

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2010 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 3

Left image: *Saint Michael the Archangel*, right leaf of an ivory diptych, early sixth century C.E.
Right image: Blank

3. The work shown is a sixth-century ivory relief depicting Saint Michael the Archangel.

Which elements tie the work to the Classical tradition? Which elements deviate from the Classical tradition? (5 minutes)

Background:

This question asks students to discuss ways in which this panel is a transitional work demonstrating a shift from the more naturalistic Classical tradition of Greco-Roman antiquity to increasingly abstracted approaches commonly utilized in the Byzantine art of the Early Middle Ages. In shifting power away from Rome to the Eastern Mediterranean and establishing a Christian empire, Byzantium (renamed Constantinople) played a central role in both maintaining continuity and initiating contrast with the Classical tradition. This ivory panel exemplifies both stylistic and iconographic links with, and deviations from, Classical tradition, illustrating the complexity and fluidity of this transition from the Classical world to the medieval world.

Measuring nearly a foot-and-a-half in height, the panel was originally the right leaf of a diptych, as evidenced by the three hinge holes on the left extremity of the border. It appears to have been carved in the Eastern Christian (Byzantine) Empire, as revealed through the Greek inscription at the top (“✚ receive these gifts . . .”). Beneath the inscription, the archangel is likely offering an orb of Christian triumph to a figure on the lost left leaf of the diptych, as suggested by the inscription’s reference to the reception of gifts (either spiritual or material). The high quality of carving and the strong vestiges of the Classical style suggest that the panel may have been carved in Constantinople, with that city’s tendency toward the cosmopolitan sophistication frequently associated with the Byzantine court during the early sixth-century apogee under the rule of the emperor Justinian.

Students are most likely to address ties to and deviations from the Classical tradition in stylistic and/or iconographic terms. In terms of style, continuity with the Classical tradition is apparent through visual features such as the figure’s drapery, stance and poise. The flowing drapery of the toga, revealing the body’s mass beneath, is consistent with the Classical tradition, as is the relatively naturalistic proportion of the figure’s body. The figure stands in a relaxed pose that vaguely suggests contrapposto, with a sense of calm and grace redolent of Classical ideals of mental and physical balance, illustrating what art historian Ernst Kitzinger termed the “perennial Hellenism” visible in Byzantine art. Strong stylistic continuity with Classical notions of beauty is evidenced by the idealized, classicizing features of the figure, as well as the detailed, feathered wings. Comparison could be made with the profoundly classicizing late fourth-century ivory panel of the diptych of the Nicomachi and Symmachi.

In terms of iconography, continuity with the Classical tradition is apparent through the appropriation of a pagan personification of victory. This translation into a Christian context would seem intentional, as it alludes to triumphant Christianity, thereby fashioning an archangelic figure that simultaneously suggests a continuation of imperial Roman tradition while recasting it as an adamantly Christianized Rome. Also, the placement of the figure in an arcuated setting that visually alludes to a niche derives from Classical (particularly Late Roman) images. The architectural motifs utilize a Classical vocabulary — composite capitals surmounting fluted columns that rest atop plinths, as well as the use of rosettes and foliate *rinceau* motifs. The orb and staff held by the saint and the circular laurel wreath above his head, denoting triumph, are derived from Greco-Roman Classical images of power or victory.

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Question 3 (continued)

Deviation from the Classical tradition is visible, albeit more subtle. Decreased interest in naturalistic consistency and clarity of spatial arrangements can be seen in the ambiguous relationship between the figure and the architectural setting. Although the feet are positioned against receding steps, they seem to hover above the surface as opposed to anchoring the figure's weight. The wings, arms and staff are placed in front of columns that appear to align with the lower terminus of the steps. This spatial ambiguity is inconsistent with Classical interest in naturalistic clarity. The lack of attention to such spatial consistency helps concentrate attention on the conceptual, iconographic significance of the image. Additionally, the discrepancy between the scale of the figure and the architectural setting reduces the adherence to naturalism while concentrating attention on the more conceptually significant figure of the triumphant archangel by utilizing essentially anti-Classical, albeit subtle, hierarchical scale. To illustrate this change, we might compare the St. Michael ivory relief with the high relief showing the arrival of the spoils of Jerusalem in Rome, portrayed on the Arch of Titus on the Via Sacra leading to the Roman Forum, and the more stylized and abstracted Consular Diptych of Anastasius c. 517. This ivory plaque depicting St. Michael mediates between these two poles, illustrating its particular standing as a transitional image from Classical to medieval aesthetic approaches.

Iconographic deviation or change from pagan Classicism is most clearly manifest in the overt references to Christianity. The placement of the cross within the laurel wreath announces that this triumphant imagery is now decidedly Christian. The adamancy of the new Christian content of the work is also visible in the cross-capped orb that the archangel holds in his right hand, symbolizing Christian triumph over the world. Furthermore, the fact that the inscription begins with the symbol of the cross introduces the specifically Christian intent of both the image and text.

