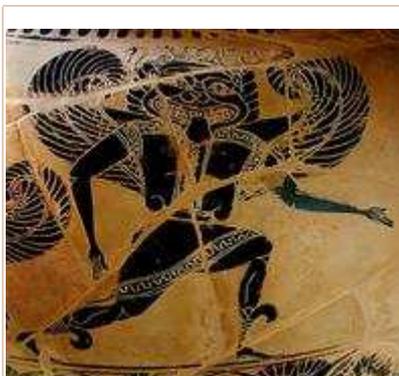


Home - Eye-Openers - In-Depth Studies

In-Depth Studies : Hybrid Creatures of the Ancient Greek World



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Introduction | Chimaera | Gorgon | Monsters & Heracles | Sphinx | Minotaur |
Markers: pottery | Ancient literature (1) | Ancient literature (2) | Bibliography

Mythological monsters and decorative motifs

Greek imagery is peopled with strange figures: major and minor divinities, personifications, terrifying monsters combining two or more species of animal. As ancient Greek art evolved, each creature quickly developed its own distinctive appearance, symbolizing its character and function.

In the early 7th century BC, monsters from the Greek tradition of oral poetry began to appear in vase paintings. The centaur Nessos, the Gorgons, and the Chimaera became firmly established in the iconography of Greek mythology. At the same time, vases decorated in the Orientalizing style (notably in Corinth and eastern Greece) featured friezes of sphinxes, sirens and gryphons. The repertoire expanded with the flowering of Black-figure vase painting in the 1st half of the 6th century BC: the wings sprouted by gods and personifications such as Hermes, Eros (Love), Boreas (the north wind), Eos (the Dawn), and Nike (Victory) symbolize their supernatural powers or the gift of ubiquity. The sea-gods Nereus and Triton feature serpentine bodies covered with scales. Satyrs, the companions of Dionysus, have horses' tails and pointed ears. Monsters symbolizing the forces threatening civilization are represented, mainly, by elements from the animal world, both real and imagined. The Gorgon Medusa, whose gaze turns her enemies to stone; the Minotaur in its labyrinth; the Chimaera, and the Sphinx of Thebes are allegories of chaos, conquerable only by heroes - sometimes with divine help - whose downfall frees human society from their thrall. Images from this rich figurative tradition are rooted in our subconscious today: the silhouette of the winged horse Pegasus, fighting the chimaera with Bellerophon astride his back, is a universal symbol of speed and freedom.

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Home - Eye-Openers - In-Depth Studies

In-Depth Studies : Hybrid Creatures of the Ancient Greek World



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Files

► **Maps**

Introduction | **Chimaera** | Gorgon | Monsters & Heracles | Sphinx | Minotaur | Markers: pottery | Ancient literature (1) | Ancient literature (2) | Bibliography

Bellerophon and the Chimaera

The Chimaera: a fabulous, fire-breathing monster

The Chimaera (literally "goat") is one of many hybrid monsters in Greek mythology. Its appearance varies, but it is most often depicted with a lion's body, a goat's head and a serpent's tail. A fire-breathing creature with impenetrable skin, the Chimaera was the offspring of two terrifying monsters from the dawn of the Universe: the hundred-headed Typhon, and the snake-woman Echidna. The Chimaera's horde of monstrous siblings include the many-headed dogs Orthos and Cerberus, and the Hydra of Lerna, killed by Heracles.

According to Homer, the Chimaera was raised by Amisodaros, king of Karia (the region immediately west of Lykia) whose population it terrorized, devouring their livestock. It figures chiefly in the legend of Bellerophon, the hero charged with its destruction by the Lykian king Iobates. Mounted on Pegasus, Bellerophon at first fails to penetrate the monster's hide with his sword. His mission succeeds when - advised by Athena, the protectress of Greek heroes - he fixes a lump of lead to the end of his lance and plunges it into the creature's fiery mouth, where it melts, burning the vital organs.

The reptilian, fire-breathing Chimaera is closely related to the dragons of other mythologies. Its name is synonymous with the terrifying but unreal monsters of the human imagination; its conquest symbolizes Man's struggle with his innermost fears.

Bellerophon: a queen's vengeance

The offspring of the sea-god Poseidon, Bellerophon's human father was Glaucus, king of Corinth, himself the son of Sisyphus. His adventures begin with the accidental murder of a man sometimes referred to as Belleros (Bellerophon means literally "killer of Belleros"). Banished from Corinth, he flees to the court of Proteus, king of Argos, where he rejects the passionate advances of Proteus's queen, Anteia. Furious, Anteia accuses Bellerophon of attempted rape. Proteus refuses to kill Bellerophon under his own roof, and arranges for him to be summoned by his father-in-law Iobates, king of Lykia. Iobates sends Bellerophon to combat the Chimaera, certain that he will die in the attempt. When Bellerophon returns victorious, Iobates sends him to fight the neighboring tribe of the Solymi - notoriously ferocious warriors - and, subsequently, the Amazons. Convinced that Bellerophon's victories are proof of his innocence, Iobates grants the hero his daughter's hand in marriage, and bequeathes him his kingdom. Bellerophon sets out to take his revenge on Anteia, who escapes astride Pegasus. The winged horse drops her into the sea, however, where she drowns. A later episode describes how Bellerophon tries to reach Mount Olympus, riding on Pegasus. Outraged by his pride and daring, Zeus sends a gadfly to sting Pegasus, who throws Bellerophon to his death. Bellerophon was the object of an heroic cult in Corinth and Lykia.

