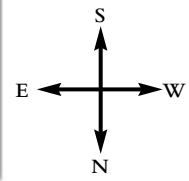


“Hunts” Inside the Museum / The Greek Art Galleries



THE GREAT HALL

“HUNTS” INSIDE THE MUSEUM

THE GREEK ART GALLERIES

Exploring the drama of ancient Greek epic poetry and legends in the Greek art galleries means more than encountering compelling and beautiful works of art; a “hunt” inside the Museum offers students of all ages an overview of the styles and materials mastered by Greek artists.

The following hunts organized for the Greek art galleries provide teachers with a selection of works of art with which they can create specialized searches for students of any age. Since some of the vase paintings are small, more than one vase with a similar scene is provided. In this way, the class can split into smaller groups to study the same theme more easily. These hunts lend themselves particularly well to writing and drawing exercises; for instance, students can either draw or write narratives and poems (which they could also illustrate) relating to what they see in a work of art. They may also want to describe the events that occurred before or after the scene depicted. Going from work to work, they can replicate an ancient Greek legend or, perhaps, create their own myth in words and images.

While examining the vases in the Greek art galleries, you may want to have your students consider the following questions: What was the function of a particular pot? Can you tell how the details of the figures were created? Did the artist create them by incising the fired orange clay or by painting lines onto the surface of the pot? When you look at a particular pot, which is emphasized more: its elegant shape or the decoration across its surface? How is the mood of a particular scene expressed? Are the animals livelier than the humans?

The following scenes and stories illustrated on vases in the Museum collection are those most easily viewed by a large group of visitors.

LORE ABOUT THE TROJAN WAR

The Homeric epics, which originated as oral poems, are believed to have been recorded in the form we now know them about 750 B.C. The *Odyssey*, being an adventure story about the travels and travails of the hero Odysseus on his return home to Ithaca after the end of the Trojan War, probably has more appeal in the modern world; whereas the *Iliad* had a far greater influence on ancient Greek society, art, and literature. The *Iliad* itself recounts only the action that took place in and around Troy during about fifty days of the ten-year siege and focuses on the wrath of Achilles. Other episodes in the war were recounted in six other poems, known collectively as the *Trojan Cycle*, which have been attributed to Homer as well, but were more likely later creations. These stories, now lost, are preserved in later sources. The six epics are the:

- *Cypria* (the Wedding of Peleus and Thetis up to the Judgment of Paris, the seduction of Helen, and the Trojan War)
- *Aethiopis* (The Greek hero Achilles' slaying of the Amazon Penthesilea, Thersites, and the Ethiopian Memnon, followed by his own death and the Greek Ajax of Telamon carrying back his body)
- *Little Iliad* (includes the suicide of Ajax of Telamon, the fetching of Philoktetes and Neoptolemos to help the Greeks end the war, and the wooden Trojan Horse)
- *Iliou Persis* (The Sack of Troy) (includes the Trojan debate about bringing the Trojan Horse secretly full of Greek warriors into the city; the Trojan Laocoön's warning about the horse, for which he and his sons were killed by a sea serpent; the Sack of Troy, including the rape of Cassandra at the altar of Athena by Ajax of Lokris, and the sacrifice of Polyxena at Achilles' grave; and the departure of the Greeks)
- *Nostoi* (Returns) (the returns of the Greek heroes, ending with the murder of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, the revenge of his son Orestes upon his murderers, and the homecoming of Menelaos, king of Sparta)
- *Telegony* (about Telegonos, Odysseus' son by Circe)

A Hunt for the Trojan War

1. Peleus wrestling the sea nymph Thetis while her two companions flee. Obverse of a terracotta stamnos (jar); reverse, two sea nymphs approach their father Nereus. Attic, red-figure, ca. 470 B.C. Attributed to the Altamura Painter. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.51) (Location: The Wiener Gallery)

Both Zeus and Poseidon desired Thetis but, after they learned that she was fated to bear a son who would be stronger than his father, she was married off to Peleus, a mortal. As Peleus tried to catch her, she evaded him by changing into many different forms. Here, however, he has finally secured his bride, the future mother of the great hero Achilles

2. The Judgment of Paris. Terracotta pyxis (*box*). Attic, white-ground, ca. 465–460 B.C. Attributed to the Penthesilea Painter. Rogers Fund, 1907 (07.286.36) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery II)

Please read the description of slide 11.

3. Marble statue of a wounded warrior (*Protesilaos*). Roman, Antonine period, ca. A.D. 138–181. Copy of a Greek bronze statue of ca. 460–450 B.C. Frederick C. Hewitt Fund, 1925 (25.116) (Location: The Mary and Michael Jaharis Gallery)

Please read the description of slide 13.

4. Thanatos (*Death*) and Hypnos (*Sleep*) with the body of Sarpedon. Obverse of a terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel); reverse, Eos (Dawn) with the body of her son Memnon, an Ethiopian king. Attic, black-figure, ca. 500 B.C. Attributed to the Diosphos Painter. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.25) (Location: The Judy and Michael H. Steinhardt Gallery)

The scenes on this jar show two great allies of the Trojans being lifted from the battlefield after their deaths. Sarpedon, a son of Zeus, will be carried to Lycia, his homeland in southwest Asia Minor, while Memnon will be borne back to his kingdom in Ethiopia.



5.

5. The carrying away of Sarpedon by Sleep and Death. Obverse of a terracotta calyx-krater (vessel for mixing wine with water, with handles in the shape of the calyx of a flower); reverse, youths arming themselves. Attic, red-figure, ca. 515 B.C. Signed by Euxitheos as potter and Euphronios as painter. Purchase, Bequest of Joseph H. Durkee, Gift of Darius Ogden Mills, and Gift of C. Ruxton Love, by exchange, 1972 (1972.11.10) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery II)

Please read the description of slide 9.

6. Warrior arming, possibly Achilles with his mother Thetis. Obverse of a terracotta stamnos (jar); reverse, Menelaos reclaiming his wife Helen. Attic, red-figure, ca. 470–460 B.C. Attributed to the Deepdene Painter. Rogers Fund, 1941 (41.162.20a,b) (Location: The Stavros and Danaë Costopoulos Gallery)

The subject matter of the obverse is indicated by the woman who is handing the warrior his armor: in the *Iliad*, Thetis replaces the original armor that Achilles gave to his friend Patroklos, who lost it to the Trojans after his death. This side probably depicts Achilles, the principal Greek hero of the Trojan War, while the other indicates the cause of the war: the desire of Menelaos, king of Sparta, to reclaim his wife Helen from Paris, the Trojan prince. The fluid execution of the figures is complemented by the superb handle ornaments.

