

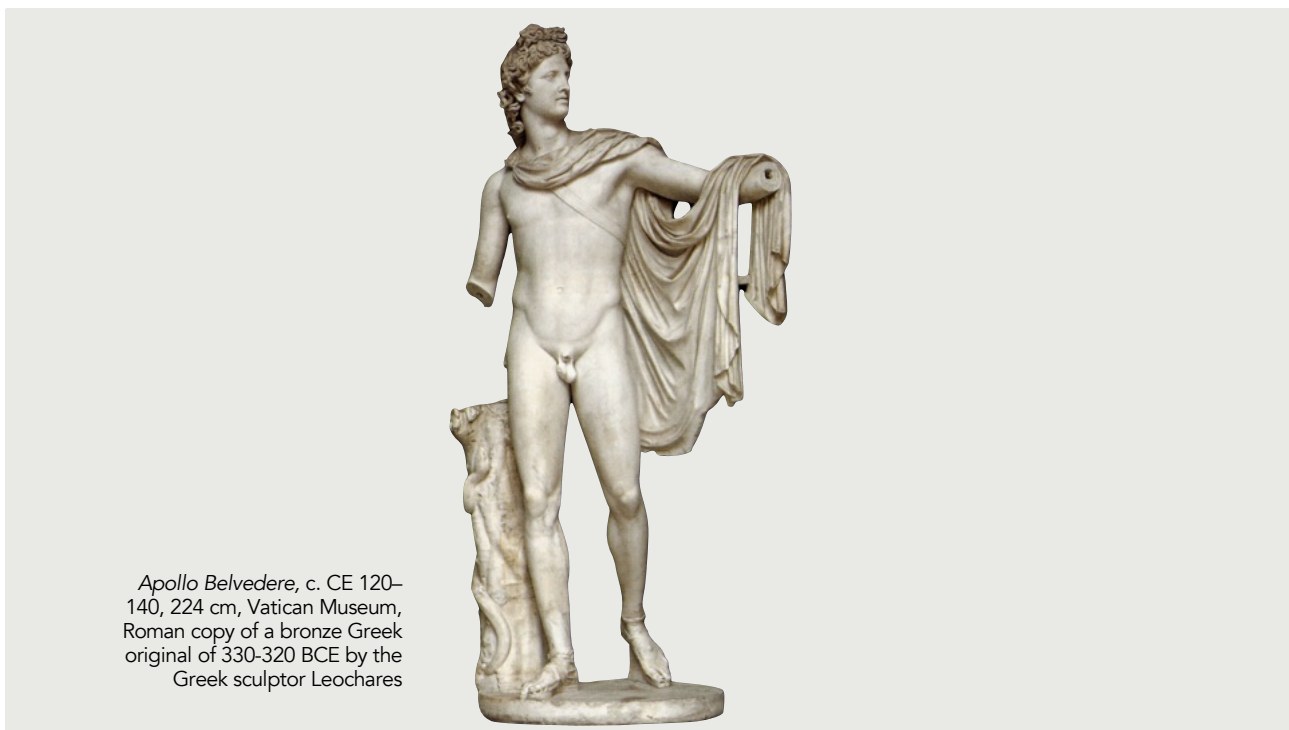
- I start with a brief introduction to Greek sculpture which I intended to expand. However, it struck me that the chronological development of Greek sculpture can be found in many books and I thought it would be more interesting today to raise more fundamental questions about our understanding or rather our lack of understanding of the role and context of art in antiquity.
- All we can do is interpret classical works based on our present day cultural assumptions and our limited knowledge from the few remaining objects and texts. We often take it for granted that we understand an artwork but even the simplest questions of why, what and when make it clear that we can easily slip into interpreting works from the point of view of our culture.
- Often what we regard as common sense hides some fundamental assumptions that are part of our culture. By giving examples and raising questions I will show the difficulty of seeing artworks in the context of an alien culture.
- I start with sculpture but the majority of the works shown are mosaics and paintings. This is a particularly difficult area as very few wall paintings remain from antiquity and the majority come from two Roman sites—Pompeii and Herculaneum.

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REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT

- The talks are given to a small group of people and all the proceeds, after the cost of the hall is deducted, are given to charity.
- The notes are based on information found on the public websites of Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
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Apollo Belvedere, c. CE 120–140, 224 cm, Vatican Museum, Roman copy of a bronze Greek original of 330-320 BCE by the Greek sculptor Leochares

- Antiquity began to be rediscovered and invented during the Renaissance fuelled by the discovery of statues like this which had remained buried for over 1,000 years.
- 'Renaissance' is a French word that means rebirth and it was seen as the rebirth of the art and glory of the Greek and Roman civilisations. Surprisingly, the word did not appear in print with its current meaning until the middle of the nineteenth century (1855) and it was associated with the end of what was called the 'Dark Ages'. So, the Renaissance itself was in some ways a later invention.
- This statue is one of the earliest found and is called the **Apollo Belvedere** as it was thought to represent the god Apollo. It is a Roman copy of an original Greek sculpture in bronze and was discovered in the late 15th century and was displayed in the Villa Belvedere in the Vatican City in 1511, so it was called the Apollo Belvedere.
- In the eighteenth century the person who can be regarded as the creator of art history, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), described its "**noble simplicity and quiet grandeur**" and regarded it as the best example of the perfection of the Greek sculpture.
- It became a symbol of the Enlightenment and was praised by Goethe, Schiller and Byron and came to represent the aesthetic ideal, an idealised image in pure white marble. Our museums are full of these white marble statues and we have come to associated white marble with the perfection and high point of the sculptor's art.

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Augustus of Prima Porta, statue of the emperor Augustus, 1st century CE. Vatican Museums

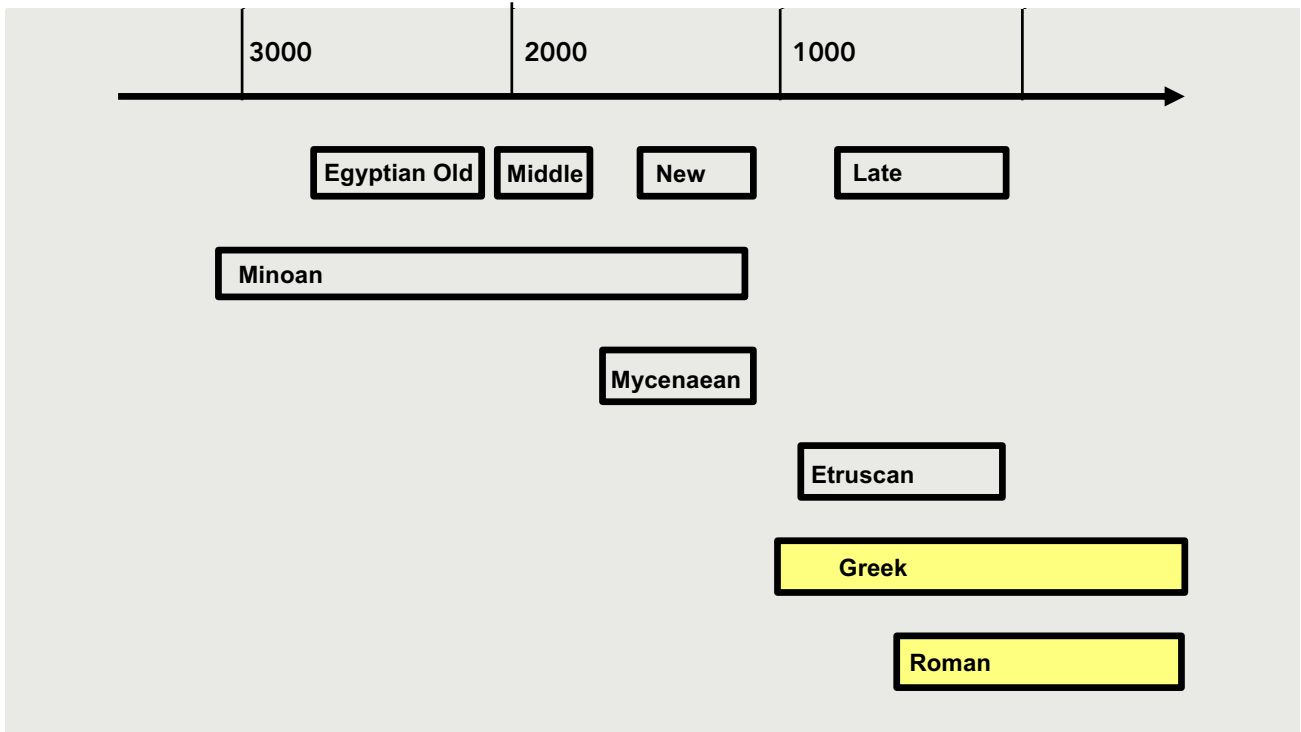
- This statue was discovered in 1863, during archaeological excavations at the Villa of Livia owned by Augustus's (63 BCE - 14 CE, age 75) third and final wife, Livia Drusilla (59 BCE - 29 CE, age 86-7) in Prima Porta, north of Rome.
- Traces of paint were found and scholars began to accept that the ancients painted the marble. This had been known for some time but everyone found it hard to accept. (CLICK) This is an example of a modern reconstruction. This realisation was such a profound shock to our aesthetic appreciation that even today painted sculptures are seen as slightly kitsch. Yet in antiquity it was perfectly normal so clearly they had a different relationship with the sculptures. This points to a deeper misunderstanding that I would like to explore, namely the day-to-day role of art, not as aesthetic object but as a practical statement, much as we might use in an advertisement or a decorative item. This applies particularly to Roman rather than Greek art.

