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Cover illustration: Submerged structures from shipsheds in the Zea harbour, Piraeus.  
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# Sight, object, space

## The notion of landscape in Antiquity as a functional or an aesthetic category★

Lise Bek

Manifold and often even contradictory are the different attempts made to explain and define the concept of landscape in general, definitions reaching from the given conditions of nature to the material and spiritual phenomena attached, by people living there, to the said natural surroundings making of them the landscape of an individual culture. From this diversity merged a spectre of likewise variegated theories based on morphological, linguistic and perceptual arguments.

From the methods of investigation utilized arises, still, another variety since they range from the more traditional humanistic analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of historical, textual, and visual source material to the more specialized modern methods of semiotics and statistics, the drawing in of information technology not to be forgotten.

At a closer look, however, these seemingly dispersed efforts gather to provide a total idea of the process of man's perception and comprehension of landscape through the long span of time from its origin to the actual days, from the formation of the landscape as a geomorphologic structure to the characteristics of the region and its population in our time.

Thus, remarkable observations can be made as to the transformation, thanks to man's activity, of a piece of indifferent nature into a well functioning and well-known place for living, into what is designated today, a true cultural landscape, that is through his settling, name-giving, mapping, and describing it.

And it may be demonstrated, furthermore, how this landscape of culture, thanks to human thinking and imagination, through religion, philosophy,

art, and literature, will be moulded into an ideal form, the ideal centre of the world, as it were. At this point, exactly, the meeting place of the functional and the aesthetic conception of landscape is to be found, which in the following will have our special attention, as far as the notion of landscape in ancient Greece is concerned.

But in order to be able to embark upon this subject we must know what we speak about when we are using the term "landscape".

In the beginning was the word landscape, we might say and if landscape has ever existed, it was created through this word - to paraphrase the Gospel of St. John. Or to put it differently, it is not until the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD, in several of the Romance languages, that the word "landscape" comes into use. So it makes sense to assume that before then no concept of landscape existed in the modern sense of the word, that is (to refer to the definition given in a 17<sup>th</sup> century French dictionary) as the totality of a region with all its characteristic elements; mountains, plains, woods, rivers etc. Evidently, landscape is understood here, not in its functional aspect that is to say, neither as a geographical region, nor as an area providing pasture or crops nor as a place having some specific sacred or other symbolic meaning. But landscape is regarded rather as part of man's natural surround-

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\* The present article is the outcome of my participation in an international seminar on the landscape in Greek Antiquity organized by Professor Panaiotis Doukellis from the Ionian University and held at the island of Santorini in 1998. For the linguistic revision of my English I am deeply indebted to my close friend, Knud Børge Bendtsen.



Fig. 1. Bison, cave painting from Altamira represented as a particular object of solid form.

ings to be perceived visually and hence to form the basis for an aesthetical appreciation and qualification.

Let us turn, however, from the world of words and concepts to that of visual experience, which, to my mind, has priority over the former in these matters. As documentary material, in the following investigation, we will rely, therefore, just as much on the visual as on the textual sources. And as it would not be possible, by the way, to step back into the mode of sight of bygone ages, we have to resort to the pictorial and literary testimony of its function.

Ever since his appearance upon the scene of culture, man has undoubtedly had a visual awareness of his natural surroundings even if he has had no consciousness of their totality as landscape. This is to be noted as far back as to the prehistorical cave paintings of hunting animals. And perhaps these paintings tell us, moreover, something about the way of seeing, recognizable also in the widely different cultures of a much later age, namely the ancient Mediterranean cultures. As the superimposition of various images indicates, the animals

represented were perceived and probably also conceived of as singular objects that had a function other than that of being enjoyed visually, be it as objects of celebration or as magic signs (Fig. 1).

But before we embark upon our actual discussion of the notion of landscape in Antiquity three more factors are to be taken into consideration, the human sight, the object or thing seen, and that which is in between or which contains these things, space that is to say.

As for the first of these factors which is of interest here is not so much the physiological function of sight as a sense organ, but far more its ability, in a given cultural setting, to respond, through its deciphering of the influx of visual information received, in accordance with certain strategies or conventions of vision. So the field of sight will be arranged to conform to a distinct pattern by giving preference to some elements, while others are suppressed. In general, one might here distinguish between two fundamentally different ways of seeing.

One is the immediate apprehension, by direct gaze, of the things seen close at hand, in which





Fig. 2. Meindert Hobbema, Dutch landscape with alley in perspective depicting the spatial extension of the visible surroundings towards the horizon, 1689, National Gallery, London.

case any object will present itself as suspended in the vertical field of vision just like the cave painters saw their animals. The other way of seeing is by rationally calculating the field of vision as a whole by visually measuring its horizontal extension. To make a comparison to architecture one might speak of the first mode of vision as concentrating on the elevation of the building as opposed to the latter's concern with the ground plan.

