Chapter 3
Portraits of the Gods

Relatively few figures in ancient narrative scenes are identified by inscriptions. Rather, context and attributes, such as dress, objects carried, accompanying animals and physical appearance are the usual means of identification. The identity of many heroes is clear from context, but gods and goddesses are sometimes only bystanders in heroic scenes. Thus the members of the divine family and their entourage need to be introduced here with their attributes.

In the main band encircling the François Vase a procession of deities approaches the house of Peleus to celebrate his marriage to Thetis. Almost exactly the same scene appears on an Attic black-figure dinos from a decade or so earlier signed by the painter Sophilos, and fragments of another dinos from the Acropolis show that he painted the scene more than once.[**1**, **8**, **34**] These are the first 'family portraits' of the gods and goddesses in Greek art. Since almost all of the figures are named in both Sophilos' and Kleitias' depictions of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, these scenes serve as appropriate starting points for our introductions. The myth of the wedding itself is discussed in Chapter 9.

34 Attic black-figure dinos signed by Sophilos. Top, Wedding of Peleus and Thetis. Below, animal friezes and lotus-palmette chains. *c*. 580. 71 cm (28 in.) with stand

An obvious distinction is made on both vases between the lesser figures who walk and the grander ones who ride in chariots. At the front of each procession is a group of those on foot, the chariots follow, and at the very end are Hephaistos on his mule and the fish-bodied Okeanos. Various figures on foot accompany the chariots as well.

Iris leads the procession in her role as herald or messenger. She is the female counterpart of Hermes and shares some of his attributes. Both of them regularly carry a kerykeion, or herald's staff. In early art it is shown as a cleft stick, then as a staff with an open figure of eight at the top; later it sometimes ends in facing snake-heads, and in Roman art it becomes the caduceus. On Sophilos' vase, Iris wears boots with wings at the front which are also often worn by Hermes in Archaic art. Boots depicted on black-figure vases often have a flap at the front quite similar in shape to these wings; however, they should only be called wings when the feathers are clearly indicated as they are here. Iris only rarely appears in 6th-century art, but she does appear on 5th- and 4th-century Attic and South Italian red-figure vases where she sometimes has wings on her back and can easily be confused with Nike (Victory). She also appears on the west pediment of the Parthenon attending Poseidon and perhaps as the winged attendant of Hera on the east frieze.

On both vases, a group of women without attributes follow on foot not far behind Iris. On the François Vase they are Hestia, Chariklo and Demeter. For Sophilos they are Hestia, Demeter, Chariklo and Leto.

These are two rare appearances of Hestia in ancient art. She has little mythology and almost no iconography. Likewise, these are two of the few appearances of Chariklo, the wife of the centaur Chiron, and she, too, has no attributes. He, on the other hand, is easily recognized. On the François Vase he walks with Iris, on Sophilos' vase he is a bit further back in the procession, but on both he carries a branch over his shoulder with animals hanging from it. He is a civilized centaur and wears a chitoniskos (a short tunic) on his wholly human body which is attached at the rump to the chest and hind legs of a horse. Unlike other centaurs, he often wears a cloak of some sort and his front legs are sometimes human. He is discussed in Chapter 9 as Achilles' tutor.

The inclusion of Demeter in this group of minor figures is, at first thought, surprising since she is certainly a major deity in Classical Athens. Before the middle of the 6th century, however, she only

occasionally appears in Greek art, and then only in groups of deities on Attic vases. From the late 6th century she appears more and more frequently on Attic vases with her daughter Persephone (Kore) and with the Eleusinian prince Triptolemos, who sits on his wheeled throne about to leave on his mission to teach agriculture to mortals, a subject that continues to be popular in Athens through the 5th century, and in South Italy on through the 4th.[35] Since vase-painters seldom indicate a woman's age, it is often difficult to distinguish Demeter from her daughter in these scenes. On the 5th-century vases they both often hold torches and wear crowns, on some they hold sceptres and stalks of grain. In a famous mid-5th-century relief from Eleusis, Demeter has a sceptre, Persephone a torch, while on the east frieze of the Parthenon it is Demeter seated between Dionysos and Ares who holds the torch.[36]

35 Attic red-figure skyphos by Makron. Departure of Triptolemos. The Eleusinian prince, holding stalks of grain in one hand and a phiale in the other, sits on a wheeled throne with wings. Persephone stands in front of him with a torch and an oinochoe about to pour into his phiale. Behind her is the nymph Eleusis, and behind Triptolemos is Demeter holding a torch and stalks of grain. The bearded snake (a motif borrowed from Egypt) is a decorative device on the throne. *c*. 480. 21 cm (8⅜ in.)

36 Marble relief from Eleusis. Triptolemos (?) between Demeter with a sceptre and Persephone with a long torch. Demeter gives something to the youth (probably ears of corn added in gold or bronze) and the scene is probably the departure of Triptolemos. *c*. 430. 2.20 m (86⅝ in.)

Demeter may also be the goddess holding torches in depictions of deities accompanying a wedded pair in a chariot, a scene that appears on Attic black-figure vases during the second half of the 6th century. However, it is not safe to assume that all women with torches are Demeter or Persephone. On an Attic red-figure krater from shortly after the middle of the 5th century, Hekate holds torches as Hermes leads Persephone from the underworld to Demeter who holds a sceptre.[37]

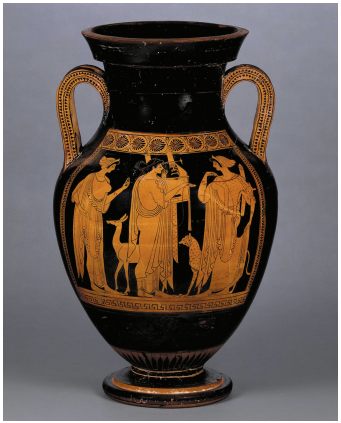
37 Attic red-figure bell-krater. Hekate with torches leads Persephone accompanied by Hermes with his kerykeion and petasos from the underworld while Demeter, holding a sceptre, waits. Inscriptions identifiy all of the figures. *c*. 440. 41 cm (16¼ in.)

