Dionysos, a God for the Athenians

Developments after 480 BC

Hermonax and his Contemporaries

We have seen that in the decades before 480 Dionysos was most frequently depicted among his thiasos of satyrs and maenads, as was already the case with black-figure vases. Another important motif of that time was his encounter with a standing woman or, less frequently, with a satyr. We also see him, surrounded by his retinue, as a symposiast or at the arrival or departure of his quadriga. Depictions of Dionysos participating in mythological events, such as the return of Hephaistos and the Gigantomachy, are much rarer; the admission of Herakles to the Olympus is found only sporadically. In general, there does not seem to have been much interest in Dionysos' relations with the other gods. New elements in the iconography of Dionysos are, however, emerging in the second quarter of the century and becoming ever more visible towards 450 BC. These developments will be the subject of the next three chapters.

As far as Dionysiac imagery is concerned, *Hermonax* stands out among the painters of larger vessels of the generation following that of the Kleophrades and Berlin Painter; Beazley assumes he was a pupil of the latter. Over 160 vases are attributed to him, an extensive oeuvre even though much of it remains only in a fragmentary state. His work includes large, high-quality vases (more than twenty stamnoi, almost thirty pelikai, and one bell krater) as well as many large and small amphorae, several loutrophoros fragments found in Athens, hydriai, oinochoai, lekythoi, and even cups.¹ Most of his vases with non-anonymous subjects are Dionysiac in character.

A stamnos that still clearly shows a stylistic indebtedness to the Berlin Painter has a thiasos divided over both sides.² It consists of four couples of a satyr and a maenad in various, more or less peaceful, relationships. On one side we see a satyr in the center, next to a thyrsos set aside. Playing the aulos, he is moving towards the right. A maenad greets him cordially. On the left follows a woman, carrying a torch in each hand. A satyr, partly hidden by the handle of the vessel, tries to seize her. The next maenad is captured by a satyr coming from the left, while a fourth, seen from the back, is fending off a satyr with her

1 Isler-Kerényi 1987a, 170; concerning cups by Hermonax, see Isler-Kerényi 1984b.

2 St. Petersburg 4121: ARV 484.11; BA 205394 (no image); Peredolskaja 1967, pl. 77, 3–4.

thyrsos. Hermonax not only works with great accuracy, but also nuances the various relationships in such a way that the viewer gets the impression of a narrative. There seems to be a purposeful contrast between the satyr with the aulos and the other ones who behave aggressively.

Of even greater interest is a large, signed pelike showing a thiasos in the presence of Dionysos (Figure 36).³ It is represented here for the first time in a clear and readable manner. The god stands in the center on one side of the vase, with a kantharos in his right hand and the thyrsos in his left. He turns his head to the left towards a young woman who greets him, an oinochoe in her lowered right hand. Next to her, below the handle, is an altar with an ivy branch on it. On the reverse we see a girl, executed at a somewhat smaller size. She looks back towards the couple following on the left: a satyr clasping the shoulder of a woman with a thyrsos in her right hand and a torch in her left. Both are looking towards the left. Next comes a dancing satyr and behind him a dancing woman. She carries the thyrsos in her right hand, her left arm is wrapped in the fabric of her robe. Another satyr is below the other handle, almost on his knees, dancing to the music of a satyr playing the aulos while he walks towards the right, ahead of the god. All figures on the reverse are looking towards the left, in the direction of Dionysos. All women are wearing a fawn skin over their chiton or peplos. All are wearing their hair loose, in a girlish fashion, except one: the woman who is dancing. She has gathered her hair in the neck, as is usual for mature women. The altar and the torches indicate a ritual context. The main event seems to be the meeting between Dionysos and the young woman, the other figures participating joyfully. One has the impression that Hermonax is referring to a very specific ritual that was of importance for women and young girls and in which satyrs personified the erotic element.

The scene is very similar to one on a pelike by the *Painter of the Birth of Athena*, a follower of Hermonax.⁴ We see Dionysos moving towards the right, with his thiasos consisting of maenads with torches and obtrusive satyrs. One of these is clasping the god's shoulder, as if he were Hephaistos. Likewise quite similar is the scene on a more or less contemporaneous column krater of lesser quality.⁵ Here, too, the thiasos is unambiguously moving in a specific direction, even more than was the case with some of Makron's cups.⁶ It has become a

3 Rome, Villa Giulia 50459: Addenda 248 (485.27); BA 205410 (no image); Mingazzini 1971, pl. 146–148 (675).

4 Private collection: ARV 495.4; BA 205563 (no image); Ars Antiqua AG Luzern, auction II 14.05.1960, pl. 62/63 No. 160. On the painter see below p. 83.

