* [title]More Than Holes!: An Unconventional Perspective of the “Greek Revolution” in Bronze Statuary
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* [A-head]Abstract
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* This paper explores the technical and art-historical importance of dowel holes, a largely overlooked source of material evidence for the study of fifth-century Greek bronze statuary. Generally, the “artistic revolution” in Greek sculpture is associated with the Persian Wars, with two sculptors, Kritios and Nesiotes, and with their sculptural group, the Tyrannicides, precisely dated to 477/6 BC. From an art-historical point of view, I discuss whether their statues can indeed be considered “revolutionary.” For this purpose, I investigate inscribed and signed bases connected to Kritios and Nesiotes, in order to identify and highlight technical improvements in Greek sculpture. Thanks to a fresh and close inspection of dowel holes and remains of footprints, I argue that it is not until Polykleitos’s activity and not before the Kyniskos base in Olympia that we can detect a new technical solution in positioning bronze sculptures and, consequently, in rendering poses. The different posture resulting from the shift of balance from both feet to one only has profound artistic, technical and anatomical implications. Polykleitos’ fundamental characteristic breaks with the previous rules and traditional stance and represents a revolutionary innovation. I conclude that the balance on one leg (*uno crure*), a peculiarity of Polykleitos’s works attested by the remaining dowel holes and in Pliny (*Naturalis historia* 34.55–56), represents a turning point in perfecting the representation of the human figure and a different solution to the problem of ponderation.

[A-head]1. Defining the Severe-style Period

* [main text]
* The artistic revolution in Greek sculpture is generally associated with one fundamental historical event, the Persian Wars; with two of the most important sculptors of the late sixth–early fifth century BC, Kritios and Nesiotes; and with a sculptural group: the Tyrannicides. The chronological span between the end of the Persian Wars—marked by the destruction of the monuments on the Athenian Acropolis (480/79 BC)—and the beginning of the construction of the Parthenon (448/7 BC) is commonly labelled as the “Severe style period” in archaeological literature.[[1]](#endnote-1) In this paper I discuss the notion of the artistic revolution in Greek art from an unconventional and entirely neglected perspective: the dowel holes on statue bases. I investigate the archaeological evidence in order to single out and highlight technical improvements in Greek sculpture, which in turn had aesthetic implications.[[2]](#endnote-2)
* As far as I know, Gustav Kramer was the first scholar to introduce the term “Severe style”. In his 1837 contribution on Greek vases, he identified three main phases: the Old style (*Alter Styl*) up to Olympiad 80 (460 BC); the Severe style (*Strenger Styl*) to Olympiad 90 (460–420 BC); and the third period, the Beautiful style (*Schöner Styl*) until Olympiad 100 (420–380 BC).[[3]](#endnote-3) It is evident that his classification and chronology do not coincide with the stylistic labels currently adopted in archaeological literature and handbooks. Since the publication of Vagn Poulsen’s *Der strenge Stil* in 1937, the term has been used unequivocally to indicate a specific period and style: to Poulsen and those who followed, Kritios, Nesiotes, and the Tyrannicides represented the turning point and the very beginning of a new period and style.[[4]](#endnote-4) Ridgway concurred and catalogued the most prominent traits of the Severe style: “the official date of the Tyrannicide group by Kritios and Nesiotes, 477 BC, can therefore be considered the legal birthday of the Severe style.”[[5]](#endnote-5) More recently, Stewart defined this cultural and artistic phase and concluded, “the totality of the evidence from the stratigraphy, architecture, pottery, and sculpture of the Acropolis deposits supports the theory that the Severe Style began (just) after the Persian sack.”[[6]](#endnote-6) Stewart considers the Tyrannicides “not only the earliest dated monuments in the *new style* but also themselves *revolutionary*.”[[7]](#endnote-7)
* Which new and revolutionary stylistic and technical criteria do we find looking at the artistic production of Kritios and Nesiotes in comparison with previous sculptures? And what kind of appreciation of their works of art can we find in ancient literary sources? Furthermore, does the word “severe” correctly translate Greek and Latin adjectives?
* [A-head]2. Signed Bases, Dowel Holes, and Iconography
* The names of the artists Kritios and Nesiotes are known from six inscriptions found on statue bases on the Acropolis, three of which are diagnostic for the purposes of this analysis.[[8]](#endnote-8) The dowel holes on these bases allow us to reconstruct the poses and schemes of the figures mounted on them and to evaluate their technical novelty. On the top of the pedestal dedicated by Epicharinos (**fig. 9.1**),[[9]](#endnote-9) two dowel holes are recognizable, even though it is not easy to reconstruct the pose of the figure: it stood either with the left foot advanced, to be seen in profile, or with the right foot advanced, facing the viewer. In any case, the figure was standing with both feet on the ground.
