Nudity as a Costume in Classical Art

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Abstract

The Greeks saw their custom of athletic male nudity as something that set them apart from the barbarians, as well as from their own past. A survey of male nudity as a costume in Greece attempts to trace its origin in eighth-century ritual, its gradual transformation from initiation rites to the "civic" nudity of the Classical period, and its significance in various religious, magic, and social contexts. The character of this institution can be seen more clearly by comparing it with earlier Near Eastern attitudes to nakedness, and to the later contemporary "barbarian" attitudes of the Hebrews, Etruscans, and Gauls, as well as to the contemporary views of female nudity, before its acceptance in the Hellenistic period.*

Among the innovations of the ancient Greeks that changed our way of seeing the world, one of the most prominent is a certain kind of public nudity—nudity as a costume.¹ This is a surprising phenomenon. That we have not been more surprised by it is due to the fact that we follow in their tradition and take the Greeks as models, forgetting how often their institutions and attitudes made them the exception, and not the rule, among ancient peoples. The Greeks of the Classical world did not forget. While not, as we shall see, fully understanding the significance of the custom, they were proud of its singularity.

A study of nudity in Greece needs to be undertaken from the historical point of view. I limit myself, in the present article, to a consideration of the evidence of art and literature in an attempt to understand what lay behind the words and figures concerning and representing nudity that have come down to us, and to explain something about the original character of an-

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In addition to the standard A/ÁA abbreviations, the following are used in this article: Boardman, J. Boardman, Athenian Black Figure Vases (London 1974).

Boardman, Red J. Boardman, Red Figure Vases: The Archaic Period (London 1975).


Bonfante, J. Bonfante, Etruscan Dress (Baltimore 1975).

Brendel, O.J. Brendel, Etruscan Art (Harmondsworth 1978).


Dover, K.J. Dover, Greek Homosexuality (London 1978).


¹ For nudity in ancient art, see EAA 5 (1963) 576-81, s.v. Nudo (G. Becatti), with previous bibliography. See also J. Heckenbach, De nuditate sacra sacrisque vinculis (Giesen 1911); Bonfante, Etruscan Dress 102, 111; Dover; L.P. Wilkinson, Classical Attitudes to Modern Issues (London 1978) III, "Nudism in Deed and Word" (orig. publ. Encounter 51, August 1978); and E. Keuls, The Reign of the Phallus (New York 1985). For "Heroic Nudity," the modern term most frequently used, and often misused, see now N. Himmelmann, Ideale Nacktheit (Opladen 1985); an earlier, Italian version appeared as "Nudità ideale," in S. Settis ed., Memoria dell’antico nell’arte italiana 2 (Turin 1985) 199–278. Himmelmann traces the iconography of the male and female nude in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, as well as the development of "heroic" or "ideal" nudity in the later scholarly tradition. Kenneth Clark’s The Nude, A Study in Ideal Form (New York 1956) has made it possible to look beyond this post-Classical convention to a past when nudity’s power was in full force. For later interpretations of male and female nudity, see C.M. Havelock, "Plato and Winkelman: Ideological Bias in the History of Greek Art," Source 5.2 (Winter 1986) 1–6.

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cient nudity and its transformations in Greece. We can at least begin to see the phenomenon of Greek nudity, not as totally isolated, but in the context of the ancient world.

THE QUESTION

Five basic reasons accounting for mankind’s use of clothing will be found to be applicable at various stages of our discussion of nudity: 1) as protection against the elements, especially the cold; 2) for social reasons, to distinguish members of a tribe or class; 3) from a sense of shame; 4) for aesthetic reasons, as decoration, pleasure, beauty, and to attract the opposite sex; 5) for apotropaic reasons, to turn away the effects of magic, sorcery, the evil eye, and hostile spirits. We shall see that one or more of these considerations can also explain what nudity once meant for the Greeks—and how it changed.2

Though it does not serve as a protection against the weather (1), nakedness, like clothing or armor, was used to distinguish social groups (2), in life and in art. Clothing, in fact, distinguishes human society, civilized people, from animals and wild beasts, which are naked. Humans wear clothes, animals do not. In a clothed society, however, nakedness is special, and can be used as a "costume." As it developed, Greek nudity came to mark a contrast between Greek and non-Greek, and also between men and women. The latter distinction is connected with the most basic connotation of nakedness, the sense of shame, vulnerability and exposure it arouses in person (3), and the related sense of shock provoked by its sight. Clothing is designed to avoid such powerful emotions by covering the body, especially the male genitals, the phallus, and female genitals and breast. A "body taboo" against nakedness in public is fairly universal.3 There originally existed in Classical antiquity, as elsewhere, a garment designed to hide the wearer’s sex organ, a loincloth, perizoma or diazoma, as the Greeks usually called it. The beauty of the naked body (4) has often been exalted. Its erotic and aesthetic appeal, as Kenneth Clark has shown, has caused a different word to be used: this aspect of nakedness is known as "nudity."4

In the ancient Near East Ishtar,5 and in the West Aphrodite,6 the goddesses of love, were traditionally naked. The beauty and strength of the naked male body were also praised, and heroes, such as the Master of Animals, were represented naked, or wearing only a belt.7 It was the Greeks who brought into our culture the ideal of male nudity as the highest kind of beauty. Greek art and athletics exalted the beauty of the youthful male athlete, whose figure provided the model for the hero or youthful god. The image of the nude young male, the kouroi statue of early Greek art (contrasting with the clothed female, the kore), embodied the arete or glory of an aristocratic youth, who was kaloskagathos, "beautiful and noble."8

Because of the powerful emotions of shame, shock, lust, admiration, violation, pity, and disgust aroused by the sight of the naked human body, the most frequent associations are with taboo, magic, and ritual (5). When the sexual organ was uncovered, its power was unleashed. Apotropaic and magical nudity, involving the exposure of male genitals and female breasts, and the exhibition of the enlarged male phal- lus have been used from early times, and testify to the enduring force of this complex image. As a taboo, it can protect against the evil eye. Like the Gorgon’s gaze, it can paralyze or protect. The partial nudity or exposure of a woman’s breast or genitals, for example, can signify weakness and powerlessness; but it can also function as powerful magic.9 In art and in life,

4 Clark (supra n. 1).
5 See infra ns. 18–19, 28. For the nudity of Ishtar, the Semitic goddess of love and beauty, queen of heaven, and Inanna, the goddess of the planet Venus, see J.B. Pritchard, Palestinian Figurines in Relation to Certain Goddesses Known through Literature (New Haven 1943), esp. 83–87; M. Mellink, “A Hittite Figure from Nuzi,” Vorderasiatische Archäologie. A. Moortgat . . . gewidmet (Berlin 1964) 155–64; and A.-J. ‘Amr, “A Nude Female Statue with Astral Emblems,” PEQ 117 (1985) 101–11.
6 LIMC II, s.v. Aphrodite (A. Delivorrias) passim.
7 Naked hero wearing a belt, in Near Eastern art: Frankfort, pl. 6, cup and base from Tell Agrab. See also stands for bowls or plates to be placed before the gods (26–27, pl. 20b): "In all these cases, where the figures are not statues in the narrow sense, but temple furniture, they are naked, wearing only a triple girdle. We cannot decide whether they depict human or mythological beings. Perhaps these naked girdled figures are another version of the hero of pl. 6, and of the seals of all later ages."
8 Infra ns. 36–39 for the kouroi.
9 Aspects of the image of the phallus, the women’s breast or organs, and of the gorgon mask converge; they are pitiful or powerful, vulnerable or magic. See L. Bonfante, Icono-
belief in such magic powers is well attested in many cultures throughout history, and has survived into our own times. Phallic or "priapic" figurines and amulets, as well as obscene gestures, still serve as protection against the evil eye in many parts of the world. When dress is normal, exhibitionist acts of nakedness often have a magical meaning. In the realm of magic, nudity wards off a spell or other harmful form of magic, compels love, and gives strength to one's own practice of witchcraft and conjuring. Since, then, in a clothed society nudity was special, monstrous, dangerous, and powerful, complete nakedness was avoided in everyday life. It was saved for special situations or specific ritual ceremonies.

Language, too, preserved traces of this magic power of nakedness. The word, like the fact, had to be avoided, so that its magic power could be preserved. A linguistic taboo thus caused the form of the word for "naked" to change, in all the Indo-European languages. Though gymnos, nudus, nakht, etc. were all originally related to each other—so linguists assure us—they were all transformed in varied and unexpected ways, so that their original similarity is practically unrecognizable. For most parts of the body, there is what Devoto called a "compact" vocabulary: the words for "heart," "eye," "foot," "knee," "nose," "tooth," "eyebrow" are basically the same in all the Indo-European languages. Differences can be accounted for, even explained, by linguistic "rules." But words for "naked," as well as the names of certain parts of the body—finger, tongue, hand, and hair—are different in the different languages. How can this be explained? Indo-Europeans obviously had fingers, tongues, hands, hair, and nakedness; and they must have had names for them. (They did not, as in the case of "lion," for example, have to adopt the name for the object from another language.) There must have been some other reason at work to account for the absence of a consistent pattern in these words. Such a reason can be found in the powerful connotations of certain parts of the body, and of nakedness. These were such that the word was avoided, and a euphemism, or a distortion substituted. The Greek word αἰδοῦα, "shameful things," for sexual organs, like the Latin word pudenda, shows that male nudity was not always accepted. The category of nudity as magic is closely related to several types of nudity we shall be discussing. Religious nudity covers a vast area of meaning. Divine nudity characterizes gods and goddesses. The divine nudity of the goddesses Astarte, Ishtar (regularly shown in frontal nudity), Aphrodite, Venus, and others signifies fertility, fecundity, and power. Ritual nudity refers to nudity as a special mode of dressing for initiation rituals for boys and girls, for sacred

11 New Catholic Encyclopedia 10 (Washington 1967) 559, s.v. Nudity (A. Closs). E. J. Bickerman, CP 41 (1946) 122: "In a 'clothed' society, where garments are a social obligation, nakedness is an exception, and as such a monstrous." On linguistic taboo, the basic works are A. Meillet, Linguistique historique et linguistique générale (Paris 1926) 281–291; G. Bonfante, in Mélanges Bally (Genoa 1939) 195–207; W. Havers, SBWien 1946, 55, for the taboo of the parts of the body. More recently, see G. Bonfante, "La parola 'nudo' e la nudità sacrale fra gl'Indoeuropei," Archivio Glottologico Italiano 66 (1981) 89–92; and "L'interdizione linguistica del capello," AttiLincei 41 (1987) 57–58. Gymnos: Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch I (Heidelberg 1960) 332–333, s.v. γυμνός (H. Frisk); Dictionnaire éymol- 


12 G. Devoto, Origini indoeuropaee (Florence 1962) ix, 195, 203 and passim.


14 Supra n. 5; infra ns. 18–19, 28.
prostitutes serving at the temple, for a priest sacrificing before his god. Clearly dress and undress, nakedness and nudity, are related in meaning and circumstance.

The Old Testament includes a famous account of the origin of clothing that reveals some of the basic ancient connotations of nakedness and clothes. According to Genesis (6:7), Adam and Eve invented a garment to hide the sex organs of men and women—the Greek Septuagint called it a perizoma. They did this to keep from being ashamed of—and/or shocked by—their nakedness after they had eaten of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they discovered that they were naked; so they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.” (In the Vulgate: Et aper- ti sunt oculi amborum: cumque cognovissent se esse nudos, consuerunt folia ficos, et fecerunt sibi perizoma . . .) Whatever the meaning (or meanings) of nakedness in this passage, the purpose of the perizoma was clearly to avoid appearing naked before each other, as male and female, and before God. It was not for protection; for only afterward (Gen. 3:21) did God give them fur coats to protect them from the cold.

