

'We must do better...'

Corrigenda to a review of *Greek Sculpture*

A cautionary tale. Richard Neer and Nigel Spivey both teach Classical art at university level. Each, in his way, disdains the study of Greek sculpture by *Kopienkritik* – the attempt to establish the style of certain Greek sculptors by comparative study of ‘copies’ of their work made in Roman times. So it can happen that Spivey, during the production-process of a(nother) book on Greek sculpture, fails to notice that his submitted image of the Lancellotti Discobolus has been replaced by a different Discobolus; and then it happens that Neer, reviewing Spivey’s book, seizes upon this error – and compounds it by stating that the image shows ‘the Townley Discobolus in London’. In fact, Fig. 4.11 of Spivey’s *Greek Sculpture* (CUP 2013) shows the Vatican Discobolus. (A surviving fig-leaf should have signalled this).

Serves you both right, some will say. But students can learn something from this tale, and not just that their teachers are fallible. It says something about the process whereby ‘copies’ of Greek ‘masterpiece’ statues were produced for Roman patrons. I imagine that some of those patrons took gleeful satisfaction from exposing a guest to the villa who could not tell the difference between a ‘Townley’ or ‘Vatican’ version of Myron’s fifth-century ‘Classic’ – originally a bronze commemoration of some victor in the pentathlon. The ‘copies’ are not replicas; inequality of technical finish is not the only way of distinguishing them. (Since both ‘Townley’ and ‘Vatican’ statues were recovered from Tivoli, perhaps the emperor Hadrian played that game of refined expertise).

Publishers, too, could learn something. If they will devolve not only the printing but also the design and setting of a book to a faraway place, and then deny its author the opportunity to see a final bound proof, it multiplies the risk of slips such as these, and of digital images appearing ‘flipped’. Reprinting offers the chance to make necessary corrections, but I hold out little hope that the overall look of the volume will be improved. As far as producing fine books is concerned, one is tempted to say *cessavit ars circa AD MM* – a regrettable consequence of the ‘digital revolution’.

I here break a principle (tested, alas, in the past) of suffering a malevolent review in demoralized silence. The exception is occasioned by Richard Neer’s notice of *Greek Sculpture* (in *Classical Review* 64 [April 2014], pp. 268-70), partly because it strays from criticism into calumny; and also because, beyond the Discobolus-muddle, it raises important questions about how we define ‘errors of fact’ in Classical archaeology. In the course of not getting ‘bogged down in details’ – a rare feature of

the book applauded by the reviewer – an author clearly becomes vulnerable. Introducing the Archaic Akropolis, for example (p. 157), how much should one say about the Hekatompedon? In a paragraph duly hedged with caution ('it seems', 'probably', 'apparently', 'appears to have', 'it seems that'), I do not discuss the problem-ridden archaeological (and epigraphical) evidence for the Hekatompedon as a temple, nor go into the chronological difficulties associated with defining 'Solon's time': I merely alert readers to the existence of poetic salutations to Athena attributed to Solon, and the likelihood of an early sixth-century temple to Athena upon the Akropolis, before proceeding to discuss the iconography of the 'floating temples' associated with the Peisistratids. Where, one would like to know, is the 'factual' evidence that the Hekatompedon – as Neer asserts – '*was not built "in Solon's time", but c. 560*'? Does the Akropolis Museum, do other scholars, make an 'error of fact' by giving a date of 570 BC for pedimental fragments and sculptures thought to have belonged to an Archaic temple thought to have existed more or less where the Parthenon stands?

Some of the criticisms seem to derive simply from careless reading, or incomprehension. Thus: (i) '*No Geometric!*': 'Geometric' is defined early on in the book (p. 8), and referred to and illustrated subsequently (e.g. pp. 20-21). (ii) '*Korai cannot routinely represent matrons since they can be called "maiden" in inscriptions*'... This comment baffles me, for in the section referred to (pp. 111-113) I nowhere use the term 'matron', and explicitly translate *korai* as 'maidens'. (That some of the statues we count as *korai* appear to represent older women, possibly married women, is I think generally accepted). (iii) Kleobis and Biton are not directly described as 'funerary monuments' – though it would be odd to deny that they are, in a broad sense, memorials to the dead. (iv) To reproduce a drawing by Cockerell of the Aegina west pediment (Fig. 5.2) is done for antiquarian interest: the caption makes perfectly clear that the present arrangement in Munich is different. (v) As for using the term *kouros* loosely: we have it on good authority that since *kouros* is a modern denomination for a statue-type, 'we should not be too finicky about defining the type' (R.T. Neer, *Art & Archaeology of the Greek World*, p. 115).