Depictions of the Chimaera in Antique art.

Despite its name (from the Greek khimaira or goat), the Chimaera is traditionally depicted with a lion's body. Its archetypal form emerged in Corinth in the late 8th century BC: faithful to the texts of Hesiod and Homer, it shows a hybrid animal with a lion's body, a goat's head and a tail ending in a serpent's head. Representations of the Chimaera in art ignore the "fiery breath" that is such an important feature of the ancient texts.

Variations on this type include the winged chimaera, prominent in Etruscan art of the 6th century BC but quickly abandoned elsewhere, and the female chimaera seen on a small number of vases from the late 5th and early 4th centuries BC (G 447, K 362).

Corinthian depictions of the Chimaera in the 6th century BC are purely decorative, while Athenian art of the same period focusses on narrative depictions of the combat with Bellerophon. The chimaera's popularity subsequently declined for almost 100 years, after which it reappeared on a small group of vases dating from the late 5th century BC. (G 446, G 447). It was often depicted on shields, and featured on the main currency of the Peloponnesian town of Sikyon.

In the Hellenistic period, and Imperial Roman art, depictions of the Chimaera in isolation

were gradually supplanted by narrative scenes of the combat with Bellerophon. These images were popular in funerary art (doubtless symbolizing the conquest of the fear of death), and as celebrations of Imperial triumphs.

The winged horse Pegasus, companion of heroes

Pegasus sprang from the bleeding, severed neck of the Gorgon Medusa. He features in a number of Antique myths, including those of Perseus and (notably) Bellerophon. Ancient etymology links the name to water and springs: the so-called Hippocrene spring on Mount Helicon marked the spot where Pegasus struck a rock with his hoof. Its waters were a source of poetic inspiration.

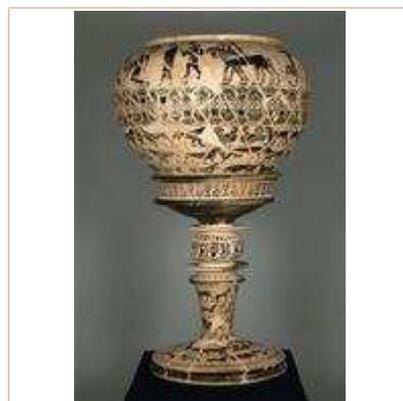
On Mount Olympus, Pegasus was entrusted with the sacred task of carrying Zeus's thunderbolts, until he was tamed by Bellerophon (with the help of Athena, the protectress of heroes, who presented him with a golden bridle). Bellerophon slipped the bridle around Pegasus's neck while he was drinking, and climbed onto his back. Thanks to Athena's intervention, Bellerophon was able to slay the Chimaera. After Bellerophon's death, Pegasus rejoined the gods, and eventually became a constellation.

The winged horse is an Occidental motif, in use as early as the Mycenaen period, where it is seen on a number of intaglios. It also features on the decorative freizes of Orientalizing Greek pottery. The first known representation of Pegasus is in a narrative scene showing Bellerophon fighting the Chimaera on land. Images of Pegasus in flight are common from the mid-7th century onwards, however, and quickly became the norm. From the early Archaic period, Pegasus is often shown fighting the Chimaera alone (G 447). Pegasus was the symbol of the city of Corinth, and appeared on its coinage.

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Home - Eye-Openers - In-Depth Studies

In-Depth Studies : Hybrid Creatures of the Ancient Greek World



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Files

► Maps

Introduction | Chimaera | **Gorgon** | Monsters & Heracles | Sphinx | Minotaur | Markers: pottery | Ancient literature (1) | Ancient literature (2) | Bibliography

Perseus and the Gorgon

The Gorgon

According to the Theogony, a "genealogy of the gods" by the ancient Greek author Hesiod, the three Gorgons Stheno, Euryale and Medusa belonged to the first generation of divinities. Their parents Phorkys and Ceto were the progeny of Pontos (the Waters) and Gaia (the Earth). The monsters were among the primitive forces combatted by the second generation of gods, those of the Olympian pantheon, who brought order to the universe and upheld its laws.

The winged god Perseus flew across the ocean in search of the Gorgons, who lived at the edge of the western world, near the mouth of Hell. Unlike her sisters, Medusa was not immortal.

The terrifying Gorgons had squat noses, bulging eyes and grimacing mouths with boars' tusks. Their gaze turned whoever saw them to stone. Serpents were tangled in their hair. Their hands were made of bronze, their wings of gold.

Perseus surprised the Gorgons while they were asleep. Averting his gaze (as recommended by Athena), he allowed the goddess to control his arm. Using her shield as a mirror, he approached Medusa and cut off her head using a curved scimitar or scythe presented to him by Hermes.

According to Hesiod, Medusa was pregnant with the progeny of Poseidon. When Perseus severed her head, the winged horse Pegasus and the warrior Chrysaor sprang from the bloodied stump of her neck. Perseus put the head in his satchel and fled, wearing the helmet of Hades (lord of the dead) for protection. He was pursued in vain by Stheno and Euryale.