Now for thousands of years the first model has prevailed, as far as can be judged from pictorial documentation, and it was not until the invention in the Renaissance of geometrically constructed perspective that the latter, the spatial mode, became predominant as the matrix of visual perception (Fig. 2). And so it is, even today, despite the collapse of linear perspective in the previous century and the appearance in our time, of modern perceptual psychology.<sup>1</sup>

Now to the second factor, the object. As far as can be deduced from the artistic representation of things, the way of seeing them has varied considerably over time. I do not think here of simple stylistic changes, but of alterations in the degree of

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<sup>1</sup> Already at the end of the previous century, art historians like Alois Riegl had begun to understand the change of style as a historic process ruled by the alterations in human sight from what he saw as the objective way of seeing which implies a fixation upon the near-by object as form to the subjective way, in which the beholder will let the far-off elements of his field of vision melt together in a pictorial whole. So Riegl makes a distinction between the "taktische" or "haptische" and the "optische" ways of seeing. For his application of this theory upon ancient art, cf. Riegl 1901. This idea has been further developed by other art historians and archaeologists to make the distinction between the Greek and Roman style not so much a question of historicity of mentality as of racial disposition.

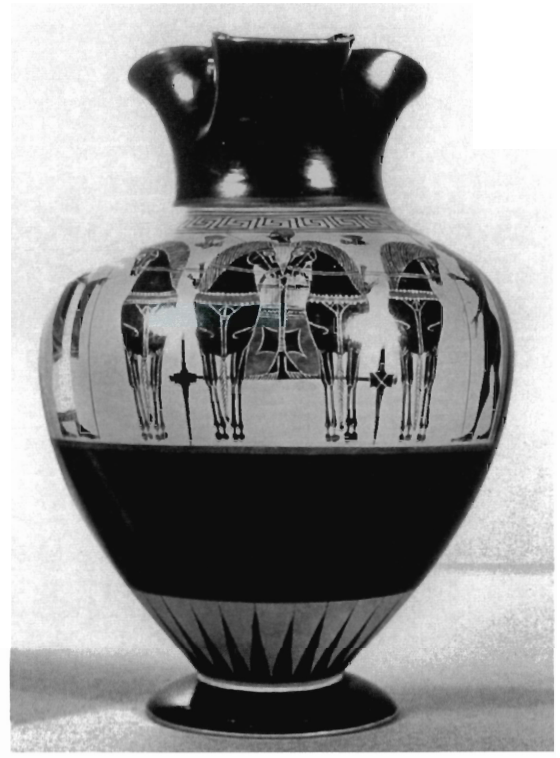
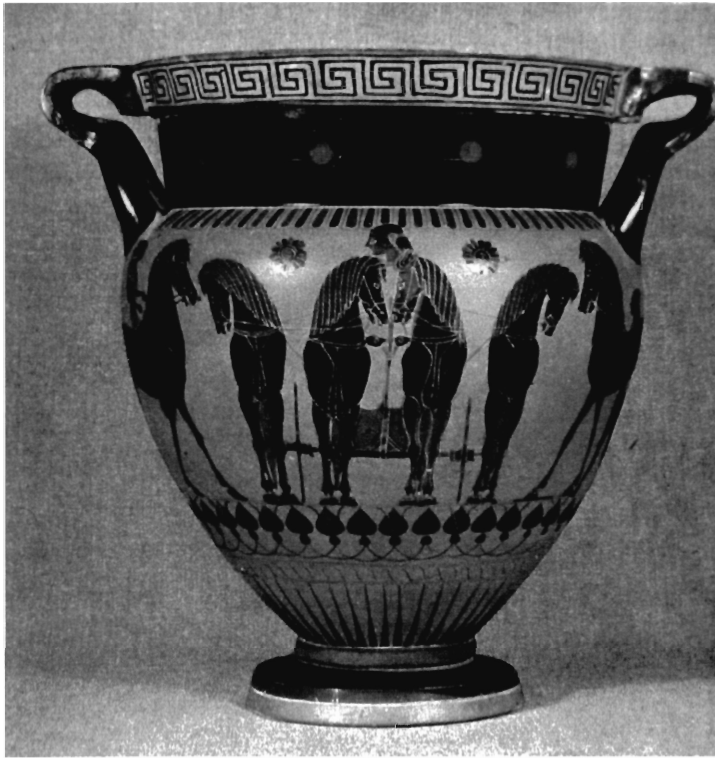


Fig. 3. Greek black-figure vase painting of quadriga in frontal view, dated around 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, British Museum.

reality conveyed, by people of different periods, to the things seen. This is a fact, I dare say, although I must abstain from further argumentation on the subject.<sup>2</sup> Suffice it, here, to state that in periods, when reality is attached to material existence, the objects take on the shape of solid form, which in artistic representation result in their being defined plastically as volume. In cultures of a highly spiritual orientation, on the other hand, any object-form tends to become an insubstantial image, an illusion or shadow, to refer to the Platonic concept of the world of senses. Consequently, there will be a tendency to stress in art, too, their incorporeal and abstract values.

Thirdly, there is the factor of space. In its invisibility and emptiness, space certainly ranged lowest on the scale of reality and was even regarded as non-existent except as a place to be taken up by an object.<sup>3</sup>

In the Renaissance on the contrary, space was, for the first time, recognized as a phenomenon *in se*, the all-embracing container of the objects and a *sine qua non* for their existence as a three-

dimensional graspable form. Thanks to the perspective system, moreover, the mutual relationship of the objects was exactly determined as was their respective size according to distance as opposed to the vague indications of before and behind, of nearness and distances by overlapping, depth cues and foreshortenings in the non-perspective view.<sup>4</sup>

From what I have said until now, it will appear that a precondition for the constitution of land-

<sup>2</sup> In my view, it is possible to operate with a sequence of visual models following each other from prehistoric time until our own day, perceptual psychology being but the theoretical foundation of one of these models, the modern one, and not as claimed by its founding fathers, an objective science of sight. For a more thorough discussion of this problem, cf. Bek 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Evidently, to people of a certain time or culture, the notion of reality will be more or less identical, which is stated by the fact that the answers sought for to the fundamental questions of humanity will be more or less identical despite differences in philosophy, religion, or material state of life, Bek 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Common to these means is that they do not function on spatial premises, but in relation to the objects alone.

