

Book Reviews

A. A. DONOHUE

Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description

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Alice Donohue's new book examines the historiography of stylistic description and its role in scholarly interpretations of ancient Greek statuary by focusing on a few of the earliest and perhaps best-known stone statues of draped women in Greek art: the statue dedicated by Nikandre on the island of Delos and the small-scale "Lady of Auxerre" now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris. Donohue, professor of classical and Near Eastern archaeology at Bryn Mawr College, is one of the few classical art historians in the United States whose work focuses specifically on the historiography and intellectual history of ancient Greek and Roman art, a research interest that has already resulted in a volume of papers, edited with Mark Fullerton, entitled *Ancient Art and Its Historiography* (2003), based on two colloquiums organized for the Annual Conferences of the College Art Association in 1997 and 2000. Her new book, "preliminary to a broader examination of the historiographic structures that have shaped the way we think about the art of ancient Greece and Rome" (p. xi), developed from Donohue's first book on the concept of the *xoanon* (a venerable image) and early Greek sculpture (*Xoanon and the Origins of Greek Sculpture*, published in 1988). The focus here is on what Donohue calls "the problem of archaeological description" (p. 1) and the artificial distinction implicitly made in most archaeological publications between description and interpretation. As Donohue demonstrates throughout the book, how statues are described has had a significant but mostly unacknowledged effect on how those statues are perceived and interpreted.

Donohue sets out the aims and premises of the book clearly in the first chapter. She is concerned with explicating the ways in which the intellectual interests and concerns that shaped and informed the creation of the modern discipline of classical archaeology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continue to have a profound effect on how we write the history of ancient art today. Donohue's command of this intellectual history is impressive, and she has done all students of Greek art a tremendous favor not only by bringing so

much of it to our attention but also by translating extended sections into English and including the original language in the footnotes (here Cambridge University Press should be praised for allowing the notes to be printed where they could be of most use to the reader).¹ She argues that the quest of these early practitioners for scientific and intellectual rigor in methods of analysis—in part, an attempt to escape the specter of antiquarianism and the charge of dilettantism—resulted in the system of description, comparison, and interpretation that is still very much with us today. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and Johann Joachim Winckelmann, names familiar to most classical archaeologists and art historians, play leading roles in her analysis, as do somewhat more obscure but no less important figures such as Otto Jahn and Georg Zoëga. The connection between ancient art and classical literature—and the subsequent matching of physical remains with things mentioned in the literature, particularly by Pliny and Pausanias—was a major focus of this early scholarship.

Despite some differences in their methods and stated aims—Zoëga, for example, took what might be considered a more "archaeological" approach, while Winckelmann's interest was in writing a synthetic history of ancient art—all these early scholars implicitly conceptualized description as something prior to and separate from interpretation, a move that Donohue considers deeply problematic. The contrast between the perceived interests and aims of archaeology and those of art history—for example, style as an objective diagnostic trait versus style as a signifying aesthetic trait and the role of description in both—is a recurrent theme throughout the chapter, providing, in fact, an overarching interpretative framework for the book as a whole. The separation of description and interpretation, according to Donohue, is still fundamental to the study of classical art; indeed, it is standard practice, as she points out, in the publication of primary archaeological material in the form of the excavation monograph.

Chapter 2, by far the longest chapter of the book, forms the heart of the study. It begins with that venerable art historical methodological tool, the slide comparison—a practice that, with the demise of the slide projector and the rise of the PowerPoint presentation, may soon become a historical artifact in its own right. The comparison pairs two pieces of Greek sculpture

discovered in the late nineteenth century, well known to any student of Greek art: the statue dedicated by Nikandre on the island of Delos, now in the National Museum in Athens, and the Nike of Samothrace, now in the Louvre. The narrative of the comparison, too, is well known: the evolutionary progress of Greek sculpture toward ever-increasing naturalism, with Nikandre's statue standing toward the beginning of this notional developmental line and the Nike toward its end. The juxtaposition is strong and therefore effective. But what is offered as straightforward description and objective stylistic analysis is in actuality carefully crafted triumphal rhetoric that has little to do with the statues themselves. According to Donohue,

it is the interpretation of the styles that determined the historical positions assigned to these images, because neither can be dated on other grounds. The stylistic comparison is therefore circular, for it serves merely to reconfirm a chronology that was established by the stylistic analysis of the individual works in the first place. What passes for secure information is the outcome of intensive interpretation. (p. 27)

In the section that follows Donohue reviews in detail the circumstances of the statues' discoveries. She asserts that the dates of Nikandre's statue and the Nike of Samothrace are based entirely on stylistic analysis since the archaeological contexts in which they were found are not particularly helpful when it comes to chronology. If one is after a precise date of manufacture, then this is certainly true; neither context provides that kind of information. However, the archaeological-find contexts of statues rarely tell us this. And to juxtapose stylistic analysis or "art history" on the one hand and contextual analysis or "archaeology" on the other, as Donohue does, sets up an artificial contrast between two modes of analysis that in fact share many of the same methodological premises. Art history and archaeology, as Richard Neer has recently proposed, are equally committed to the evidence of style.² While information derived from an archaeological context might appear more objective than an art historical attribution based on stylistic analysis, both are predicated on stylistic associations.