Demeter is named as the goddess without attributes who mounts a chariot on an Attic black-figure hydria from *c*. 525, and on a slightly earlier amphora she holds stalks of grain as she mounts a chariot in the presence of Triptolemos and others. Unnamed goddesses often mount chariots on Attic vases from the last quarter of the 6th century, but it is not safe to name them without the presence of an attribute or an inscription.

Demeter's appearance in art of the 6th and 5th centuries is limited almost exclusively to Attica and her popularity as a subject after the middle of the 6th century is certainly connected with the increased importance of the Eleusinian mysteries in Athens, fostered by the tyrant Peisistratos. But for both Sophilos and Kleitias, she is not yet a goddess deserving special attention.

Leto, the fourth in the group of women without attributes on Sophilos' vase, is not part of the group in Kleitias' version. In fact, Leto does not appear anywhere in what survives of the procession on the François Vase, though she may well have ridden in a missing chariot with Apollo. He was surely included and Hermes rides with his mother Maia, rather than with Apollo as on Sophilos' vase.

Leto never has attributes. Thus, she can only be recognized by an inscription or through her association with her children, Apollo and Artemis. She may sometimes be the goddess mounting a chariot in the presence of Apollo and Artemis. She is certainly the woman between Apollo with his kithara and Artemis with her bow on the mid-6th-century metope from Selinus and she is probably one of the two women who often flank the god with his kithara on a large number of Attic vases from the second half of the 6th through the 5th century. Unless Artemis carries her bow, it is not possible to distinguish her from her mother in these scenes.[38]



38 Attic red-figure amphora from Vulci. Leto with a flower stands behind Apollo, who plays his kithara and faces his sister, Artemis, who wears the skin of a feline and a quiver hanging at her back. A deer and a panther accompany them. *c*. 500. 62 cm (24 ½ in.)

One of the few myths in which Leto plays a significant, if passive, role is the death of Tityos. Though there are several versions of the story, the one illustrated in ancient art is always the same. Tityos was a monstrous son of Gaia (Earth) by Zeus. On seeing Leto he was overcome by desire and tried to rape her. As he carried her off she called to her children for help and they killed him. Odysseus later sees the huge body of Tityos stretched out in the underworld where an eagle attacks his liver. One of the earliest depictions of the story is on metopes from Paestum dated to the middle of the 6th century. On one metope Tityos, waving a club, carries off Leto, on another Apollo and Artemis pursue with drawn bows. The myth is also the subject of several Attic black-figure vases roughly contemporary with the metopes, where Gaia is shown trying to save her son. The myth is the subject on a Caeretan hydria from the last quarter of the 6th century and on a few Attic red-figure vases from the first half of the 5th.[39]

39 Attic red-figure amphora by Phintias, from Vulci. Rape of Leto. Tityos lifts Leto off the ground as Apollo tries to restrain him and Artemis gesticulates. Apollo's bow and quiver hang behind him; Artemis carries a bow and arrow. *c*. 510. 60 cm (23⅝ in.)

On both vases, Dionysos walks alone behind the group of women. He is an outsider, as we have already seen in the Return of Hephaistos frieze. On both, he carries a branch of a grape vine, but on the François Vase he also carries a large amphora on his shoulder. These clearly identify him as the god associated with wine, but they are not his canonical attributes in Archaic and Classical art. The cult of Dionysos only became an important one in Athens around the middle of the 6th century, probably as a result of policies of Peisistratos, and both vases must pre-date that development.

Dionysos is one of the most frequent subjects on Attic vases from the middle of the 6th century on through the 4th, though the vast majority of the scenes have no clear narrative content. His attributes are a drinking vessel (a drinking horn or a kantharos) and an ivy wreath. Satyrs and nymphs or maenads are his regular companions, as discussed in Chapter 2, and the ithyphallic mule is his mount. From late in the 6th century the thyrsos, a long fennel stalk crowned with ivy-leaves, is often carried by maenads and sometimes by the god himself. Snakes and panthers sometimes accompany him.

In Attic vase-paintings from the 6th and most of the 5th centuries, Dionysos is bearded and is almost always clothed in a chiton and himation. Then suddenly around 430 a new, beardless Dionysos appears and this half-naked, effeminate youth is the god who usually appears in 4th-century art.[**40**, **41**]

40 Attic black-figure amphora. Bearded Dionysos with a kantharos in front of a grape vine between a maenad and a satyr. c. 510. 39 cm (15⅜ in.)

41 Attic red-figure pelike from Camiros. Dionysos with a thyrsos seated between a satyr and a maenad leaning on a tympanum and holding a thyrsos. *c*. 340. 42.5 cm (16¾ in.)

The early iconography of Dionysos is probably an invention of Attic vase-painters. He rarely appears on Corinthian vases, though he did appear on the Chest of Kypselos, bearded and fully clothed reclining in a cave. He never appears on Laconian vases; the earliest East Greek depictions of him are later than the earliest Attic and give him similar attributes. He appears on a few Chalcidian vases and, as already shown, in the Return of Hephaistos on Caeretan hydriai. The beardless Dionysos with Ariadne is popular with South Italian vase-painters throughout the 4th century.

Around 530, a coinage was produced at Naxos in Sicily with the bearded, ivy-wreathed head of Dionysos on the obverse and a grape cluster on the reverse, which was later replaced by a squatting satyr. [**42**] As in vase-painting, the traditional bearded head is replaced by a beardless one by around 400. A bearded Dionysos reclining on the back of a mule becomes the coin type of Mende in northern Greece before the middle of the 5th century and is replaced in the 4th by the head of the beardless god.[**43**] However, the head of Dionysos adopted during the last quarter of the 5th century as the coin type of Thebes, Thasos and Sybirita on Crete is the traditional bearded one.

