

Psychological aspects of ancient greeks statues



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This paper aims to present how the ancient Greek statues have been influenced by the humanistic worldview. It will narrate a brief biography of Praxiteles and will bestow a focused discussion on his three selected sculptures, namely, the Aphrodite of Knidos, the Nike Adjusting Her Sandal, and the Hermes and the infant Dionysus. It will unleash the ideas as to how these statues communicate with the spectators. Furthermore, it endeavors to identify the influences of ancient Greek's psychological state of human as "the measure of things" with regards to the creation of the chosen statuary.

Praxiteles is said to be the most well-known artist in the ancient world because countless of his masterpieces have been copied, have ancient descriptions and have Roman marble copies. He is either the son or a close relative of Kephisodotos, the famous sculptor who helps him with his sculpting career which has covered from the 370s to the 340s BC, the era of the latter end of the Hellenic Period to the Hellenistic Period (Narzariunus). His school of art is mostly concentrated and focused with marble because of its fine qualities.

A number of his works has known to be painted by Nicias whom he greatly respects and proclaims that his best statues are the ones painted by Nicias. He has demonstrated a new approach to art by humanizing the gods and the goddesses. He does not cast off and dismiss the High Classical sculptors' favored themes rather his hands manipulate the superhuman elegance and grandeur of the Olympian gods and goddesses albeit the notion that the solemn beauty has been lost.

Nevertheless, Praxiteles crafts them in such a way that they will illustrate worldly sensuousness (Gardner, Kleiner and Mamiya 131). One of his great works is the controversial Aphrodite of Knidos. The Aphrodite of Knidos has been illustrated by Praxiteles in an exceptional manner. According to Pliny the Elder—one of the writers who gives descriptions to Praxiteles—he has been originally commissioned by the island of Ko to make the sculpture nonetheless, when he divulges to them his contentious work, the people has been astonished by the nudity, hence, they rejected the work.

This statue has been well-known for its beauty. It illustrates the goddess Aphrodite as she prepares for the ceremonial and ritual bath that refurbishes her virginity (“Aphrodite of Knidos”). The original of it has been carved from Parian marble. Praxiteles has sold it to the Knidians when the people of Ko reject it. It thus, makes the Knidian well-known. She is not an isolated and cold image because she connects and takes in a trivial act out of everyday life.

Praxiteles is said to have used Phryne—the famous courtesan of ancient Greece who is said to augment her prices for her clients—as his model for Aphrodite which increases the gossips regarding its provenance. The masterpiece then evolves to be famed and celebrated which results to the production of a myriad of copies. A hilarious anecdote spreads along with its popularity wherein Aphrodite herself comes to the Knidians to see the famous statue and asks, “Where did Praxiteles see me naked?”

On the other hand, the Nike Adjusting her Sandal is a low relief statue done during the 410-407 BC which is taken from a portion and fragment of the Temple of Athena Nike Parapet (Scott). This statue illustrates Nike, the

goddess of victory, stooping to fix the strap of her sandal. Praxiteles demonstrates his interest in the discovery of the relationship between the drapery and the female anatomy. In contrast, Hermes and the infant god Dionysus is created during the 343-330 BC and is the only masterpiece of Praxiteles that has survived.

It is found at the Temple of Hera and is currently located at the Museum of Ancient Olympia (Lahanas). The statue is dedicated and devoted to the sacred Altis from the Eleians and Arcadians to celebrate their peace and treaty. Praxiteles depicts Hermes with a minor exaggeration on the swing of the hips; it is as if he has to weigh down the baby Dionysus with whom he supports on his left arm (Osborne 229). The featured masterpieces of Praxiteles have created a nexus to the viewers.

They serve as liaisons to the spectators, allowing them to establish a relationship as to how the ancient Greeks psychological aspects dominate and influence the creation of artistic objects. The Aphrodite of Knidus illustrates the influence of women in Praxiteles' life. The characteristic of the object is greatly revealed to her facial expression thus allows and grants the viewers to focus and to look more on her face. It also portrays the feminine principle and depicts the female counterpart of Hermes and Dionysus.