7. Thetis in a chariot with winged horses flying over the sea, accompanied by the messenger gods Iris and Hermes. Terracotta lekythos (oil flask). Attic, black-figure, ca. 500 B.C. Attributed to the Sappho Painter. Rogers Fund, 1941 (41.162.34) (Location: The Judy and Michael H. Steinhardt Gallery)

This scene may reflect a passage in the *Iliad* (Book 24, lines 95–96). Summoned to Mount Olympos, the sea nymph Thetis is ordered by Zeus to convince her son Achilles to return the body of his enemy Hector to Hector's father Priam, king of Troy, for proper burial.

8. Achilles and Ajax of Telamon playing a board game at Troy. On the body of a terracotta hydria (water jar); on the shoulder, chariot departing. Attic, black-figure, ca. 510 B.C. Attributed to the Leagros Group. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.29) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

About 540 B.C., Exekias, the potter and painter whose work represents the height of black-figure painting, invented the representation of Achilles and Ajax passing the time during the siege of Troy by playing a board game. Remarkably, the original composition survives on an amphora in the Vatican Museums. It remained one of the most popular subjects in Greek art, mainly vase painting, between about 540 and 480 B.C.; over 150 occurrences are known. In this variant, the painter has placed Athena center stage, as the two principal Greek heroes of the Trojan War while away their time playing a game in which pieces are moved according to the roll of dice. Note the incised names and other words that accompany the scene.

9. Ajax of Telamon and Achilles playing a board game at Troy. Terracotta kalpis (water jar). Attic, red-figure, ca. 490 B.C. Attributed to the Berlin Painter. Mr. and Mrs. Whitridge Gift Fund, 1965 (65.11.12) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery II)

This subject remained popular into the fifth century B.C. The evenly matched warriors hold their spears and shields as they play. The artist seems less concerned with characterizing them than with laying out an interesting symmetrical composition on the shoulder of the vessel.



II.

10. Achilles and Penthesilea. Terracotta kalpis (*water jar*). Attic, red-figure, ca. 500 B.C. Attributed to the Berlin Painter. Rogers Fund, 1910 (10.210.19) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery II)

Penthesilea, the queen of the Amazons who assisted the Trojans in the Trojan War, was killed by Achilles, who fell in love with her as he dealt the mortal blow. The Berlin Painter, who is particularly known for single, elegantly posed figures, wraps the figures diagonally around the shoulder of the vessel. For artistic effect, Penthesilea is disproportionately tall and assumes an unnaturally balletic pose. The composition, however, is admirably appropriate for its placement.

11. Memnon between his Ethiopian squires. Reverse of a terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel); obverse, Apollo between Hermes and a goddess. Attic, black-figure, ca. 530 B.C. Attributed to an artist near Exekias. Gift of F. W. Rhineland, 1898 (98.8.13) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

As king of Ethiopia, Memnon, the son of Tithonos and Eos, goddess of the dawn, led a contingent of Ethiopians to Troy to help his uncle, King Priam. He was killed by Achilles in a duel, while their two mothers pleaded with Zeus for their lives. The present condition of the vase provides insight into the painter's working method. Memnon's shield, drawn with a compass—the circles easily visible—would have been painted in white directly onto the clay. Without the white, however, we can see the cursory sketch that the artist drew for the figure's torso.

12. Achilles waiting to ambush Troilos and Polyxena. On the shoulder of a terracotta hydria (water jar). Attic, black-figure, ca. 560–550 B.C. Attributed to the Painter of London B 76. Rogers Fund, 1945 (45.11.2) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

The ambush depicted here with verve and eloquence is one of the crucial episodes of the Trojan War. Troilos and Polyxena, children of King Priam, went to fetch water at nightfall from a well outside the walls of Troy. They were attacked by Achilles near the temple of Apollo at Thymbra. Achilles' menacing stature is indicated by his height in relation to the fountain house, and by the scale of his weapons. In one version of the story, a raven foretold Troilos' imminent death: his two horses bolted when Achilles attacked and the youth was dragged along behind the chariot. Polyxena, however, survived the encounter.

13. Achilles pursuing Troilos and Polyxena. Exterior of the obverse of a terracotta kylix (drinking cup); reverse, horsemen; interior, Gorgon's face. Attic, black-figure, ca. 575 B.C. Attributed to the C Painter. Purchase, 1901 (01.8.6) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

The C Painter takes his name from the strong influence of Corinthian vase painting on his style. He particularly favored the Siana cup, like the one here, which afforded him an ample, regularly shaped surface over which to deploy mythological narratives. The C Painter has chosen a later moment in the Troilos story than the Painter of London B 76 (no. 12). Here, the hare and bird emphasize the speed of Achilles' pursuit.



13.

14. Ajax of Telamon carrying the body of Achilles. Obverse of a terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel); reverse, the departure of Odysseus from Ithaka. Attic, black-figure, ca. 530 B.C. Attributed to the Painter of London B 235. Fletcher Fund, 1926 (26.60.20) (Location: The Judy and Michael H. Steinhardt Gallery)

The *Iliad* ends with Achilles still alive, but other epic poems, notably the *Odyssey*, describe his death at the gates of Troy and the ensuing battle in which Ajax manages to rescue Achilles' body for proper burial. The subject of Ajax carrying the body of Achilles was popular during the sixth century B.C.

15. Ajax of Telamon carrying the body of Achilles. Reverse of a terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel); obverse, Herakles bringing the Erymanthian boar to King Eurystheos. Attic, black-figure, ca. 520 B.C. Attributed to the Antimenes Painter. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.20) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Achilles was killed at Troy by an arrow that pierced his heel, the only vulnerable spot on his body. Although shot by Paris, the arrow was guided to its mark by Apollo. After Achilles fell, a fierce conflict erupted for possession of his body. While Odysseus kept the Trojans at bay, Ajax carried the corpse back to the Greek encampment. This depiction of Ajax bearing his fully armed comrade emphasizes Achilles' weight.



