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MYTHS, IMAGES, AND THE TYPOLOGY OF IDENTITIES IN EARLY GREEK ART

1. Identity: Problems with a Modern Concept in Present Times and in the Past

Identity, in its double sense as both an individual and a collective concept, has since the 1970s become a key term of discourse on historical as well as contemporary societies. This notion of *identity* is not only used as a descriptive category of historical and sociological analysis but is also, and above all, asserted as a universally legitimate claim of individual and collective entities; today individual persons as well as social groups and national populations claim the right to live according to, and to fight for, their identities. In the context of this contribution, I am going to focus on the aspect of collective identity.

Nobody will deny the importance of collective identity. Communities cannot exist without a conscious or unconscious knowledge of what they are, that is, how they identify themselves. Nor will anybody in principle contest the right of communities to cultivate and defend their identities: we concede this right to the Greeks in their fight against the Persians as well as to contemporary peoples who are suppressed by superpowers or threatened by foreign enemies. It is, however, also evident that such emphasis on identity is anything but innocent. For there can be no doubt that during the last generation the increasing assertion of collective and national identity has produced enormous potential for conflicts throughout the world. And the same is true of classical Athens and republican Rome. In this sense, the term and the notion of *collective identity* has recently been subjected to an overall critical examination.[1]

In general, the notion of collective identity involves two highly problematic and even potentially dangerous features. First, the emphatic search for and insistence on collective identity by social groups or "national" entities testifies to a high degree of self-centeredness that—not necessarily but notoriously all too often—tends to neglect, ignore, and even destroy the identity of other entities. Identity is difficult to socialize. Second, identity is a highly conservative concept. Identity manifests itself in how an entity has come into existence, how it persevered through the ages, how it stuck to its own values and thereby stayed "identical" with itself. Sure, traditions of identity can be reshaped and values can be reconceptualized according to historical development and change, but the inherent power of traditions, whether old or newly created, is in favor of stability and against change. In this sense, the notion of identity can become a sort of sacred dogma that is based not so much on reason and insight but on the affective values of descent and heritage—a habitual self-righteousness that cannot be called into question. The dangers of irrationality are evident.

These problems become even more urgent when *political identity* is consciously founded on the memory of its own specific past. Common memory is highly exclusive: it excludes all those who do not—and even worse, those who cannot—share the same memories. The memory of the Nibelungs can be adopted and cultivated only by native Germans, the Rütli oath can be commemorated only by Swiss, the French and the American revolutions only by French and Americans. Even inclusive myths, like the Roman legend of blending Trojans and Latins, which eventually provided a model for the incorporation of Italian peoples, was a totally Roman-centered device. A much more reasonable concept would found communities not on exclusive pasts but on common values open to all those who accept them through insight and free choice.

It is probably not by chance that the concept of *cultural memory*—that is, the reference to an exclusive past—is so successful within the Western world in this period of conservative self-reflection. However, I am not convinced that for our own time it is a healthy device to found collective identities on the basis of a set of prefixed memories, and to stick faithfully to the unchanging values incorporated in these memories just because of their age-old authority. Of course, recent research has shown that collective memory is anything but a stable set of generally accepted facts and notions: memory can be a flexible instrument in the service of changing historical positions and tendencies. But this is a conclusion from a metahistorical standpoint, for the implicit *tendency* or explicit *intention* of a historical entity in founding its collective identity on collective memories is to create for itself an enduring exclusive stability.

It is with this critical view that I am going to approach some basic aspects of how a collective entity creates identity using the memory of a mythical heroic past in early Greece.

2. Categories of Mythological Identity

The creation of collective identity through myths is effectuated by establishing a meaningful relation between the mythical past and the present time of actual societies. More precisely, this is an act of "identification" between, on the one side, a specific person or community of the present and, on the other, specific characters and events of the mythical past. Through this act the individual or community derives an identity from a mythical model, shaping the identity in this sense: individuals or communities become to some degree "identical" with their mythical models and, through this "identicality," with themselves.

However, this relation between present-day societies and the mythical past is anything but static dependence on a fixed mythical tradition. Greek communities—entire poleis as well as the social groups therein—dramatically changed their character, and by implication their identity, from one generation to another. Consequently, each generation, both as a whole as well as in its subdivisions, created new versions of mythological identification, either by selecting new "model myths" or by inventing new versions of traditional myths. Thus, the actual present and the mythical past are interfering with each other through some kind of

reciprocal dynamics. Explicitly, the present society conceives and shapes its identity according to the model of myth; but by implication, the mythical model is adapted to the changing structure and values of the present-day society, as it must in order to become an authoritative prefiguration of this actual society's features and ideals.

The construction of identity between myths and the present is achieved along three basic lines, the distinction of which seems to be crucial for a proper understanding of the relevant strategies and phenomena.[2]

Genealogical identity means a legitimizing reference to great ancestors. This category comprises two aspects. On the one hand, there is individual physical descent: the Peisistratids, for example, derived their origins from Neleus while the kings of Sparta, as well as those of Macedonia, derived theirs from Heracles. On the other hand, there is the extraction from "corporate ancestors": the Athenians traced their common origins back to their mythical kings Cecrops and Erechtheus, the Romans to their founder-king Romulus. From such "genealogical" origins, individuals and communities derived their specific claims of prestige and predominance.

Local identity means a venerating reference to mythical figures of specific places or regions. Thus, Agamemnon was venerated in Argos, and Menelaus and Helen in Sparta, where the Dorian invaders had cut off all genealogical lineages. Likewise, Oedipus was worshipped in Athens, his genealogical descendants in Thebes having been extinguished long before. These heroes could arouse veneration and even assign identity because the power they exerted in their specific *local* sphere was so great.