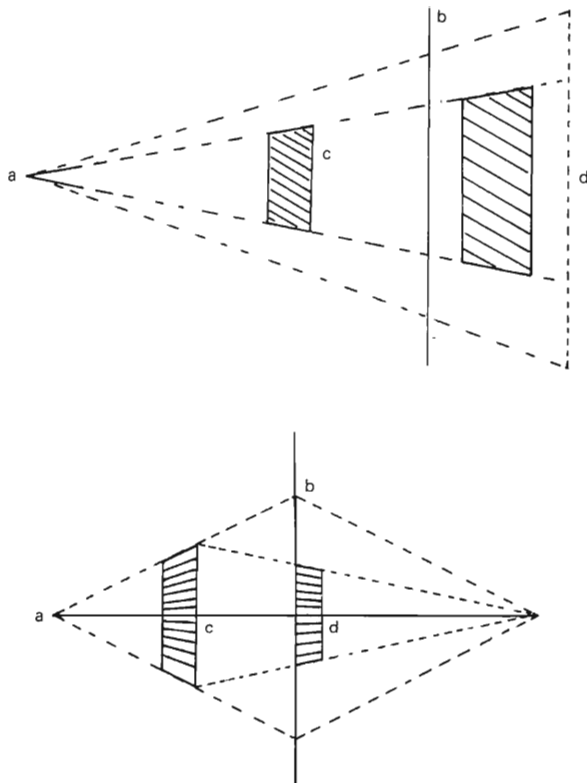


Fig. 4. Diagram of the Euclidean cone of vision.

scape, defined as the natural surroundings in their totality, as a phenomenon to be visually perceived and hence as an aesthetic category, will be the perspective mode of vision.

The next question to be answered, then, is how far the ancient beholder did have the capacity for this kind of perspective viewing, or rather, whether he took any interest in it. Among modern art historians, in fact, there has been a lively discussion of whether or not the Greeks and Romans had, in effect, any knowledge of perspective.<sup>5</sup> I should like to argue that the ancients neither conceived of nor perceived their natural surroundings in terms of a perspective measurable totality of object-forms and space-extension. Instead of letting the eye seek the distant focal point of perspective on the horizon line, they concentrated on the nearby object, the eye itself being the focus-point for constituting its visual appearance. In this way the object would be reduced from form to image in as much as only its front aspect facing the beholder will be perceptible,

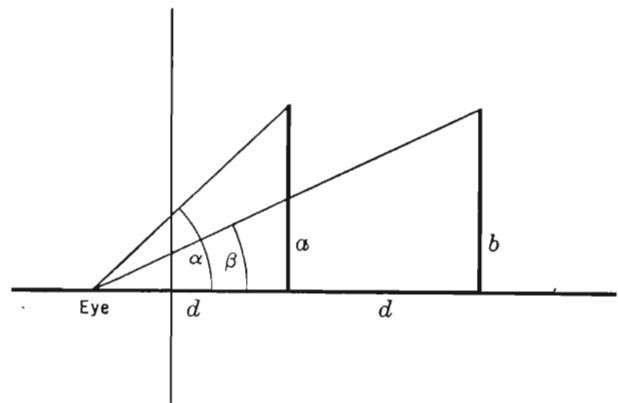


Fig. 5. Diagram of depth diminution indicated by Erwin Panofsky to be in accordance with Euclidean optics and with the perspectival construction respectively.

whereas its rear side as well as its location in space and relation to the horizon will be neglected as fading out in uncertainty (Fig. 3).

Ancient visual theory seems to confirm this. So the Hellenistic natural scientist Euclid, a true follower of Plato in this respect, when in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, he formulated his *Optics*. Here he laid out the guiding lines for man's visual perception, fallacious though it is, of the illusory world of senses as opposed to the firm principles of geometry ruling the higher reality of the realm of elementary ideas.<sup>6</sup>

According to Euclid the beholder will see each object as a separate image confined, not to say contoured by the bunch of visual rays that connects the eye and the object (Fig. 4). And since each object in this way forms its own cone of vision, more objects will be seen in the visual field as situated beside, below or above one another. As the size of the object is measured, furthermore, by the width of the angle of vision and not by the vertical height of the area it occupies, depth diminution

<sup>5</sup> White 1957 and Edgerton 1973 bear witness to a positive standpoint in this respect.

<sup>6</sup> The Euclidean recognition of the deception of sight as opposed to the geometric truth demonstrated in his work on the *Elements*, is evidenced, through the fact that together with his *Optics* he deals with the catoptrics, the problems of mirrors and mirror magic.

of objects located behind one another will be fairly small, and the distance between them imprecise (Fig. 5).