The transitional nature of Late Antiquity, with one foot still in the Late Classical world and one foot in the burgeoning medieval world (specifically, the Byzantine Empire), is particularly cogent here in terms of its political implications. In asserting its legitimacy as the heir to the Roman Empire, the Byzantine court linked itself to Classical Antiquity. Constantine's founding of the capital city of Constantinople in 324 as the "New Rome" boldly proclaimed both the continuity of the Roman tradition and the notion that there was something new about this assertion of antique imperial authority. While notions of triumphant imperial continuity most markedly asserted this link to Roman tradition, the ascent of Christianity within the Roman world palpably signified the transition from pagan antiquity to what could be termed the Christian Middle Ages. The Byzantine Empire served as the Christian continuation of the Roman Empire. Works such as this ivory plaque reveal how elements of Classicism were utilized to present and legitimize, or at least aggrandize, Christian content.

Characteristics of the work that tie it to the Classical tradition:

- Flowing drapery of the toga, revealing the body's mass beneath.
- The relatively naturalistic proportion of the figure's body.
- The figure's relaxed pose that vaguely suggests contrapposto.
- The figure's idealized, classicizing features and calm poise and grace, suggesting mental and physical balance.
- The classically stylized coiffure.
- The figure's derivation from a pagan personification of victory.
- Placement of the figure in an arcuated setting that visually alludes to a classicizing niche.
- Carefully detailed, naturalistic, feathered wings.
- Classical architectural motifs — composite capitals surmounting fluted columns that rest atop plinths, as well as the use of rosettes and foliate *rinceau* motifs.
- Symbolic objects denoting triumph — the staff, the orb and the circular laurel wreath above the saint's head — derive from Greco-Roman iconography of victory.

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Question 3 (continued)

Characteristics of the work that deviate from the Classical tradition:

- An ambiguous relationship between the figure and the architectural setting.
- The feet are placed on the steps that extend into the picture plane, but they seem to hover above the surface of the steps as opposed to anchoring the figure's weight upon the steps.
- The wings, arms and staff placed in front of the columns that appear to align with the lower terminus of the steps.
- Discrepancy in the scale of the figure and the architectural setting (utilizing subtle but anti-Classical hieratic scale).
- The figure's unnatural stance and lack of true contrapposto, although it is vaguely suggested.
- Overt references to Christianity, particularly the cross within the laurel wreath and the cross-capped orb that the archangel holds.
- The symbol of the cross, introducing the specifically Christian intent of the image and text.
- Flattening and attention to pattern that could be read as stylized.

Students have two tasks:

- (1) They must identify elements of the work that tie it to the Classical tradition.
- (2) They must identify elements of the work that deviate from the Classical tradition.

Although they are given the date of the work, students are **not** asked to specifically address this as a **transitional work** of Late Antiquity; however, this phenomenon of **continuity and change** is at the heart of the question. Better responses will discuss both the continuity of Classical stylistic and iconographic elements and the ways in which these elements morphed to serve the new Christian context of the nascent Middle Ages.

Weaker responses will simply describe the work without offering substantive, clear discussion of the elements of the work that both tie it to the Classical tradition and deviate from it.

Points to remember:

- Students are given the date of the work but are **not** asked to specifically address this as a **transitional work** of Late Antiquity or to specifically discuss the Late Antique transition from the Classical world to the Middle Ages.
- The intent of the question is for students to address **continuity and change**.
- Students are **not** required to discuss both stylistic and iconographic elements.
- The question may be addressed as a style question and/or an iconography question.
- Students are given the subject and medium of the work.
- This is a 5-minute question.

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Question 3 (continued)

Scoring Criteria

Score Scale 0–4

- 4** Identifies elements of the work that are tied to the Classical tradition **and** that deviate from the Classical tradition. Discussion is full, clear and without significant errors.
- 3** Identifies elements of the work that are tied to the Classical tradition **and** that deviate from the Classical tradition. Discussion is less full, may contain errors and/or may be unbalanced.
- 2** Identifies an element of the work that is tied to the Classical tradition **and** an element of the work that deviates from the Classical tradition but does so with little clarity. Discussion may be weak and contain errors.
- OR**
Identifies elements of the work that are tied to the Classical tradition **or** that deviate from the Classical tradition. Discussion may be weak and contain errors.
- Note: The highest score an essay can earn if it does not identify both elements of the work that are tied to the Classical tradition and elements that deviate from the Classical tradition is a 2.**
- 1** Identifies an element of the work that is tied to the Classical tradition **or** that deviates from the Classical tradition. Discussion may be weak and contain significant errors.
- 0** Makes an attempt, but the response is without merit or makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements.
- This is a nonresponse, such as a blank paper, crossed-out words or personal notes.

ART HISTORY
SECTION II—Part B

Time—1 hour

7 Questions

Directions: The questions in this part are based on color images and/or text. The corresponding images are shown in the green insert. Each question is timed separately, as indicated by the length of time noted after each question. The proctor will announce when the time for each question has elapsed, but you may proceed freely from one question to the next. You must answer each question on the lined pages in this booklet.