5 Caltanissetta 69: Para 385; BA 275997 (probably by the Florence Painter).

6 See above Chapter 3, note 102.

FIGURE 36 *Pelike, Hermonax, Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia 50459 (photographs Soprintendenza per i beni archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale).*

- a. side A: Dionysos.
- b. side view (right).
- c. side B.
- d. side view (left).

kind of procession and in this way has moved from the mythical to the ritual (i.e. human) level.

An analogous shift may be discerned in a smaller, less elaborate pelike by Hermonax.⁷ A woman, looking over her shoulder, is walking towards the right. Her hair is gathered at the nape of the neck. She has a thyrsos in her left hand and her right is covered by the himation she wears over her chiton. One feels this is a woman moving and acting in a Dionysiac sphere, and not a mythical maenad. Two women on a more or less contemporaneous column krater give the same impression. Wrapped in their himatia, they look completely human as they move towards the right with measured pace amid gesticulating satyrs.⁸

Probably unique representations may also be found in the work of the lesser masters of this period. Let me mention Dionysos running in a short chiton on a calyx krater by the Oreithyia Painter⁹ (Figure 37) and a neck-amphora by the Alkimachos Painter.¹⁰ Or Dionysos in a stage costume, dancing between two satyrs on a column krater by the Leningrad Painter.¹¹ We also find scenes that cannot be interpreted. They may have been inspired by the theater or belong to lost myths.¹² A familiar, though rarely depicted, myth, however, is shown on a lekythos by the Alkimachos Painter, who is known for his predilection for Dionysiac subjects: the birth of the god from the thigh of his father in the presence of Hermes.¹³ The same painter also depicted satyrs, dressed like citizens, in conversation with a herm¹⁴ or offering a hare to a seated youth.¹⁵ But what is the meaning of a satyr wearing a helmet, who puts on leg guards in the presence of a woman with thyrsos and leopard skin, the maenad's attributes?¹⁶

7 St. Petersburg 727: Para 512 (486.45); BA 205428.

8 Ferrara 1685: Addenda 252 (511.5); BA 205738 (Painter of Bologna 228).

9 Agrigento C 1538: See above Chapter 3, note 8.

10 Naples 81783: Addenda 254 (529.13); BA 205985.

11 Madrid 11040: ARV 568.36; BA 206525 (Leningrad Painter). In the work of the Berlin Painter compare Dionysos in a stiff and ornate robe with a lion on his arm, Munich 8766: Addenda 191 (198.21bis); BA 275643.

12 For instance St. Petersburg B 201: Addenda 258 (555.95); BA 206338 (hydria by the Pan Painter).

13 Boston 95.39: Addenda 255 (533.58); BA 206036. This motif will be discussed in the next chapter.

14 Dresden ZV 2635; Addenda 254 (531.29); BA 206005.

15 St. Petersburg 734: ARV 531.33; BA 206009. Compare a satyr in a himation who looks on as a frightened bride is running away from Dionysos on the column krater Ferrara 2818: Addenda 254 (524.23); BA 205905.

16 London E 377: Para 381 (501.35); BA 205622 (Deepdene Painter).

FIGURE 37 *Calyx krater, Oreithyia Painter, Agrigento, Museo Archeologico Regionale C 1538, side A (De Miro 1994, pl. 38) © Regione Siciliana-Assessorato Reg.le dei BB.CC. e dell'I.S.*

In any case, at this stage, too, vase painters treated Dionysos and the satyrs in a more imaginative way than Dionysiac women. In addition, we find that, apparently, some subjects were at the time considered particularly topical: apart from the handing over of a child in a Dionysiac setting (which will be discussed in the next chapter), there is the making of wine, usually by satyrs, but in one instance by men of various ages.¹⁷ The harvest, the transport of the baskets, and the treading of the grapes in pithoi or large bell kraters were widely depicted since the middle of the 6th century; the splendid Basel amphora by the Amasis Painter comes to mind.¹⁸ The motif is reproduced in an abbreviated form—one person treading grapes—in the medallion of some early red-figure cups. Now, however, the subject is taken up by several painters of column kraters and