16.

16. Aeneas rescuing his father Anchises during the Fall of Troy. Obverse of a terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel); reverse, woman and warrior. Attic, black-figure, ca. 500 B.C. Attributed to the Diosphos Painter. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.26) (Location: The Judy and Michael H. Steinhardt Gallery)

Aeneas carrying his aged father Anchises away from Troy at the end of the Trojan War was a much illustrated incident from the *Iliou Persis*, a lost epic poem that described the victory of the Greeks over the Trojans. The adventures of the Trojan hero on his way to Italy were later celebrated in the *Aeneid*, the epic poem of the founding of Rome composed in Latin by Vergil during the reign of Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D. 14).

17. Ajax of Lokris seizing Cassandra, a Trojan princess and prophetess, during the Sack of Troy. Obverse of a terracotta amphora (storage vessel); reverse, Theseus attacking the Minotaur. Attic, black-figure, ca. 540 B.C. Attributed to Group E. Rogers Fund, 1941 (41.162.143) (Location: The Judy and Michael H. Steinhardt Gallery)

The *Iliou Persis* described the fall of Troy to the Greeks. Although Cassandra, a daughter of King Priam, tried to take refuge at the cult statue of Athena, she was dragged away and raped by the Greek warrior Ajax. On this amphora, she kneels below Athena's shield, while Ajax appears to challenge the goddess herself. The artist has shown the statue of Athena much as it appears on Panathenaic prize amphorai of this time (see slide 8, obverse view).

Group E is the name given to a workshop of painters active during the mid-sixth century B.C. Exekias, the greatest black-figure artist, began among them, and it is to him that the group's name refers.

18. **Ajax of Lokris attempting to seize Cassandra at the cult statue of Athena.** Obverse of a terracotta Nolan amphora (storage vessel); reverse, a youth. Attic, red-figure, ca. 450 B.C. Attributed to the Ethiop Painter. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.41) (Location: The Wiener Gallery)

A number of ancient Greek texts recount that Cassandra, a daughter of the Trojan king Priam, had warned her countrymen against Greek treachery, but to no avail. When the Greeks sacked Troy, Cassandra took refuge at the cult statue of Athena; however, Ajax tore her away and raped her, thus committing sacrilege against Athena. The legendary actions of heroes were the basis for numerous rituals that took place in Greece. In Lokris, Ajax's native region, the citizens expiated his crime for a thousand years by sending two virgins every year to serve in the temple of Athena at Troy.

19. **Menelaos reclaiming his wife Helen after the Trojan War.** Obverse of a terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel); reverse, flute player and dancers; on the neck, obverse and reverse, horsemen and youths. Attic, black-figure, ca. 540 B.C. Attributed to Group E. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.18) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

A Hunt for Homer's *Odyssey*

20. **Odysseus pursuing Circe.** Obverse above of a terracotta calyx-krater (vessel for mixing wine with water, with handles in the shape of the calyx of a flower); reverse above, women and king; obverse below, man between women; reverse below, youth and women. Attic, red-figure, ca. 440 B.C. Attributed to the Persephone Painter. Gift of Amelia E. White, 1941 (41.83) (Location: The Stavros and Danaë Costopoulos Gallery)

The primary and most interesting scene on this two-row krater shows Odysseus pursuing Circe, the enchanting daughter of Helios and Perse. In the air between them are Circe's magic wand and the skyphos, or deep drinking cup, which contains the potion with which she transforms men into animals. Behind Odysseus, two of his men, with the features of a boar and a horse or mule, gesture to him. The pursuit below also may be mythological.

21. Eurykleia washing Odysseus' feet. Terracotta plaque. Greek, from the island of Melos, ca. 450 B.C. Fletcher Fund, 1925 (25.78.26) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery II)

One of the dramatic threads in the account of Odysseus' return to Ithaka is the gradual revelation of his identity. Here, Odysseus is seated before a columned facade that represents his palace. Before him stand his son Telemachos and his wife Penelope. As the old nurse Eurykleia washes Odysseus' feet, she recognizes him from an old scar on his leg.

22. Odysseus returning to Penelope. Terracotta plaque. Greek, from the island of Melos, ca. 450 B.C. Fletcher Fund, 1930 (30.11.9) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery II)

After the ten years of trial and adventure recounted in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus returned to his native island of Ithaka, where he found his wife Penelope harassed by suitors, who had taken over his palace and were consuming his wealth. Odysseus made his entrance looking like a beggar. Here he is shown approaching the disconsolate Penelope, as the faithful members of his household—his father Laertes, his son Telemachos, and the swineherd Eumaios—look on.



22.

LORE ABOUT PERSEUS

An oracle warned King Akrisios of Argos that the son of his daughter Danaë would kill him. Akrisios shut Danaë in a bronze chamber, but Zeus visited her as a shower of gold through a window, landed on her lap, and made her pregnant. After his daughter had her baby, Perseus, Akrisios set them both adrift in a chest on the sea. They washed ashore on the island of Seriphos, where a kind fisherman named Dictys took care of them. In time, his brother Polydektes, king of the island, fell in love with Danaë, and to get rid of her now grown-up son, Polydektes sent Perseus to fetch the head of Medusa, the only Gorgon who was mortal. Athena equipped Perseus with a bronze shield; the nymphs gave him a bag, a cap of darkness for invisibility, and winged shoes for flying; and Hermes presented him with a curved sword made of hard metal. From the three Graiai (“Gray Ones”), sisters of the Gorgons, Perseus learned the location of the cave where the Gorgons—Stheno, Euryale, and Medusa—lived. Knowing that if he looked directly at their snake-haired heads he would turn into stone, Perseus advanced on the sleeping sisters by looking at their reflection in Athena’s shield. He cut off Medusa’s head, dropped it into his bag, and, invisible thanks to the cap of darkness, flew away on his winged sandals as Medusa’s sisters vainly pursued him. On the way back to Polydektes, Perseus rescued from a sea monster the Ethiopian princess Andromeda, whom he later married. Since Polydektes was still bothering his mother at Seriphos, Perseus revealed Medusa’s head to him, turned him to stone, and then handed over his throne to Dictys. When Perseus returned his gear, he gave Athena the Medusa’s head to put on her aegis, the goatskin that she wore over her upper body. Perseus then went to Argos to see his grandfather; but Akrisios, to avoid the fulfillment of the oracle, fled to Thessaly. Perseus followed him and, while competing in Thessalian funeral games, he accidentally threw the diskos among the spectators and killed Akrisios, thus fulfilling the old prophecy. Perseus eventually became the king of Tiryns in Greece.

