

# Roman art



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A Comparison of Roman Art: Marble Statue of Youthful Hercules & Marble Statue of a Wounded Warrior The Flavian period of Roman art (68-98 A. D.) comprised the reign of the emperors Vespasian, Titus and Domitian, and the Antonine period (138-181 A. D.) was during the reign of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. (Mattingly 48; 51) The Statue of Hercules reviewed here is from the Flavian period and the Statue of the Wounded Soldier is from the Antonine period. When comparing works from these two periods one is first taken by their similarities between this Roman art and the earlier Greek sculpture produced in the Archaic period, from 660 to 450 B. C. Initially the Archaic period had several rigid rules of representation to be adhered to, and although they changed over time during that period, the beginnings were strict. In the sculpture of standing figures what has been termed the “law of frontality” was enforced till almost the end of the sixth century. This placement consisted of the figures being posed looking straight ahead, standing straight, the eyes often appeared more bulbous, never truly sunken in and the ears were usually placed for esthetic purpose and not for anatomical correctness, usually being placed too high on the head. Even the hair was arranged in an almost geometrical pattern like style. (Chase 46) We see the law of frontality readily apparent in both figures. The stance of Hercules is perhaps more naturalistic and relaxed and does not have the left foot forward. However, the Wounded Warrior does and is more representational of the Archaic Style.

Notably and fortunately missing from this period are some of the other Archaic elements. The Roman art made correction for anatomy and the figures' ears and eyes are more in proportion with their figures as well as being anatomically correct. Another feature that has been lost is what was

termed the “ Archaic Smile” of this period in Greek sculpture (Chase 47) This smile is a rather too happy sort of smile that one might not expect from the more stoic aspects of this period. It seems often out of place and unnatural. Many critics felt that this was simply an attempt by the artist of the time to add some personality or expression to the face. The Roman art lost this appellation and created more natural figure. There is an overall more natural state, the figure and the face seem to be responding to their environment and are not contrived or artificially posed as in the Greek Archaic styles. The Wounded Warrior is actually a copy made of a Greek original from the Archaic period of the fifth century. At first it seems that the warrior is falling backwards and many thought it was a warrior falling in his death throw. Later when the comparison between the original and this was made, the original’s name was restored. (Strong 67) This copy has more of the original Greek affects than the other. We can see the more complex and stylized hair patterns as well. Being a copy one would expect this but another influence was that the Romans rulers during this period were very attracted to Greek culture:

The Antonine emperors, who ruled the Roman Empire in the second century A. D., it seems, had a fascination with Greece as a vacation retreat in much the same way modern Americans romanticize a visit to the Greek islands. One of the Antonine emperors, Hadrian, sought to turn the city into a commercial hub. (Constantine 8)

The comparison statue of Hercules has less of the Greek influence. Although Heraclites, (The original Greek Hercules) had many statues made in the Archaic period, this Roman Version is a very different in both pose and relief. This statue does not show the left foot forward stance but is placed in a

much more relaxed and naturalistic position. Hercules club is down and he holds what appears to be the Golden Fleece or some other prize. The battle is over and he returns with the spoils. The hair while seeming to retain some of the geometry of the Archaic period is still more wild than stylized. It also seems there was an attempt to match the hair with that of the Fleece's hair lying over his left arm.

While both statues have some remnants of the period in Greece that came before, they still are unique of these Roman eras. Both have a more naturalistic representation of the figure and a more realistic one as well. Correcting for the anatomical discrepancies of earlier art forms, the Romans while perhaps losing some artistic flare, have gained in the dramatic representation of these figures.

#### Works Cited

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