NOTES

- Livia married Augustus in 37 BCE. After Augustus died in AD 14, her son Tiberius (42 BCE - 37 CE, age 77) became emperor and she continued to exert political influence until her death in 29 CE. She was the great-grandmother of the emperor Caligula (12-41, aged 28, reigned 37-41), grandmother of the emperor Claudius (10 BCE - 54 CE, aged 63, reigned 41-54), and the great-great-grandmother of the emperor Nero (37-68, aged 30, reigned 54-68).

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus_of_Prima_Porta



- First, when was antiquity? Broadly, it is any period of ancient civilisation before the Middle Ages. Today, I am specifically talking about classical antiquity, shown in yellow.

NOTES

- The exact dates depend on what point is taken as the start and end. The timeline first proposed by Sir Arthur Evans was:
 - Egyptian Old Kingdom 2700-2200 BCE
 - Egyptian Middle Kingdom MK (ca. 2000-1800 BCE),
 - Egyptian New Kingdom 1550-1077 BCE
 - Minoan 3100-1100 BCE
 - Mycenaean 1600-1100 BCE
 - Etruscan 900-27 BCE
 - Ancient Greece 1000 BCE - 600 CE
 - Ancient Rome 753 BCE - 480 CE
- I have modified this slightly



Kouros, 530 BC

Korē ('young woman'), c. 530 BC, Peplos Athena dedicated to the goddess Athena. Every year in Athens a peplos (a one-piece woollen woven dress) was presented to the goddess Athena during the Panathenaic festival during August.

GEOMETRIC (c. 1200 BC TO c. 800 BC)

- Starting at the beginning, the earliest period of Greek art is characterised largely by geometric designs on vases. It flourished towards the end of the Greek Dark Age and its centre was in Athens, and from there the style spread among the trading cities of the Aegean.

ARCHAIC (800 BCE TO SECOND PERSIAN INVASION IN 480 BC)

- This was followed by the Archaic period, shown here, around 800 BCE until the second Persian invasion of 480 BCE about three hundred years. Very little two-dimensional art remains from the early Greek period although it was produced and the art that remains is also mostly Roman copies of Greek originals.
- If we focus on sculpture, the earliest Greek art consists of stylised, rigid life-size figures that, in the twentieth century became known as kouros (young man, singular pronounced 'kOR-os', plural kouroi) and korē (young woman, singular pronounced 'kOR-ay', plural korai), carved from limestone, later marble.
- Some early statues were made of bronze but most have been lost as the metal was valuable and was reused for other purposes. The few bronze statues we have were buried (like the Charioteer at Delphi) or found in shipwrecks (like the Antikythera Youth).
- Note that male kouros were naked and female korai were clothed and I have shown an example of the brightly coloured chiton women wore at the time (the peplos was a

looser fitting garment).

- Women in ancient Greece had **few rights** in comparison to male citizens. They were unable to vote, own land, or inherit, a woman's place was in the home and their purpose in life was the rearing of children.
- However, **Spartan women** were treated somewhat differently and they had to do physical training like men, were permitted to own land, and could drink wine. Girls were educated but with an emphasis on dancing, gymnastics, and musical accomplishment.
- Young women were expected to marry as a virgin at the age of 13 or 14, and marriage was usually organised by their father or guardian, who chose the husband and accepted from him a dowry. There was no role in Greek society for single mature females. Contact with non-family males was discouraged and women occupied their time with indoor activities such as weaving. They could visit the homes of friends and were able to participate in public religious ceremonies and festivals but not public assemblies. We do not know if they could attend theatre performances. A woman's name was not mentioned in public.
- Slavery was widely accepted and slaves worked on farms, in quarries and mines and as domestic servants. There is little known about slaves as little was written about them. An Athenian household would own one to four slaves and someone would need to be very poor to own no slaves. They were acquired through war or piracy or were bought at the market and there were many categories of enslavement. They lacked rights but "even the most worthless slave could not be put to death without trial".

NOTES

- Black Figure pottery from early 7th century BC to Red Figure from about 530 BC

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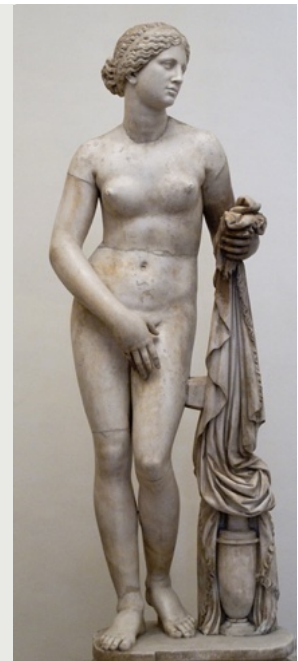
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Polykleitos (5th century BC), *Doryphoros* (Spear-bearer), Roman marble copy



Myron (480-440 BC), *Discobolus* (discus thrower), British Museum



Praxiteles, The Ludovisi Cnidian Aphrodite

Polykleitos (5th century BC), *Doryphoros* (Spear-bearer), **Roman marble copy**

Myron (480-440 BC), *Discobolus* (discus thrower), British Museum, with incorrectly restored head, **Roman marble copy**

Praxiteles, The Ludovisi Cnidian Aphrodite, **Roman marble copy** (torso and thighs) with restored head, arms, legs and drapery support, National Museum of Rome

CLASSICAL PERIOD (480-323 BCE)

- The Classical Period lasted about 200 years and started with the death of the last Athenian tyrant and independence from the Persian Empire.
- Classical Greece had a powerful influence on the Roman Empire and on the foundations of Western civilization. **Much of modern Western politics, artistic thought, scientific thought, theatre, literature, and philosophy derives from this short period of Greek history.**
- The most famous building of this period was the **Parthenon** (447-432 BCE) designed by Phidias. Looking at these statues by Polykleitos, Myron and Praxiteles you can see that figure sculpture became more naturalistic. Note that all these statues are Roman marble copies probably of Greek bronze figures.
- It was in this period that sculpted figures adopted a contrapposto stance. The word describes a human figure standing with most of its weight on one foot so that its shoulders and arms twist off-axis from the hips and legs. This gives the figure a more dynamic, or alternatively relaxed appearance. Contrapposto was an extremely important sculptural development as it marks the first time in Western art that the human body was captured at a frozen moment in time, mid-action and so used to express a psychological disposition. The static, balanced stance of the kourai suggests the perfect, ideal man but contrapposto creates an individual real man and the point of movement.

- We know the name of the individual sculptors from this period:
 - **Phidias** (493-430 BC) oversaw the **building of the Parthenon** (447-432 BC), statue of Zeus at Olympia (now lost) and the statue of Athena Parthenos in the Parthenon (now lost). The Parthenon itself replaced an older temple of Athena, which historians call the Pre-Parthenon or Older Parthenon, that was destroyed in the Persian invasion of 480 BC. The Parthenon is regarded as an enduring symbol of Ancient Greece, Athenian democracy and Western civilization, and one of the world's greatest cultural monuments. To the Athenians who built it, the Parthenon and other Periclean monuments of the Acropolis were seen fundamentally as a celebration of Hellenic victory over the Persian invaders and as a thanksgiving to the gods for that victory. From 1800 to 1803, Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin removed some of the surviving sculptures with permission from the Turks of the Ottoman Empire. The *firman* or certificate of authorization from Sultan Selim III reads 'When they wish to take away some pieces of stone with old inscriptions and figures, no opposition be made'. These sculptures, now known as the Elgin Marbles or the Parthenon Marbles, were sold in 1816 to the British Museum in London, where they are now displayed.
 - **Polykleitos** (5th century BC), **Doryphorus** (Spear-bearer), produced a canon of the ideal proportions (now lost)
 - **Myron** (480-440 BC), **Discobolus** (discus thrower). He is known for making a bronze heifer that was mistaken for a real cow
 - **Praxiteles** (400-330 BC) **Aphrodite of Knidos**, made the nude respectable from the Late Classical (350 BC onwards). It is one of the first life-sized representations of the nude female form in Greek history. The *Aphrodite of Knidos* was commissioned as the cult statue for the Temple of Aphrodite at Knidos. It depicted the goddess Aphrodite as she prepared for the ritual bath that restored her purity, discarding her drapery with one hand, while modestly shielding herself with the other. Praxiteles produced a clothed and an unclothed version of Aphrodite. The clothed version was purchased by the city of Cos and the unclothed by Knidos. **The statue would have been polychromed** and there are stories that it aroused men sexually. Nigel Spivey argues that she was not a 'pin-up' but designed to be attractive to both male hetero- and homosexual modes of desire. The statue brought much fame to Knidos and many tourists and the statue was used on their coins. It was one of the most widely copied statues in the

ancient world.

NOTES

- Age of Tyrants was c. 650-510 BCE. The best known was the Athenian tyrant Draco (c. 621 BCE) who was the first to put law into writing but his laws were so callous that they gave rise to the word 'draconian'. Stealing fruit could lead to a death sentence giving rise to the problem that murder and temple robbing could not result in a more severe penalty.

