

ATTIC INSCRIPTIONS: EDUCATION
TEACHERS' NOTES ON A-LEVEL CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

B. Greek Art (H408/24)

The specifications mention 'functions of free-standing sculpture including: cult statue, votive, grave marker, memorial'. Several slides under this heading illustrate the range of grave-markers found in UK collections. They are indicative of the range of types of *stelai* and *naiskoi* ('little temples') that were used. Cost and evolution were probably factors in the stylistic choices of families, with early markers being rather plain without architectural detail, with figures carved in shallow relief within a recessed panel on rectangular slabs. Markers were cut sometimes with rounded tops (finials) and sometimes in the form of a triangular pediment. The iconography varies: some markers, especially those showing the *dexiosis* gesture (hand-clasping, which may indicate continued solidarity between family members after death) gesture appear to have been stock images, off-the-shelf from a sculptor's workshop; others may have been designed bespoke for a family.

Markers reached their most elaborate form in the second half of the fourth century BC at which point we see elaborate *naiskoi* with carved figures placed within. We should bear in mind that when looking at these objects, their context is usually completely lost: most Greek funerary monuments were set up in family enclosures (*periboloi*) which would have contained a range of monuments for family members including children and slaves. Moreover, not every deceased person placed interred in a *peribolos* would have been granted a funerary inscription: families may have invested in them when they saw fit to do so. The desire to mourn and commemorate was certainly a factor, but we know also from extant speeches that monuments were sometimes held up in lawcourts as proofs of family relations or associations with the deceased in the context of inheritance disputes.

Note: none of the prescribed sculptures on the OCR specifications, other than *kouroi* and *korai*, are grave-markers. Accordingly, this section of the notes should be regarded very much as an extension activity, though it may be possible for teachers to, for example, use the material for studying the portrayal of women in Greek art or the development of relief sculpture.

As a way of getting students to engage with particular aspects of an image, Anne Wright of Woodbridge School suggests printing out 'a high-quality A3 version of a *stèle*, cut it up and then presenting it to them as a 50-piece jigsaw puzzle. The purpose of the task is to get them to slow down and think about what the various bits show – they concentrate on hands and gestures much more if they have to work out what is happening and how the bits are interrelated. You'd need to allow at least 15 minutes for this activity, but it works well.'

Slide 8:

Stelai depicting human figures of the classical period (fourth century BC), probably the deceased: these include, from left to right: (upper): Chorine's stele with relief panel (British Museum); (lower): *naiskos* for unknown woman (British Museum); stele with relief panel for Arkesis (Lyme Park); stele with pediment and *acroteria* in relief above a sculpted scene for Xanthippos (British Museum); *naiskos* (British Museum). Xanthippos holds what seems to be a shoe last indicating he may have owned a shoe-making business. *Naiskoi* stelai often depicted family groups, and may have been a way of making a statement about family prosperity and solidarity.

Slide 9:

Other forms of stele, left to right: rosette stele surmounted with a floral decoration (usually acanthus leaves in relief) for a Phoenician, 340s BC (British Museum); painted stele for Kollion, early fourth century BC (Broomhall): in this case the paint has faded away leaving a ghostly figure; arch *stèle* from the Roman period (British Museum).

Slide 10:

Stelai regularly depicted the deceased that they commemorated, often alongside family members. But they also included animals, sometimes real and at other times mythical. We sometimes see depictions of Sirens, as on these monuments at Newcastle (left) and Oxford (right): there are echoes in these monuments of Sirens luring individuals to their fate: in *Odyssey* 12 Odysseus had himself bound to the mast of his ship so that his response to the seductive song of the sirens was restricted (Od. 12.184-91). It is an indication that stories like these had resonance with Athenians of the classical period. Sometimes it is thought that these depictions were reserved for those who died prematurely or unmarried, but the Oxford *stèle* may well depict a man-and-wife.

Slide 11:

Stelai depicting *loutrophoroi* (British Museum, Leeds City Museum). This was a common shape for Athenian funerary monuments of this era: it was modelled on that of contemporary water-jars. It is thought that these models were used extensively, but not exclusively so, for the commemoration of individuals who were not married, given the association of this kind of vessel with nuptial rituals. The example on the right (British Museum) depicts two males with shields and helmets, suggesting that one or more of the individuals commemorated here was a shield-bearing soldier (hoplite). This might not necessarily mean that the deceased died in battle but rather than they were of hoplite age or status. Beneath the *loutrophoros* is a sphinx, a mythical creature commonly found represented in funerary *periboloi*, perhaps as a protective motif.

Slide 12:

Stone *loutrophoroi* (British Museum): see notes on previous slide.

Slide 13:

Stone *lekythoi* (British Museum). Terracotta oil flasks (*lekythoi*) appear as grave goods within funerary *periboloi* and stone versions often adorned funerary enclosures.

Slide 14:

Kioniskoi (little columns) (British Museum). At the time of the tyranny of Demetrios of Phaleron (317-307), the size and decoration of funerary monuments was limited by legislation; this appears to have been part of an attempt to restrict ostentation at the graveside and may have formed part of a wider programme limiting political expression. These plain monuments usually bore only names or sometimes a depiction of a funerary vessel such as a *loutrophoros*.

Slide 15:

Other funerary markers, left to right: a fluted column, sixth century BC (British Museum), a panel, fourth century BC (Mount Stewart), a discus, sixth century BC (British Museum), a sarcophagus of the 2nd – 3rd century AD (Broomhall).