The myth of Perseus

Perseus's exploits are described in the poems of Homer and Hesiod. The son of Zeus and Danae, his legend originated in Argos. Danae's father Acrisius was warned by an oracle that his son-in-law would try to kill him. Hoping to forestall his fate, Acrisius built a bronze chamber and shut Danae inside. Enflamed with passion for the young girl, Zeus turned himself into a shower of gold and penetrated the bronze roof, falling upon the virgin's breast. Perseus was the child of their union. Acrisius subsequently locked his daughter and grandson into a chest, which he threw into the sea. Off the coast of the island of Seriphos, the chest was caught in the nets of Dictys, the brother of King Polydectes. During a banquet, Polydectes asked his friends what gifts they would offer him. All replied that a horse was the only present fit for a king, apart from Perseus, who replied that if necessary, he would bring him the head of the gorgon Medusa. The king, in love with Danae, ordered Perseus to behead the monster, or he would take Danae by force. Aided by Hermes and Athena, Perseus found the Graea (the Gorgons' sisters), who shared one eye and one tooth between them. Perseus succeeded in stealing these, and forced the Graea to point out the way to the abode of the Nymphs. The Nymphs presented Perseus with winged sandals, the kibisis (a magic satchel) and the helmet of Hades, which made the wearer invisible. Hermes presented him with the harpe, a curved scimitar or scythe.

Pegasus and Chrysaor

Poseidon, the god of the sea and rivers, was also worshipped in Greece under the epithet Hippios ("of horses"), and was thought to have created the first horse (in Greek, hippos). Horses play an important role in Poseidon's genealogy and legend. Another horse was born of his union with the goddess Demeter. After the beheading of the Gorgon Medusa, the offspring of her union with Poseidon sprang from her severed neck: first Pegasus the winged horse (whose Greek name means "spurting water" or "spring" in reference to his birthplace at the source of the western ocean), and secondly, the warrior Chrysaor (born brandishing a golden sword, from which his name derives).

Athena caught and tamed Pegasus, and presented him to the Muses. The Hippocrene spring on Mount Helicon (the home of the Muses) rose at the spot where Pegasus struck a rock with his hoof, before escaping in flight to rejoin the gods. In Hesiod's version of the

myth, Pegasus flew to Mount Olympus, where he resided in Zeus's palace, and was charged with carrying his thunderbolts. Pegasus is linked to a number of legends, notably that of Bellerophon. Chrysaor's union with Callirrhoe, the daughter of the Ocean, resulted in the birth of the giant Geryon, a warrior with three bodies.

The Gorgoneion: a petrifying countenance

Returning from his mission to behead the Gorgon Medusa, Perseus was refused hospitality at the palace of the Titan Atlas. The hero showed Atlas the head of Medusa, turning him into a mountain of stone. Flying over Africa, the drops of blood falling from the kibisis caused the continent to be filled with savage beasts. The first coral was created when Perseus laid the Gorgon's head upon a bed of leaves and seaweed.

Perseus used the head to turn his enemies to stone - including his mother's suitor, King Polydectes. The Gorgon's blood was both a remedy, and a poison. One strand of her hair was enough to fell an army.

Perseus offered the Gorgoneion (the Gorgon's head) to the goddess Athena. In Homer's account of the legend, Athena placed the head in the center of her breastplate (or aegis). The writer Apollodorus describes it fixed to her shield.

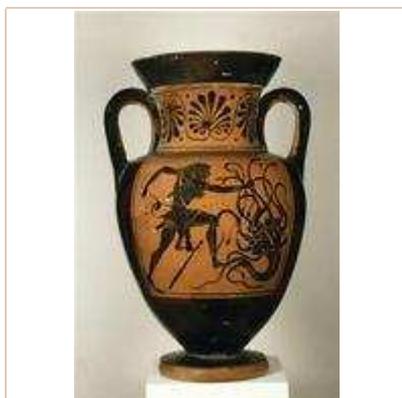
In Antique art, the Gorgoneion was depicted as a motif on breastplates and shields, but was also produced as a decorative item in its own right. It was a popular decorative motif during the Archaic period, on bronze and clay vases, terracotta architectural decorations and temple pediments. The oldest known examples are the most faithful to the ancient texts. From the mid-5th century BC, however, the monstrous face is gradually transformed to that of a young woman. In French and English, the verbs "méduser" (to transfix or stupefy with fear) and "to petrify" (to terrify, or turn to stone) retain echoes of the ancient myth.

Perseus and the Gorgon in Greek art

The legend of Perseus first appears in vase paintings of the 2nd quarter of the 7th century BC. The story seems to have been known from the Homeric period. The Archaic period highlighted the episodes in which Perseus confronts the Gorgons, especially the beheading of Medusa and her sisters' hopeless pursuit. The subject fell from favor in the ceramic workshops of the Late Archaic period, but was taken up again by sculptors and engravers c. 550-530 BC. Certain episodes were neglected in favor of others, such as Perseus's encounters with the Graea or the Nymphs, from whom he obtained his magical accoutrements. Athenian artists, not content with depicting the protective acts of their city's goddess, created new episodes in order to give Athena a more prominent role. The depiction of Perseus's weapons and attributes evolved over time: in the Archaic period, he is armed with a broadsword, while 5th-century BC images show him beheading Medusa with the harpe (a curved scimitar or scythe). The winged shoes with upturned ends are described in the oldest sources, while his headgear (the helmet of Hades) was long depicted as a petasus or pilos (a felt cap). The kibisis is sometimes depicted as a type of satchel, and sometimes as a basket. As Perseus's winged shoes became established as a central element in his iconography, artists began to confer similar magical properties upon his headgear, adding wings like those usually sported by Hermes.

