



THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF  
**T H E B E S**





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VASSILIOS ARAVANTINOS

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF  
THEBES



John S. Latsis  
Public Benefit Foundation



# T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

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**T**he wealth of Greek museums has not been promoted as fully as possible. And this is because, although the State invests significant amounts in recording and protecting our cultural heritage, there is less money available to develop and publicise it.

Since 1997, the Latsis Foundation books about Greek archaeological museums have contributed considerably to balancing this one-dimensional approach.

These are books which, through their scholarly and aesthetic quality, highlight the role of our country's archaeological museums, not only as valuable repositories of historical memory but also as meeting places in which the Greeks of today have an opportunity to view, become acquainted and interact with our heritage.

This year's book is dedicated to the Archaeological Museum of Thebes, a region that has enriched, as have few others, Greek art, history and mythology with gods, heroes and ordinary people, all of whom are part of the mosaic of our heritage.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism continues to support the Archaeological Museum of Thebes and has already scheduled the re-exhibition of its prehistoric, Classical and Byzantine antiquities by including the project in the NSRF of the region in question.

Thus, this book will contribute to the effort to highlight the wealth of the museum, in the hope that it will function as a supplement to the work of re-exhibition, which will modernise the museum and make it more accessible to the public.

This collaboration has enormous value because the way in which the world perceives who we are and what our identity is depends not only on contemporary Greek creation but also on the way we publicise our heritage.

How we light a monument, how we structure a museum, and even what features of our cultural wealth we choose to promote, or what we disregard, all say something about who we are today.

I would like, then, to thank everybody at the Foundation who has helped to create this book.

In their own way, they are contributing to the great effort to make the best of what we have to offer as a nation.

PAVLOS YEROULANOS  
Minister of Culture and Tourism



This book, dedicated to the many and important antiquities of Boeotia, is the twelfth volume in the Museums Cycle published and funded by the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation and Eurobank EFG. The primary purpose of this joint initiative is to constantly increase public interest in the museums of Greece by offering its recipients, as well as a global audience via the internet, an annual volume that contributes with both scientific validity and artistic sensibility to a deeper knowledge and understanding of various pages in the history of Hellenic civilization.

The Archaeological Museum of Thebes is among those repositories that shelter with affection and splendour the tangible and venerable evidence of the life and cultural creation of the distant past from various Greek regions. Thebes, the third hegemonic power of ancient Greece, made a catalytic contribution to the evolutionary course of development that culminated in the ancient Hellenic intellectual and cultural miracle.

The Boeotian cities' artistic treasures and the testimony of their history recall memories of the great figures of mythology and history, of arts and letters associated with our student days. Heracles and Dionysus, Cadmus, Europa and Harmony, Antigone and Ismene, Oedipus and Jocasta are all familiar to us from Theban myth and Athenian tragedy. The poets Hesiod, Corinna and primarily Pindar, the incomparable panegyrist of the athletes of the Panhellenic Games, were born and lived in Boeotia. Well-known and outstanding artists, such as Pheidias, Praxiteles, Lysippus and Polygnotus, adorned its cities and sanctuaries with masterpieces.

The rich collections of the Museum of Thebes house all the finds brought to light through excavations by a pleiad of Greek archaeologists to whom we gratefully dedicate this book. We also extend our heartfelt thanks and congratulations to the archaeologist Vassilios Aravantinos, the Museum Director and author of this exceptional achievement, the product of his deep love and knowledge of this particular area.

We all hope and wish that this volume you now hold—which, as always, had the full support of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism—will be of assistance to the Museum of the City of Thebes in achieving its rightful prominence and true place in the mosaic of Greece's archaeological museums.

MARIANNA J. LATSIS



It was 25 February 1981, the day after the earthquake whose epicenter was in the Gulf of Corinth, that I started working at the Thebes Museum. From that date to the present, I have remained close to the antiquities of Boeotia. Having specialized in the Mycenaean civilisation and in particular in Linear B script, I had asked to be sent to the city of my dreams. Moreover, Boeotia had always been regarded as a repository of ancient civilisations, a place favoured by geography and history alike.

There was no loss of human life in this earthquake and most people forgot it soon. But the archaeologists, whom it had made very busy, remember it differently. There were countless occasions on which the bowels of the Boeotian earth gaped open, revealing its real history. Fortifications, public and private buildings, dwellings, battle trophies, sacred shrines, villas, necropolises, archives in Linear B script, stone and terracotta inscriptions, coins, figurines, masterpieces of sculpture and painting, and finally thousands of small objects, records of daily life and of the devotion and cultural creations of the people of Boeotia over the centuries.

At the zenith of this unique conjuncture of discoveries and new prospects, Mr. Vangelis Chronis entrusted me with writing the book “The Archaeological Museum of Thebes”. I felt as though my long years of study and activity in Boeotia had been recompensed and would, at long last, yield rich and glorious fruits.

The Archaeological Museum of Thebes houses the antiquities of Boeotia and as a result constitutes a repository of civilisation and a treasury of historic artifacts, the intellectual property of humankind as a whole. It contains a rich harvest of works of ancient and medieval art whose ripened stalks created enormous haystacks of the Greek cultural heritage. Improved and endowed with new halls and exhibits, products of persistent and patient research, the Museum is preparing to welcome the art-loving public.

Selecting the Thebes Museum treasures for inclusion in a single book, however voluminous, was a difficult venture. But it acquired flesh, bones and even wings after it was placed under the powerful auspices and rich sponsorship of the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation and Eurobank EFG, with the prompt approval of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The genuine inspiration and rare enthusiasm of a cluster of people supported and realized the vision of this book. First Mrs Marianna Latsis, staunch and art-loving upholder of her family’s tradition, agreed to add another precious jewel, the twelfth, to the golden crown of the monumental series of Greek books in the “Museums Cycle”. Mr Vangelis Chronis, General Director of the Latsis Group, conceived the vision of the book, inspired and supported the work and its contributors from beginning to end. Mrs. Eirini Louvrou, publication supervisor, kept her hand steadily on the helm, guiding the ship to a safe harbour in good time. Mr. Dimitris Kalokyris, with his artistic intervention, transformed the multitude of images and words into an integrated aesthetic whole. The artist-photographer Mr. Socratis Mavrommatis, with the diligent assistance of archaeologist John Fappas, breathed into the works the quintessence of their ancient soul. Mrs. Judy Giannakopoulou rendered the archaeological terminology into English with marvelous precision.

From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank all those mentioned above, as well as all the colleagues, co-workers and friends who helped and encouraged me, each in his or her own way, throughout all stages in the writing of this book. In particular I would like to thank my wife Margherita Bonanno, Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, for her critical contribution to the texts in this book.

VASSILIOS ARAVANTINOS

Director of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of Boeotia



“...and they were brought to the Museum...”

## THE THEBES MUSEUM AND THE BOEOTIAN ANTIQUITIES

**T**HE FOUNDING OF THE FIRST MUSEUMS IN GREECE COINCIDED WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FREE Hellenic State (1830), which initially included the Peloponnese (Morea), Sterea Ellada (Central Greece or Roumeli) and the islands of the Cyclades. From the outset, the Archaeological Society at Athens shouldered the responsibility for collecting and safeguarding the ancient artifacts that were dispersed throughout the cities and countryside (1837). Boeotia, a key region and important centre of the ancient Hellenic world, with dozens of cities and small settlements, soon attracted the interest of travellers, historians and archaeologists.

The small collections of archaeological finds that had been gathered together in the cities, towns and monasteries, or in churchyards and the courtyards of houses – especially inscriptions, sculptures and architectural members – were rescued and recorded. As time went by, small Boeotian collections were grouped together in the care of the Archaeological Society, and constituted the core exhibits of museums in Tanagra (Schimatari), Chaeronea and Thebes, which have recently been remodelled and upgraded.

After the mid-19th century, the scourge of illegal excavators appeared in Boeotia. They concentrated their activities on the search for the famous Tanagra figurines that portray elegant women at various moments in their daily life. At Schimatari, on a plot belonging to the historic monastery of Sagmata (on Mount Hypaton), a plain building was constructed (1890) in which to keep the remains (*spolia*) from the thousands of plundered graves in the vicinity of ancient Tanagra. The small museum contained a large number of grave *stelae* and architectural members, as well as any movable antiquities that had not been transferred to the National Archaeological Museum. At the dawn of the 20th century, in Chaeronea, the site on which the 300 members of the Theban Sacred Band gave their lives (338 BC), the famous Lion that had been erected over their common grave was restored (1902-04). The small but attractive Museum was built in 1902-05, and contained significant antiquities from the broader region of northern Boeotia and the valley of the Boeotian Kephissos.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the first excavations of ancient graves began in Thebes (1897), which until then were being plundered freely by grave robbers. The antiquities, mainly inscriptions and reliefs from various Boeotian cities (Plataea, Thespies, Coronea), as well as from excavations by Greek and international archaeological institutions in Plataea, Thespies and Anthedon (Loukisia), in the sanctuaries of Ptoon and the Cabirion and in the Valley of the Muses, were gathered together in Thebes in anticipation of the museum that was soon to be

*Groups of painted pottery from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes, at the selection and re-construction stage.*



built. Early in the 20th century, Panayiotis Kavvadias noted that the rich collection of inscriptions in Thebes was second only to that of the Epigraphic Museum in Athens and perhaps that of Delphi. The Thebes Museum was built in stages between the years 1905 and 1912, by the pioneer and visionary archaeologist Antonios Keramopoulos, on the northernmost point of the Kadmeia, near the magnificent medieval tower that was built almost exclusively of material from the ancient walls and dominates the steep hill of the citadel. Construction works on the first two-storey archaeological museum and its outbuildings appear to have been completed just before the outbreak of the Balkan Wars (1912-13). It contained the main museum building and some annexes, such as the workshop, the “House of the Lion” containing the cast of the Lion of Chaeronea, and the house of the Ephor. The latter buildings were demolished recently (2006) to make way for the expansion and renovation of the museum.

