

## THE VIEWING AND OBSCURING OF THE PARTHENON FRIEZE

[PLATES I–IIa)

FOR all its notoriety, Classical archaeologists find the Parthenon frieze a difficult object with which to come to terms: its position on the building is seen as perverse, its subject-matter impenetrable, and its 'style' anomalous. This paper sets out to show that these difficulties are inter-related.

The difficulties which even the most experienced scholars feel with the position of the frieze are well summed up in the following statements by A. W. Lawrence and by Bernard Ashmole. Lawrence writes that the Parthenon sculptures are completed by

'a continuous frieze on level with the metopes, on the outer wall of the internal chamber. In this position it was only visible from a distance in occasional glimpses between the columns, while to those who walked inside the colonnade only a distorted view was possible, and that by much craning of the neck. But in the Athens of Pericles this was a matter of indifference; the tribute paid by weaker allies was pressed into the service of the glorification of Athens, so that the city could lavish richness even on beauties which would remain almost invisible.'<sup>1</sup>

Ashmole opens his chapter on the Parthenon frieze by saying that

'An ancient Greek stranger coming for the first time to the Acropolis at Athens and looking up at the sculptural decoration of the Parthenon might well have been excused for believing that its architect had taken leave of his senses . . . the frieze was hidden, nearly forty feet from the floor and at an angle of vision so sharp that it was difficult to distinguish the main actions and impossible to see details. The light too was unfavourable, since it was all reflected up, much diffused, from the pavements, columns and walls. The decision to have an Ionic frieze, and to have it here, was an extraordinary one, and induces the uneasy feeling that . . . it was dictated by a kind of artistic hubris, a determination to load every available space with decoration, and to show what unlimited money could do.'<sup>2</sup>

Both Lawrence and Ashmole find the position of the frieze incomprehensible other than in terms of conspicuous display. For them the Athenians were showing off to their fellow Greeks. Others have felt that the frieze was so invisible that it could hardly have been designed to have an impact on men at all, and have come to the conclusion that the spectators to whom the Athenians are making the display are the gods. Thus Langlotz wrote that

'All der uns so kostbare Bildschmuck am Tempel war nicht für den antiken Betrachter geschaffen, der die Schönheit des Frieses seiner Lage am Bau wegen gar nicht bewundern konnte, sondern allein für die Augen der Götter.'<sup>3</sup>

Such an explanation not only ignores the fact that the relief of the frieze is deeper at the top than the bottom, a fact which suggests that efforts were made to improve the visibility of the frieze for the spectator below,<sup>4</sup> but it makes no greater attempt to explain why the display took the form of a frieze, and a frieze in this position.

Those who have faced the latter questions have produced answers in terms of tradition or architectural function. Martin Robertson invokes tradition: having discussed the question of visibility, remarking that 'I am told that when [the west frieze] was planked over during restoration work it told well in the reflected light from below,' he goes on to observe that 'This

<sup>1</sup> A. W. Lawrence, *Greek and Roman Sculpture* (London, 1972) 139.

<sup>2</sup> B. Ashmole, *Architect and sculptor in classical Greece* (London, 1972) 118.

<sup>3</sup> E. Langlotz, *Phidias und der Parthenonfries* (Stuttgart, 1965) 5.

<sup>4</sup> See F. Brommer, *Der Parthenonfries* (Mainz 1977) 156, citing earlier discussions.

was in any case a favourite position for sculpture on a Greek temple, at the ends of the building though not along the sides.<sup>5</sup> Ridgway, on the other hand, appeals to the needs of the building, claiming that 'the frieze visually connects the prostyle porches to the cella.'<sup>6</sup> Neither of these types of explanation is really satisfactory: that sculpture is not unknown over the columns in antis of pronaos and opisthodomos before the Parthenon will hardly explain why a continuous sculptural frieze is put all round the cella of the Parthenon; and Ridgway herself admits that there are other amphiprostyle temples outside Athens which survive without employing a sculpted figural frieze as a binding element, relying rather on the use of purely architectural mouldings, including the moulded anta and wall base which the Parthenon eschews.