Home - Eye-Openers - In-Depth Studies

In-Depth Studies : Hybrid Creatures of the Ancient Greek World



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Files

► [Maps](#)

Introduction | Chimaera | Gorgon | **Monsters & Heracles** | Sphinx | Minotaur | Markers: pottery | Ancient literature (1) | Ancient literature (2) | Bibliography

Monsters in the myth of Heracles

Heracles, hero of the Twelve Labors

Heracles was raised as the son of Alcmena and Amphitryon, but his true father was the god Zeus, disguised as Amphitryon in order to seduce Alcmena. Amphitryon himself subsequently fathered Iphicles, Heracles's twin brother. At their birth, Zeus's wife Hera placed two gigantic snakes in the babies' room, to suffocate them. Heracles, gifted with supernatural strength, subdued the snakes and saved his brother's life (see the stamnos G 192, in Room 43, vitrine 23). Heracles later married Megara, with whom he had many children. Cursed with madness by the jealous Hera, he killed them all, and asked the god Apollo for punishment. Apollo ordered him to the palace of Eurystheus - king of Argos and Mycenae, and a cousin of Alcmena and Amphitryon - in the ancient city of Tiryns. Eurystheus would oversee the execution of Twelve Labors "to the glory of Hera" (hence the name Heracles).

Eurystheus ordered Heracles to rid the world of monsters: he should kill the Nemean Lion and the Hydra of Lerna, and capture the hell-hound Cerberus, the hind of Arcadia, the wild boar of Erymanthus, the Cretan Bull, the mares of Diomedes, and the oxen of Geryon. He had also to cleanse the stables of King Augeas, destroy the flesh-eating birds of Lake Stympthalus, and obtain the girdle of the queen of the Amazons, and the golden apples from the garden of the Hesperides. If he succeeded, Zeus would reward him with immortality and a place on Mount Olympus.

Heracles and the Hydra

The Hydra of Lerna was a snake-like monster with many heads (between 5 and 100, according to the various sources). Born of the primordial gods Typhon and Echidna, it was raised beside a spring by the goddess Hera, with the specific aim of confronting Heracles and securing Hera's revenge for her husband's infidelity. Heracles was sent to Lerna by Eurystheus. The Hydra had infested the region's marshes, terrorizing the local people (its poisonous breath spelt death to its enemies). Heracles planned to weaken the Hydra with flaming arrows, then slice off its heads with a sword. Unfortunately, the heads grew back as soon as they were cut. Hera sent a giant crayfish to assist the monster, while Heracles sought help from his nephew (or friend) Iolaus. Together, they decided to sear the monster's neck-wounds with flaming branches, to prevent the new heads from growing. The monster was duly killed, and carefully buried. Heracles dipped his arrows in its poisonous venom. The slaying of the Hydra of Lerna was the only Labor for which Heracles had recourse to Iolaus's help.

Heracles and Cerberus

For the 11th of the 12 twelve Labors set by Eurystheus, Heracles was ordered to bring to Mycenae the terrifying monster Cerberus, the hound of the god Hades, lord of the dead, and guardian of the gates of the underworld. Like the Hydra of Lerna, Cerberus - a three-headed dog with a serpent's tail, and snake-heads growing out of his back - was the offspring of the primordial gods Typhon and Echidna. Heracles asked for help from Athena and Hermes, and was initiated into the Eleusian Mysteries - secret religious rites celebrated at the ancient Greek city of Eleusis in honor of Demeter and Persephone - in preparation for his passage to the underworld. After a number of adventures on his journey, Heracles asks Hades (or Pluto) for Cerberus, who accepts on one condition: Heracles must tame the monster unarmed. Heracles succeeds in grasping Cerberus in both hands, and is permitted by Hades to take the hound to Eurystheus. Terrified by the sight, the "brave" king orders Heracles to return the monster to Hades forthwith.

Heracles and Triton

Triton is a sea-god, the son of Poseidon and Amphitrite. Half-man, half-fish, he has a human torso and a fish's tail. In combat alongside Poseidon, he uses a conch-shell as a clarion. Triton is sometimes identified as the god of Lake Tritonis in Libya, from where he directed the expedition of the Argonauts to the Mediterranean. Triton received a three-legged stool as thanks, which he took to the bottom of the lake. Another local Boeotian legend describes Triton's quarrel with Dionysus. Triton tried to abduct women bathing in the lake during a Dionysiac celebration at Tanagra, but was chased away by Dionysus, after which he continued to cause trouble for the people of the region. Triton was offered wine, and fell into a deep, drunken sleep during which he was hacked to death. Dionysus emerged victorious. The struggle between Heracles and Triton is not described in the ancient texts, but is abundantly illustrated on Attic Black-figure vases. The two protagonists are portrayed in a terrific struggle, accentuated by the writhing, plastic qualities of Triton's scaly tail.

