

**MEDUSA: FROM BEAST TO BEAUTY  
IN ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL ILLUSTRATIONS  
FROM GREECE AND SOUTH ITALY.**

by

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## **PREFACE**

Representations of an attractive Medusa occur on vases as early as the mid-fifth century B.C in the context of the Perseus myth. Earlier portrayals, however, feature a monster, generally hideously depicted. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the iconographic development of Medusa's full-figure and gorgoneia images on vases and other objects from her earliest archaic representations to her fourth century B.C. portrayals. The primary aim of this thesis is to determine when the transformation of Medusa from a hideous monster into a beautiful woman initially occurs and whether this transformation is simultaneous with regard to both her full-figure representations and the gorgoneia.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABV</i>	Beazley, J. D. <i>Attic Black-figure Vase-painters</i> . Oxford, 1956.
<i>Addenda</i> <sup>2</sup>	Carpenter, Th. H., <i>et al.</i> <i>Beazley Addenda. Additional References to ABV, ARV<sup>2</sup> and Paralipomena</i> . Oxford, second edition, 1989.
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i> . From 1885.
<i>AM</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts: Athenische Abteilung</i> . Athens, from 1876.
<i>ARV</i> <sup>2</sup>	Beazley, J. D. <i>Attic Red-figure Vase Painters</i> . Oxford, second edition, 1963.
<i>CVA</i>	<i>Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum</i> .
<i>FGrHist</i>	Jacoby, F. <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> . Berlin/Leiden, 1923-1958.
<i>Götterbeistand</i>	Beckel, G. <i>Götterbeistand in der Bildüberlieferung griechischer Heldensagen</i> . Waldsassen/Bayern, 1961.
<i>Henle, Myths</i>	Henle, J. <i>Greek Myths: A Vase Painter's Notebook</i> . Bloomington, 1973.
<i>LCS</i>	Trendall, A. D. <i>The Red-figured Vases of Lucania, Campania and Sicily</i> . Oxford, 1967.
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> IV. Zurich and Munich, 1988.

<i>Para</i>	Beazley, J. D. <i>Paralipomena, Additions to Attic Black-figure Vase-Painters and to Attic Red-figure Vase-painters</i> . Oxford, 1971.
<i>Roscher, ML</i>	<i>Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie</i> . Leipzig, 1884-1937.
<i>RVAp</i>	Trendall, A. D. and A. Cambitoglou. <i>Red-figured Vases of Apulia</i> , Vol. 1. Oxford, 1978.
Schauenburg, <i>Perseus</i>	Schauenburg, K. <i>Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums</i> . Bonn, 1960.
<i>Urkönige</i>	Schefold, K. <i>Die Urkönige, Perseus, Bellerophon, Herakles und Theseus in der klassischen und hellenistischen Kunst</i> . Munich, 1988.
<i>VL</i> <sup>3</sup>	Brommer, F. <i>Vasenlisten zur griechischen Heldensage</i> . Marburg, third edition, 1973.
Woodward, <i>Perseus</i>	Woodward, J. <i>Perseus: A Study in Greek Art and Legend</i> . Cambridge, 1937.

## CATALOGUE

### ARCHAIC ILLUSTRATIONS:

#### Beheading of Medusa:

1. Paris, Louvre CA 795 Plate 1, figure 1.  
  
Boeotian relief amphora from Thebes, circa 670 B.C. Medusa as woman with horse body, hindquarters and tail attached at the small of her back. Unattractive female face with open mouth revealing teeth.  
Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 36, no. VI; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 275, E1; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 312, no. 290.
  
2. Paris, Louvre CA 937 Plate 1, figure 2.  
  
Fragment from a relief amphora from Thebes, circa 670 B.C. Only Perseus appears.  
Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 275, E2; *LIMC* IV (1988) p. 312, no. 290.
  
3. Samos, Archaeological Museum E1 Plate 2, figure 1.  
  
Ivory relief from the sanctuary of Hera, Samos, fourth quarter seventh century B.C. Fragmentary image. Winged Medusa with open mouth showing teeth, tongue and wrinkled nose. Snakes rising from her head.  
Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 36, no. VII; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 312, no. 291.
  
4. Athens, National Museum 15365 Plate 2, figure 2.  
  
Ivory relief from Sparta, fourth quarter seventh century B.C. Fragmentary image. Winged Medusa with grimacing mouth, protruding tongue and snaky locks in hair.  
Hampe, "Korfugiebel und frühe Perseusbilder", *AM* 60/61 (1935-36) p. 288, no. 6; *LIMC* IV, (1988), p. 312, no. 291a.
  
5. Olympia, Museum at Olympia B 975 Plate 2, figure 3.  
  
Bronze shield-band from Olympia, shortly before the mid sixth century B.C. Winged Medusa with four snakes rising from her head. Athena taking part in slaying of Medusa.  
Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 36, no. VIII; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 312, no. 292.

6. London, British Museum B 471

Plate 3, figure 1.

Attic black-figured olpe by the Amasis Painter, circa 550/540 B.C. Medusa with wings, short chiton, nebris and belt of snakes. Four snakes rising from her head. The signature *Amasis mepoiesen* ("Amasis made me") appears along far left side. Beazley, *ABV* 153, 32; Beazley, *Para* 64, 32; *Addenda*<sup>2</sup> 44, 153.32; Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 36, no. 40; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 274, A1; Bothmer, *The Amasis Painter and His World*, 1985, pp. 150-152, no. 31, pl. 5; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 312, no. 293.

7. Paris, Louvre F 218 bis

Plate 3, figure 2.

Attic black-figured amphora attributed to the Swing Painter, third quarter sixth century B.C. Winged Medusa with white skin, distended mouth and animal-like nose. Perseus is bearded and carries a harpe. Beazley, *ABV* 308, 80; *Addenda*<sup>2</sup> 83, 308.80; Schauenburg, *Perseus*, 1960, p. 53, fig. 5.1; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 274, A4; Böhr, *Der Schaukelmaler*, 1982, pp. 35-36, no. 119, fig. 125.

8. Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum 62 d

Plate 4, figure 1.

Black-figured plate fragment from Tarquinia, circa 530 B.C. Fragmentary image. Winged Medusa with white skin, grimacing mouth and protruding tongue. Presumably Perseus holds the short sword. Hampe, "Korfugiebel und frühe Perseusbilder", *AM* 60/61 (1935), p. 292, no. 10; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 274, A2.

9. Rome, Villa Giulia 3556

Plate 4, figure 2.

Attic black-figured hydria from Falerii attributed to the Antimenes Painter, circa 520/510 B.C. White skinned Medusa with wings and winged boots holding two large snakes in her hands. Small snakes rising from her head. Inscriptions identify Perseus and Athena. Beazley, *ABV* 269, 35; Beazley, *Para* 118, 35; *Addenda*<sup>2</sup> 70, 269.35; Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 37, no. 41; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 274, A3; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 312, no. 294; Burow, *Der Antimenesmaler*, 1989, pp. 62-63, no. 130, fig. 127.

## CLASSICAL ILLUSTRATIONS:

### Approach of Perseus:

10. Athens, National Museum 10459

Plate 5, figures 1, 2.

Red-figured plate with double image, perhaps a Boeotian copy of an Attic prototype (see Wolters-Bruns ref.), second quarter fifth century B.C. Fragmentary image. Inner image portrays winged Medusa with protruding tongue wearing short chiton and sleeping on a rocky incline near tree. On opposite side, Perseus creeps forward with harpe. A fragmentary inscription appears along far left side behind Perseus that presumably identifies the hero.

Wolters-Bruns, *Das Kabirenheiligtum bei Theben*, 1940, p. 85, fig. 24; Schauenburg, *Perseus*, 1960, p. 20; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 275, B8.

11. London, British Museum E 493

Plate 6, figure 1.

Attic red-figured bell-krater from Kamiros attributed to the Villa Giulia Painter, circa 460/450 B.C. Fragmentary image. Winged Medusa with grinning mouth and protruding tongue in short chiton sleeping on the ground. Inscriptions identify Perseus, Athena and Hermes.

Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 619, 18; 1662; Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 37, no. 42; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, 274, B1; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, p. 105; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 312, no. 298.

12. Madrid, Museo Arqueologico Nacional 169 (11010)

Plate 7, figures 1, 2.

Attic red-figured bell-krater attributed to the Villa Giulia Painter, circa 460/450 B.C. Winged Medusa with grinning mouth and protruding tongue in short chiton sleeping on the ground. Similar to BM E 493. Inscriptions identify Perseus, Athena and Hermes.

Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 619, 19; Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 37, no. 43; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 274, B2; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, p. 105; *LIMC* IV (1988) p. 312, no. 298.



13. Richmond, Virginia Museum 62.1.1

Plate 8, figures 1-3.

Attic red-figured hydria attributed to the Nausikaa Painter, circa 450 B.C. Winged Medusa with grinning mouth and protruding tongue sleeping on the ground in short chiton.

Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1683, 48 bis; Beazley, *Para* 452, 48; *Addenda*<sup>2</sup> 330, (1110.48 bis); Schauenburg, "Zu einer Hydria des Nausikaa-Malers in Richmond", *Kunst in Hessen und am Mittelrhein* 3, 1963, pp. 3-15, figs. 1-3; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, p. 105; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 312, no. 299.

14. Paris, Louvre MNB 1286 (L 183)

Plate 9, figures 1, 2.

Attic white-ground pyxis from Athens perhaps by the Sotheby Painter, circa 460/450 B.C. Winged Medusa with Negroid features reclining against rocky outcrop in short chiton.

Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 775; 1669; Beazley, *Para* 416; *Addenda*<sup>2</sup> 288, 775; Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 37, no. 44; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 274, B3; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, pp. 105-106; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 312, no. 300.

15. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 45. 11.1

Plate 10, figures 1, 2.

Attic red-figured pelike by Polygnotos, circa 450/440 B.C. Winged Medusa with attractive face sleeping in short chiton, her head resting against her left hand. An inscription identifies Perseus.

Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1032, 55; Beazley, *Para* 442, 55; *Addenda*<sup>2</sup> 318, 1032.55; Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 37, no. 45; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup> p. 274, B6; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, pp. 104-105, fig. 126; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 313, no. 301.

*Beheading of Medusa (Fourth century B.C.):*

16. Leningrad, Hermitage St. 1918

Plate 11, figure 1.

Attic red-figured pelike, circa 360/50 B.C. Perseus beheading wingless Medusa with nude upper torso.

Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup> p. 274, B5; Schauenburg, *Perseus*, 1960, p. 25; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 313, no. 304.

17. Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum 1764

Plate 12, figures 1, 2.

Apulian relief rhyton from Ruvo, third quarter fourth century B.C. Fragmentary image. Winged Medusa as beautiful young woman with snakes in hair, sinking to knee.

Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup> p. 276, E4; Schauenburg, *Perseus*, 1960, p. 24; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 313, no. 303.

Gorgoneia:

18. Berlin, Staatliche Museum F 2377

Plate 13, figures 1, 2.

Attic red-figured hydria from Vulci, the name-piece of the Perseus Painter, circa 470 B.C. Perseus holds head of Medusa that has long hair, grinning mouth showing teeth and protruding tongue. Her eyes are closed.

Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 582, 16; 1660; Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 35, no. 34; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 286, B9; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, p. 104; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 315, no. 336.

19. Munich, Antikensammlungen 8725

Plate 14, figure 1.

Attic red-figured pelike attributed to the Pan Painter, circa 470 B.C. Perseus holds head of Medusa in both hands that has grinning mouth showing teeth, protruding tongue and fleshy fold at chin. She wears a diadem and earrings.

Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 554, 85; *Addenda*<sup>2</sup> 258, 554.85; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 287, B17; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, pp. 102-103, fig. 122; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 315, no. 335.

20. London, British Museum E 181

Plate 15, figure 1.

Attic red-figured hydria attributed to the Pan Painter, circa 470 B.C. The headless, winged torso of Medusa in short chiton is collapsed to the ground. Medusa's head peeks out from kibisis carried by Perseus.

Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 555, 96; Beazley, *Para* 338, 96; *Addenda*<sup>2</sup> 258, 555.96; Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 35, no. 33; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup> p. 280, B2; Henle, *Myths*, 1973, p. 96, fig. 47; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, p. 102, fig. 121; *LIMC* IV (1988) p. 315, no. 335.

21. Catania, Museo Biscari 1677 (L 697) Plate 16, figure 1.
- Attic red-figured kylix-krater from Kamarina in Catania attributed to the Mykonos Painter, circa 460 B.C. Perseus holds up head of Medusa to show to Polydektes. It has grinning mouth, protruding tongue and Negroid features.  
 Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 515, 6; 1657; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 287, B16; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, p. 113.
22. Bologna, Museo Civico 325 Plate 17, figures 1, 2.
- Attic red-figured bell-krater from Bologna attributed to the Polydektes Painter, circa 450/440 B.C. Perseus turning Polydektes to stone by displaying head of Medusa. It has short, wavy hair with attractive features.  
 Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1069, 2; 1681; Beazley, Para. 447; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 287, B13; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, p. 113, fig. 137; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 315, no. 337.
23. Olympia, Museum of Olympia Plate 18, figure 1,
- Attic red-figured plate, perhaps from the workshop of the Achilles Painter, circa 440 B.C. Fragmentary image. Perseus holds Medusa's head that has short hair and protruding tongue.  
 Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup> p. 287, B20; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 315, no. 339.
24. Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina 2512 Plate 19, figures 1, 2.
- Attic red-figured oinochoe attributed to the Shuvalov Painter, circa 430 B.C. Perseus holding head of Medusa that has short, wavy hair and small protruding tongue as he flees from a Gorgon sister up a mountain.  
 Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1206, 2; Beazley, Para 463; *Addenda*<sup>2</sup> 344, 1206.2; Beckel, *Götterbeistand*, 1961, p. 33, no. 37; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup> p. 280, B9; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, p. 107, figs. 129-130; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 315, no. 333.
25. Leningrad, Hermitage 2077 (B 1026) Plate 20, figures 1, 2.
- Campanian red-figured neck-amphora attributed to the Owl-Pillar Group, third quarter fifth century B.C. Perseus turning Polydektes to stone by displaying head of Medusa.  
 Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup> p. 289, D17; Trendall, *LCS*, 1967, p. 667, no. 2; Schefold, *Urkönige*, 1988, p. 113; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 315, no. 340.

26. Strassburg, University Museum 1574 Plate 21, figures 1, 2.
- Presumably South Italian (see Beazley ref.) red-figured cup, circa 400 B.C. Perseus holding profile Medusa head that has short, wavy hair as he flees from Gorgon sister. Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1361, 2; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup> p. 282, D3; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 315, no. 334.
27. Taranto, Museo Nazionale Plate 21, figures 3, 4.
- Presumably South Italian (see Beazley ref.) red-figured cup from Ceglie, circa 400 B.C. Perseus holding profile head of Medusa that has short, wavy hair as he flees from Gorgon sister. Similar to Strassburg, University Museum 1574. Beazley, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1361, 1; Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup> p. 282, D3; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 315, no. 334.
28. Taranto, Private Collection Plate 22, figures 1, 2.
- Apulian red-figured pelike attributed to the Tarporley Painter, circa 400/380 B.C. Athena in center sits upon stony hill holding up head of Medusa which is reflected in her shield. Perseus stands on left looking at the reflection. The head portrays a beautiful woman with the tip of her tongue protruding from her mouth and snakes in her hair. Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup> p. 289, D21; Schauenburg, *Perseus*, 1960, p. 78; Trendall-Cambitoglou, *RVAp* I, 1978, p. 51, no. 44.
29. Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum 79 Plate 23, figures 1, 2.
- Apulian red-figured bell-krater attributed to the Eton-Nike Painter, circa 370 B.C. Perseus displaying head of Medusa to satyrs. Head portrays an attractive woman with snakes rising from her head and knotting around her neck. Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup> pp. 288, D1 and 290, D1; Trendall-Cambitoglou, *RVAp* I, 1978, p. 77, no. 83; *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 315, no. 342.
30. Copenhagen, National Museum 3407 Plate 24, figure 1.
- Lucanian red-figured Panathenaic amphora attributed to the Choephoroi Painter, third quarter fourth century B.C. Perseus holding head of Medusa that has short, wavy hair, closed eyes and attractive features. Bearded man on left possibly Diktys. Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 289, D16; Schauenburg, *Perseus*, 1960, p. 84; Trendall, *LCS*, 1967, p. 122, no. 617.

## **THE PERSEUS MYTH**

One of the oldest and most complete known accounts of the Perseus myth was written by the Greek poet, Pherecydes, probably in the first half of the fifth century B.C. In his second book of *Genealogie* which survives only in fragments,<sup>1</sup> he recounts the myth generally as follows:

Akrisios, the King of Argos was prophesied to die at the hand of his yet unborn grandson. To prevent the prophesy's fulfillment, Akrisios imprisoned his unwed daughter, Danäe, in an underground chamber. However, Zeus fell in love with her and easily penetrated her prison by transforming himself into a shower of gold. As a result of their union, Perseus was born. Once Akrisios became aware of his grandson, he locked Danäe and the infant Perseus in a chest and threw them out to sea. The chest landed on the island of Seriphos where Diktys, a kindly fisherman, cared for them until Perseus grew to manhood. Meanwhile, King Polydektes, the brother of Diktys, had fallen in love with Danäe who rejected his affection. At an event held by the King, Perseus foolishly boasted that he would bring back the head of Medusa. She was the one mortal Gorgon among three sisters and was endowed with the formidable power to turn men to stone with a glance. The King seized the opportunity to be rid of Perseus once and for all in order to marry Danäe. However, Perseus was assisted in his quest for Medusa's head by Athena and Hermes. They helped him to obtain the cap of Hades for invisibility, the winged shoes for swiftness and a pouch or kibisis to hold the head of Medusa. With these magical accessories and the protection of the gods, Perseus was able to decapitate Medusa while she slept. At the moment of her death, Pegasus, the divine winged stallion, and Chrysaor, the hero with the golden sword, were born from her severed

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<sup>1</sup> The fragments are quoted by another ancient author in his commentary on the *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius. They are preserved in two notes: schol. Apoll. Rhod. IV. 1091, 1515 (Pherecydes: *FGrHist* 1, 61 f., fragments 10-11).

neck. Medusa's two Gorgon sisters, seeking revenge for her death pursued Perseus, who was able to elude them by wearing the cap of Hades that made him invisible. On his return to the island of Seriphos, he discovered his mother taking refuge from the King in a temple sanctuary. He rescued her by exposing to Polydektes and his supporters the decapitated head of the monster, whose power to petrify was effective even in death. Perseus elected Diktys as King of Seriphos and left for Argos to find his grandfather, whose fears about the prophecy had been allayed. The prophecy was fulfilled nonetheless as Perseus accidentally killed Akrisios by an unlucky throw of the discos during a sporting event. Perseus left the kingdom of Argos and retired to Asia, where his son became the ruler of the Persians, a folk named in honor of the hero.