Ancient sources for stories of Perseus include Apollodorus (*Library*), Apollonius Rhodius (*Argonautica*), Euripides (fragments of *Andromeda*), Hesiod (*Shield of Herakles*), Homer (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*), Hyginus (*Fables*), Ovid (*Metamorphoses*), Pausanias (*Description of Greece*), and Pindar (*Pythian Ode 12*).

A Hunt for Perseus

23. Gorgon's face. Top of a terracotta stand. Attic, black-figure, ca. 570 B.C. Signed by Ergotimos as potter and Kleitias as painter. Fletcher Fund, 1931 (31.11.4) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Ergotimos and Kleitias signed a large volute-krater now in the Archaeological Museum, Florence, that is a compendium of Greek mythology, particularly relating to Achilles. This stand is the only other preserved work with both of their signatures. The three Gorgons were so horrible looking that whoever saw them turned to stone. In Archaic art and later, the Gorgon's face is a frequent motif, partly because it fit well into a circular format. It was also believed to avert bad luck and evil.



23.



24.

24. Fragment of a Gorgon from the marble stele (*grave marker*) of Kalliades. Greek, Attic, ca. 500–490 B.C. Rogers Fund, 1955 (55.11.4) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

The inscription identifies the person commemorated as Kalliades, son of Thoutimides. Whatever other references may have been intended, the Gorgon here replaces the usual sphinx or lion protecting the grave and warding off evil.

25. **Perseus beheading the sleeping Medusa.** Obverse of a terracotta pelike (jar); reverse, King Polypeithes between two women. Attic, red-figure, ca. 450–440 B.C. Attributed to Polygnotos. Rogers Fund, 1945 (45.11.1) (Location: Stavros and Danaë Costopoulos Gallery)

By the mid-fifth century B.C., the story of Perseus overcoming Medusa and the motif of the Gorgon's head had become popular in Attic art. The rendering here is unusual, however, because it is one of the earliest in which Medusa's face is that of a beautiful young woman, not of a monster whose gaze turned mortals to stone. Perseus looks unwaveringly at his protectress Athena. Another important feature here, although no longer easily visible, are the rays that surround the hero's head, indicating special stature or power, or perhaps representing the cap of invisibility given to him by the nymphs.

Compared with the movement and detail on the obverse, the reverse shows a grand and quiet scene of a king—who is not otherwise known—between two women holding the standard utensils for ritual offerings.

Polygnotos, a popular name in Classical Athens, is most often associated with Polygnotos of Thasos, who painted large-scale wall paintings in Athens and Delphi that are described in ancient literary sources.

26. Perseus flying away with the head of Medusa, while Pegasus springs from her severed neck. Terracotta lekythos (oil flask). Attic, black-figure, ca. 500 B.C. Attributed to the Diosphos Painter. Rogers Fund, 1906 (06.1070) (Location: The Judy and Michael H. Steinhardt Gallery)

On this vase, Perseus flees with Medusa's head in a sack as the immortal winged horse Pegasus springs from the neck of the dead Gorgon. Perseus and the horse are shown in the traditional black-figure manner, while the Gorgon is drawn in outline, a technique probably influenced by the newly developed red-figure method. Another particularly graphic rendering of the subject occurs on one end of a limestone sarcophagus from Golgoi in the A. G. Leventis Foundation Gallery located on the second floor of the Museum with the art of Cyprus.

27. Pegasus, the mythical winged horse. Terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel); shoulder, obverse and reverse, horsemen setting out; on the neck, men pursuing youths; under each handle, Pegasus. Attic, black-figure, ca. 550–540 B.C. Attributed to the Affecter. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.17) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

The decoration on this amphora derives entirely from the world of the Athenian male. One onlooker proffers an aryballos (oil flask), suggesting that the protagonists are returning rather than departing. The scenes on the neck probably pertain to the gymnasium, where older trainers mingle with the younger athletes. The inclusion of Pegasus may have something to do with the fact that the youths are riding horseback.

LORE ABOUT HERAKLES

Herakles, the hero of superhuman strength and power, is the son of Zeus and Alkmene and thus a descendant of Perseus, whose son Electryon was the father of Alkmene. Zeus, wishing to have a son who would be a guardian of mortals and immortals, visited Alkmene in Thebes, where they conceived Herakles. On the day Herakles should have been born, Zeus boasted that the descendant of Perseus about to be born would rule over Greece. Homer describes how the doubly jealous Hera delayed the birth of Herakles until the day after his cousin Eurystheos was born, thus ensuring that Eurystheos, also a descendant of Perseus, would inherit the throne. Throughout his life, Herakles had difficult tasks imposed on him by Eurystheos and by the vengeful goddess Hera. Even while he was still an infant, she sent two snakes at night to destroy him as he lay in his cradle. However, the young Herakles grasped the two serpents, one in each hand, and strangled them. According to some traditions, Herakles performed several great feats in his youth. He accompanied the Argonauts on their quest for the Golden Fleece, took part in the Calydonian boar hunt, and engaged in an expedition against Troy. Athena was his guardian and counselor, and at the end of his life, it was Athena who brought the hero to Olympos where he was deified.

Herakles is also closely connected with Apollo, with whom he quarreled over the Delphic tripod. In a fit of anger, Herakles attempted to steal the tripod from the Delphic oracle in order to found an oracle of his own. Zeus finally interceded and Apollo retained the tripod for his oracle.