The Thebes Museum was used to accommodate German-Italian occupation forces during World War II (1941-44); after liberation, it never again opened its doors to the public. During the 1950s, the building was demolished and in its place a new one was built that was inaugurated just a few months after the death in 1962 of the man who inspired it, Ioannis Threpsiades, who had been appointed Ephor to Thebes before the war. His presence there during the German-Italian occupation proved to be a great blessing to the antiquities and the city alike. He supervised the account of the losses of ancient artifacts during the war and, as he himself wrote, envisioned and oversaw the rebuilding and re-exhibition of the new Museum, to the degree permitted by political and economic conditions in Greece.

Systematic excavations in Aulis and on the Mycenaean acropolis at Gla (Copais Kastro) as well as rescue excavations on private lands and on major public projects hampered the operation of the newly built Museum and made protection of the antiquities problematic even in the early 1960s. The Museum had no workshops, underground storerooms or other auxiliary areas. These problems were not solved by the partial reorganisation of the exhibits in the following decades. Ancient artifacts were literally piled up in large sheds inside the medieval Saint Omer tower and in the expropriated old neighbourhood west of the Museum hill. Hundreds of inscriptions, funerary reliefs or palmette stelae were displayed in the Museum’s courtyard. The antiquities in the courtyard and tower created a pleasant, idyllic museum environment, because the layout of heterogeneous ancient and medieval artifacts reminded visitors of other times and places. But the permanent exposure of significant works of art and unique historic records to the damage caused by weathering constituted a threat to their preservation and indeed to their very existence.

The Thebes Museum, despite its limited space, hosted for almost half a century a superb exhibition with important works of ancient art dating from the Neolithic to the Byzantine period. Some of its groups of exhibits are unique in Greece and in the whole world. The museum contains singular prehistoric and early historic collections. Outstanding among them are: (a) Oriental cylinder seals, the only large group of objects of this kind that has ever been found west of the Aegean Sea, (b) The group of lapis lazuli jewellery, (c) A group of commercial stirrup jars with inscriptions in Linear B script, and (d) The sole examples on mainland Greece of painted terracotta chests (*larnakes*) from Tanagra. Objects from the historical period include: (a) The group of grave stelae of dark Boeotian stone, with superb carved figures of warriors in action at the moment of battle, (b) A large number of sculptures from the sanctuary of Artemis at Aulis, (c) A few *kouroi* from the sanctuary of Apollo on Mt Ptoon, (d) Some exceptional examples of Archaic and Classical sculpture, (e) the group of porous limestone grave stelae in the form of an ancient entablature and (f) Archaic Boeotian fruit bowls (*karpodochai*) decorated with birds.



*The east tower of the Elektrai Gate that flanked the southeasternmost point of Kadmeia during the Hellenistic period. Photograph of the excavations under Antonios Keramopoulos in 1914.*

In the exhibition of the Thebes Museum, as it has operated for almost fifty years, the ancient and Byzantine/medieval art and history of Boeotia was represented, albeit in an unequal and non-uniform way, often beyond its modern and ancient borders. Moreover, during the Mycenaean palatial period and for many centuries in Hellenic and Byzantine/medieval times, Thebes was identified as a political entity with Boeotia and vice versa. This reciprocal relationship of identity and separation, which functioned historically as a synthesis of the conflicting components of Boeotian cities, was what prevailed in planning this new exhibition of the antiquities and culture of the region in the now expanded and renovated Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Many ancient finds from Boeotia and especially from Thebes were incorporated into the Museum's collections during the last quarter of the 20th century and the early 21st. A selection of them is included in the renovated and expanded form of its collections. As a whole, they offer an unrivalled and global picture of the history and art of Boeotia through the millennia.



## A CHRONICLE OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS IN BOEOTIA

**T**HE ART AND HISTORY OF THE PEOPLES WHO HAVE LIVED IN BOEOTIA FOR MILLENNIA, FROM THE PALAEOLITHIC age to the end of the Middle Ages, are represented by the exhibits at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Every exhibit has its own story, ancient and modern. The latter tends to be brief, frequently unknown and without glory.

The travellers who visited and described Boeotia before and after the Greek War of Independence were succeeded by the scrupulous recording of outdoor surface antiquities, chiefly inscriptions and sculptures, and eventually the first excavations were conducted. These activities were initially undertaken on the initiative and at the expense of the Archaeological Society at Athens, which was established with the participation of distinguished and scholarly citizens in 1837, just a few years after the constitution of the Hellenic State.

Excavation research was delayed in Boeotia and, when it finally began in the late 19th century, it was primarily due to the activities of foreign archaeological institutions. Interventions by the archaeologists of the Archaeological Society and the newly constituted state Archaeological Service were initially restricted to collecting and saving ancient artifacts and monuments from destruction as they came to light at random on public and private lands, as well as those that were confiscated from the loot of grave robbers and dealers in the illicit antiquities trade. Then, as later, Greek archaeological excavations in Boeotia were rarely of a systematic nature.

The travellers Edward Dodwell and W. M. Leake, who visited Boeotia early in the 19th century, and later H.N. Ulrichs, H.G. Lolling and Ludwig Ross, had already identified quite a few of its ancient sites. They attached particular significance to inscriptions, many of which they copied and cited in their writings. Dodwell's publications were, in addition, interspersed with many exceptional lithographs, in which the sculptures and architectural monuments are frequently presented as scattered members of ancient Boeotian cities.

The objectives of state interventions in Boeotia for the rest of the 19th century were to encourage public visits to the ancient sites, gather together ancient artifacts and curtail illegal excavations and the illicit trade in an-

*The west side of Thebes seen from the Ayia Triada hill. In front, the fountain of Dirce can be discerned. Early decades of the 20th cent.*

tiquities. It should be noted that during this period, brigandage, lawlessness and transactions between outlaws and the authorities ravaged the cities and countryside alike. Fortunately, Boeotian art was misunderstood and did not initially attract the interest of the emissaries sent by the major European museums, who sought to acquire exceptional works of art, as had already been done with the plundering of the Athens Acropolis, the stripping of Aegina, the looting of the Apollo Epicurius at Phigaleia, and of many other monuments in the Peloponnese and the Aegean Islands. In the last three decades of the 19th century, however, Boeotia suffered incursions by many unscrupulous purveyors of illegally acquired antiquities, with the result that hitherto intact cemeteries from all periods of history were completely ransacked. The reason for this and the objective of the grave-robbers was the demand for terracotta figurines, the skilfully created miniature replicas of statues, which they called “dolls” among themselves, and were publicly known as Tanagra figurines that depicted lovely draped women at moments in their daily life, and had suddenly become famous and fashionable and were in great demand by museums and wealthy collectors.

The archaeologists Panagiotis Stamatakis, Vassilios Leonardos, Epaminondas Koromantzios and Christos Tsountas, who belonged to the heroic epoch of Greek archaeology, followed the grave-robbers closely and salvaged whatever they left behind, mainly grave stelae and potsherds. Towards the end of the century, the first archaeological excavations began in Boeotia, on the initiative mainly of foreign archaeological schools in Athens and some international scholarly institutions. Excavations by French archaeologists in the sanctuary of Apollo and the hero Ptoios on Mt Ptoon, and in the regions of Perdikovrysi and Kastraki were particularly rich in finds, as they brought to light significant architectural remains and many Archaic *kouroi*. The French School in Athens also explored the Valley of the Muses, selected points in Thespies and did supplementary work on the site of the Polyanthion, where Panagiotis Stamatakis had already identified and excavated its enclosure in 1882. Moreover A. De Ridder, who had collaborated (1888-1891) with P. Jamot at Thespies and in the Valley of the Muses, worked at both Orchomenos and Gla (1893).

Excavation research was conducted in Boeotia by German archaeologists as well, following in the footsteps of H.G. Lolling, who had visited and excavated in Chaeronea (1885) and Antikyra (1888). The archaeologists P. Wolters, W. Dörpfeld and W. Judeich of the German Archaeological Institute conducted systematic explorations in the sanctuary of the Cabiri, near Thebes (1888-89), which had been found and identified by Eustratios Kalopais (1887). Their investigations were repeated by G. Bruns between 1956 and 1966. At Orchomenos, where Heinrich and Sophia Schliemann (1880-81 and 1886), and later A. De Ridder (1893) had worked, the excavations were conducted in the early 20th century by the Bavarian Academy of Sciences.

At the same time, American archaeologists explored the acropolis and city of Plataea (1889-91), where a limited excavation by the Archaeological Society was reported under A. Skias (1899). The American archaeologist J.C. Rolfe together with C.D. Buck, excavated part of the defence walls and some graves in ancient Anthedon, the Boeotian port on the Euboean Gulf.