None of these scholars takes into serious consideration the full effect which its position has on the way that the frieze of the Parthenon is seen. Any frieze on the outside of a building cannot be seen all at a single glance: at least half, and more normally three-quarters, of the frieze will be invisible to the viewer at any particular moment. With the Parthenon, however, the constraints on the viewer are still greater. As Stillwell has pointed out, the common assumption that the 'natural' way to view the frieze is from the peristyle is quite unreasonable, involving an impossibly acute angle of view. The only way to view the frieze is through the peristyle, from some distance outside (PLATE Ia).<sup>7</sup> From this position the viewer cannot see the whole even of a single side of the frieze, but simply sees one or more short segments of the frieze, as it appears between the columns of the peristyle. To a certain extent this can be seen to transform the Ionic continuous frieze into a Doric discontinuous frieze of metopes,<sup>8</sup> but there is an important distinction: while each metope of a Doric frieze offers a complete scene, a single and self-sufficient composition, the sections of the Ionic frieze seen through the external colonnade are not discrete and have no fixed boundaries; what the viewer sees is dependent upon his or her position and alters as that position alters.

The way in which the frieze is seen has several important consequences. Most obviously, it places strict controls upon the subject and composition: compositions which work at the level of the whole side will become incomprehensible when chopped up in this way, and subjects which demand such compositions will be excluded. Thus the battle scenes of the frieze of the temple of Athena Nike depend upon the viewer being able to see the whole of one side at a time, and would be impossible on the Parthenon. Equally impossible, however, are compositions which break down into distinct individual units, for while they may provide a fine sight for a viewer in one position they will more frequently be cut about as the frame of composition moves with the spectator. The subjects which are admirably depicted on temple metopes are therefore not suitable for this frieze. Even a frieze in the manner of those of the temples of Apollo at Bassai and (probably) of Poseidon at Sounion, which ran round the inside of walls enclosing a space, is ruled out. Although these friezes relied neither on composition at the level of the whole side, nor on composition at the level of the single combat, both their subject and their manner of presentation did depend on the ability of the viewer rapidly to scan the whole frieze.

Less straightforwardly, the way in which the frieze is seen has implications for the relationship between the viewer and the frieze. While the sculptures of the pediments and metopes display themselves to a passive viewer as created objects upon which to gaze, the sculpture of the frieze engages the viewer in an active capacity: the viewer actually creates what he or she sees by the position which he or she adopts, and the process of viewing the frieze is a process of continuously creating new views. What the viewer sees at any one moment, in any one view, is thus only one of an infinite number of possible views: it is the viewer who is master of what s/he surveys. At the same time the viewer must also recreate what s/he is seeing, for s/he

<sup>5</sup> C. M. Robertson, *The Parthenon frieze* (London 1975) 10.

<sup>6</sup> B. S. Ridgway, *Fifth century styles in Greek sculpture* (Princeton 1981) 74.

<sup>7</sup> R. Stillwell, *Hesperia* xxxviii (1969) 231-41.

<sup>8</sup> Some have thought that the viewer would be better served if the frieze had been discontinuous, cf. C. S. Murray, *The sculptures of the Parthenon* (London 1903) 84.

does not and cannot see the frieze as a continuous band: s/he sees two sections of the frieze on either side of a column before seeing what joins them, as s/he moves to reveal what the column had obscured.<sup>9</sup> Constantly the viewer must gaze upon scenes whose antecedents and results s/he cannot see, and must supply provisional answers to these problems before being able to see the resolution offered by the sculptures themselves. The viewer is thus involved in the creation of the frieze in a way that s/he would not be if the frieze were not so 'perversely' placed.