17 Ferrara 42684: Addenda 254 (524.26); BA 205908 (Orchard Painter); Bérard/Bron 1984, 131, fig. 185.

18 Basel Kā 420: Addenda 43 (151); BA 350468. See also Isler-Kerényi 2007, 132, fig. 68.

executed in various manners.¹⁹ Apart from the exception mentioned above, we see satyrs at work, sometimes in the presence of women with thyrsos or the wine god himself.²⁰ Another theme that emerges at this time and establishes itself after the middle of the century is a Dionysiac ritual in which a chair seems to play a certain role. We will return to this motif below.²¹

The most remarkable phenomenon in Dionysos-inspired vase painting of the second quarter of the century is the transformation of the circle dance of satyrs and maenads into a procession-like train accompanied by torches. This is illustrated by two column kraters by the same mediocre painter, where the maenads carry torches instead of thyrsos. It should also be noted that on the second (see the note) Dionysos, obviously intoxicated and leaning on a young satyr making music, is now for the first time practically naked (Figure 38).²² The development mentioned above even extends to the motif of the return of Hephaistos, as is clear from a column krater decorated around 440 BC, where a woman with burning torches in her hands shows the smith-god on his mule the way (Figure 39).²³ It would, however, show little understanding of the fundamentally unrealistic manner of expression of the vase painters, to assume that Dionysiac processions had only now arrived in Athens. We should rather consider this a manifestation of a new need to stress the human side of the thiasos. For the same reason it is not surprising that, at this point, we sometimes see satyrs who act like caricatures of citizens, and women who almost imperceptibly turn into maenads.²⁴

As the motif of the altar demonstrates, the ritualization of the imagery is at this time a general phenomenon. We are not speaking here, of course, about altars that fulfill a narrative role, as is the case, for instance, in the Ilioupersis or the story of Busiris, nor about scenes showing the abduction of women. On red-figure vases before 500 BC altars, as a kind of optional element in traditional depictions of gods, are rare. It is only in the first half of the 5th century

19 Sparkes 1976, 54 f.

20 For instance Louvre C 10774: Addenda 253 (518.4); BA 205809 (Syracuse Painter); Naples, Capodimonte 960: Addenda 260 (563.4); BA 206429 (Pig Painter); Vatican 16505: ARV 1170.7; BA 215533 (Painter of Bologna 322).

21 See below Chapter 6.

22 Agrigento Painter: Vienna 341: ARV 575.17; BA 206617, and Rome, Villa Giulia 846: ARV 575.20; BA 206620.

23 Lecce 603: Addenda 329 (1104.7); BA 216174 (Orpheus Painter). For the torch-bearing woman in the context of the return of Hephaistos, see Schöne 1987, 45.

24 The fact that, as far as Dionysiac images are concerned, the number of dancing women on red-figure lekythoi increases significantly after 460 BC, also belongs to this context, see Paleothodoros 2011, 137.

FIGURE 38 *Column krater, Agrigento Painter, Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia 846, side A (CVA Villa Giulia 4, pl. 9.1).*

FIGURE 39 *Column krater, Orpheus Painter, Lecce, Museo Provinciale Sigismondo Castromediano 603, side A (CVA Lecce 1, pl. 8.1).*

that we find a substantial number of altars, mostly on cups. The motif culminates in the decades around 450 (especially in the work of the Niobid Painter), after that the number of altars decreases markedly. The motif of the altar is usually combined with anonymous figures, mostly women. Not surprisingly, Nike is the one among the gods who is most often shown with an altar, which, apparently, is there to hallow the moment of her appearance.²⁵ Dionysos is next and after him comes Apollo; in the case of the other gods, altars are added only sporadically.²⁶

It seems, therefore, that by 450 BC both the vase painters and their clientele find themselves involved in a growing religiosity, which also embraces Dionysos and his retinue. The decision to erect a large new temple on the Acropolis fits this atmosphere very well, as do the activities of the great tragedians Aischylos and Sophokles.²⁷