Just as clothing could serve different purposes, so nakedness and nudity could have different meanings. This seems to be shown by the story of Ishtar, the goddess who in art normally appeared in frontal nudity, in the full pride of her beauty and power. In the story of Ishtar’s descent into the Underworld, she is progressively stripped of her jewels and ornaments as she enters each of the seven gates. At the last, the gatekeeper removes her “breechcloth,” and the goddess of fertility appears completely naked, deprived of her divinity and dignity. Even she can be stripped and shamed. (The Akkadian phrase for the loincloth is “robe of shame,” sometimes euphemistically rendered as “robe of splendor.”) There was evidently all the difference in the world, to ancient eyes, between a gloriously, divinely naked figure wearing jewelry, a crown, a loincloth, even a belt, and one not wearing anything. Being “stark naked” meant poverty, as well as shame.

In the Old Testament nakedness always signifies poverty, shame, slavery, humiliation. In the ancient Near East and elsewhere it is a sign of defeat—naked, bound prisoners were paraded in the king’s victory celebration, and are thus represented on innumerable monuments. The slain enemy, regularly stripped of clothes or armor, lies naked. As in a dream of anxiety, nakedness exposes you to fear and shame. But the Greeks were to turn the concept around and to see the beauty and pride of the male human body, without cover or adornment.

Herodotus and Thucydides correctly saw athletic nudity as a custom—much more than a costume!—that separated the Greeks from other people. Herodotus, in his well-known story about King Gyges (1.10.3), comments that “among the Lydians, as among just about all the other barbarians, even for a man to be seen naked brings great shame.” The passage in Thucydides (1.5—6) is more complex, and we will deal with part of it later. He, too, emphasizes this basic contrast between Greeks and barbarians; adding the fact that the custom separated the Greeks from their own past as well. It was, indeed, an unprece-

16 Already in the Protoliterate period nakedness signified service to the gods. On a vase from Warka, a frieze shows men bringing gifts to the goddess, “naked, as was common then and throughout Early Dynastic times when man approached the gods” (Frankfort 10, pl. 3). For temple prostitutes, see Frankfort 194; Hdt. 1.199. For initiation rituals, see A. van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (Chicago 1960); trans. of Les rites de passage, (1908) 65–115; nudity and costumes, 81–84; sacred prostitutes of antiquity, 100. “Van Gennep makes a sharp distinction between religion and magic” (S.T. Kimball, “Introduction,” p. ix).


18 For this passage from the Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. by E.A. Speiser, see Pritchard, ANET 105–109; ANE 82–85.


20 For nudity in the Bible, see Lurker and Montalbano, supra n. 17. For bound prisoners, see, among many other monuments, an ivory carving from Megiddo (1350–1150 B.C.), in Pritchard, ANE, fig. 90; and a fragmentary Akkadian statuette vase in the Louvre (second half of the third millennium) in A. Parrot, The Sumerians (Milan 1968) figs. 229–30. For the corpse of the enemy under the victorious chariot, see Frankfort, pl. 161, relief from Carchemish.
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dented departure from a norm accepted in every other time and tribe. "Formerly, even in the Olympic games, athletes competed with a diazoma, or perizoma. A number of other customs show that the Greeks once lived like the barbarians of today." Many other passages could be cited to show that the Greeks believed that the custom of nudity marked a break with their own earlier tradition.

What led to this change? Explanations have for the most part referred to the Classical period, and emphasized one or another aspect of this custom: the artistic nudity of the kouroi, the monumental statue of a standing youth, or the real-life nudity of the athlete.

I would like to try to trace the origin and development of such an important phenomenon. Of the many questions involved, several must for the moment remain unanswered; this is work in progress. The tentative nature of some of my suggestions will, I hope, stimulate others to treat this important subject. In trying to sort out the different chronological levels of Greek nudity and their significance, I have attempted to do what I did for the Roman triumph,21 finding, along the way, how differently Greek and Roman sources deal with central features of their cultures: typically, Roman tradition sees continuity, Greek historians stress innovation. The result is schematic, but I hope, helpful.

The Greek word for naked, or nude, is gymnos, and shows something new in the ancient world. The word refers to total nudity. In Classical times, a man was not gymnos if he wore a perizoma. In a military context gymnos meant "unarmed" (II. 16.815, etc.), not covered by armor, exposed (Thuc. 3.23, 5.10.71; Xen. Hell. 4.4.12); and "light-armed," as opposed to the heavy-armed hoplite. The gymnion stadion (Pind. Pyth. 11.49) was the race run without armor, in contrast to the hoplitodromos. By far the most common usage, however, was specifically "exercising in the nude."22 The word had become something new, just as the Greeks had made something new of the ancient social, religious, and magic taboo of nudity in daily life. For while the word for "naked" had universally—in the Bible, for example—been used to mean "poor," "wretched," or "miserable," in Classical Greek the word rarely means "poor." When did the change come about?

ARCHAIC PERIOD

In Homer's poems, of around 800 B.C., nakedness implies shame, vulnerability, death, and dishonor. The naked body of the hero must be rescued. Thersites is threatened with being stripped and run naked through the assembly. Odysseus covers himself with leaves before Nausicaa.23 The latter instance, of course, may be due to the specific circumstances. The hero is meeting a young, unmarried woman for the first time, and it would hardly be appropriate for him to appear before her completely naked. Homer presents us, it seems, as so often, with the old and the new, the traditional and the earliest instance of what is to come.

A crucial passage seems to illustrate such a coexistence. In the 22nd book of the Iliad, Priam and Hecuba in turn attempt—in vain—to dissuade Hector from going to battle and to certain death. Both appeal to his compassion, and respect, by facing him with the spectacle of their nakedness. The sight of one's parents' nakedness is awesome.24 Priam paints a picture of his own death and degradation. An old man's death is ugly: "When an old man is dead and down, and the dogs mutilate the grey head and the grey beard and the parts that are shameful (aiðō), this, for all sad mortality is the sight most pitiful" (II. 22.74–76). Immediately after this, Hecuba exposes her breast and holds it out for Hector, in entreaty (79–81). This pitiable significance refers to the traditional sense of nakedness.

What is new is what Priam contrasts with the grishly, shameful, ugly death of an old man: the beauty of the nakedness of a young man. "For a young man all is decorous when he is cut down in battle and torn

23 Compare the story of the drunken Noah, Gen. 9.21–23.
with the sharp bronze, and lies there, and though dead all that shows about him is beautiful...” (Il. 22.71–73). The picture is startling at such an early date. It was understandably famous. Echoes of the passage sounded down the centuries, among them Tyrtaios’s well-known poem, with its contrast of ugly and beautiful.

For this is shameful, for an older man fallen in battle among the front line fighters to lie before the young men, an older man with his hair white and beard silvery, breathing his virulent life into the dust, his bloody genitals in his hands and with his skin all bare. This sight is shameful for the eyes to behold and reprehensible. But in contrast among young men all these things are proper as long as he shines in the bloom of lovely youth manhood. They are admirable for men to see and wonderfully attractive for women while he is alive—and he looks also honorable and beautiful fallen in the front line.25

There is no sign of any difference between Greeks and barbarians in Homer in terms of language, religion (the Trojans’ sacrifice at the temple of Athena), dress, or nudity. In the athletic competitions, the heroes “gird their loins” to prepare for the wrestling match. Ancient authors assumed this meant that they wore the perizoma. Recently others have suggested that they were engaged in belt-wrestling, known from the ancient Near East, where nude male figures wearing thick belts were common in early or protohistoric times.26

Ancient Near Eastern monuments illustrate various types of nudity, including the motif of a hero wearing a belt, which does not hide his genitals, and boots.27 Otherwise heroes tended to be clothed, and to cover their genitals. Total nudity for men could signify service to the god, a ritual “costume.”

The nude woman, always shown in front view, was a very common motif that could have different meanings at different times. In Near Eastern art goddesses were so represented, chief among them Ishtar (Astarte), whose powerful, naked image was widely distributed, and influential in many places and periods.28 The most frequent connotation of female nudity in historical times seems to have been service rendered in the temple.29 For men, however, in the ancient Near East and elsewhere it was a sign of defeat. As in the Old Testament, nakedness signifies poverty, shame, slavery, humiliation.30

Greek prehistory offers fewer examples of complete nudity. Active younger men and heroes were represented in art wearing the perizoma or short pants throughout the Aegean and the whole Mediterranean, in contrast to older men, dressed in long chitons and mantles. Thus exposed to the sun, they evidently developed the dark suntan with which they were regularly shown in contrast to the white skin of the women, who were more covered and went out less into the sun. This traditional iconography appears, for example, on the fresco of the bull-jumpers from Knossos (ca. 1450 B.C.). A man and two women are performing a bull-jumping exercise. All three are wearing the athletic perizoma. Only the color, white for the women, dark for the man, distinguishes the sexes.32 This sports costume, the short pants, trunks, or perizoma, had a long life. It is found in later, Classical times, worn by women athletes, as well as by the barbarian neighbors of the Greeks, the Etruscans and Romans.33

25 Tyrtaios, fr. 7 (11.15–31).
26 Hom., e.g., Il. 23.685; 23.710. Ζώνοις is often translated by the general term “gird one’s loins,” and a ζώνη is a metal belt, a protective piece of armor: see S. Karouzou, ArchDelt 16 (1960) 60–71, for a list of Homeric passages. C. Gordon (“Belt-Wrestling in the Bible World,” Hebrew Union College Annual 23 [1950–1951] 131–36) interprets this passage and Il. 23.710 as meaning that the contestants put on a belt for wrestling (cf. 23.684, boxing). On the other hand, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (7.72.3) cites the same passages (and Od. 18.66–69, 18.76) as evidence that the Greeks did not compete in the nude in ancient times. In his own time this ζώνη would seem to have signified pants or loincloth, since a plain belt would hardly keep the contestant from being naked. See Bonfante, Etruscan Dress 109 n. 4. For Near Eastern belted figures, supra n. 7. Particularly convincing as belt-wrestlers is the group from Tell Agrab (Frankfort 27, pl. 20c). For belt-wrestling, see also Polia-koff (infra n. 54) 31–33.
27 Frankfort 12, pl. 6c: “a naked hero occurs commonly in this period.” One of these is “hardly a mere mortal, in spite of the homely details of his rope girdle and mountaineer’s boots . . .”; 237, n. 36: “He is not mentioned in literature, and his identification with the hero of the Gilgamesh epic is entirely without foundation.”
28 For Ishtar, supra ns. 5, 18–19. Frankfort 12: “Ishtar, in later times, was a goddess of war as well as love.”
29 For temple prostitutes, see supra n. 16.
30 Supra ns. 17, 20.
31 Pausanias (1.44) also uses the participle (ἀνόρο περι-εξωμοίων). “Perizoma” refers as well to later garments, or to Roman equivalents: see Plut. Vit. Rom. 21 (περυώμα), Aem. 33, Arr. 4.8.16; Polyb. 66.25.3. Other words used were διασώματα (Ath. Deipnosophistae 13.607c), or διά-ζωμα (Lucian, Alex. 13). The verbs περιζώμασαι or διασώ-μασαι were also used, meaning “to put on the perizoma.” Bonfante, Etruscan Dress 19–21.
32 W. Deonna, Le symbolisme de l’acrobatie antique (Coll-Latomus 9, 1953) esp. 65. “Résumé.” For the Toreador fresco, see S. Hood, The Arts in Prehistoric Greece (Harmondsworth 1978) 60, fig. 44.
33 Female athletes: Bonfante, Etruscan Dress 21, with references. In Greece, women wore the perizoma when performing the pyrrhic, or armed dance; → J.C. Poursat, “Les
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Nudity appears in Geometric art, in a different context. Long after the Mycenaean age, Geometric artists in Athens reintroduced the human figure in art and developed a different set of conventions for its depiction. Most of the male statuettes of Geometric age are nude; some wear a belt but this does not hide their genitals. In vase painting, too, male nude figures appear, in scenes of funerals, war, or processions, where it was not necessarily a depiction of reality. It is difficult to see that such male nudity has any connotation other than that of distinguishing gender. Figures wearing long skirts could be either women or charioters, dressed in long robes according to the earlier convention. J.L. Benson has suggested that some examples of a charioteer not wearing a robe, and thus presumably naked, might be attributed to a strong feeling, even at this early date, “for the arete in the unclad state of warriors and athletes.” At what stage in Greek history can one safely assume such a feeling to have existed? Perhaps, in Geometric art, as in Homer, it was just beginning to exist, but was not yet fully developed, even for nude male figures represented with pronounced sex organs.34

Indeed, we seem to see a gradual development toward a restriction of nudity in Greek art, or rather a definition of it as heroic, divine, athletic, and youthful for men; and something to be avoided for women. A group composed of a big bronze statuette of a youth from Dreros (more than 2½ ft high), found together with two smaller female figures, already shows, in the

8th century B.C., the distinction between nude male kouroi and clothed female korai. It is hard to know to what extent the youth’s nudity was already significant: Robertson suggests the group represented Apollo with Leto and Artemis.35

In the seventh century B.C., there began to appear statues of naked youths, life-size or over, monumental, heroic, divine, votive, or funerary—the kouroi.36 Egyptian art inspired the size, pose and type of kouroi, but its nudity was a Greek innovation. On the other hand, the apotropaic, magical quality of nakedness survived in other nude, or rather, phallic male figures which soon made their appearance in Greek art. Satyrs, animal-like human figures with horses’ tails, were represented full of vitality, naked, with exaggerated huge phalli (or phalluses), on black-figured vases of the sixth century B.C. Actors who represented satyrs in the theater in the fifth century wore animal-skin loincloths with a large phallus sewn on.37 The herms the Athenians encountered daily in the streets of their city, from ca. 540 B.C. on, were not, strictly speaking, nude, since they had no body. Each consisted of a male head sculptured on a pillar, on which was carved an erect phallus, serving as a reminder of the powerful magic residing in the alert male member (fig. 1).38 At the time of the mutilation of the herms, the city of Athens perhaps feared treason as mass castration.