An account by Hesiod perhaps from as early as the eighth century B.C. is generally limited to the events surrounding the death of Medusa and the slaying itself which is vividly described in his poems, *Shield of Heracles* and *Theogony*.<sup>2</sup>

Hesiod, *Shield of Heracles*, 216 ff.:

He (Perseus) was flying swift as thought. The head of a dreadful monster, the Gorgon, covered the broad of his back, and a bag of silver - a marvel to see - contained it; and from the bag bright tassels of gold hung down. Upon the head of the hero lay the dead cap of Hades which had the awful gloom of night. Perseus himself, the son of Danäe, was at full stretch, like one who hurries and shudders with horror. And after him rushed the Gorgons, unapproachable and unspeakable, longing to seize him: as they trod upon the pale adamant, the shield rang sharp and clear with a loud clanging. Two serpents hung down at their girdles with heads curved forward: their tongues were flickering, and their teeth gnashing with fury,

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<sup>2</sup> Hesiod *Shield of Heracles*, 216 ff. and *Theogony*, 270 ff. *The Homeric Hymns, and Homerica*. Loeb Classical Library ed., trans. H. G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), pp. 99-101, 235-237.

and their eyes glaring fiercely. And upon the awful heads of the Gorgons great Fear was quaking.

Hesiod, *Theogony*, 270 ff.:

And again, Ceto bore to Phorcys the fair-cheeked Graiae, sisters grey from their birth: and both deathless gods and men who walk on earth call them Graiae, Pemphredo well-clad, and saffron-robed Enyo, and the Gorgons who dwell beyond glorious Ocean in the frontier land towards Night where are the clear-voiced Hesperides, Stheno, and Euryale, and Medusa who suffered a woeful fate: she was mortal, but the two were undying and grew not old. With her lay the Dark-haired One in a soft meadow amid spring flowers. And when Perseus cut off her head, there sprang forth great Chrysaor and the horse Pegasus, who is called because he was born near the springs (*pegae*) of Ocean; and that other, because he held a golden blade (*aor*) in his hands.

Important elements from the beheading of Medusa described by Hesiod which are reflected in her early pictorial representations, include her hideous face, the appearance of snakes in her hair and at her waist, and the localization of the event near the garden of the Hesperides.<sup>3</sup> Although the accounts provided by Hesiod and Pherecydes were generally accepted, variations were introduced which might have had an influence on her visualization in art. Contrary to the consensus description of Medusa as a hideous monster, Pindar, writing in the early fifth century B.C., refers to Medusa as "fair-faced".<sup>4</sup> Additionally, various ancient authors cite the

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<sup>3</sup> Writing earlier than Hesiod, Homer too mentions the Gorgon, but mainly as a decorative device on the aegis of Athena and shield of Agamemnon. In *The Iliad*, Athena joins the Greeks in their battle against the Trojans, clothing herself in her aegis decorated with the head of the ". . . grim gigantic Gorgon, a thing of fear and horror. . .". Later, the Gorgon is described on Agamemnon's shield as a ". . . blank-eyed face . . . with her state of horror, and Fear was inscribed upon it, and Terror. . .". Homer *The Iliad*, Book V, 738 ff. and Book XI, 36. Trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951).

<sup>4</sup> Pindar *Pythian Odes* XII, 16. *The Odes of Pindar*. Loeb Classical Library ed., trans. Sir John Sandys (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915).

dwelling place of Medusa as Libya, rather than in the vicinity of the garden of the Hesperides.<sup>5</sup> Pindar's description in particular might have helped to generate the visualization of Medusa as a beautiful, winged maiden which first appears in vase painting around the middle of the fifth century B.C.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, facial features exhibited by Medusa prior to 450 B.C. might reflect her African heritage in response to her proposed Libyan origin.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, it may be assumed that literary accounts influenced the pictorial representations of Medusa, especially with regard to the narrative situation portrayed. However, a specific iconographic influence from literature is much harder to trace, if at all, given the fragmentary preservation of the ancient works of art and the literary sources.

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<sup>5</sup> Classical authors who mention Libya as the dwelling place of Medusa include: Herodotus II. 91-92. Loeb Classical Library ed., trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), p. 337; and, Euripides *The Bacchae*, 985-990, trans. Geoffrey S. Kirk (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> Red-figured pelike by Polygnotos (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art 45.11.1: Plate 10).

<sup>7</sup> Catalogue nos. 14 and 21.



## INTRODUCTION

The gorgon Medusa from the Perseus legend exhibits a remarkable evolution from her early archaic representations to her later portrayals on fourth century B.C. vases. Over the centuries, the hideous monster of early representations is gradually transformed into a beautiful woman, a development which is most vividly traced in those episodes which depict scenes of her death. The once powerful and dangerous creature, who is pitted against Perseus in the archaic period, eventually evolves into a beautiful, but powerless adversary who succumbs to his violent onslaught.

Three distinct Medusa types delineate her evolution in vase illustrations.<sup>8</sup> The first of these occurs in archaic representations which graphically portray her hideousness. This image predominates until the early classical period, when a more humanized, yet decidedly unattractive transitional or "middle" figure appears. By the mid-fifth century B.C. the initial beautiful type with completely human features is introduced representing the last phase of her development.

Medusa is most dramatically portrayed in archaic vase paintings when a stock image, possibly borrowing from Assyrian-Babylonian demon or giant images, clearly and effectively conveys her terrifying and beastly nature.<sup>9</sup> The early artist generally represents Medusa in dramatic scenes which provide the optimum format for exhibiting her monstrous form. Certainly, Medusa's decapitation by Perseus and the flight of Perseus from the Gorgons after dispatching Medusa were the preferred episodes from the myth, based on the frequent appearance of these scenes

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<sup>8</sup> The most comprehensive accounts of Medusa's transformation are by A. Furtwängler, "Die Gorgonen in der Kunst", Roscher, *ML* I (1886-1890), cols. 1701-1727; and, Ingrid Krauskopf, "Gorgo, Gorgones", *LIMC* IV (1988), pp. 319-330.

<sup>9</sup> Clark Hopkins, "Assyrian Elements in the Perseus-Gorgon Story", *AJA* 38 (July-September 1934), pp. 345-356.

in the archaic period.<sup>10</sup> Not only were they highly dramatic subjects, but they also featured Medusa and her Gorgon sisters in prominent roles.

Medusa's round, grotesque head with its grimacing, toothy mouth, protruding tongue and glaring eyes, together with her extraordinary size, characterizes her archaic canonical form. Since it is her glance or look that could turn men to stone, the artist gave particular emphasis to her eyes. They are usually inordinately large, glaring, sometimes bulging, and always frontal to face the viewer, thereby stressing their petrifying power. Her mouth also receives special attention, possibly because of its close association with her voice. Indeed, scholars speculate that the originating force for the Gorgon is, in fact, some terrible noise, since the name Gorgon or "garj" in Sanskrit means "to shriek".<sup>11</sup> Medusa's pictorial representations give credence to this theory as they seem to convey visually the idea of a terrible, guttural roar which is expressed by her greatly distended, open mouth and protruding tongue. Medusa's remaining features serve to enhance her beastliness. Her nose is generally broad and flat, more animal than human in appearance, while ferocious tusks are sometimes portrayed, adding to her grotesqueness.

Apart from the earliest vase, Medusa always appears winged, wearing a short chiton and is occasionally shod in winged boots. An animal pelt is often worn over her chiton, especially in high archaic vase paintings. Although snakes are not associated with the oldest Medusa image, they are quickly adopted once they are introduced in the mid-seventh century B.C.<sup>12</sup> They frequently ring her head as

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<sup>10</sup> Of these two subjects, representations of Perseus' flight appear more frequently than scenes of her beheading. Jane Henle, *Myths* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 90, 92.

<sup>11</sup> Hopkins, *AJA*, p. 341.

<sup>12</sup> Snakes appear on the Polyphemus amphora found at Eleusis dating from around 650 B.C. which represents the earliest known depiction of the flight of Perseus (Eleusis Museum 544). Konrad Schauenburg, *Perseus* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1960), p. 33, fig. 7.

snaky locks and are sometimes attached to her belt. Characteristic of the drawing technique of the early artist who renders figures in their most descriptive outline, Medusa's legs are shown in profile, while her torso and head are frontal. In scenes of her decapitation, Medusa is almost always shown with one knee raised and the other bent almost to the ground, usually combined with one raised and one lowered arm to produce a swastika-like arrangement of her limbs. Since this position represents an early artistic convention to express swift motion, the visual language speaks of Medusa's unsuccessful, yet valiant, attempt to flee from her assassin.

By the early classical period, a less potent and more humanized image is introduced replacing her archaic stock image.<sup>13</sup> Her earlier animal wildness is suppressed in favor of increased femininity in terms of facial features and figure and greater passivity in terms of character. Rather than graphically portraying her beheading, the early classical artist now prefers the moment immediately before, when Perseus stealthily approaches the sleeping Medusa with weapon in hand to dispatch her.<sup>14</sup>

As a transitional figure between her hideous archaic representation and the beauty she is yet to become, this early classical Medusa inherits the wide mouth, protruding tongue and usually broad, animal-like nose of her monstrous predecessors. In later portrayals, sometimes only the tip of her tongue is visible, if at all, to help identify her heritage. Her eyes, the source of her power, are no longer inordinately large and intrusive due to her sleeping state, thus becoming much less significant in her overall appearance. Her hair is generally neatly arranged and is devoid of the snaky locks of her earlier image. Wings remain the telling feature of this humanized Medusa and help to identify her sub-human status, particularly when she is indistinguishable from a beautiful woman in the last phase of her

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<sup>13</sup> Furtwängler, Roscher, *ML* I, col. 1718; and, Krauskopf, *LIMC* IV, pp. 324, 330.

<sup>14</sup> Henle, *Myths*, p. 90.

development. She remains dressed in the short chiton of the archaic period and is now portrayed with bare feet. On later vases from the fourth century B.C., her garment slips to her waist, draping over her lower body to leave her upper torso exposed.

It has been theorized that this evolution in Medusa's facial appearance was influenced by shield and aegis gorgoneia produced in the classical period and in particular, by the gorgoneion appearing as a shield device on a work by Phidias, the Athena Promachos dated around 460/450 B.C.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, the gorgoneia appearing in vase painting and in sculpture do reveal features identified with this new transitional figure of Medusa, occasionally displaying purely human characteristics marred only by a protruding tongue.<sup>16</sup>

Around the mid-fifth century B.C., a beautiful maiden with refined features and seductive form initially appears in vase illustrations and is particularly well-represented in decapitation scenes revived from the archaic period. By the fourth century B.C., Medusa has become a defenseless victim, whose vulnerability is

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<sup>15</sup> The discovery of a "beautiful gorgoneion", the Medusa Rondanini by Goethe in 1786, has led scholars to speculate on its derivation. As a Roman copy of a Greek original from about the first century A.D., Furtwängler was one of the first to suggest a fifth century B.C. date for its original prototype. Later scholars have generally accepted this date and have concentrated on attributing the piece to one of the known fifth century B.C. sculptors. Ernst Buschor argues that the Medusa Rondanini was a central shield device of the Athena Parthenos created by Phidias between 447 and 438 B.C. Although the attribution to Phidias is generally accepted, scholars dispute the linkage to the Parthenos, since all copies of the Parthenos shield depict an older, "grotesque" form of the gorgoneion. As an alternative, Martin Robertson suggests that another work by Phidias, the Athena Promachos, might have contained the original prototype, as less is known about this statue. Karl Schefold agrees with this attribution, since the date of the Promachos, around 460/450 B.C., coincides with the first beautiful representation of Medusa in Greek vase painting depicted on a pelike by Polygnotos (New York, MMA 45.11.1: Plate 10). A. Furtwängler, *Meisterwerke der griechischen Plastik* (Leipzig: Giesecke und Devrient, 1893), pp. 325-332; E. Buschor, *Medusa Rondanini* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1958); M. Robertson, *A History of Greek Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 313-314; K. Schefold, *Urkönige* (Munich: Max Hirmer, 1988), pp. 101-102; and, J. P. Belson, "The Medusa Rondanini: A New Look", *AJA* 84 (July 1980), pp. 373-378.

<sup>16</sup> Krauskopf, *LIMC* IV, pp. 295, 326.

enhanced by her lovely head and figure, exposed breasts and desperate gestures which serve to instill a new sense of tragedy into the grisly episode.

Separately, Medusa's transformation from beast to beauty is also reflected in illustrations which display her decapitated head, the gorgoneion. Beginning in the fifth century B.C., Perseus is frequently portrayed holding the gorgoneion in his hand(s) which usually exhibits the transitional features associated with her full-figure image from the early classical period.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes the hero carries her head while fleeing from the Gorgons or he seems to contemplate its power when standing motionless. Moreover, a new episode was added to the repertoire of the classical artist which directly borrows from mythological accounts and illustrates Perseus exposing the head of Medusa to King Polydektes, who in two of these illustrations is turning to stone.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to her full-figure image, it is only in the fourth century B.C. that the gorgoneion is usually represented as the head of a beautiful woman. In that century, its portrayal finally coincides with Medusa's full-figure image, as both are lovely or at the very least, her unattractive features are minimized. While new episodes loosely borrowed from the Perseus myth and from drama are introduced which feature the gorgoneion, Medusa's decapitated head generally remains attractive, its beauty occasionally marred by the appearance of a lolling tongue and/or snakes rising from the hair or knotting under the chin.

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<sup>17</sup> See Catalogue nos. 18-25.

<sup>18</sup> See Catalogue nos. 22, 25.

### THE ARCHAIC ILLUSTRATIONS

The oldest known representation of the slaying of Medusa is found on a Boeotian relief amphora from Thebes from about 670 B.C. (Paris, Louvre CA 795: Plate 1, fig. 1.) Medusa appears on this amphora as a woman who has a horse body, hindquarters and tail attached to the small of her back. Her slim female body faces the viewer with her arms rigidly held at either side. She wears a long skirt belted at the waist and has dainty breasts. Medusa's horse segment appears in profile. Its right hind leg steps toward Perseus opposite, who strides forward to meet the monster. Wavy lines are incised over her skirt and horse body possibly indicating a woolly skin and garment. Unexpectedly, the face of Medusa is not the hideous monster of literary fame, but rather a woman with bared teeth. Her open mouth displays two rows of zigzag lines indicating teeth, while the base of her nose, almost as broad as her mouth, tapers upwards to form a squat triangular shape. Her widely spaced eyes, the source of her power, are no more terrifying than those of Perseus who averts his face to escape her glance. Medusa's hair flows to her shoulders in carefully arranged locks with bangs over her forehead.

On the left, Perseus steps aggressively toward Medusa with his head and legs in profile and upper torso frontal. He firmly grasps a lock of her hair in his left hand as he lays his sword to her throat with his right. A sword sheath hangs at his back from a baldric suspended from his shoulder. He wears an odd boat-shaped hat, probably the cap of invisibility he receives from the nymphs and a short chiton. The oblong kibisis hangs by a long strap over his right shoulder. He is shod in wingless sandals which tie at his ankle, contrary to their winged counterparts described by Hesiod.<sup>19</sup> His hair is worn in locks to his shoulders and his

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<sup>19</sup> Hesiod *Shield of Heracles*, 216 ff. Loeb Classical Library ed., 1914, p. 235.

youthfulness is indicated by his smooth, beardless face. This youthful image is a common characteristic of Perseus in scenes of Medusa's beheading, in contrast to his bearded image which prevails until the fifth century B.C. in illustrations of his flight from the Gorgon sisters.<sup>20</sup> A decorative creeper behind him frames the scene on the far left, while a delicately curved lotus or lily encloses the gruesome scene on the right. Beyond simple framing devices, these plants and the salamander-like creature filling the empty space above Medusa's horse torso, probably help to localize the scene near the mythological entrance to the underworld where the Gorgons dwelled according to Hesiod.<sup>21</sup>

This unusual equine figure of Medusa is unique among the known vase representations and probably demonstrates the creative invention of its early artist. Since no full-figure depictions of Medusa had yet been formalized into a stock image and detailed literary descriptions related primarily to her head, the artist might have improvised her bodily appearance based on the local divinities with whom she associated.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, since it is her centaur figure, recognized in Greek art as a generic form for monster which primarily conveyed her frightfulness, it was not necessary to severely distort her facial appearance in order

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<sup>20</sup> The single preserved vase painting which depicts a bearded Perseus decapitating Medusa appears on an archaic amphora attributed to the Swing Painter (Paris, Louvre F 218 bis: Plate 3, fig. 2). Schauenburg, *Perseus*, p. 53, fig. 5.1.

