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Miletus - Didyma, Archaic Sculpture

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Summary :

Since the 18th century the Milesian peninsula has produced a huge number of Archaic sculptures, so as to constitute one of the most numerous and elegant collection of Archaic works of the Greek world. According to the time of discovery, pieces went to various museums around the world.

Date

Archaic period

Geographical Location

Miletus and Didyma

1. Story of research

The seated figures of [Didyma](#) were the first known group of Archaic sculptures from [Miletus](#). They were reported in 1765 when Richard Chandler visited the area but remained mostly undescribed until the second expedition of the Dilettanti in 1812. At this time, William Gell marked on a sketch the location of twelve seated figures along the sacred way leading to the [sanctuary of Apollo](#). In 1857-1858 Thomas Newton visited the area on the request of the British Museum. He found there ten seated figures and proceeded to their removal and shipment to London.

A second major group of Archaic sculptures was discovered in Didyma and Miletus during the German excavations at the beginning of the 20th century, and most of them reached the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, while others went to Istanbul and Izmir Museums. More recent discoveries, as numerous and fine as the old ones, are hosted in the local Museum of Miletus, which, frustratingly enough, remains closed to the public. Dispersed among several countries and museums, the Archaic sculptures from Miletus are unequally published in museum catalogues¹ and have never been the subject of a comprehensive study, with the exception of the sculptures from Didyma which were well examined by Klaus Tschelt,² without, however, forming a separate group.

2. Towards a definition of the Milesian school of sculpture

V. von Graeve, who announced long ago the complete publication of the Milesian sculpture, adopted in several articles³ a minimalist position, which has much in common with Gisela Richter's method. According to Richter,⁴ in the present stage of knowledge, we cannot differentiate between several regional schools, and only a general chronological sequence of the [Archaic sculpture](#) can be defined. This method has been much criticised by several scholars.⁵ On the contrary, the existence of regional schools of sculpture is well established and our ability to distinguish between different meaningfully constituted styles is not so weak as it has already been stressed.

It is then misleading to consider *a priori* that all the statues discovered in Miletus are Milesian works and to postulate a great stylistic diversity of Milesian production, as V. von Graeve asserted. When studying the Archaic plastic in Miletus and Didyma, we have to make a distinction between local Milesian works and importations.

For example, the beautiful veiled head discovered in the [Athena temple](#) (Berlin 1631), which is certainly the work of a Samian master,⁶ has a particular meaning as the gift of a Samian dedicator or, more probably, of a Milesian who wanted to distinguish himself from other dedicators. Statues have much more to tell us when they are rightfully ascribed to a particular workshop.

If we do not accept to consider all statues found in Miletus as representative of Milesian sculpture, the definition of Milesian characteristics becomes easier. Actually, there has been a constant debate among scholars on the existence of a definite and separate



Milesian school of sculpture. In several pages of incredible assertion, A. Furtwängler⁷ already defined in 1893 the outlines of a Milesian school distinctive from those of [Samos and Naxos](#). Against this thesis, W. Deonna⁸ argued that Samos and Miletus should not be distinguished by definition of a local style, since the draped kouros found at Cape Phoneas on Samos (in Vathy Museum) and Aeakes' seated statue (in Pythagorio Museum) were exactly of the same style as the statues found in Miletus. Today we know that these two statues found on Samos are in fact Milesian works exported to Samos. In his masterwork, *Frühgriechische Bildhauerschulen*, E. Langlotz⁹ demonstrated the existence of two completely distinct styles, namely the Samian and the Milesian, whose existence and differences have been strongly confirmed by Fr. Croissant's book on *protomai*.¹⁰

The inclusion of the terracotta figurines in the discussion and its confrontation to the large scale marble sculpture make sense when a clear stylistic type of faces emerges from the works. If you put side by side the heads of these four works, the Hieronda kouros , a seated statue from Didyma, the draped kouros from Cape Phoneas and a small terracotta head recently discovered on Zeyintepe hill in Miletus, you can see the similarity in the general contour of the round figure, the globular aspect of the eyes, the strength of the chin, the styling of the hair.

Stylistically consistent, Milesian sculpture is however not monotonous. Compared to other regional traditions, Milesian sculpture is typologically much diversified. In addition to kouroi, korai and architectural sculpture, Milesian workshops produced offering bearers, draped kouroi, seated statues, symposiasts, naiskoi with standing and seated goddess, egyptianizing and ionian reclining lions.