Representatives of the Archaeological Society at Athens and the state Archaeological Service, whenever they were not supervising the work of their foreign colleagues, were preoccupied with gathering up the antiquities that been placed in the care of temporary local collections in villages or monasteries, or transferred to the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. Then (1899) a bronze statue of Poseidon was found in the bay of Ayios Vassilios by fishermen and taken to the National Museum by Panayiotis Kastriotis. Until then, archaeologists were



*The first building of the Thebes Museum and the Frankish tower in its courtyard. Between them is the roofed cast of the Lion of Chaeronea. Early decades of the 20th century.*

excavating the graves that they had literally snatched from the hordes of grave-robbers who had been pillaging ancient Boeotian cemeteries. Their self-denial is echoed in the written reports by Stamatakis who, until his untimely death in 1885, travelled extensively through Boeotia in an effort to rescue its antiquities. His work in the region was carried on until the end of the 19th century by Koromantzios, Kalopais, Leonardos, Filios, Sotiriades, Skias and many other learned men.

Early in the 20th century (1904-10) Antonios Keramopoulos was posted to Thebes, and through his excavating and publishing activity, placed his seal on the archaeology of the region up to 1930. Keramopoulos who, in addition to Boeotia, was active in Phocis, Attica and finally, from 1912-13 in liberated Macedonia, was fortunate enough not only to discover but also to publish many of his finds, alongside his subsequent career at the University and as head of the Archaeological Service. Parallel to the work of Keramopoulos, a major excavation project was conducted in Boeotia. G. Sotiriades was extremely active, explored the topography of Thebes and excavated Chaeronea, Medeon near Antikyra, Distomo and the Schisti Odos.

In Chaeronea, a small but attractive museum was built to house the antiquities of northern Boeotia, while ancient finds flooded into the Thebes Museum from all over Boeotia and Locris. From 1909 on, N. Pappadakis worked at Thebes, excavating several graves (1911) in Thebes (Tachi) and Tanagra, and investigated the Tumulus of Salganeus, which was known to the ancients, on the coast of the Euboean Gulf, as well as the famous pyre of Heracles on the Marmara peak of Mount Oita. Also taking part in this excavation was the great archaeologist Christos Karouzos, then a young scholar. The excavation was recently continued by P. Pantos; all finds have been housed in the Thebes Museum.

The work of Greek archaeologists was interrupted by the Balkan Wars (1912-13), World War I (1915-18) and the disastrous Asia Minor expedition (1919-22). During the interwar years, excavations were conducted at Eutre-



*The Archaeological Museum of Thebes after its recent renovation and expansion.*

sis and Halai by the American mission under Hetty Goldman. Then exploration of the cemetery at Ritsona (Mykalessos) that had been begun by R.M. Burrows (1907-9) was continued by P.N. and A. Ure. This couple, in addition to publishing, were also involved in exhibiting the finds at the old Thebes Museum. A little later, the British School under R.P. Austin investigated the acropolis of Aliartos. At that time four archaeologists, whose work was a credit to Greek archaeology, were working in Thebes: Christos Karouzos, Nicolaos Platon, Georgios Sotiriou and Anastasios Orlandos. Minor excavations were also carried out then in Thebes, Levadeia and Akraifnio, and in 1935, the Benaki Museum acquired a significant hoard of jewellery and gold rings that were declared to have originated in Thebes.

Just before the war, Ioannis Threpsiades was appointed Ephor to Thebes. He and his wife Antigone, daughter of the Theban physician Loukas Bellos, lived in Thebes during the bleak war years, helped persecuted citizens and kept vigilant watch to ensure the safety of the antiquities when the Thebes Museum was turned into quarters for occupation troops.

The Archaeological Society began the first postwar excavations under Threpsiades in the sanctuary of Artemis at Aulis and on the Mycenaean citadel at Gla. At Thebes and Levadeia, dispersed antiquities were gath-



ered together with the help of Karouzos. Orlandos reconstructed the scattered members of the Trophy of Leuctra (1958) near the village of the same name and the church of Ayia Foteini, near the Ismenos River and the walls of ancient Thebes. At that time, supplementary excavations were being conducted at Eutresis by the American School of Classical Studies, at Akraifnio by the French School and finally at the sanctuary of the Cabiri and in the Seidi Cave by the German Archaeological Institute.

Early in the next decade (1960), numerous, valuable and highly instructive finds, in terms of the history and art of Boeotia in antiquity, came to light during rescue excavations. In 1963-64, at two points on the Theban citadel, and in the ruins of the Mycenaean palatial period buildings (13th century BC), art objects were discovered made of precious and exotic materials, gold, ivory and lapis lazuli, as well as weapons and harness accessories. Of particular significance were the first clay tablets incised with Linear B script. Excavations in the now densely-inhabited acropolis and lower town of Thebes provided a great deal of new evidence regarding the early habitation, art and history of the city.

In the decades that followed, large sections of the city's diachronic fortification walls came to light, cemeteries from the Bronze Age and the historical period, sections of the Mycenaean palatial complex with archives in Linear B script, workshops and storerooms for valuable objects. Moreover, the many grave goods that have been unearthed recently in Thebes have contributed new data about its art, cults and history, and generally about its contribution to the Hellenic civilisation of the historical period. Likewise the recent investigations of ancient cemeteries in Thespies, Akraifnio, Tanagra, Aliartos, Dilesi and Eleon have proved to be instructive and productive. In Thebes, Plataea, Chaeronea, Gla, Orchomenos and Kallithea, and in the caves of Sarakenos and Ayia Triada, surface research or excavations are being conducted either because of human interventions in the environment of the antiquities, or in accordance with scholarly research programmes.

*The medieval tower of Saint Omer in the courtyard of the Thebes Museum. It was built entirely of ancient building material.*





## THE GEOMORPHOLOGIC, HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

**B**OEOTIA, LIKE ATTICA, IS ONE OF THOSE REGIONS WITH A LONG COASTLINE IN CENTRAL GREECE (STEREA ELLADA), distinguished for its lacey shores and marked horizontal divisions. The geographer Strabo (*Geography* 9, 2, 2), citing the historian Ephorus, declared that Boeotia was the only region in Central Greece with “three seas” (*trithalattos*), noting that it had many ports on the Corinthian and Crisaeon gulfs to the south and southwest, as well as on the Euboean Gulf, both north and south of the Euripus Strait. The fact that Boeotia is situated at the intersection of the main roads that have always run through the Greek peninsula makes it ideal for communicating with southern, central and northern Greece, as well as for access to the Aegean, and to the road westwards to the Peloponnese, from both land and sea.

In antiquity, however, as today, Boeotia was regarded primarily as a mainland region, with fertile plains, lakes, rivers and springs, in the middle of a spacious corridor flanked by high, forested mountains. Strabo noted this special feature as well (9, 2, 15) “The plains in the interior ... are hollows and are surrounded everywhere on the remaining sides by mountains...” Indeed, some of the most famous mountains of antiquity – Cithaeron, Helicon, Messapion, Sphingion or Phikion, Acontion, Hedyllion, Chlomon, Ptoon and Hypaton – are on its territory; and the mountains Parnitha, Pastra and Parnassos are very near its boundaries.

The particularities and variety of the terrain and climate of Boeotia have to some degree shaped the special character of its inhabitants, art and culture. In all periods of their history, the Boeotians stayed at home near the land they usually cultivated themselves, without slaves or vassals, and rarely emigrated in search of a better life or mounted expeditions to distant lands. The different character of Boeotia and its inhabitants compared to, say, that of neighbouring Attica and the Athenians, is reflected in ancient and modern literature alike, and is expressed above all by the poet Hesiod.

From the vivid but anecdotal description of Boeotia by Heracleides of Crete, who lived in the 3rd century BC, we can glean some information about its capital: “The city lies in the middle of the country of the Boeotians. It is completely flat, round in shape and its soil is black. It is old, but its street plan is new, since owing to the arrogance of its inhabitants, it has been destroyed three times, as narrated by history. It is also suitable for raising horses, is well watered, is entirely composed of verdant hills and has more gardens than any other city in Greece, because two rivers flow through it, watering all the plains around it. The city is splendid in summer as it has plentiful cool water and gardens.”

*Detail of a stirrup jar inscribed with Linear B script. From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC (see also page 95).*

In his introduction in the *Guide to the (old) Thebes Museum*, Christos Carouzos wrote: “Anyone travelling from Attica to Boeotia, whether he comes from the Parnitha side or from the old entranceway of Cithaeron, will soon be aware that this new place is very different from the Attica he left behind.”

The lines by Odysseus Elytis, from his “Form of Boeotia” (*Orientalisms* 1940), describe in poetic terms the primeval mystery and enchantment of Boeotian land and nature: “On this red soil of Boeotia / in the solitary march of the rocks / you will light the golden sheaves of fire / you will uproot the evil fecundity of memory / you will leave a bitter soul in the wild mint!”

From his rich and lengthy experience of exploring its countryside and museums, the epigraphist Paul Roesch (*Études béotiennes*, V) came to the conclusion that “Boeotia today, as in antiquity, does not surrender to the hasty amateur. You have to live it, to walk along the paths and roads of its villages, rub shoulders with its inhabitants, climb its citadels and mountains, and discover unexpected treasures in the storerooms of its museums; you have to search, ask and spend time with an old man who seems to have been leavened with ancient wisdom, who quotes excerpts from Pausanias and recites verses from Hesiod.”

Boeotia is thus presented collectively by ancient and modern scholars alike, as a region richly endowed due to its geographic location, its geomorphology and its legendary fertility. Its soil, in the basins created between the mountain ranges, consists mainly of sedimentary, calcareous and clayey deposits resulting from the erosion of the mountain massifs or the sedimentation generated by the sea. Thus, it is appropriate for all crops and especially for cereals, vines and olive groves, the products of which constitute the three age-old basic items of the Mediterranean diet. With this attribute they are recorded in the Mycenaean Linear B palace records that have come to light in abundance on the acropolis of Thebes in recent years.

