The art historian's view of Greek mythology is subtly different from that of the student of Greek literature. Most of the mythological scenes which have survived, and they are myriad, appear on objects of ordinary use, or at least not of extraordinary use like temple sculptures. Most Greeks learnt their myth-history from a rich and infinitely varied oral tradition. Our classical studies start from texts: theirs did not, and we exaggerate their literacy (there are more outward signs of literacy in the Indian subcontinent today than there were in ancient Greece, yet well over 70 per cent of the population cannot read or write). Most of the artist's stories were closest to those understood by everyman, often just as illogical, contradictory, and distorted or improved in the telling through generations. The poet's stories were more consciously adapted to the context of his poem or play, to the patron or society for which he was writing or for the moral he wished to draw from his use of myth as parable. Sometimes art follows texts, sometimes texts follow art: there are some scenes of our period which deliberately follow texts, though probably fewer than is generally thought. The artist had the same freedom as a writer to adjust his story, but he was more restricted even in the content of what he portrayed by the formulae of his craft. He could not, for instance, offer continuous narrative and there was a limit to what could be explained by inscription. He was also in many respects more conservative than the poet. He was not in our period guided by pattern books, but clear conventions for particular subjects and for generic scenes were established. Nevertheless, all but the veriest hacks avoided repeating themselves line for line, not deliberately, but because there was no need or compulsion to do so.

The earliest pictures are symbols for contemporary events, of burial or battle, and the example of the East led the artist to an idiom in which more specific detail of a historical (to us, mythical) story could be expressed. The first myth-scenes are prompted by formulae suggested by orientalizing arts. They have virtually nothing in common with the rich visual imagery of Homer, least of all in his Ionian homeland, beyond sharing the same traditional oral sources and, more tentatively than he, employing the same language of metaphor.

Abjuring the strip-cartoon system of narration the Greek artist was obliged to encapsulate the narrative and message of a story in a single scene. The Archaic artist generally chose a moment of maximum action: the Classical, relying on his viewer's knowledge of the story, could sometimes dwell on proem or aftermath, which might be psychologically or dramatically more telling. Both relied for the identification of their figures on conventional dress, attributes, and poses. Few scenes are helped by inscriptions, and figures are

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more often allowed interjections than conversations. Reliance on detail of pose or attribute also enabled the artist to introduce an element of continuous narrative by allusion to past and future. Latter-day theorists devise imposing names for this process, as though it was a deliberate invention and not inescapable in a period in which the 'camera-still' was unknown and the media offered single-panel or frieze compositions, not acres of temple and palace walls as in Egypt and the Near East.

A classic example is the Corinthian crater of about 560 (see Plate 4), showing Amphiaraus departing for his doomed expedition (with the Seven) against Thebes. His wife Eriphyle stands off to the left, holding prominently the necklace with which she had been bribed to persuade the King to go to war. Behind him is his son Alcmaeon who will avenge him. To the right his seer whose gesture shows his foreknowledge of the outcome of the expedition. And there is a plentiful animal presence, no doubt omens. More subtly, in the east pediment at Olympia, the remorseless vengeance of Zeus on oath-breakers, which pursued the house of Atreus, is recalled not by any major episode of action but at the moment of the oath-taking, before the race between Pelops and Oinomaos. Juxtaposition of scenes involving the same figure, though not in episodes of the same story, seems to have been introduced with the new Theseus cycle in Athens at the end of the sixth century, and is taken up to better effect for the series of Heracles' Labours.

In the popular arts such as vase-painting the choice of subject seems generally that of the artist who, of course, knew his market, and specially commissioned pieces for dedication or other occasions can generally be identified in an artist's work by their (for him) uncharacteristic subjects. He was influenced in his choice mainly by tradition. In some periods, as in fourth-century south Italy, stage subjects seem deliberately sought, and there is sometimes the echo of the stage on fifth-century Athenian vases. New stories, such as the Theseus cycle, or an emphasis on certain myths which answered state propaganda, were quickly mirrored in the popular arts. Theseus' role in the new Athenian democracy is clear enough in literature as in art. Before him it is in art that we most clearly observe a new treatment of Heracles with his patron Athena as symbol of the Athenian state and especially of its tyrant family. New cults too—Athens' adoption of Eleusis or the arrival of an Asclepius—are reflected in the popular arts. Certain almost ritualized aspects of everyday life, presumably of a significance which goes beyond mundane interest in the world around them, also occupied artists and were blessed with their own iconographic conventions, like myths:

the symposium, courting of youths, athletics, wedding preparations.