<sup>21</sup> Hesiod *Theogony*, 270 ff. Loeb Classical Library ed., 1914, p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> In the seventh century B.C., different representations of the Gorgon's body suggest that the Gorgon did not yet have a distinctive, pictorial form. On a Rhodian plate ( *AJA* 58 (1954), p. 222, pl. 35, fig. 3), the Gorgon's head is placed on the shoulders of the nature-goddess, Artemis, while on this Boeotian amphora Medusa appears a centaur-maiden with a full female fore-figure. Variations in gorgoneia are also prevalent in this early period, which further demonstrates the pictorial non-conformity with respect to this monster. To provide an explanation for this diversity, Thalia Howe suggests that the early seventh century B.C. artist, ". . . had to improvise a bodily appearance and costume out of attributes temporarily borrowed from the local divinities . . .". In regard to Medusa's equine appearance on this Boeotian amphora, Howe proposes that her centaur guise was for the greater pleasure of her consort, Poseidon, who was locally worshipped as Hippios, God of Horses. Thalia Howe, "The Origin and Function of the Gorgon-head", *AJA* 58 (July 1954), pp. 213-214.

to visualize her grotesqueness. Thus, the artist rendered her face in a decidedly human fashion, perhaps to provide the womanly appeal considered necessary to attract her divine consort.

On a fragment from a similar relief amphora also from Boeotia, only Perseus is preserved, striding to the right with his head turned behind him in profile (Paris, Louvre CA 937: Plate 1, fig. 2). He is almost an exact replica of his counterpart on the previous vase. A sword sheath hangs at his back from a baldric and his kibisis is carried by a strap over his right shoulder. Both arms are outstretched toward the right, where the figure of Medusa would be expected to stand. His left arm is lifted slightly higher than his right, perhaps in the same grasping gesture seen on the prior vase, while his right hand probably held the sword. The cap of Perseus, though missing its upward turning ends due to damage, is similar to its counterpart, as is the arrangement of his hair and the appearance of his garments. Given the replication between the two Perseus figures and their Boeotian origin, it is easy to imagine that the subject depicted is Medusa's beheading portrayed in much the same manner as on the previous amphora.<sup>23</sup>

There were no followers for this unusual equine image of Medusa; however, certain elements contained in the presentation of the subject are represented in later archaic vase paintings, becoming standard features until the early fifth century B.C. when a different moment in her death is portrayed. Such features include the movement of Perseus from left to right symbolizing his victory over the monster; his averted face; the sword at Medusa's throat; and, one or more of his mythical accessories comprised of the cap of invisibility, kibisis and sometimes winged shoes.

It is not until the late seventh century B.C. that a more traditional image of Medusa appears on an ivory relief dedicated in the sanctuary of Hera on Samos (Samos,

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<sup>23</sup> Kuhnert, "Perseus", Roscher, *ML* 3 (1897-1909), col. 2036.



Archaeological Museum E 1: Plate 2, fig. 1). Medusa is by far the largest figure, indicated by the huge size of her frontal head which is tilted toward Perseus. Her large, bulging eyes and snarling, toothy mouth with a protruding tongue are her dominating features. Her nose is wrinkled and nostrils are distended as they curve upward, creating a bulbous effect. Medusa is the hideous, terrifying creature of legend with the power to kill at a glance. This frightful monster is now winged and snakes rise from her head. Perseus relentlessly thrusts his sword into her neck as he grasps one of her snaky locks in his left hand.

Visual focus on the head of Medusa is emphasized by the tilt of her head, indicating her collapse and inevitable death, and the upward sweep of a feathery wing which curves inward to frame her face. She crosses her left hand over a scaly breast probably in a gesture of supplication, although her appeal is unheeded by the steadfast Perseus. Decorative curls frame her face, adding emphasis to her huge eyes. Although the stance of Perseus is similar to his counterpart on the Boeotian amphora -- frontal torso and profile legs as he steps toward the Medusa -- his head is now frontally positioned. By portraying the heads of both Perseus and Medusa full front and in such close proximity, the artist strongly contrasts the handsome, youthful Perseus with the hideousness of Medusa.

Perseus wears a short chiton and a pointed cap which overlaps the frame to give him emphasis and underscore his triumph. A strap is indicated across his chest which might hold his sword sheath or kibisis, neither of which appears in the representation. Due to the fragmentary nature of the relief, it is uncertain what he wore on his feet. His shoulder length hair is neatly combed into ringlets with tight curls across his forehead. He is encouraged to complete his dreadful task by a female figure who stands on the far left. She gently touches Perseus' sword arm with her right hand, as she looks directly toward the collapsing Medusa without

harm. This figure can only be Athena, whose staunch assistance enables Perseus to complete successfully his terrible deed.

The scene is a dramatic illustration of the triumph of Perseus over the monster Medusa, whose legendary frightfulness is powerfully visualized through her exaggerated facial features, repulsive expression and accompanying snakes. This is a decidedly different image from the centaur maiden on the earlier Boeotian amphora, which expressed Medusa's monstrosity through her hybrid body rather than her grotesque face. It is this head from the ivory relief which becomes the standard Medusa type throughout the Archaic period until her humanized image is revived by the classical artist, whose "hatred of ugliness" eventually transforms the monster into a beautiful woman.<sup>24</sup>

A second ivory relief from Sparta dated about 630 B.C. is similar to the Samos ivory relief, but is much more fragmentary (Athens, National Museum 15365: Plate 2, fig. 2). Medusa collapses to her knees under the merciless onslaught of Perseus, who severs her neck with the sword held in his right hand. With his left, he grasps one of Medusa's snaky locks which swirls in frenzy about her head. In proportion to Perseus, Medusa is huge. The artist has cleverly manipulated the composition to make the Gorgon appear larger than the format allows. Not only is her large size indicated by the enormity of her head, but it is also suggested by her reconstructed kneeling position which enables her figure to be contained within the spatial confines of the frame without awkwardness.

Medusa is the monstrous figure of legend and like her sister on the Samos relief, tilts her head toward the figure of Perseus on the left. Her large, round head faces forward with glaring eyes and open mouth exposing her teeth. Fangs jut from her lower lip underscoring her frightfulness. A wrinkled, animal nose and protruding

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<sup>24</sup> H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (New York: Dutton, 1959), p. 30.

tongue have been added in the reconstruction drawing, as have her torso, legs (apart from her right calf) and her left foot to complete the features missing due to damage. Curved wings growing from her waist sweep upward between herself and Perseus who moves as convention dictates to the right, placing his foot on the calf of her leg in a triumphal stance. Her natural hair falls in straight, static ringlets to her shoulder in contrast to her writhing snaky locks. She is bare-footed, unlike her later images which usually portray her shod.

As in previous representations, Perseus wears a short, fringed chiton and possibly protective greaves for the first time. Surprisingly, he looks directly at Medusa, contrary to mythological accounts and pictorial representations of the beheading. Moreover, there appears to be an outline of a beard and faint stippling which occurs on the chin that probably indicates short, bristly hair. Since a bearded hero is indeed uncommon in representations of the beheading,<sup>25</sup> and Perseus rarely appears in archaic illustrations looking directly at Medusa,<sup>26</sup> it is unlikely that this head fragment belongs to Perseus. Besides the hero, the only other male figure of significance in representations of the myth is Hermes. As a protecting divinity, he is usually depicted looking toward Medusa, unlike Perseus, and he almost always appears bearded. Given that the head fragment is incorrectly identified and it indeed represents Hermes, perhaps the god was originally positioned standing behind Perseus on the far left looking to the right toward the center of action, in a similar manner as the figure of Athena in the Samos relief (pl. 2, fig. 1).<sup>27</sup> Since

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<sup>25</sup> See note 20.

<sup>26</sup> The one preserved archaic vase painting of the beheading which depicts Perseus looking directly at Medusa appears on a skyphos dated around 490/480 B.C. Unfortunately, the poor reproduction of this vase illustration does not allow for a detailed analysis of the painting beyond the identification of the subject and characters. Fogg 60.324: *AJA* 60 (1956), p. 16, no. 17, pl. 13, figs. 61-62.

<sup>27</sup> Instead of a male figure, Roland Hampe proposes that the head fragment is, in fact, Athena; however, he does not mention the appearance of a beard. Roland Hampe, "Korfugiebel und frühe Perseusbilder", *AM* 60/61 (1935/36), p. 289.

the actual perimeter of the relief is unknown due to its fragmentary state of preservation, it is certainly conceivable that Hermes, as a third figure, could have been included, replacing Athena as Perseus' protecting divinity in this specific image. Furthermore, the appearance of a hatless Hermes is not unprecedented in the context of the Perseus myth, since both Hermes and Athena are sometimes portrayed without their identifying attributes in archaic vase representations.<sup>28</sup>

Medusa's curious kneeling position in the reconstruction drawing which shows both knees touching the ground and her left foot extending slightly behind her right is also disputable. Instead of both knees touching the ground, her later archaic images always show her in a running gait with one knee bent and the other raised.<sup>29</sup> The running stance would coincide with the tilt of her head, although her long skirt might make a bent knee position somewhat ungainly.

Medusa's running gait is distinctly portrayed on a bronze shield band from Olympia created shortly before the mid-sixth century B.C. (Olympia B 75: Plate 2, fig. 3.) Medusa now occupies the middle position between the flanking figures of Perseus and Athena on the left and right respectively, thus achieving a more balanced composition with increased focus on her centralized form. She is a giant who would easily dwarf both Perseus and Athena were it not for her bent knee stance which compresses her figure into the given pictorial space in a natural fashion. Her frontal eyes are large and glaring, mouth snarling and tongue protruding over her lower lip to express her fearsomeness. Her feet are bare and she wears a short,

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<sup>28</sup> A fragmentary relief pithos that portrays the flight of Perseus includes a bearded, male figure presumed to be Hermes, who is missing his identifying attributes. S. Hersom, *Hesperia* 21 (1952), p. 277. pl. 72c. Two additional vase representations depict the protecting divinities without their attributes in scenes of Perseus' pursuit by the Gorgons. Berlin, Staatliche Museum F 1682 (679): J. Woodward, *Perseus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), fig. 4a; and, Rome, Museo Vaticano 355: J. D. Beazley, *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, V (1934), p. 113, note 79.

<sup>29</sup> Hampe, *AM*, p. 289; and, Emil Kunze, *Archaische Schildbänder* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1950), p. 137.

tight fitting chiton which is belted at the waist and covered with a lozenge pattern. A pair of downward sweeping bird-like wings with feathery tips grow from her shoulders, contrary to the sickle-shaped wings on the previous ivory reliefs. Her left arm crosses her breast toward Perseus perhaps in a gesture of supplication similar to the relief from Samos, while she seems to excitedly grasp her thigh with the other. The downward sweep of Medusa's wings and her hand gestures suggest her imminent demise. Her nose is broad, cheeks wide and full, and forehead creased between the eyes. Curls frame her head and fall to her shoulder, while four snakes rise from her head in a decorative manner. Her grotesque features are flat and mask-like, probably due to the linear patterning of the drawing which describes her features. Apart for her sinking wings and hand gestures, she is an entirely formalized figure who is the precursor for Medusa's running image on later vases. Perseus on the left is portrayed as the smooth-faced youth of prior images, who steps toward the monster with his head averted. He is about to plunge his sword into Medusa's neck with his right hand, while he grasps a snaky lock with his left. A strap crosses his chest, but it is indiscernible whether it carries his sword sheath or kibisis which seems to appear as a small pouch at his back. He wears a brimmed hat over long, neatly arranged locks and a short chiton. He is bare-footed like Medusa.

Athena stands in profile on the right and firmly grips a snake rising from Medusa's head with her left hand, while she touches Medusa's shoulder with her right. She actively participates in the slaying of the monster by helping Perseus to hold Medusa immobile, an unusual act rarely seen in other representations of this episode where Athena is present. The goddess stands slightly larger than Perseus and looks directly at Medusa without registering any harmful effect from her petrifying power. Her long hair is gathered at the neck by a band and small curls frame her face. She wears a long, patterned peplos with decorative trim and

appears without her usual warrior attributes of spear, helmet and aegis. The certainty of her identification is based on the myth which attests to her protective presence during the quest of Perseus.

As an arm band decoration for a soldier's shield, this image would be constantly before the soldier in battle, probably giving encouragement and instilling courage.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, no human enemy could be more terrifying than Medusa who, despite her fearsome power, is successfully dispatched by the heroic act of Perseus with the assistance of Athena.

The first preserved black-figured vase portraying the beheading of Medusa is the olpe by the Amasis Painter from the mid sixth century B.C., dated slightly later than the shield band just discussed (London, British Museum B 471: Plate 3, fig. 1). Amasis signed several of his vases with the phrase *Amasis mepoiesen* or "Amasis made me" and this vase is no exception.<sup>31</sup> His signature is written along the far left side of the scene. The Amasis Painter has greatly elaborated on the three figure grouping established earlier and has created a powerful image. Medusa is ferociously portrayed with an enormous, muscular torso and terrifying head. She attempts to flee from the grasp of Perseus who holds her firmly by the shoulder with his left hand, as he thrusts the sword into her throat. Blood gushes from her neck and down her chest as the sword is driven into its target. Medusa is shod in wingless ankle boots and wears a short chiton embroidered along the edges beneath a stippled fawn skin that is tied over one shoulder and belted by two snakes. Her wings are now a double pair, combining the upward curving, sickle wings from the earlier ivory reliefs with the sinking, bird-like wings appearing on the shield band.

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<sup>30</sup> Ernst Langlotz, *Der triumphierende Perseus* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1956), pp. 33-34.

<sup>31</sup> Amasis is the potter. However, since the decoration and style of drawing on all of his signed vases are the same, the vases must have been painted by one man; hence the Amasis Painter. J. D. Beazley, *The Development of Attic Black-figure* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1986), p. 52.

Four writhing snakes decorate her gruesome head and hiss at the flanking figures of Perseus on the left and Hermes on the right, who has replaced Athena as the protector of the hero. The Amasis Painter has cleverly incorporated a male figure as the counterpart to Perseus in order to achieve compositional symmetry.<sup>32</sup> Being male, the figure of Hermes reflects the dress of Perseus comprised of a short chiton, hat and boots, as well as the hero's striding stance which would not be possible for the peplos garmented Athena.

The image of Medusa reaches its archaic apex in this vase illustration by the Amasis Painter. Her head is portrayed with large glaring eyes, widely distended mouth revealing rows of teeth and ferocious tusks. Her tongue protrudes over her lower lip, while a broad nose and a beard complete her frightful features. The Amasis Painter might have been influenced by sixth century B.C. gorgoneia which included beards as a common facial characteristic, probably to enhance grotesqueness.<sup>33</sup> This feature was not incorporated in later vase paintings portraying the full-figured Medusa who always appears beardless in scenes of her death.<sup>34</sup>

The youthful Perseus strides toward Medusa in the center, averting his head while driving the killing blow into her neck. He wears the cap of invisibility, depicted as a relatively flat and wide brimmed hat which fits snugly over his short hair. Like Medusa, he wears a nebris over his decoratively embroidered, short chiton and he carries a large, loose, sack-like kibisis which hangs at waist level. He wears boots

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<sup>32</sup> Guntram Beckel, *Götterbeistand* (Waldsassen/Bayern: Stifland Verlag, 1961), p. 36.

<sup>33</sup> A vivid example of the bearded gorgoneion is illustrated on an Attic black-figured plate painted by Lydos, circa 560 B.C. Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen 8760: *Para* 46; *Addenda*<sup>2</sup> 31, (112); *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 291, no. 38.

<sup>34</sup> In contrast, the Gorgon sisters of Medusa sometimes appear bearded in scenes depicting the flight of Perseus.

similar to those of Medusa and Hermes with tongues that curve forward over his toes, but which are not winged.

The calm figure of Hermes on the right serves as an effective counterpoint to the actively engaged figures of Perseus and Medusa. His profile form steps to the left toward the center of action, as he surveys the grisly scene before him. He is unaffected by the sight of Medusa which attests to his divinity. He is bearded, wears a petasos and carries his kerykeion in his left hand, his divine attribute which serves to identify him with certainty. His short garment is richly decorated under a long, fringed shawl casually slung over his shoulder. He motions to Perseus with his downward extended right hand and open palm, as if to encourage him to complete his gruesome deed quickly.

The high aesthetic appeal of this vase is achieved through the delicate, precise drawing of the Amasis Painter, whose mastery of the black-figure technique is demonstrated in the rich detailing of the figures. His understanding of human anatomy is evidenced by the successfully rendered profile torso of Perseus. Medusa, however, is represented in the conventional stance of earlier vases, with legs in profile, head and upper body full front. This convention of drawing was deliberately included by the Amasis Painter most likely to communicate her horrific presence in the clearest and most dramatic manner yet devised.

A neck-amphora produced in the third quarter of the sixth century B.C. and attributed to the Swing Painter varies somewhat in composition from the beheading scene depicted on the previous vase (Paris, Louvre E 218 bis: Plate 3, fig. 2). Only two figures appear, that of Perseus and Medusa on the left and right respectively. Medusa is portrayed with white skin, an artistic convention to indicate a female figure. She is the muscular Medusa of the Amasis Painter, with powerful arms and legs. The artist has portrayed her with profile legs, and frontal torso/head as she attempts to flee from Perseus, judging from her bent knee stance. She wears a short



chiton and nebris, and is bare-footed. Her wings are enormous as they sweep downward from each shoulder, framing her white torso against a backdrop of dark feathers. The contour of her face is greatly distorted to accommodate her widely distended mouth and she has bulging ears on either side of her head. Her large eyes are widely spaced with black pupils which stare out unwaveringly at the viewer and her bulbous nose is animal-like in appearance, recalling the grotesque appendage of Medusa on the Samos ivory relief (pl. 2, fig. 1). Her long, black hair is pushed behind her ears in a natural manner and she now lacks the snake attributes generally associated with her figure since the mid-seventh century. Notwithstanding, her exaggerated features, wings and powerful figure, together with the presence of Perseus, immediately identify her as the monster of legend.