Paradigmatic identity means the collective acknowledgment of mythical heroes who incorporate such values or models of behavior that are valid in a specific community and, further, are considered essential for its identity. Such ideal models are in principle independent of direct succession, either genealogical or local. Thus, Heracles was adopted as an individual model of physical, military, and/or ethical virtue by many monarchs and generals who had no genealogical or local relation. Similarly, Hellenistic Pergamon founded its collective cultural identity on the succession of classical Athens, although it had not been founded by Athens and therefore had no specific claim whatsoever as a "physical" daughter of the great metropolis. These are purely ideal or ideological models, working as *paradigmatic* examples.

A common feature of genealogical and local traditions is that they cannot without preconditions be transferred to or adopted by any individual person or collective entity; those who did not descend from a specific hero or live in this hero's specific realm could not make any genealogical or local claim on him. Conversely, paradigmatic models are accessible to all those who are ready or willing to identify themselves with the values represented.

In general, genealogical, local, and paradigmatic identities are not to be adopted as exclusively distinct categories. Often genealogical ancestors are at the same time local heroes; both types may also become paradigmatic models. Nevertheless, in the sense of Weberian *Idealtypen*, the distinction seems to be useful.

Genealogical as well as local identity serves to legitimize privileges in the same way that hereditary property transmitted from ancestors or predecessors is legitimately inherited by descendants or successors. Genealogical myths are efficient claims to an individual's rank and privileges as well as to a community's

predominance and power. In genealogical arguments, the claimant's own qualification becomes secondary in comparison with his or her predetermined hereditary excellence. In comparison, local myths and heroes are forceful factors for etiological foundations of rituals and institutions of religion and politics. Moreover, local heroes convey power and protection within their sphere of influence. Paradigmatic identity, on the contrary, places values, qualities, and achievements at the fore. Thus, the glory of the Greek heroes of the Trojan War became a model of ideal identification for all those who dared to compare their own achievements with those of the Greeks. In this method of identity creation, there were no other connections between myth and the present except for achievements and values as such.

The analytic power of these categories can be proven by looking at particular historical moments in which a revealing shift was made from one to another of these strategies of creating identity. Particularly striking is the case of Roman generals of the late republic referring to Venus as their great tutelary goddess. Sulla and Pompey both venerated her as the divine guarantor of *felicitas,* that is, as a representative of a general ideological concept. Julius Caesar, however, outdid all his predecessors and rivals by exclusively claiming Venus as his personal ancestress. Here, Caesar's use of the genealogical strategy served to establish an individual statesman's monopoly of a hitherto generally adopted ideology of *felicitas.* Pompey must have been well aware of his rival's superior claim, as evidenced by a nightmare in which he was adorning the Temple of Caesar's Venus.[3]

At the same time, however, the efficiency of mythological strategies depended greatly on the actual political power of the claimant. For example, when Sulla besieged Athens, and the Athenian embassies asked him to spare the city from violent conquest by evoking the great past of Theseus, Eumolpus, and the Persian wars, he replied: "Go off, good men, and take your speeches with you; for I was not sent by the Romans to Athens for love of learning but to subdue its rebels."[4] In cases of conflict, policy mostly dominates over myth.

3. Festive Pottery and Religious Architecture in Archaic Greece: A World of Paradigmatic Identity

The prehistory of myths in Neolithic and Bronze Age Greece is a matter of much speculation, and no one can guess whether or in which sense they served to create social and cultural identity. However, a new and emphatic interest in myths old and new that originated in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. obviously correlates with the contemporary emergence of basically new social, political, and cultural patterns, which ultimately were an element of the emergent polis society. As is well known, within this period the great past of myths was re-created in three different fields: the epic poetry of Homer and his fellow bards; images on vases and other precious equipment used by the elite to celebrate festivals and rituals; and cults performed at revived Bronze Age tombs, obviously considered to be burial places of powerful heroes of the great past.[5]

Various explanations have been given for the increased importance of myths during this period. An old but still influential view, recently revived by Jan

Assmann,[6] sees the work of Homer (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*) at the origins of Greek culture as it took shape in the early archaic period—an authoritative book that created, contained, and propagated those traditions of collective memory on which Greek identity was founded throughout antiquity. This view is open to several objections.[7] First, the impact of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* on early Greek art is not very significant: of all representations of myths down to circa 600 B.C.E., 10 percent at most deal with subjects from these two poems. Second, even in these cases there are good reasons for assuming that it was not the authority of Homer that caused the popularity of these topics (see below). The function of a "founding book" seems rather to apply to—and to be conceived after the model of—Israel, whereas early Greek societies are, in contrast, characterized by a significant lack of powerful acknowledged authorities, whether political, religious, or cultural. Probably, then, Homer's role as a primordial founder of Greek culture was conceived no earlier than the fifth century B.C.E.

My aim in the following considerations is not to give an overall explanation of early Greek mythmaking but to focus on images in the visual arts. The question will be how far and in what sense these images can be understood as testimonies of identities—of self-conceptualizations of various communities and social groups, changing through time and space. My basic assumption is that these images must have played their roles during three specific phases of early Greece: during the early poleis of the eighth to seventh centuries, in the developed citizen poleis of the sixth century, and in the politicized poleis of the fifth century B.C.E. In this context one of the crucial questions will be whether the identities created through different genres—that is, images created for different social situations—are identical to or diverse from one another.

The Period of the Early Polis (Late Eighth through Seventh Centuries B.C.E.)