The viewer approaches the Parthenon from the Propylaea and comes first to the west end. Looking up at the frieze from almost any position opposite this west end the viewer will be dissatisfied. Stillwell has pointed out how the direct view (from the axis of the intercolumniations) of the stretches of frieze between any two columns provides no satisfactory compositions on this west side:<sup>10</sup> the glimpses that s/he gets encourage the viewer to move across the west end. What the viewer can see is the representation of horsemen moving from the right to the left, and appears to be faced with a choice: s/he can apparently choose either to join the procession by moving with it, or to watch the procession pass by moving in the opposite direction to the figures on the frieze. The latter option is, however, illusory and cannot be sustained further than the southern end of the west side. The southernmost slab of the west frieze encapsulates the viewer's dilemma: here alone on all the preserved frieze (West xiv 26) there is a horse rearing and facing against the flow of the rest of the figures. The spectator whose position has created a view in which this horse is dominant will find that whichever course s/he takes moving with this horse or against it, s/he in fact ends up joining the procession as a whole; for if s/he moves to the right and proceeds down the south side of the temple s/he will indeed find that s/he is moving with the figures on the frieze and not against them, and the same is true if s/he moves to the left. It can hardly be accidental that this ambiguous signal to the viewer is found at this point, at the south-west corner from which the two strands of the procession both start out.

Whether the viewer initially decides to proceed to left or right, s/he will find himself or herself making a halting progress along one of the flanks of the temple with the procession which s/he will both constantly have to recreate as s/he moves and which his or her own progress will reproduce. This procession has become the procession of the viewer in a very strong sense. When the viewer comes to the east front of the temple his or her progress is slowed. The views between the columns at the east end offer more satisfactory compositions and more stability:<sup>11</sup> the spectator can stand still to observe the waiting dignitaries, lean on a stick to contemplate East vi 46, or even take a seat to gaze longer at the seated deities. Nevertheless, the spectator will not be allowed entirely to lose momentum until s/he comes to the central scene above the doorway into the cella, where the two strands of the procession meet.

The interpretation of the central scene of the east frieze (PLATE Ib) has been the subject of extended debate. Any interpretation must make sense of it in the context of the frieze as a whole, and because of the way in which the frieze has to be viewed the viewer is an essential part of that context. Scholars have noted that throughout the frieze the figures are as much preparing to process as themselves processing, and Robertson notes that 'by choosing the preparation of the procession rather than its progress the artist is enabled to emphasise the human side by constant light touches . . .'<sup>12</sup> However, the emphasis on the human side is much more basic and fundamental than this allows: while the figures on the frieze may themselves but prepare, there is one figure who in fact processes—and that is the viewer. Discussion of the subject of the frieze has focussed on the debate as to 'whether it could display a contemporary occasion, even generalized, and so represent a fifth-century festival enacted by contemporary, even if not identified Athenians.'<sup>13</sup> What has been ignored in this debate is that the procession that is enacted is the procession by the viewer: the procession can only be contemporary, but

<sup>9</sup> Stillwell's drawings make it clear that it is possible to see every part of the frieze in this way.

<sup>10</sup> Stillwell (n. 7) 234–8.

<sup>11</sup> Stillwell (n. 7) 238–9.

<sup>12</sup> C. M. Robertson, *A history of Greek art* (Cambridge 1975) 309.

<sup>13</sup> J. Boardman, 'The Parthenon frieze,' in E. Berger ed. *Parthenon-Kongress Basel* (Mainz 1984) 210–15.

contemporary not with the sculpting but with the viewing. The rôle of the viewer in both creating and reproducing the procession ensures that the procession is human and set in present time.