In remotest antiquity, the earliest inhabitants of the region were well aware of its great potential in terms of agriculture, the pasturing and breeding of all stock, apiculture, hunting and fishing in the lakes and seas. Aristophanes, author of the comedy *Lysistrata*, refers to Boeotia as a place with “a fertile vale” (l. 88) and praises the excellent eels of Lake Copais, a coveted delicacy in Classical Athens (*Acharnians*, 880; *Peace* 1005).

The geographical position of Boeotia, and especially the geomorphology of its terrain, became synonymous with the overall picture of the country and had a decisive impact on its history over the centuries. It contributed to shaping its civic, political and religious institutions, the structure of the societies in its cities and countryside and artistic trends with their particular local expression. The famous, timeless duality between south and north Boeotia was manifested, according to historical evidence, in the early Archaic period and took the form of a tug-of-war for power between Thebes and Orchomenos. However, the ancient written tradition dates the ancestral rivalry and fierce quarrel between these two city-states to the mythical period when their leaders were the demigod Heracles and the Minyan king Erginos respectively. The clash ended in the defeat of the Orchomenians and the flooding of Copais, which had previously been drained. The mythological version may reflect the conflicts and military confrontations of the Late Bronze Age, when the rival cities of the historical period were regarded as administrative centres of autonomous state entities. The true form of the relations and possible interdependence between the two regions in the Mycenaean period remains hypothetical, as their separate listing in the Catalogue of Ships in the *Iliad* (2, 511) does not constitute historical proof of the situation prevailing in the Late Bronze Age.

The marked geomorphologic division of Boeotia favoured its political fragmentation and the artistic differentiations of the cities, despite Thebes’ desperate and bloody efforts to unite the region and to lead the Boeo-

tian League, perhaps the world's most ancient confederation. In this effort, Thebes repeatedly devastated the hostile Boeotian towns of Plataea, Thespies and Orchomenos. The Plataeans and Thespians sought an alliance with and support from Athens and, given the opportunity (335 BC), collaborated to destroy Thebes. Oropos was almost always under the sovereignty of Athens, with Tanagra under its intellectual and artistic sway. Orchomenos, Chaeronea and Levadeia leaned toward the central Greek states of the Thessalians and the Phocians, with Halai and Larymna preferring the border region of the Opuntian Locrians.

The citation of the above historical and geographical facts, the analysis of ancient financial data and comparison of the latter with data found in medieval and modern archives and with today's statistics provide an approximate picture of the productive potential of Boeotian land over the centuries. The density of the Boeotian population, which varied according to the period, is comparable to that of neighbouring regions with an analogous area, such as Attica, or to more distant regions with similar resources and a similar historical conjuncture, such as fertile Messenia, whose capital Messene was founded by Thebes, when it reached the zenith of its temporary hegemony in Greece and lent the finishing touch to its glory.



# THE DAWN OF BOEOTIAN PREHISTORY

**A** FEW DECADES AGO, OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE PALAEO-ENVIRONMENT AND THE EARLY INHABITANTS OF Boeotia was based almost exclusively on references by ancient scholars in sources that were meagre, frequently conflicting, inadequate and usually meaningless for research purposes. Strabo (9, 2, 3) and Pausanias (9, 5, 1) cite the names of various mythical tribes whom they reported as inhabiting the area before the advent of the Phoenicians and of Kadmos, founder of Thebes, and before the descent of the Boeotians, the historical inhabitants of the land. Strabo refers to the Aones, Temmices, Leleges and Hyantes as barbarians, together with the Minyans of Orchomenos. Pausanias reports the following mythical peoples in a different order and as indigenous: the Ectenes, Hyantes and finally the Aones. According to other ancient historians, travellers and mythographers, among whom were Herodotus, Thucydides, Diodorus and Nonnus, Boeotia was initially inhabited by mixed tribes, obviously pre-Hellenic and proto-Hellenic.

Today excavations, with the contribution of the physical sciences especially palaeobotany, archaeozoology and palaeontology, in conjunction with surface and speleological exploration, have become the starting point for reconstituting the palaeogeography, climatology and ecological conditions prevailing in the region then. As a result, the picture of the earliest human presence and life in Boeotia is much richer today than it was in the past. During the most recent archaeologically traceable period of the Palaeolithic Age, the so-called Upper Palaeolithic, it has been confirmed that there were many groups of hunter-gathers in Boeotia, who roamed the countryside in search of food and shelter. Their open-air encampments have not been preserved, nor have they left any material traces, owing to erosion and to the temporary nature of their sojourn. On the contrary, their presence in caves, under rock shelters or in cave-like hollows, albeit occasional, has left human deposits of great significance to the study of their habits and efforts to adapt to their adverse physical environment.

In Boeotia, the caves that were inhabited by the wandering hunter-gatherers of the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Age are mainly found on the limestone shores of what was then Lake Copais. Two of these are the best known, as they contain very ancient layers of deposits by human habitation. They are the Seidi Cave, which is in a rocky region near Aliartos, and the Sarakenos Cave on a steep slope over the shores of a lake in the Akraifnio region. Together they provided the basis for the exploration and knowledge of the early phases of the human presence in Boeotia and the ancient environment of the region.

The Seidi Cave was explored during the German-Italian occupation by German archaeologists and military personnel, and more systematically, although on a small scale, two decades or so later. Even though the conditions

*Front and back view of a clay figurine representing a woman holding a phiale, from the Sarakenos Cave on the banks of Copais, near Akraifnio. Late Neolithic, first half of the 5th millennium BC.*



Core (LEFT) and tools (RIGHT) of flint from the Seidi Cave near Aliartos. Upper Palaeolithic, c. 35,000-10,000 BC.

of the initial excavation and the adventures of the findings have made it difficult to assess this small cave, the evidence available is sufficient to confirm its fundamental significance to its era. The findings include flakes of flint, which confirm that humans visited and sojourned in the cave during the Palaeolithic Age, and that it was more frequently inhabited in the Neolithic. Indeed the most recent research confirmed the conclusions of the initial excavations, placing the latest chronological and cultural horizon of the deposits and findings to the Upper Palaeolithic period.

The second cave, known as the Sarakenos Cave, is located fairly high up over the former lake, and has a superb view of it. Although it is the region's highest and largest hollow in the limestone karstic sections of the Copais shores, there are many other smaller caves, cave-like hollows or rock shelters that were used by humans over time as permanent or temporary refuge, to stable herds or as drainage outlets. The Sarakenos Cave has a large area and contains evidence of habitation, the beginning of which can be dated to the last period of the Palaeolithic hunting stage, the Upper Palaeolithic (c. 35,000-10,000 BC), and then to the Mesolithic period (c. 10,000-8000 BC). The cave was used extensively in all phases of the Neolithic (c. 6300-3200 BC) and continued to be used by nearby settlements in the Early and Middle Bronze Age, as attested by the regular stratigraphic succession of human residues. Its systematic excavation (1971-2 and from 1990 on) brought to light thick layers of deposits inside the spacious hollow cavern with many and various findings (abundant pottery, figurines, tools of all types, vegetable and animal remains). In its Neolithic phases, it appears that the Sarakenos Cave was used simultaneously with, and as a supplement to, significant open or open-air installations on the lakeshore, where a dense network of settlements on or near the lake was already flourishing.

The earliest habitation in the region around Copais has been confirmed by the nature of the stone tools found on these two important Palaeolithic sites, which were in continuous use at least through the subsequent periods

of the Stone Age. The recent systematic efforts to find new open-air or roofed places of temporary or permanent habitation by prehistoric man and to record known ones in the lakeside cave environment of the only known site in southern Greece, have continuously enriched the data available to research. The density, size and living conditions of groups of people in encampments in which the slow, gradual transition takes place from the dependency and uncertainty of the hunter-gatherer to the permanently resident producer, under conditions he himself created and controlled, prove the fundamental significance of the Copais basin at the dawn of Greek prehistory.

Despite their charm, the mythical references to the distant past of Boeotia “from the creation of the world”, in the words of Byzantine chroniclers, are not related to history but rather to the invention of incidents in indistinct periods about which ancient authors could not possibly have had the least knowledge.



*Part of a marble statuette of a female figure from the Sarakenos Cave on the banks of Copais, near Akraifnio. Late Neolithic, first half of the 5th millennium BC.*



## THE FIRST ORGANISED SOCIETIES



**T**HE SPECIAL FEATURE THAT DIFFERENTIATES THE NEOLITHIC AGE FROM THE LONG STONE AGE THAT PRECEDED it was the gradual domestication and exploitation of various plants and animals. These developments had a decisive impact on the human race. A succession of natural effects gave rise to a new productive economy, permanent housing, a complex social organisation, specialized know-how and population growth. Their distinguishing feature is considered to be the first appearance of pottery.

In contrast to the very few instances of Palaeolithic habitation in caves, there are several dozen confirmed Neolithic settlements in Boeotia. These Neolithic settlements, by then permanent, are scattered all over the territory of Boeotia and new ones are constantly being discovered and added to the earlier known ones. These sites have usually been identified by their abundant surface pottery, stone tools and figurines, whereas traces of houses and graves are found only rarely. Of the total sites, which span a very broad chronological period, just a few have so far been excavated and explored, and over a small area. Fewer still are those to which scientific methodology has been applied to the excavation and study of the findings, and even fewer have been published.