* On top of the base dedicated by Hegelochos, father and son of Ekphantos (**fig. 9.2**), two dowel holes placed widely apart make it appear as if the base supported a large-scale bronze figure: it is possible to reconstruct Hegelochos’s dedication as an approximately life-size, striding male warrior in an attacking pose (a pose identical to that of an Athena Promachos).[[10]](#endnote-10)
* The circular base dedicated by “[ . . . ]as and Ophsios” (**fig. 9.3**) presents two long dowel holes on the surface. The shape of the base is not common and it may be that one of the unfinished column drums of the older Parthenon was reused as a pedestal. The position of the dowel holes shows that the bronze statue, a lost bronze Athena,[[11]](#endnote-11) stood with its feet close together; the statue was standing and not in motion.
* Unfortunately, we cannot evaluate style and technique of those lost sculptures by Kritios and Nesiotes. However, thanks to the presence of the dowel holes on the bases, it is possible to pinpoint some aspects related to the typology and the iconography of the statues. On two monuments, the figure is represented standing with both feet anchored to the ground, according to poses already attested in the sixth century BC. More interesting is the case of Hegelochos’s dedication: the figure was represented with legs spread, like those of the coeval Tyrannicides.
* Going back to the initial issues, were the pose and the iconography new and revolutionary in comparison with the sculpture of the (late) Archaic period? The answer is negative, since Kritios and Nesiotes adopted and exploited typologies that were already in use in different media and at various scales in late Archaic artistic production. Examples include the imposing Athena Promachos from the Gigantomachy pediment, the Ugento Zeus, and, in small format, a bronze hoplite statuette from Dodona.[[12]](#endnote-12) The tradition of this pose is documented on the Athenian Acropolis after 480 BC, as we can see on the small bronze depicting Athena, dedicated by Meleso.[[13]](#endnote-13) In sum, the poses and typologies used in the sculptures of Kritios and Nesiotes appear not to be innovative in comparison with previous statues.
* The Tyrannicides[[14]](#endnote-14)—representing the attack by Harmodios and Aristogeiton—are constructed employing a well-established iconography: legs spread, rear foot lifted, torso erect, arm raised, and head held frontally.[[15]](#endnote-15) The vehement action of the two protagonists is not reflected in their abdominal muscles—which while precisely detailed are not very natural in terms of rendering movement—or in the position of the heads, which are held straight and facing fixedly forward on muscular necks.[[16]](#endnote-16) We have the same impression observing coeval sculptures like the Miletus torso, the statues of athletes from Delos, or the archer from the Acropolis.[[17]](#endnote-17)
* In literary sources, statues made by Kritios and Nesiotes were not highly appreciated. In a rhetorical context, Lucian gives aesthetic evaluations of the “hardness” of the sculptures, mentioning the sculptor Hegias (also called Hegesias) in association with the more renowned figures of Kritios and Nesiotes. In chapter 9 of his *Rhetorum praeceptor*, the author mentions as exemplary (*paradeigmata*) exponents of ancient technique (*palaia ergasia*) Hegias, and artists around Kritios and Nesiotes,[[18]](#endnote-18) characterizing their works as rigid (*apesphigmena*), robust and muscular (*neurode*), hard (*sklera*), and precisely divided into parts with lines (*akribos apotetamena tais grammais*).[[19]](#endnote-19) Although in modern historiography the two sculptors are considered to be the pioneers of the artistic revolution of the Severe style, in ancient literary sources they are classified among the “hard” (*sklera*, Lucian). Furthermore, in a well-known passage of the *Institutio oratoria* by Quintilian (12.10), Hegias’s style is described as “harder and close to Etruscan statues” (*duriora et Tuscanicis proxima*).
* It is interesting to note how the Greek and Latin adjectives associated with the artists of this period (*skleros*, *durus*, *rigidus*) have been rendered in modern translations as *severo*,[[20]](#endnote-20) severe,[[21]](#endnote-21) *sévère*,[[22]](#endnote-22) *streng*,[[23]](#endnote-23) in an attempt to put a positive twist on an aesthetic concept that was by no means positive for the ancients. This connotation does not seem to be supported by textual analysis of these adjectives used in other contexts, where they definitely indicated rigidity, fixedness, and immobility.[[24]](#endnote-24) According to scholars such as Strocka and Stewart, this wording can be traced back to a formulation suggested by J. J. Winckelmann.[[25]](#endnote-25) Reading Winckelmann, however, I realized that he used the adjective *streng* not to characterize ancient artists but solely in connection with a modern artist; he contrasted the “correct and strict” style (*die richtig und streng angegebenen Figuren*) of Raphael with the gentler style (*die rundlich und sanft gehaltenen Formen*)of Correggio.