On the left, Perseus steps toward Medusa with his head averted and he seems to grip her neck with his left hand, despite the relatively wide distance between the two figures. Uncharacteristically, the weapon of Perseus is not poised at the throat of the monster, but is held horizontally at waist height and has a curved rather than straight blade. According to the myth, Perseus receives an "adamantine sickle" or harpe from Hermes, a weapon which becomes more prevalent in fifth century B.C. vase paintings, although it never completely replaces the sword.<sup>35</sup> Besides introducing the harpe, this vase is also one of the few which portrays Perseus bearded as he dispatches Medusa, a pictorial anomaly which remains a mystery.<sup>36</sup> An unattributed fragmentary plate dated around 530 B.C. seems to represent a deviation from the standard image of Medusa and hints at the transformation yet to occur (Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum 62 d: Plate 4, fig. 1). Medusa is again white skinned indicating her female sex and she has a grinning mouth, protruding

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<sup>35</sup> Apollodorus *The Library* II. iv. 2. Loeb Classical Library ed., trans. J. G. Frazer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), p. 157.

<sup>36</sup> Schauenburg, *Perseus*, p. 53.

tongue and snub nose. However, her features are much less exaggerated and her expression less repulsive, while the contour of her face is largely undistorted. Her almond shaped eyes appear to be human, in contrast to the huge, sometimes bulging orbs of her predecessors. Her wavy hair is parted in the middle and falls loosely to her shoulders in a natural fashion. Although fragments of her upward curving wings add to her monster status, the snakes which usually rise from her head are not present.

An outstretched arm clutching a short dagger-like sword represents the only remaining feature belonging to the figure on the left who must be Perseus, since he is the only hero in mythology known to slay Medusa. Rather than lay the sword directly on Medusa's neck, he seems to wave it before her face in a threatening gesture. Given his close proximity to Medusa, he might be grasping her by the shoulder in a gesture which is depicted on earlier vases. A strap across his shoulder might carry his kibisis or sword sheath.

Although this late archaic representation seems to signal a more humanized pictorial image for Medusa, her canonical figure apparently predominates until the early classical period. On a carefully painted hydria attributed to the Antimenes Painter dating about 520/510 B.C., Medusa again appears as a monstrous figure, who is reminiscent of the hideous image portrayed on the olpe by the Amasis Painter (Rome, Villa Giulia 3556: Plate 4, fig. 2). However, on this hydria her collapsed state is carried a step further. The white skinned monster falls heavily onto her right knee that now touches the ground under the relentless onslaught of Perseus. She grips large, writhing snakes in both hands which, though threatening, pose no danger to Perseus as he is about to dispatch her with his viciously toothed harpe. Although Medusa is not the giant seen on earlier vases, she is sized somewhat larger than the flanking figures of Perseus and Athena to the left and right respectively. She is rendered conventionally with legs in profile and

torso/head full front probably to communicate best her monstrosity, even though the artist has successfully drawn the torso of Perseus in profile. Her stock figure incorporates the double wing pair established on the olpe by the Amasis Painter that combines the upward curving, sickle wings with sinking, bird-like wings. The artist has beautifully elaborated on their feathery texture, as well as on Medusa's chiton which is delicately patterned with small star shapes. Her short garment is tightly belted at the waist and falls in well defined folds to the middle of her thighs. Her attire is completed by winged ankle boots with curved tongues. Medusa's head is decoratively framed by small, writhing snakes which appear to attack harmlessly the left hand and arm of Perseus as he holds her head for his killing stroke. Unfortunately, her facial features and expression are lost due to flaking of the glaze, but her remaining features, her black pupils, stare unflinchingly at the viewer. Because her stance, snake attributes, double pair of wings and powerful body strongly resemble her counterpart on the vase by the Amasis Painter, it is likely that her face also mirrored the repulsive expression and grotesque features of her earlier sister.

Perseus is equally elegant in a short, decorated chiton which is worn beneath a nebris. He averts his head as he approaches the fallen Medusa, firmly gripping her head as he slashes at her neck with his toothed harpe in his right hand. He is bare-headed, revealing neatly arranged hair tied at the back of his head with a fillet, and he is youthfully smooth-faced with refined features. The kibisis appears to hang loosely over his left shoulder.

To the far right, Athena stands with her feet directed to the right as she looks back at Medusa and Perseus. She seems to encourage Perseus with her raised right arm, as if saluting the hero. She is the fully armed warrior goddess with her helmet, aegis without the gorgoneion, and spear held in her left hand. Her aegis is fringed with small writhing snakes and is finely textured to suggest its scaly fabric, while

her long peplos falls in straight folds to her ankles. Her divine status is evidenced by her imperviousness to Medusa's power and her helmet, the crest of which overlaps the picture frame. Her rigid figure indifferently regards the gruesome scene behind her, as if a statue rather than a living entity.

Within this standard three figure format, the animation the Antimenes Painter achieves in his figures is unprecedented, especially the figure of Perseus, whose graceful movement and natural form reveals a solid understanding of the body in motion. Moreover, his refined drawing technique creates a range of textural contrasts which seem to add to the vitality of the figures. Given this outstanding example of black-figured vase painting, it is indeed unfortunate that the face of Medusa did not survive the passage of time.

It is not until the early classical period that this hideous archaic Medusa is transformed into a more human-looking creature which appears with regularity in later vase paintings. Certainly, the fragmentary plate in Bonn (pl. 4, fig. 1), which depicted a less grotesque face, indicates that a change in her representation was gradually emerging, resulting in her "middle" or transitional image about a half-century later.

### **THE CLASSICAL ILLUSTRATIONS**

The early classical artists visualized Medusa as a woman with an attractive, feminine figure, whose facial features alone preserve the remnants of her earlier, monstrous appearance. Her once almost ubiquitous snakes are no longer associated with her classical form until they are reintroduced in fourth century B.C. vase illustrations. Generally, the characteristics of her early classical, "middle" or transitional image incorporates the wide, sometimes grimacing mouth and protruding tongue of her archaic predecessors, as well as an animal-like nose. Her moon shaped face retains its rounded contour until the mid-fifth century B.C. when an oval variation is introduced.

The early classical artists generally depict Medusa frontally and wearing a short chiton which is belted at the waist. She always appears bare-footed, unlike her archaic sisters who are sometimes shod in winged boots. Moreover, the archaic convention which portrayed Medusa with legs in profile and upper torso/head full front was no longer utilized by the classical vase painter, whose proficient drawing skills made this primitive outlining technique redundant. By the high classical period, the artist's mastery of perspective and complex poses creates almost sculptural images which seem to occupy three-dimensional space. Indeed, the traditional frontal position of Medusa is abandoned in favor of a more subtle, twisted pose around the mid-fifth century B.C. Almost simultaneously, the exaggerated features of Medusa's transitional image are eliminated and an entirely lovely creature emerges, whose wings and short chiton alone betray her monstrous heritage.

The fifth century B.C. vase painter deviates from his archaic predecessor in terms of the content and emphasis of his vase paintings. In contrast to the dramatic decapitation scenes favored by the archaic artist, these artists usually prefer subtle

and suspenseful episodes which seem to serve as a backdrop for the internal reactions of his characters.<sup>37</sup> As a result of this changed emphasis, the suspenseful moment just prior to the decapitation of Medusa is frequently depicted when she is represented sleeping as Perseus creeps toward her. This sleeping motive is first mentioned in the writings of Pherecydes from the early fifth century B.C.:

" . . . Then (Perseus) flew to Ocean, to the Gorgons, and Hermes and Athena went with him. He found the Gorgons sleeping. And the Gods warned him that he must turn away as he cut off the Gorgon's head . . .".<sup>38</sup>

In this tense moment prior to her decapitation, Perseus is usually portrayed cautiously approaching her sleeping form with weapon in hand to sever her neck. Athena and frequently Hermes accompany Perseus in these scenes which coincide with the myth. The composed and resolute figure of Athena in particular seems to serve as an effective foil for Perseus, whose tentative creeping stance is in direct contrast to the bold pose of his archaic image. His figure now replaces Medusa as the central focus of most early classical illustrations, as the artists attempt to communicate his apprehension through the positioning of his body and sometimes by the expression on his face. In contrast to her archaic counterparts, Medusa is now a reclining figure who is often relegated to an off-center position and she is usually not the predominate figure in terms of size.

Perhaps the classical artist's lack of a "sense of ugliness" remarked upon by Jocelyn Woodward, combined with this sleeping motive recorded by Pherecydes, helped to generate the visualization of Medusa as more human than monster.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, in

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<sup>37</sup> Jocelyn Woodward suggests that this change in pictorial emphasis represents a change in the mentality of the Athenian people, whose heightened sensitivity demanded that the artists reveal the emotional reactions of their characters. Woodward, *Perseus*, p. 78.

<sup>38</sup> Pherecydes: schol. Apoll. Rhod. IV. 1515 (*FGrHist* I, 61 f., frag. 11).

<sup>39</sup> Jocelyn Woodward makes this observation in reference to Greek fifth century B.C. artists. Woodward, *Perseus*, p. 73.

her unconscious state Medusa's petrifying power is momentarily neutralized. Under the guise of innocent sleep, the artists could temper her archaic grotesqueness and beautify her image without detracting from the emphasis of the story which is now seemingly focussed on Perseus.<sup>40</sup>

In contrast to Medusa's full-figure representation which evolves into an entirely lovely creature slightly after the mid-fifth century B.C., her decapitated head held aloft by Perseus or Athena often continues to be distorted by a wide mouth and lolling tongue until the end of that century.<sup>41</sup> The head is generally flat and unrealistically portrayed until the high classical period, when it is often plastically rendered and imbued with human emotion. During the fifth century B.C., its facial expressions range from grotesque theatrical masks which recall her monstrous, archaic counterparts to almost lovely, tragic images which might reflect her beautiful full-figure representations introduced around the middle of that century. However rendered, these gorgoneia exhibit features more human than monstrous, sometimes including such beautifying accessories as earrings and diadems, perhaps to temper its ugliness and suggest an important, if not royal personage.<sup>42</sup> By the fourth century B.C., the gorgoneion is generally presented as the head of an attractive woman, whose beauty is occasionally marred by a protruding tongue and/or snakes rising from her hair and knotting under her chin.

A fragmentary double-sided plate produced in the second quarter of the fifth century B.C. crudely represents this more humanized version of Medusa, while introducing the suspenseful moment prior to her decapitation (Athens, National

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<sup>40</sup> Josef Floren, *Studien zur Typologie des Gorgoneion* (Munster Westfalen: Aschendorff Verlag, 1977), p. 181.

<sup>41</sup> Unlike the decapitated head of Medusa held aloft by Athena or Perseus, aegis and shield gorgoneia sometimes display attractive features already by the mid-fifth century B.C. Krauskopf, LIMC IV, pp. 296, 304, nos. 108, 214.

<sup>42</sup> The name Medusa means "ruler" or "queen". Henle, *Myths*, p. 89.

Museum 10459: Plate 5). The inner illustration depicts Medusa asleep upon a rocky outcrop facing left with her upper torso frontally positioned and her legs and head in profile. One arm hangs loosely at her side and she is bare-footed. A small tongue protrudes from her mouth over her lower lip and her dark hair covers the forehead and left temple. Her features are distinctly human, although her thick neck and long jaw detract from her overall feminine appearance. A feathery wing attached to her right shoulder opens up behind her.

She wears a short chiton belted at the waist and decorated with a scalloped pattern at the neck line and hem. A tree grows from the ground near her legs which possibly serves to localize the scene near the garden of the Hesperides where the Gorgons resided according to Hesiod, ". . . and the Gorgons who dwell beyond glorious Ocean in the frontier land towards Night where are the clear-voiced Hesperides . . .".<sup>43</sup>

This image of Medusa is unusual because of her profile rather than frontal head which, although unattractive, is fully human. This apparent deviation from the traditional frontal position appears with greater regularity after the mid-fifth century B.C., when her head is depicted not only in profile, but also in three-quarter view in representations of her full-figure. In contrast, the gorgoneia are usually frontally portrayed throughout the fifth century B.C.

The illustration on the opposite side of the plate depicts Perseus in profile creeping presumably toward the figure of Medusa on the other side. His firm step to the right indicates a victorious outcome according to archaic convention, although his crouched stance suggests caution and evokes a sense of danger. In his outstretched right hand he holds the harpe with its curved blade, a weapon which frequently appears in classical vase paintings rather than the archaic straight edged sword. He

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<sup>43</sup> Hesiod *Theogony*, 270 ff. Loeb Classical Library ed., 1914, p. 99.



wears winged boots and a short cloak or chlamys fastened by a clasp at his right shoulder and draped over his left arm, revealing his torso. His kibisis is not portrayed and his hat probably appeared on the fragment now missing. In contrast to literary and pictorial convention, Perseus looks straight on as he quietly creeps toward Medusa's sleeping form. Although in archaic illustrations it is indeed rare when Perseus does not avert his head from Medusa, in classical representations it is not uncommon.<sup>44</sup>

The early classical artist's apparent willingness to break with established convention is again evidenced on two red-figured bell-kraters by the Villa Giulia Painter, both from about 460 B.C. (London, British Museum 493: Plate 6; and, Madrid, Museo Arqueologico Nacional 169 (11010): Plate 7.) On both kraters, Perseus creeps toward the sleeping Medusa with his head averted, but now moves from right to left -- the opposite direction for the victor. Perhaps this directional change for the hero demonstrates the general willingness of the early classical artist to break with traditional approaches and explore new compositional formats. Certainly, Perseus remains victorious regardless of the direction of his movement. On the fragmentary London krater (pl. 6), Medusa reclines frontally on the left upon a slight incline with her eyes closed. Her lithe, feminine body is clothed in a short, sleeveless chiton with tight vertical pleats running the length of the garment. Her left arm drapes over her recumbent body, while her right hangs limply at her side. Large wings open up behind her, framing her head and upper body and effectively contrasting their feathery texture against the tight pleats of her chiton. Her moon-shaped face has a wide, protruding tongue, unconvincing fangs and an

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<sup>44</sup> Other classical vase illustrations which depict Perseus looking toward Medusa include a hydria in Richmond where Medusa is portrayed sleeping, circa 450 B.C. (Virginia Museum 62.1.1: Plate 8); and, a fragmentary pyxis lid in Brauron which shows Perseus creeping toward Medusa who presumably appears on the fragment now missing, circa 440/430 B.C. (Brauron Museum: Schauenburg, *Perseus*, pp. 15, 23).

animal-like nose. Her closed eyes are surmounted by thin eyebrows, while her hair is neatly arranged into two round forms over each ear. Although plain in appearance, she is definitely more human than her monstrous, archaic counterparts. The creeping figure of Perseus gingerly steps toward Medusa in three-quarter view, as he extends both hands toward her recumbent form. His harpe is held in his right hand and his head is averted. There is no mistaking his identity since his name is inscribed above his head. He wears his winged hat and boots and carries his kibisis across his right shoulder. He is the youthful figure of prior images, his wavy hair now falling loosely to his shoulders in an informal fashion. His features are delicately drawn and his eye is carefully rendered with eyelid and lashes in the correct side view. He turns his head to look at Athena behind him, perhaps to gain courage from her resolute figure which stands in three-quarter position facing Perseus. She raises her right hand, probably in a gesture of encouragement, while seeming to instill confidence through her steady gaze. She holds her spear in her left hand which, together with her inscription, identifies her as the warrior goddess. She wears a diadem rather than a helmet, probably to indicate her divine sovereignty. A himation is fastened on her left shoulder by a large pin which pierces through its heavy fabric. Underneath, a pleated, sleeved garment is visible, presumably a long chiton. Her dark hair is neatly tied at the back of her head and it falls gently along the nape of her neck.

The figure flanking Perseus on the left is identified as Hermes by a fragmentary inscription, as well as by his brimmed hat and beard. He wears a short cloak which appears to be wrapped around his shoulders. His footwear is not visible, since he stands behind the reclining Medusa and he looks intently toward Perseus, as if willing him to succeed in his dreadful task.

These three standing figures comprised of Perseus in the center flanked by Athena and Hermes to the right and left respectively, seem to converse silently with one

another through glance and gesture, establishing an intimate threesome that virtually excludes Medusa reclining below Hermes on the left. However, the eye is drawn to her recumbent figure by the downward slant of Athena's spear and the reaching arms of Perseus. Moreover, her unconscious figure is frontally positioned to command immediate attention.

The refined dignity and calm aloofness of the figures are characteristic of the detached and untroubled beauty of the classical period.<sup>45</sup> Even Medusa is transformed into an appealing, if not entirely attractive figure by the classical artist's penchant for beauty. Her lovely, sinuous body with its softly clinging dress seems to overshadow her pathetically plain features with their unconvincing fangs and lolling tongue.

The bell-krater in Madrid also attributed to the Villa Giulia Painter differs only slightly from the London krater (pl. 7).<sup>46</sup> As on the previous vase, the central figure of Perseus approaches the recumbent Medusa from right to left, in contrast to archaic convention. Medusa, who reclines to the left of Perseus, closely mirrors her figure on the previous krater in terms of body positioning, dress and hair style, although her wings are now folded behind her. Whereas her body is almost identical to her previous image, her facial expression is much less theatrical. She lacks the unconvincing fangs of her predecessor and her tongue is measurably smaller as it lolls from her mouth. Her closed eyes are widely spaced with thin eyebrows and her nose is short and animal-like.

Perseus is centrally located with his upper torso frontal and his legs and head in profile. He looks over his shoulder at Athena on the right, as he raises his left hand toward the goddess, perhaps entreating her assistance. His kibisis now hangs by

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<sup>45</sup> Woodward, *Perseus*, p. 72.

<sup>46</sup> The names of Perseus, Athena and Hermes are inscribed on the vase, although they are invisible in the reproduction. Madrid, CVA 2 III 1c, p. 8, pls. 17.1 and 18.

two straps on his extended left arm rather than over his shoulder, while his harpe held in his outstretched right hand, is suspended above the head of Medusa. He wears a sleeveless, pleated chiton and a similar winged hat of his prior image, although he now stands behind rather than before Medusa, hiding his footwear.