The one to exploit aesthetically the Euclidean theory was the Roman architect, Vitruvius. In his treatise *De Architectura*, written at the beginning of the Augustean period, he was drawing, it is true, most heavily upon Greek and Hellenistic sources.<sup>7</sup> He did not, however, write about visual perception as such, but about the creation of pictorial illusion in the architectonic prospect, tellingly named by him by the Greek word *scaenographia*, as well as in scenographical painting proper.<sup>8</sup> To Vitruvius, the central point *circini centrici* is located not on the horizon, but within the beholder's eye, and after having established his optimal positioning in relation to the picture or piece of architecture, the artist must see to it that all lines of the visual image respond to this point as he says in his first Book. And in the introduction to Book VII on mural painting, he adds that in this way the painter will be able to create the illusion of the protrusions of columns and recessions of niches in the *scaenae frons* of the theatre as if they were real.

If we read now, with these doctrines in mind, what he writes, later on, in the same 7<sup>th</sup> Book of the illusionist representation of natural surroundings, *topiographia* as it is called, again using a Greek term, it is remarkable that he enumerates, in the series of motifs suited for interior decoration, also some drawn from the landscape repertoire, such as mountains, pastures, and springs. But from their juxtaposition with other motifs like temples, altars, and holy groves, one might suspect that those, too, have a sacred function, through which they are imbued with a meaning other than that of being natural elements.

It is evident, moreover, that the elements listed do not form part of a landscape totality, but are catalogued as separate pictorial motifs. In this relation, it is worth noticing, by the way, that in Renaissance writings on landscape, nevertheless, the Vitruvian passage became a topos to be extensively reused.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the Vitruvian *topiographia* means neither landscape painting in our sense nor the descriptive registration of regional peculiarities. The word

*topia*, instead, seems to designate the pictorial realization of a kind of places that had no real existence, but were imaginations, only it is these vague images of fantasy or in the Vitruvian formulation, *incerta loca*, which Vitruvius intended the painter, through his pictorial illusionism to turn into *certae imagines*, true images, that is images of things which are real or might seem so, to paraphrase Vitruvius, once again.

The *topia* may be seen, thus, as a genre of motifs which, though drawn from nature, appears as an idealization of reality in the same way as the mythological figures and events of the classical Greek drama were of an ideal rather than a real nature according to the Aristotelian theory of *mimesis*.<sup>10</sup>

But to convert, by means of the mimetic process, these motifs into true images implied a both formal and contentual re-elaboration. First of all they were to be given concrete shape as definite objects apt to be projected upon the beholder's vertical plane of vision. Secondly, the various elements had to be upgraded from their mean state of trivial particularities to that of universality. And, it was in their capacity of representatives and rep-

<sup>7</sup> Vitr. *De Arch.*; Cf. further Schlicker 1940.

<sup>8</sup> For the relevant passages cf. Vitr. *De Arch.* 1.2.2; 7.11 and 5.2.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Bek 1983–4.

<sup>10</sup> Provoked by discussions with colleagues specialized in classic languages, I have retraced my documentation of the concept of *topia* and is inclined, now, to understand it as an idealization, through which the nature elements are stripped of their uncertainty as mere sense images and given a concreteness of form as well as a specification in function alien to nature as such. It might, furthermore, be seen as the background for the redefinition, in Roman aesthetics, of the relation between nature and art as a rivalry between two equal parts, whereas, in the Platonic tradition, art had been but the faint shadow of shadowy nature. In fact, *topia* is a term next to unknown elsewhere in classical literature and as it is used, by Vitruvius, in relation to pictorial representations; only, it seems likely that it has been coined by him to convey to them a specific meaning. So its derivation, as a diminutive form, from the word *topos* may refer to the literary sense of this term as designating a passage or subject that has been commonplace in some respect. In this case, the diminutive might indicate not only a transposition, in scale, of the motifs depicted, but far more a transformation, in content.



Fig. 6. Pompeii, House of the Labyrinth, 2<sup>nd</sup> Style decoration of the Corinthian Oecos showing in the centre of the walls a circular temple in plastical protrusion.



representations of this universality, no doubt, that certain significance was conveyed to them, as sacred or mythical places. So, the visualization of a mountain for instance, will be comprehended, not as the portrayal of a specific locality, but as a concretisation of the Concept Mountain or even “Holy Mountain”. In this way, in *topiographia*, natural elements like the ones listed by Vitruvius, attained a role not unlike that of the literary topoi. It is as such idealized places or *topia* that Vitruvius wants the regions depicted, which made up the scene for the dramatic journey of Odysseus along the Italian coast. The kind of super reality bestowed, thereby, upon these well-known localities with their islands, cliffs, and promontories was envisaged, by the way, as a means to underline their mythical character and, hence, their belonging to the realm of symbolic meaning. And it was on account of this functional value rather than through their aesthetic quality that these elements became worthy subjects of pictorial representation.

Similarly, in the art of gardening of the Romans,

the *opus topiarium* is not to be understood as a landscaping of the ground pure and simple in the 18<sup>th</sup> century fashion. Nor does it have the same sense as the topiary work in English, which stands for the trimming of the garden vegetation in geometric or figurative forms.<sup>11</sup> Instead, it might be seen as a mimetic recreation and consequently concretisation into *topia* of these same *incerta loca*, as it were, often in reduced scale or even in dwarf form in the villa and peristyle gardens.<sup>12</sup>

In Roman wall painting, too, in the so-called 2<sup>nd</sup> Pompeian style, that is to say, of the period prior to or contemporary with Vitruvius, we may find parallels to his motif catalogue, for instance in the temples of the Corinthian Oecos in the House of the Labyrinth in Pompeii (Fig. 6) or the holy springs of the Villa of Fannius Synistor at nearby Boscoreale, both decorations firmly rooted in

<sup>11</sup> In Latin this forming of the vegetation is, for its part, named *nemora tonsilia*.