At the age of eighteen, Herakles killed the lion of Thespieae. He later married Megara, a Theban princess, but their happy marriage ended when jealous Hera began to persecute Herakles by sending him into a fit of madness. In this state of mind, he killed his wife and all their children. According to some literary accounts, it was as penalty for these deeds that Apollo instructed him to perform twelve labors for Eurystheos, king of Tiryns. The usual order of the Twelve Labors of Herakles, which vary among ancient writers, is as follows: (1) killing the Nemean lion, which he

strangled; (2) killing the Lernaean Hydra; (3) capturing the Erymanthian boar; (4) capturing the stag of Keryneia; (5) killing the man-eating Stymphalian birds; (6) cleaning the stables of Augeas; (7) capturing the Cretan bull; (8) capturing the man-eating mares of Diomedes; (9) getting the girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons; (10) fetching the cattle of Geryon; (11) obtaining three golden apples from the Garden of the Hesperides; and (12) bringing Kerberos, the monstrous three-headed guard dog of Hades, to earth from the Underworld.

When Herakles married again it was to Deianeira, daughter of Oineos of Kalydon, for whom he had to fight the river god Acheloüs. Later on their journey, Herakles allowed the centaur Nessos to ferry his new wife across the river Euenos. However, Nessos tried to rape Deianeira, for which Herakles shot him with one of his poisoned arrows. The dying centaur convinced Deianeira that if she saved some of his (now poisoned) blood, it would act as a love potion on Herakles. By some literary accounts, when Herakles later fell in love with Iole, Deianeira smeared the blood on a white robe that Herakles was to wear before he offered sacrifice to Zeus. However, as soon as Herakles put on the robe, he was devoured by inner fire. Driven mad with excruciating pain, he threw himself on a funeral pyre on Mount Oita and the mortal part of his body burned away as the immortal part ascended to Mount Olympos. There, Herakles was at last reconciled with Hera, and married her daughter Hebe, goddess of youth.

Herakles is the most celebrated of all heroes of antiquity. Recognized for his strength, endurance, and passions, he was the patron of athletic sports and is credited with founding the Olympic games. Traditions of Herakles are the richest and most widely circulated. In the earliest Greek legends, he is a purely human hero, while later sources cite him as the subduer of monstrous animals.

The many ancient sources recounting the life of Herakles include Apollodorus (*Library*), Apollonius Rhodius (*Argonautica*), Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History*), Euripides (*Furious Herakles* and *Alcestis*), Herodotos (*History*), Hesiod (*Shield of Herakles* and *Theogony*), Homer (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*), Hyginus (*Fables*), Ovid (*Metamorphoses*), Pausanias (*Description of Greece*), Pindar (*Nemean Odes*), Plautus (*Amphitruo*), Seneca (*Hercules Furens* and *Hercules Oetaus*), Sophokles (*Women of Trachis*), Strabo (*Geography*), Theocritus (*Idylls*), and Vergil (*Aeneid*). In more modern times, Molière and Giraudoux mined Herakles' story for their literary works, as did Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden.

A Hunt for Herakles

28. Herakles statuette. Bronze. Greek, last quarter of 6th century B.C. Fletcher Fund, 1928 (28.77) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Here, Herakles is presented not only as a hero of extraordinary strength and vitality but also as a beautifully groomed—thus civilized—individual. Archaic art emphasizes this aspect of Herakles; only later do episodes such as the madness that Hera inflicted upon him become prominent in art. This bronze statuette was probably made as a votive dedication in a sanctuary. For a picture of this work of art, see figure 15 in the **Greek Art** section.

29. The infant Herakles strangling snakes sent by the goddess Hera.

Terracotta hydria (water jar). Attic, red-figure, ca. 460–450 B.C. Attributed to the Nausicaä Painter. Fletcher Fund, 1925 (25.28) (Location: The Wiener Gallery)

Herakles was one of the twins conceived in a night when Alkmene, the wife of Amphitryon, was visited by both her husband and the god Zeus. Angered by his infidelity, Zeus' wife Hera tried to kill the infant Herakles with snakes. Here, the child strangles them in the presence of his parents, his twin brother Iphikles, and Athena, his protective goddess.

30. Herakles and the Cretan bull. Terracotta kylix (drinking cup). Greek, Lakonian, ca. 550 B.C. In the manner of the Arkesilas Painter. Gift of N. Koutoulakis, 1959 (59.15) (Location: East side of The Robert and Renée Belfer Court)

One of Herakles' twelve labors was to capture a wild bull on the island of Crete. Here, the hero rushes at the beast, while a siren perches above on a branch.

31. Herakles and Amazons in combat. Obverse of a terracotta amphora (storage vessel); reverse, Dionysos, Hermes, and satyrs. Attic, black-figure, ca. 530 B.C. Attributed to an artist of the Bateman Group. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.7) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Another of Herakles' labors was to capture the girdle of the Amazon queen Hippolyta. Smitten with his strength and charm, Hippolyta was willing to make a gift of it to him when he arrived. However, Hera spread the rumor that Herakles intended to abduct the queen, which resulted in a fight between Herakles and the Amazons. In the end, Herakles killed Hippolyta and took her girdle. In the fierce battle depicted here, the Amazons are dressed like Greek hoplites (foot soldiers) with helmets, cuirasses, and round shields.



29.

32. **Herakles fighting the Amazons.** Obverse of a terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel); reverse, combat scene with two women watching. Attic, black-figure, ca. 520 B.C. Attributed to the Medea Group. Purchase, Christos G. Bastis Gift, 1961 (61.11.16) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Herakles confronts two Amazons armed like Greek hoplites with spears, while another Amazon, an archer, flees to the left. She wears the tunic and soft leather cap associated with eastern dress at this time.

33. **Herakles fighting an Amazon.** Interior of a terracotta kylix (drinking cup); exterior, obverse and reverse, three chariots. Attic, black-figure, ca. 560 B.C. Attributed to an artist related to the C Painter. Rogers Fund, 1912 (12.234.1) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

This hybrid Siana lip-cup is distinguished by its rich decoration and by the sensitivity with which the composition is applied to the shape. On the inside, Herakles' opponent is identifiable as a woman by the white pigment used for her flesh. The chariots on the exterior have been described as racing, but it is equally possible that they are advancing in a procession.



34.