HELLENISTIC



Lysippos, Alexander, Roman copy of a herma by Lysippos, Louvre Museum



Alexandros of Antioch, Venus de Milo, 130-100 BC, Louvre



Laocoön and His Sons, attributed by Pliny to Agesander, Athenodoros and Polydorus



Dying Gaul, a Roman marble copy of a Hellenistic work of the late 3rd century BC. Capitoline Museums, Rome

Lysippos, Alexander, Roman copy of a herma by Lysippos, Louvre Museum. Plutarch reports that sculptures by Lysippos were the most faithful. Hermes-type bust (pillar with the top as a sculpted head) of Alexander the Great called *Hermes Azara*. Bears the inscription: "*Alexander [the Great], son of Philip, [king of] Macedonia.*" Copy of the Imperial Roman Era (1st or 2nd century CE) of a bronze sculpture made by Lysippos. Found in Tivoli, East of Rome, Italy. Pentelic marble, region of Athens.

Alexandros of Antioch, Venus de Milo, 130-100 BC, Louvre

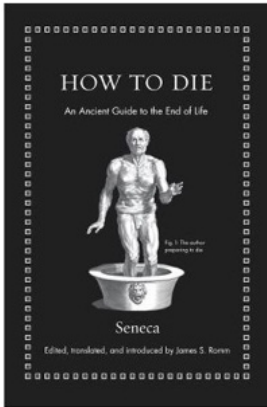
Laocoön and His Sons, attributed by Pliny to Agesander, Athenodoros and Polydorus, we do not know if this is an original work or a copy of an earlier sculpture, probably in bronze, or made for a Greek or Roman commission.

Dying Gaul, a Roman marble copy of a Hellenistic work of the late 3rd century BC. Capitoline Museums, Rome. An Ancient Roman marble copy of a lost Hellenistic sculpture, thought to have been originally executed in bronze. The original may have been commissioned some time between 230 and 220 BC by Attalus I of Pergamon to celebrate his victory over the Galatians, the Celtic or Gaulish people of parts of Anatolia (modern Turkey). The identity of the sculptor of the original is unknown.

HELLENISTIC PERIOD

- Finally, the period following the **conquests of Alexander the Great** (336-323 BC) is known as the Hellenistic Period. The sculpture includes portraits, nude female figures and figures showing the **extremes of emotion**. It is sometimes seen as overwrought and therefore indicating the decline of Greek civilisation.
- Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) created one of the largest empires of the ancient world by the age of thirty, stretching from Greece to north-western India. He was undefeated in battle and is widely considered one of history's most successful military commanders. This portrait bust is assumed to be one of the few accurate

representations as Lysippus (4th century BC) was his official sculptor.



Seneca (trans. E. F. Watling), *How to Die: An Ancient Guide to the End of Life*, published February 2018



Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), *The Dying Seneca*, 185 x 154.7 cm, Bavarian State Painting Collections, Munich

Dying Seneca, 2nd century, black marble and alabaster, basin: purple breccia, height 1.8m, Louvre



The Old Fisherman or *Dying Seneca*, 2nd century CE, black marble and alabaster, basin: purple breccia, height 1.8m, Louvre

Old Fisherman Vatican-Louvre, also known as *Dying Seneca*, statue: black marble and alabaster, (modern) basin: purple breccia, **Roman copy of the 2nd century after an original Hellenistic statue**, found in Rome.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), *The Dying Seneca*, 185 x 154.7 cm, Bavarian State Painting Collections, Munich

Seneca (trans. E. F. Watling), *How to Die: An Ancient Guide to the End of Life*, published February 2018

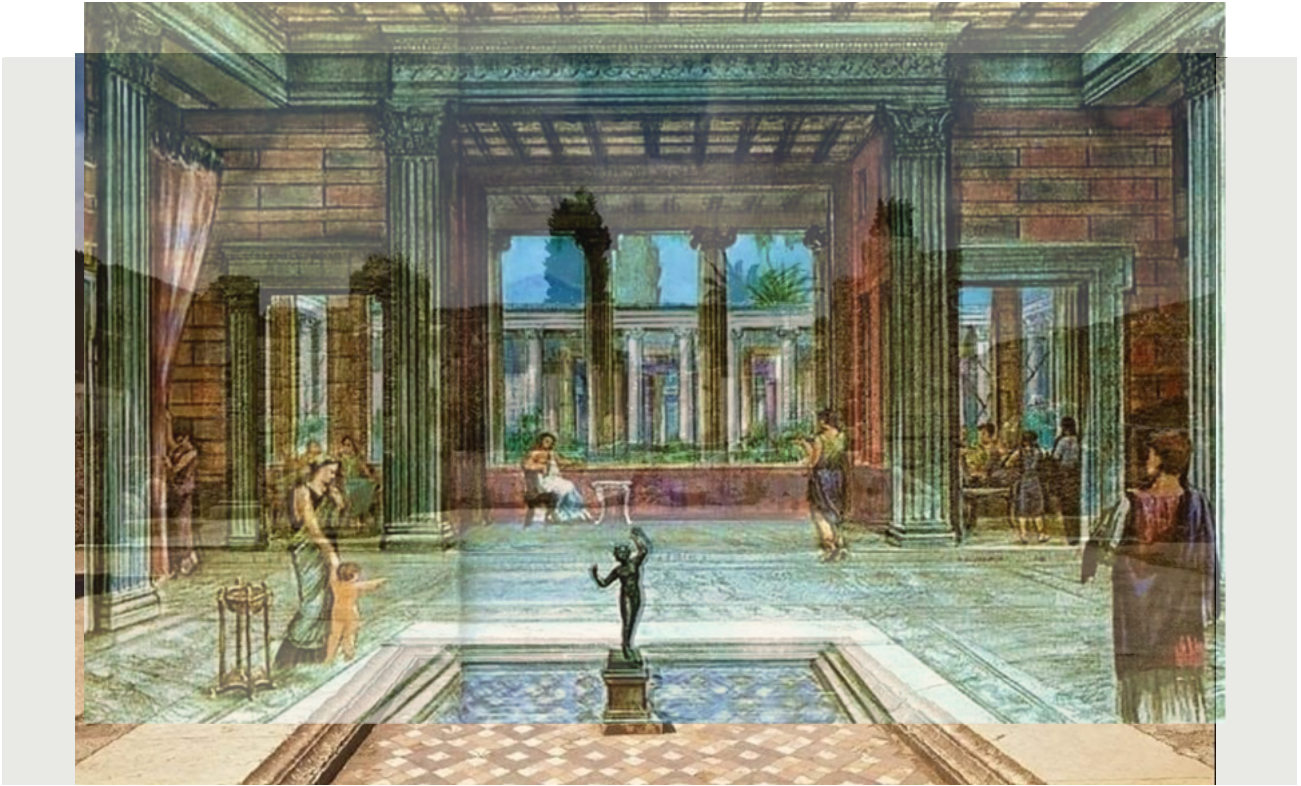
- With that background in Greek art let us look more closely at a particular work in the Louvre.
- In 65 CE there was a botched attempt to assassinate Nero (37-68, aged 30, reigned 54-68). One of those rounded up as a conspirator was **Nero's old tutor Seneca**. He was 'invited' to take his own life and chose to open the veins of his arms, wrists and legs and step into a warm bath.
- (CLICK) Seneca had written this book, *How to Die*, that provided guidelines to Romans on the most noble way to die.
- Fifteen hundred years later a statue surfaced in Rome appearing to immortalise his death. His face is scored with the pain and yet we see the fortitude and resignation of the philosopher.
- (CLICK) **Rubens was so moved by the statue that he based his painting *Death of Seneca*** on the statue and there was extravagant praise from intellectuals. Another admirer, Napoleon Bonaparte brought the statue back for his new museum, the Louvre, although by this period the haggard upturned face was already seen as

disgusting.

- When the statue was first found it was missing its eyes, parts of the face, both legs from the crotch to below the knees and probably both arms from below the armpits, and it was not standing in a basin. **So a large part of the work is a Renaissance restoration that was created to inspire us with a famous figure from antiquity in his moment of glory.** You might also be wondering about the yellow belt. It was also added in the Renaissance with the supporting pillar you can see between its legs.
- Note the basin or small bath in the painting and on the book cover. To add authenticity the Louvre placed the statue in a basin like this but around 1900 it removed the basin and mounted it on a concrete plinth. In the late 1990s it was put back onto the basin, perhaps in recognition of the role of the restoration in the history of the piece.
- **The attribution to Seneca was doubted** by some scholars including the father of modern art history, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) and today it is called ***The Old Fisherman***. Over a dozen similar figures have now been found wearing belts or loin cloths but none of them has such bent knees with the torso bent straight.
- **We invent stories around our discoveries that fit the aspirations of the period** and how these change over the years. Remains are modified, 'restored' and tampered with and identifications change as controversies rise and fall. The image is still being used to illustrate the death of Seneca.

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The **House of the Faun**, Pompeii, **2nd century BC**, repaired/rebuilt after the **earthquake of 62 CE**. It was owned by the **Cassius family** which had married into the *gens* or **clan Satria**. It was first excavated in **1830** and contained the famous **Alexander mosaic**. We see the **atrium** of the house, a courtyard open to the sky and containing an **impluvium** for catching the rain water. The **statue of the faun** was originally at the edge of the impluvium. The impluvium was semi-permeable and it allowed rain water to slowly drain into a cistern below which could be accessed by a cover, ropes and buckets. Excess water in the winter drained out of the house and in the hot summer water would be brought from outside by servants and poured into the impluvium. The evaporating water would cool the entire atrium and surrounding rooms.