<sup>12</sup> Grimal 1943.

Hellenistic pictorial tradition. Typically enough these paintings all represent particular elements singled out through their functional meaning as sacred objects and depicted as the main topic of the picture framed in a natural setting rather than imbedded in nature in the guise of landscape.

Now, it is to be supposed that the convention of visual apprehension and symbolic interpretation of the topia in the arts of painting and gardening has had an effect upon the viewing and comprehension of natural surroundings too.

A direct account of how they were experienced visually by the beholder in reality is given at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD by Pliny the Younger.<sup>13</sup> Pliny relates of his Tuscan villa how magnificently it is situated at the Apennine mountain slope. And characteristically enough, he lists at first, one by one, all the nature elements, the gardens, meadows, fields, woods, mountains etc. surrounding the building complex to take the reader, finally, up the hillside to enjoy the view, not of the landscape as such, but of the villa situated in the midst of all these multiple elements. And while each of these was qualified functionally for its fertility, good hunting and the like, the view of the villa is qualified aesthetically, not, indeed, for the sake of the landscape, but for that of the estate. So beautiful it is that you would hardly believe it to be your own place, but a painted picture, *formam pictam*, he exclaims.<sup>14</sup> And one might ask if he is, here, thinking of a *topiographia* in the Vitruvian sense, a pictorial representation which elevates the villa to a higher sphere of significance.

It should be noted, incidentally, that the dualism between functionality and aesthetics, *utilitas et amoenitas*, is the rhetorical figure chosen by Pliny to guide his whole description, an antithesis adopted by me in my subtitle. But to Pliny as to me, it is more than rhetoric,<sup>15</sup> for it testifies to his disinterest in the landscape totality as an aesthetic category as well as to his appreciation of his villa, not for its beauty alone, but just as much for its being his patrimony, that is again in its functional aspect, though this time not as a sacred place, but as the owner's pride and delight.

When we look at the villa prospects painted a little earlier in Marcus Lucretius Fronto's House in

Pompeii, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Pompeian style, we see, as the central and dominating motif in each of the four illusory pinakes painted on the tablinum walls, a villa hardly framed by nature elements (Fig. 7). And the building complexes seem to unfold towards the beholder, their lines corresponding to the centric point of his eye, but with no exact definition of their backward extension or location in respect to the horizon. Here, as in the Vitruvian catalogue it is some single object that makes up the central motif of the picture, functionally qualified not for its sacredness, but as in Pliny's case, maybe, for being the owner's property, but first and foremost visually qualified as being a definite object, which might, in its turn be appreciated aesthetically, not in its capacity of architectonic form, but of its picturesque attractiveness.

And if we enter such villas or the private town houses of the domus-type from the period to enjoy from their interior the view out into the countryside or into the peristyle garden, always aptly framed through window or door openings, columns or terrace balustrades, this view will, with hardly any exception, be firmly directed to focus upon some significant object. Numerous are the fountains, sculpture groups, paintings, pavilions or whole ensembles of scenography and the like artificial elements as well as mountain peaks, trees, cascades and other natural view points artfully centred in the thus framed field of vision. In the more sophisticated triclinia of the distinguished houses and villas one even finds these pictorial compositions tuned to suit the oblique angle of vision from a reclining position on the dining couch.<sup>16</sup>

Also the poet Statius describes in one of his poems from the *Silvae* a villa each of whose hundreds of rooms of which has its own view to a specific point of attraction.<sup>17</sup> But of the panoramic

<sup>13</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 5.6.

<sup>14</sup> *Neque enim terras tibi, sed formam aliquam ad eximiam pulchritudinem pictam videberis cernere*, cf. Plin. *Ep.* 5.6.