Heracles and Acheloos

Acheloos (or Achelous) was the eponymous god of one of Greece's longest rivers. He is variously described as the son of Oceanus and Thetys, the Sun and the Earth, or Poseidon. The brother of 3,000 other rivers, and the father of numerous springs, he had the power to metamorphose at will.

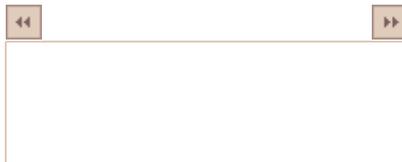
His legend is connected with that of Heracles: Acheloos was the neighbor of King Oeneus of Aetolia, whose daughter Deianira he hoped to marry. Deianira was suspicious of Acheloos's powers of metamorphosis, and refused. During his descent into the underworld in search of Cerberus, Heracles encountered Deianira's dead brother Meleager, who asked him to marry his sister upon his return to the land of the living. Heracles gave Meleager his word, and hurried to Aetolia as soon as the Labors were accomplished. Acheloos opposed Heracles' request for the hand of Deianira, and the two engaged in a desperate struggle. Heracles summoned all his mighty strength, while Acheloos turned himself into a bull. Heracles broke one of Acheloos's horns, and the river-god admitted defeat. He asked Heracles for the horn, but was presented instead with the horn of a goat presented by Zeus to the nymph Amalthea - the so-called cornucopia or "horn of plenty", symbol of fertility and happiness. In modern Greek, Acheloos's river is known as the Akhelos Potamos or Aspropotamos.

Home - Eye-Openers - In-Depth Studies

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Files

► [Maps](#)

Introduction | Chimaera | Gorgon | Monsters & Heracles | **Sphinx** | Minotaur | Markers: pottery | Ancient literature (1) | Ancient literature (2) | Bibliography

Oedipus and the Sphinx

The Sphinx

Hesiod describes the Sphinx as the daughter of the primordial goddess Echidna and Orthos, the dog of the giant Geryon. Her mother's father was Phorkys, the father of almost every monster in Greek mythology. The Sphinx is, then, the sister of Cerberus, the Hydra, and the Chimaera. Through Phorkys, she is related to the Gorgons, the Graea and Pegasus.

The classical texts describe the Sphinx as having a lion's body (like her sister the Chimaera), a young woman's head (like her mother Echidna), and the wings of a bird of prey (like her grandmothers the Harpies). Aeschylus describes her as a "ravisher of men", Euripides as "abduction incarnate", a menacing threat preying upon the people of Thebes. Zeus's wife Hera sent the monster as a punishment for the Theban king Laius, guilty of loving and abducting the youth Chrysippos. In another version, Apollo or Hades (the god of the underworld) sent the Sphinx as a punishment for the impious Thebans themselves. From a mountain-top, the Sphinx controlled routes to and from the city, posing riddles to travelers and sparing only those able to answer. In a third version, the Thebans assembled each day in the main square to resolve the riddle, without success. Each day, another inhabitant was eaten. Haimon, the son of the Theban king Creon, was the Sphinx's last victim. Creon had promised his kingdom to whoever was able to rid it of the Sphinx. Oedipus finally answered the riddle; the monster dashed itself on a rock in despair.

Oedipus

Oedipus is first mentioned in Homer; later his legend was dramatized and perpetuated in the great Greek tragedies.

Laius, king of Thebes, was told by the oracle at Delphi that his own son would murder him. When his wife Jocasta bore him a son, the king had the child's feet pierced and bound together. The baby was then abandoned on Mount Cithaeron, but was found by a shepherd and adopted by the Corinthian king Polybus, who christened him Oedipus ("swollen feet"). Upon reaching adulthood, Oedipus questioned the oracle as to his origins, and was told that he would one day kill his own father and marry his mother. Horrified, Oedipus left Corinth and his adoptive parents, but unwittingly killed his real father Laius on the road to Thebes. The city was devastated by the Sphinx, which posed the following riddle to travelers: "What creature walks on all fours in the morning, on two legs at noon, and on three legs in the evening?" Anyone unable to answer was eaten by the monster. Oedipus gave the correct answer (a human being, since a baby crawls on all fours in the morning of life, an adult walks upright, and an old person walks on two legs with a stick). The vanquished Sphinx threw itself from the top of its rock. Other versions describe Oedipus killing the creature with his sword. The grateful Thebans made Oedipus their king, and gave him the hand of their widowed queen Jocasta, in marriage. The prophecy was fulfilled.

The Sphinx in art

Male sphinxes existed in Mycenaean art before the arrival of their female counterparts, during the Archaic period, through Oriental influences. Around this time, the Sphinx lost its significance as a protector against evil.

A mythological scene from the early 6th century BC shows the Sphinx perched on the body of a young warrior. The iconography is faithful to a passage in Hesiod describing the deadly Sphinx as the destroyer of the Cadmeans, and the devourer of the luckless inhabitants of Thebes. Such images minimize its carnivorous nature, however. At worst, it is seen making ready to pounce on its victim, or gripping a body in its talons. More often, the creature is depicted standing motionless, although images of the Sphinx in flight also appeared around this time.