In art, therefore, the nude male figure reigned from the seventh century B.C. on. On the kouroi, the sex

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34 Robertson 19–21 (Geometric experimentation), 39 (sphyrylata from Dreros). J.L. Benson, Horse and Man. The Origins of Greek Painting (Amherst 1970) 105–107. Hurwit 98–99: “...the distinctions are minute: the Dipylon Master’s mostly nude figures, male and female, on all seven of the vases attributed to him...are essentially the same figure.” I am grateful for the help of an anonymous AJA reviewer on this point.


38 Paralipomena 402. Boardman, Red Figure Vases, Archaic 364. R. Lullies, Die Typen der griechischen Herme (Königsberg 1931). For herms, → H. Goldman, “The Origin of the Greek Herm,” AJA 46 (1942) 58–68; E.B. Harrison, Agora XI: Archaic and Archaistic Sculpture (Princeton 1965) 108–17; Robertson 285–86. H. Wrede, Die antike Herme (Mainz 1986), with review by A. Hermay, Gnomon 61 (1989) 75–76. For their apotropaic power, see the explanation in W. Burkert, Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual (Berkeley 1979) 40–41, who quotes Plutarch, Quaest. conv. 682 on why they averted the evil eye. Burkert also quotes Pollux 7.108 as evidence that the Greeks found them laughable, geloia. The laughter they created is a normal reaction to the power of the sexual object or subject because of embarrassment, shame, magic power, etc.; see also Plato, text, infra n. 85; it is often connected with aggression (see infra n. 61). Frontal face and phallus: supra n. 9. Hermes was also the god of the palaestra, and of wrestling: a herm presided over the palaestra, and sometimes was enough to set the scene for the viewer (Poliakoff [infra n. 54] 12–13). For herms as symbols of Attic unity and Athenian democracy in the fifth century, see B.M. Lavelle, “Hipparchos’ Herms,” EchCl 29 (1985) 411–20.
Nudity was certainly significant for the image of the kouroi. Exceptions like the statues of draped youths from Asia Minor, probably influenced by the attitude of the neighbors of the Ionian Greeks, among whom, as we have seen, male nudity was considered shameful, only serve to underline the extent to which, in mainland Greece, the consistent attributes of the kouroi were its nakedness, its youth, and, consequently, its beauty. But what was the significance of such nudity? The kouroi seems to have been in some way "archetypal"; it was used in a variety of contexts. Like the kore, it could stand as a marker over a grave or as a dedication in a sanctuary. A kouros sometimes represented Apollo (fig. 2), and was sometimes dedicated for an athletic victory. Given the relationship often assumed, no doubt correctly, between the nudity of the kouroi figure and athletic nudity, it is somewhat surprising to note that no kouroi were found at Olympia. Kouroi and korai were the "emblems and embodiment of Archaic Greece's aristocracy—its beautiful people"; they were the visible form of their ideals of beauty and nobility, of their heroic arete and kalokagathia. Although I think a connection with athletic nudity existed, I believe it was indirect rather than direct. The kouroi were not, as has been pointed out, primarily athletic. Their various functions were all in some way religious. They were gifts for the gods, or for the dead. In some cases, as mentioned above, they actually did represent a god, Apollo (fig. 2). Brunilde Ridgway has sug-

38 I owe this observation to one of A/JA's anonymous reviewers.
39 Boardman, Sculpture, Archaic 69, 87. Infra n. 77.
40 Hurwit 191-202. Ridgway (supra n. 36) believes "the early kouroi are not generic representations of youths, but portray Apollo himself" (27). Andrew Stewart instead reaffirms the priority of the generic kouros type over individual manifestations as Apollo, stressing the heroic ambience of the Attic graves, and above all showing their role as symbols of aristocratic arete and kalokagathia. A.F. Stewart, "When Is a Kouros Not an Apollo? The Tenea 'Apollo' Revisited," in M. Del Chiario and W.R. Biers eds., Corinthia. Studies in Honor of D.A. Amyx (Columbia, Mo.

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Fig. 1. Nolan amphora by the Nikon Painter. Herm. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 68.163. (Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Landon T. Clay)
suggested that the broad, leather-backed belt some kouroi wear may have been an attribute of Apollo, and of divinity. According to Andrew Stewart, however, it represented a passing fashion. Other attributes, such as jewelry (the Metropolitan Museum's kouros wears a necklace), boots (Kleobis's and Biton's at Delphi), or fancy hairstyles of various types may have implied another religious association, for which the nudity of the kouroi provided a "costume": the initiations of youths into manhood, and into their proper rank.44

In Greece, full-fledged initiations are known from Dorian Crete, and from Sparta. Inscriptions bear witness to herds of youths stripping off their clothes (ekdyomenoi), while the younger boys wore girlish clothes. In Athens the institution of the ephebeia still bears the marks of initiation motifs.45 The gymnopaides of Sparta, which took their name from the nudity of the participants, were the best known initiation rituals in antiquity.46

The kouroi type fits the concept of the sacred quality of nudity: its nakedness represented a feature of initiation ritual. It referred to those religious dances and rituals that called for the candidate's nakedness as a special costume or habit. Perhaps the elaborately dressed pattern of the hair also represented part of a ritual costume.47

Nudity finds its original place as a "costume" in the context of the initiation of youths. An emphasis on youth remains a permanent part of the aesthetic aspect of male nudity. K.J. Dover has described, in his recent book on Greek homosexuality, how the emphasis of the ideal of youthful male beauty included the

44 For the belt, see Ridgway (supra n. 36) 54-57; Stewart (supra n. 41) 57-58. Robertson (47; cf. 182) remarks that the colossus dedicated by the Narxians to Apollo on Delos probably represents the god himself: the cult image of the god in his temple on Delos was belted, and the sculpture may have been influenced in this particular by the cult figure. For the boots, see Stewart (supra n. 41) 56: they may characterize farmers or travelers. Stewart, 60, on the nudity, youthfulness and beauty of the kouroi, described as "numinous, even fetishistic."


46 Brelitch (supra n. 45) 158, 452, on nudity at Sparta.

47 Ridgway (supra n. 36) 54-62, on stylizations of the kouroi's hair: were the long locks basically a female hairstyle, adopted by certain kouroi for specific reasons? Or was such abundant hair a sign of a divinity or a hero? The layered hairstyle may have had a special iconographic significance. Of all the attributes and accessories, hats and hairstyles are most often used with symbolic purpose; this would be even truer for naked figures, which have no other socially distinguishing feature. For the significance of hair in Greek art and culture, see Scanlon (infra n. 94) 211, with full references. Cf. Brendel 303. For erotic significance of hair, see H.A. Shapiro, "Courtship Scenes in Attic Vase-Painting," AJA 85 (1981) 139.

48 On the preference of Athenian artists of the fifth century B.C. for the physical type of the youth, see Dover 126, Fig. 2. Red-figure amphora by the Dwarf Painter. Helen and Menelaos (or Cassandra and Ajax?). British Museum E 336. (Courtesy Trustees of the British Museum)
was to fight against Old Age, which defeats all mankind. As we have seen, a naked young man was always beautiful, even if dead; a naked old man was ugly, a thing of shame. In contrast to the large, erect phallus of the magic, apotropaic figure, a beautiful young man was characterized by a small penis. For women, too, whether they were represented naked or dressed, in art, literature, and life, depilation and small breasts were part of the ideal of youthful beauty. It was more than an obsession with male nudity: Athenians were infatuated, endlessly fascinated, by the charm of youth. In fact, if the nudity of the ephebe became the "costume" of the citizen in Athens, it was because the Athenians idealized the youthfulness of the 16-year-old ephebe. Until he became a hoplite at 18, he stood for the most resplendent of physical beauty, on the verge of manhood, with only the bloom of hair on his cheeks.

This was the ephemeral moment of beauty Athenian artists wanted to capture in their statues of kouroi. Such an emphasis on youth is closely related to athletic nudity, also to be seen in the ritual, religious context of early Greek nudity, although, as in the case of the Rampin Horseman, older men also appeared naked.

134–35; and Thuillier 403–409. Sweet (infra n. 69) 48 comments on this preference in explaining why most Greek athletes were represented without infibulation, which may have actually been used more widely than was illustrated: "The ideal of many Attic artists was the pubescent boy rather than the mature male. Consequently artists commonly "youthen" the figure, to use J.D. Beazley's felicitous phrase (AJA 54 [1950] 321). Hence even mature males were often shown with immature genitals." For the custom of infibulation, see infra n. 69.

49 Red-figure Attic vases: Rome, Villa Giulia, 480 B.C., ARV² 284. Louvre G34, ARV² 286, 1642, and Dover, fig. R 422.

50 Men with large penises were considered ugly (Dover 126–28, and see infra n. 79), as were women with large breasts (infra n. 145). Further evidence for this aesthetic ideal is the custom of female depilation of pubic hair, for which there is a good deal of literary evidence, much of it from the plays of Aristophanes. The subject has recently attracted the interest of a number of scholars; most recently, and most thoroughly, M.I. Davies, "Merkins and Modes," Images et société en Grèce ancienne (Lausanne 1984, publ. 1987) = Cahiers d’archéologie romande 36 (1987) 234–48, richly documented, with previous bibliography. See M. Kilmer, "Genital Phobia and Depilation," JHS 102 (1982) 104–12; D.M. Bain, in LCM 7.1 (1982) 7–10, and LCM 7.8 (1982) 111.

51 After the beard has grown, the youth is considered to be an adult, and can no longer be an eromenos: Sargent (supra n. 45) 202, quoting Theopompos of Chios; Dover 144 and Age classes, which exist in primitive societies and even among the primates, were well known in Classical Greece. The separation of athletes or soldiers according to age groups went back to early times, and was observed at Olympia from the seventh century on at least. The nudity of the athletes, which was so important a part of the tradition of the competitions held every four years at the sanctuary, must have been a part of the initiation rites of youths, in the religious context of the holy place.

Greek and Roman authors pay a good deal of attention to the Greek custom of athletic nudity. Various writers recorded the details of its origin. They agreed it had taken place in the context of the Olympic games, but disagreed about the date and the individual responsible for this innovation. According to some, a certain Orsiippus of Megara won the footrace at Olympia when he lost his perizoma on the way, finishing the race naked while the others still wore their loin cloths. Dionysius of Halicarnassus says it was Acanthus the Lacedaemonian, in the 15th Olympiad (720–716 B.C.), who began the new custom. Thucydides also credits the Lacedaemonians or Spartans with setting the example for a custom eventually universal among the Greeks. This religious stage of nudity we can try to reconstruct by way of archaeology and anthropopo-
The Greeks of the Classical period and later did not themselves recall or understand this aspect of their past. Yet a ritual origin for the nudity so characteristic of Greek culture explains a great deal that is otherwise obscure. In fact, as Brelich has noted, it is easier to understand the nudity of athletes at the Olympic games as originally prescribed than—as later Greek tradition had it—an innovation.