The structure of the world, as it was experienced in the early phase of archaic Greece, can be schematically described as two concentric circles.[8] An inner circle comprised the realm of the emerging polis, with a central settlement and its territory of arable land, and an outer circle included the entire sphere of civilized peoples, in principle coinciding with the world of all Greek poleis. Both of these realms were surrounded by a liminal zone of threatening wilderness, which was conceived in opposition to the order that had been established within the single polis on the one hand and within the entire realm of human/Greek civilization on the other: the polis was encircled by uncultivated woods and mountains, full of wild beasts, while the world of civilized man was surrounded by a zone thought to be a dreadful "end of the world," a place where the reliable laws of civilization and nature were no longer valid. This twofold, concentric structure of the opposition between civilization and wilderness is at the basis of images of Greek myths in their initial phase, from the late eighth through seventh centuries B.C.E. Here, the world of order is defined and defended against a fictitious world of enemies.

The most important general theme of these images is heroes combating terrible wild beasts and threatening monsters. These combats are located precisely in those

liminal zones that delineate the structure of civilized human order. Heracles, in his first six labors, fights beasts and creatures in the wilderness at the margins of the poleis of the Peloponnesus, the core region of Greek civilization. He battles the Nemean lion, which is reported to have threatened herds and travelers; the Hydra, which hindered the access to the fountain of Lerna; the boar of Mount Erymanthos and the hind of Kerynai, which devastated the fields; and the centaurs, who by their bestial lust threatened two basic institutions of Greek societies: institutionalized communication between male hosts and guests (as when the centaurs disturbed the banquet of Heracles in the cave of Pholus) and institutionalized communication between men and women (as when they attacked Heracles' bride, Deianira).[9] In the above examples, the crucial elements of early Greek poleis are at stake: herds and fields, potable water, travel routes, and the traditional relationships between hosts and guests as well as between men and women. These threats to the polis community are both literally and conceptually located in the surrounding wilderness where Heracles defends the island of human civilization.

Myths about the outer zone surrounding the whole of civilized mankind are a favorite topic of the art of this period. Numerous great heroes advance to the end of the world, where they have to face the most horrible monsters. Heracles is sent to the far west, to the island of Erytheia, located in or beyond the ocean, where he has to fight the three-bodied Geryon in order to get his famous herd of cattle, which is guarded by the dreadful hound Orthrus, a brother of the hellhound Cerberus. Perseus has to make his way to remote wilderness to kill the Gorgon, cutting off her petrifying masklike head. Jason conducts his expedition to Colchis, in the far east, where the sun rises, in order to win the golden fleece, guarded by a terrible dragon. Bellerophon is sent to the far-off mountains of Lycia in order to defeat the monster Chimaera—part lion, part ram, part snake. Last but not least, Odysseus and his companions are exposed in a remote fantasy land to the cannibal Polyphemus. Obviously, these myths are transformations of those experiences, fantasies, and fears that the seafarers, merchants, and pirates of this period faced in their daring enterprises.[10] Closer interpretation shows that in the images representing these myths some central values of Greek self-conceptualization—such as technical skill, inventiveness, cleverness in critical situations, and not least, the favor of the gods—are brought to the fore.

Thus, both of these general themes of early myth representation are conceptualizations of communities: on the one hand that of the polis, and on the other hand that of civilized/Greek mankind. In light of the categories discussed earlier in this essay, it is striking that genealogical and local criteria do not seem to play any role at all in these images. Heracles is a favorite hero all over Greece; the same is true of Odysseus, who is represented in Athens, Argos, Samos, and Caere. Even the specifically Corinthian hero Bellerophon does not appear more frequently in Corinth than in Athens, Naxos, and other places. The significance of the images that use these particular myths is purely paradigmatic; they do not create the local or genealogical identity of a specific city but instead convey a general, ideal identity to both individual polis communities as well as the entire community of civilized men.

One may ask whether this is due to the specific functions of the decorated objects themselves, which perhaps favored themes of more general paradigmatic

relevance. Indeed, most of the objects belong to social situations that are collective and inclusive in character. Painted vessels, for instance, were used for symposia or funeral rites, while votive offerings were dedicated during public festivals. In such collective and inclusive social situations, specific genealogical claims of single families were out of place; for collective genealogies of the whole community there was no audience. Unfortunately, there is no controlling element for this explanation, since in this period there are no other genres of visual art, such as the decoration of public architecture, whose function would motivate an essentially different mode of creating identity.

Private Art and Public Monuments in the Period of the Developed Archaic Polis (Sixth Century B.C.E.)

The early sixth century B.C.E. is throughout Greece a period of a significant consolidation and condensation of great, comprehensive communities. These communities are again divided into two groups. On the one hand are the polis communities, the power of which is evident in their collective enterprises, including the construction of monumental temples and public buildings, the establishment of common meeting places, and the reorganization of religious city festivals, like the Athenian Panathenaia. On the other hand is the all-Greek community of the inter-polis elite class, which finds its expression in common military campaigns, like the First Sacred War for Delphi, or in the foundation of panhellenic festivals, like those at Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea between 582 and 573 B.C.E. Both of these communities are prefigured in contemporary representations of myths.

This is the period in which, among others, three myths of great battles begin to appear in Attic vase painting: gods against giants, Lapiths against centaurs, Greeks against Amazons. These are archetypal communities who fight against archetypal enemies, anticipating that ugly credo of Greek identity: the pride of being born as a Greek and not as a barbarian (gods versus giants), as a man and not as a woman (Greeks versus Amazons), as a human being and not as an animal (Lapiths versus centaurs).