In the major arts, wall-painting and temple sculpture, there were other considerations, not least the fact that they were for public display, not ephemeral consumption, and that these expensive and lengthy projects were not appropriate fields for experiments. The Parthenon is unusual in having its sculptural themes all closely related to Athena, Athens, its glorious past, both mythical and recent, and Athenians. On other temples the relevance of the subject is sometimes less apparent, and we may imagine that the decisions were those of a committee of magistrates and priests rather than of the artists. Many demands, of patronage, politics, and religion might need to be answered.

While individual figures of myth, monsters or heroes, may seem to serve mainly decorative functions, generally Greek art is telling a story or setting a scene. The student of style may find the subject-matter irrelevant, and the mythographer may discount the power of tradition or of what, in terms of technique and convention, was possible in the representation of myth. But a study of Greek art can no more ignore its subjects than its style or purpose.

Religious Art

Most of Egyptian or Indian art and a large proportion of the arts of Mesopotamia were religious: that is to say, they were designed to attract or appease a deity, to inspire or intimidate worshippers, to guarantee a life beyond the grave. Hardly any of this is true of Greek art, which may reflect upon man's relationship to his gods but is seldom dictated by exclusively religious requirements. At a fairly low level some degree of near-magical use of art is seen in the apotropaic devices, usually animals or monsters, sometimes the human eye or male genitals, on various objects, but Greek art was not dominated by such crude symbolism. The sphinxes or lions on grave monuments no doubt did guard the grave, just as the Gorgon head in early pediments guarded the temple (but from what?). There must have been no less of the irrational in the thought of ancient Greece than in that of other cultures, but it was expressed in literature, and hardly at all in art, where even the monsters and demons have a stunning plausibility.

The artist was virtually never called upon to exercise his skills on objects destined only for the grave. The oil flasks (white-ground *lekythoi*) made for some two generations in Athens deliberately as grave furniture were placed on as well as in tombs. The Archaic grave monuments idealized the dead in an anonymous way, and the Classical ones expressed no more than a calm confrontation of the live and the dead, as if both were

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alive: no demons, no gods of the Underworld, no threats, no violent grief, more expressions of human dignity or even pride than of desolation or dumb acceptance. The idealizing qualities of Greek art abet these attitudes magnificently.

Dedications could flatter a deity with his image or a portrayal of his power in scenes of action, but they were as often images of mortal attendants for the god (the Archaic *korai* and *kouroi*), and if they portrayed the dedicator himself it is not in a servile manner, but in the pride of his profession—soldier, athlete, or citizen. Remarkably, it became possible for a votive relief to depict the worshipper and his family in the presence of the deity, with only their smaller size to indicate the profound difference in status.

Scenes of cult and sacrifice were simple statements of the act, and the deity was often shown virtually as a mortal onlooker. The orgiastic rites of Dionysus, on which ancient literature is reticent, were ritualized into dance and myth by the artist. The god himself was wrested from his role of rustic fertility spirit into joining the Olympian family where his appearance and behaviour were made by the artist to conform with his new setting. But he rubbed shoulders with humanity more than most, mainly through his gift of wine, and this was well expressed on the clay vases, many of which were designed for the symposium. On them his maenad-nymphs impersonate his ecstatic mortal followers, while the satyrs, nature demons recruited into his troupe, act out mortal aspirations which wine, women, and song can promote, and become one of the most engaging creations of the Greek artist. Other mystic religions or beliefs, the Pythagorean or Orphic, found as little response in Greek art as did Hellenized foreign goblins such as Lamia.

Cult statues had a more clearly defined religious purpose, as symbols of the god's presence in his house. The earliest acquired their sacred power from their antiquity ('fallen from heaven' or the like), not their appearance, and were sometimes barely shaped logs which could be decked out on festive occasions with dress or weapons. When the old images had to be replaced or supplemented by new ones, the artist could have sought through his art to express something of the same magic power. But apart from attributes or dress or sheer size the cult statues are indistinguishable in appearance from statues of mortals. With the fifth century they sought to impress more through size—the Zeus at Olympia would have gone through the roof if he stood up—and material, the chryselephantine with beaten gold dress and ivory flesh. The setting, in the columned interior of a temple and barely lit from the doors or windows before them and, at Olympia and in the Parthenon, by the light reflected up from a broad shallow pool before them on the floor, will have enhanced their appearance. It was

for much later writers to dwell on the spiritual aspects of Phidias' Zeus at Olympia. In its day his Athena Parthenos seems to have excited more concern over the accounting for her materials, and Pericles could point Out to the Athenians that her gold was removable and could help pay for war. Experience of the theatre, and of art for the theatre, may have had its effect on the artist's designs and settings for his works, but he made no special provisions for imbuing them with the numinous.