When the frieze is seen as a depiction of a normal Panathenaia, whether the first, one which involves the heroes of Marathon, or one of the middle of the fifth century, the central scene is an embarrassment. The climax of the Panathenaia was the handing over of the peplos, and yet (PLATE Ib) here the exchange of a folded cloth is off-centre, and the particular figures involved do not correspond closely to those we know to have taken part in the actual ceremony.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, not only is it unclear which way the folded cloth is moving<sup>15</sup>—is the small person giving it to the man or receiving it from him?—but whichever is the direction of exchange there is no hint of what happens next. This has led Robertson to suggest that ‘the little scene at the centre is a preparation too, those on the acropolis making ready to receive the procession’.<sup>16</sup>

Regarded from the standpoint of the only person who is actually processing, the viewer, the inconclusive nature of the central scene can be seen as essential, and Robertson’s suggestion falls into place. The hypothetical viewer has been led round the temple by the frieze, at an increasingly stately pace, and finally comes to a full stop face to face with the small group of standing figures between the groups of seated deities. Not only the meeting of the processions but also the provision of stools suggests that this is the point at which to stop. Throughout his or her progress round the temple, the viewer’s glimpses of the frieze have continually challenged him/her to anticipate the results of actions, only then to reveal them. Now, for the first time, the frieze itself offers no conclusion, no culminating scene: the construction of the end of the procession relies entirely on the viewer. The procession has ended not because the frieze has provided in itself any *raison d’être* for the procession, but because the one processing has arrived, and there before the viewer is the object of his procession: the great chryselephantine cult statue of Athena. This is what the temple was built to display, this is the object towards which worship is directed, and this is what the procession was all about.

The Parthenon frieze is not a decoration independent of the temple, it is integrated into the temple programme as a whole. The central scene of the east frieze could not be conclusive, because the conclusion, like the procession, is located elsewhere. There can be no final presentation of a new peplos, for this is not the old wooden statue of Athena Polias, this is a new and resplendent image, clothed in its own glory. And this new image has been provided with a new procession, the procession of the viewer. It is a considerable irony that the frieze that is so devoted to preparation leaves the viewer finally unprepared for the revolution with which s/he comes face to face at the end of the procession: in place of comforting conclusion the viewer is confronted by a shocking disclosure as s/he walks in.<sup>17</sup>

The viewer’s shock is compounded by the way in which the other sculptures which face him or her as s/he is about to enter the temple create a frame which poses fundamental questions about the position of the Athenian vis-à-vis the gods. The east pediment showed the birth of Athena, whose genesis, fully armed from the head of Zeus, is observed by a seated company of gods and framed by the horses of Helios and Selene. The base of the cult statue of Athena *Parthenos* showed the creation of Pandora, with, in all likelihood, a central frontal figure of Pandora staring out at the incoming viewer, her genesis observed by an assembly of some twenty gods, again framed by Helios and Selene.<sup>18</sup> The east frieze also assembles the gods, but

<sup>14</sup> cf. Boardman (n. 13) 213–4; Ashmole (n. 2) 143.

<sup>15</sup> Robertson (n. 12) 308–9 makes the case for the folded cloth being the old peplos which is being removed, rather than the new being given. Despite E. Simon, *Festivals of Attica* (Wisconsin 1983) 66, there is no external evidence to settle the question one way or the other.

<sup>16</sup> Robertson (n. 5) 11.

<sup>17</sup> On major festivals the big doors would have been wide open; at other times only one leaf of the door will

have been open. Pausanias’ account of his visits to temples makes it clear that in his time, at least, it was normally possible for a visitor to enter (see P. E. Corbett, *BICS* xvii [1970] 149–58), and that in the case of temples to which access was not allowed, it was quite possible to see the cult statue (cf. especially Pausanias ii 10.4).

<sup>18</sup> See N. Leipen, *Athena Parthenon, a reconstruction*, (Toronto 1971) 24–7.

the focus of their assembly is no god or figure from myth, it is the autochthonous Athenian. In the face of scenes of the creation of Athena and of Pandora the Athenians are made to confront their own construction of themselves, their own place in the world order. No Athenian, man or woman, who visited the Parthenon, followed the frieze and absorbed the sculptural programme, could go away without having been compelled to contemplate seriously his or her individual and collective identity.