42 Silver drachma from Naxos (Sicily). Dionysos. On the reverse, a grape cluster between two leaves. *c*. 520

43 Silver tetradrachm from Naxos (Sicily). Dionysos. On the reverse, a satyr with a kantharos, ivy sprig and wineskin sits on a wineskin. *c*. 410

Representations of Dionysos in sculpture, though not numerous, follow the same course as those on vases and coins. One of the earliest is probably a colossal unfinished statue of a bearded figure still in a quarry on Naxos dating to the middle of the 6th century, and a bearded head from Ikaria survives from the end of the century. Some Attic seated figures, now headless, may represent Dionysos – one of them from Ikaria certainly does, and another seated on a panther-skin might. He is one of the twelve Olympians on the east frieze of the Parthenon where he is seated, naked to the waist and beardless. He fought a giant on one of the metopes, and he may be the naked reclining figure on the east pediment. At least by the second half of the 4th century a similar figure on the Lysikrates monument in Athens certainly is Dionysos.[**44**]

44 Marble figure from the east pediment of the Parthenon in Athens. Dionysos (?), seated on an animal skin, probably held a kantharos or a thyrsos. *c*. 440

Sophilos includes Hebe, Themis and three nymphs in the group walking ahead of the chariots, while Kleitias includes three Horai. On both vases groups of women on foot accompany the chariots. On the dinos those named are the Charites, Muses and Moirai, on the François Vase they are the Muses (named Kalliope, Ourania, Euterpe, Kleio, Melpomene, Stesichore, Erato and Polymnis) and Moirai.

Nymphs, as already mentioned in Chapter 2, accompany Dionysos on some 6th-century vases. They may also be the women accompanying various goddesses on red-figure vases, but their nature in art is as vaguely defined as it is in literature. Muses are probably the women who stand with Apollo as he plays his kithara on Attic vases (when there are more than two or when they hold musical instruments). They appear on Attic vases after the middle of the 5th century in their contest with the Thracian Thamyras. Though some of them occasionally appear together with various musical instruments and scrolls on Attic and South Italian red-figure vases, the assignment of specific functions to them did not occur until well after the Classical period.[**119**]

The Horai (Seasons) may be the women who sometimes accompany Aphrodite on Attic red-figure vases, and Pausanias (5.11.7) tells that they appeared on Pheidias' throne for his Zeus at Olympia along with the Charites (Graces). Neither group, however, has attributes. The Moirai (Fates) have little or no iconography during our period, nor does Themis, the mother of both the Moirai and Horai.

Hebe appears as the wife of Herakles on an early 6th-century Corinthian aryballos, on a few Attic black- and red-figure vases from the middle of the 6th century to after the middle of the 5th, and on at least one South Italian vase.[**195**] In a different role she is probably the girl attending Hera or Zeus on many Attic red-figure vases from the 5th century, but she has no regular attributes to make her identity clear.[**196**]

The major part of both of the processions is made up of deities in chariots. On both vases Zeus and Hera ride in the first chariot, Poseidon and Amphitrite in the second, Ares and Aphrodite in the third. Sophilos gives none of these figures attributes. Kleitias hides

the occupants of the second and third chariots under a handle, but he gives Zeus an elegant thunderbolt and sceptre.

In Greek art Zeus is almost always depicted as a bearded adult. The one notable exception to this may be on the west pediment of the Temple of Artemis on Corfu, which is roughly contemporary with Sophilos' dinos – there Zeus (if he is Zeus) is a naked, beardless youth attacking a Giant or a Titan with his thunderbolt. But on shield bands in Olympia from the same period, a bearded Zeus attacks a serpent-legged Typhon with the thunderbolt.[**81**] Though the shape of this weapon may vary – sometimes ornate and flower-like, sometimes a simple missile – it is his most common attribute in Archaic and Early Classical art.[**82, 45**] Later he sometimes holds a long sceptre as well as or instead of the bolt, particularly when he is pursuing a beloved. He is sometimes shown with an eagle, and the eagle alternates with the thunderbolt and the figure of Zeus as a coin type for Elis, where Olympia is located.[**46**]

45 Bronze figurine from Dodona. Zeus throwing a thunderbolt. *c*. 470. 13.5 cm (5⅜ in.)

46 Silver stater from Elis. Thunderbolt with laurel wreath. On the obverse (not shown) a head of Zeus. *c*. 420

Several metamorphoses of Zeus are depicted in ancient art. As a bull he carries Europa on his back over the sea to Crete as early as the second half of the 7th century on a fragment of a relief amphora. A similar scene appears on mid-6th-century metopes from Delphi and Selinus, on Caeretan hydriai, on a few Attic black-figure vases from the end of the 6th century, on gems and on many Attic and South Italian red-figure vases on into the 4th century.[47] As a swan he seduces Leda, though the earliest depiction of this encounter was a statue from about 400 (of which copies survive) where Leda gently shelters the bird.[48] The more erotic versions of the subject do not appear before the end of the Classical period.

47 Limestone relief, metope from Selinus. Rape of Europa. Europa rides on a bull (a metamorphosis of Zeus) over the sea, indicated by fish, on her way to Crete. Mid-6th century. 84 cm (33⅛ in.)

48 Marble group. Leda and the Swan. Roman copy of an early 4th-century Greek original. 1.32 m (52 in.)

As an eagle Zeus is shown on Apulian red-figure vases from early in the 4th century carrying off Thalia, daughter of Hephaistos. She becomes the mother of the Sicilian twins, the Palikoi, a myth that was the subject of a play by Aeschylus.

The Roman poet Ovid (43 BC–AD 17) tells that Zeus changed himself into an eagle to abduct the Trojan prince Ganymede, but this metamorphosis does not appear in earlier literature. Pliny (34.79) mentions a bronze by the Athenian sculptor Leochares (*c*. 350 BC), of which marble copies survive, that showed an eagle carrying Ganymede, but Pliny implies that the bird was only an agent of Zeus. Similar scenes are depicted on Hellenistic jewellery and mirrors. On some 4th-century Apulian vases Ganymede is pursued by, or carried by, a swan as his tutor looks on helplessly. An anthropomorphic Zeus carries the young Ganymede in a terracotta sculpture from Olympia *c*. 470, and a similar Zeus pursues or carries the youth on Attic vases during the first three quarters of the 5th century.[49]

49 Terracotta akroterial group from Olympia. Rape of Ganymede. Zeus carries off the Trojan prince Ganymede, who holds a cock in one hand, a traditional love gift. *c*. 470. 1.08 m (42⅝ in.)

