

Hidden Cultural Heritage: Antiquity in the University of Copenhagen

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This project invites the public to experience the frescoes in the entrance hall of the University of Copenhagen. They will get an insight into how antiquity was perceived by people in the 1800’s and used by the University to inspire students and public alike who visited the halls of the University. Most importantly, everyone will get a chance to share their thoughts and feelings about the frescoes and compare them to voices from the 19th century.

Background

The frescoes were both praised and dispraised when they were unveiled to the Danish public in 1853-55. Some saw them as educational, inspiring the public with the virtues of Classical Greek culture. Some thought the frescoes failed to convey the underlying *idea* or criticized the utilization of Greek instead of Norse mythology.

Method

I sent out a questionnaire on the seven frescoes asking:

- What do you think about the paintings?
- What do you think the paintings depict?
- Who do you think the people are in the paintings?

Results

Most responses were either conceptual or associative, rarely both. Some participants identified Gods like Athena, Apollo, Zeus, and Poseidon, some guessed based on Greco-Roman pantheons and mythologies, others associated the content with biblical motifs.

The interplay between nude and clothed persons in the frescoes were commented upon by several but the interpretations varied. Some associated the naked Prometheus and Poseidon with strength and triumph, others perceived the clothed Athena as grandiose and powerful. Athena was also seen as androgynous, but male coded due to her helmet and spear.

Words like justice, wisdom, knowledge, virtue, purity were often used.



Athena and Poseidon competing



Prometheus sculpting man and Athena giving it soul.



Marsyas and Apollo in musical contest

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