The position and subject matter of the frieze are thus intimately linked. Putting the frieze round the top of the cella and its prostyle porticos inside the peristyle forces the viewer to move, to progress: it cannot but create a procession. But at the same time, if a procession is to be shown on a sculpted frieze, if its dynamics are to be captured, the viewer must be involved fully in what s/he sees, and this can only be achieved if the representation of the procession is placed at just this position on the temple.

The implications of the position and subject-matter of the frieze do not stop with their mutual interaction, they extend further to the manner in which the sculpture is executed. The 'style' of the Parthenon frieze has provoked as much discussion as its other aspects. The dimensions of the problem are nicely illustrated by the following scholarly comments. Lawrence writes:

'Exactly the same type of face is used throughout the frieze for every young man, likewise for every adult man and for every girl; the horses are all alike with one exception, when a filly is represented. The customary Greek reliance on types was thus carried to an extreme, deliberately and meticulously, perhaps for no other reason than to make the procession flow more smoothly.'<sup>19</sup>

Boardman writes:

'With the pediments so poorly preserved we have to turn to the frieze to judge the Parthenon's art at its best. The set, Classical features are calm and thoughtful, passionless. The artists who now had little interest in portraying the emotions in features, only rarely admitted nuances of expression or feeling. The idealised mortal is near-divine, self-sufficient and above ordinary passions. While this certainly represents an advance on the Olympia sculptures, it is not perhaps the advance we might have expected, and for the further development of the incipient portrayal of emotion and mood at Olympia we have to wait nearly a hundred years.'<sup>20</sup>

The uncanny uniformity of facial expression found in the Parthenon frieze is thus seen by Lawrence as the extreme expression of something innate, if not in the artists themselves then at least in their artistic tradition. It is seen by Boardman as a product of the lack of interest in portraying emotions. Both scholars thus situate the formal features of the sculpture outside the sculpture itself, making it independent of the subject matter of the frieze. Indeed Boardman does this to such an extent that he assumes that it is possible to read off the 'Parthenon's art' as a whole from the frieze.

Brommer, by contrast, sees that the peculiarity of the facial uniformity must affect the viewer's interpretation of the frieze as a whole.

'The figures on the Parthenon frieze are thoroughly individual in their clothing and poses, unlike the stereotyped Persian spearmen, but on the other hand the differentiation does not extend to the faces. There is no portrait of Perikles here, the procession depicted is not one that took place in a particular year, attended by identifiable individuals. The intention was to give a timeless representation of a recurrent event, not to record the event in one particular year.'<sup>21</sup>

But while Brommer thus appreciates that 'style' and subject matter cannot be divorced, he limits his perception to one narrow question, that of time, and he fails to see the particular force of this representation of this procession in this position.

<sup>19</sup> Lawrence (n. 1) 144.

<sup>20</sup> J. Boardman, *Greek art*<sup>2</sup> (London 1973) 120-1.

<sup>21</sup> F. Brommer, *The sculptures of the Parthenon* (London 1979) 33-4 and cf. 67.

Once more it is necessary to take seriously the position of the frieze on the temple and the way in which it is seen. The viewer of the Parthenon frieze can only see one section at a time. S/he may choose to look at it only sufficiently to grasp what are the objects represented (e.g. men and horses), but if so will quickly become bored, for the chances are that the next section that is seen will represent the same objects. If the viewer is to reap any reward for the pains of looking, s/he must compare and contrast the successive 'frames' which s/he creates, and must review the differences in the apparent repetitions. Such a process of comparison focusses the viewer's attention on those features which do not change. Such a viewer is not allowed to overlook the incredible conformity of the heads, nor the equally incredible diversity apparent in the other features of the frieze, where no two poses are the same, no two horses are in the same attitude, successive riders are differently clothed, with or without cloaks, with or without helmets, and so on (PLATE IIa).