Certainly the most famous representation of Zeus was the ivory and gold colossus made by Pheidias for the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, but almost all we know of it comes from a few written descriptions (Pausanias 5.11 being the most complete) and what are probably representations of it on Roman coins and gems, though it has been shown that the figure on a late 5th-century red-figure fragment from near Kerch in Crimea must be derived from that work. His principal attributes there were the eagle and sceptre.

Hera, like many goddesses in Greek art (including Amphitrite) does not have regular attributes and thus must usually be identified by context. On Attic black- and red-figure vases she sometimes sits on a throne near a seated Zeus, as she does in Kleitias' Return of Hephaistos (see Chapter 2) and on the east frieze of the Parthenon. Though she sometimes holds a sceptre, it is by no means safe to

assume that all women with sceptres are Hera. Likewise, she sometimes wears a polos, or crown, but these too can be worn by other goddesses. She is one of the three goddesses in the Judgement of Paris, but there it is often impossible to distinguish her from Aphrodite (see Chapter 9).

Poseidon, like his brother Zeus, is usually shown as a bearded adult. In fact, depictions of them are so similar that it is often only the presence of an attribute that allows the one to be distinguished from the other, as the controversy over the identity of an over life-sized bronze of a bearded male found off Cape Artemision illustrates. That sculpture is complete except for the object it was holding, which could have been a thunderbolt or a trident.[**50**] In some Archaic vase-paintings Poseidon also carries a fish.[**51**]

50 Bronze figure found in the sea off Cape Artemision. Zeus with a thunderbolt or Poseidon with a trident. *c*. 460. 2.09 m (82⅜ in.)

51 Attic red-figure amphora by the Kleophrades Painter. Poseidon holding a fish and a trident. c.480. 37 cm (14⅝ in.)

Poseidon appears on many of the 6th-century painted plaques found near the Corinthian shrine dedicated to him at Penteskouphia (and very occasionally on Corinthian vases), on Attic black- and red-figure vases, and on South Italian vases from the 4th century. Throughout, the image of the god changes little. The god about to throw his trident is the coin type on the obverse of coins from Poseidonia from about 525 through to the middle of the 4th century. The only significant change in the type is the appearance of a beardless Poseidon on some coins after the middle of the 5th century, but these are produced side by side with coins showing the traditional bearded god.[52]

52 Silver stater from Poseidonia (Paestum). Poseidon with his trident. On the reverse the same figure but engraved (incuse) rather than in relief. *c*. 510

Poseidon rides a horse on some plaques from Penteskouphia from the mid-6th century, on coins of Potidaea from the end of the 6th century and then on at least one South Italian vase from the end of the 5th. He rides a hippocamp (horse–fish hybrid) on a Laconian cup from the mid-6th century and on a few Attic vases, mostly black-figure, he rides a hippocamp or a hippalektryon (horse–cock hybrid).[53] On one Attic black-figure vase he rides a bull.

53 Attic black-figure (on white ground) lekythos. Poseidon with his trident rides a hippocamp (sea horse). *c*. 490. 30.3 cm (12 in.)

The contest between Athena and Poseidon for Attica was the subject of the west pediment of the Parthenon and, on an Attic red-figure cup from the end of the 5th century, he is shown striking a rock with his trident, perhaps recalling that myth. On the east frieze of the Parthenon he sits beside Apollo.

Amphitrite is the consort of Poseidon as Hera is of Zeus, and she is shown with him on plaques from Penteskouphia contemporary with the depictions of the wedding of Peleus by Sophilos and Kleitias, but she has little mythology or iconography. She sometimes carries a fish but can only certainly be identified when she is named. Of the many women Poseidon is shown pursuing on Attic red-figure vases from the middle of the 5th century, the Danaid Amymone can be identified by her hydria. It refers to a story in which Poseidon rescues her from satyrs who had attacked her at a fountain or spring only to seduce her himself.[54] She first appears on Attic vases, *c*. 460, where she is pursued by Poseidon or attacked by satyrs, and these scenes may have been inspired by Aeschylus' satyr play *Amymone*. On later Attic and South Italian vases she is shown seated or standing with Poseidon, sometimes in the presence of satyrs.

54 Attic red-figure bell-krater. Rape of Amymone. Amymone is attacked by satyrs as she goes to fill her hydria at a spring. A thyrsos lies at her feet. The scene is almost certainly inspired by a satyr play. *c*. 420. 42.2 cm (16⅝ in.)

Ares is the archetypal warrior and little more. Only inscriptions or context allow him to be distinguished from the thousands of other warriors who appear in all periods of Greek art. He occasionally appears on Attic black- and red-figure vases as a bystander with other Olympians, but the only popular myth illustrated in ancient art in which he plays a key role is the fight between his son, the brigand Kyknos, and Herakles.

According to the earliest surviving literary version of the myth, *The Shield of Herakles*, Kyknos provoked the anger of Apollo by waylaying pilgrims on their way to Delphi. Encouraged by Apollo, Herakles confronted Kyknos and killed him in the ensuing battle. Enraged at the death of his son, Ares attacked Herakles, but through the intervention of Athena could not injure him and was, instead, wounded himself.

Most of the depictions of this myth are on Attic vases from the second half of the 6th century. On one of the earliest and most detailed, *c*. 550, all the participants are named. Herakles and Ares stand facing each other over the body of Kyknos. Each has raised his spear, ready to attack, but Zeus comes between his two sons trying to stop the fight. Behind Herakles, Athena stands with her spear poised ready to help him. Chariots frame the scene. Variations on this scheme appear on several Attic vases.[55] On a roughly contemporary Corinthian fragment, part of a named Kyknos survives beside a building, perhaps representing a sanctuary of Apollo where the fight was said to have taken place.

55 Attic black-figure amphora from Camiros. Herakles and Kyknos. Zeus intervenes as Herakles chases Kyknos towards Ares with Athena's support. The painter has given Ares an elegantly decorated Boeotian shield in contrast to Kyknos' normal hoplite shield (with a tripod as its device). *c*. 540. 55 cm (21¾ in.)

