DEATH and the AFTERLIFE:
GREEK ART
(Funerary Art from the Geometric, Archaic, and Classical Periods)
GEOMETRIC GREEK VASES

Online Links:

- Geometric art - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
- Geometric Greek – Smarthistory
- Geometric Art in Ancient Greece - Metropolitan Museum of Art
- Geometric Greek Krater - Metropolitan Museum of Art
A number of large vessels decorated in this way were used as grave markers and were found in part of the Kerameikos cemetery called the Dipylon, after the city gate nearby. The mid-eighth century Dipylon amphora is monumental in scale.

Decorative friezes of geometric designs and files of grazing deer and seated goats—each image an abbreviated symbol—run continuously around the pot and cover the rest of the surface. The panels between the handles show the most important scene, that of prothesis, the laying out of the dead body on the funeral bier. The mourners, carefully separated from one another and enveloped in filling ornaments (no space was to be left undecorated), tear their hair.
Greek potters soon developed a considerable variety of shapes. Chief among them was the amphora, a two-handled vase for storing wine and oil. This was a female burial, as suggested by the figured scene showing the deceased wearing a skirt and the amphora shape itself.

The Geometric style of Greek vase painting employs what is known as “horror vacui”, or “fear of empty spaces”. In this case, the filling of all available space may be an attempt to imitate the long-practiced art of basket weaving.
Geometric krater from the Dipylon cemetery (Athens), c. 740 BCE

Other late geometric vases such as the Dipylon Krater extend the funerary story to the procession (ekphora), an even more public event in which the funeral bier is taken by cart through the assembled populace to its final resting place.

This vase adds a lower register presenting a repetitive frieze of warriors in chariots who are probably not part of the funerary procession but rather refer to the military experience of the deceased. Warfare was a crucial activity in defense of the polis and a man’s partial prowess was throughout Greek history a critical element in his fulfillment of public duty and aspiration to aristocratic virtue (arête).
The shape of this vase - a krater or large open bowl for mixing wine with water - was an allusion to the symposium, a drinking party which provided socially significant ‘male’ bonding opportunities for warrior aristocrats.

This great wine-mixing bowl marked the grave of a man. Thus, the elaborate funeral procession is complemented by a scene of warfare. Another reading would have the chariot frieze refer to funeral games, implying a heroic statue for the deceased by analogy with Homeric figures like Patroklos.
ARCHAIC GREEK ART

Online Links:

Kouros - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Kouros – Smarthistory

Exekias Dionysos in a Sailboat – Smarthistory

Ancient Greek Funeral and Burial Practices - Wikipedia
Kouros, (known as the *New York Kouros*) c. 600 BCE, marble

Monumental sculpture of human figures began in Greece during the Archaic period. They were influenced by Egyptian technique and convention. Freestanding Greek sculptures fulfilled the same purpose as Egyptian and Mesopotamian votive statues: They paid perpetual homage to the gods. They also served as cult statues, funerary monuments, and memorials designed to honor the victors of the athletic games.

A male statue is called a *kouros* (plural *kouroi*), Greek for “young man”. The kouroi, nearly always nude, have been variously identified as gods, warriors, and victorious athletes. Because the Greeks associated young, athletic males with fertility and family continuity, the figures may have been symbolic ancestor figures.
This kouros wears only a neckband. Male nudity need not cause surprise, since it had occurred in the Geometric period in bronze sculptures (though the figures were belted), and since in everyday life men appeared naked in the gymnasia. But there is probably more to it than that.

No other nation with which the Greeks came into contact allowed male nudity, so this may have served to distinguish the Greeks from the rest. At the same time, it allowed the body- shared attribute of gods and men- to be fully revealed.
At this time, only males were depicted in the nude. This female statue wears a peplos.
Such statues replaced the huge vases of Geometric times as the preferred form of grave marker in the sixth century BCE. This kouros stood over a grave in the countryside somewhere near Athens.

It has the hallmarks of an earlier Orientalizing (or more specifically, Daedalic style). Its head is triangular, its waist is slim, and it exhibits the same love of pattern throughout, especially in the hair.
Very few objects were actually placed in the grave, but monumental earth mounds, rectangular built tombs, and elaborate marble stelai and statues were often erected to mark the grave and to ensure that the deceased would not be forgotten.

Immortality lay in the continued remembrance of the dead by the living. From depictions on white-ground lekythoi, we know that the women of Classical Athens made regular visits to the grave with offerings that included small cakes and libations.
The Greeks believed that at the moment of death the psyche, or spirit of the dead, left the body as a little breath or puff of wind.
“Classic statuary came to life” at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece (Time 8/23/04)
Kroisos, from Anavysos, Greece, c. 530 BCE, marble

This later kouros stood over the grave of Kroisos, a young man who died in battle. The statue displays more naturalistic proportions and more rounded modeling of the face, torso, and limbs.

Fortunately, some of the paint remains, giving a better sense of the statue’s original appearance.

The inscribed base invites visitors to “stay and mourn at the tomb of dead Kroisos, whom raging Ares destroyed one day as he fought in the foremost ranks.”