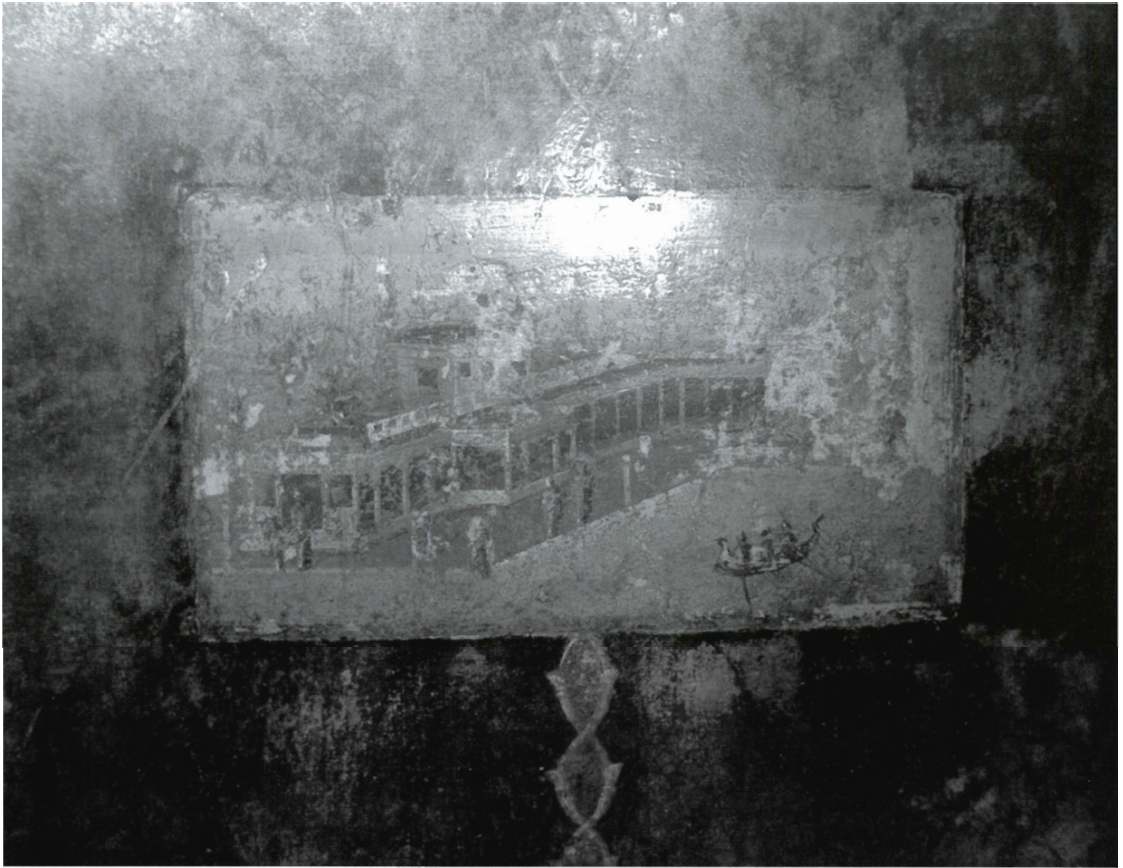
<sup>15</sup> Cf. Bek 1976.

<sup>16</sup> Bek 1983.

<sup>17</sup> Stat. *Silv.* 2 "The poem on the villa of Pollius Felix".



Fig. 7.  
Pompeii,  
House of  
Marcus  
Lucretius  
Fronto,  
Villa-pro-  
spect from  
the 3<sup>rd</sup> style  
decoration  
of the tabli-  
num.



scanning of the landscape as a whole there is no sign. Even from the sea villas on the Italian coasts one seems to have taken a special pleasure in the view of the neighbouring coastline with its villas and villages as described by Pliny in the letter on his Laurentine villa,<sup>18</sup> or that of a distant island like Capri seen from Castellamare di Stabia, or some far mountain top like the Vesuvian cone as seen from the villas at Capri. One might ask, in fact, if the Emperor Domitian has not had an eye either for the sublime infinity of blue sky and deep blue sea seen from the lofty ambulatory of his Capri refuge.

If one is allowed to draw, from these scarce examples, any conclusions about Roman visual culture or convention it might be that it was developed on the basis of Euclidean optics. This implies favouring the object just in front of the beholder unfolding towards him in the vertical plane of sight, but with no mass volume or extension in the horizontal plane. Landscape, as a consequence, is reduced to a subordinate role as

framework for the motif proper, the piece of architecture or a natural element singled out for its functional rather than its aesthetic qualities.

Equipped with such knowledge or hypothesis, if you like, of the Roman way of seeing, we will return, now, to our theme proper, the notion of landscape in the ancient Greek region. But instead of trawling, here, for the much more scanty literary and pictorial sources in this relation, we will go to architecture and its siting. And we will confine our investigation to the temples,<sup>19</sup> although also the towns or theatres might have served as examples.

To the modern beholder, the Greek temples look as if situated in a subtle interplay between architecture and nature, as Le Corbusier sketched

<sup>18</sup> Plin. Ep. 2:17.

<sup>19</sup> In the 1954 volume 13, no. 4, of the *Journal of the American Society of Architectural Historians* the problem was discussed by among others Stillwell and Lehman.



Fig. 8. Le Corbusier, sketch of the Parthenon, according to the way of seeing of modern perceptual psychology and the likewise modernist conception of the interrelation of architecture and nature, 1911.

the Parthenon (Fig. 8), and to command a splendid view over the surrounding countryside. Certainly, the many temples crowning a mountain top or windy cape, like the Apollo temple in Bassai or the Poseidon Temple at Cape Sunion, seem to dominate their surroundings. Their domination is to be experienced, however, not from the buildings outwards, but from afar towards them. Closed in by its high temenos walls, furthermore, the temple has not had a direct view of the landscape, but has constituted, by the way, a far more massive object of vision than in the present-day ruinous state. Thus, there would be established, for the beholder, an object-image to fix sight upon in the indefinite and indefinable spatial non-existence of mountains, valleys, plains, and rivers, an object qualified not so much by its aesthetic as by its functional values as being the temple of a mighty god.

That the visual impression of the temple during approach was of vital importance is seen from the places where the approach road is still preserved,

or can be reconstructed as in the Athenian Hephasteion or the Parthenon.

Thus, when one enters the Acropolis through the Propylaea, the Parthenon presents itself to the right, the good side of the beholder,<sup>20</sup> and seen in an oblique view, so that its north-west corner constitutes a protrusion like those described by Vitruvius, in the scenic decorations (Fig. 9). What was intended to overwhelm the beholder was not the temple on its landscape background nor the work of architecture in its geometrical perfection. But it was through the impressive sight brought about by means of its towering prospect of build-

<sup>20</sup> From the earliest times, a preference for the right side as being just the right one on a functional as well as on the moral level, as opposed to the left or sinister one can be observed in many relations. As far as visual perception is concerned, it seems to have been the case up to the period when reading ability had become a wide-spread capacity among the socially higher ranging people, a fact that can be deduced from visual art and architecture.