* From a technical and art-historical point of view, it is not until the activity of Polykleitos and his “Canon” that we have a clear testimony of interest in the movement of the body and its laws: the inflection of the anatomy, the position of the head, and the movement of the body are all precisely anatomically reflected in the individual parts. That sculptor’s distinction, as we read in Pliny, was to have created statues standing on one leg (*proprium eius est uno crure ut insisterent signa excogitasse*), breaking with the traditional stance of sculptures characterized by a certain sense of rigidity and immobility of the figure.[[26]](#endnote-26) We need only compare works attributed to Polykleitos with other coeval sculptures to visualize and understand his achievements. In his works[[27]](#endnote-27) we detect the surpassing of the previous anatomical schema: on the base of Kyniskos of Mantinea (**fig. 9.4**),[[28]](#endnote-28) we find a very peculiar positioning of the lower limbs, with the left foot barely resting on the ground and the right held to the rear with the heel raised. This ponderation (the tension of the figure moving from resting to moving) is found in both the Doryphoros and in the Diadumenos statues. Perhaps due to this new artistic concept and its technical solution, Quintilian reported that Polykleitos’s statues were perceived as lacking stability (*deesse pondus putant*) compared to those of Pheidias.[[29]](#endnote-29) In previous translations, *pondus* has been rendered as “grandeur, solemnity, majesty”[[30]](#endnote-30) and connected to his style and iconography of the statues. Polykleitos was thought, Quintilian continues, to have been less successful in representing the dignity of the gods (*deorum auctoritas*), and was further alleged to have shrunk from representing persons of mature years, having ventured on nothing more difficult than a smooth and beardless face. I would like to propose an alternative translation of *pondus*, namely “stability, equilibrium”, to be connected with the new pose and stance “on one leg” (*uno crure*), as attested in Pliny’s passage (*Naturalis historia* 34.56).
* In order to support this hypothesis, we can look at sculptural evidence. For instance, we can compare the anatomical structure of the Kassel Apollo (believed to be a replica of the Parnopios Apollo) or the Lemnian Athena,[[31]](#endnote-31) as passed down through Roman copies, with the Kyniskos statue, as far as we can reconstruct it based on holes for mounting: we find a major difference in balance and stability. The impression gathered from an examination of these statues attributed to Pheidias is one of stable poses and solid bodies, while Polykleitos’s works of art are not well balanced. For this reason, Polykleitos’s statues were not appropriate for the representation of gods. This comparison allows us to fully comprehend the importance of Polykleitos’s achievement, the final outcome of a long, slow, continuous technical process begun at the end of the sixth century BC, through small but significant formal stages.
* This analysis brings me to conclude that significant changes in Greek sculpture are to be detected around that time: it is a transitional period, which seems to include the second quarter of the fifth century. I favor a paradigm of continuity instead of a clear-cut division of artistic periods, artists, and styles: the poses, typologies, iconography of statues of the second quarter of the fifth century are inherited from the past. Furthermore, late Archaic artists of the ancient Mediterranean worked both before and after the year 480 BC (some of them were spared by the Persians!): the case of Kritios and Nesiotes is self-evident in this regard. This experimental phase lasted several decades until the middle of the fifth century: it is with Polykleitos that we detect a significant change, a disruptive innovation in pose and scheme in comparison with the previous artistic production.
* This notwithstanding, the notion of a “Severe style period” need not be expunged from handbooks, but we must be aware that we use it as a modern, conventional art-historical label, somewhat misleading, yet nonetheless useful. Reading ancient sources is very instructive on the perception of aesthetic evaluation and judgments of ancient art and artists and the modern reception of it in the construction of an art-historical system. In epigram 62 by Poseidippos of Pella, for instance, there is no distinction between the late Archaic and Classical periods, between Late Archaic and Classical artists. To him, what happened before Lysippos’s activity is considered as an indistinct entity.[[32]](#endnote-32) According to Latin literary sources,[[33]](#endnote-33) the art of bronze sculpture proceeds through formal steps and advancement, adopting the scale of hardness and beauty: from the most rigid statues by Late Archaic artists to the less rigid statues by Kalamis, to the beautiful ones by Myron and those more beautiful still by Polykleitos. In this frame of progress and continuity, it must be clear that to the ancients the Severe Style as a chronological and stylistic category never existed.