One of the difficulties with utilizing stylistic analysis to date Nikandre's statue and the Nike of Samothrace is that a large group of similar statues with which they can

be compared, a necessary prerequisite for this method to work most effectively, is lacking. The suggested dates for Nikandre's statue range from about 660 to 630 BCE, a fairly narrow range when it comes to dating early Greek sculpture, while the dates for the Nike of Samothrace vary much more widely, from the later fourth to the first century BCE. The greater disparity here may have much to do with the fact that Hellenistic sculpture is generally more difficult to date precisely based on the traditional framework of stylistic progression because Hellenistic sculpture did not develop in this way. But Donohue is certainly right to point out that the problematic nature of dating statues based on seemingly objective stylistic criteria is indicated by the wide range of dates that such an "objective" method of analysis is able to produce. Few scholars acknowledge the tenuous nature of the evidence on which this enterprise rests and the circularity of reasoning typically deployed.³ A detailed physical description, which is presented as if it were a disinterested accounting of the "facts" of the piece, is in fact deeply implicated in the interpretation that is then offered.

Donohue vividly demonstrates the imbricated nature of this process through a thorough accounting of the various and changing ways in which Nikandre's statue has been described and interpreted. She argues that the scholarly reception of the statue was affected by several shifting variables, including "the corpus of Greek sculpture known at any particular time; prevailing theories about early Greek sculpture in terms of origin, stylistic development, regional characteristics, and non-Greek affiliations; shifting conceptions of artistic form and representation; and aspects of the social context of scholarship" (p. 38). By quoting a series of descriptions of the statue published from 1878 to 1885 by its excavator, Théophile Homolle, she shows quite clearly how Homolle's different interpretative interests, derived primarily from ancient texts referring to the early development of Greek statuary, shaped the language he used and the particular features he emphasized in his formal analysis of the statue's appearance. While we might assume that the actual appearance of a statue is fixed and a matter of objective truth—a premise that is reinforced structurally by the separation of description and interpretation—Donohue's incisive analysis illustrates that "what the statue 'looks like' is determined by the interpretive contexts" (p. 54). Even the category of early Greek statuary itself can be seen at least in part as an interpretative construct.

Homolle's descriptions and interpretations of Nikandre's dedication set the parameters of the discourse on early Greek art for more than a century. The statue figures prominently, for example, in a series of crucial late-nineteenth-century debates concerning the originality of Greek sculpture and its independence from the artistic traditions of Egypt and the Near East, and the construction of a master narrative of artistic

progress and the interrelation of materials, forms, and techniques. Each of these interpretative models had its own suppositions and aims, and anyone familiar with contemporary scholarship will know that these questions still animate the discourse on early Greek art. The comparison of Nikandre's statue with later works like the Nike of Samothrace merely serves to reinforce a master narrative of artistic progress that continually places the earlier statue at a distinct disadvantage simply because it does not look like what comes later. A different interpretative model is clearly needed, one that does not insist on seeing early Greek statuary as a prelude to the Classical or the Hellenistic or that simply assumes as its organizing principle a progressivist paradigm. Surely when Nikandre set up what must have been a very expensive, visually prominent, and artistically innovative votive dedication to the goddess Artemis in one of the most prestigious sanctuaries in the Aegean, she did not regard her dedication as a failure because it did not utilize an artistic style that would not exist for centuries to come, and neither should we.

Donohue indeed presents an alternative explanation of Nikandre's statue in chapter 4, one that, by taking seriously the representational content of the figure itself, refreshingly refuses to engage in the kind of negative rhetoric that has plagued most previous studies. She does not make stylistic comparisons with later Greek statues, as such an exercise is rather pointless if the object is to try to understand something about the dedicant's and maker's original goals; the later style of Classical or Hellenistic statuary is logically irrelevant to these questions. Here is where a close reading of the historiography of another early Greek statue, the Lady of Auxerre—a much-better-preserved statuette that is probably roughly contemporary with Nikandre's statue—can contribute significantly to formulating a different approach. Donohue resurrects an earlier interpretation of the Lady of Auxerre's costume, published by Maxine Collignon in 1908 but afterward abandoned, that suggested that the statuette has two garments, a thick, stiff, and heavily decorated skirt over a finely pleated underskirt. She argues convincingly that this particular costume's form, decoration, and color had important positive associations for these early images that had little or nothing to do with modeling the forms of the body beneath. The Lady of Auxerre or Nikandre's statue may fail as "draped nudes," a common way of conceptualizing the draped female form at least since Winckelmann, but that clearly was not their aim, and it is counterproductive to evaluate them as if it were.