Most of the Neolithic sites are concentrated around the Copais basin, in the valley formed by the Boeotian Kephissos, in the Asopos valley and on the Skourta plateau. Some can also be encountered around the edge of the Theban plain, which is crisscrossed by ravines and streams, and punctuated by hills and lakes, large and small (Yliki and Paralimni). The presence of several settlements along the coast of the Euboean Gulf, perhaps indicating early shipping and fishing activities, is also noteworthy. The general picture of the dispersed settlements shows that Copais and the Kephissos valley attracted Neolithic man quite early, as virtually all categories of contemporary pot-

*Three views of a clay figurine of a male, from Thebes. Final Neolithic, 4th millennium BC.*

tery are represented in the settlements and caves they inhabited. It is, however, certain that the critical location of Boeotia at the crossroads of significant routes favoured communication between the populace of central Greece with other groups of people on both the mainland and the islands, especially towards the end of the period, when new conditions arose with the creation of communications and trading networks, such as the trade in obsidian from Milos.

In any event, very little is known about the particular living conditions, such as the form of housing, the type of food and its preparation, daily tasks, the practice of crafts, and the use of figurines, jewellery and seals in Boeotia, in comparison with other regions of Greece, where systematic, large-scale excavations have been conducted in open settlements. Likewise no significant building remains were found in earlier excavations in Orchomenos, Chaeronea and Eutresis. And during the period in which they were conducted, no studies of inorganic matter were possible, nor of organic remains of ancient flora and fauna. In the Seidi Cave, for example, all phases of the Neolithic period are represented, but no data have been published regarding excavation techniques or the classification of findings.

In contrast to the practices of the past, the years of interdisciplinary excavation and exploration of the large Sarakenos Cave have yielded rich data about the habitation of caves in Neolithic Boeotia. The cave was discovered by groups of hunter-gatherers in the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods in their search for a protected place to live, even if only occasionally. It was in a good location, high over the steep rocky banks of Lake Copais, near Akraifnio. In the Neolithic Age it was densely populated over a long period of time, and on a permanent basis, simultaneously with an open settlement a short distance away, either on or near the lake.

The enormous quantities of pottery, the multitude of figurines and tools of all types indicate continuous habitation by human beings in the enormous hollow Sarakenos Cave, where food was prepared and stored and livestock stabled. Some graves were also found there. Most of the finds date to the Middle and Late Neolithic, constituting typical examples of the cultural phases of Chaeronea and Elateia. It is argued that the location and contents of the cave presuppose the existence of other contemporary settlements in the region, which were critical to the network of communications and trade, and to the interchange of ideas to and from eastern Central Greece.

The Neolithic settlements of Boeotia, as well as those on key sites near or on the lake that are assumed to have supplied provisions to the Sarakenos Cave, are more dense in lakeshore and riverside regions, on low and fertile hills and on the edge of plains. They are characterized generally by a rather small number of individuals, permanently settled and organised into agricultural and stock-breeding communities. In addition, they are distinguished for their houses built of natural materials near the fertile land and ample water supplies required for the people and their flocks.



*Head of a clay figurine from Chaeronea. Middle Neolithic, mid 6th millennium BC.*





*Clay vase with painted red decoration from the Sarakenos Cave on the banks of Copais, near Akraifnio. Middle Neolithic, mid 6th millennium BC.*



*Head of a clay figurine from the Sarakenos Cave on the banks of Copais, near Akraifnio. Late Neolithic, first half of the 5th millennium BC.*

*Neolithic clay vases from Thebes. Final Neolithic, 4th millennium BC.*



In Boeotia, all phases of the Neolithic period are represented. Some settlements are better known, even though no more than limited excavations have been conducted, and most sites have been identified on the basis of surface exploration. Some of the Neolithic sites with highly developed craftsmanship noteworthy for the time were succeeded by significant Bronze Age settlements (Eutresis, Orchomenos, Chaeronea and Halai). The first two expanded gradually over a large area and were occupied throughout the prehistoric period in mainland Greece.

Neolithic settlements of great density have been confirmed recently in the valley of the Boeotian Kephissos, where new sites keep coming to light. Near Chaeronea, successive habitation layers were found early in the 20th century with pottery, figurines and tools, a few occupation remains and a grave mound. More recent investigation has confirmed the conclusions of previous exploration, and the observed habitation density is attributed to the particularly favorable living conditions in the river valley and to the abundance of food from agriculture, stock-breeding, hunting and fishing. In the limited excavation sections, no houses have been found, but the pottery is plentiful and representative of all phases of the period.

The contacts of Boeotian settlements with Neolithic communities in the Peloponnese, Thessaly and other regions of Central Greece have been confirmed mainly by ceramic production. The manufacture of large earthenware jars for transporting and storing liquid or solid materials and foods was an achievement of Neolithic man and required rudimentarily skilled labour. Moreover, even agriculture then required complicated technical preparation and planning so that farming would produce the desired crop. In addition, weaving, basketry, and the manufacture of figurines and small-scale art also demanded specialised skills.

The Neolithic Age was distinguished by different periods and sub-periods based on the evolution of pottery. Although there can be no absolute correspondence with chronology, in order to facilitate classification of the artifacts found, the Neolithic period has been divided into the Early (6800-5800 BC), Middle (5800-5300 BC), Late (5300-4500 BC) and Final Neolithic (4500-3200/3100 BC). It should be stressed from the outset that Boeotia, together with the upper Kephissos Valley (Elateia) and Phthiotis, was an independent geographical and cultural entity, in which local styles developed, such as the Chaeronea style with red decoration painted on a light-coloured ground, and the “black-on-red” style. The vases of the Early Neolithic were monochrome at the beginning, usually in the shape of a bowl (*phiale*) with thick walls. Later they became more refined and were decorated with painted and incised patterns. In the Middle Neolithic, techniques for moulding and firing clay improved. Pottery surfaces are decorated with linear or geometric motifs and white alternating with red, with the simultaneous use of the scraping technique. The ware of the Late Neolithic is distinguished for the variety of its shapes and its polychrome decoration. The main feature of the period is regarded as being the introduction of dark colour in the decoration of vases. This was the so-called matt-painted ware to which decoration with a burnished dark colour was soon added (black on red ground) and eventually polychromy. Monochrome vases, either incised or burnished, co-exist with decoration of the splendid Dimini type ware. In the next period, the Final Neolithic, which is represented in the Thebes Museum, monochrome pottery predominates. Among the various shapes are wide bowls (*phialai*) and boat-shaped vases or scoops.

The Sarakenos Cave was occupied frequently in the Neolithic period. The enormous quantities of pottery cover the entire spectrum of types known from Thessaly, Euboea and Boeotia and reveal networks through which materials and ideas were exchanged, sometimes originating from distant areas. There are painted vases from the beginning of the Late Neolithic (5300-4500 BC) and pottery of the Gonia type from the second half of the 5th mil-



*Neolithic clay vases from Eutresis (LEFT) and Thebes (RIGHT). Final Neolithic, 4th millennium BC.*

lennium, both of which are of excellent quality. The clay and marble figurines, jewellery and large numbers of small objects are likewise of interest.

One truly major achievement of Neolithic art and ideology was its small-scale sculpture, which gradually reached a very high level of development. Neolithic figurines display a wide variety of themes (male and female figures, animals, houses, furniture and household utensils) and are fashioned of various materials, mainly clay but also stone, marble, wood, shell or bone. Special significance must be attributed to the inventive representation of the human figure in this very early stage of civilisation. There are many examples in Boeotia, including some interesting terracotta figurines, although few in number compared to the output of Thessaly, for example, where they appeared in the Early Neolithic. The Boeotian examples come chiefly from Chaeronea and from the Thebes region, and more have come to light recently from the Sarakenos Cave. They date to the Early and Middle Neolithic and have many features in common with corresponding figurines from Thessaly and Macedonia. Similarities have also been observed between the sculpture of the Late Neolithic from various sites in Boeotia with that of Euboea, neighbouring Locris and the Peloponnese.

Neolithic Boeotia neither created nor developed its own local types of small-scale sculpture but, since it was situated at the crossroads of reciprocal influences, it had some local production that can readily be classed, together with that of the rest of mainland Greece, as a single thematic unit. The use of Boeotian figurines was not differentiated from that of other regions, whether or not their religious interpretation as depicting the Mother Goddess or other related deities is accepted, or whether their use as dolls or as objects of communication and trade is perceived as secular. Instances where their special characteristics date them to the Final Neolithic and declare their religious function or feelings appear frequently in Boeotia. Also known from Chaeronea and other sites are the replicas of houses or sanctuaries with a hole on the top of the roof for letting out smoke.

Significant changes in the productive base of Neolithic communities, with a visible impact on all realms of human activity, are observed in Boeotia during the Final Neolithic period (4500-3200/3100 BC). This transitional

stage, which some scholars have called Chalcolithic, has been confirmed in the lower town of Thebes, with findings from houses and graves.

The increased number of settlements and cave occupations in relation to the past is usually attributed to the growing population and to the differentiations in production processes that mark the advent of the Bronze Age. Within this context, the role of the communications network and trade between the various communities was enhanced, and contact with Euboea and the Cyclades acquired particular significance, with the introduction of new products, tools, jewellery and ideas.



