New Perspectives on Greek and Roman Art

This session's participants use interdisciplinary inquiry to offer new interpretations of ancient artworks. The selected monuments present a range of imagery, functions, and contexts that show the breadth of current scholarly interest in the ancient material world. The papers exemplify current approaches as they question traditional identifications, present alternatives, and reconstruct original compositions through the examination of anthropological, archaeological, epigraphic, iconographic, literary, and socio-historical evidence. Not only important for their original contributions, they also provide useful models of investigating ancient visual culture for teachers and students of classical antiquity.

Herakles and Geryon: A Reinterpretation of the Sappho Painter Lekythos in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

On the front of this ca. 500 BCE lekythos (oil flask), said to have been found in an Attic tomb, Helios rises in his chariot, flanked by Selene and Nyx, who descend into the sea. On the back, Herakles roasts meat over a flaming brick altar as part of a sacrifice. Past scholars have agreed that Herakles and Helios occupy the same physical and temporal space, thus Herakles performs his sacrifice at dawn. This paper accepts that the moment shown on the front is sunrise, but argues that Herakles conducts his sacrifice in the far west of the known world, not only in a different location from the Sun but also in the opposite temporal context—sunset. My interpretation explores the anthropological significance of Herakles' solitary sacrifice and reconsiders the context of his ritual as an excerpt from the Geryon labor.

Reflections on a Figure of a Warrior in the Wadsworth Athenaeum

This ca. 510-500 BCE Greek bronze figurine known as the "Spartan Warrior" and often reproduced in educational materials, is noteworthy for its rare iconographic features. The small, yet intimidating, figure is draped in a heavy cloak and wears a Corinthian-style, face-covering helmet. Most interesting is the helmet's crest, which is not the typical longitudinal one but is oriented transversely. The identification of the figure as a Spartan officer has been reiterated ever since its first suggestion in the 1960s, despite the lack of solid evidence. By examining the figure and its archaeological and iconographic parallels, we can assess the likelihood of this identification and open discussion for other possibilities.

The Arch of Germanicus and Attic Statuary in the Early Imperial Period

In 19 CE the Arch of Germanicus, which no longer survives, was built in the Circus Flaminius in Rome to memorialize Emperor Tiberius' heir after his death in Antioch. Its decoration has been a topic of exploration, especially because of the twelve sculptures of imperial family members documented to have been on top of its attic. Although bronze statue groups depicting the emperor riding in a triumphal chariot are the best-known type of early imperial triumphal arch attic statuary, they were not the only option. Arches could also be decorated with statues depicting family groups, a format first seen in the earliest republican arches. I use archaeological and epigraphical evidence to reconstruct the attic statuary of Germanicus' arch, which included, for the first time on an attic, women and children. I analyze the social and dynastic implications of this group and its significance within the changing dynamics of the Julio-Claudian family.

The Dumbarton Oaks Amazon Dish: The Good Life and the Docile East in Late Roman Domestic Art

This paper reconsiders a fifth-century silver plate attributed to Constantinople that bears a unique pairing in surviving ancient art: a standing archer in "Eastern" dress and a mounted, spear-wielding Amazon with bared breast dispatching a leopard and lion. Scholars identify the archer as Trojan or Phrygian and situate the image within the late antique trend of *pasticcio,* the combining of figures without iconographic coherence. Drawing on literary and iconographic evidence, I contend that the archer's "Phyrgian" garb and the hunt's exotic quarry underscore the Amazon's Easternness, encouraging identification of the figures with Sassanian Persia. The hunting context links the image to scenes that constructed an idealized "good life" for a wealthy household. The emergence of hunting Amazon images in late antiquity, this paper argues, reflects a desire to find a nonthreatening place for the East within a domestic vision of harmony and abundance.

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