The work of art is basically in a single flat surface, which means that it is meant to be seen from the front. It discloses the head as the most influential feature. From there, it can be pulled out that Praxiteles abides with the Greek's belief that the head, having it the most important aspect of human body—the mind—needs to be given focus and importance. On the contrary,

the Nike Adjusting Her Sandal implies the most interesting aspect of her life—the celebration of great military triumphs in ancient Greece .

It is a parapet relief that is crafted during the Peloponnesian war, which dates back to circa 410 BC, when Athens are experiencing and suffering from mortifying and shameful defeats that situates the fate of their realm in danger. The sculpture represents victory, however, instead of narrating and illustrating Praxiteles' interest with the subject; he focuses with the intricate drapery of Nike's dress as it flows around her body. Praxiteles has been unmindful to the laws of nature or to the acts of the image under it .

The statue's external qualities and attributes likely illustrate escapism or defeat because Athens has been overtaken by Spartans. Her gauche position depicts graceful and elegance. Though it is not clear whether she is tightening or loosening her sandal, the statue communicates in such a way that it brings to mind a character or event (Hope). Nike is the representation of triumph and dominance in the battlefield of Greeks (Scott). Hermes and the infant god Dionysus, on the other hand, is the most well-known example of an adult and child statue.

In this statue, Praxiteles trails the steps of Kephisodotos by crafting a relationship between two figures in the sculpture. Hermes' figure is portrayed as tall and slender, standing in calm and relaxed position because Praxiteles decides to change the rules and principles of the standard, ideal body proportions. The sculpture conveys the secular world of the period and is found at Olympia, where they have been commissioned for the said haven ("Hermes with the Infant Dionysus"). The classical restriction and poise has been altered and replaced by a billowing body in the manner of an S shape.

The baby Dionysus is more attributed to a midget rather than a baby . Hermes is depicted as sluggish and yet manly. His hair is mixed up and appears in disparity with his skin (Papakyriakou). This Praxiteles' magnum opus illustrates Hermes, messenger of the gods, carrying Dionysus who attempts to take something from his hand (Papakyriakou). It gives a narration that Dionysus is being carried by Hermes to the muses with whom he will be raised. Even though Hermes' right arm is lost, it is originally lifted and raised to hang a bundle of grapes in front of the baby.

The ancient Greeks' psychological state of human as the "measure of things" has been reflected in the images that they have done. Praxiteles and other artists try to achieve perfection in illustrating and portraying gods and goddesses in the form of a "human." For Praxiteles, reality is the ideal and perfect manner of attaining everything that he and other Greeks strive for. He develops his own distinctive style during the late Classical Period of 4th century BC, thus, Skopas of Paros' artworks, his follower, mirrors the general style and approach toward the humanization of Greek gods and goddesses and heroes.

However, his artistic identity renders strong emotionalism. The life of the Greeks has been dominated by religion so it not surprising that their works of art render mythologies—of gods and goddesses. If his Aphrodite of Knidos portrays beauty and elegance, beauty for him is mere seductiveness. He explores much to the sexual aspect of the sculpture, thus giving an impression of the image as an allegory of fertility ("Aphrodite of Knidos").

He is considered as "sensual" and yet he is believed to illustrate with sophistication in his feminine bodies. ("Hermes with the Infant Dionysus").

In his *Hermes and the infant Dionysus*, the incorporation of the baby with the subject is an important indicator of the social changes, of the existing secularism and sentimentalism. Subsequent with the sophisticated style, the gods then have been represented as infants (“*Hermes with the Infant Dionysus*”), probably for the well-known characteristics of baby as pure, modest and innocent.

On the contrary, *Nike Adjusting Her Sandal* demonstrates a craftsmanship of relief that is fine and superb and reveals an alteration in the focal point of the subject with regards to human anatomy. The focus is preoccupied with the lines and contrasts of the drapery thus giving an impression on the less description of physical events (“*Athena Nike Parapet Freize*”). In order to bestow life to the statuary and to keep in mind the Greek’s belief and values with regards to humans as the true manifestation of things, Praxiteles decisively and persistently does not mind symmetry in his magnum opuses.

He also has the ability to change the attribution and characteristics of the marble in such a way that he will reach and accomplish a masterpiece delineating a soft and radiant flesh of the subject (Gardner 131). As sculpture embraces the space of the spectator, the viewers are then motivated to embrace the statue, hence there is a fundamental language between art and its viewers that enables the stories behind it to be told (Osborne 235).