*Arrowheads of flint and obsidian from the Sarakenos Cave. Final Neolithic, 4th millennium BC (ABOVE) and clay pellets for slingshots from the Middle Neolithic (mid 6th millennium BC) from Chaeronea (BELOW).*





*Hoard of bronze tools (ABOVE) and a set of bronze needles (MIDDLE AND RIGHT PAGE) and spearheads of the Early Bronze Age, from Thebes. Second half of the 3rd millennium BC.*



# BOEOTIA IN THE EARLY BRONZE AGE

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*New ideas, crops and technologies*

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**T**HE TRANSITION FROM THE FINAL NEOLITHIC OR CHALCOLITHIC TO THE FIRST PHASE OF THE EARLY BRONZE Age (3200/3100-2700 BC) took place in Boeotia, as it did elsewhere, slowly and imperceptibly, without being accompanied by any phenomenon detectable through archaeological research. The character of the early centuries of this new period was markedly sub-Neolithic. In essence, it constituted an unbroken continuum from the previous era, with small changes and inventions. The occupations, crops, diet, housing, tools, jewellery and all manifestations of the material culture in general remained the same, with minor changes in the variety of handmade, monochrome pottery shapes.

On the territory of Boeotia, the occupied sites of the Final Neolithic continued to exist and, at some crucial points, new settlements were established, also with few inhabitants. However, the general physical pattern of scattered habitation did not change. People continued to be densely clustered around the Copais Basin as before; at the same time the human presence was reinforced on the Theban plain, on lakeshores and on the Boeotian coast facing Euboea. It is obvious from the foregoing that habitation growth was gradually shifting from the hinterlands outwards, towards the eastern edges of Boeotia, through which passed the trade and communications networks with Euboea, the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean.

At that period, when the Aegean was timidly passing from the age of stone to that of metal, dynamic centres of development in Mesopotamia and later in the cities of the Nile Valley had already gone through the processes of urbanisation and a controlled economy, and had created the conditions needed for rapid production growth. At the same time they began to use script and to keep records.

The Early Bronze Age in the Aegean region covered the third millennium BC in its entirety. However, the swift development of the various components of its first “high” civilisation took place during its second, mature





*Clay vases of the Early Bronze Age from Lithares (LEFT) and Thebes (RIGHT). Mid 3rd millennium BC.*

phase (2700-2200 BC). On the islands and mainland alike, it was manifested in the form of decisive changes in the economy, technology and life, and in the visible and universal prosperity of the settlements and the distinctive, strong households inside them.

These phenomena were fostered by the indirect dissemination of elements imported from the more developed societies of the East. As they moved westwards, they were eventually dispersed through the entire geographical area of the Aegean, via the islands and maritime communications. The main features of the new technological advances included the use of metals, a wider variety of agricultural output, monumental architecture, the use of seals in administration and large-scale public works. Copper, the most useful metal in prehistory, had by then been disseminated all over Greece, together with the knowledge of techniques for processing it.

The economy was primarily based on systematic and widespread agriculture, with a variety of crops and a production surplus that may have been redistributed. In particular, the cultivation of grapes and olives in the Aegean region, starting from Crete, appears to have had a serious impact on the physical and social landscape. The contribution made by breeding domesticated livestock was likewise important, while hunting, fishing and the seasonal gathering of fruit and nuts supplemented people's diet. Specialised sectors of production, with pottery ever present at the top, included metalworking, weaving, carpentry, stone masonry, basketry and other similar manual occupations. Imported products suggest the significant role of networks of trade and communications with the Cyclades, the Aegean and the Peloponnese, by means of recently established trading posts on the Euboean and Corinthian Gulf coasts.

Distinct examples of the organised urbanisation and fortification of settlements or of some powerful households are then recorded in Boeotia and elsewhere. At the same time crop enhancement created conditions in which output was systematically stored and the surplus possibly distributed. It has been confirmed that large quantities



*Clay vases of the Early Bronze Age from Thebes. Second half of the 3rd millennium BC.*

of obsidian were brought from the Cyclades to Boeotia and processed, while tools of various materials continued to be made, now including metal ones from alloys of copper. Analogous know-how, skills and utility are presented by the miscellaneous bone, clay, metal and stone craft products that have been preserved, particularly the pieces of jewellery that are sometimes true works of art. Various hand-crafted artifacts were brought in from the Cyclades, the northern Aegean and the Asia Minor coast, together with the techniques for making them. The result of all these developments was the emergence of populous and organised cities and finally a great burgeoning of the arts and crafts.

Boeotia occupied an eminent position in the main region in which this culture was transmitted, i.e. the Peloponnese, eastern Central Greece and Euboea. On her soil many settlements have come to light with architectural remains and some, as yet unpublished, cemeteries. In the mature Early Helladic II period, new settlements were established on the Boeotian coast facing Euboea as well as in lakeshore or riverside regions, on hills with some rudimentary natural fortification and in passes leading inland from the coast. The most significant sites in Boeotia – Thebes, Orchomenos, Eutresis and Lithares – were inland, built on plains and low hills.

The characteristic feature of the organised settlements or towns of the period was their complex urban layout, which presupposed a corresponding social and financial organisation. Continuous developments in the urban organisation and improved housing have also been confirmed, and a simultaneous leaning has been observed toward monumental architecture and public projects for the benefit of the people. Indeed, during the Early Helladic II period, between 2700 and 2200 BC, some prosperous settlements evolved into cities covering a large area, with dense and organised habitation. Such settlements were Thebes, Eutresis, and perhaps Orchomenos and Lithares in Boeotia, as well as Manika on the opposite Euboean coast near Chalcis. Although our data is still fairly limited, since not one of the sites has been excavated in its entirety together with its cemeteries, it can nonetheless be

Clay vases of the Early Bronze Age from Thebes (ABOVE AND MIDDLE). Second half of the 3rd millennium BC. Pyxis from Lithares (BELOW LEFT) and zoomorphic vase-rhyton from Eutresis (BELOW RIGHT). Mid 3rd millennium BC.



stated indicatively that Tiryns occupied almost six hectares, Eutresis eight, Thebes about 20 and Manika may have covered nearly 80 hectares.

In Boeotia, the only Early Helladic city to have been excavated gradually but over an enormous expanse of its ancient and modern urban fabric is Thebes. The city had an urban organisation worthy of its size, since in the mature Early Helladic II phase it exceeded in magnitude every other city in the broader region of Central Greece. It was thus comparable only with Manika on the coast of Euboea near Chalcis, a city that has also been excavated in sections. In the Early Helladic II period, Thebes consisted of various small settlements built on its hills, which had previously been dispersed over the surrounding plain.

Some monumental buildings, rectangular or apsidal, have been discovered at various points on the Kadmeia citadel which, in some cases, had been fortified by a surrounding wall. Early in the period, rectangular buildings with corridors appear, and in the mature phase, toward the end of the period, some apsidal buildings also appeared. These structures had stout walls and a number of rooms, although it has not yet been proven whether they were used for public purposes, suggesting social stratification and administration with the possible use of seals, or whether they belonged to powerful and organised households. Ordinary houses were, as elsewhere, mainly rectangular, circular or apsidal, with stone foundations and brick or pile-built skeletons, constructed in groups or rows, leaving passageways between blocks.

The Early Helladic tombs known in Boeotia consisted of a hewn approach road (*dromos*) and a chamber. The nature and presence of typical Cycladic findings, including frying-pan vessels, toiletries boxes (*pyxides*), marble cauldrons (*lopades*) and bowls (*phialai*), suggest strong cultural influences from the Cyclades, the northern Aegean and northwestern Asia Minor.

The pottery of the Early Helladic period is exceptional in terms of both its variety and the inventiveness of its shapes. In Eutresis, as in Thebes, a plethora of new shapes appeared. In the hands of the Early Helladic potters of Boeotia, modest handmade ceramic products attest to the craftsman's confidence in moulding the material and selecting the appropriate decoration, burnishing or polishing, and ultimately creating true works of art. A wondrous variety of techniques and types can be ascertained, from the *lopades* and *phialai* (shallow bowls with the rim usually turned inwards), sauceboats and ewers (*prochoi*) of the older groups, up to the



Gold pendants or beads of the Early Bronze Age from a monumental cist grave on Amphion's Hill in Thebes. Late 3rd millennium BC.

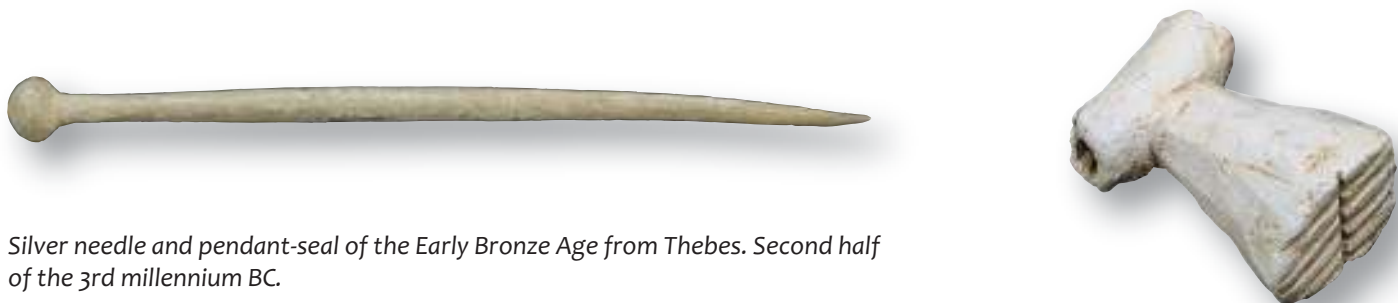


Early Bronze Age clay figurines of oxen from Lithares. Mid 3rd millennium BC.

early slip-painted flask-shaped jugs, one-handled (Trojan) cups, amphora-type goblets, one-handled funnel-shaped vases and water jars (*hydriai*), as well as large and small unpainted storage jars with or without lids.

