

ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL GREEK ART by Robin Osborne

If Greek sculptors were inspired and assisted by Egyptian practices, the sculptures that resulted were nevertheless quite distinct. Greek artists strip the Egyptian body of its loin-cloth and of flesh, and remove from the legs and arms the supporting stone left in by Egyptians working in harder granite. (76) They simplify the face, both in terms of planes—mouth is linked to eye in two planes in this example, but sometimes in just one—and in terms of line—the brows continue the line of the flat sides of the nose as they repeat the curve of the eye, introducing no sudden junction and no contrasting line. By contrast both to Egyptian and Daedalic heads, the hair, though similarly braided, barely frames the head. The result is stark, not just in its form but in its total lack of any sense of individuation or of character. Though beardlessness was a mark of youth in Greece, the absence of facial hair here seems merely part of the effacing of particularities.

How are we to account for the difference between the Egyptian and Greek statues? The new large stone statue tradition clearly did overlap with the old bronze statuette tradition in some ways: very similar dedicatory inscriptions accompany both statuettes and *kouroi*, declaring them to be thank-offerings for services rendered by a god, and/or bids for future divine favour. Both statuettes and *kouroi* share nudity, frontality, and an inactive stance. But the *kouroi* operate on a very (77) different scale and relate in a very different way to the viewer: given the readiness of the Greek sculptor to abandon the Daedalic heads and leggy proportions of statuettes, we need to explain the retention of nudity and the simplifications of bodily form in some way more closely related to the context and role of these sculptures.

The Egyptian statues are images of power and embody the power of the individual they represent. The Greek *kouroi* were certainly expensive and prestigious offerings, and must have drawn admiration and (78) respect for the individuals who put them up, but they do not embody power. *Kouroi* refuse identification, whether with man or with god. They figure the male human body, but not a particular body; they have all the potential to act but are engaged in no action: feet apart they make no feature of rootedness, but, feet flat, they do not actually move. Without attributes and without motion they give no grounds for telling a story. The Egyptian statue with its sleek physique, gently rounded musculature, and characterful face reveals to the viewer the nature of the ruler, but the analytical anatomy and plain features of the New York *kouros* make no definitive statement about man at all. Only the choker, by drawing attention to the nakedness of the rest of the body, might seem to suggest that the nakedness makes a positive statement.

What then are the advantages of a statue that is so stark? Surveying the use that was made of *kouroi*, it is clear that one advantage is that it was not adapted to any single role. Primarily used as a dedication in a sanctuary, it appeared both in sanctuaries of Apollo, Poseidon, and other male deities and in sanctuaries of the goddess Hera and Athena. But the *kouros* also had a role outside sanctuaries, at least in Attica, where it was used as a marker on men's graves. (79)