- Our most spectacular discovery of the ancient world was the uncovering of the ancient worlds of Pompeii and Herculaneum in the mid-eighteenth century. They were both buried by the same eruption of **Vesuvius in 79 CE**. The finds that began to be uncovered caused excitement across the whole of Europe and tourists flocked to see the sites. What was exciting was the idea that a complete civilization had been captured and we could imagine ourselves back in antiquity. **Everything had been caught**, graffiti, workmen's tools and the living quarters for the slaves. Despite the excitement no one at the time could have imaged the impact the discovery would make far into the future. Today we are still discussing and making discoveries at both sites and those sites form **virtually the only examples we have of ancient painting**. At the time of the eruption of Vesuvius, Pompeii was a town of modest size, with a population of around 11,000, and a thriving community with sophisticated architecture and infrastructure.
- One of the largest and most impressive private residences in Pompeii is The House of the Faun covers 3,000 square metres, an entire city block. The house has two enclosed gardens, a private bath system, kitchens, slave quarters, bedrooms, dining rooms for

summer and winter, a reception room and an office.

- I will spend some time looking at the wall and floor art in the House of the Faun as it gives a good idea of the way a wealthy Roman lived. What we are looking at is the outer atrium which is a room with an open skylight. A faun is an untamed woodland spirit and this bronze faun was originally at the edge of the impluvium which is often found in the centre of the atrium and is designed to catch the rainwater.
- The house was built in the 2nd century BC and rebuilt after the great earthquake of 62 CE. An inscription was found with the cognomen Saturninus suggesting the villa was owned by the important gens (clan) Satria. Also a ring was found with the family name Cassius was found indicating someone from the Cassii family married into the Satria family.
- In the entrance is a floor mosaic with the **greeting 'HAVE' (a variant of 'Ave') which is a greeting both for meeting and parting.**

ROMAN PERSONAL NAMING CONVENTIONS

- A Roman name consisted of a praenomen, nomen and cognomen (the tria nomina). It is the basis of modern naming conventions and differed from the way names were constructed in other civilizations. The nomen was the hereditary family name which identified the person as belonging to a particular gens or clan. The nomen could be followed by the personal name of their father or sometimes their mother. The cognomen was a sort of sub-tribe and could be personal or hereditary or both.
- The format and structure of names changed through Roman history and during the Roman Republic the praenomen and nomen were the essential elements. The cognomen was used by the Roman aristocracy and not often by the plebeians. By the imperial period the cognomen became the principal distinguishing element of the name and from the second century onwards the nomen and cognomen were the important elements. The cognomen could be enhanced by the addition of a fourth name, the agnomen, which might refer to a famous victory, for example Quintus Caecilius Metellus Numidicus (conqueror of Numidia). The upper-class Romans generally referred to each other using their cognomen as we do today, for example, Marcus Tullius Cicero is Cicero, and Gaius Julius Caesar is Caesar.
- Women's names evolved differently and by the end of the Republic most women did not use or have a praenomina and were called by their nomen

alone.

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The Alexander Mosaic, c. 100 BCE, mosaic, 273 x 513 cm, National Archaeological Museum, Naples, originally House of the Faun, Pompeii

- The **Alexander Mosaic**, dating from **circa 100 BC**, is a Roman floor mosaic in the National Archaeological Museum, Naples, originally from the **House of the Faun** in Pompeii. It is believed to depict a battle between the armies of **Alexander the Great** and **Darius III of Persia** (2.72 by 5.13 metres). The mosaic is believed to be a **copy** of an early 3rd-century BC **Hellenistic painting**.
- It is one of the most extraordinary works to have survived from antiquity. A vast mosaic floor unearthed in 1831 that has always been (CLICK) thought to show Alexander the Great routing Darius, the king of Persia in 330 BCE. There are **2.5 to 5.5 million tesserae** in total in five main colours. The scene is **a turning point in a battle**. (CLICK) The figures on the left are surging forward while the figures on the right are in turmoil. In particular, the tallest figure turns to look back even though his charioteer has already turned away and is whipping his team of black horses to carry them off as fast as possible. (CLICK) One of the soldiers has been caught out by the turning point of the battle and is about to be crushed under the wheel of the flying chariot. We can see a last glimpse of his face reflected in his shield a moment before he is crushed. (CLICK)
- Alexander became a legendary leader to the Romans and to subsequent generations up to the present day. It was the convention to show the enemy as noble and therefore worthy opponents as this heightened the victory **was intended to evoke feelings of pity or sadness** (pathos) for the enemy.
- We do not know how the **mosaic arrived** in Pompeii. It may have been **bodily transported from Greece**, alternatively, it has been suggested it is the work of **Italian craftsmen copying an earlier Greek painting** that may have dated from the time of Alexander the Great. All of these different theories are based on references and other

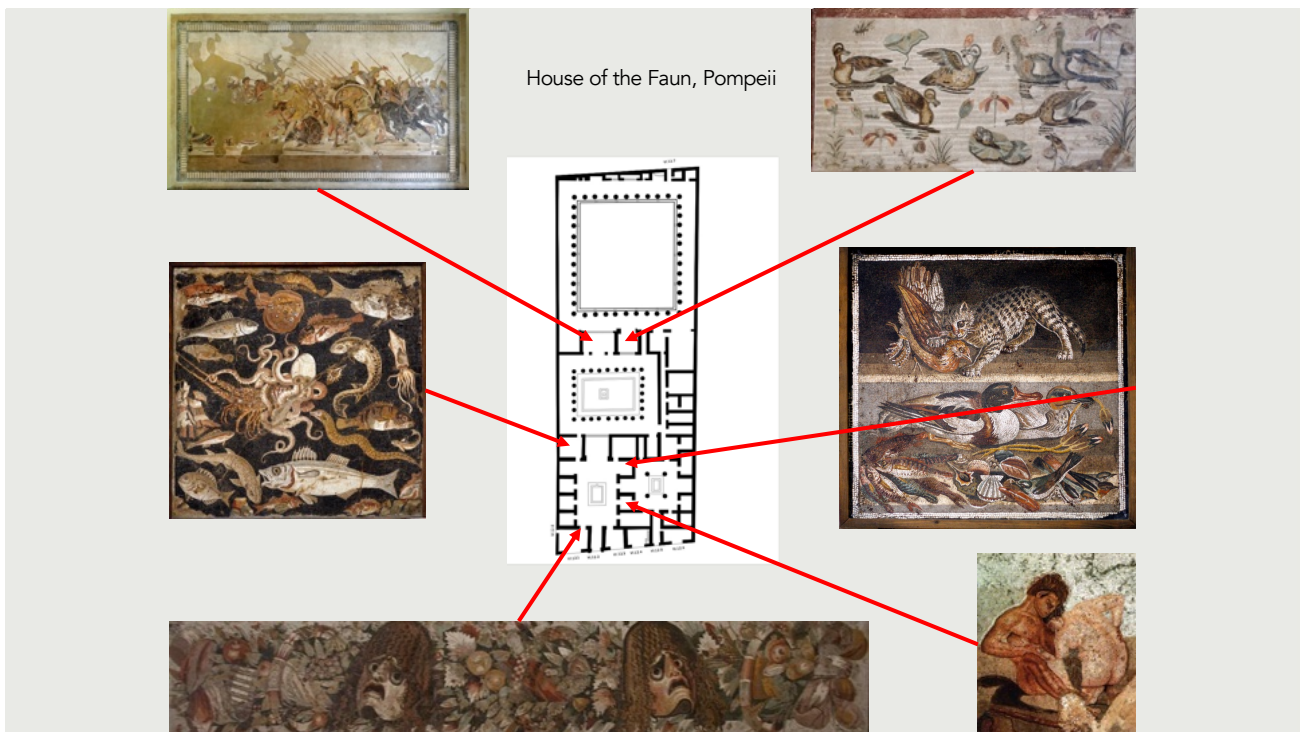
clues from the past. For example, **Pliny the Elder mentions a Greek painting** of a *Battle of Alexander against Darius* by Philoxenos of Eretria in the Macedonian court.

- Many mosaics and paintings from the **Roman period copy or are variations on a Greek original**. This would have **been known and appreciated by visitors** to the house. A great deal of research today consists of finding or usually **speculating about a Greek original**. There was an active trade in plunder, purchase and copying original works and there was a long tradition of easel painting in Greece and Rome but little if anything survives and scholars scour texts for any hint of an artist, painting, style or critical judgement.
- Today we value the original and regard copies as inferior. However, it is likely that Romans regarded Greek culture as a **lesser culture to their own but one associated with the origination and production of better art**. The Roman writer Horace said: 'Gracia capta ferum victorem cepit' (the conquered Greece conquered the barbarian conqueror).
- Roman women had to live and eat with their husband and homosexuality was considered a vice. Greek women had to live and eat in a different room, men mixed with men and homosexual relations were common. The Romans adopted a great deal of Greek culture (the arts, literature, philosophy, the alphabet, weights and measures, coinage, gods and cults and temple buildings) but they did conquer Greece and so would have regarded them as a lesser culture. It became a must for every rich young Roman to study in Athens or Rhodes and learn to speak Greek but some Romans did not trust the Greeks and thought that adopting Greek customs would lead to degeneration and the fall of Rome.

Note

- If it does represent the victory of Alexander the Great over Darius III and the Persians at the Battle of Gaugamela (331 BC) then it shows one of Alexander's greatest victories. The Persians easily had double the number of troops as the Macedonians and they came prepared for victory with scythed chariots and the largest cavalry force that had ever been assembled up till then. Darius expected Alexander to outflank him as he had done previously but this time Alexander changed strategy. It is said that Alexander rejected a night attack as it would steal a victory. The next morning Alexander overslept and his men were well fed and relaxed. Darius's men had stayed awaked the whole night fearing an attack.