The Imagery of Red-Figure Pointed Amphorae

The second quarter of the 5th century presents us with even more surprising representations of Dionysos. In these cases, the unusual image carriers as well as the images themselves allow us to speculate about Dionysos' significance for the people for whom these images were intended. One of the rarest image carriers was the pointed amphora, a neck-amphora which tapers to a point at the bottom, for which reason it had to be placed in a ring stand. The pointed amphora originated shortly after 500 BC and was inspired by the official Panathenaic prize amphora. From an artistic point of view it was a particularly demanding vase type.²⁸ So far only five black-figure and ten red-figure specimens are known.²⁹ The latter can all be dated between 500 and about 450 BC. Two were decorated by the Kleophrades Painter, one by the Syleus Painter, two by the Oreithyia Painter, four by Syriskos, and one by the Achilles Painter.³⁰ Five of them are known to have been excavated at the same site, Vulci in Etruria:

25 Isler-Kerényi 1971, 30; Thomsen 2011, 171 f.

26 Of particular interest is a representation of Hades between two altars, Louvre G 187: Addenda 222 (361.2); BA 203793 (stamnos by the Triptolemos Painter, with Triptolemos on the reverse).

27 Schneider/Höcker 2001, 113. See also below Chapter 7.

28 Isler-Kerényi 1977b, 10 and 14.

29 Oakley 1997, 85, note 103. Massa-Pairault, 50. In addition, the unpublished amphora Basel 2405, black-figure, with scenes of symposium and winepress: CVA Basel 5 (V. Slehoferova), forthcoming.

30 Syriskos is the name of the Copenhagen Painter: Weiss 1997, 104.

the Kleophrades Painter's only complete one, the one by the Syleus Painter, the two by the Oreithyia Painter, and Syriskos' London amphora. We may presume that the three other pointed amphorae decorated by Syriskos were likewise found here. At any rate, the two which have been adequately published, carry Etruscan graffiti, which suggest buyers from the institutional elite.³¹

The oldest known red-figure pointed amphorae are attributed to the Kleophrades Painter.³² The idea of the official prize amphora being a probable source of inspiration for this new vase form is supported by the subject of the neck image of the Munich amphora: young athletes with sports utensils.³³ As is well known, athletes of various disciplines are depicted on the reverse of every Panathenaic prize amphora—Athena Promachos is on the main side. Side A of the Berlin amphora shows young warriors arming themselves. This refers to the background of sports activities: the acquisition of military skills in order to defend the polis.³⁴ The main image of the Munich amphora is one of the most famous and beautiful representations of Dionysos surrounded by his thiasos, here consisting of four ecstatically dancing maenads and three satyrs. The satyr playing the double flute in the center of the reverse image is shown *en face*. The two others are placed beneath the handles; each harasses one of the maenads. The satyrs have been given the role we already know from 6th-century imagery: their primary interests are sex and music.³⁵ When shown full face they are supposed to directly address the beholder. Both the image carrier and the combination of subjects eloquently illustrate that the Dionysiac thiasos was an essential part of polis life.

Six of these exceptionally high-quality red-figure vases explicitly refer to the polis's most important festival, not only through their form, but especially through their subject matter which emphatically focuses on Athenian mythology. The main image of the second amphora by the Kleophrades Painter shows Theseus slaying the Minotaur in the presence of Ariadne and her wet nurse. On the reverse we see the afflicted Athenian youths. The shoulder images of the amphora by the Syleus Painter present the Gigantomachy of Athena and Poseidon, and Theseus fighting the Marathonian bull in the presence of Athena. A line of images on the amphora's belly shows heroes and centaurs in combat.³⁶ Here, too, one of the warriors must be Theseus, the founder