Athena, who flanks Perseus on the right, is almost an exact replica of her previous figure. She is identified by the seemingly encouraging gesture of her right hand, her spear in her left which casually rests upon her shoulder and the diadem worn on her head. Her dark hair, however, is styled differently in a bun at the back of her head, rather than falling loosely down the nape of her neck.

The frontal figure of Hermes on the far left is immediately recognized by the similar brimmed hat and beard of his previous image, as well the kerykeion now held upright in his left hand. His right is casually placed on his hip, a position which might have appeared on the previous vase if not for its fragmentary state. He turns his head to the right to watch Perseus complete his grisly deed and perhaps convey his support through his steady gaze. As in the previous illustration by the Villa Giulia Painter, the dramatic focus centers on Perseus. The hero directs almost a questioning glance toward Athena which is suggested by his raised eyebrow and he appears to beseech the goddess for assistance with his raised left hand, open palm and spread fingers. This gesture not only seems to emphasize his uncertainty, but it also distinguishes him from his prior image.

The hesitant approach of Perseus as he prepares to dispatch Medusa is vividly portrayed on a red-figured hydria attributed to the Nausikaa Painter dated around 450 B.C. (Richmond, Virginia Museum 62.1.1: Plate 8.) The frontal, reclining figure of Medusa now displaces Perseus as the central image. Her horizontal form is flanked on either side by two pairs of upright figures who help to balance the composition. Compared to her body, her head appears disproportionately large, its size further emphasized by a thick ring of lighter glaze which sets it off from the

dark background and renders it prominent. Her features are decidedly unattractive with a dark, protruding tongue, pug nose and closed eyes with heavy eyebrows. Her short, wavy hair is parted down the middle and pushed behind her ears to leave them exposed. She wears a short, pleated chiton which is simply decorated with bands on the sleeve and lower edge. Her position is similar to her reclining sisters painted by the Villa Giulia Painter, although her left shoulder, arm and wing are not portrayed. It is conceivable that these body parts are hidden by a ground swell as Konrad Schauenburg suggests, given the uneven contour of the land surface which rises up to meet her body.<sup>47</sup> Medusa's single wing is half opened above her as she sleeps, while a prominent tree with four leafy branches grows from the ground where she lays. As previously encountered, the tree probably helps to localize the scene in the vicinity of the Hesperides.<sup>48</sup>

As in prior vase representations, a youthful Perseus in profile tentatively creeps toward Medusa. He cautiously steps to the left, in the opposite direction of his archaic counterparts. His hesitancy is registered by his crouched position and the careful placement of his feet as he moves toward Medusa. Rather than firmly step toward her, he appears to slide one foot warily ahead, as he prepares to shift his weight from his bent left leg to his forward right foot. He moves silently on his toes probably in order to quickly react to any change in Medusa's sleeping state. He holds his harpe in his outstretched right hand, positioning it directly above her head to strike the killing blow cleanly. On his left arm, the kibisis hangs by two straps, one tightly clutched in his hand and the other wrapped around his upper arm. He is bare-headed revealing short, curly hair.

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<sup>47</sup> Schauenburg, "Zu einer Hydria des Nausikaa-Malers in Richmond", *Kunst in Hessen und am Mittelrhein* 3 (1963), p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Hesiod *Theogony*, 270 ff. Loeb Classical Library ed., 1914, p. 99.

Rather than avert his head from Medusa, he looks directly forward and seems to focus his glance on Athena, who stands in profile across from Perseus on the left. The goddess extends her right hand toward Perseus more in a cautioning than an encouraging gesture and she appears to watch Medusa intently for any sign of movement, indicated by the downward cast of her eyes and slight forward tilt of her head. She wears a chiton which falls to the ground in long, loose folds under a himation and a helmet whose high crest overlaps the frame, thereby emphasizing her figure. Her spear, held in her left hand, rests against her shoulder as it slopes downward to the recumbent monster. A heightened sense of danger is conveyed by Athena's watchful gaze, together with her cautioning gesture, and it is especially apparent in the tentative, almost fearful, approach of Perseus as he prepares to dispatch his foe.

On the far right stands a youthful Hermes who is frontally positioned with his head turned in profile to the left. His smooth-faced image is a rare representation for the god, since he is usually depicted bearded in scenes associated with Medusa's death.<sup>49</sup> He is identified with certainty by his kerykeion which is held in his right hand and his brimmed hat which rests at the back of his neck. He throws his left arm behind him, perhaps in excitement as he turns his head to watch Perseus about to fulfill his task. His counterpart who sits frontally on the far left behind Athena, raises his left arm and spreads his fingers, perhaps mirroring the excitement of Hermes. Like Hermes, he turns his head toward Perseus to observe the outcome of his deed. This figure is bearded and wears a sleeveless chiton with a thin band around his head. According to Konrad Schauenburg, he is most likely Atlas, who holds a curved staff instead of scepter perhaps to indicate his wild nature or signal

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<sup>49</sup> A beardless Hermes also appears on a pelike from around 360/350 B.C. (Leningrad, Hermitage St. 1918: Plate 11).

his impersonation as a shepherd.<sup>50</sup> His presence together with the tree increases the likelihood that the setting is indeed near or in the garden of the Hesperides.<sup>51</sup> Medusa receives strong emphasis in this particular vase painting due in part to her disproportionately large head with its halo of light, her frontal placement and her central positioning. Importantly, her figure now becomes the focal point for the looks and gestures of her surrounding figures. The cohesiveness of this composition is in contrast to the vase paintings the Villa Giulia Painter produced about the same time, which seem to exclude Medusa from the intimacy of the standing figure group. However, all three vase paintings display similar characteristics for the monster which include a wide mouth with a protruding tongue and an animal-like nose. Compared to her appealing, plastically rendered body, her unattractive head is flatly portrayed, producing a mask-like image which is enhanced by her theatrical expression.

An innovative full-figure image of Medusa represented on a white-ground pyxis, perhaps by the Sotheby Painter from around 460/450 B.C. introduces revolutionary changes in the portrayal of Medusa (Paris, Louvre MNB 1286 (L 83): Plate 9). Perhaps due to the shape of the pyxis which allows for a frieze-like procession of figures, the artist has included additional images who are relevant to the scene, but are rarely portrayed in association with Medusa's impending death. They are the bearded god, Poseidon, identified by his trident and a Gorgon sister of Medusa.

As in previous full-figure images, Medusa leans upon a rocky incline facing left as Perseus approaches with his arm outstretched. Her conventional frontal positioning

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<sup>50</sup> If the assumption is correct that the figure is Atlas, this is the first representation of the god in an illustration not associated with Herakles. Schauenburg, *Kunst in Hessen und am Mittelrhein* 3, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Ovid describes the visit of Perseus with Atlas, whose realm encompasses the golden tree of the Hesperides. Ovid *Metamorphoses* Book IV. 635-640. Loeb Classical Library ed., trans. Frank J. Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), p. 223.

is now replaced by a more realistic pose which turns her body in space, almost in a sculptural manner. Her upper torso is twisted to the right, while she turns her head over her shoulder to converse comfortably with her Gorgon sister positioned behind her. Medusa's relaxed state is registered by her hands which are clasped together in a natural fashion and her limply crossed feet. Her left elbow rests upon a ledge and large, feathery wings open behind her, almost encircling her head. Her profile features describe a human, although barbarian maiden, with small eyes, a snub nose and short, frizzy hair which suggests an African heritage for the mythological monster. Indeed, Medusa's African origin is recorded in various mythological accounts which specify her home in Libya.<sup>52</sup> Importantly, the features of Medusa are not marred by a protruding tongue or grimacing mouth and her head has lost its usually flat appearance, becoming a natural extension of her plastically rendered body. Her Negroid characteristics help to identify her as the monstrous creature of legend, as do her wings and short chiton which recall her archaic predecessors. Again, a naturalistic tree grows from the rocky ground where Medusa reclines, possibly localizing the scene in the vicinity of the Hesperides.<sup>53</sup>

On Medusa's right, the Gorgon seems to awkwardly step toward her sister with her body frontally positioned and her head turned in profile over her right shoulder. She has the same short, frizzy hair as Medusa and probably had facial characteristics which were similar, although today they are illegible due to the state of preservation. Large, feathery wings attached to her shoulders open up behind her. Her lithe body resembles Medusa's as does her short chiton which is darkly colored to distinguish it from her mortal sister's white garment.

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<sup>52</sup> See note 5.

<sup>53</sup> Hesiod *Theogony*, 270 ff. Loeb Classical Library ed., 1914, p. 99.



To the left of Medusa, Perseus is portrayed in profile stepping up the slope which leads to her dwelling place with his arm outstretched and his head averted. His conventional left to right movement is reintroduced on this small pyxis, perhaps intending to signal his victory. He wears a chlamys and winged sandals, but it is impossible to discern whether he carries his kibisis and harpe in this quick sketch. A nimbus of rays emanates from his head, a rare feature which reappears on a slightly later pelike painted by Polygnotos (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 45.11.1: Plate 10). Although various theories for the nimbus have been suggested,<sup>54</sup> Konrad Schauenburg convincingly argues that the rays, together with the unusual climbing stance of Perseus, links this specific painted image with his ancient star constellation.<sup>55</sup>

Behind Perseus stands the bearded Hermes facing right in profile, who is identified by his kerykeion and wide brimmed hat which rests at the back of his neck. He wears a chlamys like Perseus, but is bare-footed. He gestures to the hero with his outstretched right arm as if to show him the way, as does Athena who frontally stands behind Hermes in a decorated peplos. She wears a diadem on her head, her aegis which lacks the head of the Gorgon, and holds her spear in her outstretched left hand. She turns her head to the right in order to monitor the ascent of Perseus. Lastly, to the left of Athena is the regal figure of Poseidon identified by his trident,

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<sup>54</sup> The claim that the nimbus identifies Perseus as a sun god is based on disputable evidence according to Schauenburg. Furthermore, the proposal that the nimbus may be a means to glorify great heroes is refutable, since only Perseus and no other hero appears with rays emanating from his head. Schauenburg, *Perseus*, pp. 129-131.

<sup>55</sup> The ancient star constellation of Perseus was reconstructed by Windisch in his 1892 dissertation (G. Windisch, *De Perseo Eiusque Familia Inter Astra Collocatis* (Leipzig, 1892), p. 71). Later, Langlotz proposed four variations on the Perseus constellation based on medieval sources, one of which bares a strong resemblance to the Windisch reconstruction (E. Langlotz, *Der triumphierende Perseus* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1956), p. 27, fig. 4). The stance of Perseus on this pyxis and the later pelike (pls. 9 and 10), resembles the star constellation of the hero reconstructed by these two scholars that positions Perseus with his arm raised as he steps upward. A nimbus of rays was probably included in these illustrations to further strengthen the link to Perseus' stellar image. Schauenburg, *Perseus*, p. 131.

who stands in profile facing right. Unlike Athena and Hermes who are involved in the action, Poseidon is simply a spectator, his presence probably alluding to his intimate relationship with Medusa.

The small size of this pyxis seems to belie its importance as the precursor of a new artistic vision which transforms Medusa into an attractive, wholly human entity. Her innovative twisted pose is repeated in a later vase painting, while her profile head is modified to a three-quarter position. Importantly, her face is undistorted by a lolling tongue, grimacing mouth and the occasional fangs seen in prior representations. This breakthrough in her appearance which depicts a fully human, although barbarian figure, heralds her transformation into a beautiful, winged creature which initially appears in an illustration by Polygnotos around 450/440 B.C. (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 45.11.1: Plate 10.) In this elegant vase painting, Polygnotos revives the archaic beheading scene, while he retains the early classical sleeping motive for Medusa. Indeed, Medusa is further beautified under the guise of sleep and remains blissfully ignorant of her doom, unlike her agonizingly aware archaic sisters.

Rather than portrayed frontally or in profile, the head of Medusa is drawn in three-quarter view as it gently rests against her left hand. Her large eyes are closed, her lips are pursed together and her nose now resembles the noble, aquiline type associated with humans, heroes and divinities. Her lovely, almost idealized features are well proportioned within her long and narrow face which deviates from the rounded contour of her predecessors. Her hair falls in loose waves below her chin and bangs rim her forehead. Her figure facing left is gently twisted to the right, a position apparently borrowed from the earlier pyxis. She appears to rest upon high ground, since she is elevated above the base line established for Perseus and Athena, and Perseus must climb upward to reach her. Her complete state of relaxation is registered by the attitude of her legs with one foot crossed comfortably

over the other, her languid right arm which is folded across her body and her tilted head which is tenderly cupped in her left hand. She is dressed in a knee-length chiton which is elegantly decorated with geometric patterns. Small flowering plants enclose the scene on the left, perhaps intending to suggest a grassy knoll.

The central figure of Perseus steps up to Medusa in three-quarter view with his head averted to the left. He grips her hair in his left hand, while he places his harpe at the back of her neck with his right. Polygnotos probably derives this position of his arm from archaic representations and incorporates as well the archaic convention to signal the hero's triumph by his step to the right. Once again, a nimbus of rays encircles the head of Perseus. Although his stance is suitably modified to coincide with the action of this scene, it certainly resembles his star constellation, an identification which is further strengthened by the rays encircling his head.<sup>56</sup>

Perseus wears a cloak fastened at his throat which opens up to reveal his youthful, muscular torso. The beauty of his face and form is effectively balanced by the lovely, graceful figure of Medusa on the right. The hero is shod in elegant, winged boots and wears a cap, whose wings point in the wrong direction, perhaps due to the absentmindedness of the artist as suggested by Marjorie Milne.<sup>57</sup> His wavy hair peeks out from under his helmet, as he looks intently toward the stalwart figure of Athena on the left. The goddess majestically stands facing forward as she turns her head to the right to meet the hero's gaze. She wears a belted peplos which falls in soft folds to her ankles and an aegis fringed with small, writhing snakes. Her helmet and the spear held vertically in her left hand complete her attire. She looks

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<sup>56</sup> Schauenburg, *Perseus*, p. 131.

<sup>57</sup> Marjorie Milne, "Perseus and Medusa on an Attic Vase", *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n. s. 4 (January 1946), p. 126.

directly at Perseus as if to instill courage, while she extends her right arm in a downward motion, perhaps to signal the killing stroke.

Although Polygnotos presents his figures in generally complex poses, they remain highly convincing and supremely graceful images with the refined features and calm expressions associated with the classical period. For the first time, Medusa is presented not only as a beautiful, but also as a vulnerable and a somewhat tragic figure, who is unknowingly destroyed in the prime of her life. Only her wings and short chiton recall her archaic precursors who struggle valiantly for survival, unlike this passive and lovely figure. Perhaps when Pindar wrote about the "fair-faced Medusa" in the early fifth century B.C., he had a similar beautiful maiden in mind.<sup>58</sup>

About a hundred year time span separates this illustration by Polygnotos and the following known full-figure representation of Medusa, which appears on a pelike from around 360/350 B.C. and portrays her beheading (Leningrad, Hermitage St. 1918: Plate 11). Differences between this fourth century B.C. image and the previous representation by Polygnotos are striking and seem to reflect a revival of the archaic preference for violent action. Apart from the stance of Perseus and the allure of Medusa which can be traced to her prior image, the graphic scene of her beheading now displaces the usual suspenseful moment of fifth century B.C. vase painting.

Instead of sleeping, the central figure of Medusa is actively engaged in a desperate struggle for her survival. She is depicted wingless for the first time since her earliest known representation and is clothed in a peplos which has fallen to her waist during the battle, revealing her upper torso. With the elimination of her wings and short chiton, her link to her earlier, powerful sisters is broken and she is

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<sup>58</sup> Pindar *Pythian Odes* XII, 16. Loeb Classical Library ed., 1915. Other translations describe Medusa as "lovely", as well as "beautiful".

presented simply as a woman. This dramatic representation elicits a new sense of pathos which is apparently generated by the futility of Medusa's struggle, coupled with her feminine vulnerability that is enhanced by her semi-nudity. She faces right in three-quarter view which seems to depict best her female contours. The ferociousness of the hero's onslaught is measured by the sharp angle of Medusa's head that is snapped back by Perseus' left arm and her upper garment which has slipped to her waist. Unfortunately, only sketchy facial features remain which include the black pupil of her eye, a thin eyebrow and her mouth defined by a black line. However, these characteristics appear undistorted by the exaggerated expression of her early classical precursors and her head, which extends naturally from her body, suggests a face that might be as alluring as her figure. Her stance is relatively unstable with her left leg bent at the knee and her right extended straight to the ground under a voluminous skirt. She seems to thrust her body forward and away from Perseus on the left, using her right leg as leverage in an attempt to escape from her tormentor. She throws both arms behind her in a desperate effort to grasp Perseus, who is undeterred by her action. The hero is identified by his winged boots, his hat and a vicious-looking weapon at Medusa's throat which combines the sickle-shaped harpe with a short sword.<sup>59</sup> He averts his head from Medusa as convention dictates and steps to the right to signal his victory. Besides his winged boots, he wears a chlamys which drapes over his outstretched left arm. The profile male figure facing Medusa on the right is probably Hermes since he frequently appears in scenes associated with Medusa's death, although his identifying attributes are not included. He looks directly at her struggling figure without being harmed by her, thereby attesting to his divinity. He wears a closely fitting cap and a chlamys fastened at his right shoulder which drapes across his left

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<sup>59</sup> This combination weapon frequently appears in fourth century B.C. vase paintings. Woodward, *Perseus*, p. 82.

arm to reveal his torso beneath. He is youthfully smooth-faced, a rare portrayal for Hermes in scenes associated with the death of Medusa.<sup>60</sup> He extends his right arm toward Perseus and behind Medusa, perhaps in a gesture of encouragement.