[A-head]Acknowledgments

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1. See Stewart 1990; Rolley 1994; this chronological span is also labeled as “transition period” (Richter 1951) or “Bold Style” (Harrison 1985), among others. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. A thorough investigation on the development of technique is in Mattusch 2006; see also Adornato 2008. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Kramer 1837, 101. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Poulsen 1937. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ridgway 1970, 12. Already Poulsen 1937, 116. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Stewart 2008a, 406–407. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Stewart 2008b, 608 (my italics). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Raubitschek 1949, no. 161: the fragment found between 1877 and 1886 west of the Erechtheion contains too few letters to be included in this analysis. No. 161a is not included because the fragment was found in the Agora and contains just a few letters. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. *IG* I3, 847 = DAA 120; Keesling 2003, 170–72. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. *IG* I3, 850 = DAA 121; Raubitschek 1949, 128; Keesling 2003, 186–90. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. *IG* I3, 848 = DAA 160; Keesling 2000. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Athens, Acropolis Museum, inv. 631: Stewart 1990, 129; Taranto, National Archeological Museum, inv. 121327: Adornato 2010, 318–20; Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. Misc. 7470: Stewart 1990, 147. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Athens, Acropolis Museum, inv. X 6447: Stewart 2008a, 385, 388, 410. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 6009 and 6010; *FGrHist* 239 A 54; Marm. Par. A, ll. 70–71 (*IG* 12.5.444, 70–71); Brunnsåker 1971; Taylor 1991. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. De Cesare 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. This is in disagreement with Stewart (1997, 73), who writes that “its revolutionary ‘severe’ or early classic style with its emphatic, powerfully organic, yet still rigorously ordered articulation of the male body did what the archaic style’s calligraphic patterning could not do.” I argue, on the contrary, that the rendering of the joints and muscles is still bound to the formal conventions and traditions of the Late Archaic period. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Paris, Louvre, inv. Ma 2792: Bol 2005; Delos, Archaeological Museum, inv. A 4275, A 4276, A 4277: Hermary 1984, 8–13, nos. 5–7; Athens, Acropolis Museum, inv. 599: Stewart 2008a, 385, 408. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. On Kritios and Nesiotes: Muller-Dufeu 2002, nos. 576–84; see also Keesling 2000. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Zweimüller 2008, 240–43. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Vlad Borrelli 1966. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. E.g. Ridgway 1970. On the reception of Archaic style, Hallett 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Rolley 1994, 320: “C’est sous l’influence des auteurs latins, qui caractérisent les œuvres des sculpteurs de cette période par les qualificatifs *durus*, *rigidus*, *austerus*, que Winckelmann, dans son *Histoire de l’art antique* de 1764, qualifie de sévère (*streng*) la sculpture antérieure à Pheidias. . . . C’est l’étude fondamentale de V. Poulsen qui a imposé l’expression ‘style sévère’.” For Muller-Dufeu (2002, 171) “le style sévère, en référence à la noblesse d’attitude que les artistes donnent alors à leurs œuvres.” [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Poulsen 1937; Bol 2004a; Germini 2008, 19, attributes the concept of *hardness* solely to Archaic artistic production, in clear contradiction with the literary sources analyzed. See Lapatin 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. E.g., Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* 11.3.76: staring eyes (*rigidi oculi*); 11.3.82: head held high, neither rigid nor bowed (*cervicem rectam oportet esse, non rigidam aut supinam*). [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Winckelmann 1764, ch. 4, section 3, part I.C (Engl. trans., see Winckelmann 2006, 231–32); Donohue 1995; Strocka 2002, 120; Germini 2008, 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Pliny *Naturalis historia* 34.55–56. Fruitful discussion in Leftwich 1995. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. In general, see La Rocca 1979. On the Doryphoros: von Steuben 1990; on the Diadumenos: Bol 1990; Settis 1992; in general, Franciosi 2003 (with bibliography), to be read with the discerning assessments of Di Cesare 2003. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. The attribution of the Kyniskos statue to Polykleitos is based on Pausanias 6.4.11, since the base in Olympia is not signed. On the inscription: Dittenberger and Purgold 1896, 255–58, no. 149. Borbein (1996, 78) rejects the hypothesis that the Westmacott Boy is linked to the Kyniskos base, for chronological reasons; Stewart (2008c, 167, fig. 84), on the contrary, is open to the possibility of the connection. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Kaiser 1990; Neumeister (1990, 441) links the meaning of *pondus* to the concepts of *auctoritas* and *maiestas*; see Hölscher 2002. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Pollitt 1974, 422–23; on aesthetic thought in ancient Greece: Porter 2010; Adornato 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Kassel, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Antikensammlung inv. Sk 1; Bol 2004a, 29–32, and 2004b; Gercke and Zimmermann-Elseify 2007, 44–50; Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Skulpturensammlung, inv. Hm 49; Knoll, Vorster, and Woelk 2011, 121–31, no. 2 (J. Raeder). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Adornato 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Cicero *Brutus* 70; Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* 12.7–9; Adornato forthcoming. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)