In the Greek imagination, hybrid creatures such as the Sphinx, the Sirens or the gryphon, are invariably powerful and malevolent, symbolizing the uncontrollable forces governing the destiny of man.

In its earlier role as the upholder of the cosmic order, the Sphinx was often depicted as a decorative motif framing the principal scene, as a witness or guardian. A number of works depict sphinxes and men together, although it is difficult to ascertain in this case whether the artist has chosen to depict the legendary monster or a creature of his own imagining. Gradually, the Sphinx became a simple decorative motif on clay vases and bronze shields, and a subject for terracotta figurines and larger statues.

The Sphinx as a funerary motif

The Sphinx is often associated with funerary art, as a kind of predatory demon or a spirit of death. Like other hybrid and fantastical creatures from the Oriental canon (sirens, gryphons), the Sphinx is imbued with sacred powers.

In the early 6th century BC, a new iconographical type appeared on Red-figure vases: the Sphinx is shown carrying off its victims in flight, as described in Euripides's drama, *Phoenician Women*. The vase painter modeled the scene on images of Eos carrying the body of her son Memnon (cup G 115 by the painter Douris, vitrine 24, Room 43 in the Galerie Campana).

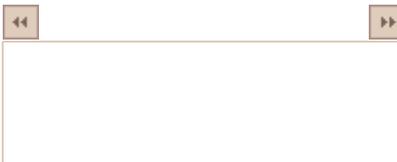
The Sphinx's later role in funerary art may derive from the themes of vase paintings such as these. Described in the *Theogony* as an evil demon, the Sphinx evolved in art to become a benevolent spirit, watching over the dead and recovering its original, protective character. In Greek tragedy, the Sphinx is frequently depicted as a symbol of death rather than a carnivorous monster. Its funerary role is explored in vase paintings, stone sculptures and terracotta figurines. Gradually, the Sphinx became a decorative motif associated with death, and was often represented on funerary monuments.

Home - Eye-Openers - In-Depth Studies

In-Depth Studies : Hybrid Creatures of the Ancient Greek World



Signée par Pamphaios, potier
 Coupe à figures rouges
 Vers 530 - 520 avant J.-C.
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Files

► [Maps](#)

Introduction | Chimaera | Gorgon | Monsters & Heracles | Sphinx | **Minotaur** | Markers:
 pottery | Ancient literature (1) | Ancient literature (2) | Bibliography

Theseus and the Minotaur

The Minotaur

Pasiphae, the wife of the Cretan king Minos, fell in love with a bull sent by Poseidon. The Minotaur - half-man, half-bull - was the offspring of their monstrous union. Filled with shame and fury, Minos summoned the Athenian artist Daedalus to build an immense palace filled with hundreds of rooms and winding corridors from which no one could escape: the Labyrinth. The way out was known only to Daedalus himself. Shut inside, the Minotaur devoured an offering of 14 young Athenians each year (or, in another version, every 9 years). This gruesome "tribute" (7 youths and 7 girls) was demanded by Minos in revenge for the killing of his son Androgeos at the hands of the Athenians.

Theseus

According to the various versions of the story, Theseus was the son of the Aethra, the daughter of the king of Troezen, and the Athenian king Aegeus, or the god Poseidon. In order to protect his son, Aegeus allowed him to grow up with his mother, in Troezen. Told by her of his true identity on his 16th birthday, Theseus journeyed to Athens armed with his father's sword, and arrived at Aegeus's court, hoping to make himself known to his father. The victim of an attempted poisoning by the jealous witch Medea, Theseus drew his sword to defend himself, whereupon Aegeus recognized him as his rightful heir. Aegeus sent Theseus to Crete with a party of young Athenians, on a secret mission to kill the Minotaur. The group set sail in a boat with black sails. A second set, in white, were to be hoisted upon their victorious return.

The combat with the Minotaur

Arriving in Crete, Theseus met King Minos's daughter Ariadne, who fell in love with him and secretly gave him a ball of thread with which to leave a trail leading to the exit from the Labyrinth. Theseus entered the palace and engaged in a violent struggle with the Minotaur. He succeeded in killing the monster, and escaped thanks to Ariadne's thread. Theseus promised to marry her if he returned alive, and the couple escaped with the rest of the group, aboard their boat. In the different versions of the story, Ariadne either died during the voyage or was abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos. Nearing the Attic coast, Theseus forgot to change the black sails. Grief-stricken, Aegeus threw himself into the sea, henceforth known as the Aegean.

Home - Eye-Openers - In-Depth Studies

In-Depth Studies : Hybrid Creatures of the Ancient Greek World



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Files

► **Maps**

Introduction | Chimaera | Gorgon | Monsters & Heracles | Sphinx | Minotaur | **Markers:** **pottery** | Ancient literature (1) | Ancient literature (2) | Bibliography

Greek pottery

From the Protogeometric to the Orientalizing style

The styles and forms of ancient Greek pottery are similar throughout Greece, with small regional variations. In the Athenian workshops, the successive styles attained their greatest heights of perfection. The Protogeometric style seems to have originated in Athens, c. 1050 BC. Lines, circles and semi-circles are inscribed on a light-colored ground and, later, on a dark background. The repertoire of motifs gradually extended to include triangles, hooks, lozenges and meanders painted in brilliant black glaze, eventually covering the entire the surface of the vase. The highly refined Geometric style reached its height in Attica in the 9th and (especially) the 8th centuries BC. Figurative scenes appeared first in the later Geometric period (770-700 BC). These include funerary scenes, chariot processions and battles. In the late 8th and early 7th centuries BC, the Geometric style was transformed by influences from the Levant and the Far East, notably in the workshops of Corinth and the Aegean islands. The Orientalizing style features a diverse range of motifs - often borrowed from textiles - including flowers, foliage and plants, and exotic or hybrid animals.