The chief witness of ideal structures and values of this period is the François krater.[11] In the upper register of the piece, the youths and maidens of mythical Athens, rescued by Theseus from the threat of the Minotaur, are united in a ritual dance. Their inscribed names identify them as representatives of all parts of Attica: Hippodamia and Menestho from Athens, Coronis from East Attica, Daduchos from Eleusis, and so forth.[12] Thus, the mythical group of young Athenians, united in a religious ritual, constitutes the model of the archaic community of Attica, as it had been "brought together" by the reforms of Solon. Below this scene, the Lapiths, assisted by the Athenian hero Theseus, battle the centaurs, demonstrating the unanimous coherence of a "political" community in warfare; this corresponds closely to the new unanimity of the Athenian military elite, fond of its hoplite armor, as it was created in the time of Solon.

In opposition to these "political" entities, a third part of the François krater depicts a panhellenic community of mythical heroes cooperating under the leadership of Meleager in hunting the Calydonian boar: Peleus and Admetus from Thessaly, Castor

and Polydeuces from Sparta, and so on. Such were the inter-polis communities that in this period began to unite for common military campaigns like the First Sacred War. Moreover, the panhellenic aspect is emphasized by a fourth frieze, representing the funerary games for Patroclus, organized by Achilles, in which again heroes from all parts of Greece were engaged. This is a precise anticipation of the all-Greek games that were institutionalized for the inter-polis aristocracy in exactly these years.

Taken together, these four scenes add up to a comprehensive and almost systematic panel of coherent communities, as they developed during the first half of the sixth century B.C.E. in various sectors of social life—religion, warfare, hunting, and games—in the frame of the polis as well as in the wider horizon of the entire Greek world.

Again, these are myths of almost purely paradigmatic character. As in early archaic art, this is a widely diffused phenomenon in vase painting of this period. Where the François krater brings a new aspect to the tradition is in its slight emphasis on Athenian myths, evident in the youths and maiden led by Theseus and in the same hero's participation in the Lapiths' fight against the centaurs. However, these Athenian accents are integrated into a wide panorama of myths from all parts of Greece; therefore, local and genealogical identity is still of less relevance in this instance.

In addition to the above example of private banquet equipment, the sixth century B.C.E. provides for comparison with images decorating public architecture, in particular the polis treasuries at Delphi. Here we might expect an expression of more explicit and exclusive political identity. This expectation, however, is not fulfilled by contemporary examples.

A series of metopes from Delphi, of about 560 B.C.E. and attributed by most scholars to a treasury of Sicyon, combines various myths that are not united by any common genealogical or local band whatsoever.[13] Instead, they are manifestly stamped by paradigmatic concepts. The metope with the Calydonian boar, supplemented by other lost metopes representing groups of hunters, is an enterprise of a panhellenic group of heroes. Equally panhellenic is the character of Jason's expedition to Colchis with the ship *Argo;* this myth also unites heroes from all parts of the Greek world and thus becomes a mythical prototype of common maritime enterprises to far-off destinations. Those members of the crew that are preserved—the Dioscuri on horseback and two lyre players, one of them Orpheus—represent the noblest talents of the aristocracy in archaic Greece: horsemanship and musicianship. In contrast, another very impressive metope depicts Castor and Polydeuces together with the Apharetids Idas and Lynceus stealing a herd of cattle. Here, the emphasis is on the solidarity and cooperation of glorious heroes in an act of robbery, which in archaic times was considered a demonstration of manly virtues. Also complementary to these assertions of manly virtues, another metope represents Europa carried off by Zeus in the guise of a bull. This myth is obviously to be understood as a mythical projection of the institution of marriage, which in early Greece was conceived as a violent abduction of the bride by the bridegroom—in this case as represented by the most powerful bridegroom of myth and incorporating in his metamorphosis the strongest forces of virility.

The preserved metopes of the Sicyonian treasury are just a part of the original set and therefore do not add up to a complete and coherent program. Yet, what one

can see is that this panorama does not create any specific genealogical or local identity of a particular polis; rather, it conveys values that are paradigmatic in the sense that they constitute ideal models of behavior and achievements within the frame of basic structures and situations of archaic Greek societies.

The same general focus is to be recognized one generation later in the treasury of Siphnos at Delphi.[14] Here, too, the relief decoration of the friezes is full of paradigmatic meaning valid within the entire Greek world: the combat of Achilles and Memnon in the presence of the assembly of the gods represents values of *arete*, glorious death in battle, and divine control of human destiny; the battle of the gods against the giants underscores the persistence of the divine order of the world; the judgment of Paris exemplifies the choices of life; and the fourth frieze perhaps depicts the famous abduction of the Leucippides as a prototypical marriage. Again, these themes could have been adopted and celebrated by any Greek polis.

Nevertheless, this *is* identity. The cities that erected these precious buildings identified themselves with those myths and the values they conveyed. If asked, the citizens would have said, yes, this is what we stand for. It did not matter that in this they were not unique, and that other cities identified themselves with the same or similar myths and values. Identity is not necessarily individual, nor is it exclusive. The remarkable feature of this phenomenon is that even on the panhellenic stage of Delphi, where the great city-states competed for glory and prestige, the Sicyonians as well as the Siphnians did not aim at distinguishing themselves by unique and exclusive local or genealogical profiles but presented themselves instead as representatives of widely recognized collective values. Certainly there was competition among the individual poleis—but this competition was not about claims for unique identities but about who was the best protagonist of those common myths and values.