Other remarks by the reviewer are enigmatic, e.g. (i) '*The Large Pergamene Gauls did not stand on the acropolis of Pergamum.*' The sanctuary of Athena on the Pergamene acropolis 'has usually been favoured as the setting for the Large Gauls' (R.R.R. Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, p. 102; see also C. Kunze in *Pergamon: Panorama der antiken Metropole* [Berlin 2011], p. 316). In suggesting that the bronze originals of the Large Gauls 'probably' stood upon the *Rundmonument* inscribed in honour of Attalos (1), and located in the sanctuary, I went with what is more or less current orthodoxy. There must be new evidence that renders this orthodoxy an 'error of fact': perhaps the reviewer will divulge it? (ii) Similarly, if he can establish any facts at all about the Laocoon Group – even whether or not the statue described by Pliny is the statue recovered in 1506 – please may we share them?

The reviewer's own 'misquotes' and 'misuse' of the book he is reviewing are evident enough: his bibliographical citations are inaccurate (I have never published anything in *GBRS*: the reference should be to *G&R*), and his logic questionable. It seems, for example, a *non sequitur* to claim that scepticism about the methods of attributing 'personal styles' to Classical sculptors means denying the historical/historiographical existence of Pheidias, Myron *et al.* But suppose we agree to differ on how ancient texts may be used to gain insight into ancient responses to Greek sculpture. What is left is a farrago of insinuations: whereby the author who quotes French is 'self-consciously urbane' (*quelle horreur*), or worse, guilty of 'middlebrow aestheticism'. To qualify as a 'fan' of Kenneth Clark does not take much, apparently – I quote from his monograph *The Nude* because that book (deriving from Clark's 1953 Mellon lectures), albeit of its time, discusses certain topics of Classical sculptural style with clarity and intelligence. Clark, acknowledging the help given to him by Ashmole and Charbonneaux, was wise enough to warn his readers in a Preface that his discussions of Classical art were 'peppered with heresies, some intentional, some, no doubt, due to ignorance': would that we were all so honest.

A certain 'genteel aestheticism' may be associated with this style of art history, but I doubt that it is typically 'British'. One can admire Bernard Berenson for his prose style (as even Hemingway did), whatever one thinks of connoisseurship as a practice, and regardless of its attendant snobbishness, conservatism, etc. And as for the crime of citing a sentence written by Ernst Buschor (p. 18) without telling readers about Buschor's politics, I make no apology: the fact is well known, and we do not burn Samos excavation reports because their author became an enthusiast for the Third Reich. (It is usual to cite Martin Heidegger without reporting the saga of Heidegger's National Socialism: e.g. R.T. Neer, *The Emergence of the Classical Style in Greek Sculpture*, p. 12).

'At the very moment that Greek nationalists are beating up African immigrants in the Peloponnese, S. blithely endorses ethnic essentialism.' Of course I do no such thing. I make a case for (Ionian) Greeks in the Nile Delta producing, in the sixth century BC, statues that were recognizably 'Greek' rather than done in some Greco-Egyptian *Gemischstil*. From the standpoint of a modern liberal it might be pleasant to contemplate our ancient Greeks as 'multicultural' in outlook. But it would strain the evidence, I fear – not to mention threaten an academic industry of defining 'the Greeks and the Other'.

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Enough: in the spirit of the Platonic Academy these responses should be offered as 'amicable confutations', and not *ad nauseam*. One reason for writing the book in the first place was to indicate how much of our knowledge in this field is hypothetical, even when based upon such methods as *Kopienforschung*. Richard Neer has himself offered a thoughtful, and thought-provoking, hypothesis about the original effect and

conception of sculpture in the Archaic to Classical period (*The Emergence of the Classical Style in Greek Sculpture*); itself proof that old statues, 'familiar' as some of them may seem, can yet generate fresh approaches. If my book appears to narrow rather than expand the '*intellectual options*' of Classical archaeology, I can only say that such is the very opposite of its intent, and I sorely regret the implied failure of communication.

Nigel Spivey

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ps And if my drawing of the Parthenon horse-head looks like an '*impromptu sketch*', I would have the world know that it took several attempts, each involving hours not minutes, to get a satisfactory result.

pps I resent being called 'Wagnerian'. I do not like Wagner.