Black-figure and Red-figure paintings

During this period, Attica began to emerge as the dominant center for pottery production in ancient Greece. Attic vases of the period were decorated with Black-figure paintings featuring silhouettes drawn in black on the orange-colored surface of the fired clay. Incised details and highlights in purple or white were added later. Black-figure painting reached its height c. 560 BC, when the Attic workshops consolidated their artistic supremacy. Themes favored by the painters included moments of high tragedy from the epic poems recounting the Trojan wars, religious and mythological scenes, and battles, but also scenes of everyday life: women in the gynaecium (the female quarters of larger houses) or at the well, banquets or wrestling bouts at the palestra.

The decline of the Attic workshops

Around 480 BC, vase painters began to show a greater mastery of the representation of the human body, in motion and at rest. Eyes were now depicted in profile, in a complete break with Archaic tradition. Bodies in motion were drawn with a confident knowledge of anatomy, and a skillful use of perspective. Around 410 BC, delicate vases featured refined images of mythological lovers or scenes from the gynaecium, with gold highlights. Figures were superposed, in a quest for greater pictorial depth. The poses, drapery and fabrics of female figures were clearly influenced by sculpture in the so-called Rich style. These sumptuous, highly refined productions represented the final flowering of Attic art.



In-Depth Studies : Hybrid Creatures of the Ancient Greek World

Files

► Maps

Introduction | Chimaera | Gorgon | Monsters & Heracles | Sphinx | Minotaur | Markers: pottery | **Ancient literature (1)** | Ancient literature (2) | Bibliography

Hybrid creatures in ancient literature

Bellerophon and the Chimaera

"[Echidna] was the mother of Chimaera who breathed raging fire, a creature fearful, great, swift-footed and strong, who had three heads, one of a grim-eyed lion; in her hinderpart, a dragon; and in her middle, a goat, breathing forth a fearful blast of blazing fire. Her did Pegasus and noble Bellerophon slay."

(Hesiod, Theogony, v. 319-325).

"Athena, they say, was the divinity who gave most help to Bellerophon, and she delivered to him Pegasus, having herself broken in and bridled him." (Pausanias, II, 4, 2).

"So Bellerophon mounted his winged steed Pegasus, offspring of Medusa and Poseidon, and soaring on high shot down the Chimera from the height." (Apollodorus, Library, II, 3, 2).

"[the Chimaera] had the fore part of a lion, the tail of a dragon, and its third head, the middle one, was that of a goat, through which it belched fire. And it devastated the country and harried the cattle; for it was a single creature with the power of three beasts"

(Apollodorus, II, 3, 1).

"[Iobates] commanded Bellerophon to kill that savage monster, the Chimaera, who was not a human being, but a goddess, for she had the head of a lion and the tail of a serpent, while her body was that of a goat, and she breathed forth flames of fire; but Bellerophon slew her, for he was guided by signs from heaven." (Homer, Iliad, VI, 179-183).

Theseus and the Minotaur

"[Pasiphae] gave birth to Asterius, who was called the Minotaur. He had the face of a bull, but the rest of him was human." (Apollodorus, III, 1, 4)

"This creature was of two-fold form, the upper part of the body down to the shoulders being that of a bull, and the rest, that of a man" (Diodorus of Sicily, IV, 77, 3-4)

"This brilliant gold jewel which adorns my hand, bring it from the depths of the sea. Throw your body courageously into your father's domain. The dolphins inhabiting the seas quickly carried the mighty Theseus to the dwelling-place of the god his father [Poseidon or Hippios]. He arrived at the palace of the gods." (Bacchylides, Dithyramb, III, 36-37, 56-57))

Perseus and the Gorgon

"[Ceto bore] the Gorgons who dwell beyond glorious Ocean in the frontier land towards Night where are the clear-voiced Hesperides, Sthenno, and Euryale, and Medusa who suffered a woeful fate: she was mortal, but the two were undying and grew not old." (Hesiod, Theogony, 274).

"...the Gorgons had heads twined about with the scales of dragons, and great tusks like swine's, and brazen hands, and golden wings, by which they flew; and they turned to stone such as beheld them." (Apollodorus, II, 4, 2).

"Medusa once had charms; to gain her love

A rival crowd of envious lovers strove [...]

Her Neptune saw, and with such beauties fir'd,

Resolv'd to compass, what his soul desir'd.

In chaste Minerva's fane, he, lustful, stay'd,

The bashful Goddess turn'd her eyes away,

Nor durst such bold impurity survey;

But on the ravish'd virgin vengeance takes,

Her shining hair is chang'd to hissing snakes.

These in her Aegis Pallas joys to bear,

The hissing snakes her foes more sure ensnare,

Than they did lovers once, when shining hair." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, IV, 791).