A recent study by J. Mouratidis on the earliest stages of Greek athletic nudity asserts that “nudity in Greek athletics had its roots in prehistoric Greece and was connected with the warrior-athlete whose training and competition in the games was at the same time his preparation for war.” These conclusions seem to me to be correct. But I think in moving from this primitive context the author underestimates, or neglects entirely, the religious level of the phenomenon, just as the Greeks did. We can trace generally—but not date—some of the phases of the development of nudity, from its connection with the “aggression and apotropaic purposes characteristic of the early stages of human society,” to its survival in the historical period in Greek athletics.

Other scholars have seen the origin of athletics in funeral games, cultic practices, etc. Any explanation for the rise of sport or athletics has to account in some way for the related phenomenon of “athletic nudity,” a feature of Greek culture as characteristic and far-reaching as their spirit of competition. Recently a good case has been made for a ritual origin for Greek athletics, in connection with early hunting rituals. The argument which has been made against a religious connection seems to me to lose sight of a phase of Greek culture which is in fact visible, though sometimes dimly, in later times. The very fact that both sports and religion are so extraordinarily conservative allows us to trace their existence and character in earlier times. There is little doubt that nudity was involved with the religious atmosphere of the games. At the sanctuary at Olympia, as elsewhere, initiation rites of youths, athletic and artistic competitions were related within the same religious atmosphere. Ritual nakedness was a typical initiation motif. In initiation rites in ancient Crete, the young man was naked before he took the arms of the warrior and entered into his manhood.

56 Much recent work in archaeology and anthropology has focused on Greek ideas of religion, of divinity, the sacred, the irrational, ritual, and magic. The weakening of “the old link between theology and classics” and the strengthening of the relatively new link of anthropology had contributed to an earlier reluctance on the part of scholars to accept “religious” explanations (see Rose, below), not too different from Thucydides’ point of view, which as Ernst Badain pointed out, in fact distorted the picture of events. (E. Badain, unpublished lecture, New York, 1985; cf. infra ns. 57, 84–87).

57 M.I. Finley, The Use and Abuse of History (New York 1975) 18: “the classical Greeks knew little about their history before 650 B.C. (or even 550 B.C.), and . . . what they thought they knew was a jumble of fact and fiction. Thucydides’ introduction contains an interpretation of early Greek history derived from prolonged meditation about the world in which Thucydides lived. . . . ” Sansone (supra n. 54) 109: “The effect of these various and divergent accounts is to prove to us that the ancient Greeks, who were always fond of assigning names to the ‘inventors’ of otherwise unexplained customs, were themselves unaware of the reason for the practice.”

58 Supra ns. 45–46, 57.

59 Brelich (supra n. 45) 452.


61 Mouratidis (supra n. 60) 321. Mouratidis (223, cf. 32) quotes me (Etruscan Dress 102) on the nudity of Greek athletes as protection against the evil eye. I now believe that such apotropaic, protective nudity is related to, but not the same as, ritual nudity. The nudity of the phallic herm, the satyr, Priapus, etc., is aggressive and protective in a way that athletic and ritual nudity (which emphasize youth and a small penis) are not. See supra, text.

62 For a survey and classification of such explanations, see Sansone (supra n. 54) 3–14. Add Rose, supra n. 56; Griffin, infra n. 63.

63 See Raschke, “Introduction” (supra n. 54), esp. 7–9, on mock combats as a form of ritual, initiatory rites of endurance, and the presence of “athletic” nudity as a feature of such rituals. In his review of Raschke and Sansone (supra n. 54), Jasper Griffin points out that Sansone’s theory for the origin of sport as ritualistic actions derived from hunting (“sport is the ritual sacrifice of physical energy”) cannot account for the phenomenon of nudity in Greek athletics (Sansone 107–15): J. Griffin, “Playing to Win,” The New York Review of Books, 29 Sept. 1988, 3–5.
Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s work on the religious and social context of the Athenian ephebeia shows this institution to have originated in early initiation rites characterized by both nudity and change of clothes.64 Women, too, participated in ritual nakedness in the course of initiations into special cults, for example the Athenian festival in honor of Artemis. Here, too, age groups were distinguished by their costumes: in the foot race, some bared one breast, and wore short dresses; others ran naked.65 The ritual nakedness of the women, however, did not initiate them into the life of a warrior or a soldier: it prepared them for marriage and the private life of child-bearing and a family, and therefore it did not develop further as a feature of Greek public life and culture. As we shall see, Plato, like other Greeks, was conscious of the connection between nakedness, exercise, and war, and took the logical but bold step of imagining that the women who would be guardians alongside the men must also exercise naked alongside them.66 It was evidently the Spartan model that most easily came to mind. There it was most important in the *agoge* or parade of the boys and the spectacle of the *gymnopoiaia*.67 There, too, the women exercised and exposed themselves as much as the men. So the story grew up that athletic nudity had been invented by the Spartans.68

The ideal of the kouros was an aristocratic ideal; so was its nudity. The nudity of the athlete was related, but it was complete: no necklace, no boots, no belt. There was, on the other hand, an attribute of athletic nudity which may well have been more common in life than in art. Athletes who participated in competitions and who exercised naked were infibulated; that is, they tied up their penises with a string, apparently as a protection and precaution. This infibulation was often, but not always—no doubt for aesthetic reasons—shown in painting and sculpture.69

Throughout the sixth century B.C., black-figure Attic vases regularly show athletes competing in the nude, as well as nude gods, heroes, mortals, revelers, etc. Nudity as a costume was fashionable, and was regularly shown on the vases used in the symposium, another phenomenon of Greek culture developed by and for the aristocracy who competed at the festivals, commissioned the artists, and served as hoplites in the army. Like the symposium, athletic nudity was a creation of Archaic Greece brought about by the rise of the hoplites.70 These men attended the gymnasium, and proudly wore the “costume” that was appropriate for this place. The gymnasium functioned as military institution, public banquet-hall, court, auditorium, country club, and university.71 This was the context in which the other typically aristocratic feature of Greek society—homosexuality—also flourished. As Oswyn Murray has remarked, “The cult of nakedness and athletic prowess in the *gymnasion* and *palaistra*, the sexual exclusiveness of the symposion, and the emphasis on male courage in a society still largely organized for war must surely be connected with the rise of homosexual love among an aristocracy who invented a new compound to describe themselves, ‘The beautiful and the good’ (*kaloikagathoi*—“good” of course in the sense of well-born).” It is no coincidence that so many illustrations of naked youths occur on vases used for the symposium.72 Athletic nudity had by this time evi-

64 Vidal-Naquet, *Le chasseur noir* (supra n. 45) 281, bases his study on van Gennep (supra n. 16), whose pioneering study is still the clearest statement of such rites.
65 Scanlon (supra n. 45). Burkert, *Greek Religion* 263; L. Kahil, “L’Aréémis de Brauron: Rites et mystère,” *AntK* 20 (1977) 86–98, pls. 18–21. Boardman, *Black Figure Vases* 182, fig. 317, illustrates a crater from Brauron, one of several showing naked girls dancing, related to local cult.
66 Infra, text and n. 85.
67 Supra n. 45. Vidal-Naquet (supra n. 45). For the origin of many features of Greek religion and Greek sport in initiation ritual, especially nakedness, see H. Jeannaire, *Cours et Coutûres* (Lille 1939) 531, 559, 566; Brelich (supra n. 45); Heckenbach (supra n. 1); Sargent (supra n. 45).
68 Spartans: supra ns. 45–46. Women: supra ns. 52, 65, infra ns. 82, 94.
69 W. E. Sweet, “Protection of the Genitals in Greek Athletics,” *AncW* 11 (1985) 43–52. Thullier 155, 291, 394–401; Keuls (supra n. 1) 68–70, 73, figs. 51, 56. Sweet surveys the evidence and possible explanations for the practice, but fails to find any practical reason to account for it. See infra n. 88.
71 Delorme (supra n. 70); Crowther (supra n. 54) 113, who also c.⇒ C. A. Forbes, “Expanded Uses of the Greek Gymnasium,” *CP* 40 (1945) 32–42.
72 O. Murray, *Early Greece* (Glasgow 1980) 205–206. “Archaic attitudes to sex were closely related to the social institutions of the aristocracy. . . . There is little enough evidence to trace the transition from the heterosexual society reflected in Homer and in Archilochus; . . . Art reflects these preoccupations. . . . The kouros can be understood in terms of a preoccupation with the beauty of the youthful male nude. Another product of this concern are the many Attic black-figure and red-figure cups, primarily from the archaic period, inscribed ‘so-and-so is beautiful,’ *kalos*. Most of these names refer to aristocrats; the cups reflect the tastes and interests of the Athenian aristocracy who used them at symposia.” Many of Murray’s observations agree remarkably well with my own view of the development of Greek male nudity. For example, his view of the symposium as a ritual drinking session, capable of many transformations: “Such transformations are easy to understand in terms
dently become distinguished from religious nudity. Respectable women, the wives of the athletes and symposiasts, did not participate in this nudity. When the nudity of the ancient initiation rites became in Athens the “uniform” of the ephebe, the future citizen and soldier, and of older men as well, women were not included: the distinction came to be between citizens—especially upper-class citizens—who exercised, and women, who did not.

Recent work on Greek hoplite warfare has explored the type of military training used by the Greek cities. The capacity to serve in the army constituted the fully qualified citizen: the polis derived from the people in arms.73 But how did Greek soldiers acquire and maintain the skills they needed? We know few details about military training in Sparta, or, in Athens, about the ancient institution of the ephebeia before its regularization in 335 B.C. Gymnastic exercises and the Pyrrhic dance must have played an important part as a preparation for war.74 The Athenian pyrrhic, or armed dance, was performed nude at the Panathenaia and involved choruses from the Athenian tribes.75 The tradition of the warrior athlete who participated in armed dances and races, still being held in the Classical period, may, as Mouratidis noted, have originated in earlier times before being introduced into the Olympic program.76

The Greeks were proud of their soldiers’ physique and of the tan skin that was the result of their exercising in the nude. A story about Agesilaos of Sparta illustrates how, to a practiced military eye, nakedness allowed an accurate judgment of a man’s physical fitness: “He gave instructions . . . that the barbarians captured in the raids be exposed for sale naked. So when his soldiers saw them white because they never stripped, and fat and lazy through constant riding in carriages, they believed that the war would be exactly like fighting with women.”77 The contrast between their own bronzed men’s bodies and the white, feminine flabbiness of the Persians renewed the courage of the Greek troops.

Male figures on Attic painted vases show the meaning of physical beauty for athletes, youths, citizens, and soldiers. Most are lithe and slender, though one Attic red-figure vase shows a heavy, paunchy figure, holding boxing thongs, with others at the palaestra (fig. 3): he is a specialized athlete, a boxer.78 A rare scene of naked men who are ugly turns out to represent slaves who prepare the palaestra, not citizens exercising in the gymnasion (fig. 4),79 marking the dif-


73 “The polis derived from the people in arms; it was essentially the state of the citizens. Both facts made the defense of the state the concern of its people. There was no question of compulsory military service; it was the other way around: the capacity to serve constituted the fully qualified citizen”: V. Ehrenberg, The Greek State (1960) 80. E.L. Wheeler, “Hoplomachia and Greek Dances in Arms,” GRBS 23 (1982) 223–33, summarizes recent work on this subject.


76 Mouratidis (supra n. 60) 213. Cf. Wheeler, supra n. 73.


78 Clark (supra n. 1) fig. 17; Swaddling (supra n. 54) 63. See also Jüthner (supra n. 54) fig. 6, and W. Kreiker, AM 55 (1930) 169. For gymnasion and palaestra, see S.L. Glass, “The Greek Gymnasium: Some Problems,” in Raschke (supra n. 54) 155–73.

