

Dr. Ross Brendle

Western Art History I- 201.01

5 December 2022

Egyptian and Greek Sculpture Compare & Contract

Royal Egyptian and Greek *korai* and *kouros* sculptures share similar structures and symbolism, yet they are also distinctive in expressing their ideals and function relating to their religious customs. Viewers will appreciate Egyptian and Greek connections and their uniqueness by comparing and analyzing specific sculptures. With a deeper examination of these ancient statues, viewers determine that Greek *korai* and *kouros* establish a different relationship between human and god existence than that of royal Egyptian monuments. Greeks' immortal gods, although still superior, offer mortal beings' beauty, stature, and physical strength, unlike their Egyptian predecessors, whose "kings were revered as gods in human form" (Stokstad 51).

One area that highlights the human-to-god dynamic is the ideals both regions' sculptures represent. It is apparent that Greek and Egyptian sculpture possess similar physical standards and views on beauty; however, in the examples below, certain Greek *kouros* and *korai* focus primarily on exceptional human abilities and strength rather than the ethereal beauty and status found in Egyptian royal figures. Evidence suggests that Greeks drew inspiration from Egyptian sculpture with their noticeably similar posture and mathematical techniques (Richter 2, Brendle), and these similarities can be found when comparing the men in Egyptian *Meukaure and a Queen* (Figure 3.10) and Greek *Metropolitan Kouros* (Figure 5.18). Viewers observe both male figures standing upright, their left leg advancing, and their arms by their sides with tightly closed fists (Stokstad 60). Likewise, *Metropolitan Kouros* and the royal king adhere to matching canon of proportions of twenty-one units ranging from the sculpture's eye level to the sole of their feet (Boardman 20).

In addition, both male figures incorporate broad shoulders, well-defined arms, and narrow torsos, all of which showcase strength.

Although the two male statues represent an ideal form, they differ in what is significant and their meaning. For traditional Egyptian royalty, "dignity, calm, and permanence" (Stokstad 60) are portrayed in King Menkaure's attire. The commonly used headgear, the lower abdomen hidden by a pleated kilt, and an exaggerated beard demonstrate the king's status (Stokstad 117) and symbolize refinement, leadership, and divinity. King Menkaure's facial features are also lifelike, and considerable detail is present on his nose, lips, ears, and bone structure. Since rulers were accepted as gods, it is apparent that the understanding of godlike royalty was considered in the composition. On the other hand, *Metropolitan Kouros* exuberates "vigorousness, [youthfulness], and in the prime of [his] life" (Shakeshaft 32), and it suggests that of an athlete, hero, or courageous warrior (Ridgway 119). Initially, *kouros*' were believed to represent the Greek God Apollo; however, "their identity is often unclear" (Shakeshaft 24). Contrary to King Menkaure, this vibrant kouros is nude, less naturalistic, and closer to abstract geometric configuration (Brendle). The youth's facial features are flat and stylized, showcasing large eyes, an archaic smile, and thick long hair (Stokstad 117), which further signified the peak and coming of age. Some theories call attention to the fighter's "cauliflower ears," some *kouros* seem to have, which Ridgway proposes as a shift from Apollo himself to a more personal depiction of athletes who often participated in the Olympic games (123).

In addition to each group's central idea on essential attributes, the purpose and function of Greek and Egyptian sculpture are alike yet maintain separate traditions according to what they believed was pleasing to the gods. Egyptians and Greeks placed great emphasis on the afterlife and, in turn, created statue figures to place in funerary or sacred spaces. Due to the vast motives

behind each votive or grave marker, for the sake of time, the assessment of the female *Kore of Nikandre* (Figure 5.20) and Egyptian princess *Karomama* (Figure 3.38) will explore the social aspect of each piece of art. It is worth mentioning that some of these same reasons may also apply to the male *kouros* or royal statues mentioned above.

When studying the two women, a few related areas are the details found within their dresses and identifying inscriptions. At first glance, *Nikandre* appears to have a simple, plain dress; however, in a reconstruction rendering (Figure 5.21), researchers believe the statue includes rosette and meanders motifs typically found in numerous *korai*'s (Shakeshaft 35). Furthermore, an engraving on *Nikandre*'s side confirms its intended purpose of dedication to the god Artemis the “far shooter of arrows” (Brendle, Slide 9). In conjunction with divine favor, it was often customary for Greek women to be depicted in the latest style as a sign of aristocratic status (Ridgway 123). Equally, *Karomama*'s dress contains a great deal of shapes and patterns resembling that of an Egyptian register. The dress is arranged in a way that folds across the chest and is tied using “a ribbon in a high-waisted style which was fashionable in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Murray 161). The inscription associates *Karomama* as a “divine consort of Amun,” a part of the priestess community, and a descendant from the lineage of King Osorkan I from the Twenty-First Dynasty (Stokstad 80).