34. Herakles offering sacrifice at an altar. Terracotta lekythos (oil flask); to the left, Helios (the Sun) rising in his quadriga (four-horse chariot), Nyx (Night) driving away, and Eos (goddess of dawn). Greek, black-figure, ca. 500 B.C. Said to be from Attica. Attributed to the Sappho Painter. Rogers Fund, 1941 (41.162.29) (Location: The Judy and Michael H. Steinhardt Gallery)

This vase shows a scene that is probably related to Herakles' journey to the west, outside the ring of ocean believed to have encircled the earth. Traveling in the bowl of the sun, he reached an otherworldly place where he killed the monster Geryon, one his twelve labors. Here, Herakles offers a sacrifice to Helios as the sun rises.

35. Herakles fighting Geryon. Reverse of a terracotta amphora (storage vessel); obverse, Herakles wrestling the Nemean lion. Attic, black-figure, ca. 540 B.C. Attributed to a painter of Group E. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.11) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Geryon was a three-bodied creature who lived in the far western corners of the Greek world in what is known today as Spain. He was renowned for his magnificent herd of red cattle. Several additional representations of Geryon—with and without Herakles—are in the Cypriot galleries on the second floor of the Museum.

36. Herakles with women, a satyr, and Pan in the Garden of the Hesperides. Terracotta hydria (water jar). Attic, red-figure, early 4th century B.C. Attributed to the Hesperides Painter. Fletcher Fund, 1924 (24.97.5) (Location: The Spyros and Eurydice Costopoulos Gallery)

Another major labor of Herakles was to bring to Mycenae the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides, which lay far to the west and was guarded by the serpent Ladon. In the usual account, Herakles kills Ladon and takes the apples. But in this scene, the Garden of the Hesperides seems to have become a sanctuary of Dionysos, for the guardian women may be maenads, while a satyr and the part-goat divinity Pan stand nearby.

37. Herakles, Theseus, and Perithous in Hades. Obverse and reverse, above, of a terracotta calyx-krater (vessel for mixing wine and water, with handles in the shape of the calyx of a flower); obverse below, Apollo and Tityos; reverse below, Zeus and a giant. Attic, red-figure, ca. 450–440 B.C. Attributed to the Nekyia Painter. Rogers Fund, 1908 (08.258.21) (Location: The Stavros and Danaë Costopoulos Gallery)

This vase illustrates a story that would have been sung or recited. Herakles' most difficult and last labor was to fetch Kerberos, the three-headed watchdog of the Underworld. In the upper zone, Herakles, with his guide Hermes, stands beside Theseus and Perithous, who were punished for attempting to carry off Persephone, the wife of Hades. Hades, king of the Underworld, is shown behind Perithous. Around the circumference of the vase appear other heroes known chiefly from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, each with his name inscribed. The two scenes in the lower zone depict further mythological punishments.

38. Herakles and Apollo struggling for the Delphic tripod. Obverse of the body of a terracotta amphora (storage vessel); reverse, Dionysos, god of wine, between a satyr and maenad; on the lip, obverse and reverse, Herakles and the Nemean lion. Attic, red-figure, ca. 530 B.C. Signed by Andokides as potter; attributed to the Andokides Painter (red-figure) and the Lysippides Painter (black-figure). Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1963 (63.11.6) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

The introduction of the red-figure technique is attributed to the workshop of Andokides. While we think of red-figure mainly in terms of drawing, it differs from black-figure also in the distribution of glossed and unglazed surfaces on a vase. The preparation of these surfaces was probably the responsibility of the potter, and for this reason the new technique is associated with potters rather than painters. On some works that combine red-figure and black-figure, known as bilingual pots, a single painter seems to have done both. In this particular instance, however, two different artists are most likely responsible. The scene on the obverse depicts Herakles, with his club, and his half-brother Apollo, with his bow and arrows, struggling over

the Delphic tripod. After Herakles killed his friend Iphitos, he sought purification at the sanctuary of Delphi, sacred to Apollo, in central Greece. As punishment, Apollo ordered Herakles to serve as a slave to Queen Omphale of Lydia for one year. Angry, Herakles seized the sacred tripod of Delphi upon which the Pythian priestess sat and delivered prophecies. A struggle ensued between Apollo and Herakles until Zeus separated the pair with his thunderbolt.

39. Herakles and Apollo struggling for the Delphic tripod. Obverse of a terracotta column-krater (vessel for mixing wine with water, with handles in the shape of columns); reverse, onlookers; on the inside of the mouth, ships. Attic, black-figure, ca. 520–510 B.C. Attributed to the Lykomedes Painter. Rogers Fund, 1907 (07.286.76) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Representations of Herakles' attempt to seize the tripod from the oracle of Apollo at Delphi were popular in Attic vase painting from the end of the sixth century B.C. to the middle of the fifth century B.C. In addition to featuring the popular hero Herakles, they afforded artists the opportunity to depict two male figures in motion. This challenge particularly interested practitioners of the newly introduced red-figure technique, but it also spurred black-figure artists who wished to remain up-to-date.



38.

40. Herakles in the struggle for the Delphic tripod. Reverse of a terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel) with twisted handles; obverse, Apollo. Attic, red-figure, ca. 490–480 B.C. Attributed to the Kleophrades Painter. Rogers Fund, 1913 (13.233) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery II)

In the Archaic tradition, depictions of the struggle for the Delphic tripod emphasize the narrative: Herakles tries to carry off the tripod, while Apollo, the presiding deity, keeps firm hold of it. By contrast, the Kleophrades Painter emphasizes the protagonists rather than the action: Apollo moves purposefully, asserting himself simply by raising his right hand; Herakles has possession of the tripod, which he appears to defend with his club. The outcome is conveyed by the characterization of the figures.

41. Herakles wrestling Triton. On the body of a terracotta hydria (water jar); on the shoulder, Achilles pursuing Troilos. Attic, black-figure, ca. 560–550 B.C. Rogers Fund, 1906 (06.1021.48) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Herakles wrestling Triton is a recurrent subject, especially on hydriai and neck-amphorai of the second half of the sixth century B.C. No surviving ancient source spells out the story. Its popularity on pots in general use, particularly water pots like the hydriai, is due partly to Tritons being marine creatures and partly to widespread interest in the exploits of Herakles. The pursuit of the Trojan youth Troilos, represented on the shoulder, is pertinent because, as he fled in vain from the Greek hero Achilles, his twin sister Polyxena dropped the hydria in which she was carrying water from the fountain house.