Alexander feigned an all out attack on the right wing and Darius moved the troops in his centre to his left wing. Alexander held off an outflanking manoeuvre and his infantry held the centre. He suddenly turned his elite troops to the centre and launched an all out attack on Darius himself. Alexander came close to Darius and flung his spear narrowly missing him. Darius tried to turn his chariot but was prevented by dead bodies so he fled on a horse. This led to confusion and disarray among his troops and Alexander achieving a total victory. Darius was later killed by one of his officers and Alexander found the body and buried him with full military honours in Persepolis, the former capital of the Persian Empire.



House of the Faun, Pompeii, 3,000 sq. m.

- National Archaeological Museum, Naples, originally House of the Faun, Pompeii (left to right and down)
 - The Alexander Mosaic, c. 100 BCE, mosaic, 273 x 513 cm,
 - Nilotic scene, a series of three mosaics that include a crocodile and a hippo
 - Seafood
 - Cat and Bird, Ducks
 - Masks, Fruit and Flowers
 - Mosaic, Satyr & Nymph
- **The House of the Faun was the largest surviving house in Pompeii** and its area of 3,000 sq.m. could have contained up to a dozen standard houses. The house had **many mosaics of which about ten are preserved** in the Naples Archaeological Museum. I will concentrate on a few of these to make a point about how differently we see these works from the Romans.
- The range of subjects at Pompeii far exceeds the mythological, there still-lives, portraits, landscapes and an enormous range of naked bodies ranging from the modern idea of an artistic nude to what we would see as pornography.
- In ancient Rome prestige and power had to be demonstrated by the **display of opulence**. Outside all the houses looked the same although some were larger than others. Inside the wealthy demonstrated their power through gardens with vistas, mosaics, sculptures and paintings. The owner of the house was the lead actor in this theatre of display and everyone else played minor roles designed to enhance his

prestige. The House of the Faun occupied an entire block and had two gardens, two courtyards and many rooms for receiving and entertaining guests. Houses were not as packed with furniture as ours but a house like this would have had table and chairs, divans, cupboards, candelabra, vases and silverware. The images range from **sealife to erotic displays of nudity**. At the entrance is the word 'H A V E' (Welcome) picked out in mosaic.

- The house had stood on the site for 300 years and so the meaning and use of the images must have changed over time. The house and the images were also modified and repaired, for example following the severe earthquake that had occurred 17 years previously. The town of Pompeii became an ally of Rome and it was then 'Romanised' and forcibly settled by a large number of retired Roman soldiers. It is likely all the major mosaics were installed as early as the second century BCE in which case by the time of the eruption they would have become period pieces and referred as such.



Mosaic, Satyr & Nymph, from the House of the Faun in Pompeii, now in the Archaeological Museum in Naples

Mosaic, Satyr & Nymph, from the House of the Faun in Pompeii, now in the Archaeological Museum in Naples

SEX

- One area where the Romans differed from us was in their **attitude to sex** and the representation of the naked body. When Pompeii was **first excavated all erotic images were regarded as associated with brothels** and were locked away in the Archaeological Museum in Naples. They could only be viewed by respectable adult males by appointment. More and more finds were found and increasingly elaborate reasons were found to explain why they were found in association with respectable houses. Today it is thought that the Romans had a much more open view of the body and it is not clear that what we call erotic was a concept they possessed.
- This mosaic was found in the side chamber of the main atrium of the House of the Faun and we do not know whether it was a semi-private room for relaxing inhibitions or simply another tasteful decoration of a mythical scene.
- When Pompeii and Herculaneum were being excavated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many images and works were uncovered that were considered obscene. When the only visitors were **aristocrats on the Grand Tour** this was not considered a problem but as the works were placed in public museum it was felt the public had to be protected. In 1821 the National Archaeological Museum in Naples put **all such objects in its Secret Museum (*Gabinetto Segreto*)** and the doorway was bricked up in 1849. At Pompeii frescoes deemed to be obscene had locked metal covers placed over them and only men 'of mature age and respected morals' could see them on payment of a fee. **This practice continued until the 1960s.** The modern work 'pornography' and the modern concept developed during this period. **What was**

regarded as natural by the Romans and interesting on the Grand Tour had **become so shocking it was hidden away and never discussed.**

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Wall painting from peristyle in the House of L. Carcilius Lucundus, Pompeii

Wall painting from peristyle in the House of L. Carcilius Lucundus, Pompeii

- This is a bedroom scene found on the **wall of a courtyard garden in another house in Pompeii**. There is a person in the background which some interpreters have seen as heightening the sensuality. However, **others see it as a servant who is conventionally waiting to take care of the couple's every need**. So it could be anything from titillating and erotic to the celebration of married love.
- **The Romans had no words that distinguished between heterosexual and homosexual sex or love**. The shame associated with looking at what we call pornography (a nineteenth century term) would have been quite alien to them. However, this did not mean that anything was accepted. **Sex was based on power** so a person of prestige would not engage in certain acts such as performing oral sex and male penetration as the receiving partner.
- Sappho of Lesbos refers to same-sex relations between women and there is an image of two females engaged in sexual activities from the Suburban Baths in Pompeii.
- **Unlike the Greeks, public nudity was frowned upon and athletes kept their genitals and buttocks covered**. This is probably because nudity was associated with defeat (defeated enemy was first stripped naked) and with slaves and servitude.
- **Rape was illegal and the rapist was subject to execution, a rare penalty in Roman law**. However, **a slave could not be raped as he or she was considered property** and not legally a person but a slave's owner could prosecute for property damage.
- The worst crimes in Roman law were the rape of a freeborn male, patricide, the rape of a female virgin and robbing a temple.
- Interestingly, it was **illegal to use obscene language in front of a freeborn male or female child** although boys were allowed to tell obscene jokes at weddings as it was

thought to promote fertility.

- **Prostitution was legal** throughout the Roman Empire in all periods. Most prostitutes were slaves or freedwomen and could have sex with a married man without him committing adultery.

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Wall paintings from the brothels of Pompeii



Wall paintings from the brothels of Pompeii

- **A strong and active sex market was considered essential for the successful functioning of society and particularly for a successful marriage.** Marriages were arranged and a husband was not expected to seek sexual pleasure from his wife and out of respect for her would pay for pleasurable sex.
- There were many brothels in Pompeii and some of them still contain the original wall paintings. It is thought these were to titillate clients or they acted as a form of menu. The women worked in cells barely big enough for a single bed and many have no window. Most sex workers were slaves and so property and so no one cared about their conditions. **Freeborn women were not allowed to have intercourse with anyone except their husbands so the clients were exclusively men.**

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<https://theconversation.com/the-grim-reality-of-the-brothels-of-pompeii-88853>

Pompeii, House of the Vettii,
Priapus wall painting, entrance,
west wall, north part, 62-79 CE



Pompeii, House of the Vettii, Priapus wall painting, entrance, west wall, north part, 62-79 CE

- The most startling images to our eyes are the phallic images which appear everywhere (until they were locked away in the Archaeological Museum).
- **The phallus was the symbol of the male dominated society** and it was also a **good luck token against evil spirits**. It was **completely devoid of shame or embarrassment** and was used for everything from wind chimes to the shape of loaves as a sign of good health and good luck. It was displayed everywhere, as a shop sign, inside houses and as here, at an entrance
- The painted Priapus in the doorway guarded the house from evil spirits in two ways, by demonstrating male fertility and by provoking laughter. The phallus provides safety from demons thought to lurk in liminal spaces. The phallus also brought **prosperity to businesses and often appeared in shops and bakeries**.
- It was not sexual except in an obvious sense but represented a **genial guardian god**. We do not know to what **extent it was humorous** but here it is being used as a counterbalance of some scales that are being used to weigh a sack.
- In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was stored away so it could only be seen by male adults in the Naples National Archaeological Museum as it was regarded as obscene.



Achilles Discovered on Skyros, House of Dioscuri (above), Achilles (top right), and Apollo (mosaic, bottom right), Pompeii



Achilles Discovered on Skyros, House of Dioscuri (above), Achilles (top right), and Apollo (mosaic, bottom right), Pompeii

- Let us switch from sex to a **well-known classical story** and see the **different ways in which it was interpreted** as this throws light on the way in which images were copied and used.
- **Pliny the Elder** is an important source of information about art. He mentions a work by Athenion of Maroneia in northern Greece of '**Achilles concealed in girl's clothes as Ulysses finds him out**'. Achilles was **hidden by his mother as a girl** among the **daughters of a king** on a **remote island** because she knew that if he went to Troy he would die. The other Greeks knew that **only Achilles could help them win the war against Troy** so they sent their most cunning representative, Ulysses (Odysseus in Greek) with a companion, Diomedes. Ulysses took gifts for the king's daughters and included a suit of armour. As the girls examine the gifts he blows a war trumpet and **Achilles instinctively reaches out for the armour**.
- It is interesting how close they are indicating they are not interpretations of the original story but variations of a original picture thought to be by the Greek artist Athenion.
- In all three we see **Achilles grabbing the shield** with Ulysses recognising him with a stare and Diomedes grabbing his arm. There is an **erotic charge** in the encounter emphasised by the framing of the group by the frontal exposed woman in the paintings and the naked rear view of the girl on the left. The larger painting would originally have had the same girl on the left. **The aggression** shown in the painting **on the left** heightened by **implication of the rape of Achilles dressed as a girl** can be compared with the **softer rendering of the scene on the upper right**. The painting on the **upper right** is generally **seen to be inferior** to the one on the left. Another difference is that in one Ulysses holds a spear and in the other fingers a sword. The spear points to an image on the shield

we can no longer see but the mosaic helps and it shows the **spear pointing to the young Achilles being taught the lyre by his mentor Chiron**. The **discipline and harmony of music were thought to be perfect training for his future role as a warrior** and so the spear can now be seen as a **pointer to his destiny** and the image can therefore be read as a statement of the inevitability of fate.