79 A. Lezzi-Haftle, in H. Bloesch ed., Greek Vases from the Hirschmann Collection (Zurich 1982) 104–105, no. 39: “Even if they share the athletes’ practice of infibulation, the two workers can scarcely be meant to be Athenians, rather, they are slaves, probably from the East. The sprinkler is a tall man with a full beard and hairy belly. The hooked nose and overly large lips do not belong to the Athenian idea of beauty: is he too a foreigner? . . . This skophos gives us a look, probably for the first time, behind the scenes of a sports ground where, in the early light, a group of maintenance men is already at work while the athletes still lie in bed. Ca. 460–450 B.C.” (Illustrated in C. Bérard, “L’ordre des femmes,” in La cité des images [Paris 1984] 89, fig. 126). Yet, at least some of the time, athletes prepared the palaestra themselves: they chopped the ground with pickaxes to prepare the sand surfaces, and the pickaxe was one of the iden-
ference between the free man who exercised nude, gymnos, in the gymnasium, and the slave who was
naked in the line of work and out of poverty. (The
slaves on this vase, like the athletes, are infibulated.) A
law forbade slaves to exercise and anoint themselves in
the gymnasium like free men (though obviously it did
not forbid them to enter in order to do the necessary
work for their upkeep).80 The custom of frequenting
the gymnasium was characteristic not only of free men
in general, but of upper-class citizens, who exercised
as members of the hoplite army. The use of nudity for
magical reasons, on the other hand, belonged to a dif-
f erent level of reality—and was restricted, as we have
seen, to herms, satyrs, and the stage.

CLASSICAL PERIOD

By the Classical period, the custom—or “habit”—of
nudity had changed, from a religious to a civic practice.
From the ritual nudity of the kouros—set up, from the
seventh century B.C. on, as image of Apollo, votive gift,
funerary image, offering or servant of the god—and the

ifying signs of the athlete. A story features the sloth of
the people of Sybaris, who saw the athletes of Kroton digging up
the palaestra and wondered why they did not hire workers
to perform such menial tasks (Poliakoff [supra n. 54] 12–13,
with fig. 13).

80 Aeschin. In Tim. 138; citet M. Golden, “Slavery and
were actually banned from entering the palaestra. For a
similar law in Crete, see Arist. Pol. 11.19: Grettans give

ritual nudity of the athlete who competed in the
Olympic games, dedicated to the gods, there was a
change to the athletic nudity of the citizen-soldier. The
transition was, I believe, originally involved with the
ritual costume proper for initiation rites.

This passage from a religious to a civic context was
not effected all at once; and it reflected one or more situa-
tions peculiar to Greece.81 Nudity now comes to mean
something special. No longer does it mean vulnerability;
it means, on the contrary, the readiness to stand up
and fight even though one knew one was vulnerable. It
has to do with military valor which requires risking
one’s life, being fully exposed. The women were kept
covered because it meant they were protected, not ex-
posed to danger. The relation of this manly nudity to
the nudity of the gods is also crucial: the gods could be
nude because they relied on themselves.

Authors of the Classical period eventually looked
back at the custom and offered rationalizing explana-
tions for an institution whose meaning had changed
from religious and ritual to civic.82 The Greeks did

slaves the same rights as they have, except that they forbid
them from exercising in the gymnasium and bearing arms.
Gymnastics and war are mentioned together also as some-
thing normally foreign to women: supra, text and n. 85.

81 For transformation of earlier institutions and values, see
Murray 1980 (supra n. 72) 193. Similar transformation,
from religious to civil, took place, e.g., in the theater, or in
the polis, with the use of the lot.

82 Rationalizing explanations: Brelich (supra n. 45) 158
not entirely understand the origin or the development of their nudity. Yet they had to explain it, as a pecu-
liarity that illustrated in a visible manner and con-
firmed in action the difference between themselves and everyone else, a difference of which they were acutely aware. We have seen that they attributed the origin of athletic nudity to the 15th Olympiad, in the 
last decades of the eighth century B.C. The earliest monumental kourosi appeared in the seventh century. 
But the custom spread gradually, and later, into everyday life. Such a gradual development can explain the 
statement of Thucydides (1.6)—echoed later by Plato (Resp. 5.452a–c)—that athletic nudity had be-
come universal in Greece "shortly before his time." These authors were referring to the normalization of 
nudity in real life, to its civic significance, not to its 
earliest appearance in religious ritual and art.

Thucydides saw the custom of exercising in the 
nude in the context of democracy, which had trium-
phantly been confirmed at Athens shortly before his 
time, after the Persian Wars. The introduction of ath-
letic nudity into the everyday life of the gymnasium 
and palaestra was part of a "modern" way of life, 
freer, simpler, more democratic, according to Thucy-
dides. It was the dress, one might almost say the uni-
form, of the citizen who exercised in order to maintain 
himself in readiness for military service. A Greek sol-
dier must be in shape: he must be lean and muscular, 
not portly and prosperous. Civic nudity marked a 
break with the barbarians—everyone except the 
Greeks—who announced their status and wealth by 
weaving luxurious garments that gave an impression 
of elegance and authority.83

While Thucydides explains Greek nudity in the 
context of democracy, Plato explains it as a result of 
the logical, rational way of thinking of which the 
Greeks were so proud.84 In a passage in which he ob-
viously has the Spartan model in mind, Plato imagines 
the situation that would arise if women were to have 
an equal role with men in society.

If, then, we use the women for the same things as the 
men, they must also be taught the same things. Now 
music and gymnastic were given to the men. These two 
arts, and what has to do with war, must be assigned to 
the women also, and they must be used in the same 
ways. Perhaps, compared to what is habitual, many of 
the things now being said would look ridiculous if they 
were done as is said. The most ridiculous thing (being) 
the women exercising naked with the men in the pa-
laestras, not only the young ones, but even the older 
ones, too, like the old men in the gymnasia who, 
when they are wrinkled and not pleasant to the eye, all 
the same love gymnastic.—By Zeus, he said, that 
would look ridiculous in the present state of things.— 
Well, since we've started to speak, we mustn't be 
afraid of all the jokes—of whatever kind—the wits 
might make if such a change took place in gymnastic, 
in music, and not the least, in the bearing of arms and 
the riding of horses. But since we've begun to speak,

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**Fig. 4. Red-figure skyphos by the Zephyros Painter. Preparation of the palaestra. (Courtesy Hirschmann Collection, Zurich)***

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on nudity at Sparta "... cosi anche le ragazze spartane, 
a differenza di quanto avveniva in qualsiasi altro stato della 
Grecia antica, in certe occasioni comparivano nude in pub-
blico, costringendo gli autori non-spartani ai più vari tenta-
tivi di giustificazione" (my emphasis). Cf. Paus. 1.44.1 (At-
tica): "I believe he [Orsippus] purposely dropped his girdle, 
knowing that a man can run more easily naked." See also 
supra n. 57, infra n. 111.

83 D.G. Kyle, review of D.C. Young, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics* (Chicago 1984) in EchCl 29 
(1985) 142: "nude noble and non-noble looked alike on the 
track"; but see D.C. Young, "Professionalism in Greek Ath-
letics," AncW 7 (1983) 51: "... but at the finish line there 
was a difference." S.C. Humphreys, *Anthropology and the 
Greeks* (London 1978) 142: "In a comparatively undifferen-
tiated society like that of ancient Greece attention must be 
paid to a wide variety of evidence, from myths and philo-
sophic utopias to anecdotes on the physical appearance, 
movements, or dress associated with a particular status or 
role...;" cf. 219, 262.

84 Cf. Hdt. 1.60, on the less naive, cleverer, more rational 
spirit of the Greeks in comparison to the barbarians. For 
this and other observations of Herodotus concerning Greeks 
and barbarians, see S. Benardete, *Herodotean Inquiries* 
(The Hague 1969). The Greeks of the Classical period 
believed that a number of primitive customs, such as human 
sacrifice, were shared by Greeks of "prehistoric" times and 
present-day barbarians: cf. Poliakoff (supra n. 54) 189, n. 3. 
Infra n. 112 for the Romans.
we must make our way to the rough part of the law, begging these men... to be serious; and reminding them that it is not so long ago that it seemed shameful and ridiculous to the Greeks—as it does now to the many among the barbarians—to see men naked; and that when the Cretans originated the gymnasiuums, and then the Lacedaemonians, it was possible for the urbane of the time to make a comedy of all that. But, I suppose, when it became clear to those who used these practices that to uncover all such things is better than to hide them, then what is ridiculous to the eyes disappeared in the light of what's best... And this showed that he is empty who believes anything is ridiculous other than the sight of the foolish and the bad; or, again, he who looks seriously to any standard of beauty he sets up other than the good... Then the women guardians must strip, since they'll clothe themselves in virtue instead of robes, and they must take common part in war and the rest of the city's guarding, and must not do other things... And the man who laughs at naked women practicing gymnastic for the sake of the best, "plucks from his wisdom an unripe fruit for ridicule" and doesn't know—as it seems—at what he laughs or what he does. For this is surely the fairest thing that is said and will be said—the beneficial is fair and the harmful ugly.

Aside from the distinction between men and women in Greek life, and Platonic ideas, the passage touches on a number of important aspects of Greek nudity: its purpose in education (music, athletic exercises, the art of war), as a preparation for military service; laughter as a reaction to something embarrassing and shameful—the sight of a naked woman, as earlier the sight of a naked man; the adoption of public male nakedness in everyday life as an innovation; and the explanation of athletic nudity as a useful, rational custom.

Other authors gave a variety of rationalizing explanations for the institution. Plutarch sees a social purpose in the nakedness of men and women together in the institution of the gymnopaedia at Sparta: Lycurgus wanted to encourage in the young men the desire to marry as soon as possible.

This rationalizing tendency of the Greeks is clearly evident in the “practical” explanations offered for the “introduction” of athletic nudity at Olympia—that it facilitated the athlete’s victory. It is also illustrated in a passage in Pausanias, in which he attributes the custom of having trainers entering the arena naked to a historical incident. According to this account, a mother who had disguised herself as her son’s trainer at Olympia became so excited at his victory that she jumped over the fence, and thus exposed herself as a woman. She was not punished, but a law was passed to make sure that henceforward only men were admitted.

Modern scholars have in some cases taken such explanations seriously. In contrast to ancient explanations, most modern interpretations, however, have concentrated on the aesthetic aspect of the phenomenon. This is perhaps natural, since nudity in art is most familiar, having long been considered an expression of the Greek ideal. Since the time of Polykleitos the image of the male nude youth, ideally beautiful, remained, for generations, the favorite theme of Greek artists. Yet we cannot take Greek nudity for granted. One can only explain its origin in Greek culture, and the relationship of athletic nudity with the artistic nudity of the kouroi, the phallic herm, the satyr, and the actor of Old Comedy, by taking into account the originally religious, ritual, apotropaic reasons for Greek nudity, which lead us back to its ancient status of taboo. At a later point in its history, its significance was understood in a different way. The institution was transformed, and a different set of connotations developed. This is clear from the evidence of ancient authors who deal with this custom, as we have seen, in terms of their own historical context.

Perhaps we can better understand the situation in Greece by looking at those who did not share in this institutionalized nudity: women and barbarians.

WOMEN

For women in Greek art, literature, and life, the taboo against nudity remained in full force, with all its sense of humiliation and vulnerability as well as its magic power.

In art the female nude appears briefly, in the early Archaic period, as a religious fertility motif, following the Near Eastern model of the naked mother goddess. After these early figures the image was used for pathetic appeal, for magic or erotic appeal, or for scenes from the life of a courtesan.

