



Winckelmann had not seen the actual Laocoon statue when he described it as embodying noble simplicity and restraint; his description is consistent with his theory rather than with the sculpture itself. It is true that Winckelmann opened the eyes of Goethe and others to the beauty of Greek art but he was not really visually analytical himself and often lifted artistic dicta from other, less well-received writers. When he wrote his History, he drew on his ancient literary sources, especially rhetorical writers like Cicero and Quintilian, whose rhetorical styles serve as models for his categories of sculptural styles.

Winckelmann saw the high bloom of Greek art as very short (from about Pericles to Alexander), owing much to Pliny the statement about Greek art collapsing around 296BC. Winckelmann thus links artistic style to political liberty (especially as reflected in the rhetorical writers of antiquity). From Cicero and Quintilian he gets his praise of 5th century Athens, but from Pliny he gets his view of the 4th century beauty of the work of Lysippus (sculptor) and Apelles (painter). But this presented a problem in linking political liberty with flourishing art, since Lysippus was court sculptor for Alexander. Winckelmann thus argues that Greece fell onto hard times after the death of Alexander because, under Macedonian rule, even though political liberty may have been gone, there was still order and lack of strife.

Dionysos of Halicarnassus gave support for timetable of corruption of eloquence, especially in comparison with Pliny the schema on the development of art. The influence of rhetorical development colored the analysis of artistic development; discovery of Hellenic and Asiatic schools of art was similar to the topos of regional styles marked by a single major figure. But artistic schema are more suited to rhetoric than to visual art; Lysippus and Apelles seem to get their prominence largely from the association with Alexander the Great, whose death also marks the end of rhetorical excellence. The Hellenistic style was considered inferior; Alexander had died, so art and rhetoric had to die also.

reliance on his literary sources poses a problem: did these writers present art or themselves interpret it? The division of the schools of rhetoric in day into Attic, Asiatic and Rhodian may not have reflected a real practice but rather only a pigeon-holing as the ancients tried to make sense of a field by fitting in pieces as they saw it (not necessarily) as it actually was).

prose is so convincing that it sweeps you along. Of course, his contemporaries generally did not see the originals. His descriptions are stunning pieces, but they are a playing out