31 Martelli 1991, 282 f.; Maggiani 1996, 107 f. and note 53.

32 Greifenhagen 1972 dates both of them to just after 500 BC.

33 Munich 8732 (2344): Addenda 186 (182.6); BA 201659; Lissarrague 2013, 151 f., fig. 125.

34 Berlin 1970.5 (fragmentary): BA 5766 (no image); Greifenhagen 1972, 13–21.

35 Isler-Kerényi 2004a, 96.

36 Brussels R 303: Addenda 203 (249.6); BA 202485.

of Athens. Both the second Munich vase and its lost counterpart, formerly in Berlin, have a multi-figure representation of the abduction of the Attic princess Oreithyia by the wind god Boreas.³⁷ Boreas was credited with the victory over the Persian fleet at Cape Artemision, for which reason he had his own cult in Athens since 479 BC.³⁸ The Zurich pointed amphora by Syriskos contrasts Achilles mourning Patroklos and a victorious Theseus.³⁹ The neck images depict Centauromachies, also the one involving Theseus.⁴⁰ The main image of a Syriskos amphora in a private German collection shows Athena protecting Herakles in the Garden of the Hesperides.⁴¹ In addition, it has several river gods and fresh water nymphs, whose individual names are given. The three pointed amphorae by Syriskos that have figures on the shoulders present heroes and centaurs in combat. Again it is clear that not only the image carriers, but also the images themselves (especially those of Athena and Theseus), were supposed to convey the glory of their place of production to the distinguished foreign clientele.⁴²

Apart from Athena, pointed amphorae regularly celebrate Dionysos. As we have seen, the Kleophrades Painter presents him in the main image, surrounded by his thiasos. The neck image of the B side of the Berlin fragment showed a maenad between two satyrs. On Syriskos's London vase—a scene comparable to the one on the Munich kalathos by the Brygos Painter⁴³—Dionysos accepts the welcoming gift a young woman named *Nymphaia* offers him at an altar (Figure 40).⁴⁴ On the reverse, two women with different hairstyles are engaged in conversation. In the center of the main image of the pointed amphora by the Achilles Painter, which we will discuss in more detail below,⁴⁵ an energetically moving Dionysos is surrounded by a boisterous thiasos consisting of eight maenads and two satyrs.⁴⁶

37 Formerly Berlin F 2165; Para 380 (496.1); BA 206421 (no image); Miller/Kästner 2005, 124; Munich 2345; Addenda 250 (496.2); BA 206422.

38 LIMC VII.1, 64 (E. Simon).

39 Zurich, Archäologische Sammlung der Universität L 5; BA 275252 (the attribution is out of date); Isler-Kerényi 1977b.

40 Compare the inscription on its counterpart in a private collection in Germany: Weiss 1997, 108.

41 Private collection Germany: Tiverios 1991; Weiss 1997, 104–111; BA 30676 (no image).

42 Compare Massa-Pairault 2007, 47 f. where the choice of subjects for pointed amphorae is considered from an Etruscan perspective.

43 See above Chapter 3, note 76.

44 London E 350; Addenda 204 (256.2); BA 202921.

45 See below Chapter 5, note 20.

46 Cab. Méd. 357; Addenda 311 (987.2); BA 213822.

a

b

FIGURE 40 *Pointed amphora, Syriskos, London, British Museum E 350.*

a. *side A (CVA British Museum 3, III Ic pl. 18.1b).*

b. *detail of side A: Dionysos is welcomed by a woman (CVA British Museum 3, III Ic pl. 18.1d).*

This brings us to Syriskos' New York amphora, which, like the one in Paris, still has its original, richly decorated stand.⁴⁷ On the main side we find a depiction of Peleus leading Thetis to his home. All figures are given familiar names, except one. In the center of the main image the groom is leading the bride towards the centaur Chiron on her right, who receives the couple with two torches. Thetis performs the typical gesture of *anakalypsis* for the groom. Behind Chiron is his mother, Philyra, likewise carrying two torches. In the background beneath the handle, two columns with an architrave indicate the house; inside we can see the bed that has been prepared. Artemis, again with two torches, follows on Thetis's left, beneath the other handle Apollo, with kithara, turns towards his mother Leto, who carries a wreath. The scene seems to continue on the reverse side: in the center we see a dignified standing Dionysos with his thyrsos, facing him on the right his mother Semele with a torch, and on the left a young woman with a wreath-like branch. She is referred to as Hopla, a name otherwise unknown.