- We are **left with almost as many questions** as when we started. How do we know these paintings are related to Pliny's brief description? We don't and there are other representations of the story in other quite different paintings in Pompeii. Even if we did know they were based on a, then ancient, Greek original which one is closer to the original? Would we chose the one **we thought was 'best'**? And how do we account for the differences we have seen, were there different versions of the painting in Greece or were the variations the inspiration of local Italian craftsmen working in Pompeii. We do not even know if the **craftsmen were Italian as Greek craftsmen** were often employed by Romans.



- This image of **Leda and the Swan** was **discovered on Friday 16 November 2018** in the entrance to a bedroom in a villa on a main road in Pompeii. (CLICK) The image is very different from other more common portrayals of the story that were found in Pompeii and elsewhere, which don't often depict the sexual act and tend to show Leda standing while being pursued by the swan. The image of Leda has been painted to make it appear she is looking at whoever enters the bedroom.
- In Greek mythology Leda was an Aetolian princess who became a Spartan queen. **She was seduced by Zeus in the guise of a swan** while she lay in bed with her husband King Tyndareus and **she gave birth to Helen** ('Helen of Troy'), Clytemnestra, and Castor and Pollox. According to various accounts there were **two eggs** but which of her offspring were divine and which of her husband differs between accounts.
- Leda was a **popular subject** in ancient art and a common house decoration **but we don't know exactly how she was regarded**. It was used in ways that suggest a deeper meaning, for example, a husband might commission a funerary monument for his dead wife based on Leda and the swan. We don't know why and the danger is that we interpret it in the light of modern culture and social and ethical assumptions.

NOTES

- Helen was said to have been the most beautiful woman in the world, who was married to King Menelaus of Sparta, but was abducted by Prince Paris of Troy, resulting in the Trojan War when the Achaeans set out to reclaim her and bring her back to Sparta.

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Pompeii, House VII, 2, 6: the baker Terentius Neo and wife, although this attribution is disputed, fresco, 20-30 CE, National Archaeological Museum of Naples



Pompeii, House VII, 2, 6: the baker Terentius Neo and wife, although this attribution is disputed, fresco, c. 70 CE, National Archaeological Museum of Naples

Found in the exedra (a recess or alcove with a seat) opening off the atrium (a large enclosed space open to the sky) of the house.

- From the moment Pompeii started to be uncovered opinions varied **on what was mediocre art and what was fine art**. Most of the 'pornographic' art could not be classified or even shown in public so was hidden away in a secret room. A fashion of Pompeii-style interiors swept Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Victorian painters, such as Alma Tadema used the discoveries to construct what they believed was a representation of everyday life in a Roman town. Some art critics were bitterly **disappointed by the lack of tonal range** (chiaroscuro), **limited colour palette** and by the **numerous faults** of draughtsmanship. Of course, it was easy to write off all Pompeian art as the work expected to be found in a provincial backwater and its merit was only to hint at the greatness of the art from which it was derived.

THE PORTRAIT

- Overall the idea of portraiture and an **exact representation was a minor motif** in wall painting and most pictures were of **historical, myth, comedy or genre scenes**. The historical figures were **often Greek** reflecting the overwhelming Hellenistic culture of contemporary Roman taste.
- Many supposed portraits were displayed in ancestor rooms and may therefore be **idealised representations**. Some include mythological figures and may be merely decorative figures or historical figures sometimes identified with labels.
- However, these figures from Pompeii are **clearly individualised** with the **man's wispy beard and moustache**, full lips and a slightly shifty expression. The man is protectively

shielding his wife with his shoulder. The scroll held by the man has been identified as a **marriage contract**.

- “For a long time mistakenly considered the portrait of Paquio Proculo and his wife, in reality the **fresco portrays the baker Terentius Neo** with his wife. The two characters, of **humble origins**, climbed the social ladder, show him as a scholar (he holds a roll of papyrus in his hand), while **she holds a waxed tablet** (so she takes care of the **bookkeeping** of the bakery and the house).”
- It could be a wedding portrait or a portrait of the owners of the house showing they were literate and by implication erudite.

REFERENCES

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Portrait of a Young Woman, Pompeii, third quarter of 1st century CE, fresco on gesso, 37 x 38 cm, National Archaeological Museum, Naples



Portrait of a Young Woman, Pompeii, third quarter of 1st century CE, fresco on gesso, 37 x 38 cm, National Archaeological Museum, Naples

- Another danger for the modern scholar is jumping to conclusions. *This Tondo of a Young Woman* was discovered in 1760 and classical scholars immediately began to speculate that it might be the ancient Greek poet Sappho of Lesbos (c. 630-570 BCE) who wrote of the love between women.
- It is now known that it portrays a high-society Pompeian woman, richly dressed with **gold-threaded hair and large gold earrings**, bringing the stylus to the mouth and holding the type of wax tablets used for accounts which therefore have nothing to do with poetry and even less with the famous Greek writer. Sappho is typically shown holding a lyre and a plectrum and if she is shown with writing equipment it is a papyrus roll not a wax tablet.
- This tondo was balanced in the corresponding position on the **other half of the wall by a tondo of a man** holding a scroll. We do not know if they are portraits but their features are particular and so portrait-like.

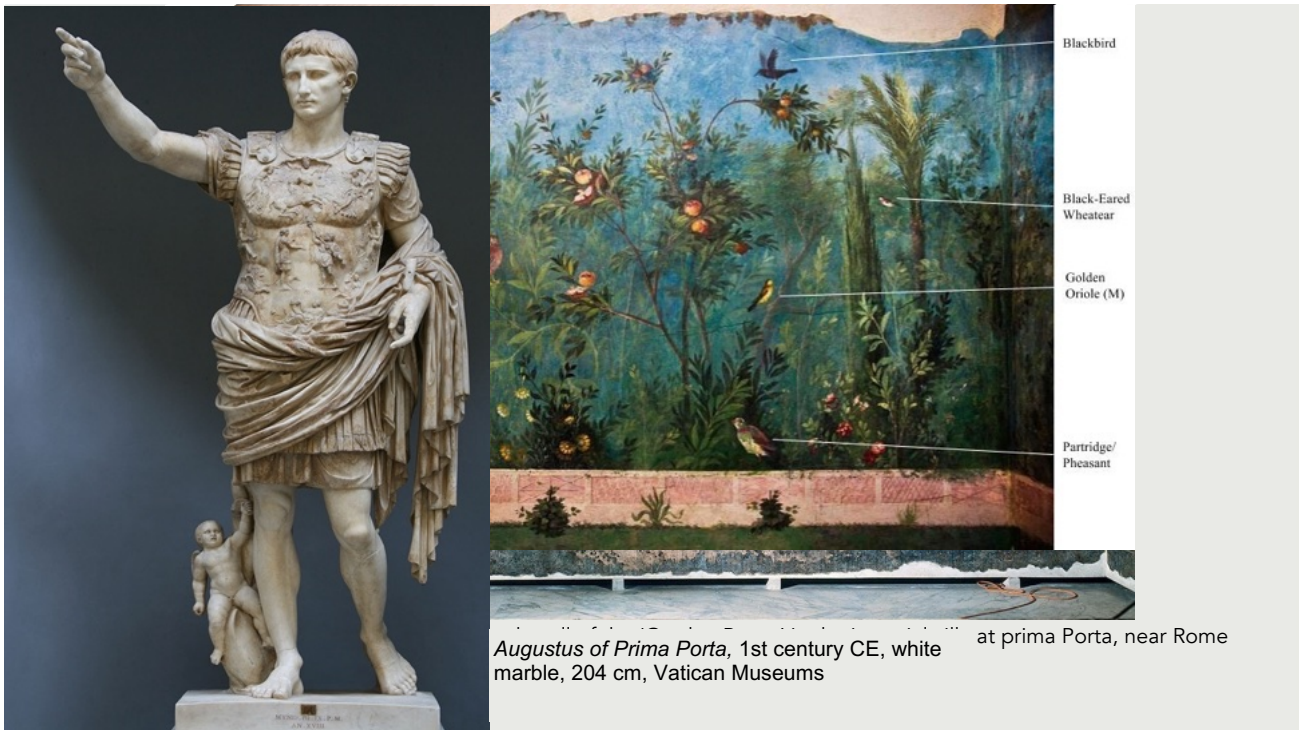
NOTES

- **Sappho** (c. 630–c. 570 BC) was a Greek poet from the island of Lesbos known for her lyric poetry. Most of her poetry is now lost but was greatly admired through much of antiquity. She is well known as a symbol of love and desire between women and the word 'lesbian' comes from her island of Lesbos. However, in classical Athenian poetry she was caricatured as a promiscuous heterosexual woman.