An interesting case in this respect is the policy of the tyrant Cleisthenes of Sicyon regarding the Homeric poems. During a conflict with Argos he excluded the rhapsodes from all public festivals since, by performing the works of Homer, they glorified mainly the heroes of the neighboring enemy city. For the same reason he aimed to expel the Argive hero Adrastus, who received heroic cult in a temple in the agora of Sicyon. The enemy city, therefore, was considered to possess a specific identity derived from local or genealogical heroes of myth. Interestingly, however, Cleisthenes did not think of replacing Adrastus with a hero of Sicyon but instead transferred the cult of the hero Melanippus from Thebes to his own city. The reason for this was that in mythical times Melanippus had been a furious enemy of Adrastus and therefore was expected to be an efficient mythical protagonist in the expulsion of the hated Argive intruder. Thus, a specific mythical identity based on *local* heroes was adopted only in response to an enemy; but as soon as a proper hero was to be established in Sicyon, this hero could be chosen from abroad, as a *paradigmatic* model of forceful fighting against the Argive foe.[15] Indeed, there is no contradiction in the fact that heroes often came from far away, for once they have played their role in their new place—as in the case of founders like Cadmus in Thebes or of refugees like Oedipus in Athens—they could exert their power as *local* representatives.

This does not mean, however, that genealogical and local identity played an entirely negligible role in preclassical times. A conspicuous case is the hero shrine

established by the Argives for the "Seven against Thebes" on their agora in the middle of the sixth century B.C.E.[16] Here it was precisely Adrastus who emphatically figured as an Argive hero; although most of the "Seven" came from other cities, they followed Adrastus as their leader. Argos thus presented itself through this cult place as the home of political leadership.

Nevertheless, such references to a genealogical or local past seem to have been relatively rare in monuments of archaic times. In vase painting they seem to be almost absent. There, as a norm, paradigmatic identity seems to predominate.

One may think in this context of what has been termed "aristocratic internationalism."[17] In fact, this remarkable openness and permeability seems to be a basic feature of archaic aristocratic city-societies. If we go further and ask for the underlying sociological preconditions of this phenomenon, it seems to be grounded in a fundamental structure of early Greek poleis: their specific lack of institutionalized political power. In the absence of strong political or religious institutions, like monarchies or mighty priesthoods, power in the communities was in an unstable balance, changing from one group to another; often the competing groups cooperated more with their friends in a neighboring city than with rivals in their own. Under such conditions, each individual polis did not generate a specific polis ideology that embraced the entire citizen-body; instead, they all played the same game with the same rules—striving for the same kind of paradigmatic identity, often by appropriating the same mythical models—which of course does not mean that they were all equally successful.

4. Public Monuments and Private Pottery in Classical Greece: The Conflict-Generating Character of Political Identity

A new level of potentially aggressive identity was reached in the polis monuments of classical Athens and Sparta. At the core of this development was both cities striving for a position of hegemony within the world of Greek city-states. In Athens, this claim was from the beginning inherent in the new political order of Cleisthenes. The intensified participation of the whole citizen-body in the common affairs of the polis must have massively increased the collective self-consciousness. For this purpose, various devices of political self-assertion were developed, among which mythology and public monuments were of paramount importance.

In the realm of myths, first of all a new hero was brought to the fore: Theseus.[18] In archaic times the favorite heroes of public and private art were chosen regardless of their provenance, yet, toward the end of the sixth century, in Cleisthenic Athens, Theseus was emphatically re-created as a patriotic hero of Athens, conveying to the city a marked local and genealogical identity.

The achievements through which a young Theseus became equal to Heracles were designed as a glorious travel sequence from his birthplace, Troezen, to his mother city, Athens. His further exploits were conceived as actions that helped lay the foundations of the Athenian state. All genres of art were called into service for propagating stories about this founder-hero of patriotic identity. For example, a narrative medium describing the sequence of the hero's deeds—a poem "Theseis"—has

been conjectured by scholars. On vases beginning from the last decade of the sixth century, a sequence of these deeds is displayed. Most important, the Athenian treasury at Delphi, which was probably erected shortly before the battle of Marathon, was decorated with a series of metopes that depicted, on the more visible south and east facades, the exploits of Theseus, while the less visible north and west sides showed the equivalent deeds of Heracles. Moreover, Theseus was distinguished by the presence of Athena, his tutelary goddess, who was at the same time the city goddess of Athens.[19]

This well-known series of Theseus metopes is stamped by two devices that need to be emphasized in this context. First, Theseus is a local and genealogical hero. Second, Athena, in her role as the divine representative of the city of Athens, is a new local element in this panhellenic sanctuary. All earlier votive offerings had been destined to honor the god of the sanctuary, Apollo. Thus, the Athenian treasury is the first explicit example of a city bringing to the fore the main goddess of the city. Other monuments continue this device: the bronze palm tree, erected after the battle of Eurymedon, with the Athenian *palladion* on top, and the Marathon monument, with a dozen Athenian heroes and Athena accompanying the commander Miltiades.[20] In promoting Athena in this way, Athens played a unique card: her city name. No other polis possessed this privilege—a city name that contained the name of one of the great divinities. By stressing this fact and by claiming Athena's special favor through ambitious public monuments, Athens mobilized this panhellenic goddess not to create a monopoly but to emphasize its identity.