Even in his execution of religious subjects the Greek artist worked within the confines of his training, but could exercise imaginative invention to the full. The restraint was technical rather than psychological, and his choice of image did not depend, as in other periods and places, on prayer or meditation. Poets, actors, musicians, dancers, even historians had their Muse, but not artists.

Decoration in Art

Nothing, except perhaps the heroic nude, provokes recognition of Greekness more readily than ornaments such as meander, egg-and-dart, palmette friezes. Subsidiary ornament was subjected to the same discipline as major designs, and in some periods and media we find objects devoted wholly to pattern. The need to articulate and frame friezes or panels allowed the development of orientalizing florals which adopted the rows of palmettes and lotuses of Eastern art, created new and less botanically correct patterns, and established a decorative scheme that only in the fifth century gave way to more realistic florals with some observation of live forms, and the evolution of leafy, but strictly controlled, arabesques. Many patterns belong to woodwork, but have become more familiar translated and enlarged on to stone architecture. Care was taken to see that the profile of a moulding and its decoration were matched. The Eastern volute-trees could become adjusted in scale or use to Ionic columns or to decorative details of furniture or utensils.

Many arts have sought to animate objects by introducing human or animal features to otherwise functional forms. The Greeks were not obsessive about this, nor did they let it dominate what they made, and there are a few Archaic vessels in the shape of whole animal or human figures. But handles could be created from the curving body of an athlete or a leaping lion, human heads could spring from handle attachments, feet become lion paws. Curly extremities grew snake heads: Athena's aegis, Hermes' caduceus, the Chimaera's tail. The Greeks spoke of parts of the vase as parts of the human body, just as we do (lip, neck, shoulder, foot, ears = handles) and, mainly in the Archaic period, allowed this conceit expression by

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painted or moulded additions—eyes under arched handles, or on eye-cups where, with the ear-handles and trumpet foot (like a mouth), the whole vessel can look like a mask when raised to the drinker's lips.

The question of colour in Greek art is a difficult one. Architecture under a Mediterranean sun tends to simple, clear, bright forms, with colour in detail, not mass. On Greek architecture the colouring of details in the upperworks of buildings could have done little more than help articulate the sharply carved forms. Only in the clay revetments of Archaic roofs does there seem to have been a positive riot of colour. On sculpture it seems that colour was used to lend verisimilitude, but we know too little about how intense the colours were when applied. Neo-classical versions of Greek statues, with colour supplied, are disturbing, and we have become so used to judging form without colour that it is distracting. The few coloured marbles left from antiquity, as at Pompeii, look like rather crude dolls. There seems no indication of coloured outer walls for buildings, and for any painting on interior walls, figural or decorative, we have no evidence. New discoveries could dramatically change our view. Scraps of painted plaster show that the seventh-century temple of Poseidon at Isthmia near Corinth had somewhere upon it large (though not life-size) figures of animals. We may, then, underestimate the value of colour in Greek art, but in their language they are strangely vague in defining colours, their jewellery long abjured settings of coloured stones, and the modest use of dark stone in architecture is in marked contrast with Rome's addiction to variegated marbles. Their vase-painting evolved from four-colour black-figure to two-colour red-figure, while their most famous Classical painters were said (as seems true, to judge from near-contemporary mosaics) to have worked in four colours only.

If not in colour, in form at least there was a tendency to what we would regard as the over-ornate. When execution and design is perfect a degree of elaboration is acceptable—I think of the finely chased and cast bronze and silver vessels of the later Classical period; where workmanship is poorer, or the medium less inspiring, it would become difficult to admit the products to one's drawing room—I think of the large, over-decorated, clay vases of south Italy in the fourth century. Knowing where to stop is the hallmark of the great artist. Not all Greek artists were sublime, nor their customers always impeccable in their taste.