The final phase of the period arrived without disasters or changes in architecture and with no trace of decline. The dense habitation in central parts of the Kadmeia continued and a wide variety of pottery styles was still produced, with the introduction of unusual painted decoration in the Ayia Marina style, and the manufacture, among other things, of some wheel-made vases, the grey early Minyan ware.

But towards the end of this period and of the third millennium BC, indisputable signs of conflagration are recorded in Thebes, Orchomenos, Eutresis and Drosia on the west coast of the Euboean Gulf. The disruption was not limited to isolated settlements or regions, but extended over a large geographical area. In Thebes, evidence of fierce fires in pottery storerooms has come to light, in one case with human victims. The appearance of the Ayia Marina pottery style suggests the last chronological phase of these events, which may possibly be linked to the advent and activity of people foreign to the population of Boeotia, perhaps the tribes that have, from time to time, been associated by many scholars with the advent of the first Greeks to their subsequent homeland. In any event, what is significant here is that a mature, developed society was destroyed and in its place a new one was established that would require several centuries to reach such a high standard of living, art and technology.



Silver needle and pendant-seal of the Early Bronze Age from Thebes. Second half of the 3rd millennium BC.

The devastation that marked the end of the “cosmopolitan” environment of the Early Helladic period in southern mainland Greece and the islands coincides with the foundation of the main palace complexes on Crete. Crete was probably not affected by the developments but followed an independent course and achieved a high degree of prosperity in the centuries to come. Along the way, it was greatly influenced by the major civilisations of the Orient and transmitted its radiance successively towards the islands and the mainland that are washed by the Aegean Sea.

Towards the end of the period and of the third millennium BC, disasters do not appear to be random and isolated, but sudden; they affected all the settlements at their very peak. It is in fact possible that the destruction was more generalised and signalled the activity of new elements in the broader Helladic region. Some years ago, this destruction and the subsequent changes in living standards, housing and art were interpreted in the light of the arrival of a new race, possibly Greek-speaking, and the predominance of characteristic changes (use of the horse, Minyan ware) that have since been found everywhere in the broader Aegean area, on its east and west coasts alike. This theory and the interpretation of the finds deriving from it constitute a separate object of study.



*Miniature bone statuette of a human figure of the Early Bronze Age from Thebes. It is just 3 cm. high. Second half of the 3rd millennium BC.*



# THE MIDDLE HELLADIC INHABITANTS OF BOEOTIA: LOCAL PEOPLE AND NEWCOMERS

**T**HE BEGINNING OF THE MIDDLE HELLADIC PERIOD (CIRCA 2000-1700 BC) ON THE SOUTHERN GREEK MAINLAND, the central part of which is occupied by Boeotia, coincides chronologically with the establishment of the first palaces in Crete, a development that culminated in the Minoan civilisation. The palaces were the administrative, financial and political centres of large regions of the island; they had contacts and trade with Egypt and Mesopotamia and, like them, made extensive use of archives and seals. It is in fact believed that Minoan radiance and power were expressed in the mythical Minoan *thalassocracy* or maritime supremacy, and in the *pax minoica* that ensured the conditions required for safe shipping and prosperity throughout the entire eastern Mediterranean basin and the countries around it.

Although this latter statement may be somewhat exaggerated, details of the developments that determined the equilibrium in the Aegean are not known, and it is very likely that Cretan supremacy left no room for independent growth and artistic expression by the small island communities that, in the tumult of the new geopolitical conditions, were so overshadowed by their powerful neighbour that the previous authentic creativity of their civilisation was lost.

So while this was the situation prevailing in the Aegean region during the early centuries of the second millennium before Christ, the centuries' long comparative isolation of the Middle Helladic populations and the fact that they did not take any active part in the rapid economic, social and cultural developments and technical advances of their times is a jarring note, and difficult to understand. The conditions of domestic turmoil that prevailed in mainland Greece, in regions and communities that had already experienced the zenith and end of the Early Bronze Age may perhaps have resulted in regression and monotony in sociopolitical processes and cultural expression alike. For at least two centuries, the people of mainland Greece refrained from initiating contacts, and as an inevitable result, networks of communication were not developed with the superior culture of the early Minoan palaces, where a different language may also have been spoken.

It would appear, however, that the conditions needed for the Minoans to pass on their technological and intellectual advances to the Middle Helladic populations had not matured in Crete either. This would not occur until the last centuries of the Middle Helladic Period, and then in a spectacular way. A very significant Middle Helladic settlement already existed on Aegina, while Minyan ware has been discovered on the Aegean islands nearest At-

*Large pithos jar of the Middle Bronze Age with matt-painted decoration. From Eutresis. Early 2nd millennium BC.*





*Vases of the Middle Bronze Age with matt-painted decoration, from Eutresis. Early 2nd millennium BC.*

tica that gradually established more frequent contacts with mainland Greece. Of these islands, Kythera and above all Aegina played an intermediary and decisive role in the transfer of Minoan cultural elements to mainland Greece in the mid-Middle Helladic Period, especially in the early Mycenaean years.

Scholars of Aegean prehistory unanimously describe the early centuries of the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000-1800 BC) as a monotonous period, with visible signs of stagnation, insecurity, introversion, regression, conservatism and relative self-sufficiency in meeting the vital needs of the population. The above descriptions come from comparisons with the previous Early Helladic vigour and prosperity, and with the mature, last Middle Helladic phase (c. 1800-1700 BC), as well as with the Shaft Grave period (c. 1700-1500 BC) that followed it.

Then only were the conditions ripe for the introduction into mainland Greece of many new cultural features that had come from everywhere in the known world. This was certainly a unique conjuncture, in which large numbers of imported works of art and crafts were deposited in the “rich in gold” tombs of Mycenae which, with their contents, were the culmination of the social power of living princes and the ideology of grave gifts to dead ones. In terms of custom, the phenomenon was not isolated and appeared in differing degrees in other parts of Greece. It is encountered, inter alia, in Thebes, Orchomenos, Dramesi and Glypha (Aulis region) and elsewhere on the territory of Boeotia.

The many years of excavation and study of Middle Helladic habitation remains and grave monuments on the Kadmeia citadel of Thebes, and the older, systematic excavations in Orchomenos and Eutresis confirm the full spectrum of the period’s developments and its overall features in Boeotia. Excavation data has shown that, throughout the region, the first two or three centuries of this period constituted a long, quiescent preparation for the future material, technological and cultural changes that followed in its second half. No excavations in Thebes, Orchomenos, Eutresis or elsewhere in Boeotia have unearthed the least evidence of monumental architecture or interest in prestigious, comfortable dwellings and magnificent tombs, collective communal activities, or indications of administration and production with the parallel use of seals and archives. On the contrary, in fact, findings



*Grey Minyan vases of the Middle Bronze Age from Thebes. Early 2nd millennium BC.*

from the settlements and cemeteries of the early Middle Helladic centuries contained nothing but objects that are usually regarded as elementary necessities of daily life.

Archaeological excavations and surface research have proven that Middle Helladic settlements, large and small, were situated throughout the territory of Boeotia, where not only were almost all the Early Helladic sites inhabited, but new ones had also been established, so that the country appears to have been quite densely populated. The most powerful and populous cities, which constituted poles that attracted smaller scattered settlements, were found in Thebes, Orchomenos and Eutresis. In Thebes and Orchomenos, and possibly also in Eutresis which has been explored to a lesser extent, Middle Helladic habitation extended throughout the length and breadth of the land on which the settlement was established.

As can be concluded from the excavations, these settlements were organised in islets of rectangular buildings and planned public areas, cemeteries and roads. It is even speculated that the layout of the city blocks was radial and that buildings were constructed on different levels, following the contour of the hills, as in Pefkakia near Volos and Aspis near Argos. As in the previous period, settlements were established on low or slightly higher hills and included rectangular buildings, and more rarely apsidal ones, with stone foundations, brick superstructure and two or more rooms. Some are in the form of a *megaron* with one small and one larger room, and sometimes a small porch in the entrance. Inside, there were usually hearths, rarely drainage tanks, sometimes ovens for baking bread, as well as grids, terracotta benches and large storage jars.

Cemeteries and isolated graves came to light in all Middle Helladic Boeotian sites that were excavated. In the larger centres (Thebes, Eutresis, Orchomenos) cemeteries were mainly found inside the limits of the settlement, and sometimes between buildings. The graves of infants and children were still being dug between the walls and under the floors of rooms, and we do not know if and when they were used or whether they had been abandoned. In other settlements (Paralimni, Dramesi), however, graves were found outside the limits. The typology of the graves (cist graves, simple pits, brick- and stone-built shaft graves) is common to the entire southern Helladic re-

gion. Cist graves, built with large upright slabs or stones around the sides and with one or more on top, are in greater number everywhere. Usually their dimensions are small, since bodies were buried in a contracted position.

In the later phase of the Middle Helladic period, the dimensions of the graves became larger and were frequently covered by tumuli. Grave goods, which at the beginning of the period were rare, gradually became more numerous and valuable. They included bronze rings and bracelets, beads of semi-precious stones, silver bowls, gold jewellery and warriors' armour with spear tips, knives, long swords, boars' tusk helmets, bows and arrows. From a grave of this era in Orchomenos has come a large bronze pin (*perone*) with a head of rock crystal, similar to pins found in the Mycenaean grave circles.