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88 Plut. Vit. Lyc. 14.2–15.1. A similarly ethical, philosophical, social explanation has been suggested by a modern scholar who sees the nakedness of the ancient Greek athlete as neither useful nor rational, but rather as affording the naked athlete the opportunity to demonstrate his sophrosyne in public, showing that he does not become avarous A. Arieti, “Nudity in Greek Athletics,” CW 68 (1975) 431–36.
89 Paus. 5.7–8. Cf. supra ns. 57, 82.
89 Supra ns. 9–10, 16, 18–19, 82. Robertson 390–93. Boardman, Sculpture, Archaic, figs. 19, 23, 26; Sculpture,
The sense of shame which was so pervasive in the Near East was still found in Homer’s account of the punishment of Thersites, as we have seen. The fear of exposure long remained an effective threat for women. At Miletus, a decree was passed to discourage a rash of suicides among the girls of that city: those who killed themselves were threatened with being carried to the grave naked. “The maidens ceased to seek a voluntary death, deterred by mere shame of so disgraceful a burial.”

Literature, as well as art, preserves evidence of the apotropaic significance of female nakedness in Greek as well as Eastern mythology: Baubo makes Demeter laugh by lifting her skirts and exposing her genitals; the women of Xanthos bare themselves before Bellerophon. Herodotus understands the importance of the story of Gyges, who looks upon the king’s wife naked and thereby must become the king himself. Artemis feels diminished by Actaeon; he has seen her nakedness, and must die.

In Classical Greek art, particularly in Attic vase painting, naked women are usually prostitutes. Respectable women did not go out much, they did not attend male symposia, and they certainly did not undress in public. They were in fact protected from the sun, from men’s eyes, and from the evil eye by dresses and mantles that covered them from head to foot.

Exceptions confirm the special character of nudity in women. Women occasionally participated in athletic and ritual nudity. Spartan women danced naked in certain initiation rites, as we know from literature. Girls also took part in a footrace at the festival of Hera at Olympia, as Pausanias tells us; it has recently been suggested that Spartan practice may have influenced Olympic contests. The physical education of Spartan girls is well attested; they were organized in age groups like the boys. Because Spartan women had a reputation for beauty, and for dressing in a way that exposed their bodies, Attic tragedy and comedy contain innumerable references to these characteristics, as well as to the immorality they were thought to imply. These are still echoed by Propertius (3.14.1–4), who marvels at the blessings of a girls’ gymnasium, where a naked girl can wrestle with the men. Atalanta was shown semi-naked, wearing athletic costume, a perizoma and (often but not always) brassiere, wrestling or standing beside Peleus in sixth- to fourth-century Greek vases and Etruscan mirrors (fig. 5). Bronze mirror handles...
from the sixth century B.C., in the form of naked women, or women wearing a perizoma, have been interpreted in turn as free-born Spartan girls, athletes, entertainers, courtesans or Aphrodite herself. Their nudity is certainly special; we are not certain what it was meant to convey. \(^98\)

Women appear partially naked in mythological scenes in Greek art in moments of great danger, to indicate their weakness and vulnerability when exposed in this manner. Helen bared her breasts before Menelaos, as Clytemnestra before Orestes, and Hecuba before Hector. Cassandra, on the Kleophrades Painter’s hydria, is shown naked by the statue of Athena in Troy because she is about to be attacked and raped by Ajax. \(^99\) She is defenseless before his violence, vulnerable, small and weak. The statue of Athena, in contrast, is armed and menacing. A plate by Paseas in New Haven with a tiny figure of a naked, pitiful Cassandra emphasizes her helplessness by her size (fig. 6). \(^100\) Euripides represented Polyxena as partially naked in the moment preceding her death: “exposing her naked breasts, bare and lovely like a sculptured goddess.” The Niobids flee naked and defenseless before the arrows of Artemis and Apollo; Iphigenia is naked before those who are about to sacrifice her. The daughters of Proetus go mad and disrobe; Maenads uncover their breasts. \(^101\)

Female nudity, even when erotic, carries with it this sense of weakness and vulnerability. Greek hetairai, shown naked, or partially naked, were not citizens; they could be beaten or humiliated by the men who hired them.

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**Fig. 6. Red-figure plate by Paseas. Ajax and Cassandra. New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery 1913.169. (Courtesy Yale University Art Gallery)**

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\(^99\) Red figure hydria, Naples 2422, 500–474 B.C. ARV² 189 no. 74. Robertson 234, pl. 80c. Cassandra’s nakedness is vulnerable rather than erotic. Most scholars seem to see the nudity as erotic. Robertson: “We know he [Ajax] tore her away to rape her . . . . The woman’s nakedness, constant in the iconographical tradition, is the only indication of the nature of the assault.” Cf. Keuls (supra n. 1) 400, fig. 38: “Her complete nudity dramatizes her sexual defenselessness.” Chamay and von Bothmer (infra n. 100): “Cassandra est parfois à demi dévêtue ou même complètement nue, ce qui suggère le viol.” I believe, however, that rape was thought of as violent rather than erotic.

\(^100\) *LIMC* I, pp. 339–51, s.v. Aias II (D. Touchefeu), with additions by S.B. Matheson, “Polygnos: An IIlupersis Scene at the Getty Museum,” *Greek Vases in the J. Paul Getty Museum 3. Occasional Papers on Antiquities* 2 (1986) 101–14; esp. 101–107. Matheson, fig. 3, illustrates the vase at Yale: the diminutive Cassandra seeking refuge behind the shield of Athena’s statue constitutes the earliest red-figure representation of the subject. There is also a splendidly naked Cassandra on a kylix by Onesimus recently acquired by the Getty Museum (83.AE62; 84.AE80; 85.AE385; Matheson fig. 4). Such an iconography depends on the persistent black-figure tradition of Cassandra shown as a small figure (a child?), J. Chamay and D. von Bothmer, “Ajax et Cassandra par le Peintre de Princeton,” *AntK* 30 (1987) 59. For Cassandra and Ajax in wall-painting, see F. Buranelli ed., *La Tomba Français di Vulsì* (Rome 1987) 102, fig. 15; an unusual feature in the François Tomb is the substitution of an image of Aphrodite for the traditional statue of Athena.

Wives, in contrast, were not shown publicly in art, not so much because they did not count, as from a respect for the privacy of the marriage still found in many Mediterranean countries. We know (Ar. Lys. 72) that wives did undress for their husbands. A passage in Theopompos’ scandal-mongering account of the sexual customs of the Etruscans, contrasted with those of the Greeks, illustrates Greek criticism of foreigners’ frankness about sexual matters, particularly between husband and wife: “[The Etruscans] actually say, when the master of the house is making love [ἀφροδίσια ἐνεργεῖαι], and someone inquires for him, that he is undergoing so-and-so, openly calling the act by its indecent name.” In a similar vein, on Attic vases even scenes once thought to represent the privacy of the home (including scenes of wool-working) can be seen to deal with the world of courtesans.

A Corinthian vase shows the scene of Ismene who has been caught in adultery by her husband, Tydeus. She is bare-breasted. Her lover, who was in bed with her, attempts to escape. He is represented naked, which is not surprising. What is surprising is the white color, very rare for a man, here used perhaps not only for visual contrast, but to emphasize his nakedness as “female,” rather than male, with connotations of eroticism and danger. (Is the artist expressing something like the chorus’s snarl at Aegisthus, when he finally makes his appearance at the end of Aeschylus’s Agamemnon, “so then you, like a woman, waited the war out, here in the house, shaming the master’s bed with lust...”?)

Gods can afford to be naked, or to look upon nakedness, without being diminished. In Greek art men participate to some extent in this divine nudity. But naked or partially naked women are defenseless. The contrast is clear on a red-figure vase of the fifth century B.C. on which we see a desperate woman clinging to the statue of an impassive Apollo represented as a nude kouros (fig. 2).

The contrast between men and women was most marked in Athens, as we have seen. There is a good reason for this situation. The equality among male citizens in the political life of the city, based on their equality on the battlefield in the hoplite phalanx, widened the distance between public and private life, and consequently between the worlds of men and women. In public life, and in an art which was public by its very nature, the distinction between the appearance of men and women was emphasized, and, in particular, the significance of the sight of their naked bodies. Male citizens were distinguished by their costume from women, who participated neither in battle nor in the assembly. A naked woman was a slave, for hire, or about to be violated. It is a frequently noted fact that, while male nudity in art dates back to Archaic times, respectable female nudity normally does not appear until much later; not until the Hellenistic period, in fact, and then only for Aphrodite, ac-


105 Corinthian amphora in the Louvre, with Tydeus, Ismene, and Periklymenos: color pl. in J. Charbonneaux, R. Martin, and F. Villard, Archaic Greek Art (New York 1971) 74, fig. 78. Important figures were often painted white: J.H. Oakley, “A Calyx-Krater in Virginia by the Nikias Painter with the Birth of Erichthonios,” AntK 30 (1987) 126.


107 E.B. Harrison, “Apollo’s Cloak,” in Studies in Classical Art and Archaeology. A Tribute to F.H. von Blanckenhagen (Locust Valley, N.Y. 1979) 91: “we may see Apollo’s revelation of his nude body as a gift of prophetic knowledge . . . A Muse, being divine, can learn and live . . .” The Muse can see and remain alive: Cassandra must die. For the vase, Robertson 161, fig. 89ε. On Greek literary references to the motionless dignity of a divine or heroic statue, “a decoration and an honor for a god or a tomb,” and temples, offerings and statuary as “things proper to eternity rather than to mortality,” see Holloway (supra n. 36) 197–201.

108 Supra n. 42. For the statue of Athena, see Matheson, supra n. 100: here we see the contrast between the dressed and naked female figure.

109 The idea that citizens should be equal and similar in the political contexts of the city as they were on the battlefield in the hoplite phalanx thus led to a progressive hardening of the boundary between public and private life.” Humphreys (supra n. 83) 260; cf. 219. Cf. Vidal-Naquet, supra n. 74. Keuls (supra n. 1) 67–68, on the contrast between men and women.
cepted by Ionian Greeks already familiar with the naked mother goddess worshipped by their Eastern neighbors.110

BARBARIANS

Among barbarians nudity as a costume also existed, but in different contexts. That of the Gauls is documented by references of Classical authors. That of the Etruscans can be seen in their arts, which allow us to look at the reaction of a barbarian, i.e. non-Greek, people to the Greek conventions regarding nudity. This Greek innovation was accepted by contemporary Etruscans, as by later Romans, as one of the signs of “civilization.” It was never adopted in daily life, however, only in art, and even then reluctantly. The attitude to nudity outside Greece was quite different from that of the Greeks, and it reminds us, once more, what a very peculiar and unique convention it was. The Greeks were correct in remarking that the barbarians of their own time shared the earlier Greek attitude: they still thought being naked was a sign of shame and humiliation. For Hebrews, Etruscans, and Romans, nudity preserved its ancient significance of magical shame. Greek male nudity was adopted by them, if at all, as an artistic convention, rarely if ever in daily life.

The case of the Gauls is of particular interest for our subject, for they were warriors. Ancient sources emphasize their extraordinarily war-like spirit—they were “war-mad, high-spirited and quick for battle,” as Strabo puts it. They fought naked—or at least some of them did.111 Naked Gallic warriors appear in the Pergamene statuary, in Etruscan art, on Greek and Roman coins, and in ancient Irish legends.112 The sight of these tall, large barbarians, stark naked except for their golden torques, terrified the Romans.113

The difference between the Gauls, who fought naked, and the Greeks’ athletic nudity is vividly illustrated in a passage in Livy: “Their wounds were plain to see because they fight naked and their bodies are plump and white since they never are naked except in battle; in consequence, there was a greater flow of blood from their excess of flesh, the gashes were more horribly visible, and the stains of the dark blood stood out more conspicuously against the whiteness of their skins.”114 The Romans, who exercise in the Campus Martius (though always with a loincloth, or perizoma), are surprised at the white skin of these northerners, who do not expose themselves to the sun. In this the Gauls differed, not only from the Greeks, but from the Romans as well. They did not normally

110 Robertson 44, 58–59, 204–205, 390–93, 452, 493, 548–57. Between the eighth and fourth centuries B.C. images of naked females in Greek art can be explained by Eastern influence: J.N. Coldstream, Geometric Greece (London 1977) 130–32; Robertson 44. Robertson pl. 8d, 44, 58–59: the naked goddess, borrowed from the Orient, appears on the Dipylon ivories in Athens, and occasional other examples from the seventh century; “in the sixth and fifth she virtually disappears from Greece to be reborn there in the fourth. Naked women reappear from time to time in the minor arts of the intervening period, but not goddesses.” For the Dipylon ivories, he suggests, the date must be around 700 B.C., rather than 750 B.C. (Hurwit). For a nude female figure (Aphrodite?) on a vase from Lemnos, see Bonfante, Etruscan Dress, fig. 163.

