It is remarkable that the image of Kairos (L. Occasio), opportune time or the propitious moment, never fell into the oblivion that obscured other classical personifications of time-concepts in the literature and art of the Middle Ages. The theoretical concept of irreversible time, its ephemeral-ity and volatility, and the flight of the expedient or decisive moment, had crystallized in antiquity into the personified image of Kairos. Its message, however, was not evanescent and elusive, for it conveyed the idea that one could grasp the expedient moment and thus counteract the ruinous course of time. A decisive impetus in promoting the transition of Kairos from antiquity was the facility of adapting its allegorical imagery to Christian moralization and didactic iconography. By the early Renaissance humanists had resuscitated the literary sources that described and interpreted the classical image, and by the sixteenth century the personification of Kairos, restored in its authentic Greco-Roman form with accumulated moralistic appendages, was restructured into contemporary contexts with humanistic, political and moral implications.

Lysippos and the Classical Literary Tradition

The famous bronze statue of Kairos (ca. 350 B.C.), now lost, was created by the sculptor Lysippos and placed near the Agora of Sikyon. A later epigram by Posidippos (3rd c. B.C.), set forth as a dialogue between a spectator and the statue, was said to be carved on the statue's base:

1 According to Pausanius (2nd c. A.D.), an altar of Kairos, described in mythology as the youngest divine child of Zeus, was located near the stadium at Olympia beside that of Hermes of the Games, Periegesis (Guide to Greece, V.14.9). It has been suggested that the statue was related to the agon—the athletic contests or Olympic games; see Debra Hawhee, Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece, Austin, 2005, 65–78. For other interpretations of the statue and epigrams, and literature regarding Kairos, see Évelyne Prioux, Regards Alexandrins, Leuven, 2007, 214–224, 240–43.
Who and whence was the sculptor? From Sikyon. And his name? Lysippus. And who are you? Time who subdues all things. Why do you stand on tip toe? I am ever running. And why have you a pair of wings on your feet? I fly with the wind. And why do you hold a razor in your right hand? As a sign to men that I am sharper than any sharp edge. And why does your hair hang over your face? For him who meets me to take me by the forelock. And why, in heaven’s name, is the back of your head bald? Because none of whom I have once raced by on my winged feet will now, though he wishes it sore, take hold of me from behind. Why did the artist fashion you? For your sake, stranger, and he set me up in the porch as a lesson.²

The Greek and Latin literary tradition of *Kairos/Occasio* continually emphasized and expounded the moralistic connotations of the prosopopaeic image.³ Although it has been suggested that the allegorical meanings described by Posidippos were not intended by the sculptor, who was famous as a sculptor of athletes,⁴ modern authors have generally accepted the allegorical interpretation.⁵ Copies in marble, interpretive descriptions and eulogies seem to have proliferated from the time of Lysippus. About 700 years later, in the 4th c. A.D. the Greek rhetorician Callistratus was still emphasizing the temporal metaphors and didactic message set forth by Posidippos, as represented in the following passage:

> The wings on his feet, he told us, suggested his swiftness, and that, borne by the seasons, he goes rolling on through all eternity; and as to his youthful beauty, that beauty is always opportune and that Kairos is the only artificer of beauty, whereas that of which the beauty has withered has no part in the nature of Kairos; he also explained that the lock of hair on his forehead indicated that while he is easy to catch as he approaches, yet, when he has passed by, the moment of action has likewise expired, and that, if Kairos is neglected, it cannot be recovered."⁶

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⁵ Jerome Jordan Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, Cambridge, 1986, 54, suggested the statue was “a personal artistic credo” of the artist expressing the idea that “art dealt with temporal and ephemeral things”.