Here it might have been useful for Donohue to extend her analysis of the problematics of description beyond the narrow focus on style, stylistic development, and chronology to consider the problem of artifact categorization, which is also produced through description. In the case of Nikandre's statue, this is a crucial interpretative prob-

lem. That is, how are we to describe the subject of Nikandre's dedication? Does the statue represent the goddess Artemis, or does it represent Nikandre herself? The inscription on the statue is typically ambiguous; early votive inscriptions do not usually name the subject of the statue. Donohue's compelling interpretation of the statue's costume leads one to the conclusion that it is Nikandre who is represented, although in the end, perhaps rightly, Donohue pulls back from such an identification. But is the reluctance to see Nikandre's dedication, and the statues of archaic korai that Donohue also mentions here, as images of particular individuals partly a result of the way in which these statues have been described and categorized, primarily by Gisela Richter, as generic types? A recent study, not mentioned by Donohue, makes just this assertion, pointing out that earlier descriptions of the Acropolis korai had in fact emphasized the figures' individuality.⁴ In her interesting interpretation of Nikandre's statue, Donohue invokes beauty as an important signifying element (p. 220): "the garments are involved in the production of a kind of beauty that results from the wearers' successful conformity to socially determined aesthetic norms." Given the problematic role description plays in defining beauty—can beauty in fact be described?—it would have been useful for Donohue to consider this aspect of the statue more fully.

While narrowly focused on a select number of statues, *Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description* so thoroughly undermines traditional approaches to the analysis of draped female statues from all periods of Greek art that the category as a whole appears ripe for reassessment. Donohue has shown how the historiography of Greek sculpture has direct relevance to current praxis; all who are interested in moving the study of Greek sculpture away from its obsession with chronology and the construction of master narratives based on artistic progress will profit from engaging with the issues raised in this book. We eagerly await the author's next volume.

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Notes

1. See now the new English translation of Johann Joachim Winckelmann's original 1764 edition of *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, which should make this foundational text accessible to many more readers: Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, trans. H. F. Mallgrave, with an introduction by Alex Potts (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006). Alex Potts is also the author of the first intellectual biography in English of Winckelmann, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).
2. Richard Neer, "Connoisseurship and the Stakes of Style," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 1 (2005): 1–26.

3. See the important critique of these issues by R. R. R. Smith, "The Use of Images: Visual History and Ancient History," in *Classics in Progress: Essays on Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. T. P. Wiseman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 59–102, esp. 64–78.
4. Mary Stieber, *The Poetics of Appearance in the Attic Korai* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

WILLIAM TRONZO, ED.

St. Peter's in the Vatican

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Throughout the years, the extraordinary history of St. Peter's continues to attract scholars from various disciplines, to focus their attention on elements that may have been overlooked in the past or to prompt new approaches to well-known phenomena. For a volume like this one, that may be both an asset and a weak point, since it runs the risk of repeating already familiar facts and approaches. As William Tronzo indicates in his introduction, the eight contributions range from the specific to the general, although one could differ on what is specific and what is general. The contributions that the editor calls specific are those of Glen W. Bowersock ("Peter and Constantine"), Antonio Iacobini ("*Est Haec Sacra Principis Aedes: The Vatican Basilica from Innocent III to Gregory IX [1198–1241]*"), Irving Lavin ("Bernini at St. Peter's: *Singularis in Singulis, in Omnibus Unicus*"), and Alessandra Anselmi ("Theaters for the Canonization of Saints"). It remains to be seen, however, how general the other four contributions are, written by Dale Kinney ("Spolia"), Christof Thoenes ("Renaissance St. Peter's"), Henry Millon ("Michelangelo to Marchionni, 1546–1784"), and Richard Etlin ("St. Peter's in the Modern Era: The Paradoxical Colossus"). The titles of the contributions show the attempt to cover large parts of the history of the building and to pay attention to specific problems or phenomena on top of that. Wisely, no attempt has been made to cover something as elusive as "the history" of this most important church of Christianity in Europe.