On other Attic vases Herakles is shown fighting Kyknos while the two of them are flanked by Athena and Ares. On a metope from the Treasury of the Athenians at Delphi (*c*. 500) Herakles and Kyknos fight alone, a scene that also appears on a few Attic vases and on a Chalcidian amphora. Pausanias (3.18.10) also tells that this was the subject of a relief on the throne by Bathykles at Amyklai near Sparta from the end of the 6th century. The subject seldom appears in any form after the first quarter of the 5th century.

One of the earliest depictions of Ares is on a fragment of an amphora from Naxos of the mid-7th century where, as on the François Vase, he rides in a chariot with Aphrodite, who is sometimes said to be his wife.[56] The two were probably shown together on the Chest of Kypselos, and they appear in some Attic red-figure depictions of the assembled deities. On a Lucanian vase from the 4th century, Aphrodite sits holding his helmet while Ares, a naked youth, stands beside her holding his shield and her mirror. Eros flies above them. Ares is usually bearded on Attic black- and red-figure vases, but statues of him by Alkamenes and Skopas, known only through ancient descriptions and Roman copies, were of a beardless god.

56 Naxian amphora fragment from Naxos. Aphrodite and Ares ride together in a chariot drawn by winged horses. Mid-7th century

Aphrodite occasionally appears in scenes with other gods on 6th-century Attic black-figure vases and on red-figure vases from the first half of the 5th century, but her great period of popularity in Greek arts starts after the middle of the 5th century. Sometimes she holds a sceptre, a flower, or later a mirror, but none of these is by itself sufficient to identify her. She is shown riding a swan or a goose on Attic and then South Italian vases from the beginning of the 5th century on through the 4th, and this is also the subject of terracotta statuettes, bronze reliefs and gems.[57]

57 Attic red-figure lekythos by the Achilles Painter, from Cyprus. Aphrodite holding a sceptre rides on the back of a swan. *c*. 440. 31 cm (12¼ in.)

Aphrodite is clothed in Archaic and Classical art before the 4th century. Praxiteles' statue of her at Cnidos was one of the first and certainly the most famous depiction of the naked goddess, and established a new vision of her, but even during the 4th century she is usually clothed in vase-paintings.[58] The principal myth of Aphrodite depicted in ancient art is her birth, which is discussed in the following chapter.

58 Gold finger ring. Aphrodite with a dove stands beside a pillar with her clothes on it while Eros holds up a crown in front of her. 4th century. L. 2.1 cm (7/8 in.)

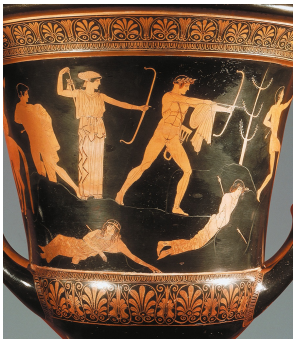
The procession of deities includes four more chariots on the François Vase, but they are so badly damaged only a few of the occupants are recognizable. There are only two more chariots in Sophilos' scene and both are well preserved. Apollo and Hermes ride in the first, Athena and Artemis in the second.

While Hermes drives the chariot, a beardless Apollo in a long chiton stands beside him playing his kithara. This is just the Apollo who appears most often in ancient art. Occasionally he is bearded in Archaic art, such as on a Melian amphora from about 650 and on the Troilos frieze of the François Vase, but in Classical and later art he is always beardless and often naked, the epitome of young male beauty.

The kithara, sometimes the lyre, is his most common attribute. He plays a lyre on the Melian vase just mentioned, a kithara on a bronze cuirass found at Olympia from later in the 7th century, on a shield band from the mid-6th, and on dozens of black-figure vases where he is part of a divine entourage. On both black- and red-figure vases he often appears playing his kithara between Artemis and Leto or with the Muses.[38] These scenes have no specific narrative content but represent the gentle and reasonable god for whom the byword is 'nothing in excess'.

The other side of his nature, death and destruction – Apollo the far-shooter – is symbolized by another common attribute, the bow, which he shares with his sister Artemis. Free-standing sculptures of Apollo with his bow appear at least by the mid-6th century and continue to appear throughout our period. The Apollo Belvedere, a copy of a 4th-century bronze, is one of the best-known examples.[59] In most depictions of the death of Tityos, Apollo and Artemis use their bows, as they do when they slaughter the children of Niobe, the woman who foolishly boasted of her progeny at Leto's expense. This myth is depicted on an Attic black-figure amphora from about 550, but the next occurrence of it does not appear until nearly a century later, when it appears in a scene on a red-figure krater certainly influenced by wall-painting. The myth was the subject of a frieze on Pheidias' throne of Zeus at Olympia, of which copies of parts have been identified.[60] Sculpture from what was probably a pedimental group of the dying Niobids survives from the mid-5th century, and in the 4th century the myth is a subject of South Italian vases.

59 Marble figure. Apollo Belvedere. A Roman copy of a 4th-century bronze of Apollo as archer, holding his bow in his left hand. The tree trunk and snake were added by the copyist as a support for the statue, which is not necessary in bronze. 2.24 m (88¼ in.)



60 Attic red-figure calyx-krater by the Niobid Painter, from Orvieto. Death of the Niobids. Apollo and Artemis shoot the children of Niobe. The painter has abandoned the usual single ground-line here and has placed the figures at various levels, probably in imitation of contemporary wall-painting techniques. *c*. 450. 54 cm (21⅜ in.)

The tripod and the fawn are two more important Apollonian attributes that appear in ancient art. The tripod is associated with the god's oracle at Delphi and most often appears in depictions of Herakles' attempt to steal it. The meaning of the myth is not clear since surviving literary sources are late and contradictory, but it seems that Herakles tried to steal the tripod so that he could set up his own oracle. Presumably some offence at Delphi provoked his actions. The earliest depiction of the myth is on a late 8th-century bronze tripod-leg from Olympia. It is the subject of a mid-6th-century metope from Paestum and the east pediment of the Siphnian treasury at Delphi, but its greatest popularity is on Attic black- and red-figure vases during the last quarter of the 6th century and first quarter of the 5th. On the vases, Artemis often aids Apollo while Herakles' patron, Athena, stands behind him.[**61**] This is, in fact, one of the most common Heraklean scenes on Attic vases. From late in the 6th century it is the subject of shield bands, a Chalcidian skyphos and Boeotian black-figure vases, and from the 4th century it is the subject on a few Lucanian and Apulian vases.