42. Herakles wrestling Triton. Obverse of a terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel); reverse, courting scene. Attic, black-figure, ca. 520 B.C. Attributed to the Medea Group. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.21) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Though the observers are not central to the action, it is interesting to see how they are treated: when they stand and watch, they appear to be onlookers, but when they sit, as here, they seem to be an audience listening to a story.

43. Herakles slaying the Egyptian king Busiris. Obverse of a terracotta column-krater (vessel for mixing wine with water, with handles in the shape of columns); reverse, the king's priests and attendants in flight. Attic, red-figure, ca. 470–460 B.C. Attributed to the Agrigento Painter. Rogers Fund, 1915 (15.27) (Location: The Wiener Gallery)

One of Herakles' numerous adventures occurred in Egypt, where he encountered Busiris, a king who had been advised to sacrifice all strangers to Zeus in order to avoid drought. Herakles prevailed over Busiris, killing him and all his henchmen.

44. Jason about to seize the Golden Fleece, the stern of the *Argo* at the right. Obverse of a terracotta column-krater (bowl for mixing wine with water, with handles in the shape of columns); reverse, women between two youths. Attic, red-figure, ca. 470–460 B.C. Attributed to the Orchard Painter. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1934 (34.II.7) (Location: The Wiener Gallery)

By some accounts, Herakles joined Jason and the Argonauts, a band of adventurers, when they set out on the ship *Argo* to steal the magical golden fleece of a ram. The fleece was preserved in Kolchis on the Black Sea. With the help of the gods and the sorceress Medea, Jason was able to take the fleece from a grove protected by a dragon. Here, with Athena beside him, he reaches for the fleece, while a companion prepares to board the ship.

The basis of the Golden Fleece legend is probably the ancient practice of extracting alluvial gold by causing the deposits in a stream to wash over a fleece, thereby catching the gold-bearing material in the curly pelt.



44.



45.

45. Herakles slaying Nessos. Terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel). Attic, second quarter of 7th century B.C. Rogers Fund, 1911 (11.210.1) (Location: East side of The Robert and Renée Belfer Court)

During the first half of the seventh century B.C., vase painters in Athens abandoned the almost abstract geometric tradition in favor of a vigorous naturalistic style inspired by art imported from the Near East. An early representation of a Greek myth is shown on the front of this monumental vase. Herakles strides to the left, sword in hand, grabbing the hair of Nessos, a centaur who had tried to rape Herakles' wife Deianeira. The two components of the centaur—horse and man—are not well integrated in this early representation, but the creature shows emotion, pleading for mercy with outstretched hands. Behind Herakles, a four-horse chariot and a driver wait patiently for the outcome of the battle, while a small man attracted by the excitement rushes forward. The scene is depicted with a combination of outline and filled-in silhouette enlivened by white and incised lines. A lion attacks a deer on the neck of the vase, and horses graze on the shoulder, but most of the surface is filled with floral motifs and curvilinear decorations.

46. Introduction of Herakles among the Olympians. Obverse of a terracotta amphora (storage vessel); reverse, combat of two warriors over a third. Attic, black-figure, ca. 520–510 B.C. Attributed to the Lysippides Painter. Gift of Colonel and Mrs. Lewis Landes, 1958 (58.32) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Herakles, son of a divine father, Zeus, and a mortal mother, Alkmene, was the only hero to be introduced among the gods. He is shown here with his protectress Athena as he mounts a chariot, and with Dionysos, Kore, and Hermes. This scene allowed the combination of three subjects popular at the time—Dionysos, chariots, and Herakles.

LORE ABOUT THESEUS

Influenced by the lore of the ever-popular Herakles and the desire for a local hero, ancient Athenians created the legends of Theseus, probably at some time near the end of the sixth century B.C. Since Theseus was a late-comer to Attic tradition, he had few sanctuaries, but was deeply embedded in the Athenian festival cycle. In 475 B.C., the Athenian general Kimon, as a popular gesture, fetched the hero's supposed bones back from the island of Skyros and reinterred them in a temple dedicated to him in Athens.

Theseus is the son of Aithra, daughter of King Pittheus of Troizen in the eastern Peloponnesos, and King Aigeus of Athens, although in later times the belief that Theseus was the son of Poseidon became widespread in Athens. After Aithra became pregnant, Aigeus placed his sandals and sword under a great boulder with instructions that Theseus lift the boulder and bring the items to Aigeus in Athens and claim his right to the throne. Theseus passed this test in early manhood, and decided to return to his father via the dangerous land route along the Saronic Gulf. Along the way he defeated many formidable monsters and criminals, such as Periphetes

near Epidauros, Sinis at the Isthmus of Corinth, the wild sow of Krommyon, Skiron near Megara, Kerkyon at Eleusis, and Prokrustes at Koydallos in Attica. Upon his return to Athens, his father's new wife Medea tried to poison him, while his cousins tried to ambush him. However, Theseus persevered and Aigeus named him as his successor. Theseus then turned his attention to killing the wild bull of Marathon, the same bull that Herakles had brought back from Crete. But the greatest deed of Theseus' life was going to Crete and killing the Minotaur. Because his son Androgeos had been killed at the Athenian games, King Minos of Crete had been exacting a terrible tribute from the city. Every year Minos obliged the Athenians to send seven adolescent boys and girls to be offered up in the Labyrinth to the Minotaur, a monster that was half man and half bull. According to some, the Minotaur ate the victims, but other stories maintain they simply wandered about in the Labyrinth until they starved to death. Theseus accompanied the victims, slew the Minotaur, and escaped from the Labyrinth with the help of King Minos' daughter Ariadne.

Afterwards, he fled Crete with Ariadne, only to abandon her on the island of Naxos. Before Theseus had left Athens for Crete, he had been instructed by his father to raise the white sails on his ship upon his return as a signal that he had been successful. However, Theseus forgot to do so and, according to one account, Aigeus hurled himself into the sea that now bears his name—the Aegean. Theseus thus became king of Athens and united all the surrounding communities into a single political entity with its capital at Athens (the synoecism of Attica).

