art.

My presentation today consists of three parts (and a coda), with a focus on the representability of feminine beauty: These are: 1: Some modern examples of the fascination with ancient female images. 2: The culture of viewing in later Greek literature under the Roman Empire, especially *ekphrasis* or the art of describing images in words, a rhetorical trope designed to make listeners (or readers) into viewers. 3: Three textual examples, all focused on the representations of (or allusions to) beautiful women and their famous historical models. These consist of two ancient romances, Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* (c. I C.E.) and Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* (*Ethiopian Tale*, c. III-IV C.E.). In between I turn to the Sophist Lucian (III C.E.), whose twinned dialogues (*Imagines* and *Pro Imaginibus*) wittily address the interfaces between art and text, word and image, to describe what he thinks is the indescribable. All three take up the question of likeness with regard to portraiture: the description of the heroine Callirhoe in Chariton, the composite image of the mysterious Panthea in Lucian, and the painting of Andromeda in Heliodorus as the model itself for the girl, Charicleia. This is perhaps a paradoxical (even perverse) move, because, in a sense, these are not strictly *ekphrases* at all, but rather are dependent on audience recognition of an inherited storehouse of images and texts. At stake in each case is the ineffable (or charismatic) beauty of a woman, whose depiction, from Homer on, resorts to different strategies of showing and telling. I follow a descending order, as it were, starting from the most tangible figure (Chariton) to end with an inversion of the very idea of a mimetic similitude in the relationship between person and image (Heliodorus). Note, however, that the first (Chariton) appeals to statuary, the second (Lucian) to a combination of sculpture and painting, and the third (Heliodorus) to an unusual painted portrait. The first two examples examine the urgent issue of anthropomorphization, when it comes to divinity and the fact that gods are represented in human form. The last (Heliodorus), while invoking a mythological heroine, goes in an entirely different direction with regard to the primacy of copy over model. As a coda, I turn to the figure of Phryne, the famous courtesan (4th c. B.C.E.), who created a notorious scandal by baring her breast to the onlookers at her trial for impiety (*eusebeia*), and whose beauty was such that she was reputed to have been the model in both painting and sculpture by two of the most renowned practitioners of their art: Apelles' *Aphrodite Anadyomene*, and Praxiteles' *Aphrodite of Knidos*. Finally, I return to the modern to interrogate some contemporary interpretations of *ekphrasis* that have insisted on the relationship between art and text as "a struggle for mastery between word and image as repeatedly gendered." That is, the object described is a silent submissive female, the spectator/author an aggressive male, and the art of describing is a desire equivalent, as one reviewer puts it, to "lusting for the natural sign."

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PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Zeitlin, Froma (Ithaca,2023)

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<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1851741305>

Zeitlin, Froma (New York,2017)

Longus and Achilles TatiusFroma Zeitlin

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Zeitlin, Froma (Groningen,2013)

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Zeitlin, Froma (Lanham, Md [u.a.],2009)

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Zeitlin, Froma (2001)

Visions and revisions of Homer

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Zeitlin, Froma (Chicago, Ill. [u.a.],1996)

Playing the other : gender and society in classical Greek literature

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Women in culture and society series

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=278934196>

Zeitlin, Froma (1993)

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Zeitlin, Froma (Princeton, NJ,1992)

Mortals and immortals : collected essays

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