"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. When her head was cut off, there sprang from the Gorgon the winged horse Pegasus and Chrysaor, the father of Geryon; these she had by Poseidon."

(Apollodorus, II, 4, 2).

Oedipus and the Sphinx

"Echidna was subject in love to Orthus and brought forth the deadly Sphinx which destroyed the Cadmeans." (Hesiod, Theogony, v. 326).

"She had the face of a woman, the breast and feet and tail of a lion, and the wings of a bird." (Apollodorus, III, 5, 8).

"Thou cam'st, O winged fiend, spawn of earth and hellish viper-brood, to prey upon the sons of Cadmus, rife with death and fraught with sorrow, half a monster, half a maid, a murderous prodigy, with roving wings and ravening claws" (Euripides, Phoenician Women, v.101).

"...the Sphinx, that winged maid, fell monster from the hills [...] she that erst drew nigh our walls and snatched the sons of Cadmus away in her taloned feet." (Euripides, Phoenician Women, v. 806).

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In-Depth Studies : Hybrid Creatures of the Ancient Greek World

Files

► Maps

Introduction | Chimaera | Gorgon | Monsters & Heracles | Sphinx | Minotaur | Markers: pottery | Ancient literature (1) | **Ancient literature (2)** | Bibliography

Monsters from the myth of Hercules: source texts

The Hydra of Lerna

"And [Echidna] bore a third, the evil-minded Hydra of Lerna, whom the goddess, white-armed Hera nourished, being angry beyond measure with the mighty Heracles. And her Heracles, the son of Zeus, of the house of Amphitryon, together with warlike Iolaus, destroyed with the unpitying sword through the plans of Athene the spoil-driver." (Hesiod, Theogony, v. 313).

Cerberus

"[Echidna] bare a second, a monster not to be overcome and that may not be described, Cerberus who eats raw flesh, the brazen-voiced hound of Hades, fifty-headed, relentless and strong." (Hesiod, Theogony, v. 310-312).
"Hercules was to bring Cerberus from Hades. Now this Cerberus had three heads of dogs, the tail of a dragon, and on his back the heads of all sorts of snakes [...] When Hercules asked Pluto for Cerberus, Pluto ordered him to take the animal provided he mastered him without the use of the weapons which he carried. Hercules found him at the gates of Acheron, and, cased in his cuirass and covered by the lion's skin, he flung his arms round the head of the brute, and though the dragon in its tail bit him, he never relaxed his grip and pressure till it yielded. So he carried it off and ascended through Troezen [...] and Hercules, after showing Cerberus to Eurystheus, carried it back to Hades." (Apollodorus, II, 5, 12).
"But Homer, who was the first to refer to the creature brought back by Heracles as 'the hound of Hades', does not give it a name, nor does he describe it as having multiple forms, as he did the Chimaera. Later, poets gave it the name Cerberus, and although they describe its similarity to a dog, they state that it had three heads. Homer, on the other hand, does not imply that it was a dog, the friend of man, any more than if he had called the dog of Hades 'a veritable snake'." (Pausanias, III, 25, 6).

Triton

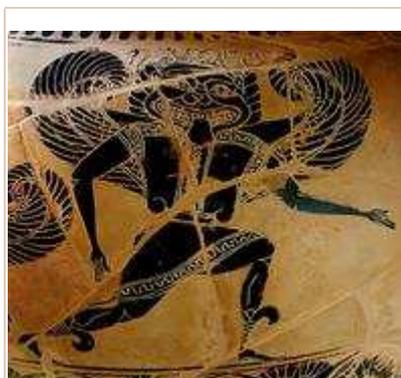
The earliest known reference to Triton is the Theogony of Hesiod (v.930-933) : "great, wide-ruling Triton [...] an awful god."
"And his body, from the crown of his head, round his back and waist as far as the belly, was wondrously like that of the blessed ones in form; but below his sides the tail of a sea monster lengthened far, forking to this side and that; and he smote the surface of the waves with the spines, which below parted into curving fins, like the horns of the new moon." (Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica, IV, v.1610-1619).
"...a thickly-bearded triton, like a half-made man, from the loins downwards, a greenish fish [...] he had two forms of loins, a human form, and a different body, green, from the loins to the head, the half of his body, but descending from his wet loins, the curved, forked tail of a fish." (Nonnos, XXXVI, 93-94 & XLIII, 205-209).

Acheloos

"...and Melpomene had by Achelous the Sirens" [...] Heracles wooed Deianira, daughter of Oeneus. He wrestled for her hand with Achelous, who assumed the likeness of a bull; but Heracles broke off one of his horns. So Heracles married Deianira, but Achelous recovered the horn by giving the horn of Amalthea in its stead." (Apollodorus, I, 3, 4 & II, 7, 5).

Home - Eye-Openers - In-Depth Studies

In-Depth Studies : Hybrid Creatures of the Ancient Greek World



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Files

► [Maps](#)

[Introduction](#) | [Chimaera](#) | [Gorgon](#) | [Monsters & Heracles](#) | [Sphinx](#) | [Minotaur](#) | [Markers: pottery](#) | [Ancient literature \(1\)](#) | [Ancient literature \(2\)](#) | **Bibliography**

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