Read the questions carefully and take time to think about what the questions ask. Formulate your answers before you begin to write. You can receive full credit only by directly answering the questions.

Note: For questions involving two images, when you are not asked specifically to name the artists and/or titles of the works, you may refer to the work on the left as (L) and the work on the right as (R).

3. The work shown is a sixth-century ivory relief depicting Saint Michael the Archangel.

Which elements tie the work to the Classical tradition? Which elements deviate from the Classical tradition?
(5 minutes)

This relief sculpture was created in a transitional period in which art moved away from classical influence to strictly Christian. Still remaining of classical forms are the soft drapery and fleshy face. The background columns and arch are also Roman. However, the subject is Christian. It depicts an angel holding a orb and cross and there is a halo with a cross above her head. Her feet also float unnaturally, similar to that of Byzantine art.

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ART HISTORY
SECTION II—Part B
Time—1 hour
7 Questions

3B

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Which elements tie the work to the Classical tradition? Which elements deviate from the Classical tradition?
(5 minutes)

I. Classical	non-classical
self-contained, emotionless face	representation of space — feet on the steps like he is floating
free flowing draperies	

The sixth century ivory relief carving depicting Saint Michael the Archangel exhibits both classical and non-classical stylistic conventions. The ~~subject~~ subject shows a self-contained, emotionless face typical of classic Greek statuary. He also has the appearance of the clinging wet draperies. A non-classical representation of space is seen as his feet span over the space of three steps giving the sense of floating.

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ART HISTORY
SECTION II—Part B

30

Time—1 hour

7 Questions

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3. The work shown is a sixth-century ivory relief depicting Saint Michael the Archangel.

Which elements tie the work to the Classical tradition? Which elements deviate from the Classical tradition?
(5 minutes)

The Saint Michael the Archangel relief consists of Early Christian and Byzantine elements that derived from ancient Greek and Roman sculpture. Saint Michael holds an orb and a cross which dates back to traditional Christian elements used in Constantine's Roman rule. ~~the~~ ~~the~~ Saint Michael's drapery consists of the same wavy folds as the one's first seen in ~~Greek~~ Greek sculptures. The detail of ~~the~~ the wings are also based of the elements of the Greek Nike of Simothrace in which she ~~is~~ ~~has~~ ~~had~~ broad extended wings.

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2010 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 3

Overview

This question asked students to discuss the ways in which the work shown is a transitional piece of Late Antiquity, demonstrating a shift from the more naturalistic Classical tradition of Greco-Roman antiquity to increasingly abstracted approaches commonly utilized in the Early Middle Ages, in this case Byzantine art. In particular, the question assessed the ability of students to recognize shifts and continuity in style and imagery to underscore the fluidity of the transition from the Classical to the medieval worlds.

Sample: 3A

Score: 4

The student observes that the relief was created in a period of transition from Classical to Christian art and connects the work to the Byzantine tradition. In noting that stylistic elements are “remaining” from Classical tradition, the essay reveals an understanding that the Classical elements are precedent. While not overly specific, comments about “soft drapery” and a “fleshy face” connote the naturalism of cloth folds and skin. The student notes that the arcuated columns are Roman. In terms of deviation from the Classical tradition, the student observes the Christian subject, specifically pointing out the orb with cross that the angel holds. Regarding style, the observation that the “feet also float unnaturally” reveals an understanding that this deviates from the naturalism commonly visible in the Classical tradition. For clearly articulating stylistic and iconographic elements that both connect with and deviate from Classical tradition, this essay earned a score of 4.

Sample: 3B

Score: 3

The student observes elements that both tie to and deviate from the Classical tradition. Noting that the figure “shows a self-contained, emotionless face typical of classic Greek statuary,” the essay reveals an understanding of the emotional calm and balance discernible in works of the Classical tradition and how these are employed in the figure of the angel in this relief. The “clinging wet draperies” are also related to the Classical tradition of drapery that reveals the body’s form. Observing that the feet extend over several steps, “giving the sense of floating,” the essay reveals an understanding that this deviates from Classical traditions of naturalism. For noting stylistic features that both tie to and deviate from the Classical tradition, albeit with an imbalance in favor of the former, this essay earned a score of 3.

Sample: 3C

Score: 2

The student observes that the orb with a cross held by the angel connects the image to Early Christian and Byzantine traditions. While explaining that this harkens back to Constantinian imagery, the essay is unclear as to which images. Noting that the figure wears drapery that “consists of the same wavy folds . . . seen in Greek sculptures,” the student articulates a stylistic tie to the Classical tradition. The “detail of the wings” is compared to that on the Nike of Samothrace, but the discussion has little clarity. For identifying one iconographic feature that deviates from the Classical tradition and one stylistic trait that connects to the Classical tradition, this essay earned a score of 2.