So far this version of the famous wedding is unique. From the middle of the 6th century, the scene was usually represented with the couple mounting a chariot.⁴⁸ It is important to note who are present: Chiron will raise Achilles, the son who is born from this union; Artemis is the patron goddess of childbirth, not because she is a fertility deity (this would be incompatible with her chastity), but because she is responsible for untamed human beings—infants and children.⁴⁹ The image implicitly refers to a future birth. The presence of three mother figures—Philyra, Leto, and Semele—is likewise remarkable. Their appearance seems to highlight the idea of the house, which in turn reminds us of the concept of the *oikos*, the family as an integral part of the polis. This concept could already be discerned in Sophilos's marriage of Peleus and Thetis of a century before, and in Kleitias' version on the famous François krater—here, too, through the inclusion of a house and prominently placed mother figures.⁵⁰ And Sophilos also depicted Apollo, whose song would immortalize this event that was of decisive importance for cosmic order.

In the archaic versions Dionysos was the key figure. He was the representative of the gods, the only one of them to speak to Peleus. In the case of Syriskos' New York amphora, he dominates the reverse side of the vase. He is standing between a mother and a young woman, conceivably because he is responsible for the transition from one life phase to another and, thus, for all weddings. The

47 New York SL 1990.1.21: BA 43937 (no image); LIMC VII, Peleus 210.

48 Vollkommer 1994, 266 f. (Peleus 205–208 including the note to no. 209).

49 Montepaone 2002, 70–72; Isler-Kerényi 2002b, 480 f.

50 Isler-Kerényi 2007, 75–79.

reference to Athens is implicit here in the shape of the vase and in the shoulder image, which shows Theseus' Centauromachy. This battle—the result of a mistaken indulgence in wine at a wedding feast—is here contrasted with the most exemplary of weddings. Moreover, the subversive, wild centaurs are opposed to the one that would be entrusted with the education of the couple's offspring. The shoulder image shows the founding hero of Athens fighting for the order that is celebrated in the main image—Sophilos had already presented Dionysos as its most important guarantor.

The glorification of Athens is particularly appropriate in the years 480–470 BC, the decade that follows the victory over the Persians. It is the decade to which this pointed amphora and the majority of the other ones are dated. It also fits into the oeuvre of the vase painter Syriskos, whose preference for such motifs is also evident from other original works. We could think of the stamnos with the tyrannicides,⁵¹ or the one showing Theseus slaying the Minotaur with the Athenian children anxiously awaiting the outcome of the fight on its reverse (compare the Berlin pointed amphora by the Kleophrades Painter),⁵² or the Acropolis fragment with the dead Minotaur.⁵³

How much importance Dionysos held for Syriskos is also evident from a signed calyx krater of about 470 BC on which all figures are mentioned by name (Figure 41).⁵⁴ On the main side Dionysos, accompanied by a panther, solemnly offers *Ge Panteleia* ('the all-embracing earth') a plant, which has been identified as the branch of a fig tree.⁵⁵ In his left hand he holds an ivy branch. Because the kantharos is absent, the scene is evidently not about wine. This also accounts for the presence of *Okeanos*, who, with a scepter in his hand, stands behind the goddess on the left. On the reverse we see *Themis* (which is, according to Aischylos, an alternative name for *Ge*),⁵⁶ standing between

51 Würzburg 515; Addenda 204 (256.5); BA 202924.

52 Private collection; BA 202929; Isler-Kerényi 1977a, 66–69.

53 Athens, Acr. 2.780: ARV 258.28; BA 202946 (no image).

54 Formerly Malibu (Ca) 92.AE.6; BA 28083 (no image); Shapiro 1993, 219–221; Lubsen Admiraal 1999; Smith 2011, 27 f. and 150 VP 3, fig. 3.1.

55 According to Lubsen Admiraal 1999, 239, who studied the vase in great detail. This attribute is extremely unusual. I am therefore most grateful to her for the following personal communication of August 11, 2013: "Dionysos is here a Meilichios/Dionysos Sykeatis (or Sikitis) . . . For his association with figs, cf. Ath. 111 78c citing Sosibios telling us that the introduction of the fig tree took place by Dionysos; Hesychius s. v. sykatis; Usener 1896, 146." Incidentally, the branch of a fig tree may also be discerned on the very fragmentary outside image A of Makron's Acropolis cup depicting the handing over of the infant Dionysos, see Chapter 3 note 112, Kunisch 1995, no. 437, pl. 149b.