Fig. 9. The Parthenon seen from the Propylaea, in an oblique view to the right.

ing elements, columns, capitals, architraves etc. emerging above the enclosure wall and silhouetted against the sky in the same manner as in the later illusionist prospects of Pompeian wall decorations, painted as if seen through highly placed window openings (Fig. 10).

As time passed, the organization of the approaching road underwent a change. So, in the large Hellenistic temple complexes, like the Asklepios sanctuary at Kos or the Athena Lindos at Rhodes, not to mention the Fortuna Sanctuary of Preneste, the plastical objectness of the Classical temple was subdued in favour of a more pictorial totality to be experienced preferably from below upwards. In this way the building complex with its stairs, ramps, and colonnades would present itself as unfolding towards the beholder though not in plastical protrusion as in the oblique view, but as a harmonious balanced image of sight centered around an optical axis not unlike the Pompeian villa prospects.<sup>21</sup> This harmony, however, is but an optical illusion having little or no foundation in a

similar system of lay-out. It should be remarked, incidentally, that the flattening-out of plastical object to image of sight, which seems to take place from Classical to Hellenistic time, might, according to what I have stated earlier, be symptomatic of the increasing distrust in the world of senses as being sheer illusion in contrast to the true reality of the intelligible existence.

It was not for man, then, to get lost in the view of far horizons, but on the contrary, the object was to present itself to the beholder approaching, forming the perfect point of attraction for his moving eyes.

But how, one may ask in conclusion, did these people see and perceive their natural surroundings,

<sup>21</sup> To Kähler 1949, as an adept of the Vienna-School of art history, cf. n. 1, this change is due to the innate difference between Greek and Roman mind. To me it is to be connected with the change in the concept of reality, which might be seen as characterizing the alteration of mentality from the Greek to the Hellenistic culture, cf. furthermore, Bek 1993.

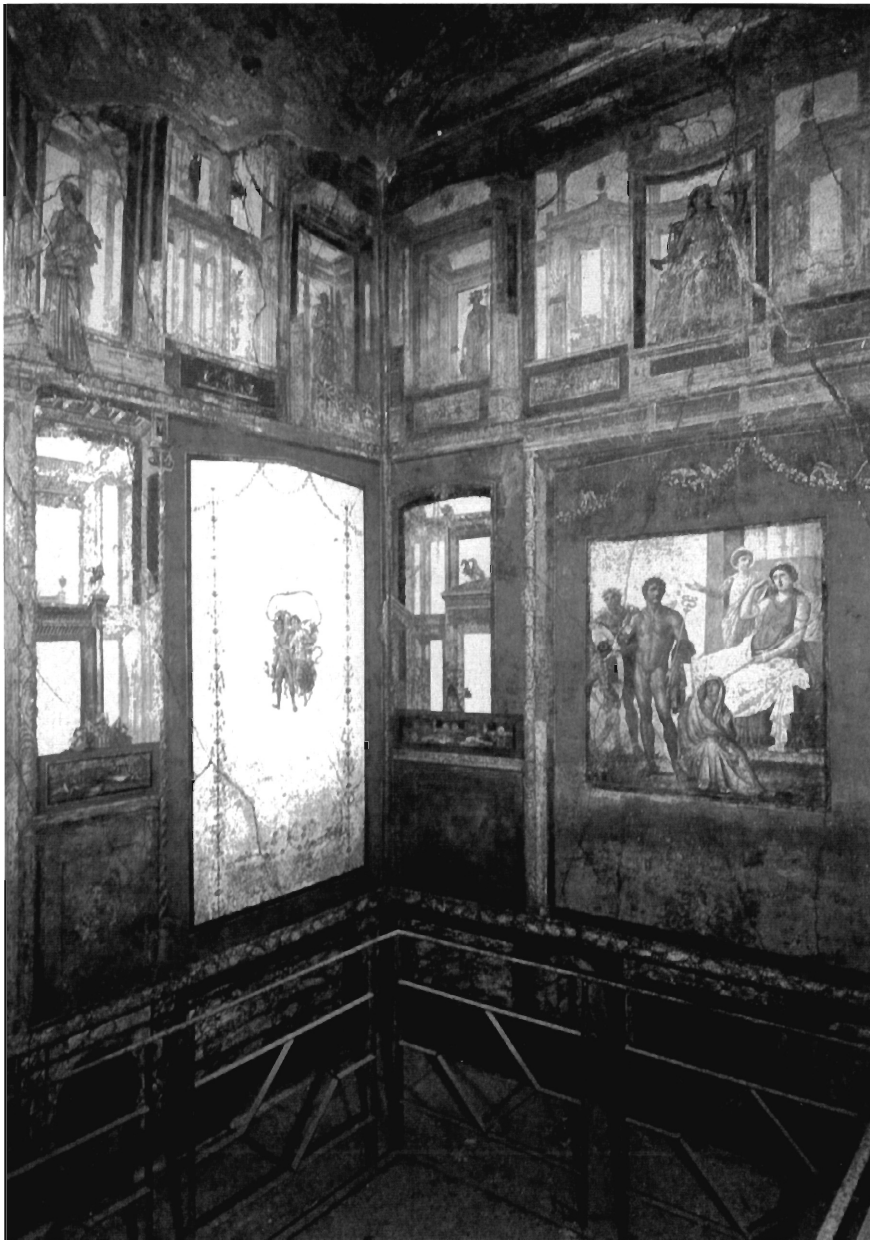


Fig. 10. Illusionistic window with architectonic prospect from wall decoration in 2<sup>nd</sup> Pompeian style.