The smiling statue is no more a portrait of a specific youth than is the New York kouros. But two generations later, without rejecting the Egyptian stance, the Greek sculptor rendered the human body in a far more naturalistic manner. The head is no longer too large for the body. The long hair does not form a stiff backdrop to the head but falls naturally over the back.
Exekias. Dionysos Kylix, c. 530 BCE

Of the approximately 30,000 surviving Greek vases, the majority were preserved in Etruscan tombs, providing us today with many examples of Greek art that may have otherwise been lost. In the painted image of this kylix (drinking cup) by Exekias, the slender, sharp-edged forms have a lacelike delicacy, yet also resilience and strength, so that the design adapts itself to the circular surface without becoming mere ornament. Dionysos reclines in his boat (the sail was once entirely white), which moves with the same ease as the dolphins, whose lithe forms are balanced by the heavy clusters of grapes.
According to a Homeric hymn, the god of wine had once been abducted by Etruscan pirates. He thereupon caused vines to grow all over the ship and frightened his captors until jumped overboard and were turned into dolphins. We see him on his return journey—an event to be gratefully recalled by every Greek drinker—accompanied by seven dolphins and seven bunches of grapes for good luck.

It is well known that sailing is a metaphor, often used in archaic Greek poetry, for the symposium. Marine symbols and characters replace the gorgoneion, evocative of death; the bottom of the cup is assimilated to the sea and the bottom of the cosmos, the Underworld.
The question must be raised why, of all the marine animals, it is specifically the dolphin and not merely a fish that lends itself as a Dionysian symbol. The interpretation of Dionysos as a god of all metamorphoses highlights the fact that the dolphin lives not in one but in two elements, water and air. For it, life is a continual passage below and above the surface of the sea.

Dionysos too lives between two realms. He is one of the very few gods that can bring the dead back from the underworld. From being the essential power of nature, associated with wine and the vine, he also became closely associated with the afterlife. Under the influence of Orphic mysticism he became the god who was killed, who descended to the underworld of death, and was then born again, reflecting the widespread symbolism of death and rebirth of the vine. It is in this role that Dionysos came to be identified with the Egyptian god Osiris, and with a range of fertility rituals.
CLASSICAL GREEK ART

Online Links:

Grave Stele of a Little Girl - Metropolitan Museum of Art

Kermeikos – Wikipedia

Stele of Hegeso - Smarthistory
Grave stele of Hegeso (Athens), c. 400 BCE, marble

Here, the deceased is represented in a simple domestic scene that was a standard subject for sculptured and painted memorials of young women.

She has picked a necklace from the box held by the girl servant and seems to be contemplating it as if it were a keepsake. This scene from everyday life is called a genre scene.
The reticence on display here is both a social and a political reticence. Respectable women were not named in public while alive; if it was necessary to refer to them in the course, for instance, of a law-court speech, then they were referred to by their relationship to some man-wife or daughter of so-and-so.

This was part of a general denial of individual rights and agency to women, who were not citizens in a Greek city and in Athens had very limited property rights or legal rights. The style and imagery of the grave reliefs both reflect and reinforce the denial to women of an active role in social or political life.
Tall, slender, one-handed white-ground lekythoi were used to pour libations during religious rituals. Some convey grief and loss, with scenes of departing figures bidding farewell. Others depict grave stelai draped with garlands. Still others envision the deceased returned to the prime of life and engaged in a seemingly everyday activity.

This lekythos shows a young servant girl carrying a stool for a small chest of valuables to a well-dressed woman of regal bearing, the dead person whom the vessel memorializes. The scene portrayed here contains no overt signs of grief, but a quiet sadness pervades it. The two figures seem to inhabit different worlds, their glances somehow failing to meet.
On this particular relief, a little girl, standing in profile, bows her head with a seriousness unusual in someone so young; her face is serene and strong. The gentle gravity of the child is beautifully expressed through her sweet farewell to her pet doves. Children often appear with their pets on Classical grave reliefs.
In the fourth century BCE, during the Late Classical period, greater intensity of feeling can be sensed in funerary sculptural works. A new style of sculpture was introduced by Skopas, demonstrating the expression of emotion in the facial features and body gestures of his figures. Unfortunately, none of his work is known to survive.
Grave stele of a young hunter (Ilissos River), c. 330 BCE, marble

A taste for individual characterization and the influence of Skopas can be seen in the grave stelae of the Late Classical period.

Compared with the stele of Hegeso, the relief here is more deeply carved, so that the deceased youth almost looks like a freestanding figure leaning against a marble wall. He has died in the prime of life, a loss accentuated by the sculptor through the youth’s heroic form and the representation of the aged, grieving father at the right.

The weeping boy seated on the steps at the left and the dog sniffing the ground add touches of pathos that become typical of Greek art in subsequent centuries.
The lying in state of a body (prothesis) attended by family members, with the women ritually tearing their hair, depicted on a terracotta pinax by the Gela Painter, latter 6th century BCE

During the early Archaic period, Greek cemeteries became larger, but grave goods decreased. This greater simplicity in burial coincided with the rise of democracy and the egalitarian military of the hoplite phalanx, and became pronounced during the early Classical period (5th century BCE). During the 4th century, the decline of democracy and the return of aristocratic dominance was accompanied by more magnificent tombs that announced the occupants' status.
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ACTIVITIES and REVIEW
Identify these “unknown” works as one of the following: Geometric, Orientalizing, Archaic, Classical, or Late Classical.
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