This formal diversity inside a stylistically well-defined sculptural tradition is certainly sociologically meaningful. It probably reflects the dedicators' need of differentiation and their wish to dedicate to the deities a statue, which is not the exact copy of other offerings, but one that truly speaks about them. This diversity peculiar to the Milesian sculpture gives us the picture of a split Milesian society, where competition between citizens is intense and permanent. Actually, civil strifes and rivalries are well attested in written sources¹¹ and tend to confirm our archaeological reading. Let us examine more closely the case of the Didymean seated statues, which are the best representatives of the Milesian sculpture.

3. The seated statues in Didyma






These Archaic seated statues were found along the Sacred Way leading to the sanctuary of Didyma. Art historians often interpreted them as representations of the Branchidai known as historical people, and Möbius¹² even recognised in one of them the portrait of the highest priest, the prophet of the sanctuary.¹³ On the contrary, Tuchelt¹⁴ has long been arguing against this identification. First, in Archaic times, there was not in the Greek world any row of statues similar to the processional way leading to Egyptian sanctuaries. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the so-called Branchidai were not discovered in their original setting. Initially, most of them were offerings consecrated inside the sacred precinct; they were probably expelled from the ruins of the sanctuary at the time of the renewal of activity of the oracle and placed along the Sacred Way in the beginning of the Hellenistic period. Second, the word "Branchidai" was initially used to designate seated statues with topographical meaning¹⁵ and it is only in the more recent archaeological literature that the term became to be understood sociologically. Finally, German archaeologists discovered recently a new precinct wall along the Sacred Way at mid-way between Miletus and Didyma, at Kokkinolakka.¹⁶ There, they found another set of seated statues, which were aristocratic offerings but quite certainly not representations of priests from Didyma. Among all these male seated statues, different artistic orientations are represented, so that no one is the exact replica of another. The statue B 271 of the British Museum, the one dedicated by Chares, the so-called "Prophet", which corresponds to the egyptianizing Milesian style, and one of those recently discovered in Kokkinolakka represent four distinct orientations of the Milesian Archaic plastic. Consequently, inside a definite typological form, sculptors could express their artistic genius in order to make dedicators proud of their originality.

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2. Kl. Tuchelt, *Die archaischen Skulpturen von Didyma* (Berlin 1970).
3. V. von Graeve, Archaische Plastik in Milet. Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Werkstätten und der Chronologie, *MiJb* 34 (1983) p. 7-24. V. von Graeve, Über verschiedene Richtungen der milesischen Skulptur in archaischer Zeit. Bemerkungen zur formalen Gestaltung und zur Lokalisierung, in W. Müller-Wiener (ed.), *Milet 1899-1980. Ergebnisse, Probleme und Perspektiven einer Ausgrabung* (Tübingen 1986) p. 81-94.
4. G.M.A. Richter, *Korai. Archaic Greek Maidens* (London 1968). G.M.A. Richter, *Kouroi, Archaic Greek Youths* (London 1970³).
5. See Fr. Croissant, *Les kouroi du Ptoion*, RA (1977) p. 87-94 and Cl. Rolley, *L'espace ou le temps. Poin de vue sur la sculpture grecque archaïque, Formes 2* (1978) p. 3-12.
6. Fr. Croissant, *Les protomés féminines archaïques* (Paris 1983) p. 35-48.
7. A. Furtwängler, *Meisterwerke der griechischen Plastik* (Berlin 1893) p. 711-719.
8. W. Déonna, *Les "Apollons" archaïques. Étude sur le type masculin de la statuaire grecque au VI^e siècle avant notre ère* (Genève 1909) p. 285-293.
9. E. Langlotz, *Frühgriechische Bildhauerschulen* (Nürnberg 1927) p. 103-108.
10. Fr. Croissant, *Les protomés féminines archaïques* (Paris 1983).
11. See M. Faraguna, *Note di storia milesia arcaica. I Gergithes e la stasis di VI secolo*, SMEA 36 (1995) p. 37-89.
12. H. Möbius, Archaische Sitzstatue aus Didyma, *AntPlast* 2 (1963) p. 23-29.
13. See U. Höckmann, Die Sitzstatue des "Propheten" aus Didyma, *MDAI(I)* 46 (1996) p. 93-102.
14. Kl. Tuchelt, *Die archaischen Skulpturen von Didyma* (Berlin 1970) p. 215-219.
15. See Ch. T. Newton, *A History of Discoveries at Halicarnassus, Cnidus and Branchidae* (London 1863).
16. Kl. Tuchelt, P; Schneider and T.G. Schatner, *Ein Kultbezirk an der Heiligen Strasse von Milet nach Didyma* (Didyma 3.1, Mainz 1996).

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