The second new construction of mythical identity was the famous series of combats fought by protagonists of religious and political order against the forces of *hybris,* violence, and injustice.[21] The battles of the gods against the giants, the Lapiths against the centaurs, and the Athenians against the Amazons had been favorite themes of polis monuments beginning in the sixth century B.C.E. Then, they were independent paradigmatic myths used in various polis communities throughout the Greek world. In fifth-century Athens, however, these myths were transformed into a linear series leading from primordial times directly to the historical and present-day city of Athens. In the famous public funeral speeches in honor of that year's fallen soldiers, the military achievements of mythical Athenians (here against the Amazons and the Thracians as well as in the Trojan War) were interpreted as predecessors of the victories against the Persians and present-day enemies. Public monuments—including the "painted" Stoa Poikile, the Parthenon, and others—extend this series in various directions: In the Gigantomachy, the fight for the world's order is traced back to the gods, claiming a principal role for Athens's city goddess, Athena. In the Centauromachy, the role of the Athenian Theseus is emphasized. The battle against the Amazons is redesigned by Aeschylus and in the paintings of the Stoa Poikile as a prefiguration of the defense of Athens against the Persians. Last but not least, in the three herms erected for the Athenian commanders of the campaign against the Persian stronghold Eion, the Trojan War is interpreted through epigrams as a demonstration of Athenian virtue; later a colossal monument of the Trojan horse on the Acropolis of Athens also showed Athenian heroes as the protagonists of the panhellenic enterprise.

The characteristic strategy of this patriotic mythmaking is to take over the Greek world's great paradigmatic myths and, at the same time, to transform them into genealogically and locally specific Athenian achievements—ultimately to demonstrate Athens's superior position. This strategy was complemented by the well-known ideology of autochthony, which created an absolutely unbeatable genealogical claim of Athenian uniqueness. Thus, in this case local and genealogical identity served as a device of highly exclusive and aggressive political claims, which created an enormous potential for explosive conflict.

However, Athens was not the only state to develop such strategies. Other cities—"democratic" as well as "aristocratic" ones—competed for superiority with similar monuments. Early in the fifth century the Phocians erected at Delphi an ambitious statuary group celebrating their victory over the Thessalians.[22] It represented no fewer than three leading individuals of the Phocian army, the commanders of the hoplites and the cavalry, Rhoeus and Daiphantes, together with the seer Tellis, and moreover a number of unnamed Phocian heroes of the mythical past, all under the protection of Apollo, who was not only the god of the sanctuary but at the same time the principal divinity of the Phocians themselves. This is the most explicit presence one can imagine of an aristocratic state's identity in a panhellenic context. Late in the century, after the victorious exit of the Peloponnesian War, even Sparta joined the all-Greek "war of monuments" by erecting at Delphi the most numerous of all classical statuary groups, comprising Apollo together with various Spartan gods and heroes, all honoring the glorious commander Lysander, with his seer, his herald, and thirty-eight ship admirals of his confederation.[23] Thus, this kind of self-asserting political identity is to be interpreted as a general development of political practice in fifth-century Greece. One may argue that this kind of local focus is a function of democratic ideology, promoted by the dominant political power of Athens. I, however, prefer to see it as a development of the general political discourse, heated up by the increasingly "worldwide" dimensions of political conflicts—and ensuing dangers—between Athens and Sparta, Greece and the "barbarians."

The new, sharp antithesis of Greeks and "barbarians"—especially Persians—that was established during the Persian wars has been abundantly investigated and commented on in recent years. During that period, Greek identity was emphatically defined against the archenemy in the East who embodied all that was considered non-Greek and foreign.[24] Without repeating and discussing these approaches, I add some theoretical considerations and suggest some ensuing consequences for our understanding of this antithesis between Greece and its eastern antipodes.

A major problem is rooted in the fact that Greek identity is often too easily associated with a monolithic concept of "culture." From this premise derives the expectation of an equally monolithic relation between the Greeks and the Persians—and consequently controversial opinions of scholars when this expectation is confronted with historical evidence that points to a more varied and complex relationship between the two groups. In fact, one of the major targets of future approaches should be an attempt to introduce categories of differentiation between various fields of cultural practice—such as politics, economy, religion, lifestyle, and so forth—in order to better understand the reality of this antithesis.

The conflict that generated this opposition was first of all a political and military clash. The new feature of this enmity was that it was—as far as we know, if only through the Greeks—ideologized as a universal conflict of two cultures antithetical in practically every way, including religion, ethics, political systems, and social behavior. Yet, this totalizing of the ideological horizon cannot have been as self-evident to all Greek observers as we like to believe. For, up until the Persian wars, the "orient" was for the Greeks in many respects a model of cultural achievements, a place from which they received wonderful goods, techniques, and knowledge, a place that had a great impact on Greek values and religion, social behavior, and lifestyle. It seems almost unthinkable that all of this was in the long run cut off by one single political stroke. In particular, one may doubt whether it was evident to the Greeks that being in military opposition to the Persians also entailed automatic rejection of their achievements in the fields of luxury goods, lifestyle, social practice, religious knowledge, and so forth. Abandoning a monolithic notion of culture means splitting it up into sectors such as politics, religion, law, economy, social habits, arts, and lifestyle; this operation in turn frees up space for diverging cultural attitudes, and in this sense diverging *identities,* across such different fields.

Immediately after the great battles of 480–479 B.C.E. the antithesis between the Greeks and the eastern "barbarians" was indeed ideologically extended to many cultural fields: piety against impiety, bravery against cowardliness, male virtues against effeminacy, simplicity against luxury, moderation against *hybris,* and so forth. Some of these negative features had formerly been much appreciated among the Greek elites, in particular, oriental luxury goods. This rigid attitude, however, did not persist for long. Views began to differentiate, in two particular respects.