56 Shapiro 1993, 221.

FIGURE 41 *Calyx krater, Syriskos, formerly Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 92.AE.6, side A (Lubsen Admiraal 1999, pl. 22a).*

two mythical kings: *Balos*, who sits on the left, and *Epaphos*. These two names would probably have reminded the original beholders of Egypt and Argos.⁵⁷ The image on the A side, however, refers to the whole earth, surrounded by Okeanos and endowed with figs by Dionysos. The tame panther could refer to Asia, or, like the more or less contemporaneous Gigantomachies,⁵⁸ designate Dionysos as the lord of the wilderness.⁵⁹ What is clear, however, is that, as far as Syriskos is concerned, Dionysos' stature has cosmic dimensions and reaches far beyond Athens.

57 LIMC VIII.1, 540 Belos II 1 (M. True) and 574 Epaphos 1 (M. True).

58 See for example Carpenter 1997, pls. 2A and 6A.

59 Because of the great skill and originality of the vase painter, one should actually consider these two images against the background of Syriskos' known oeuvre. Unfortunately this is impossible here.

The Pelikai of the Painter of the Birth of Athena

A representation of Dionysos in a specifically Athenian context may again be found on a large vase that was made ten to fifteen years later. It concerns a pelike by the Painter of the Birth of Athena, who was close to Hermonax.⁶⁰ The pelike belongs to a group of seven vases of this type by the same painter.

Let us first have a closer look at the vase type. 'Pelike' is currently the conventional term; its antique designation is unknown.⁶¹ The pelike is different from the amphora in that it has a lower belly. It therefore seems to be sagging and makes a less elegant impression. It has a flanged mouth. Depictions of pelikai are, almost without exception, also found on pelikai.⁶² From these depictions we may conclude that it was mainly used as a container for oil, often perfumed oil for the women's quarters. Like the bell krater and the stamnos, which will be discussed in Chapter 6, this vase type was only invented around 520 BC and was, from its earliest times, produced with both red-figure and black-figure decoration. As Scheibler did for the belly amphorae, Shapiro studied the about one hundred known black-figure pelikai, in order to determine their characteristic image repertoire.⁶³ It mainly consists of three themes: firstly, trade and the work of the artisan, in other words, the world of the *banausoi*, the less-distinguished Athenians who had to make a living as laborers and craftsmen; secondly, musicians, especially musical contests in the context of the Panathenaic festival; thirdly, Dionysiac subjects. The latter far outnumber any other mythological representations. In addition, it is remarkable that, as far as the subject of the Gigantomachy is concerned, black-figure pelikai nearly always feature Athena. It seems evident that the idea of the Panathenaea dominated the pelikai repertoire, and that this included the lower segments of Athenian society, which may have been less respected, but nevertheless gave the city much of its wealth and prestige. This conclusion, moreover, ties in with the use of the pelike as a container for oil, which was the most important product of the Attic region.

60 London E 410: Addenda 250 (494.1); BA 205560 (no image).

61 Shapiro 1997, 63 f.

62 Agrigento 34: ARV 185.30; BA 201682 (Kleophrades Painter); Adolphseck 42 and Vienna 895: ARV 285.1 and 2; BA 202574 and 202575 (both Group of Vienna 895); Berlin F 2173: Addenda 209 (286.18); BA 202589 (Geras Painter); Bern 12227: Addenda 265 (596.1); BA 206905 (in the manner of the Altamura Painter); Karlsruhe 206 (B10): ARV 735.III; BA 209103 (Karlsruhe Painter). Also Shapiro 1997, 64. In addition, rather exceptionally, the depiction of a pelike in the tondo of a cup at present in the art trade (?): Addenda 242 (451.3); BA 205374 (Oedipus Painter).

63 Shapiro 1997, 64–68. See above Chapter 3, p. 52.

In the course of the 5th century the red-figure pelike apparently came into use in Athens as a funerary urn for warriors who died at an early age.⁶⁴ It can be assumed that the pelikai found in Etruscan necropoleis were at least eventually meant as grave gifts. This, in any case, holds true for those by the Painter of the Birth of Athena, which were found partly in Cerveteri and partly in Vulci. We shall now look at them in more detail.

