

4-1990

The Parthenon West Metopes and Xenophon

Katherine Schwab

Fairfield University, kaschwab@fairfield.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/visualandperformingarts-facultypubs>

Originally appears in American Journal of Archaeology. Copyright 1990 Archaeological Institute of America.

Peer Reviewed

Repository Citation

Schwab, Katherine, "The Parthenon West Metopes and Xenophon" (1990). *Visual & Performing Arts Faculty Publications*. 3.

<https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/visualandperformingarts-facultypubs/3>

Published Citation

Schwab, Katherine. 1990. "The Parthenon West Metopes and Xenophon." *AJA* 94(2):302-302.

This item has been accepted for inclusion in DigitalCommons@Fairfield by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It is brought to you by DigitalCommons@Fairfield with permission from the rights-holder(s) and is protected by copyright and/or related rights. **You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses, you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.** For more information, please contact digitalcommons@fairfield.edu.

SESSION II C: GREEK ART AND CULTURE

THE PARTHENON WEST METOPES AND XENOPHON:

Katherine A. Schwab, Fairfield University

In his treatise, *The Art of Horsemanship* (6.3), Xenophon describes a position assumed by a horse in its training for its use both in the cavalry and in parades. This horse, because of its superior strength, is capable of rising up into a half-rear with its hind legs spread apart and firmly planted beneath it, with the hocks nearly touching the ground. According to Xenophon, a horse in this pose will be more magnificent and spectacular to ride (10), and it is the finest action proper to a horse (11).

J.K. Anderson, in his studies on Greek horsemanship and Xenophon, discusses this pose among others, and the possible connection to works of art from the Classical period. One series of sculptural reliefs, not discussed by Anderson, may be worth considering in this context: the west metopes of the Parthenon. These metopes, with an Amazonomachy, are the least well preserved of the four series of metopes on the building. With the help of C. Praschniker's drawings, F. Brommer's photographs, and E. Berger's casts, it is possible, in some cases, to determine the general outline of some of the figures. In metopes V, IX, and XIII, enough of the mounted horse is preserved to reveal a pose close to that described by Xenophon. The horse in a half-rear allows the rider, an Amazon, to maintain her balance while thrusting a lance at the wounded Greek on the ground. The west metopes of the Parthenon may be among our earliest known examples of this pose in Greek sculpture, which suggests a tradition or knowledge of the training of war horses in specific poses by the mid-fifth century B.C., and which is recorded by Xenophon during the second quarter of the fourth century B.C.

NEREIDS AND EUROPA: WEDDING OR FUNERAL? *Judith*

M. Barringer, Yale University

Ten of 13 Attic red-figure fish plates of the fourth century B.C. discovered in South Russia were found in funerary contexts. They were placed in graves after being deliberately broken at the time of burial. All the plates are ornamented with the same scene: the abduction of Europa by a bull sent by Zeus. Nonetheless, they are unusual (there are only three other extant examples of which one was also found in a grave) in their inclusion of Nereids among the protagonists. Scholars have already remarked that the Europa myth makes reference to immortality (K. Scheffold, *Die Göttersage in der klassischen und hellenistischen Kunst* [Munich 1981] 236–37), and that it alludes to the voyage of the deceased to the Underworld (H. Metzger, *Les représentations dans la céramique attique du IV^e siècle* [Paris 1951] 311–12). The appearance of Nereids on the fish plates confirms and expands Metzger's hypothesis.

Nereids were regarded by the ancient Greeks as protectresses of sea voyagers (Hdt. 7.191.4–192.1; Eur., *Hel.* 1584–87; *Anth. Pal.* 6.349; Ap. Rhod., *Argon.* 4.833–81), and they were also depicted on vases as attendants in wedding preparation scenes and as witnesses to the abduction of Thetis

by Peleus. It is, therefore, not surprising to find them on the Europa fish plates. The Greeks apparently regarded the transition from maiden to woman, that is, marriage, as a metaphorical death and a subsequent rebirth. This idea is supported by Greek tragedy, epigrams, and funerary epitaphs which liken deceased virgins to brides of Hades, and by the rituals used in ancient Greek weddings and funerals. Nereids have also been identified as escorts of the deceased to the afterlife. Thus, Nereids may act as escorts on voyages, whether literal or metaphorical, in this case for Europa who undergoes a literal sea voyage and metaphorical journey from maiden to woman, and from life to death to rebirth. The use of Europa and the Nereids on fish plates found in graves is thus due to the survivors' desire to ensure a "safe" journey for the deceased on their voyage from life to death to afterlife.

ARCHAIC STONE PERIRRHANTERIA WITH CARYATID SUPPORTS AND THE COLAEUS DEDICATION AT SAMOS:

Helga Butzer Felleisen, Indiana University

To commemorate his return from a voyage to Libya and Tartessus, the seventh-century B.C. merchant Colaeus dedicated a large vessel and stand at the Samian Heraion (Hdt. 4.152). Herodotus's description of the figural supports bearing this vessel has long been considered the best-preserved example, literary or archaeological, of one type of stand associated with detachable, Orientalizing cauldrons (U. Jantzen, *Griechische Greifenkessel* [Berlin 1955] 87). Because the corpus of material associated with these large stands is so small, scholars conclude that such figural supports represented only a rare form. One special group of objects whose relationship to these stands has not been fully explored is that of the Archaic stone perirrhanteria characterized by their caryatid supports. By pointing out the typological similarities between the Colaeus dedication and the perirrhanteria stands from Isthmia and Samos, this paper proposes that the mid-seventh-century B.C. perirrhanteria offer a variation of these large-scale figural stands.

An examination of the Isthmia perirrhanterion shows that some figural supports imitated rod-tripods in form, placement of ornament, and even iconography; that from Samos appears to follow a simpler, less ornate form like the Colaeus stand. In all cases, however, the emphasis is on the weight-bearing function of the figures rather than on decorative detail.

While the origin of the perirrhanteria is much disputed, Sturgeon (*Isthmia IV* [Princeton 1987] 51) stresses the Samian form of the perirrhanterion at Isthmia (ca. 655 B.C.). This object only shortly postdates the perirrhanterion from Samos (ca. 660). Tartessian ivory combs from a context of 640/630 at the Samian Heraion have been associated with Colaeus's journey to that Phoenician outpost (J.G. Chamorro, *AJA* 91 [1987] 227), thus placing the historic voyage earlier in the seventh century. The novelty of Colaeus's gift as implied by Herodotus's depth of detail would suggest a recent introduction of large figural stands to Greece.