61 Attic red-figure amphora by the Andokides Painter, from Vulci. The struggle for the tripod. Apollo hangs onto a leg of the tripod as Herakles marches off with it towards Athena, and Artemis stands to the side smelling a stylized flower. Note Athena's splendid snaky aegis with gorgoneion. *c*. 525. 58.2 cm (23 in.)

A parallel scene appears on a few Attic vases from the second half of the 6th century (and perhaps on a few earlier shield bands) in which Apollo and Herakles fight over a deer. The deer is usually associated with Artemis and this struggle, like the struggle over the tripod, has no surviving literary source.[**62**] It seems to be distinct, however, from Herakles' pursuit of the Kerynian hind discussed in Chapter 6.

62 Attic black-figure plate from Greece. Struggle for the deer. Herakles and Apollo with drawn bows prepare to shoot each other over a deer. A woman, probably Artemis, tries to stop them. In the predella, cocks face off in the presence of hens. *c*. 550. D. 22.8 cm (9 in.)

Artemis holding her bow rides in the next chariot on Sophilos' vase while Athena drives. As we have seen, Artemis often appears with Apollo and shares with him the bow and fawn as attributes. However, in the earliest representations of her in ancient art, she appears as the Potnia Theron (mistress of animals), a role mentioned by Homer (*Iliad* 21.470). In this form she is usually a winged figure who stands with her arms at her sides and with a large bird or an animal hanging from each hand. Though the form itself may go back to Minoan and Mycenaean art, Artemis as Potnia first appears in the 7th century on Boeotian, Melian and Corinthian vases, and on ivory plaques from Sparta and gold and bronze reliefs. During the 6th century, she appears in this form on Attic black-figure vases as well. She stands on both handles of the François Vase, once holding two lions, once a panther and a stag.[63]

63 'François Vase'. Handle. Above, Artemis as Potnia Theron. Below, Ajax carrying the body of Achilles.

The torch is another attribute sometimes carried by Artemis, but, as already mentioned, it is by no means restricted to her. During the last quarter of the 6th century, she occasionally appears with her torch in Attic black-figure depictions of a wedded couple in a chariot. During the 5th century, however, she quite frequently has a torch in many different scenes on red-figure vases and in sculpted reliefs.

Hermes drives the chariot in which his elder half-brother Apollo rides. He is bearded and wears a chitoniskos and hat. The top of a wing on one of his boots is just visible and his kerykeion rests on the front of the chariot box. In the Wedding frieze on the François Vase he drives his mother Maia, rather than Apollo, and there he is a much more dignified figure dressed in an elegant chiton and himation and holding his kerykeion. This is unusual, though not unique, dress for him, and in the Troilos frieze on the same vase he wears his more common chitoniskos, which, in later works, is replaced by a chlamys. [37]

The kerykeion is Hermes' most obvious attribute, and is, as mentioned earlier, one that he shares with Iris.[64] He is rarely shown without it; however, there are scenes where a mortal messenger carries one, a reminder that whoever may carry it, the kerykeion is first of all a herald's staff.[251]

64 Attic red-figure lekythos from Gela. Hermes with petasos, kerykeion and winged boots running to the left. *c*. 480. 34 cm (13 ½ in.)

Sophilos' depictions of Hermes in the Wedding procession and elsewhere are certainly some of the earliest of the god. At approximately the same time, however, a similar Hermes appears on middle Corinthian vases and this is the Hermes in the Ransom of Hektor on a mid-6th-century shield band from Olympia, and facing Zeus on a Laconian cup.[263] He is almost always bearded on Attic black-figure vases, but after the middle of the 5th century he regularly appears on red-figure vases as a beardless youth and sometimes wears a winged helmet as well as winged boots. This is the Hermes adopted by early Apulian painters.[37]

Hermes is one of the most common mythological figures on Attic vases – particularly black-figure – and it is difficult to think of many scenes from myth in which he does not appear at one time or another, often just watching from the sidelines. In spite of his ubiquity, however, few myths are depicted in ancient art in which he plays a central role. One exception is his role in the birth of Dionysos discussed in the next chapter, another is his killing of Argos.

According to the most common version of this story Zeus seduced Io, a priestess of Hera, and when Hera became aware of this infidelity, Zeus swore it had not happened and turned Io into a cow. Hera, aware of this ploy, asked for the cow and made the many-eyed monster Argos its guardian. Zeus then sent Hermes to free Io, and to do this he had to kill Argos.

One of the earliest depictions of the death of Argos is on an Attic black-figure amphora from about 530. Hermes attacks a falling Argos, a man with a face on both sides of his head.[65] Hera rushes to the rescue and Io, a cow, stands calmly facing away from the action. Roughly contemporary with this is a neck-amphora from the 'Northampton Group', probably made by an East Greek immigrant in Etruria. Here Argos is a large naked man with a great bushy beard and an extra eye on his chest, and Io is a bull.

65 Attic black-figure amphora from Bomarzo. Hermes killing Argos. Hermes attacks Argos, whose many eyes are represented here by faces on the front and back of his head. Hera tries to stop him, and Io (the cow) stands looking the other way. *c*. 530. 44.2 cm (17 ½ in.)

The subject appears on more than a dozen Attic red-figure vases from about 500 to the mid-4th century. Hermes' weapon is usually a sword. On the earlier ones, Argos is a naked man whose body is covered with eyes, and Io is often a bull.[66] On a krater from around 430, Argos again has a face on either side of his head, but Io has become a human woman with small horns above her forehead, and this is the way she appears on a 4th-century krater. On an early Lucanian oinochoe also from about 430, Io is a cow with a woman's face.

