
It is refreshing that Mark Fullerton does not simply take it for granted that the study of Greek art—and yet another publication on the topic—is *ipso facto* a desirable thing. The introduction to his book explores why Classical art should be of fundamental interest. And this type of exploration and explanation underpins the style of the book as a whole. Fullerton is at pains to situate the arts of Greece historically, not only as artefacts within their own socio-political context, but also as conceptual constructs, forged both in ancient times and in subsequent thinking. Rather than merely recording and organising information and ideas, the author’s chief motivation—and one that seems to this reader highly commendable—appears to be the clarification of how scholarship has shaped our knowledge and the different ways in which we understand Greek art.

This fresh approach, which shows familiarity with the scholarship of the ‘new’ art history but avoids the pitfalls of its more obscure applications, assures the book an effective place in the extensive literature on Greek art. While achieving a remarkably comprehensive general coverage within its modest page length, it avoids retracing the all too familiar run-of-the-mill ‘developments’, but offers a stimulating engagement with the art by approaching it from a number of directions.

Fullerton’s approach is reflected in the unusual organisation of the text. Avoiding the more customary overriding chronological format, or divisions by different art types, Fullerton works through themes related to the constructs underpinning Greek art—the political purposes of art; its role in forging the identity of self and other; its narrative and historical function; the importance of style; the afterlife of the classical. Each chapter in turn has three subdivisions, and the central one does in fact follow a broad chronological framework. The second section for ch.1 on art and politics (‘Art and the Polis’) focuses on Geometric art, for ch.2 on identity (‘Greeks and Others’) tackles the early Archaic period, and so forth. There would of course be something highly artificial in addressing a theme through a single period. But the third section of each chapter adds a broader discussion, applying the chosen theme to a wider range of examples, so that the argument does not unfold in a simplistic linear way.
The discussion also ranges across many media of two- and three-dimensional forms, as well as the applied arts, further enriching the text.

For a reader familiar with Greek art, it is hard to judge just how difficult this interesting approach might be for readers new to the area. Inevitably it takes for granted a fair amount of prior knowledge to make sense of the wide-ranging references and connections between the different sections. Fullerton’s unusual decision to open each chapter with an application of its theme to the Parthenon does afford a thread of continuity: but, while it adds another possibly more familiar strand to the intricate weaving of ideas, it is a moot point whether it makes the book easier to grasp.

Yet the admirable clarity of the writing style and the trouble taken to elucidate unfamiliar terms suggests that the intended audience for his book is the undergraduate student. This might also explain the lack of references and footnotes, presumably intended to promote a flowing and readable text. But if this was the reason behind the omission, then individual albeit brief commentary on each of the illustrations seems an odd inclusion, as they create the same sort of secondary interference as footnotes.

However, the commentary complements the prominence of the images, and makes it possible to engage with them independently of the main text. The generous provision of illustrations is one of the great strengths of the publication, and one that would certainly be very helpful to a student readership, particularly considering the book’s inexpensive price. The illustrations include both well-known and more unusual examples, with a very high proportion of them in colour. Photographs can never fully address the tangible reality of works, but colour does assist. All too often it is assumed (at least for scholarly texts, if not for more lavish ‘coffee table’ publications) that sculpture can be satisfactorily reproduced in black-and-white photographs. But the lack of colour neutralises sculpture’s materiality, while colour gives at least some idea of the textural and tonal values of the tactile qualities of the medium.

The layout of the images is also well-designed, shifting between full-page spreads and marginal images, and varying the customary rectangular
format of photographs with ‘etched’ images that are ‘wrapped around’ by the text. (In one particularly satisfying example, both the back and front of a vase by the Amasis painter are shown as mirror images on facing pages 72 and 73, with the text echoing their contours, thus providing not only an attractive layout, but affording an immediate visual indication that they are complementary views.)

When so much care would seem to have been lavished on the layout, it is surprising to find typographical errors in the text, particularly in a publication from Cambridge University Press. Some examples of missing capitals at the beginning of sentences impede an otherwise clear read, as does the use of the form of the verb rather than the noun in ‘Cult practises’ (41). I also spotted a number of missing apostrophes, and a curious composite word ‘envoke’ (151).

But these are minor errors. In the end of the day the chief failing of an otherwise very worthwhile addition to the general literature on Greek art lies in its lack of referencing. It is problematic not only that there are no footnotes to indicate the source of various ideas and interpretations that are raised, but that Fullerton even avoids naming writers when he specifically discusses their research. A single exception in the text is Rhys Carpenter, cited in relation to his hypothesis of a Kimonian Parthenon (110), and one wonders why he was picked out for this rare recognition.

Elsewhere the omissions are perplexing: even the most junior of students would surely want to know who the unnamed American scholar is, discussed on page 81 as the originator of a new interpretation of the Parthenon frieze that had a major impact on the scholarship of that monument, even attracting extensive press coverage. It is possible to work out by a process of deduction that Joan Connelly is the scholar, for only one item in the bibliography for that chapter has a title that matches the theory presented and the date of 1996 mentioned in the text. But this is an exceedingly convoluted procedure when standard academic referencing would have supplied the information in a straightforward fashion. Even in the absence of footnotes, it could have been addressed by including Connelly’s name in the discussion and leaving the interested reader to discover further details in the bibliography. In other cases the obscurity is even greater, as there are no clues by which to match different theories
with texts cited in the bibliography. Apart from being frustrating for those who would wish to follow up on ideas, this practice sets a poor example for the very undergraduate students who might be thought to be the book’s target readership.

There is another aspect, too, which makes the volume less suited as a prescribed text than might be thought on first impression. The arrangement of the material, so fresh in its avoidance of the well-worn conventions of organisation, makes it very awkward to consult for basic information. It is a book which will challenge conventional ideas and set students thinking, but it cannot readily be sampled or used as a reference text. Even the extensive treatment of the Parthenon, for example, which builds up a rich discourse through the opening section of each chapter, is not a fully developed coverage to which a reader could turn for information on every aspect of the monument. It also needs to be mentioned that, despite the prominence given to this architectural monument in the text, architecture per se is almost entirely neglected.

At the end of the day, Fullerton’s volume seems to fall between two stools. As a general book it cannot be expected to add to scholarly research on Greek art (although academics will enjoy reading it as a personal and well-crafted discussion of some of the implications of scholarship in the area), yet it does not directly meet the needs of an introductory text either. By failing to target a precise audience, it is a book that one must needs categorise as good in a general way, rather than as outstanding for a specific readership. It best addresses that ubiquitous but indefinite ‘educated layman’, and would probably have to be recommended to students as supplementary rather than primary reading. I would, however, strongly recommend that it should be included in this section of undergraduate reading lists, in view of the valuable service offered by what I deduce to be Fullerton’s admirable ambition—to provide an accessible treatment of the complexity of scholarship that will make his readers aware of how our knowledge of Greek art is constructed.

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