Despite commonalities in dress and identification methods, the sculpted women suggest opposing intentions and connotations that further solidify the relationship Greeks and Egyptians share with their gods. As aforementioned, *Karomama* was a priestess born from royalty, and her statue is constructed to reflect her powerful position. Three key elements that emphasize this theory are the traditional headdress covering her head, her clenched hands, which once held ceremonial rattles, and the intricate ostrich wings, potentially symbolizing the goddess Ma’at, tightly wrapped

around her figure (Stokstad 80). Priestesses, especially one of a majestic background and devotion to the god Amun, held immense “power equal to [that of] a pharaoh” (Mark). By bearing such authority, it is safe to state that Karomama’s statue reflects more political propaganda and is a permanent reminder of her celestial equivalence.

Alternatively, *Kore of Nikandre* embodies a pleasant exchange between gods and humans, also known by the Greeks as *charis*, which simultaneously links to social advantages (Shakeshaft 24). As an act of *charis*, donors would offer gifts to deities in gratitude for any preferred treatment the gods may wish to bestow upon them (Shakeshaft 25). In the case of *Kore of Nikandre*, proportion and symmetry encompass the figure with a vertical line running through the center of her body, mirroring each side identically. The *kore* has both “feet [and legs] together, arms by her side, [and a series of] ...four locks on either shoulder (Shakeshaft 33), all of which imply the importance of balance and harmony the Greeks appreciated and used as a standard for order. Another visual example is the statue's sheer size at nearly six feet tall, which not only publicized the contributor's wealth but also drew attention to its “divine recipient” (Shakeshaft 34).

In conclusion, Greek *korai* and *kouros* sculptures relay a message of partnership among the gods, whereas Egyptian royal statues suggest dominance and equality with these deities. By exploring the ideals and function of these iconic creations, viewers see standard features and differences that exist between the figures. Still, so much is unknown when deciphering these pieces; therefore, various interpretations are inevitable while examining these ancient artifacts.

Appendix



Figure 3.10- *Menkaure and a Queen, Probably Khamerernebtj II*, From Giza. Fourth Dynasty, 2490-2472 BCE. Graywacke with traces of red and black paint, height 54 ½" (142.3 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Harvard University – Museum of Fine Arts Expedition. Photograph © 2017 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 5.18- *Metropolitan Kouros*- From Attica, Greece. c. 600-590 BCE. Marble, height 6'4 5/8" (1.95 m). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photograph © 2016 The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence



Figure 3.38- *Karomama*- Third Intermediate period, Twenty-Second Dynasty, c. 945-715 BCE. Bronze inlaid with gold, silver, electrum, glass, and copper; height 23 ½" (59.5 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photograph © RMN-Grand Palais/Hervé Lewandowski.



Figure 5.20- *Kore of Nikandre*- From Delos. c. 650-625 BCE. Marble, height 5' 8 11/16" (1.75 m). National Archaeological Museum, Athens, NM1. Photograph © Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 5.21- Reconstruction of the painted decoration of *Kore of Nikandre* by Georgia Kokkorou-Alevras (color drawing by A. Drigkopoulou). Photograph obtained from Shakeshaft, Hugo. "Beauty, Gods, and Early Greek Art: The Dedications of Mantiklos and Nikandre Revisited."

Work Cited

Richter, Gisela Marie Augusta, et al. *Kouros, Archaic Greek Youths: A Study of the Development of the Kouros Type in Greek Sculpture*. Phaidon Press, 1960.

Brendle, Ross. "Ancient Egypt." Wester Art History I, September 2022, Converse University. Lecture.

Brendle, Ross. "Ancient Greece." Wester Art History I, October 2022, Converse University. Lecture.

Boardman, John. *Greek Sculpture: The Archaic Period*. Thames and Hudson, 1978.

Mark, Joshua J. "God's Wife of Amun." *World History Encyclopedia*, World History Encyclopedia, 10 Mar. 2017, https://www.worldhistory.org/God's_Wife_of_Amun/. Accessed 4 December 2022.

Murray, Margaret Alice, and Ernest A. Gardner. *Egyptian Sculpture*. Duckworth, 1930.

Ridgway, Brunilde Sismondo. "Of Kouroi and Korai: Attic Variety." *Hesperia Supplements*, vol. 20, 1982, p. 118., <https://doi.org/10.2307/1353953>.

Shakeshaft, Hugo. "Beauty, Gods, and Early Greek Art: The Dedications of Mantiklos and Nikandre Revisited." *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 104, no. 2, 2022, pp. 20–46., <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2022.2000268>.

Stokstad, Marilyn, and Michael Watt Cothren. *Art History*. Sixth ed., vol. 1, Pearson, 2018.