The Athenian citizen coming to view the Parthenon frieze thus has to join a procession in which those taking part find themselves in a wide variety of specific circumstances and are very diversely related to the material world. Yet the variation between individuals is extremely limited: the men, and indeed the male gods, are all either young men in the bloom of their first maturity, or old and grave, bearded and with a distinct hair style; the women and goddesses, in as far as their facial features are preserved, are demure young ladies, mature but unmarked by age. The range of natural circumstances is presented in all its variety, but the human actors have been rigorously classified, with a binary model for the men and a single category of women.

The different classes of human actor are by no means evenly distributed across the frieze. The bulk of the procession, on the west side and the more western parts of the north and south sides, is made up entirely of young men, either riding horses as cavalymen (PLATE IIa) or carrying full hoplite armour. The body of the procession is thus made up of soldiers. It is only towards the east end that old men and women appear, and they appear in very specific rôles: for all that the game of making precise identifications of individual figures can never be more than a game, it is clear that both the old men and the women appear not as individuals who have been caught up in the events but as particular dignitaries with particular jobs to perform. The frieze does not simply throw together the whole mixed estate of Athenian residents, or even of Athenian citizens, it certainly does not effect 'l'effacement des barrières de classe',<sup>22</sup> rather it presents the official view of the Athenian polis, in which individuals appear only in as far as they serve the polis.<sup>23</sup>

The qualities of the citizen body paraded in the Parthenon frieze correspond very closely with those advertised in the fullest contemporary statement of the ideology of democracy that we possess, the Funeral Oration. In one strand of the tradition of funeral orations emphatic and exclusive emphasis is placed upon the fact that citizens are soldiers and soldiers are young men.<sup>24</sup> In making such a presentation the democratic funeral speech picks up the association between youth and death in battle which is already fully formed in Homer.<sup>25</sup> This tradition where youth is necessarily attributed to a man as long as he risks death fighting for his polis and is acquired for good should he die fighting is prominent first in the epitaphs of individual warriors on archaic grave stelai and then in the group epitaphs of fifth-century Athens.<sup>26</sup> Just as democratic Athens takes over the language of the treatment of the individual aristocratic warrior victim of battle and applies it to the polis as a whole, so the frieze equates the young soldier with the body of citizens. But just as the citizens were not all young, so the soldiers were not all cavalymen. At the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War Thucydides has Perikles claim that hoplites outnumbered cavalry by more than 10:1, with 13,000 hoplites and 1200 cavalry;<sup>27</sup> on the frieze

<sup>22</sup> L. Kahil, 'L'acropole,' in *Athènes au temps de Périclès* (Paris 1965) 132.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. N. Loraux, *L'invention d'Athènes. Histoire de l'oraison funèbre dans la 'cité classique'* (Paris 1981) 284.

<sup>24</sup> N. Loraux, *Ancient Society* vi (1975) 1-31, especially 9-18. My account is heavily indebted to Loraux's work.

<sup>25</sup> See H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et courètes* (Paris 1939) 29-42.

<sup>26</sup> Individual warriors: *IG* i<sup>2</sup> 976; *Hesperia* viii (1939) 165-9. Group epitaphs: *IG* i<sup>2</sup> 943; *Anth. Pal.* vii 258.

<sup>27</sup> Perikles' funeral oration for the dead on Samos, quoted by Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1365a 31-3, 1411a 1-4.

the proportions are more than reversed. But as the soldiers are the spring of the year,<sup>28</sup> so the blossom of the spring are the cavalry, an idea clearly expressed in the epitaph for the cavalry who fell in a mid-fifth-century battle, perhaps that at Tanagra:

χαίρετε ἀριστῆες πολέμο μέγα κῦδος ἔχοντες  
 κῶροι Ἀθηναίων ἔχσοχοι ἵπποσύναι,  
 οἱ ποτε καλλιχόρο περι πατρίδος ὀλέσαθ' ἔβεν  
 πλείστοις ἑλλάνων ἀντία μαρνάμενοι.