111 Strab. 4.4.2.: “The whole race which is now called both ‘Gallic’ and ‘Galatic’ is war-mad, and both high-spirited and quick for battle, although otherwise simple and not ill-mannered.” Cf. Polyb. 2.28.7: “The Insures and Boii were clothed in their breeches and light cloaks; but the Gaesetae from vanity and bravado threw these garments away, and fell in front of the army naked, with nothing but their arms; believing that, as the ground was in part enumbered with brambles, which might possibly catch in their clothes and impede the use of their weapons, they would be more effective in this state.” F.W. Walbank, A Historical Commentary on Polybius (Oxford 1957) 1, 205, with references.

112 T.G.E. Powell, The Celts (London 1958) 68, 108. For representations of naked Gauls in Italy, see, e.g., I Galli e l’Italia (Rome 1978) 196–203 (Civitaalba); Brendel 376, fig. 292 (Felsina); M. Harari, in Celti ed Etruschi nell’Italia centro-settentrionale (Bologna 1987) 167–70 (Spina). It is difficult in some cases to tell whether the Gauls’ nudity in art reflected their adoption of the Greek Classical model, or their own local custom: B.S. Ridgway, Roman Copies of Greek Sculpture. The Problem of the Originals (Ann Arbor 1984) 104, 108, n. 49. In Roman eyes, the nudity of the Gauls was a barbaric custom, though less monstrous than the beheading of their enemies, whom they offered up as human sacrifices.

113 Polyb. 3.114.4 (Battle of Cannae, 2 August 216 B.C.): “The companies coming alternatively, the naked Celts, and the Iberians with their short linen tunics bordered with purple stripe, the whole appearance of the line was strange and terrifying.” See also 2.29.8: “Not less terrifying was the appearance and rapid movement of the naked warriors in the van, which indicated men in the prime of their strength and beauty; while all the warriors in the front ranks were richly adorned with gold necklaces and bracelets. These sights certainly dismayed the Romans; still the hope they gave of a profitable victory redoubled their eagerness for the battle.” Yet their nakedness, after the first shock effect, made them vulnerable: 2.30.3: “to the naked men in the front ranks this unexpected mode of attack [the volleys of pilum hurled by the Romans in front of the legions] caused great distress and discomfort. For the Gallic shields not being big enough to cover the man, the larger the naked body the more certainty was there of the pilum hitting.” Polybius on Roman Imperialism, trans. E.S. Schuckburgh (South Bend, Ind.) 173.91.

114 Livy (38.21.9) used Polybius as a source for these chapters: see H. Nissen, Kritische Untersuchungen über die Quelle der vierten und fünften Dekade des Livius (Berlin 1863) 203–204. I am grateful to Myles McDonnell for these references.
practice any kind of athletic nudity, either complete (like the Greeks) or partial (like the Romans), in the course of exercising to prepare their bodies for war. The Celts did know of the custom, and in fact imported stirrups and other toilet articles connected with this Greek institution—but these were placed in women’s tombs, not men’s.\textsuperscript{111} Theirs was evidently not the “civilized” nudity the Greeks had introduced and much of the world had adopted—at least superficially. When the Gaesatae, and other Gauls—and Germans—undressed for battle, they reacted to a special, dangerous, risky situation. They deliberately removed their pants and mantles and threw them aside, exposing themselves for the battle. Polybius attributes the custom to the Gaesatae’s φιλοδοξία καὶ βάρσου, “their love of glory and their courage.” Being a Greek, however, Polybius adds a practical reason—they did it to fight more effectively, lest their clothing be caught on the bushes and impede their movements.\textsuperscript{116} The custom might also be explained by the Gauls’ use of magic. Such a motive would account for the special situation. They were attacking, and exhibited their valor as filled with the furor, the madness of war, and they threw aside any restraint. They might also have been appealing for a special kind of supra-human assistance in a moment of crisis and of testing.\textsuperscript{117}

Even more strikingly different from the Greeks was the attitude toward nudity of their contemporaries, the Hebrews. Hebrew tradition was fundamentally opposed to the institution of Greek athletic nudity. Yet there was, as for all peoples living in a Hellenized world, a wide range of reactions, from absolute hostility to relative acceptance. They condemned the institution as a whole: but because philosophical discussions took place in the gymnasia, Hellenized Jews attended; official doctrine did not bar participation in the palaestra.\textsuperscript{118}

In Italy, too, we find a “civilized” acceptance reflected in the art, paralleled by fundamental differences of attitude and realities. There is no doubt that the Romans did not practice athletic nudity. On the exercise ground, in the Campus Martius, they wore a perizoma, a covering called the campestre. Even their ritual, religious nakedness was partial. Cicero’s rhetorical thunder against Antony’s costume as a Supercal—he ran around dressed in an animal-skin loin-cloth—is legendary. How could a consul appear in such an undignified costume?\textsuperscript{119} Recent studies of the geographical, chronological, aesthetic and social limits of Greek heroic nudity in Roman art have yielded interesting results.\textsuperscript{120} Freestanding sculpture, more closely tied to Greek Classical models than painting or relief, accepted Greek heroic male nudity as well as the Venus types evolved in the Hellenistic period, wholly or partially nude.

Earlier, in contemporary Etruscan art, we see a “barbarian” reaction to the Greek complex of images and ideals: athletic and artistic male nudity accompanied by the dressed female figure and—eventually—the return of the nude Aphrodite. In fact, much

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\textsuperscript{117} This aspect of the exposed organs usually is connected with the enlarged phallus, illustrated in Johns (supra n. 10). For the exposure of the genitals of the women, see supra ns. 9, 91.


of the repertoire of Archaic and Classical Etruscan art contrasts strongly with the Greek. We see athletes wearing shorts or *perizomata*, naked, vulnerable, male prisoners, female nudity, and the image of the nursing mother.

A series of athletes with their sex organs covered, on a group of Attic black-figure vases of the end of the sixth century B.C., has been frequently noted in discussions of Greek athletic nudity. These vases are known as the “Perizoma Group,” because of the white loincloth worn by the figures of athletes and dancers or *komasts* which decorated them. A vase in Oxford, for example, shows runners and boxers wearing the characteristic *perizoma* about their waists and hips (fig. 7). That such vases were made specifically for the Etruscan market is now generally accepted. The presence of these loincloths on athletes represented in Attic art in the sixth century, however, has proved to be a red herring for some scholars working in the field of ancient athletics. Misled by what appeared to them to document the earlier athletic *perizoma*, some hypothesized that Thucydides’ remark on the recent change to nudity referred to its reintroduction in the fifth century B.C. after an interruption of the ancient tradition.

There are other examples of Greek potters turning their attention to the Etruscan market, however, and the custom of showing athletes wearing garments, rather than appearing completely naked, is not surprising in Etruria. Although athletes do often appear naked, or infibulated, in Etruscan art of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. (in everyday life they perhaps continued to wear a *perizoma*), there are a number of sixth- and fifth-century examples of reliefs and wall paintings, such as a group from Chiusi, from the Tomba Poggio al Moro. Three-dimensional examples are rarer: in sculpture, the naked Greek kouroi usually served as model.

The rest of the decoration of the Oxford vase confirms the impression that it was made for an Etruscan market. On the neck of the vase, we see a symposium scene or party. But rather than an all-male cast, or males with naked or half-naked courtesans, as is usual in Greek representations, here the women are decently dressed. Michael Vickers has drawn attention to the strangeness of this detail in a Greek context. An Etruscan buyer, unlike a Greek, would see nothing unusual in the dress of the male figures on the lower register or of the women on the symposium scene above. The women are shown fully dressed, as respectable women, or wives, accompanying their husbands in the Etruscan custom, rather than party girls hired out in the Greek way.

It makes sense, then, to

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123 E.g., Mouratidis (supra n. 60) 213–14. Gardiner (supra n. 56) 191; J.C. Mann (supra n. 22) 77; Arieti (supra n. 86) 431 n. 31; N. B. Crowther, “Athletic Dress and Nudity in Greek Athletics,” *Eran/Jb* 80 (1982) 167; Sansone (supra n. 54) 108; and F. A. Beck, review of Poliakoff (supra n. 54) in *EchCl* 32 (1988) 420–23.


125 S. Steingräber, *Etruscan Painting* (New York 1986) fig. 32, pl. 192; cf. pl. 126, belted. Perhaps the clearest illustration of infibulated athletes (two boxers and a javelin thrower) occurs in the wall painting from the Tomba della Scimmia, Chiusi, of the early fifth century B.C. Steingräber, pl. 194, fig. 34c; this illustration has often been reproduced (e.g., Sansone [supra n. 54] fig. 23). Bronze statuettes: E. Richardson, *Etruscan Votive Bronzes* (Mainz 1983) 92.

126 Supra n. 122.

127 L. Bonfante, “Etruscan Couples and Their Aristocratic
think that we are dealing with pictures specifically chosen to please Etruscan customers who bought the vases from Greek potters, and wanted their decoration to conform to their own customs.

Another strange feature of these vases, however, still requires some explanation. These figures, whether athletes or dancers, are not young, as on Greek vases, but heavy-set, older bearded men. Why would the Etruscans prefer such figures? Did they expect experienced performers, rather than talented amateurs? It is hard to say. We still have much to learn about Etruscan customs and beliefs, as well as their cultural and commercial relations with the Greeks.

Our next example concerns another contrast between the Greek and Etruscan attitude to nudity. In Etruscan art (where, as we have seen, Greek "heroic" nudity was never wholly accepted) male nakedness could still be used for magic apotropaic reasons, or it could represent weakness and vulnerability.

On one of the famous wall paintings from the François Tomb in Vulci, now securely dated to the fourth century B.C., is Achilles’ Sacrifice of the Trojan Prisoners over the grave of Patroclus. A scene told in just two lines by Homer in the Iliad, it must have been the subject of a monumental painting in Italy, for it recurs on half a dozen Etruscan and South Italian monuments of this period. We see a group of naked, bound prisoners, vulnerable and helpless, their legs cut and bleeding to keep them from escaping. The figure that interests us is the ghost of Patroclus. It is represented in a realistic way (assuming that a ghost can be represented realistically), that is to say, he is shown as a corpse, wearing bandages in the places where he was wounded. The hero’s body is shown in its piteable state. At the same time it is not only a corpse, but a forceful soul, returning to demand that blood be spilled to satisfy him. Similar bandages are worn by the ghost of Agamemnon in the Etruscan Tomba dell’Orco in Tarquinia (where the hero’s full-size ghost contrasts with the tiny, screeching shades of the dead clustering around a sterile, wintry tree), and they appear on a number of Apulian vase paintings. This image of the soul, still caught in the wounded flesh of the body, may have inspired Michelangelo’s representation of the Pietà in the Florence Cathedral, as well as the Bound, or Dying Slaves.