First, discourses on the eastern "barbarians" differed according to various social spaces and situations. In the public space of the Athenian agora, for instance, the Stoa Poikile contained a famous painting depicting the battle of Marathon, in which the Athenian victory was represented as a demonstration of Greek prowess against Persian chaos and cowardice. These were the virtues celebrated in public monuments. Only a few years earlier on the stage of the Theater of Dionysus, the Greek naval victory at Salamis had been the theme of Aeschylus's tragedy *The Persians,* which was a complex discourse on ethics and *hybris.* And at the same time in a private symposium the guests might laugh at an obscene depiction of a Persian named Eurymedon (the place of a famous battle against the Persians) being submitted to homosexual humiliation.[25] Not much later, Herodotus in his wide historical panorama develops a very complex and diversified portrait of the Persians. Thus, the concept of the oriental adversaries changed according to different situations and discourses.

Second, the monolithic picture of the archenemy soon split into sectorial concepts of the "other," and the Greeks correspondingly defined their own identity in relation to how they differed from the Persians in the various fields of social life and culture. While in the realm of politics, for instance, the concept of "bad" Persians persisted through the fourth century B.C.E. and was reinforced by Isocrates and Philip II in preparation of a revenge war, in the later fifth century the luxury and lifestyle, religious cults, wisdom, and other cultural achievements of the orient were

again becoming more and more appreciated.[26] Concepts of Greek identity and "otherness" thus differed in different areas of culture.[27]

5. Identity and the Historian

As a conclusion, I would like to raise two general questions, one regarding the scholarly reach of these results, the other concerning our own role as historians.

First, the results regarding the changing existence, experience, and creation of paradigmatic versus genealogical and local identities have been worked out on the basis of images decorating objects of "private life" and images appearing on monuments erected in public spaces. Thus, all such testimonies correspond to specific spheres of life—to discourses during the symposium, funerary rituals, assertions of piety and social status in sacred places, political representation in city centers, and panhellenic sanctuaries. What we have to ask, and to explore further in an interdisciplinary effort, is whether these results can be considered generally valid for the specific societies and epochs, or whether other sources referring to other sectors of life present different pictures, thus testifying to "sectorial" identities, which are valid only in particular situations.

Second, our task as historians is to preserve and create historical memory. For many scholars this also means to preserve and create collective identity, based on common memory, for our own societies. For, of course, we are not only distant observers of historical worlds but at the same time agents in the present-day world. Considering the highly problematic character of collective identity *if* founded on a collective reference to an exclusive, "proper" past, I am not convinced of the soundness of such an operation. The search for identity creates an extremely narrow bottleneck for historical experience, excluding all phenomena that are foreign to this "identity." Rather, I would prefer a wider horizon: a comparative perspective on historical pasts, free from the claim of identification, including paradigmatic as well as exclusivist concepts, with the aim of exploring them as a wide field of interested experience.

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Notes

I am most grateful to Erich Gruen for a challenging invitation to his stimulating conference, although he knew my problems with the notion of identity. My paper

has profited enormously from two of the conference's participants: Jonathan Hall presented an inspiring response to my first draft, including some very healthy criticisms; although he refrained from publishing it, he generously allowed me to integrate some of his basic points. Moreover, Margaret Miller wrote a thought-provoking comment that helped me clarify some of my essential issues. To them my warmest thanks.

1. Lutz Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität: Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2000).
2. A first sketch of these categories was presented by the author in Francesco de Angelis and Susanne Muth, eds., *Im Spiegel des Mythos: Bilderwelt und Lebenswelt* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1999), 12–13.
3. Plutarch *Pompeius* 68.2.
4. Plutarch *Sulla* 13.4.
5. John N. Coldstream, "Hero-Cults in the Age of Homer," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 96 (1976): 8–17; Anthony M. Snodgrass, "The Archaeology of the Hero," *Annali di Archeologia e Storia Antica* 10 (1988): 19–26; James Whitley, "Early States and Hero-Cults," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 108 (1988): 173–82; and Maria Deoudi, *Heroenkult in homerischer Zeit,* BAR 806 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1999).
6. Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1992), esp. 272–80. See Karl Schefold, *Frühgriechische Sagenbilder* (Munich: Hirmer, 1964); and Karl Schefold, *Götter- und Heldensagen der Griechen in der Früh- und Hocharchaischen Kunst* (Munich: Hirmer, 1993).
7. For what follows see Anthony M. Snodgrass, *Homer and the Artists* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998). For more, see a monograph by the author on myths and images in early Greece (in preparation).
8. Tonio Hölscher, ed., *Gegenwelten zu den Kulturen Griechenlands und Roms in der Antike* (Munich: Saur, 2000), 12–15.
9. For early Greek Heracles myths in art (not for the interpretation here presented), see Schefold, *Götter- und Heldensagen der Griechen,* 95–114.
10. See Tonio Hölscher, "Immagini mitologiche e valori sociali nella Grecia arcaica," in Francesco de Angelis and Susanne Muth, eds., *Im Spiegel des Mythos: Bilderwelt und Lebenswelt* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1999), 17–24.
11. Erika Simon, *Die griechischen Vasen* (Munich: Hirmer, 1976), 69–77, pls. 51–57. An ambitious interpretation (not precisely coinciding with the view presented here) is given by Mario Torelli, *Le strategie di Kleitias* (Milan: Electa, 2007).
12. Stressed by Simon, *Die griechischen Vasen,* 72–74.
13. For the Sicyonian treasury, see Pierre de la Coste-Messelière, *Au Musée de Delphes* (Paris: Boccard, 1936), 1–233; George Szeliga, "The Composition of the Argo Metopes from the Monopteros at Delphi," *American Journal of Archaeology* 90 (1986): 297–305; Heiner Knell, *Mythos und Polis* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche, 1990), 19–23; Eckart Köhne, *Die Dioskuren in der griechischen Kunst von der Archaik bis zum Ende des 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Hamburg: Kovac, 1998), 29–44; and Tonio Hölscher, "Architectural Sculpture: Messages? Programs? Towards Rehabilitating the Notion of 'Decoration,'" in Peter Schultz and Ralf von den Hoff, eds., *Structure, Image, Ornament: Architectural Sculpture in the Greek World* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2009), 54–67.