(Fare well military champions who have great glory from war,  
 Outstanding young men of the Athenians, the best in horsemanship,  
 Who sacrificed their youth for their fatherland with its fine dancing-floors  
 Fighting against the greatest number of Greeks.)<sup>29</sup>

Thus it is on public grave monuments to dead in battle the sculptural representation over-represents the cavalry by comparison with the infantry (while allowing the defeated enemy no cavalry at all).<sup>30</sup>

The Parthenon frieze presents neither a record of some reality, nor the creation of some remote ideal; it presents the very aristocratic image of Athenian democracy at its most élitist, where all citizens are not just soldiers but the quintessential soldier, the young man in the cavalry whom public inspection requires to be a model of physical fitness. In presenting this image the frieze also promotes it, for in showing all the heads without individualisation the frieze shows a citizen body where distinctions are abolished and all are equal, and where, despite widely varying personal circumstances all may aspire to the same rôle; in involving the spectator in the procession the frieze draws the spectator to identify with the anonymous citizenry and share their aspirations.

A number of important conclusions for the practice of classical art history follow from this. This paper has argued that the position, subject-matter and 'style' of the Parthenon frieze are intimately linked and that the difficulties which have been experienced by scholars in its interpretation have been the direct result of a failure to appreciate this. The failure has not simply vitiated their understanding of particular details of the Parthenon frieze, it has undermined their ability to comprehend the monument as a whole. Thus Robertson is able to write that 'the sculptures of the Parthenon . . . seem to have been designed and carved for their own sake rather than for their effect on the temple they were to adorn.'<sup>31</sup> Classical scholars, in this as in other fields, have been too ready to assume that there is no overall sense to a monument (poem, or whatever) and to regard features as gratuitous. Much of the scholarly difficulty in construing the Parthenon frieze has been the direct result of the assumption that it can be construed without reference to the temple which it adorns.

The case of the Parthenon frieze brings out into the open the ever-present discourse between object and viewer which is set up by any work of art. This is a discourse in which the sculpture plays an active part: the form of the sculptural presentation frames the form of question posed to the viewer and frames the viewer's response. The language in which the discourse is carried out has to be the language of art—'style', 'composition', 'iconography'—the images which it presents and the way in which they are presented. Much of the extraordinary list of 'problems' to do with the subject matter of the Parthenon frieze recently presented by Boardman is created by the divorce which he assumes and effects between 'subject-matter' and 'style'.<sup>32</sup>

The belief that 'style' can be simply divorced from subject matter is one that is deeply ingrained in classical art history. It is this belief that has led Boardman, in the passage quoted above, to think that one can talk about 'the Parthenon's art', that has led Ridgway to have a separate sub-heading 'Style' to her section on the Parthenon frieze in her 'Fifth-century styles in Greek sculpture', and indeed is behind the whole conception of this and her earlier works on

<sup>29</sup> IG i<sup>2</sup> 946/*Anth. Pal.* vii 254.

<sup>30</sup> See Loraux (n. 24) 24–30.

<sup>31</sup> Robertson (n. 12) 310.

<sup>32</sup> Boardman (n. 13) 215.

Greek sculpture.<sup>33</sup> As the discussion above should have shown, there are fundamental difficulties with this assumption: if the Parthenon frieze was devoted to a different subject it could not be presented in the same way.