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[sappho/](#)



Wall painting of the south wall of the 'Garden Room' in the imperial villa at Prima Porta, near Rome

Image of wall of the Garden Room at the Villa of Livia with bird species identification. Robert Vanderlinden

Augustus of Prima Porta, 1st century CE, white marble, 204 cm, Vatican Museums, currently housed in the Chiaramonte Museum, Braccio Nuovo and only accessible with special permission

- The Villa of Livia is an ancient Roman villa at Prima Porta, 12 km north of Rome along the Via Flaminia. It was probably part of Livia Drusilla's dowry she brought when she married the emperor Augustus, her second husband, in 39 BC. It was her country residence complementing her house on the Palatine Hill in Rome. The name Prima Porta came from an arch of the aqueduct that travellers saw as the first indication of having reached Rome.
- (CLICK) In 1867 the famous heroic marble statue of Augustus we saw earlier, the **Augustus of Prima Porta**, was found, now in the Vatican Museum. It is a marble copy of a bronze original that celebrated the return in 20 BC of the military standards captured by the Parthians in 53 BCE.(CLICK)
- From three vaulted subterranean rooms, the largest contained **superb illusionistic frescos of garden views**, where all the plants and trees flower and fruit at once, which have been removed to Rome where, following cleaning and restoration, they have been reinstalled in the Palazzo Massimo.
- This works illustrates another problem for scholars. How to organise and date the wide variety of wall decoration found in Roman villas.

Landscape

References

<https://commons.mtholyoke.edu/romancultureofbird/murals/villa-of-livia-at-primaporta/>



First Style



First Style



Second Style

Second Style

Mau wall styles

Example of First Style painting, House of Sallust, Pompeii, built 2nd century, B.C.E.

Example of First Style painting, House of the Faun, Pompeii, built 2nd century, B.C.E.

Example of Second Style painting, cubiculum (bedroom), Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, 50–40 B.C.E., fresco, 265.4 x 334 x 583.9 cm

Example of Second Style painting, cubiculum (bedroom), Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, 50–40 B.C.E., fresco

Example of Second Style painting, view of the Dionysiac frieze, Villa of the Mysteries, before 79 C.E., fresco, 15 x 22 feet, just outside the walls of Pompeii on the Road to Herculaneum

Styles of Wall Painting

- Art historians began to try to **assign dates in order to try to introduce some order into the chaos of the range of art discovered.**
- One early critic was Johann Wolfgang von **Goethe** (1749-1832) who was **initially disappointed by the bare rooms** he found on the **site at Pompeii** and he was then 'vividly transported back into the past' when he saw the objects in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples. This led to a realisation that the individual rooms and their images and objects **must be viewed as a whole.** The paintings and mosaics are part of a complete decorative space. The paintings should not be seen in isolation (as I am showing them) but as one element of a decorative design of a complete room. Wall painting was exactly that, the **entire wall was painted** and the **pictures that were later cut out were just one element.**
- Analysis of many rooms using other methods to date them enabled the Pompeii expert **August Mau** (German, 1840-1909) to describe and name a chronological

sequence of four main styles.

- **First style, Incrustation or imitation**, 3rd-2nd century BCE, the wall is painted and sometimes moulded to **represent blocks of stone**. There are no figures scenes.
- **Second style, Architectural**, c. 100 – 15 BCE, typically has **illusionistic architectural vistas**.
- Paintings on wooden panels were also produced but have not survived except in a few cases. It is not clear if the fresco pictures surrounded by a dark frame were meant to imitate panel paintings.

References

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ancient-art-civilizations/roman/wall-painting/a/roman-wall-painting-styles>



Third style



Fourth style



Fourth style

Mau wall styles

Example of Third Style painting, panel with candelabrum, Villa Agrippa Postumus, **Boscotrecase** ('bosco-trey-carzay'), last decade of the 1st century B.C.E

Example of Fourth Style painting, Triclinium (dining room), **House of the Vetii**, Pompeii, 1st century C.E.

Example of Fourth Style painting, before 79 C.E., fresco, Pompeii

- **Third style**, Ornate, c. 15 BCE – 50 CE, **delicate decorative designs** with some **small pictures**, figures and landscapes.
- **Fourth style**, Intricate, from 50 CE, uses the **whole range of styles**, decorative with architectural features and **figures in panels**.
- It needs to be understood that **one style did not replace another as the old styles were retained**. A house such as **The House of the Fauns contains all the styles**. This combination of the old and the new is what defines a typical Pompeian house and we assume all houses across Roman Italy. **Their understanding of the new was therefore different from ours**. We see **the new replacing the old as progress** as we expect **continually technically innovations and improvements**. In a static culture the new is another form of decoration to add to the old. Some of the art, such as the **Alexander mosaic were hundreds of years old** and so we assume they appreciated the old and did not see the new as a replacement but as an enhancement.

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[painting/a/roman-wall-painting-styles](#)



The Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii,



Three panels from the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, the first fresco depicting the reading of the rituals of the bridal mysteries, the third fresco of the triclinium, interpreted to represent the stages of initiation to the cult and the fifth fresco depicting a Bacchic rite

- This is part of the wall decoration from what we call The Villa of the Mysteries and it is exactly that—a mystery.
- The wall paintings are found in the dining room (triclinium) and the favoured interpretation is that it represents the initiation of a woman into the cult of Dionysus, god of fertility known as Bacchus to the Romans, son of Zeus and Semele, daughter of a king.
- The owner of the villa is not known but could be Livia, wife of Augustus or possibly a powerful family called Istacidii. The frescoes were restored in 2013-15 and we see the seven scenes on the walls.
- It is believed it concerns the initiation of a bride in her wedding dress (far left at the top) being initiated into the rites of Bacchus as part of the transition to married life.
- Top left a wealthy Roman woman approaches a priestess on a throne while a small naked boy reads the rites or sings a song. The initiate then moves away carrying a tray of sacramental cakes and wearing a myrtle wreath.
- To its right another priestess seated at a desk while Silenus, companion to Bacchus, plays a lyres.
- Top right a satyr plays the pipes while a nymph suckles a goat. The figure on the right could be the goddess Aura or the bride being initiated. She is staring in horror at the scene to her left shown below.
- In it a satyr holds up a frightening mask while another is being offered a bowl of wine by Silenus. Bacchus sprawls in the lap of his mother Semele. On the right a winged

figure appears to be whipping her.

- Bottom left she kneels before a dancing figure while being lashed across her back. To the right a nude woman clashes cymbals symbolising the completion of the initiation.
- After the initiation the bride dresses and prepares for marriage while a young Eros holds up a mirror.
- Finally, we see the mother of the bride and owner of the villa or possible the bride herself now transformed into a mature, married woman.
- Is all this accurate, we have no idea as little was written about such ceremonies.

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Three wall paintings from the cubiculum of the House of Jason, Medea (west wall), Phaedra (south wall) and Paris and Helen (north wall)

Three wall paintings from the cubiculum of the House of Jason, Medea (west wall), Phaedra (south wall) and Paris and Helen (north wall)

- To make things easier many rooms contain **mythological scenes where** the various pictures in the room provide **theme that links them together**. For example, in the house of Jason there is a room with **three wall paintings** that seem to show **domestic bliss**. However, beware, the story of **each one leads to tragedy**,
 - the first shows Medea and her children,
 - the second Phaedra with her nurse and servant girl and
 - the third Helen apparently looking at her husband.
- What all viewers at the time would know was that **Medea is contemplating murdering her children, Phaedra is struggling with her passion for her stepson** that will lead to the destruction of the family and **Helen is looking at Paris and is planning to desert her husband**.
- The stories are not connected in mythological terms so we must assume the viewer would read them as **themes of infanticide, incest and adultery**. This raises the **question of why** would a house have a room devoted to these subjects and, as we have seen, wall paintings could **survive for generations**, it was not the casual hanging of three paintings.
- As we know the Roman empire was male dominated and founded on strict laws we can only speculate that they were **some form of moral lesson aimed at the females of the household in how not to behave**. It could also be a warning to men to beware the guile and trickery of powerful, eastern women. But a more accurate answer is **we just don't know**.

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Wall paintings from the 'Mythological Room' of the villa at Boscotrecase, *Polyphemus and Galatea* (west wall) and *Andromeda Rescued by Perseus* (east wall), Metropolitan Museum of Art

Wall paintings from the 'Mythological Room' of the **villa at Boscotrecase** ('bosco-trey-carzay'), *Polyphemus and Galatea* (west wall) and *Andromeda Rescued by Perseus* (east wall), Metropolitan Museum of Art. Brightness and contrast artificially enhanced.

- When looking at **the paintings from Pompeii** we must always be thinking – but **is this typical** or is this just a small, unrepresentative, provincial Italian town? If Pompeii was provincial the surrounding countryside contained country estates and palaces that certainly were not. The top echelon of the Roman aristocracy lived in the surrounding area. There **are a few sites in the area that contain wall paintings that were the best that money could buy**. One was **discovered by chance in 1902** when cutting into a hill for a new railway line.
- The owner of the site saw a **get-rich-quick scheme and used a digger to rip the wall paintings from the walls** to sell them without recording their location. However, ironically, it was just as well because **four years later an eruption destroyed the site**.
- Some of the rooms were vivid red and other pitch black, some had exquisite miniatures and the others large wall paintings. In one room there were the above two pictures, now in New York. One shows the **Cyclops Polyphemus pining for Galatea** and the other **Perseus saving Andromeda** from the sea monster. In each picture **the hero appears twice** in order to illustrate the narrative. Polyphemus loses his heart to the sea nymph Galatea on sight, later he **loses his single eye** when Odysseus rescues his crew from the Cyclops cave. Perseus rescues Andromeda to be his bride but success turns to tragedy when **her parents renege on the deal** signified by the handshake on the right. Andromeda's uncle claimed she had already been promised to him in marriage so Perseus used the head of the Medusa (that he happened to have on him from an earlier encounter) to turn the uncle to stone and he then flew off with his bride.