66 Attic red-figure amphora by the Eucharides Painter. On the neck, Hermes killing Argos. Here Argos' body is covered with eyes and Io is a bull. *c*. 480. 63 cm (24⅞ in.)

Hermes also appears as the warder of human souls in his role in the psychostasia (weighing of souls) and as psychopompos (guide of souls). The weighing of souls first appears on an Attic black-figure dinos from about 540, and then on a lekythos from about 500, and on several red-figure vases from the first half of the 5th century.[270] As psychopompos, he leads mortals to Charon who will ferry them across the Acheron. This is a favourite subject on Attic white-ground lekythoi after about 470. On a column drum, perhaps by Skopas, from the 4th-century Temple of Artemis at Ephesos, Hermes leads a woman to, or perhaps from, a winged Thanatos (Death).[67] On some vases he is the guide who leads Persephone back from the underworld.[68]

67 Attic white-ground lekythos by the Thanatos Painter, from Athens. Hermes psychopompos wearing a winged hat and pointing with his kerykeion leads a woman to a boat poled by Charon, which will take her across the river Acheron. Note the apotropaic eye painted on the bow of the boat to frighten off evil spirits *c*. 440. 39.5 cm (15⅝ in.)

68 Marble relief, column drum from Ephesos. Thanatos (Death), wearing a sword in a scabbard, and Hermes, with a kerykeion, escort a woman (Alcestis, Eurydice or Persephone?) to the underworld. *c*. 350. 1.82 m (71¾ in.)

On Sophilos' dinos, Athena drives her half-sister Artemis, as she may have done on the François Vase where the name of her female passenger is missing. In neither scene is she shown with attributes. She simply appears as one of many goddesses, unusual only because she, a woman, is driving. Likewise, on the Return of Hephaistos and the Troilos friezes on the François Vase she has no attributes, nor does she on the few contemporary Corinthian vases where she appears. On a Laconian cup her only distinguishing characteristic is a *polos*, the hat already mentioned in connection with Hera and worn by many other goddesses. After about 560, however, the Athena who appears on Attic vases is usually armed, wearing her helmet and often her aegis, and carrying her spear.

The aegis is Athena's most distinctive attribute, given to her by Zeus, but its nature in visual arts differs from descriptions of it in literature. For Homer it is a goat-skin fringed with golden tassels (*Iliad* 2.447) while for vase-painters and sculptors it is fringed with snakes. At first it seems to be a plain skin, but later it is often covered with scales.[73] After about 530, the Gorgon's head may be attached to the centre of it.[61]

An armed Athena striding forward with her spear raised ready to fight (Athena Promachos) is a common form for the goddess in Attic black-figure vase-paintings. This is the Athena who appears on Panathenaic prize amphorae from about 560 down to the end of the 4th century. Always painted in the black-figure technique, these vases filled with prime olive oil were given as prizes at the Panathenaic games held at Athens every four years.[**69**] During the two and a half centuries they were made, there were moderate changes in the shape of the amphora, but Athena Promachos always appeared on one side between two columns with the inscription 'a prize from the games at Athens'; a depiction of the event for which the vase was awarded appeared on the other side. This same Athena Promachos is sometimes used for the statue in black-figure depictions of the rape of Kassandra, a subject discussed in Chapter 9.[**278**]

69 Attic black-figure (Panathenaic) amphora from Vulci. Athena Promachos between columns surmounted by cocks holds a shield with a chariot wheel as a device. The inscription by the column reads: 'a prize from the games at Athens', and on the reverse is a depiction of the event for which it was awarded, here the pentathlon. It is estimated that about 1,000 of these vases, filled with olive oil, were given as prizes at the games held in Athens every four years. The earliest Panathenaic amphora dates from before 560 and they continued to be made on into the 2nd century. *c*. 530. 62.5 cm (24⅝ in.)

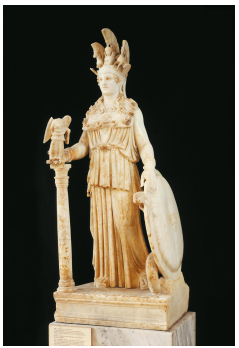
Images of Athena were coin types for many cities including Athens and Corinth. A helmeted head of Athena was on the obverse of Athenian coins from the last quarter of the 6th century through our period, and an owl, a bird associated with her, was on the reverse.[**70**] The head of Athena wearing a raised Corinthian helmet (with cheek plates and a nose guard) was on the reverse of the coins of Corinth during the last quarter of the 6th century and on through our period, with the winged horse Pegasos on the obverse.[**71**]

70 Silver decadrachm from Athens. Athena. On the reverse, an owl. *c*. 470

71 Silver stater from Corinth. Athena. *c*. 350. Note the differences between helmets worn by Athena on this coin and the previous one, known as Corinthian and Athenian helmets respectively. *c*. 510

Pheidias' huge chryselephantine statue of Athena Parthenos for the Parthenon, dedicated in 438, was certainly one of the best-known depictions of the goddess in antiquity. Though it is lost, we have a fairly good idea of what it looked like from descriptions by Pausanias (1.24.5–7) and Pliny (36.18), among others, and from small Roman

copies.[72] It has been shown that the figure of Athena on a fragment of a late 5th-century Attic krater found near Kerch must be derived from the work. She wore an ornate helmet and her aegis with the Gorgon's head on it. In one hand she held a Nike, in the other a spear. Her shield rested beside her and near it a snake. On the base of the statue was a relief showing the birth of Pandora, on her shield an Amazonomachy and Gigantomachy, on her sandals a Centauromachy.



72 Marble statuette. 'Varvakeion statuette'. A 2nd-century AD version of the Athena Parthenos by Pheidias. The crest holders of the helmet on the original were a sphinx (as here) and two griffins (replaced here with pegasoi). Note the aegis with gorgoneion and the Nike (Victory) she holds in her right hand. 1.05 m (41⅜ in.)