Conversely, presenting a sculpture in a manner similar to that of the Parthenon frieze establishes more than simply 'stylistic' links. Scholars have noted that when sculpted grave stelai reappear in the Athenian archaeological record in the late fifth century they typically look as if they are 'by sculptors who had just come off work on the Parthenon'.<sup>34</sup> Robertson has suggested on the basis of this that 'in the decoration of the Parthenon a large body of marble-carvers must have been employed and trained, and its completion will have left many of them without work . . . and a law permitting the erection of private figured tombstones may well have been passed to ease their position.'<sup>35</sup> Of course the personal identity and training of the sculptors are important factors in influencing the appearance of the grave stelai, but they are far from being the only or most important factors. As the discussion of the subject of the Parthenon frieze has made clear, the representation which Athenians make of themselves on grave stelai is a projection of an assumed identity, a systematically selective picture, not a matter of the aesthetic taste of the day for certain formal features. That there are 'stylistic' similarities between the Parthenon frieze and late fifth-century grave reliefs is to be seen in the light of a shared visual ideology, that of the soldier-citizen in a democratic polis, and not only put down to the identity of artistic personnel.

Finally, there is an important correlation between the way the Parthenon frieze has been treated by scholars and the way in which it is displayed. By putting the blocks of the frieze on the inside wall of a room and giving unimpeded views of the whole ensemble, the British Museum has distorted the whole monument. The advantage of architectural sculpture is that the conditions of display are controlled, are one of the givens upon which the sculptor can rely. By re-displaying the Parthenon frieze in a totally alien manner a new monument is created, and one which stands between the viewer and the original.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> B. S. Ridgway, *The severe style in Greek sculpture* (Princeton 1970), B.S. Ridgway, *The archaic style in Greek sculpture* (Princeton, 1977).

<sup>34</sup> Robertson (n. 12) 365.

<sup>35</sup> Robertson (n. 12) 364, and cf. 296.

<sup>36</sup> By contrast, the display of the Bassai frieze on the inside of a rather dimly lit room goes some way to reproduce the setting of the Arkadian temple, although the frieze is not at the same height, and the room has neither the spaciousness nor the variation of shadow of

the temple cella. Assessing the Bassai frieze is rendered problematic by the uncertainty surrounding the order of the slabs.

This paper has benefited from the criticism of Mary Beard, Peter Callaghan, Martin Robertson, Anthony Snodgrass and Richard Tomlinson, and from the encouragement of Simon Goldhill and Catherine Osborne. It is dedicated to John Henderson, who enthused.





(a) The Parthenon frieze: view through the west colonnade.  
(Courtesy Alison Frantz.)



(b) The central scene of the east frieze. (Courtesy Alison Frantz.)

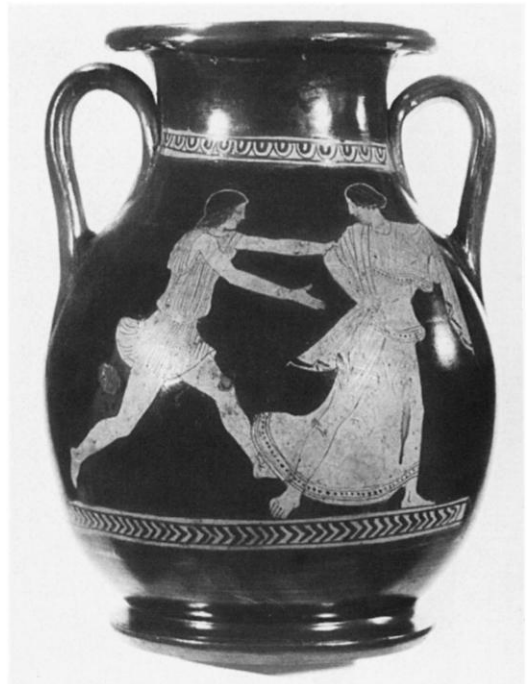
PLATE II



(a) The Parthenon frieze: young men as cavalrymen. (Courtesy Alison Frantz)



(b) Leningrad: lekane fragment  
(Courtesy Hermitage Museum)



(c) Leningrad 728, side A  
(Courtesy Hermitage Museum)

(a) THE VIEWING AND OBSCURING OF THE PARTHENON FRIEZE  
(b)–(c) EROTIC PURSUITS: IMAGES AND MEANINGS