Many of the legends associated with Theseus are not unlike those describing the life of Herakles. Like Herakles, Theseus led an expedition against the Amazons, winning their queen Hippolyta (or Antiope) for himself. (His action, however, caused the Amazons to invade Attica, where they were defeated after much trouble.) He is also associated with the Calydonian boar hunt, as well as Jason and the Argonauts. Theseus' greatest friend was Perithous, king of the Thessalian nation of Lapiths. The pair defeated the drunken and wild centaurs at Perithous' wedding, and later tried to carry off Hades' wife Persephone from the Underworld. In the usual version, after their failure and imprisonment in the Underworld, Herakles rescued Theseus but left Perithous behind. Theseus also kidnapped the lovely Helen (of Trojan War fame) as a child, leaving her with his mother until the girl should grow up and marry him. However, when her brothers, the mighty Dioskouroi, invaded Attica, Theseus was forced to give up the fair maiden. In the political upheaval that followed, Theseus fled to the island of Skyros, where he was pushed off a cliff by the treacherous King Lycomedes. One later story has Theseus fighting in the Athenian army against the Persians at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.

Ancient literary sources for Theseus include Apollodorus (*Library*), Euripides (*Hippolytos*), Herodotos (*History*), Hyginus (*Fables*), Ovid (*Metamorphoses*), Pausanias (*Description of Greece*), Plutarch (*Theseus*), Seneca (*Phaedra*), and Vergil (*Aeneid*).

A Hunt for Theseus

47. Theseus killing the brigand Skiron. Obverse of a terracotta amphora (storage vessel); reverse, Theseus killing the Minotaur. Attic, red-figure, ca. 480 B.C. Attributed to the Gallatin Painter. Rogers Fund, 1941 (41.162.101) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery II)

The exploits of Theseus differ from those of Herakles in that Theseus' major deeds had to do with the fortunes of Athens in its mythical past, while Herakles' were often acts of atonement. The killing of Skiron, for example, occurred as Theseus was on his way to assert his ancestral claim to Attica. Skiron forced travelers to wash his feet and, while they were thus occupied, he kicked them into the sea. Later, Theseus killed the Minotaur to liberate Attica from Cretan domination.

48. Theseus seizing the bull of Marathon. Obverse of a terracotta calyx-krater (vessel for mixing wine with water, with handles in the shape of the calyx of a flower); reverse, three youths. Attic, red-figure, ca. 440–430 B.C. Attributed to a painter of the Polygnotos Group. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.48) (Location: The Stavros and Danaë Costopoulos Gallery)

As Theseus made his way from Troizen to Attica, he performed a number of feats, including capturing the bull that had been ravaging the region around Marathon, which he then sacrificed to Apollo. According to some traditions, it was the same bull that Herakles had brought from Crete to Mycenae as one of his labors, but it had escaped to Marathon. Here, the two protagonists move gracefully in unison, much like their counterparts on the south frieze of the Parthenon.

49. Theseus in Poseidon's undersea palace and his arrival in Athens. Interior and exterior of a terracotta kylix (drinking cup). Attic, red-figure, ca. 480 B.C. Attributed to the Briseis Painter. Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1953 (53.11.4); Gift of E. D. Blake Vermeule, 1970 (1970.46) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery II)

The subject of the decoration on this kylix is elucidated in a poem by Bacchylides, who was active in the fifth century B.C. On the interior and on one side of the exterior, Theseus, who is bound for Crete to kill the Minotaur, takes leave of Poseidon and the sea god's wife Amphitrite. On the other side, the victorious Theseus is welcomed back to Athens by Athena.

50. Theseus about to slay the Minotaur, flanked by Nike (victory) and Ariadne. Obverse of a terracotta column-krater (vessel for mixing wine with water, with handles in the shape of columns); reverse, three youths. Attic, red-figure, ca. 460 B.C. Attributed to the Alkimachos Painter. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.46) (Location: The Wiener Gallery)

51. Theseus and the Minotaur. Obverse of a terracotta amphora (storage vessel); reverse, frontal chariot. Attic, black-figure, ca. 540 B.C. Attributed to Group E. Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.12) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Group E favored the subject of the confrontation between Theseus and the Minotaur. Though slow-moving, the figures indicate a more complex rendering of spatial relations than earlier compositions. The white object in the Minotaur's hand is a stone, a traditional weapon of adversaries considered by the Greeks to be less civilized than themselves.



52.

52. Theseus slaying the Minotaur. Obverse of a terracotta amphora (storage vessel); reverse, men weighing merchandise. Attic, black-figure, ca. 540–530 B.C. Signed by Taleides as potter; painting attributed to the Taleides Painter. Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1947 (47.11.5) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

Discovered at Agrigento in Sicily before 1801, this is the first Greek vase with a potter's signature that was known and published in modern times; there is also an inscription praising a youth, Klitarchos, as handsome. Here, Theseus kills the Minotaur in the palace of King Minos on Crete. The reverse shows a large balance with containers on each pan and men weighing merchandise.

53. Possibly Dionysos and Ariadne at a banquet. Obverse of a terracotta neck-amphora (storage vessel); reverse, Herakles and Achelouïs. Attic, black-figure, ca. 570–560 B.C. Attributed to the Ptoon Painter. Gift of Eugene Holman, 1959 (59.64) (Location: The Bothmer Gallery I)

By the second quarter of the sixth century B.C., figural subjects, and particularly mythological motifs, were more common than animal friezes on Attic vases. The man-headed bull on the reverse identifies the scene as Herakles subduing the river god Acheloius. The banquet on the obverse may depict the god of wine, Dionysos, with Ariadne, whom, according to some legends, Dionysos married after she was abandoned by Theseus.

54. Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs. On the neck, obverse, of a terracotta volute-krater (vessel for mixing wine with water, with handles in the shape of volutes); on the neck, reverse, youths and women; around the body, an Amazonomachy (battle between the Greeks and Amazons). Attic, red-figure, ca. 450 B.C. Attributed to the Painter of the Woolly Satyrs. Rogers Fund, 1907 (07.286.84) (Location: The Mary and Michael Jaharis Gallery)

Greek vase paintings frequently depicted grand mythological battles between Greeks and their eastern adversaries, the Amazons. The most celebrated depictions of these so-called Amazonomachies in Athens during the first half of the fifth century B.C. were several large-scale wall paintings that decorated the sanctuary of Theseus and the portico known as the Stoa Poikile, which also contained several painted panels depicting the Battle of Marathon.