A similar hopeless struggle appears on a relief rhyton fragment from the third quarter of the fourth century B.C. (Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum 1764: Plate 12.) The figure of Medusa in particular resembles her image on the Leningrad pelike in terms of body positioning and dress. She is located to the right of Perseus in this fragmentary two figure group in a three-quarter position which seems to present her lovely form best. Although her precarious bent-leg extended-leg stance resembles her previous image, she falls to the ground rather than remains upright. Her left knee touches the rocky surface, as her right stretches almost horizontally behind her. As in the previous pelike, her garment slips to her hips to reveal her upper torso, while one end sweeps behind her and over her raised left arm. The linear folds of the fabric create an effective contrast with the rounded smoothness of her body modelled in relief, as does the large, feathery wing folded behind her. The seductiveness of her figure is enhanced not only by these contrasting elements, but also by the sensuous curve of her body as Perseus pulls her head back by the hair to restrain her forward movement. A large snake rises from beneath her left knee and a number of these small, writhing reptiles emerge from her hair. For the first time since the archaic period, snakes are again associated with Medusa. However, they seem to be decorative elements rather than images to enforce her power. Regardless of their function, these snakes together with her wings identify her with certainty as Medusa. She looks upward, focussing her eyes on the heavens and raises her right hand, as if beseeching divine intervention. The calm expression of her lovely face with its aquiline nose and closed mouth seems to belie the

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<sup>60</sup> An early classical vase also depicts Hermes beardless (Richmond, Virginia Museum 62.1.1: Plate 8).

desperateness of her situation, as she grasps the weapon arm of Perseus with her right hand in a vain attempt to hinder his onslaught. However, the firm grip of the hero's left hand on her hair is unbroken and his right, probably holding the weapon (now missing), is undeterred as it extends toward her.<sup>61</sup> His frontal figure aggressively steps to the right and he averts his head according to convention. He wears only his hat, revealing a youth with an attractive, muscular torso rendered in relief. It is probable that an accompanying figure(s) appeared on this rhyton, given the frequent portrayal of his protecting goddess/god in prior images. However, it cannot be determined with certainty, due to the fragmentary state of the vase.

Rather than unique visualizations of Medusa, these illustrations from the fourth century B.C. seem to reflect the late classical trend in art which emphasized human emotion and in particular, the suffering of the individual.<sup>62</sup> Certainly, the figure of Medusa, who is engaged in a futile and violent struggle, provokes a strong sense of pathos which distinguishes these beheading scenes from all prior decapitation episodes. By featuring Medusa as an attractive and vulnerable woman, she evolves into a defenseless victim who is powerless to deter the seemingly unwarranted onslaught of Perseus. Perhaps this wide divergence between her fourth century B.C. pictorial image as a helpless woman and her literary description as a terrifying and dangerous beast, contributed to the virtual disappearance of her full-figure representations in vase illustrations by the end of that century.<sup>63</sup>

While the evolution of Medusa from a hideous monster into a beautiful, winged maiden can be pinpointed to the illustration by Polygnotos slightly after the mid-

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<sup>61</sup> It can be assumed that the weapon is held in his right hand, based on his gesture and on prior images, although it is not preserved in the relief.

<sup>62</sup> J. J. Pollitt, *Art and Experience in Classical Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 136-194.

<sup>63</sup> Furtwängler, Roscher, *ML* I, cols. 1725-1726; and, Krauskopf, *LIMC* IV, p. 330.

fifth century B.C., a lovely visage is not usually associated with the gorgoneia held aloft by Perseus or Athena until the next century. Throughout the fifth century B.C., images of Medusa's decapitated head remain frontal and generally exhibit lingering transitional characteristics which include a wide mouth, protruding tongue and sub-human nose. The hair is generally short and sometimes dishevelled, perhaps to stress its unattractive appearance. Around the mid-fifth century B.C., the head begins to express human emotion, just when the transitional features become less prominent. In most of these later images, the eyes are depicted open instead of closed, a motive which is first introduced in association with the petrification of Polydektes. Not only do the open eyes give credence to Medusa's mythological power, but they also become key features for the communication of an emotional state.

In three of the four early classical vase illustrations which depict Medusa's decapitated head within the context of the Perseus myth, the transitional characteristics are vividly represented. The first of these images appears on a red-figured hydria, the name-piece of the Perseus Painter from around 470/460 B.C. (Berlin: Staatliche Museum F 2377: Plate 13.) Only Athena and Perseus are illustrated, to the left and right respectively. They appear to be involved in intense discourse, given their locked gazes and insistent gestures. Perhaps this illustration represents the moment when Perseus surrenders the gorgoneion to Athena, who adopts it as a blazon on her aegis.<sup>64</sup> Perseus holds the head of Medusa frontally in his lowered left hand by the hair, as he turns his head over his right shoulder to look at Athena. The gorgoneion is pathetically homely. Rather than round, the facial contour is square with wide cheeks, a receding chin and a broad forehead.

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<sup>64</sup> Other possible interpretations of this scene include: Athena congratulating Perseus on the successful completion of his task; and, Athena encouraging Perseus to place the head of Medusa in his kibisis. Schefold, *Urkönige*, p. 104.



The tongue lolls uncontrollably out the side of a wide, toothy mouth and the closed eyes are surmounted by thick, arched eyebrows. The hair is parted down the middle to fall in straight, stringy strands below the chin, while the long nose with its flared nostrils deviates from the more animal-like renderings of early classical full-figure images. However, despite these generally distorting characteristics, the overall impression of the face is less monstrous than tragic, as if its features were altered at the moment of death and forever frozen in this exaggerated expression.

The frontal figure of Perseus with his averted head is identified with certainty by his winged hat, the harpe held in his right hand at his chest, and his kibisis which hangs by a strap over his left shoulder and another across his upper left arm. He is shod in wingless sandals with dark horizontal straps and he wears a pleated, short chiton. His hair is styled differently than in prior images, with curled strands hanging over his ear to his chin and a bun at the back of his head. Athena faces Perseus in profile on the left, removing her helmet with her left hand and stretching her right toward Perseus, as if demanding he relinquish the head. She wears a diadem, her aegis fringed with small snakes and a himation over a long chiton. The features of Athena and Perseus are almost interchangeable given the simple drawing technique of the artist, who uses the same basic shapes to indicate their characteristics. Despite Athena's non-verbal request, Perseus seems reluctant to release his prize. He protectively moves the gorgoneion away from Athena to the far right, while he raises his right elbow to his chest, as if to block her insistent gesture. Although the outcome of this battle of wills is uncertain based on this particular image, it can be assumed that Athena perseveres.

In contrast to the somewhat tragic-looking Medusa head of the prior image, a gorgoneion on a red-figured pelike attributed to the Pan Painter from about 470 B.C. achieves a decidedly different effect (Munich, Antikensammlungen 8725: Plate 14). Only the figure of Perseus is portrayed with legs and head in profile and

torso frontally positioned. He stands motionless as he holds the round head of Medusa in both hands at chest level. He wears a short, pleated chiton, a chlamys which has slipped from his shoulders onto his arms, a wingless cap and boots with curved tongues. Neither his harpe nor his kibisis is depicted, yet this figure is unmistakably Perseus, given the presence of Medusa's decapitated head. The hero turns his head over his right shoulder, not daring to look at his prize.

The gorgoneion is decidedly ugly. It appears with closed eyes and has an animal-like nose, a dark protruding tongue and a toothy mouth. A fleshy fold is depicted below the mouth which extends from ear to ear, as if a large double chin. The closed, widely spaced eyes are framed by thin eyebrows, while small furrows indicated by short, angular lines appear on its brow. Curls ring the face and a diadem is worn on its head, while the ears are decorated with small earrings, suggesting an important, if not royal personage. The head is flatly depicted and the exaggerated expression with its rounded contour suggests a theatrical mask. Although the repulsive expression recalls archaic images, the features and facial contours are much less distorting and certainly less hideous.

Another red-figured hydria attributed to the Pan Painter from the same period, portrays the head of Medusa peeking out from the kibisis carried by the fleeing Perseus (London, British Museum E 181: Plate 15). The headless, frontal torso of Medusa positioned between Perseus and Athena has collapsed to the ground, revealing a lovely, feminine body clothed in a short chiton which is reminiscent of her full-figure images. Her legs are bent behind her on the ground, while the trunk of her body is held momentarily upright by the tips of her fingers as blood gushes from her severed neck. Her large, feathery wings seem to flutter behind her as her life source drains away. A portion of the just decapitated head peeks out from the kibisis that Perseus carries over his right shoulder as he makes his escape. The closed eyes of the gorgoneion already reflect the effect of death and a diadem is

worn over its curly locks in a similar manner as the previous image, perhaps signalling her sovereignty.

The profile figure of Perseus swiftly flees toward the left in his winged hat and boots with both arms outstretched before him, as he looks back over his shoulder at the headless torso behind him. In his left hand he carries his harpe. His short chiton is ideal for swift movement, judging from the length of his stride which is directed to the left, the opposite direction established for the victor in archaic representations. According to Karl Schefold, the movement of Perseus toward the left after the completion of his gruesome deed probably symbolizes his return home, as well as defeat for the pursuing Gorgons.<sup>65</sup> Athena follows Perseus on the right in three-quarter view with a profile head. She gracefully balances her spear on shoulder with her right hand, while she daintily lifts the hem of her skirt with her left. She wears a plain aegis which is fringed with small snakes, a high-crested helmet and a long, patterned chiton with transparent fabric that reveals the contour of her leg.

Although the gorgoneion is only partly visible, it can be assumed that the hidden features resemble its mask-like predecessor, given the same attribution to the Pan Painter for both images. Moreover, the characteristics which are visible reveal similar features which include the diadem, closed eyes with thin eyebrows, animal-like nose and curly hair.

On a kylix-krater attributed to the Mykonos Painter from around 460 B.C., the head of Medusa introduces the staring, open eyes which become a common feature in later gorgoneia representations, while it exhibits Negroid characteristics which can probably be associated with her Libyan origin recorded in various mythological

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<sup>65</sup> Schefold, *Urkönige*, p. 102.

accounts (Catania, Museo Biscari 1677 (L 697): Plate 16).<sup>66</sup> The return of Perseus to Seriphos and his confrontation with King Polydektes is portrayed in this early classical vase painting. The frontal figure of the hero displays the gorgoneion, held in his left hand by the neck, to Polydektes enthroned on the right. The King is identified by his scepter and crown, as well as by his elegant dress. Both Athena on the left and Polydektes on the right are turned in profile toward the central figure of Perseus, who glances over his shoulder toward the goddess to avoid looking at the head. Presumably, the petrifying effect of the head is about to occur, since Polydektes has not yet begun his transformation into stone.

The gorgoneion displays the exaggerated expression associated with Medusa's transitional image which includes a round, frontal face, a wide mouth which stretches from ear to ear and a long, protruding tongue extending over her chin. However, its staring, cat-like eyes, snub nose with distended nostrils and short, frizzy hair suggest an African heritage and serves to establish a human, rather than a monstrous lineage despite the repulsive expression. The Mykonos Painter emphasizes the power of Medusa's glance by portraying the eyes as staring orbs with upper and lower lids and large, black pupils. Especially in this scene which depicts the petrification of Polydektes, the open eyes of Medusa are key elements in the visual drama, a feature which seems to become standardized in following vase illustrations.

Perseus stands quietly in the center holding his harpe in his right hand that is relaxed at his side. He wears a brimmed hat, winged boots and a chlamys fastened at his right shoulder which covers his torso and falls to a point between his knees. He meets the gaze of Athena standing in profile on the left, who exchanges glances with the hero. Her plain aegis is fringed with small, writhing snakes and a himation

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<sup>66</sup> See note 5.

is worn over her peplos. Her helmet is pushed back on her head to reveal her forelock, while her wavy hair falls loosely to the middle of her back. She holds her spear vertically in her left hand, while her right appears to be casually placed on her hip judging from the position of her fingers at her waist. Facing Perseus on the far right in a long, pleated garment sits the bearded figure of Polydektes, whose stare is directed upward at the gorgoneion. He realizes his danger too late, indicated by the backward tilt of his body as he seems to recoil from the head, his left hand which suddenly loses its grip on his scepter and his left foot which is lifted from the ground at the heel, as if startled by what he sees.

Only slightly later around 450/440 B.C., the transitional features so graphically portrayed in the previous image are lessened, if not entirely eliminated on a bell-krater attributed to the Polydektes Painter (Bologna, Museo Civico 325: Plate 17). In a parallel development, the full-figure image of Medusa is transformed into a lovely, winged maiden (pl. 10). However, the peaceful image of Medusa asleep in the pelike illustration by Polygnotos is in stark contrast to the open-eyed and rather tragic looking gorgoneion portrayed on this bell-krater.

Perseus stands in the center with his head in profile and torso frontal as he looks toward Polydektes sitting on the right. He holds the gorgoneion in his extended right hand at head level. This frontal gorgoneion departs from prior transitional images to become a lovely, mourning woman with an oblong face, heavily lidded eyes and pinched brows. Its wavy hair is parted in the middle to neatly frame the head. The outlines of features appear faint due to flaking; however, they seem to indicate a long, aquiline nose and a small mouth which appears to be sized in proportion to the human contours of her face. Perhaps a small tongue protrudes from the mouth to provide the single link to her earlier sisters and continue the trend which associates transitional features with fifth century B.C. gorgoneia.

Perseus watches without compassion the horrifying transformation of Polydektes whose feet and lower garment have already merged with the rock that serves as his throne. The King seems to plead for mercy with his raised right hand and open palm which is directed toward the hero. Polydektes is portrayed as a commoner rather than royalty, evidenced by his plain himation which is wrapped around his lower torso and over his left shoulder. His balding head and straggly beard and hair help to convey his vulnerable and pitiful state. In contrast to Polydektes, Perseus is presented as the victorious hero who is elegantly attired in his winged helmet, boots, chlamys and a pleated chiton which is decorated along the lower edge and sleeve. Two spears are held in his left hand rather than his usual harpe which, although unsuitable for beheading Medusa, might serve to indicate his battle readiness.<sup>67</sup>

Athena on the left stands in a new dramatic pose in her peplos and plain aegis. She rests her left foot upon a rock, places her left elbow on her raised knee and her chin in the heel of her hand. She looks upon the scene with an aloof calmness which can be associated with the classical period, while her informal, casual stance is in contrast to her usually rigid pose. Her helmet is pushed back on her head and her spear rests against her right shoulder as it slants down to the ground. Although the petrifying power of Medusa is made obvious by its effect on Polydektes, the attractive face seems to belie this power, while the sorrowful expression establishes its connection to the human, emotional realm.

In a slightly later illustration on a plate dated from about 440 B.C., a sad-looking gorgoneion is again portrayed in a scene unrelated to a specific mythological episode (Olympia, Museum at Olympia: Plate 18). The frontal figure of Perseus with his head in profile stands alone holding the head of Medusa by the hair in his

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<sup>67</sup> The spear is also associated with the leaving and returning home of great heroes. Schauenburg, *Perseus*, p. 124.

outstretched right hand at chest height. The gorgoneion is portrayed with an oval, rather than a round head and displays large, staring eyes with small, black pupils and raised eyebrows which seem to convey a somewhat sorrowful expression to her face. The nose is defined by two ridges and its tongue lolls from the mouth almost to the chin. The dishevelled hair is short, revealing two small ears.

Perseus turns his head toward the right to avoid looking at the gorgoneion. His brimmed hat has slipped from his head and rests at the back of his neck. He carries two spears in his left hand rather than the more common harpe and wears only a chlamys which is draped over the left side of his torso and fastened on his right shoulder. His dark hair is closely cropped and a large eye depicted in profile stares into the distance. Due to the fragmentary state of the plate, his footwear cannot be determined.

The rather sad gorgoneion appearing in previous images becomes a dispirited death-mask on an oinochoe illustrated by the Shuvalov Painter dated around 430 B.C. which portrays the flight of Perseus (Ferrara, Museum Nazionale 2512: Plate 19). The hero rapidly moves toward the left in three-quarter view with his legs and head in profile. His harpe is grasped in his outstretched right hand and the gorgoneion is clutched in his lowered left which he holds out behind him by the hair. The head of Medusa is broad through the cheek and narrow at the chin with a small, open mouth and a tiny, lolling tongue. The nose appears to be human, as do the small, open eyes which seem glazed and frozen by the effect of death. A sense of weariness is conveyed by the thin, slightly arched brows and drooping lower eyelid. Perseus grasps the head by its wild, curly locks reminiscent of small, writhing snakes as he leaps upward.<sup>68</sup> The force of his movement is reflected by

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<sup>68</sup> Perseus is actually climbing a mountain that was once indicated by a white line that has flaked off with time. Adrienne Lezzi-Hafter, *Der Schuvalow-Maler, Eine Kannenwerkstatt der Parthenonzeit*, [Kerameus 2] (Mainz/Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1976), p. 75.

the backward sweep of his kibisis appearing as a large, loose sack at his back. A sword sheath hangs on an angle at his left hip and he wears his winged hat and boots. A chlamys fastened at his neck opens up to reveal his nude, muscular torso. His youthful face with refined features follows the upward angle of his extended left arm, as if anticipating the destination of his flight.

The frontal figure of Athena stands resolutely behind Perseus looking toward the oncoming Gorgon on the right, with her left hand on her hip and her right holding her spear vertically near its bronze tip. She wears a helmet with a long, horse hair crest that is pushed back on her head. A long, pleated chiton is visible under her himation which is fastened by a round clasp on her left shoulder. As the divine protector of Perseus, she stands fearlessly between his fleeing figure and the pursuing Gorgon, whose swift approach is measured by her long stride and the backward sweep of her large, feathery wing and short skirt of her chiton. Her right arm is outstretched before her, while her left is extended behind her, mirroring the arm positioning of Perseus. The Gorgon is lovely, indeed resembling the beautiful, full-figure image of Medusa portrayed by Polygnotos slightly earlier in terms of her attractive body and head (pl. 10). She is clothed in a short chiton which is belted at the waist, while a shoulder cord crisscrosses her chest to hold the chiton in place as she runs. Unfortunately, her internal facial features are illegible due to flaking of the glaze, but her silhouette reveals a long, aquiline nose, human mouth and well-proportioned head. Her body in three-quarter view is plastically rendered and its feminine contours are described by the softly pleated fabric of her garment.

