REPRESENTATION OF THE HUMAN BODY IN ANCIENT GREECE

I-K xxx DCEM1
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Overview
- Evolution from a symbolic view of the body to a more realistic one
- Seeking perfection: the Classic era
- When anatomy meets emotion: the Hellenistic era
- Pottery and medical knowledge

Sculpture: timeline

Cycladic art: a symbolic view of the body
- First attempt to represent the human body
- Geometric
- Related to religion
- Symbolizes female fertility

“Kouroi”: an idealistic view of the Human anatomy
- Egyptian influence
- Common characteristics
  - Rigidity
  - Bilateral symmetry
  - Anatomy = geometrical figures
  - One foot in front of the other
  - “Smile”
- “Kouroi” represents humanity
- Generalization of the essential features of the human figure

Universal symbol of humanity

“Kouroi”: emergence of a new way to represent the body
- Anatomical features become more accurate
- “Smile”: cheeks + nose: depicted more precisely
"Kritos boy": a turning point

- Knee in a **relaxing** state
- Muscles and bones **life-like**
- Rib cage expanded as if breathing
- Spine forms “S”
- No more “smile”

Evolution

**Idealistic**

**Improved knowledge of anatomy**

**Realistic**

Factors

**Medicine**

- Humors
- Hippocrates: “A wise man should consider that health is the greatest of human blessings”
- Speculums, micro surgery performed (hemorrhoids)
- Increased interest in the human body

**Olympic Games**

- Gods
- Athletic bodies are admired
- Athletes considered as heroes
- New inspiration: beauty, aesthetics

Seeking perfection: the Classic era

- Associates both anatomy and sports through art
- Movement but **no emotions**
- Body becomes independent entity
- Perfection = athletic body
- Art: aimed at expressing perfect balance and harmony

Anatomic details

- Bursting veins
- Precise description of the intercostal muscles
- Emphasis on athletic body

Anatomic details

Hermes from Atalante.
Marble copy of the II century AC from an original possibly by Lysippos from the IV century BC.
National Archaeological Museum in Athens.
A controversial sculpture

- Intimate scene: Aphrodite about to have a bath
- Controversial:
  - female nude
  - goddess
- Blends humanity and divinity
- Myth

Transition

- Artists have mastered the anatomical features
- Preoccupation with line and contrast in order to create an impression
- Exploring new techniques, exhibiting their skills

When anatomy meets emotion: the Hellenistic era

- Exploring new realities:
  - children
  - scenes of common life
- Ideal of beauty no longer required
- Emotions and anatomy are exaggerated: pathos
- Experimentation, freedom

Pottery and anatomy

- Homer's poems influenced pottery
- Wrestling scenes depicted wounded people
- Hypotheses:
  - Knowledge of external and internal anatomy
  - Instructions to inflict lethal hits

Take home message

In Ancient Greece there was a strong interaction between medicine and art. The human body was the main inspiration of the artists, the way they chose to represent it evolved throughout the ages with the techniques but also with anatomical knowledge.

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