The first contribution, by Glen Bowersock, takes the reader back to the Early Christian era and centers on the surprising question of whether or not the emperor Constantine really was the patron of the fourth-century St. Peter's. According to Bowersock, a remarkable lack of interest on Constantine's part as patron of the Early Christian church for the Apostle Peter in contemporary sources has miraculously escaped the attention of generations of scholars. The author works his way through a few old (very old) authors, like Jacob Burckhardt and Edward Gibbon, to create doubts about the involvement of the emperor Constantine with the foundation and the actual

building of St. Peter's. However problematic the most important written source, the famous sixth-century Liber Pontificalis, may be in its wording, the doubts created by Bowersock are unnecessary and unfounded. It is undeniably true that a figure like Constantine has been used by later generations to serve their own purposes, but this element has surely been exaggerated by Bowersock. The main objection to his argument is that it serves another purpose as well, since the author introduces Constantine's son Constans as the most likely candidate to have founded the Vatican basilica. Instead of presenting mere criticism of the sources connecting the Vatican basilica and the emperor Constantine, the research in this essay seems to have been selected to deliberately remove Constantine from the foundation of St. Peter's and to replace him with Constans. By declaring the story of Constantine as founder of St. Peter's basilica to be a construct of a later generation without solid historical foundation—one meant instead to serve papal legitimacy and propaganda—Bowersock neglects the unintended consequences of his arguments. By casting doubt on the validity of the Liber Pontificalis as the main source for Constantine's involvement with St. Peter's, Bowersock overlooks the broader context of Constantine's activity as founder of Christian churches in Rome and elsewhere, as recorded in the Liber Pontificalis. The recently discovered Christian basilica in Ostia, for example, would be deprived of its founder, as would the basilica of St. John Lateran and many others. He should have reconsidered the involvement of Constantine in all the church foundations mentioned in the Liber Pontificalis instead of focusing solely on St. Peter's and ignoring the context of the foundation of this basilica.

The architecture of the Constantinian—as I will keep calling it—basilica of St. Peter's was not altered structurally until the sixteenth century. Already in the fifteenth century Pope Nicholas V initiated a project to replace the fourth-century transept and apse and to add chapels to the outer side aisles, which were supposed to be vaulted. This intriguing project, which has come down to us only in a description by Giannozzo Manetti, forms the point of departure of the essay by Christof Thoenes. An eminent historian of Renaissance St. Peter's, Thoenes guides the reader easily through the complex history of successive plans, designs, ambitions, and failures. Even though the plan of Nicholas V never reached a phase beyond the building of the foundation for a new choir much deeper than the apse of the fourth-century basilica, this unfinished project of some fifty years earlier, Thoenes suggests, gave Pope Julius II the impetus to undertake building activity in the early sixteenth century. The ample discussion of the fifteenth-century project of Nicholas V is

aptly treated by Thoenes as a careful introduction to the successive projects that eventually led to the complete demolition of the Early Christian basilica and the building of the actual St. Peter's. Nicholas V may have used the danger of the old church's collapse as a mere pretext to make his case for a project to rebuild part of the old structure. Another motif should be considered as more important, according to Thoenes. Over the centuries the old basilica had gradually undergone a very large number of changes in the interior: specific spaces like the choir of the chapter had been installed within the basilica, and many monuments and other additions had obscured the large interior space. The accumulation of all these monuments and spatial elements rendered the use of the basilica more difficult. Therefore, the modernization of the building must have been the central element in this pope's attempts to renovate Constantine's basilica.

From the time Julius II took up plans (about 1505) to build the new St. Peter's, various architects, most of all Donato Bramante, produced many drawings that afford a glimpse of the process that is rich but often confusing. A famous plan on parchment by Bramante has been considered as one-half of a centrally planned church building, but research in the past twenty years has cast doubt on this interpretation. According to Thoenes and others, this plan (Uffizi 1A)—on a parchment that has been cut on all four sides, so the original dimensions of the sheet are not known—shows only the western part of a building project. Configuring the sequence of these architectural drawings tends to form a specialized field of scholarly research, but Thoenes adequately explains his views on the overall events. Since there are so few fixed points in this part of the history, the sequence of the drawings and the involvement of Giuliano da Sangallo and Fra Giocondo could be described differently from Thoenes's account. Thoenes does not mention Fra Giocondo, but his drawing is an interesting one, not in the least because it is so dissimilar from the plan that would eventually be executed. A comparison of the drawings by Giuliano, Fra Giocondo, and Bramante reveals that they do not correspond at all in the most decisive elements: whereas Fra Giocondo delivered a plan for a large longitudinal church culminating in an apse with ambulatory and radial chapels, Giuliano da Sangallo came up with a centrally planned church, on the reverse of which Bramante sketched a longitudinal variant. If anything, these drawings indicate that no well-defined plan existed when Julius II began his enormous project, so that apparently several architects were invited to come up with ideas. Although Bramante may have been more involved in making plans for Julius II than any other architect, it still remains unclear that Bra-