- The themes that connect the pictures, that were on opposite walls of the same room, are **the consequences of love, the rewards of trickery and the resulting punishment.**
- We are lucky because these two scenes are also found in a dining room (triclinium) in the **House of the Priest Amandus in Pompeii** together with two other scenes...

References

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Perseus and Andromeda, west wall of the triclinium, House of the Priest Amandus, Pompeii



Boscotrecase, *Andromeda Rescued by Perseus* (east wall), Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fresco of Perseus and Andromeda from the west wall of the triclinium of the House of the Priest Amandus in Pompeii, excavated mainly in 1924.

Wall paintings from the 'Mythological Room' of the villa at Boscotrecase, *Andromeda Rescued by Perseus* (east wall), Metropolitan Museum of Art

- The wall painting on the left in Pompeii is usually treated as a **slightly inferior copy of the Boscotrecase** masterpiece. The colours are stated to be cruder, the larger figures spoil the fairy-tale atmosphere.
- However, in the Pompeii painting **Andromeda has turned towards Perseus adding drama to the encounter**. The figures are larger within the landscape adding emotional impact. We must also remember that the Boscotrecase painting has been subject to much greater restoration. **Does this mean the Boscotrecase painting is poorer?** And how can this be in a house where money was no object and the best artists would have been used? Perhaps, the answer is the context of the respective rooms. In Pompeii the wall painting was in an enclosed dining room that contained four paintings. In Boscotrecase it was one of two (possible three paintings) in a room that looked out onto a terrace and a spectacular view of the bay of Naples. Maybe, one painting was a talking point over dinner with larger figures to make the story clearer and the other was a decorative element in a room designed to impress through the view it provided.

NOTES

- The beautiful Andromeda was the daughter of the Ethiopian king Cepheus and queen Cassiopeia. One day, the vain queen had bragged that her daughter Andromeda was more beautiful than the Nereids ('near-e-eds'), the sea nymphs. The sea nymphs fell angry to hear that and complained to Poseidon, the god of the sea. A furious Poseidon

unleashed the sea monster Cetus to frequently ravage the coast and devastate the land of Ethiopia in order to avenge the insult to his wards, the Nereids. The desperate king Cephus appealed Zeus, who suggested the sacrifice of Andromeda as the only way to appease the wrathful Poseidon. One of the greatest heroes of Greek mythology, Perseus was flying by after killing the Gorgon Medusa by cutting off her head. He saw Andromeda chained helplessly onto the rocks, awaiting her doom and immediately fell in love and promptly killed the monster Cetus. Perseus then took Andromeda to her father Cepheus and asked for her hand in marriage. This infuriated Andromeda's uncle Phineus, to whom the maiden was already promised. During the ensuing quarrel, Perseus turned Phineus into a stone by showing him the head of the Gorgon Medusa. (see <https://www.greeka.com/greece-myths/perseus-andromeda.htm>)

References

<https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/20.192.17/>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/20.192.16/>



Aldobrandini Wedding, Vatican Museums

- This is one part of a wall painting found in Rome about 1600 and installed by its first owner **Cardinal Aldobrandini** in a purpose built pavilion in his garden. It has been heavily restored over the years. **It enjoyed enormous fame and prestige as it was one of the few and most influential paintings from the Roman empire.** It and was copied or adapted by many artists from **Anthony Van Dyck to Nicolas Poussin.**
- (CLICK) It is not clear what the painting shows, a woman on a bed with her head veiled with female attendants. We do not know but from its discovery it has been assumed to show a wedding. Some think it is the wedding of the parents of Achilles, others the marriage of Alexander the Great, others a wedding scene from a play. All agree it is a wedding with a nervous bride comforted by Venus, bare chested with sandals. It could be the ceremony of water and fire that was used to welcome the bride into her husband's house. (CLICK)
- Its fame is based on being one of the earliest Roman masterpieces to be discovered but the re-emergence of Roman painting had begun in the late fifteenth century by the astonishing discovery of the 'Golden House' of emperor Nero.

REFERENCES

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aldobrandini_Wedding



Venus de Medici, 1st century BCE marble copy of a bronze Greek original, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Alexander of Milos, Venus de Milo, 130-100 BCE, Louvre

- Venus de Medici, 1st century BCE marble copy of a bronze Greek original, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, first example of unrivalled beauty
- Alexander of Milos, *Venus de Milo*, 130-100 BCE, Louvre, right, found by French, became prime example of beauty. Formerly thought to be by Praxiteles.
- I will end with one of the most famous ancient classical statues in order to tell a story of misattribution on a grand scale.
- The **Venus de Medici was discovered first** and although we don't know exactly when it was already known in 1559. Seeing the Medici Venus was a **high point of the Grand Tour**. When Napoleon conquered Italy there was an attempt to hide it in Palermo but it was found and taken to Paris. It was known throughout Europe as the pinnacle of Greek art. When Napoleon was defeated in 1815 it was one of the first works of art to be repatriated to Florence on 27 December that year. So France had lost its greatest ancient treasure.
- (CLICK) Then, five years later, in 1820, a French officer (Olivier Voutier) was touring the island of Milos and met a farmer (Yorgos Kentrotas) who had dug up part of a statue. The officer soon found the complete statue in two parts and ten days later another French officer (Jules Dumont d'Urville) realised its significance and arranged for the French ambassador to Turkey (Charles-Francois de Riffardeau, later duc de Riviere) to purchase it.
- Despite some problems which involved various chiefs being whipped and fined and the most senior Turkish representative was executed, it arrived in Paris and the fun began.
- The French announced the statue was by the most **famous classical Greek sculptor Praxiteles** even before examining it.

- When they did they found the plinth had an inscription which read, in Greek, **'(Alex)andros son of Menides, citizen of Antioch on the Maeander made this (statue)...'**. This was unfortunate in two ways – it was not by Praxiteles and it was Hellenistic not Classical. The city of Antioch did not exist in the Classical period which dated the statue to the **Hellenistic period** which was regarded **in the nineteenth century as a period of decline** for Greek art.
- So what do you think happened?
- **The plinth mysteriously disappeared and has never reappeared.** We only know of its existence because two detailed drawings were made before it disappeared.
- **From that point onwards the French who had lost the Venus de Medici successfully promoted the Venus de Milo as the most beautiful Classical Greek sculpture in existence.**
- **Although not everyone agreed...**

NOTES

THE CLASSICAL IDEAL

- Hay measured the ratios of famous classical nudes such as the Venus de Medici and the Venus de Milo. In the early part of the nineteenth century it was the Venus de Medici that was regarded as the ideal. The Venus de Milo was not discovered until 1820 and from then on was promoted by the French authorities as the greater treasure. They had been made to return the Venus de Medici to the Italians in 1815 after the Napoleonic Wars. The statue was dutifully praised by many artists and critics as the epitome of graceful female beauty although Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) described it as a 'big gendarme'.
- The propaganda from the Louvre included losing the original plinth. We know from two surviving engravings that the plinth included the inscription **'...(Alex)andros son of Menides, citizen of Antioch on the Maeander made this (statue)...'**. The museum had been promoting the statue as by the much more famous Praxiteles from the Classical period (5th and 4th centuries BCE) but the inscription would make it later (as Antioch did not exist when Praxiteles lived) and move it into the Hellenistic period (323-31 BCE). At the time the Hellenistic period was considered as a period of decline and so the evidence was destroyed.

REFERENCES

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus_de'_Medici
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus_de_Milo



THE VENUS OF MILO; OR, GIRLS OF TWO DIFFERENT PERIODS.

Chorus. "LOOK AT HER BIG FOOT! OH, WHAT A WAIST!—AND WHAT A RIDICULOUS LITTLE HEAD!—AND NO CHIGNON! SHE'S NO LADY! OH, WHAT A FRIGHT!"

George du Maurier, *Punch*, 1870, 'The *Venus of Milo*; or, Girls of two Different Periods'

- **Chorus: Look at her big foot! Oh, what a waist! – and what a ridiculous little head! – and no chignon! She's no lady! Oh, what a fright!** (A chignon is what we call a bun)
- In the Victorian period waists were constricted by corsets which increased the waist to hip ratio sometimes, as with Lily Langtry (1853-1929) 46% (37"-18"-39").
- Waist-to-hip ratio is a secondary sexual characteristic. In healthy individuals it is 0.7 for women and 0.9 for men.
- Perception depends on culture.

NOTES

- Waist-to-hip ratio is a secondary sexual characteristic. In healthy individuals it is 0.7 for women and 0.9 for men. Women with a high WHR (0.8 or higher) have significantly lower pregnancy rates. It was first measured as an indicator of attractiveness in 1993. European men find women with a WHR of 0.7 the most attractive, Chinese men 0.6 to 0.8 in Cameroon.
- If we examine film stars such as Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe, Playboy bunnies and Miss Americas the ratio is from 0.68 to 0.72. And this ratio best predicates what people of all ages, genders and races find attractive.
- The classical **Venuses** have a waist-to-hip ratio of about 0.72.



- This talk was partly an introduction to classical art and partly a warning that much of antiquity is invented by each generation and each new culture or, more precisely, by each person whose assumptions and beliefs colour their perception and interpretation. History is not written by the winners but by historians and what they write is interpreted each of us.
- Thank you.