In antiquity the tradition of Greek “heroic” nudity was far from being universally accepted outside of Greece, even as an artistic convention. In Cyprus, and in Italy, the perizoma (which men wore in life) was still represented in the sixth century B.C. Even the strong man Heracles wears his lion skin as a perizoma on Etruscan bronzes and mirrors, rather than on his shoulders, as in Greece. Instead of appearing naked, as in Greece, the Etruscan Apollo wears a rounded mantle or tebenna, the ancestor of the Roman toga. So do a great many Etruscan bronze statuettes, studied by Emeline Richardson as the antecedents of the Roman honorary togatus statue. There are indeed numerous Etruscan statuettes of nude kouroi and naked dancing figures (although these sometimes wear something, a necklace, or shoes, to avoid the complete nudity of their Greek models). Pliny tells us, and the monuments show, that the Etruscans and later Romans preferred figures of warriors, usually wearing armor, rather than naked like the Greeks. When people on the fringes of the Etruscan world learned to render the life-size human figure in order to represent a dead warrior, a hero, they imitated the Greek kouroi by way of Etruria. Such a barbarian rendering of a Greek statue is the so-called Hirschlanden Warrior, found on a grave mound near Stuttgart in 1962, and now in the Stuttgart Museum.
Above, it is flat, like a stele; below, its legs look like the legs of a kouros. It is naked, but armed. Its nudity presents a difficult problem. It may have been inspired by that of the kouroi. On the other hand, it could reflect a local custom: this warrior, like the Gauls, may have actually fought naked. The fully armed Warrior of Capestrano, from Chieti, is distinguished as an important figure by the axe on his left shoulder—and his huge helmet—but he wears the Etruscan type of perizoma.\(^{137}\) Some years ago, the Capestrano Warrior reigned as a unique image, difficult to explain in the context of the art of ancient Italy. In the last 20 years other monumental statues of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. have come to light, allowing us to see more clearly how artists in Italy reacted to the innovation of the monumental statues of kouroi.\(^{138}\) The idea of the kouroi came from Greece indirectly, by way of Etruscan art, where the kouros is not naked, but is dressed in a perizoma. In this way, the Etruscans translated Greek innovations for barbarian, non-Greek cultures.

**FEMALE FIGURES**

The contrast between mainland Greece and Italy in the Archaic period in the matter of artistic nudity extends to female figures as well as male. In Italy many earlier traditions survived—religious, social, and ritual—occasionally expressed in fresh, unconventional artistic forms.

The image of the naked female, banned from Classical Greek art, makes surprising appearances in Etruscan art. Two examples will serve to show how differently this image was perceived. The first is the large-scale statuette of a naked goddess, found in Orvieto, in the sanctuary of Cannicella, over 100 years ago, in 1884. Its peculiar features have recently been more closely examined.\(^{139}\) The figure, half life-size, made of Parian marble, and quite clearly of Greek workmanship, was broken, repaired, and reworked in antiquity. The head is like that of an Archaic kouros. The arms and their position—Venus pudica—are of course not those of a kouroi. A Greek artist in Italy,

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commissioned to make an image of a mother goddess, for which the reigning Greek artistic style provided no model, might well have produced such a strange work as this one, whose odd appearance expresses a tension between Greek artistic tradition on the one hand and native religion and ritual on the other.

Another peculiarly Etruscan monument reflects the way in which the Greek tradition of nudity was imported and transformed. Again, we have a surprising occurrence of a naked female figure. Later in date, but still earlier than the Hellenistic period, when the type was accepted in Greek art, we see husband and wife lying naked together in a tender embrace on a sarcophagus from Vulci in Boston (fig. 8). They lie under the rounded tēbenna, which serves as a blanket, a symbol of their marriage. Such an image of a couple does not appear in Greek art. In Etruscan art, too, it is unique: the pose of husband and wife, united on the kline, is Etruscan. Etruscan, too, is the similarity of their way of dressing—in this case, their nudity. Evidently, the Etruscans did not perceive the contrast between male and female nudity, so characteristic of Greek Classical art. What then did this “costume” signify for those who commissioned the work, or for those who saw it? Was this nudity a sign of the intimacy of the marriage bed? Or did it signify a kind of heroization of the couple, as ancestors, shown in death dressed in the Greek manner, in a “heroic” nudity considered fitting for the afterworld? We do not know.

Also related to female nudity, or rather exposure, is the frequent image of the nursing or suckling mother, a motif absent from Classical Greek art. Several monuments, for example, represent the ritual suckling and adoption of the adult Heracles by Uni (Hera). The motif is unknown in mainland Greek art. On an Etruscan mirror from Volterra, the scene refers to a formal adoption rite. Witnesses stand gravely by. An inscription above the head of the goddess, describing the scene, reads like a legal document: “This picture shows how Hercules, son of Uni, drank milk.” Here a private act becomes a public, ritual act. The mirror dates from the fourth century B.C. Other representations of this myth occur on Apulian vases of the fourth and third centuries B.C. Evidently this was a motif that developed in Italy.

Figures of nursing mothers or kourotrophoi either holding children or actually suckling them were popular all over Italy—they appear in Etruscan, South Italian, and Sicilian art, in regions where the concept of a mother goddess who rules over fertility and the birth of children had never ceased to be important. Some of these images have survived, with their awesome presence: the so-called Mater Matuta from Chiusi, a large stone cinerary urn dating from the fifth century B.C., depicting a woman holding a baby in her lap; a mother nursing two babies from Megara Hyblaea, near Syracuse, in Sicily, from the sixth century; and a whole series of some 200 “mothers” or kourotrophoi from a sanctuary near Capua, in South Italy, holding as many as 14 children. (The latter are only occasionally nursing.) All present the theme of fertility on a monumental scale. Thousands of small, cheap terracotta votive figurines from sanctuaries were also offered as gifts to powerful mother goddesses. Written sources and inscriptions give us the names of some of theseItalic divinities, for example Uni Astarte, on the gold tablets from Pyrgi. Minerva, too, only incompletely identified with the Greek Athena, was a kourotrophos in Italy.

Remarkable, in contrast, is the conspicuous absence of the motif of the nursing mother from Classical Greek art. Here, too, a powerful taboo is clearly involved. It is otherwise difficult to explain why such a universal gesture as that of a mother nursing her child should be so studiously avoided. Like female nudity, this image enters the repertory of Greek art only in the Hellenistic period together with numerous other genre motifs. Even in the fourth century B.C., as

140 M.B. Comstock and C.C. Vermeule, Sculpture in Stone (Boston 1976) 244–47, no. 383: “a more or less isolated monument, the culmination of the Greek tradition in Etruria before the Hellenistic period” (246). See also Bonfante (supra n. 127) fig. 4.
Brian Shefton has shown, it is used almost exclusively for figures of Aphrodite with her child, Eros, on painted vases of South Italy or Sicily. There, the Greek colonists had become accustomed to local customs and beliefs.\textsuperscript{144}

Could the absence of this image from Classical Greek art reflect life? Interesting studies have focused on the issue of breast-feeding by the mother in various cultures and civilizations.\textsuperscript{145} Certainly aristocratic—or even "bourgeois"—Greek and Roman ladies rarely nursed their babies—they had wet nurses, often slaves from their own household. The wet nurse is well known from Greek art—for example on Greek funerary stelai, where she hands the baby to the seated mother.\textsuperscript{146} It is a sign of civilization for a lady to be freed of this embarrassingly physical necessity, all too reminiscent of our lowly animal nature. And indeed Classical Greek art traditionally represents barbarians, as well as animals or wild creatures such as centaurs nursing their young.\textsuperscript{147} The absence of such an important image, however, is not so much due to the fact that ladies did not nurse their own children, or that the image of the wet nurse was too unimportant to be represented, except in a secondary role, in relation to the mother—certainly not in the private act of holding the baby at her breast. The reason is rather to be sought in the attitude to any kind of female exposure or nudity, felt to be too private, special, shameful and dangerous, all at the same time.

The image of the female breast was too powerful to be represented lightly in art. Like the phallus, the eye, and the frontal face, the sight of the naked breast has a double role. It is a sign of helplessness; at the same

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\textsuperscript{144} For Classical art, see the excellent list by B. Shefton, in P. Arias and M. Hirmer, \textit{A History of Greek Vase Painting} (London 1962) 389–90, no. 238. For Hellenistic art, see J. Charbonneaux, "Le mythe humanisé dans l’art hellénistique," \textit{CRAI} 23 (1965) 9. For an explanation in Greek art, a scene with the wife of Amphiarao nursing a child on an Attic vase, see \textit{LIMC} I, 697, no. 27, cf. 25, s.v. Amphiarao (I. Krauskopf). Polygnotus painted an Iliupersis for the stoa at Delphi: one of the 60–70 figures was of Andromache giving her son the breast (Robertson 248). \textit{Greek Anthology} 9.589 describes the scene of Hera nursing Herakles, a motif common in Italy, but not in mainland Greece.


\textsuperscript{147} A famous painting of a centaur nursing her young, by
time it has a remarkable magic force.\textsuperscript{148} The face of the Gorgon can paralyze, and therefore protect. The evil eye can destroy, or save. It is no coincidence that the herm consists of a frontal face and an erect phallus: it was meant to serve an apotropaic function, protecting the city and its citizens.\textsuperscript{149} A grotesque statuette of a naked woman nursing an infant makes use of the potent image of the naked female breast (fig. 9).\textsuperscript{150}

CONCLUSIONS

From the seventh through the fourth centuries B.C. nudity was represented in art in both Greece and Italy, but with different meanings. In Greece the ancient pre-Homeric sense of male nudity was overturned, while for women, especially in Athens, the old significance of the shame, humiliation, and vulnerability of exposure and nudity remained unchanged. In Italy, Greek civilization brought with it its "modern" ways, without, however, changing customs and attitudes deeply rooted in the religion and traditions of the peoples living in Etruria and other regions of ancient Italy. The use of male nudity and female exposure among the Gauls shows the survival of ancient customs and taboos in historical times.

The deep and often painful emotions of pleasure, pain, shock, or shame that the sight of the naked body arouses were used by artists in many ways. Nakedness was, and still is, always something special. It can signify divinity, or show human helplessness. Most impressive is the magic of the erect male genitals, which accounts for the survival of the apotropaic image of the phallus into Classical times, on the herm and the satyr and in Old Comedy.

I have tried to illustrate some aspects of the representation of nakedness, partial and complete, for men and for women, in Greece, and in the barbarian world; to interpret some of the ancient accounts, and to "read" some of the pictures, in the Greek artistic language, as well as in some very queer barbarian dialects. There are obviously problems of translation, often involving our own understanding of the naked figure in art. We tend to think of it as mostly erotic. Eros surely moves behind the sight of the naked human body, but its erotic significance is not the only one in art. In fact, when it is only erotic its meaning is least powerful. The Aphrodite of Euripides' \textit{Hippolytus}, with all her awesome power, was fully dressed. In Greece the remarkable innovation of athletic male nudity, which surely originated in a ritual, religious context, developed a special social and civic meaning. It became a costume, a uniform: exercising together in the gymnasium marked men's status as citizens of the polis and as Greeks. On the vases, this is how young men were shown.

Female figures shown naked in public, on the other hand, were usually entertainers. Women represented as exposed were violated, stripped of their clothing, and in dreadful danger, as vulnerable and unprotected before a male attacker as Athenian law conceived them to be in life. Clothing distinguishes men from animals. This distinction is still valid in Classical Greek art for women (though not for men). Polyxena, and Iphigenia, naked by the altar, are about to be sacrificed like animals.

The view of nakedness among barbarians differs, often contrasting sharply with that of mainland Greece in the Classical period, and allows us to see more clearly, perhaps, just how special the Greek concept and custom were. Hebrews and Romans made a variety of adjustments to include—in a limited way—the classical ideal of Greek male nudity and of the gymnasium in their art and in their life. The Gauls' custom of fighting naked was remarked on as "foreign" by the Greeks. In Etruria, and in Italy, female nudity and the image of the nursing mother still mark the power of the mother goddess, as they did in the Mediterranean before Greek art prevailed.

In Classical antiquity, therefore, the contrast between the clothed and the naked human body was used to express some of the most basic contrasts of the human experience: God and man, human and animal, man and woman, public world and private life, wealth


\textsuperscript{150} From the Collection of P. Arndt: acquired 1908. Provenance unknown: probably southern Italy. H. 15.2 cm. Oroszlán, Cat. No. 1930, No. E 104. I am grateful to J.G. Szilágyi for photograph and references.
and poverty, admiration and pity, citizen and slave,
civilization and barbarism, spirit and flesh, life and
death, power and helplessness. At the same time, the
sight of the naked body has a great magic power,
which the artist must use and guard carefully. Its
meanings change over time, but not its power, which
reminds us—much as we would rather forget—of our
own animal nature and our mortality.

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