The Artists

Greek art was not the big business in antiquity that it is today. Some portable works, jewellery and plate, were expensive, and it is notable that we have learned

most about these from finds made outside the Greek world, where they appear as gifts or booty in native kingdoms, or as court furniture, from the Seine to Persepolis. Even the finer red-figure vases passed for hardly more than a worker's day wage. Some potters, especially in sixth-century Athens, observed the export market to Etruria closely enough to specialize in export models designed to attract by their familiar shapes or acceptable styles of decoration: the so-called Tyrrhenian amphorae and the products of Nicosthenes' workshop. The returns were no doubt gratifying, and some potters or pottery-owners could afford sculptural dedications on the Acropolis. In the Classical period the big names in sculpture and wall-painting could command high fees and provoke competition for their services, but these were men who travelled freely and worked wherever employment was offered. Only in the Athenian pottery trade and probably in metal workshops elsewhere (Corinth, Sparta) do there seem to have been industries which came to serve more than the local market. Specialized local industries for the national or international market were uncommon in Greece, and artists were in no different position in this regard from shoemakers or carpenters. Indeed, no distinction was drawn in antiquity in favour of those whom we designate artists—it was all craft (*technē*). Only with Phidias, and then increasingly with his successors, did any special social status appear to have been accorded to successful artists, although they had been housed at the courts of the Archaic tyrants, like musicians, entertainers, and doctors.

There was a tendency for crafts to be practised in families: a master's natural apprentice would have been his own son. There is evidence for this in pottery and in sculpture, but there was versatility too. Some of the finest vase-painters, known to us from only one or two vases, may also have been panel-painters. A sculptor might prefer modelled bronze to carved marble, but most could work in either and at any scale. He might also be an architect (Scopas) or painter (Euphranor). Some crafts were easily mobile—the jeweller, die-engraver, indeed even the sculptor who had to travel from home to quarry to finishing workshop on the site of his commission. While the family businesses helped to establish local styles and traditions, mobility meant rapid dissemination of new ideas and techniques, and the major sanctuaries served as galleries for both masterpieces of the past and novelties.

More than half the sculptors named in the Erechtheum accounts were Athenian citizens, but in earlier years the potter and painter signatures on Athenian vases reveal a high proportion of non-Athenian, or even non-Greek names, or nicknames which conceal nationality. In simpler crafts the

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immigrant Greek (metic) or non-Greek no doubt played an important role in the workshops and in a state like Sparta his role must have been a major one, but this did nothing to weaken the strong local character of Spartan art in the Archaic period. In Athens Solon is said to have encouraged the immigration of artists in the early sixth century and this, followed by the patronage of a tyrant court, may do much to explain Athens' busy record in the arts thereafter.

The number of artists' signatures from the Archaic and Classical periods is another peculiarity of Greek art. They appeared by around 700 and were by no means confined to major works or major artists. The desire of the vase-painter to sign his work might seem unusual, and the practice was fairly haphazard: for some we have only one extant signature on some fifty vases, and for most none at all. As advertisement it could have done little, and simple pride was probably the motive. The signature was often discreet, but not always: on Archaic grave monuments the artist's name may be as prominent as the deceased's. On late sixth-century Athenian red-figure vases the so-called Pioneers are free with challenges to their fellows' work or mottoes naming them. From their vases and inscriptions alone we can reconstruct a lively and very self-conscious artistic community. It was unusually literate too and may have had social pretensions, although inscribing references to handsome well-born youths of the day (the *kalos* inscriptions, irrelevant to the scenes they accompany) need not always imply close familiarity, and was as much practised by lesser artists on poorer works. The competitive spirit between artists seems also to have been exploited by patrons, but our record of these competitions, like that for the Amazons at Ephesus where each artist put his own work first and the prize went to the agreed second, Polyclitus, may have been distorted by the promotional tales of local guides who tend to be free in their use of great names and good stories.

The singular physical character of Greek art, when compared with those of other ancient cultures, was remarked at the beginning of this chapter. Its preoccupation with the human and with the gods' proper place in the world of men (rather than vice versa) was also the concern of Greek writers. The Greek artist served the society in which he lived by answering the requirements of a far wider range of the community than its priests and governors, and he demonstrated for the first time in the history of man the potential of a truly popular art in reaching beyond the demands of magic or display of status. In such service the concept of art for art's sake was unknown and unnecessary.

Further Reading

A comprehensive and well-documented account of Greek Art from Bronze Age to Hellenistic is M. Robertson, *A History of Greek Art* (Cambridge, 1975), with his *Shorter History of Greek Art* (Cambridge, 1981). Shorter handbooks are G. M. A. Richter, *Handbook of Greek Art* (London, 1974) by subject, and J. Boardman, *Greek Art* (London, 1985) by period.

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Many of the works named here relate also to the Hellenistic period.