Their subject matter, with its focus on Athena and Dionysos, very well fits the black-figure repertoire established by Shapiro. Significantly, they also feature episodes from Athenian mythology, which are only rarely depicted. Two of his pelikai, probably made as counterparts, show Zeus pursuing Aegina on one side, and on the other Poseidon's pursuit of Amymone.⁶⁵ The Aegina motif must have been especially topical at the time: 460 BC was the year the Athenians conquered the island.⁶⁶ Poseidon was, of course, Lord of the Aegean and therefore had a special relationship with Attica, whereas Amymone personified the Peloponnesos. The motif of the amorous pursuit was furthermore a common metaphor for an early death and therefore appropriate for funerary vases.

A third pelike by the Painter of the Birth of Athena has on the one side Athena and Zeus with Iris, the messenger of the gods, as well as the Peloponnesian twins Castor and Pollux, and on the other various warrior heroes among whom Theseus's rarely-depicted sons Akamas and Demophon.⁶⁷ Another of his pelikai shows Theseus taking leave of his human father Aegeus on the one side, with on the other Boreas and Oreithyia in the presence of this archaic Athenian king.⁶⁸ As far as the two remaining pelikai are concerned, the one showing a Dionysiac thiasos with ritual connotations has already been discussed.⁶⁹ The pelike fragment in the Louvre is likewise of a Dionysiac nature.⁷⁰

This brings us back to the eponymous piece showing an episode rarely depicted in red-figure vase painting: the birth of Athena from the head of her father (Figure 42).⁷¹ The main side shows Zeus seated on his throne. He turns

64 Shapiro 1997, 63 and 68, with note 7.

65 Rome, Villa Giulia 20846 and 20847: Addenda 250 (494.2 and 3); BA 205561 and 205562.

66 Isler-Kerényi 1979, 34 f. (here still 456 BC); Gehrke 2013, 147–149.

67 Kurashiki, Ninagawa 40: Addenda 250 (495.5 bis); BA 275985 (no image). The figures on the reverse are mentioned by name.

68 Hamburg 1980.174: BA 5647 (no image).

69 See above note 4.

70 Louvre CP 1115: Addenda 250 (495.5); BA 205564 (no image).

71 Two further examples: fragments of a volute krater, Reggio Calabria 4379: Addenda 203 (251.27); BA 202504 (Syleus Painter); hydria Cab. Méd. 444: Addenda 330 (1112.3); BA 214704 (Painter of Tarquinia 707).

FIGURE 42 *Pelike, Painter of the Birth of Athena, London, British Museum E 410, side A and B combined (Gerhard 1840–58, pl. 3–4).*

to the right, towards a woman who hastens away in dismay, possibly the midwife Eileithyia, while his daughter, depicted at a smaller size, rises from his head in full armor. To the left we see Hephaistos running away with the axe he used to split the head of the father of the gods and effectuate the birth. To the right of Eileithyia, Artemis greets her new-born sister, on the left Poseidon with his trident is following Hephaistos. Artemis here stands for the region of Attica; her most famous sanctuary is situated in Brauron at its northeastern border; Poseidon stands for the Aegean, which surrounds Attica. Next to Poseidon, below the left handle, we see the slightly smaller figure of Nike. The other side of the vase is rather similar to Syriskos's pointed amphora discussed above. Here, too, Dionysos (who is named on the vase) dominates the main image. He moves energetically to the right, but turns his head towards an anonymous bearded man. To the right of the god an anonymous youth is hastening ahead of him. Analogous to the Syriskos amphora showing Dionysos between a young woman and a mother figure, the god here seems to mediate between two male representatives of different age groups. As in the dinos by the Berlin Painter discussed in the previous chapter, he is again the only one to be in direct contact with human beings.⁷² It may be for this reason that, in contrast to the other figures, he is shown with his feet on the ground.

Both the exclusive group of the pointed amphorae and the pelikai of the Painter of the Birth of Athena clearly illustrate not only the human dimension of the god Dionysos, but particularly his special alliance with the Athenian polis during the Classical period. This may, incidentally, have made him

72 See above Chapter 3, note 44.

even more attractive for the Etruscan buyers.⁷³ It seems significant, however, that although he features prominently on the two vases that were discussed in detail, Dionysos is not shown in the main mythological scene, but on the reverse, in direct contact with prototypical anonymous figures—for the original beholders of the images he, more than other gods, was actively involved in the lives of human beings.

73 Compare for the case of the Kodros Painter, Avramidou 2011, 84.