Another side of Athena's nature is illustrated by the west pediment of the Parthenon where her contest with Poseidon was shown. She won Attica with her gift of an olive tree (against Poseidon's salt-water spring) which became a buttress of the Attic economy. It was oil from her trees that was given in the prize amphorae at the Panathenaic games. Athena was also patron of woolworking and of craftsmen and is shown in that guise on Attic red-figure vases. On the Parthenon frieze it is Hephaistos, the craftsman of the gods, with whom she is paired, and her image stood with his in the Hephaisteion above the Agora.[73]

73 Attic red-figure cup from Vulci. A sculptor carves a marble horse in the presence of Athena and patrons (?). *c*. 480

Athena appears as an important figure in depictions of several myths to be discussed in later chapters, including her birth, the Judgement of Paris, Marsyas, and the birth of Erichthonios, but she is also shown on Attic vases as a companion of heroes. She protects Perseus while he fetches the head of Medusa, and she watches and encourages her favourite, Herakles, in hundreds of depictions of his various labours and deeds. During the 5th century she also gives Theseus her patronage (though perhaps less enthusiastically). Of mortal warriors, Achilles, Diomedes and Odysseus are her special friends.

On the François Vase, Doris and Nereus, the parents of the bride, accompany Athena's chariot, and on both vases Okeanos, the grandfather of the bride, follows the last chariot, a merman with the lower body of a fish. Most of him is missing from the François Vase, but on Sophilos' dinos he wears a chitoniskos over a human torso which is attached at the waist to an arching fish-body. A single horn protrudes from his forehead, and he holds a fish in one hand, a snake in the other. His fully human wife, Tethys, accompanies him with Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth, beside her. This is one of the few appearances of Okeanos, Tethys or Doris in ancient art. Eileithyia (sometimes two Eileithyiai) appears in depictions of the birth of Athena, but otherwise there is little iconography associated with her.

Nereus, on the other hand, poses iconographic problems that may explain his curious absence, as father of the bride, from Sophilos' depiction of the wedding procession. On several Attic black-figure vases from the first half of the 6th century, Herakles is shown wrestling with a fish-bodied Nereus (inscriptions on some make clear his identity) as he forces from him the way to the garden of the Hesperides as discussed in Chapter 6. On a mid-6th-century shield band the mutations Nereus employs in his attempt to escape from Herakles are indicated by a flame on his forehead and a snake protruding from the back of his neck – on a krater by Sophilos a snake emerges from the curve of his back.[**74**] After about 560 Nereus is a wholly human old man in his fight with Herakles, and this is the way he appears on Attic red-figure vases during the first half of the 5th century.[**171**]

74 Bronze relief, shield band panel. Herakles and Nereus. Herakles clings to fish-bodied Nereus whose transformations are indicated by the flame and snake erupting from his head. The inscription identifies the figures as 'Halios Geron' (Old man of the sea) and Herakles. Mid-6th century

The absence of Nereus, the father of the bride, from the procession on the dinos is puzzling, but it may be explained by an iconographic problem. Nereus is clearly fish-bodied for Sophilos and thus all but indistinguishable from Okeanos. For some reason – perhaps a strong literary source – Okeanos had to be included, and for reasons of design alone it would have been difficult to include two fish-bodied creatures. Later, for Kleitias, Nereus' form was wholly human and thus he could easily include him.

Hephaistos rides side-saddle on a mule at the very end of both processions. As we have already seen, he often appears riding a mule on Attic black- and red-figure vases as he returns to Olympos with Dionysos to be reconciled with his mother, Hera. The other popular myth depicted in ancient art in which he plays an important role is the birth of Athena, discussed in the next chapter. Also discussed there are his roles in the birth of Erichthonios and the creation of Pandora.

His most common attributes are the axe or tongs and sometimes a close-fitting workman's hat (often called a pilos) and a sleeved tunic (exomis) all of which refer to his role as blacksmith. It was he who made Achilles' armour, and he is shown giving it to Thetis on Attic vases from the first quarter of the 5th century.[**75**] A similar scene probably appeared on the Chest of Kypselos. With Athena he is the patron of craftsmen – so he sits with her on the Parthenon frieze and her image stood beside his in the Hephaisteion, his temple in Athens.

75 Attic red-figure cup from Vulci. Tondo, Hephaistos and Thetis. Hephaistos presents Thetis with armour for Achilles. The shield is a curious cross between a normal hoplite shield and the heroic Boeotian form. The device shows a bird with a snake. *c*. 480

Though he is a disabled, his limp is rarely made explicit in Attic art, only hinted at. Thus he sometimes rides side-saddle on his mule, and Cicero can write of a late 5th-century sculpture of him by Alkamenes 'there is visible a slight lameness which, however, is not ugly.'

Chapter 4
The Ascendancy of the Olympians

The ascendancy of the Olympians under the aegis of Zeus came through the overthrow of his father, Kronos, who had himself overthrown his own father, Ouranos. The history of the progenitors of the Olympians is dark and confusing, but some of them appear in ancient art, so a brief review of the relevant parts of the genealogy will not be out of place here.

At the beginning of the line, according to Hesiod, Gaia (Earth) bore Ouranos (Heavens) and then mated with him to produce twelve Titans, including Okeanos, Themis, Tethys, lapetos, Rhea and the youngest, Kronos. Also born to Gaia were the Cyclopes, among others. Ouranos, who was jealous of his children, hid them all away in the Earth, who in pain devised a plan to free them and convinced Kronos to help her. She gave him a sickle (harpe) and when Ouranos came to mate with her, Kronos castrated him and threw his genitals into the sea. From drops of blood that fell on Earth (Gaia), the Giants were born, along with the Erinyes (Furies) and the Melian nymphs, and from the foam that gathered around the members floating in the sea, Aphrodite arose (the word *aphros* means foam).

Not surprisingly, this barbaric narrative is not a subject of ancient art, but Aphrodite rising from the sea is. The scene first appears in about 460 on Attic red-figure vases. Eros is often present to help her or to greet her. According to Pausanias (5.11.8) Eros receiving Aphrodite was one of the subjects depicted by Pheidias on the base of the throne of Zeus at Olympia, and a silver medallion from Greece may reflect that work.[76] Sometimes Eros is joined by a woman and