In contrast to the fine draughtsmanship of the Shuvalov Painter, who animates his figures through his solid understanding of the human body in motion, the images on the following Campanian amphora attributed to the Owl-Pillar Group appear heavy and lifeless (Leningrad, Hermitage Museum 2077 (B 1026): Plate 20). Although dated to the third quarter of the fifth century B.C., the flat, mask-like



impression of the gorgoneion resembles early classical images, as does the emotionless face.

The scene depicts the petrification of Polydektes, who stands in three-quarter view to the right of Perseus. The hero stiffly steps toward Polydektes with profile legs/head and frontal torso which recalls the primitive outlining technique of the archaic artist, in contrast to the sophisticated three-quarter views frequently appearing in Attic vase painting from the classical period. He carries the gorgoneion high above his averted head in both hands by the neck, as if a trophy. Apart from the protruding tongue, Medusa's frontal head exhibits almost entirely human characteristics which are described by a flat, linear design indicating the open eyes, thin eyebrows, long nose and a mouth that is defined by two lines extending from the nose. Its dark hair seems to be neatly parted down the middle and is shaped into waves around the head, while a small ear appears unnaturally high on the side of the head. Its oval face contributes to the human appearance of the head, although a distinct mask-like effect is achieved by the linear patterning of the features which are flatly conceived and devoid of emotion.

Perseus is depicted as a beardless youth with closely cropped hair, who wears a chlamys that is draped over his left arm and a brimmed hat that hangs at the back of his neck. In an unusual portrayal, his nude torso describes a lanky, emaciated figure which lacks the beauty and anatomical correctness of his prior images. Although his kibisis, winged boots and harpe are not portrayed, the identification of this figure is certain, based on the episode which is represented. In contrast to Perseus, the bearded Polydektes displays a solid, mature torso which is wrapped in a himation around his lower torso and over his left shoulder to reveal his chest. He stares up toward the gorgoneion with his right arm outstretched, perhaps in a pleading gesture directed at Perseus as he realizes his terrible fate. Already, the lower portion of his legs and feet have turned to stone. The semi-nudity of his

figure seems to heighten the contrast between living flesh and the inanimate stone he is in the process of becoming.

By the early fourth century B.C., the image of the gorgoneion usually appears as the head of an attractive woman which is occasionally displayed in profile or three-quarter view. Sometimes only Medusa's small, protruding tongue or the snakes rising from her head link it with the legendary monster. Moreover, two new scenes are introduced which provide an alternative format for the exhibition of the gorgoneion. Conceived by South Italian vase painters, these scenes possibly portray rare episodes from the myth not illustrated elsewhere or are inspired by Attic plays which were popular in these Greek colonies.<sup>69</sup>

One of these new episodes portrays Perseus contemplating the reflection of Medusa's decapitated head in the shield of Athena or a pool of water.<sup>70</sup> Although no preserved mythological account describes this specific event, the reflection motive is familiar through the writings of Pherecydes and later of Apollodorus in the context of Medusa's beheading.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps the South Italian artists favoured this reflection motive on its own, purposely extracting it from the dramatic beheading scene and presenting it as the main subject in a quieter moment, when Perseus is able to study the features of Medusa before Athena places the head on her aegis.

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<sup>69</sup> Besides the imported theatrical works mainly by fifth century B.C. Attic poets, there were local farces, the phlyax play, which seemed to have an influence on the vase painters choice of subject. Margaret Mayo, *The Art of South Italy: Vases from Magna Graecia* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1982), p. 33.

<sup>70</sup> Schauenburg, *Perseus*, pp. 77-82.

<sup>71</sup> "So Perseus stood over them as they slept, and while Athena guided his hand and he looked with averted gaze on a brazen shield, in which he beheld the image of the Gorgon, he beheaded her." Apollodorus *The Library* II. iv. 2-3. Loeb Classical Library ed., 1921, pp. 157-159.

The second episode depicts Perseus exhibiting the gorgoneion to satyrs, who sometimes cover their eyes or flee in fright.<sup>72</sup> Although mythological accounts record a violent battle between Perseus and Dionysos, whose army was composed of maenads and satyrs, the creatures depicted in these scenes are not engaged in battle, nor are they provocatively equipped with weapons. More likely, this episode is derived from the satyr-play which was attached to Attic tragedies as a form of comic relief. Unfortunately, only a few of them are preserved and then usually in fragments, while more than one hundred are known only by title and a few surviving words.<sup>73</sup> These new episodes originating in the Greek colonies of South Italy are depicted on a number of vases surviving from the fourth century B.C., perhaps indicating their popularity as the more familiar subjects from the previous century seem to become less prevalent.

Already around the beginning of the fourth century B.C., significant deviations from the standard representation of the gorgoneion established in the prior century are apparent. On two red-figured cups from about 400 B.C., Perseus flees from the pursuing Gorgon with the head of Medusa held in his extended right hand at waist height (Strassburg, University Museum 1574: Plate 21, figs. 1, 2; and, Taranto, Museo Nazionale: Plate 21, figs. 3, 4). Given the similarity between the two representations, it is probable that the same painter or workshop produced the images. Importantly, in both these illustrations the head of Medusa is depicted in profile for the first time since the early classical period. Furthermore, it also appears to be devoid of its usual transitional features associated with fifth century

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<sup>72</sup> Schauenburg, *Perseus*, pp. 97-103.

<sup>73</sup> The single satyr-play preserved intact is *Cyclops* by Euripides, although all Greek tragedy writers also wrote satyr-plays. Frank Brommer, *Satyrspiele: Bilder griechischer Vasen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1959), p. 5.

B.C. gorgoneia.<sup>74</sup> The silhouette does not reflect a protruding tongue or the wide, open mouth usually appearing in fifth century B.C. images; instead it reveals the head of a woman. The short hair is brushed forward on the cheek and its apparently open eye is surmounted by a delicately arched eyebrow. In both images, Perseus holds the head by the hair in his left hand, rather than by the neck, while he carries his harpe behind him in his outstretched right. Apart from his harpe, his usual attributes are not portrayed. He turns his head behind him as he makes his escape, possibly to gauge the distance between himself and his pursuer. His chlamys which is fastened on his right shoulder falls to a point between his striding legs. Illogically, his hair flows to the right, in the direction of his movement and is not pushed back by the wind as it would occur in an actual situation.

On the reverse side, a winged, fully human Gorgon pursues Perseus with both arms extended before her. In a rare representation, her short chiton is replaced by a long peplos which swirls behind her to suggest swift movement. Indeed, her figure resembles a Nike figure without her usual wreath attribute and not the familiar Medusa/Gorgon figures of fifth century B.C. illustrations. Perhaps the Italian vase painter, unfamiliar with the old Perseus legend, confuses the pursuing Gorgon with the winged Nike which was a more common art type.<sup>75</sup>

On an Apulian pelike attributed to the Tarporley Painter from around 400/380 B.C., Perseus studies the head of Medusa reflected in Athena's shield before it is committed to the aegis of the goddess (Taranto, Private Collection: Plate 22). Although only one of several South Italian vases which illustrate this scene, the

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<sup>74</sup> A Campanian red-figured hydria also dated around 400 B.C. depicts Perseus fleeing from a Gorgon with the decapitated head of Medusa held in his left hand. Uncharacteristically, the gorgoneion is portrayed in three-quarter view and seems to lack the transitional features of earlier gorgoneia images. However, the lack of facial detailing probably due to flaking of the glaze does not allow for an in-depth analysis of Medusa's features. London, British Museum F 500: Brommer, *VL*<sup>3</sup>, p. 282, D1; Trendall, *LCS*, 1967, p. 255, no. 194, fig. 102.1.

<sup>75</sup> Woodward, *Perseus*, p. 82.

image on this pelike provides the main elements of the subject and presents a gorgoneion which is representative for the series in terms of its human appearance, if not its beauty. The frontal gorgoneion is the head of a lovely woman, whose small, protruding tongue and snakes which emerge from the hair serve to identify its monstrous heritage. The broad face is distinctly human with open, almond-shaped eyes surmounted by eyebrows that are sharply articulated ridges, a nose which widens toward the nostrils and a small mouth with sensitively shaped lips. Its cold stare is transfixed outward and despite the lolling tongue, it seems to present an idealized beauty. Rather than flat and mask-like, the head is subtly modeled, suggesting eyes recessed in sockets and an indentation of the nostrils and lower lip. The hair is presented as a mass which is gently waved around the head, covering its ears. A vague reflection of Medusa appears in Athena's shield, however, the features are illegible.

Athena sits facing right in the center on an elevated level flanked by Perseus and Hermes to the left and right respectively. She lifts the gorgoneion high above her head with her right hand in order to reflect it in her large shield resting on the ground and tilted toward Perseus. The goddess casually crosses one foot over the other, as she twists her upper torso toward the left to look over her right shoulder at Medusa's reflection. She holds a spear upright in her left hand and wears a fillet on her head rather than her helmet. Her attire is elegantly described, from her tightly pleated, long chiton, to the loose folds of her himation and the scaly fabric of her aegis which is decorated with the Gorgon's head -- a pictorial inconsistency since she holds it in her hand.

The nude figure of Perseus stands in profile on the left facing Athena, as he leans his left elbow on a pillar draped in fabric, perhaps his chlamys. He wears an elaborate winged hat on his head and carries his weapon in his lowered right hand. He gazes unemotionally at the reflection of the gorgoneion in Athena's large shield.

His slim and supple body resembles that of Hermes on the far right, who wears only his brimmed hat and carries his kerykeion in both hands, as if twirling it between his fingers. Portrayed in three-quarter view, he too leans heavily on a pillar with his left arm, crossing one foot over the other as he looks toward the hero. Although a leafy tree and patterned stones seem to indicate a country-side location, the pillars do not coincide with the outdoor scene. Rather than part of the landscape, they seem to be included primarily as props for Perseus and Hermes in order to better display their languid forms.

This almost theatrical manipulation of figures and background is again demonstrated on a slightly later bell-krater from around 370 B.C. portraying Perseus exhibiting the gorgoneion to a satyr who covers his eyes in fright (Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum 79: Plate 23). Probably inspired by a satyr-play, the tone of the scene is certainly less serious than prior illustrations which are borrowed directly from the myth. Moreover, the rather overstated contrapposto stance of Perseus and the exaggerated gestures of the satyr seem to confirm its derivation from a staged work.

The gorgoneion held by Perseus in his raised right hand appears as an attractive woman with an oval face in three-quarter view, whose only link to the monstrous Medusa of legend is established by the snakes which rise from behind the ears and knot around the neck. Rather than the cold stare and idealized beauty of the prior image, this head has a tragic expression which is conveyed by the furrowed forehead, pinched eyebrows and pursed lips. Medusa's huge, open eyes with large, black pupils stare sorrowfully outward and exhibit an animation that belies her death. The wild disorder of the short, wavy hair with its writhing snakes seem to enhance this liveliness.

Perseus standing frontally on the right holds up the decapitated head with his right hand, while he carries his harpe in his left that rests at his side. He gazes forward,

thus avoiding the glance of Medusa. He wears the elaborate, winged headdress of his previous image and a chlamys that is fastened at his neck and pushed back over his shoulders to reveal his slim torso. A baldric that holds his sword sheath at the level of his left hip hangs across his chest. To the far right, an owl hovers near his head carrying a wreath in its claws, perhaps an allusion to his protecting goddess, Athena.<sup>76</sup> The contrapposto stance of Perseus appears staged in this modest vase painting, although it coincides with the exaggerated gestures of the satyr on the left. This sub-human follower of Dionysos is immediately recognized by his total nudity, his animal tail and ears, as well as his straggly beard as he runs toward the immobile figure of Perseus on the right. He lowers his head as he covers his eyes with his left hand and extends his right high above his head, perhaps in a gesture of fright or surprise. He appears to be unaffected by the petrifying power of Medusa, although he clearly registers his dismay. A leafless tree occupies the center, while a few tendrils rise from the ground to establish a rather bleak landscape.

A third variation of the fourth century B.C. gorgoneion appears on a Lucanian amphora attributed to the Choephoroi Painter from the third quarter of that century (Copenhagen, National Museum 3407: Plate 24). The gorgoneion appears once again as a woman's head, but it is now devoid of all distorting features, as well as its snake attributes. The head is frontally positioned with closed eyes that are reintroduced from early classical gorgoneia and it has a long nose with slightly flared nostrils, pursed lips and short, curly hair framing its oval face. The calm expression does not suggest the violence of her death, nor do eyes convey their deadly power. Rather, it appears as if asleep.

The central figure of Perseus stands frontally with the gorgoneion held in his lowered left hand and his weapon in his raised right. Without turning his head, he

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<sup>76</sup> Schauenburg, *Perseus*, p. 99.

looks toward Athena standing on the left by shifting his eyes toward her. He wears his winged hat and boots, as well as a chlamys fastened at his neck with a round clasp that is thrown back over his shoulders to reveal his lithe, youthful torso. His contrapposto stance seems somewhat staged in this conventional scene which recalls the petrification of Polydektes. Athena stands facing Perseus in three-quarter view with her head in profile holding a spear vertically in her left hand and placing her right at her waist. She wears a peplos which softly clings to her figure, an elaborate necklace and several bracelets on her arms, as well as a decorated band around her head. A large shield placed on the ground rests against her thigh. An elderly, bearded man approaches from the right seemingly without concern, as he looks toward the gorgoneion from his side position. He wears a plain himation which is wrapped over his right shoulder and around his lower torso and carries a staff held in his left hand, perhaps for support. Although his right arm crosses his chest, his gesture and face do not register either surprise or fear, unlike the excited images of Polydektes in prior vases. Based on the quieter tone of the image rather than hard evidence, Konrad Schauenburg suggests that this figure is Diktys, the kindly fisherman and brother of King Polydektes who initially discovered Danäe and Perseus on Seriphos.<sup>77</sup>

Within the classical period, then, the humanization of the gorgoneia achieves its apex in the fourth century B.C., when a lovely visage is portrayed with greater regularity. Not only does the head deviate from its usual frontal position in that century, but it also loses its transitional features, apart from the small, protruding tongue which sometimes lingers in late classical images. Additionally, the snakes that were commonly associated with Medusa's archaic, full-figure representations

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<sup>77</sup> Schauenburg, *Perseus*, p. 84.



sometimes now appear with fourth century B.C. gorgoneia, perhaps to establish a link with her monstrous past as her face becomes increasingly beautiful.

## **CONCLUSION**

Apart from the earliest image on the Boeotian relief amphora (Louvre CA 795: Plate 1, fig. 1), on archaic and classical vases the gorgon Medusa from the Perseus myth is always represented as a demon in female form, rather than a mixed-being such as sphinx or siren. Her female image, however, does not remain constant, but undergoes a striking evolution which transforms her usually hideous and terrifying appearance in the archaic period into that of a beautiful, but powerless adversary of Perseus in late classical vase paintings. This evolution is traced in both her full-figure representations and in portrayals of her decapitated head held aloft by Perseus or Athena, and is distinguished by three distinct stages. These stages are illustrated best in vase paintings depicting scenes of her beheading or the moment just prior to her death.

The first stage, associated with archaic representations of her beheading, usually depicts Medusa with grotesque facial features, large wings and snakes rising from her hair or attached to her belt. Her huge, sometimes bulging eyes and open, distended mouth are given emphasis -- her eyes probably because of their petrifying power and her mouth possibly because of its close association with her voice. Indeed, Medusa appears to be emitting a ferocious roar as she attempts to flee from her assassin in these violent scenes of her death.

By the early classical period, the second stage is introduced which presents a more humanized image with various distorting features that include an open mouth, a protruding tongue and a sub-human nose. During this transitional or "middle" phase, Medusa retains her archaic wings, but loses her snake attributes. Her increasingly human appearance seems to coincide with a shift in subject matter. The monster is now depicted asleep and unaware of Perseus as he approaches to dispatch her, in contrast to the graphic scenes of her beheading represented in the

archaic period. By portraying Medusa with her eyes closed, the petrifying power of her glance is effectively neutralized and her once terrifying appearance now gives way to a more human-looking image. Perhaps this new portrayal of Medusa in a sleeping state helped to generate her image as a seemingly harmless woman instead of a dangerous beast.<sup>78</sup>

Medusa's emergence as a beautiful, winged maiden which initially occurs around the mid-fifth century B.C., introduces the last or "beautiful" stage (New York, MMA 45.11.1: Plate 10). In this phase, episodes of her decapitation replace the more suspenseful approach scenes of early classical vase paintings. Medusa is now portrayed as an attractive woman who sometimes appears without her identifying short chiton and wings. By the late classical period, she is actively engaged in a futile struggle against the merciless attack of Perseus. Her vulnerable state, which is effectively conveyed through her sensuous beauty and desperate gestures, serves to instill a sense of pathos that is unique in these brutal scenes of her beheading. Moreover, the divergence between her pictorial image as a harmless woman and her mythological description as a terrifying and dangerous beast apparently undermines the heroic act of Perseus, as the once fearsome monster is far too beautiful in her weakened state to elicit fear. Perhaps as a result of this underlying inconsistency, representations of Medusa's beheading virtually disappear in vase illustrations by the end of the fourth century B.C.<sup>79</sup>

In contrast to her full-figure image, the gorgoneion reveals lingering transitional features throughout the fifth century B.C. These features continue to distort the increasingly human appearance of the head until the fourth century B.C., when it is usually attractively depicted. This slower evolution for the gorgoneia compared to

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<sup>78</sup> Floren, *Studien zur Typologie des Gorgoneion*, p. 181.