14. On the Siphnian treasury, see Richard Neer, "Framing the Gift: The Politics of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi," *Classical Antiquity* 20 (2001): 273–336.
15. Jonathan Hall in his response very pertinently added that Adrastus received cultic recognition in many other places, and that the same is true of his companion Amphiaraus. For more reflections on the multilocality of Greek heroes, see Jonathan M. Hall, "Beyond the *Polis:* The Multi-Locality of Heroes," in Robin Hägg, ed., *Ancient Greek Hero Cult: Proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult, 21–23 April 1995* (Stockholm: Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Athen, 1999), 49–59.
16. Anne Pariente, "Le monument Argien des 'Sept contre Thèbes,'" *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique,* suppl. 22 (1992): 195–225. For a similar case, of the statues of Cleobis and Biton dedicated by their mother-city Argos at Delphi, see Claude Rolley, *La sculpture grecque* (Paris: Picard, 1994), 1:168–70. I do not share the doubts on their identification as the Argive brothers.
17. This was suggested to me by Margaret Miller. I agree with her in that these phenomena reflect a shared social thought-world and are not sufficiently explained by itinerant artists (which of course are well attested). On the wider horizon of this issue I owe thanks to Jonathan Hall for his important remarks; see also Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002).
18. John Boardman, "Heracles, Theseus, and Amazons," in Donna Carol Kurtz and Brian A. Sparkes, eds., *The Eye of Greece: Studies in the Art of Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), 1–28; Jenifer Neils, *The Youthful Deeds of Theseus* (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider, 1987); Harvey Alan Shapiro, "Theseus: Aspects of the Hero in Archaic Greece," in Diana M. Buitron-Oliver, ed., *New Perspectives in Early Greek Art* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 123–39; and Schefold, *Götter- und Heldensagen der Griechen.*
19. Pierre de la Coste-Messelière, *Sculptures du Trésor des Athéniens,* 2 vols., Fouilles de Delphes 4 (Paris: Boccard, 1957); and Richard Neer, "The Athenian Treasury at Delphi and the Material of Politics," *Classical Antiquity* 23 (2004): 63–94.
20. On the Eurymedon palm tree, see Plutarch *Nikias* 13.5; Pausanias 10.15.4–5; and Werner Gauer, *Weihgeschenke aus den Perserkriegen* (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1968), 105–7. On the Marathon group, see Pausanias 10.10.1–2; Gauer, *Weihgeschenke,* 65–70; and Chrissula Ioakimidou, *Die Statuenreihen griechischer Poleis und Bünde aus spätarchaischer und klassischer Zeit* (Munich: Tuduv, 1997), 66–77, 179–200.
21. See David Castriota, *Myth, Ethos, and Actuality: Official Art in Fifth-Century B.C. Athens* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1992).
22. Pausanias 10.1.7; Ioakimidou, *Statuenreihen,* 34–36, 135–43. For this issue I owe thanks again to Margaret Miller for her helpful comments—although perhaps she will not totally agree with my interpretation.
23. Pausanias 10.9.7–10; and Ioakimidou, *Statuenreihen,* 107–15, 281–306.
24. Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Identification through Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989); and Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity,* 172–89.
25. On the Stoa Poikile, see Pausanias 1.15.30; Tonio Hölscher, *Griechische Historienbilder des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Würzburg: Triltsch, 1973), 50–84; Francesco de Angelis, "La battaglia di Maratona nella Stoa Poikile," *Annali della*

Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa 4, no. 1 (1996): 119–71. On the Eurymedon Oinochoe Hamburg, see Konrad Schauenburg, "Eurymedon eimi," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung* 90 (1975): 97–121; Tonio Hölscher, *Die unheimliche Klassik der Griechen* (Bamberg: C. C. Buchners, 1989), 18–20; and Detlev Wannagat, "'Eurymedon eimi'—Zeichen von ethnischer, sozialer, und physischer Differenz in der Vasenmalerei des 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.," in Ralf von den Hoff and Stefan Schmidt, eds., *Konstruktionen von Wirklichkeit: Bilder im Griechenland des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2001), 51–71.

26. Wulf Raeck, *Zum Barbarenbild in der Kunst Athens im 6. und 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Bonn: Habelt, 1981), 101–63; Hölscher, *Historienbilder,* 38–49; Hölscher, *Unheimliche Klassik,* 18–20; Tonio Hölscher, "Feindwelten—Glückswelten: Perser, Kentauren, und Amazonen," in idem, ed., *Gegenwelten zu den Kulturen Griechenlands und Roms in der Antike* (Munich: Saur, 2000), 301–4; and Susanne Muth, *Gewalt im Bild* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 239–67. On the cultural interrelations between Greece/Athens and Persia in classical times in general, see Margaret C. Miller, *Athens and Persia in the 5th Century B.C.: A Study in Cultural Receptivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997); and Hölscher, *Gegenwelten,* with the contributions of Albrecht Dihle, "Die Philosophie der Barbaren," 183–203, and Alain Schnapp, "Pourquoi les Barbares n'ont-ils point d'images?" 205–16.

27. The questions raised here are the topic of a research project titled "The Origins of the Antithesis East-West Before and After Alexander the Great," initiated by Zentrum für Altertumwissenschaften of the University of Heidelberg (part of the research program "Asia and Europe in a Global Context").