when there was no architecture to determine it functionally and to qualify it aesthetically? From the visual theory of Euclidean optics as well as from the still standing architectonic remains situated in landscape it is to be assumed that also in landscape in itself a distinction was made between objects and non-objects, the former, perhaps, further selected for having a specific function or meaning. The ocean of space lying between these selected points like the reflecting sea between the islands has been neglected as having no precision or no existence at all. So the view of the surround-

ings might be likened to the Vitruvian motif catalogue, and like his motifs the mountain peak, the domed island or huge tree was silhouetted as more or less planar images on the vertical field of vision, each forming its own cone of sight all of which to be assembled in the beholder's eye. And not unlikely, it seems, either that these elements were recognized, at the same time, for their sacred or other symbolic meaning, a function which made them, with all probability, remote ancestors of the fictional topia in Roman art.

It was upon these singular and significant objects

that the wanderer fixed his eye for orientation when strolling about the countryside and it was the solid forms of capes and islands, cliffs and rocks that made up the fix-points for the sailor, when using his navigation instruments. And what, in the end, made these objects worthy to be seen was not so much their aesthetic quality as their functional meaning which did qualify them aesthetically, too. But of landscape as a totality to be perceived visually, or conceived of as an aesthetic category, there was no notion. To this kind of idealization of landscape one might, from an aesthetical point of view, as a concluding remark, add the following notes.

As it seems beyond questioning that the Tuscan poet Francesco Petrararch was the first one ever to describe in words his natural surroundings in terms of spatial extension, probably, he was no less a primer in comprehending them as landscape in the sense of a visually perceptible totality.<sup>22</sup> This is confirmed, so it seems, by the fact that Petrararch's statement on the phenomenon was a negative one since, evidently, it did not match his hitherto visual experiencing, based as it was upon Euclidean optics and disposed, consequently, to spell out only the objects of significance to be disclosed to the view. So seen standing on top of the Mount Saint Ventoux near Avignon, the poet caught sight not of the Provencal plain, but of the mountain massifs and winding river bordering its area of space.

About a couple of centuries later, however, in the age of Louis of France, le Roi de Soleil, landscape had become firmly institutionalized as the ideal backdrop to men of classically cultivated society, as well as to the painted figures of ancient mythology to perform upon, the Greek landscape seems to have been far beyond reach of the Europeans. So landscape painters like Nicholas Poussin, Claude Lorrain, and others invented their own pseudo-arcade, based, to be true on the conception of the Roman authors of Antiquity, but with the gentle Roman Campagna of the actual days as their visual model. It was, moreover, to these depictions of a serene, idealized nature that, in the ages to come, the widely favoured mode of landscape gardening found its point of departure.<sup>23</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, now, when the Hellenistic concept of the sublime was, again, turned into the aes-

thetic doctrine as opposed to the classical code of harmony, one might have expected the Greek landscape to have formed a perfect counterpart to the beauties of the Roman Campagna. And even the more so, since at that time, Greece had become, anew, accessible to foreign visitors after the long years of quasi totally isolation. But by then people of the Romantic era, already, had turned their eyes from the classical ideal of the Mediterranean sphere to the nature and history of their native countries. And so Caspar David Friedrich, to mention but one example, sought sublimity in the homely, Northern mountains, forests, and sea.<sup>24</sup> This had as its consequence; by the way, that the authentic landscapes of Greece did never attain the same renown of universality as had been bestowed, earlier, upon the pseudo Arcadian Roman one. But they remained a local or national charm as witnessed, still in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the writings by Photis Kontoglou.

But maybe there was another reason, still, for this neglect of the Greek landscape. Certainly, it did not fit in, indeed, into the compositional scheme of landscape, so to speak, that had, over time, been developed in European tradition, a scheme of softly sloping mountains, smooth plains, and shadowy trees under a calm blue sky and neatly graduated in fore-, middle-, and background. In comparison to this conventional concept of landscape the Greek and, especially, the Aegean one might have appeared too dissonant in its abrupt contrasting of transparency and opacity in the immense light surface of the sea dotted with the dark signs of tiny rocky islands.

It was these abstract values of a more modern age, so it seems, that inspired the great Danish composer, Carl Nielsen, when, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in his *Helios Overture*, he transposed into music the sun's daily wandering across the deep blue sky of the insular landscape of the Aegean sea.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Bek 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Shepard 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Wedewer 1978.

<sup>25</sup> Carl Nielsen *The Helios-overture*, 1903, Opus no. 17.

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## CORRIGENDUM

In the article by Kristian Jeppesen "A fresh approach to the problems of the Parthenon Frieze" pp. 101-172 a few typing-errors occur, especially in the ancient Greek texts.

A correct version of the article will be found on:

<http://www.diathens.com/Engelskesider/Parthenon%20Frieze.pdf>







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