<sup>79</sup> Furtwängler, Roscher, *ML I*, cols. 1725-1726; and, Krauskopf, *LIMC IV*, p. 330.

Medusa's full-figure representations might relate to its presentation as an apotropaic device to ward off evil. Indeed, in archaic art, the ugliness of the gorgoneion functions as a deterrent to evil, extending its reach to those individuals who might profane the sanctity of a cult or the temple itself.<sup>80</sup> When Perseus uses the gorgoneion to petrify Polydektes, to frighten satyrs and to defeat Dionysos, the head functions as an apotropaic emblem to triumph over evil in the general sense, in addition to its role within the more specific narrative. In this context, it is understandable why the head retains vestiges of its monstrous past longer than the full-figure image of Medusa, sometimes extending into the fourth century B.C. when the lovely face is occasionally marred by a protruding tongue and/or snakes. In summary, the three stages of Medusa's evolution are vividly represented on vases and other objects from the archaic and classical periods. Whereas her first transformation from a hideous beast into a more human-looking creature apparently occurs by the early classical period, her final evolution into a beauty is not simultaneous for her full-figure representations and the gorgoneia. While Medusa appears as a lovely maiden already about the mid-fifth century B.C. (pl. 10), attractive portrayals of her decapitated head appear with regularity only in the fourth century B.C. By the close of that century, full-figure representations of Medusa have virtually disappeared, but the gorgoneion remains a popular image well into the Hellenistic period.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Benson, J. L., "The Central Group of the Corfu Pediment", *Gestalt und Geschichte. Karl Schefold zum 60. Geburtstag (Antike Kunst, Beiheft 4, 1967)*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>81</sup> Furtwängler, Roscher, *ML I*, cols. 1725-1726.

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- Plate 7. Figures 1, 2: Madrid, Museo Arqueologico Nacional 169 (11010): Reprinted from *Medusa Rondanini* by Ernst Buschor (1958), fig. 44.2; and, *Bollettino d'Arte* 27 (1933/35), p. 557, fig. 3.
- Plate 8. Figures 1-3: Richmond, Virginia Museum 62.1.1: Reprinted from *Kunst in Hessen und am Mittelrhein* 3 (1963), p. 3, figs. 1-3.
- Plate 9. Figures 1, 2: Paris, Louvre MNB 1286 (L 83): Reprinted from *Perseus: A Study in Greek Art and Legend* by Jocelyn Woodward (1937), fig. 24a; and, *Attisch weissgrundige Keramik* by Irma Wehgartner (1983), fig. 47.
- Plate 10. Figures 1, 2: New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 45. 11.1: Reprinted from *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums* by Konrad Schauenburg (1960), fig. 6.1; and, *Medusa Rondanini* by Ernst Buschor (1958), fig. 45.1.
- Plate 11. Figure 1: Leningrad, Hermitage St. 1918: Reprinted from *Rivista dell'Istituto di Archeologia e Storia d'Arte* (1960), p. 187, fig. 79.
- Plate 12. Figures 1, 2: Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum 1764: Reprinted from *Medusa Rondanini* by Ernst Buschor, fig. 45.3; and, *AM* 83 (1968), fig. 28.2.
- Plate 13. Figures 1, 2: Berlin, Staatliche Museum F 2377: Reprinted from *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums* by Konrad Schauenburg (1960), fig. 41.
- Plate 14. Figure 1: Munich, Antikensammlungen 8725: Reprinted from *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums* by Konrad Schauenburg (1960), fig. 40.1.
- Plate 15. Figure 1: London, British Museum E 181: Reprinted from *Der Pan Maler* by J.D. Beazley (1931), fig. 5.1.

- Plate 16. Figure 1: Catania, Museo Biscari 1677 (L 697): Reprinted from *Il Museo Biscari* (1930), no. 697, fig. 74.
- Plate 17. Figures 1, 2: Bologna, Museo Civico 325: Reprinted from *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums* by Konrad Schauenburg (1960), fig. 37.2; and, *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 315, fig. 337.
- Plate 18. Figure 1: Olympia, Museum of Olympia: Reprinted from *Olympische Forschungen* 5 I (1964), no. 12, fig. 88.
- Plate 19. Figures 1, 2: Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina 2512: Reprinted from *LIMC* IV (1988), p. 187, figs. 333 and 338.
- Plate 20. Figures 1, 2: Leningrad, Hermitage 2077 (B 1026): Reprinted from *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums* by Konrad Schauenburg (1960), fig. 38.
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- Figures 3, 4: Taranto, Museo Nazionale: Reprinted from *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums* by Konrad Schauenburg (1960), fig. 17.2.
- Plate 22. Figures 1, 2: Taranto, Private Collection: Reprinted from *Apulian Red-figured Vase-painters of the Plain Style* by A.D. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou (1961), pl. 13, figs. 57, 59.
- Plate 23. Figures 1, 2: Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum 79: Reprinted from *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums* by Konrad Schauenburg (1960), fig. 34.1; and, *Medusa Rondanini* by Ernst Buschor (1958), fig. 17.2.
- Plate 24. Figure 1: Copenhagen, National Museum 3407: Reprinted from *CVA Copenhagen* 6, fig. 238a.

**PLATES 1 - 24**

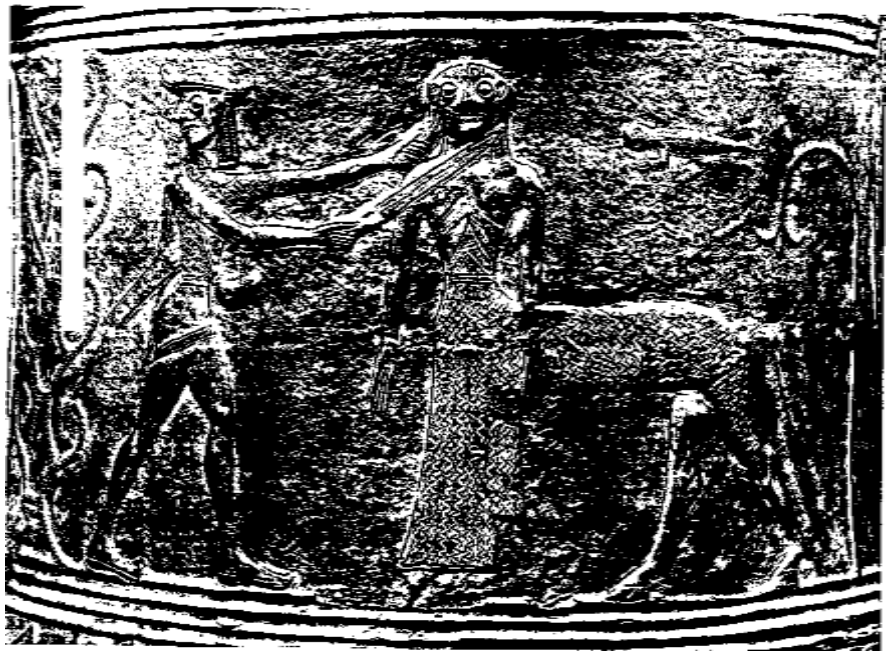


Figure 1: Clay amphora with decoration in relief. Boeotian, circa 670 B.C. Paris, Louvre CA 795 (ht. of amphora 1.30 m.).



Figure 2: Fragment of a clay amphora with decoration in relief. Boeotian, circa 670 B.C. Paris, Louvre CA 937 (ht. of fragment 23.5 cm.).

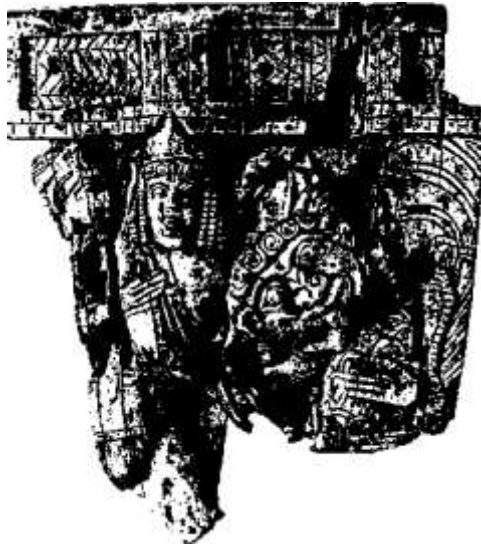


Figure 1: Fragment of a carved ivory relief from Samos, circa 630/620 B.C. Samos, Archaeological Museum E 1.



Figure 2: Fragment of a carved ivory relief from Sparta, circa 630/620 B.C. (Reconstruction drawing appears in outline.) Athens, National Museum 15365.



Figure 3: Bronze shield band from Olympia, circa 560 B.C. Olympia, Museum at Olympia B 975.



Figure 1: Attic black-figured clay olpe attributed to the Amasis Painter, circa 550/540 B.C. (Design reproduced in outline.) London, British Museum B 471 (ht. 26 cm.).



Figure 2: Attic black-figured clay amphora attributed to the Swing Painter, circa 550/520 B.C. Paris, Louvre F 218 bis (ht. 38.5 cm.).

Figure 1: Fragment of a clay plate from Tarquinia, circa 530 B.C. Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum 62d. (ht. 4.8 cm.).



Figure 2: Attic black-figured clay hydria attributed to the Antimenes Painter, circa 520/510 B.C. Rome, Villa Giulia 3556 (ht. 51 cm.).





Figures 1 (Medusa), 2 (Perseus): Red-figured fragment of a double-sided plate image, circa 480/450 B.C. Athens, National Museum 10459 (plate ø 13 cm.; image ø 6 cm.).



Figure 1: Attic red-figured bell-krater fragment attributed to the Villa Giulia Painter, circa 460/450 B.C. London, British Museum E 493 (ht. of fragment about 30 cm.).



Figures 1, 2: Attic red-figured bell-krater attributed to the Villa Giulia Painter, circa 460/450 B.C. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional 169 (11010) (ht. 36 cm.).



1

2



3



Figures 1-3: Attic red-figured hydria attributed to the Nausikaa Painter, circa 450 B.C. Richmond, Virginia Museum 62.1.1 (ht. 44.5 cm.).



Figures 1, 2: Attic white-ground pyxis perhaps by the Sotheby Painter, circa 460/450 B.C. Paris, Louvre MNB 1286 (L 183) (ht. 14.8 cm.).



Figures 1, 2: Attic red-figured pelike attributed to Polygnotos, circa 450/440 B.C. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 45.11.1 (ht. 47.8 cm.).



Figure 1: Attic red-figured pelike, circa 360/350 B.C. Leningrad, Hermitage St. 1918 (ht. 24 cm.).



Figures 1, 2: Fragment from an Apulian relief rhyton from Ruvo, third quarter fourth century B.C. Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum 1764 (ht. of fragment 9 cm.).





Figures 1, 2: Attic red-figured hydria, the name-piece of the Perseus Painter, circa 470 B.C. Berlin, Staatliche Museum F 2377.



Figure 1: Attic red-figured pelike attributed to the Pan Painter, circa 470 B.C. Munich, Antikensammlungen 8725.



Figure 1: Attic red-figured hydria attributed to the Pan Painter, circa 470 B.C. London, British Museum E 181 (ht. 34.3 cm.).



Figure 1: Attic red-figured kylix-krater from Kamarina in Catania attributed to the Mykonos Painter, circa 460 B.C. Catania, Museo Biscari 1677 (L 697) (ht. 53 cm.).



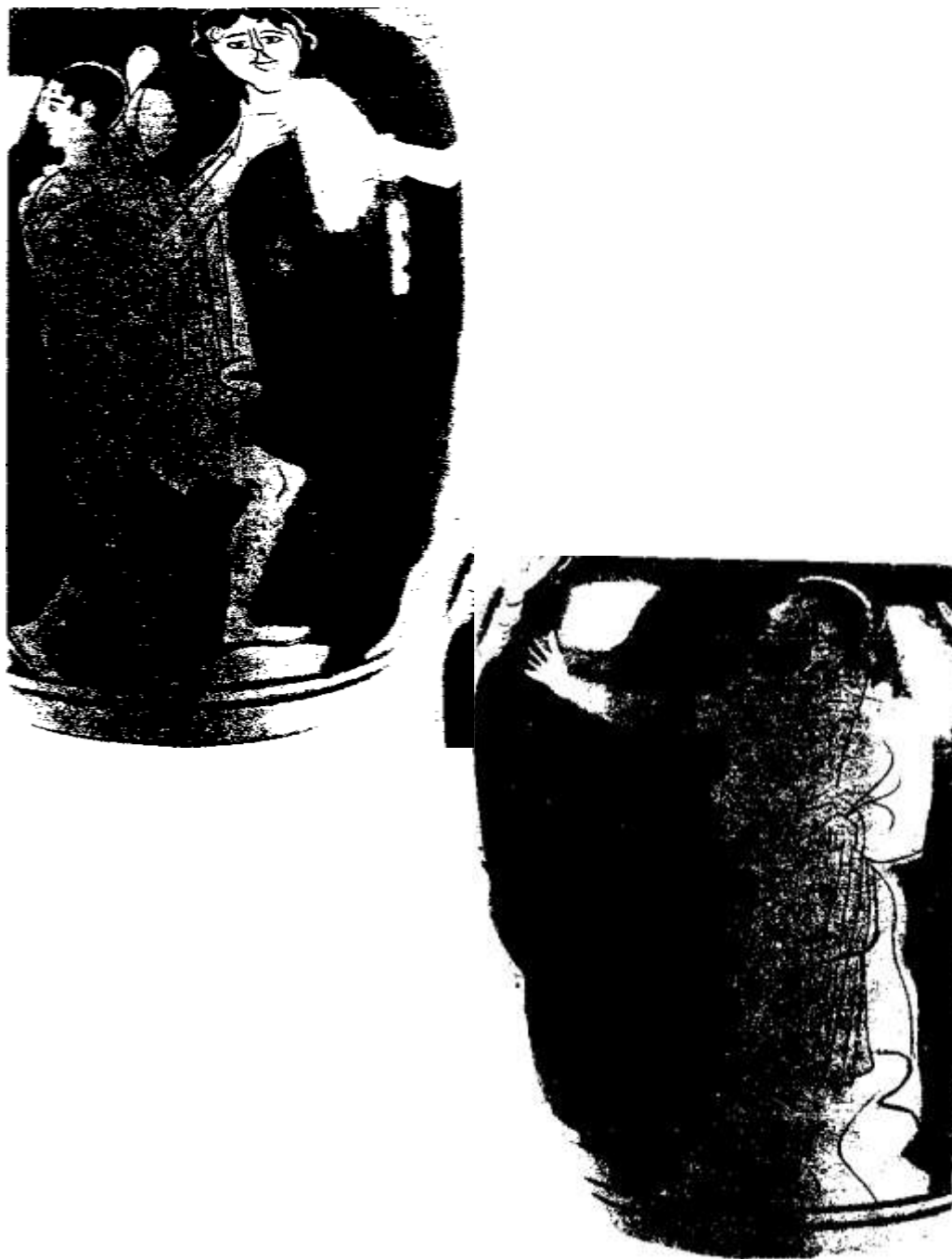
Figures 1, 2: Attic red-figured bell-krater from Bologna attributed to the Polydektes Painter, circa 450/440 B.C. Bologna, Museo Civico 325 (ht. 21.5 cm.).



Figure 1: Attic red-figured plate fragment, perhaps from the workshop of the Achilles Painter, circa 440 B.C. Olympia, Museum of Olympia (ø 22.6 cm.).

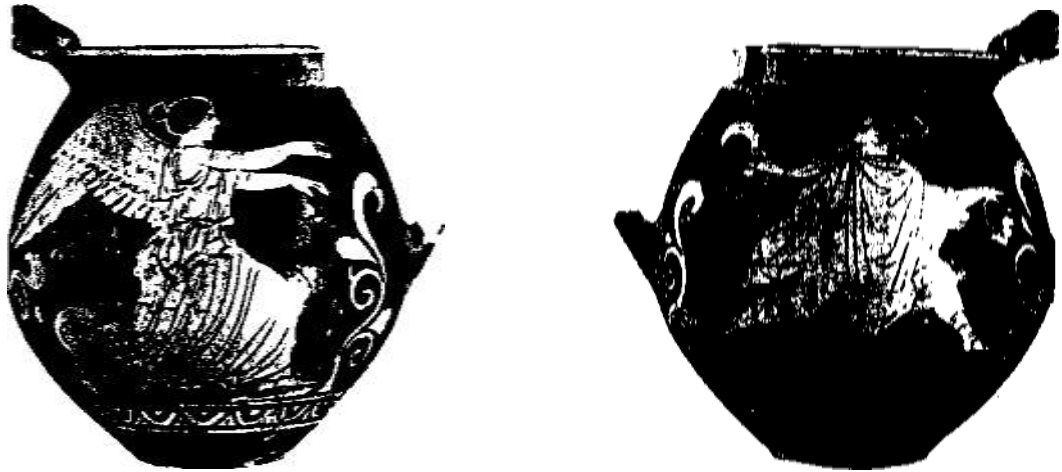


Figures 1, 2: Attic red-figured oinochoe attributed to the Shuvalov Painter, circa 430 B.C. Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina 2512.



Figures 1, 2: Campanian red-figured neck-amphora attributed to the Owl-Pillar Group, third quarter fifth century B.C. Leningrad, Hermitage 2077 (B 1026).





Figures 1, 2: South Italian red-figured cup, circa 400 B.C. Strassburg, University Museum 1574.



Figures 3, 4: South Italian red-figured cup, circa 400 B.C. Taranto, Museo Nazionale.



Figures 1, 2: Apulian red-figured pelike attributed to the Tarporley Painter, circa 400/380 B.C. Taranto, Private Collection.



Figures 1, 2: Apulian red-figured krater attributed to the Eton-Nike Painter, circa 370 B.C. Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum 79.



Figure 1: Lucanian red-figured amphora attributed to the Choephoroi Painter, third quarter fourth century B.C. Copenhagen, National Museum 3407.