The lavish grave goods and weaponry usually belonged to the tombs of the last Middle Helladic years, when the living standards and finances of the population had improved. The new ruling class of powerful warriors displayed their wealth and power in a manner hitherto unknown in Greece. Their rich graves, which were discovered in Thebes, Orchomenos and the Aulis region (Dramesi), demonstrate that the rising power of these princes was not confined to the late Middle Helladic, but introduced a new period and new forms of power in the land.

A review of the material culture and art of Middle Helladic Boeotia leads to solid conclusions about the nature and cultural development of the era, based on large amounts of excavation data. Findings of all types, in particular the evolution and coherence of the pottery found on Middle Helladic sites, regardless of the chronological sub-period in question, demonstrate the continuous occupation of the land from the beginning to the end of the era. In the main Boeotian settlements in the form of cities – Thebes, Orchomenos and Eutresis – the most characteristic categories of Middle Helladic pottery are represented by many excellent examples. Wheel-made Minyan ware was clearly modelled on metal objects and is represented by four sub-categories (grey, brown, yellow and red). Grey Minyan ware, the earliest, has been found in the largest quantities, is believed to have been produced in Thebes and Orchomenos, and in large quantities for export. The category of grey Minyan ware, frequently of excellent quality, includes broad, shallow cups with a flat base (*kylikes*), cups with high handles (*kantharoi*), small two-handled vases (*amphoriskoi*) and cups of the Vapheio type. Matt-painted pottery comprises the second most numerous category found in the large Boeotian centres. It includes various types of painted ware, mainly hand-made, with matt decoration and strong local features. The best known are the varieties of the Aeginetan and Argive type and the polychrome ware of Central Greece, which was produced in local workshops in the last phases of the period. The matt-painted ware includes coarse, fine and polychrome decorated vases, a few incised vases of the “Adriatic” type and a plethora of unpainted, coarse ware that was used for household purposes.

Of the small finds, it is worth noting those related to weaving (spindle whorls, loom weights and bobbins), bone tools that are not visibly differentiated from the Early Helladic ones, and the weapons and jewellery encountered in the mature or final phase of the Middle Helladic period, some of which belong to the era of the shaft graves and Grave Circles A and B at Mycenae (c. 1700-1500 BC).

The uniformity observed in residential and funerary architecture, and in the output of pottery, weapons and small findings between the various sites in Boeotia and the other regions of mainland Greece demonstrates both the central role of Boeotia and the long stagnancy of cultural development that is visible everywhere in the Helladic firmament.

It has been proven that the movement or even gradual migration into the region of new population groups – Greek-speaking, Indo-European, northern Helladic or other – had started before the beginning of the Middle Hel-

ladic period and, as usual, took place over a period of centuries. The movement of groups to new sites caused the disruption or disorganisation of existing structures and was clearly visible in all realms of social and financial life. This old hypothesis answers some of the crucial questions raised by excavation data, while at the same time raising others. It is, however, an undisputed fact that the direct or indirect contacts of the Middle Helladic population with Crete, the northeastern Peloponnese and the islands of the Argosaronic Gulf increased after the middle of the period and became more frequent and effective towards the end of it. The success of these contacts secured very rapid development on mainland Greece too, which now participated, as an equal partner, in the prosperity and progress of civilisation.



*Grey proto-Minyan two-handle vase of the Middle Bronze Age from Thebes. Early 2nd millennium BC.*



*Red Minyan kylix of the Middle Bronze Age from Eutresis. Early 2nd millennium BC.*



*Brown Minyan pyxis of the Middle Bronze Age from Eutresis. Early 2nd millennium BC.*

# HELLADIC PRINCES IN CRETAN PURPLE

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## *The state, society and art in Early Mycenaean Boeotia*

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**T**HE GRAVE GOODS FOUND IN THE GRAVE CIRCLES AT MYCENAE WERE UNPRECEDENTED AND SENSATIONAL when first discovered and remain unique in their entirety to this day. Later, however, it was demonstrated that the mass deposition of large numbers of precious objects in the tombs of distinguished persons was a customary phenomenon in most of mainland southern Greece in the early Mycenaean period. These Middle Helladic warrior-princes and their subjects began to develop and progress in the 18th century BC and, after consolidating the seats of their power, they intensified their contacts with the superior Minoan civilisation. Step by step they succeeded in becoming the essential interlocutors and customers of Crete with its new palaces and of the islands near the Greek coast, thereby apparently reaping enormous benefits, in material and above all cultural goods. Later they controlled land and sea routes and revenues, replacing the previous lords throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

The two grave circles, which were used simultaneously for almost a century (c. 1600-1500 BC), left a decisive mark and represented, in terms of both custom and ideology, a critical turning point in the prehistoric Greek world: the Shaft Grave period, which roughly corresponds to three pottery phases (Middle Helladic III, Late Helladic I and IIA) and lasted for more than 150 years (c. 1700-1480 BC).

In Boeotia, as in the rest of southern mainland Greece, the transition from the last Middle Helladic to the Late Helladic period was not marked by ethnological changes, although the migration and settlement of small groups on its territory cannot be ruled out. And since there was no substantial change in the population and its ethnic composition in the previous or subsequent years, it is regarded as virtually certain that the bearers of the country's culture were Greek-speaking, by at least the beginning of the Middle Helladic period.

When Minyan ware was still dominant in central Greece, and the matt-painted pottery style was in use, some graves were found in the cemeteries of Thebes and on the eastern coasts of Boeotia that belonged chiefly to warriors. In the centre of the Kadmeia, a warrior was buried in a tightly contracted position, together with his armour and weaponry, in a built grave that very likely belonged to a large tumulus. Among the objects accompanying him were: pieces of wild boar tusks that had protected his helmet, a spearhead with traces of the wooden shaft, a long sword, a knife with one cutting edge and some arrowheads. His bow, breastplate, greaves and shield had left no traces, as they were made of perishable materials (wood, linen, leather).

Some other official graves from the last years of the Middle Helladic and early Late Helladic period in Thebes contained, in addition to weapons, valuable personal objects belonging to the dead person (a silver *phiale* and jew-

els that had been sewn onto the shroud) and in others, perhaps women's or children's graves, only jewellery of gold or precious stones and openwork bone toys. Toward the end of the Middle Helladic period (after c. 1800 BC), it became customary in Boeotian cemeteries, when depositing grave goods for the dead, to include many clay vases and less frequently metal objects and weapons. The pottery that followed Minyan ware and the polychrome tradition was later enriched in terms of its shapes and decoration with new elements deriving from the contacts of the Helladic population with the Cyclades and Crete.

The Shaft Grave period was manifested and consolidated in Boeotia and, throughout the Bronze Age, embraced its two most important centres, i.e. Thebes and later Orchomenos. Similarly, other centres of local and probably lesser authority may have been Eutresis and the coastal region of Tanagra and Aulis, according to indications from the limited finds in graves and pottery.

Although most of data regarding the early Mycenaean culture of Boeotia and other Helladic areas have been derived from excavations of parts of cemeteries or selected isolated graves, Thebes in recent years, like Messenia in the past, has contributed significant information about the organisation and structure of the society in its settlement. The location, area, population density and the quality and contents of certain buildings have shown that in Thebes, and slightly later in Orchomenos and perhaps on other sites in Boeotia, functions of a higher level had been centralised, together with political and administrative activities that did not exist in the smaller settlements in their districts. It can be concluded from the larger, now monumental and wealthier tombs than the Middle Helladic ones, from the strong buildings with broad, well-constructed stone foundations, from the enormous quantities and fine quality of the ceramic objects found, including some large depository jars, that Boeotia's main city already wielded power over broad, strategic districts in the region. This power may have had the form of control and administration, military protection, secure communications with the coast or hinterlands, exchange of innovative technologies, imports of exotic products and exports or redistribution of surpluses or of some rare Aegean products, such as obsidian. The pottery of the early Mycenaean period reached as far as the archipelago of the Aeolian (now Lipari) Islands and the islet of Vivara in the bay of Naples.

It is obvious that through the above processes and other evolutionary ferments, a ruling elite emerged, who used systematic forms of organisation to administer and store or redistribute agricultural and other commodities, and that this elite possessed and managed power dynamically, although we do not know whether



Long bronze sword, spearhead and dagger blade. Found in a built tomb of the late Middle Bronze Age in Thebes. 18th-17th cent. BC.

it was a hereditary right or won by force of arms. The relationships between its members can be seen in the Mycenaean shaft graves, the tholos tombs of Messenia, the grave mounds in the centre of Argos and Thebes, and finally in a few wealthy tombs at the foot of the Orchomenos acropolis. The presence of powerful leaders – members of dynastic families in the role of princes governing a region, whose seat of authority was a naturally fortified site with control over a network of settlements – is demonstrated by findings from excavations and by comparisons with other cultures of the era in both the Aegean region and outside it, and covers the first two Mycenaean centuries (c. 1700-1500 BC).

Then, the core of the settlement at Thebes covered the whole southern and highest part of the Kadmeia, which does not mean that there were no isolated houses, settlement groups or workshops established on other parts of the acropolis. Significant buildings have been unearthed on its southern half, some of which have many rooms with stout foundations, frequently hewn out of the natural rock, which supported two-storey, brick and wood superstructures. Wealthy homes were equipped with a variety of choice household ware from the Helladic and Minoan tradition in terms of both their shapes and decoration. A little to the north, rich graves were found that very likely belonged to a tumulus placed near the limits or wall of the settlement.

The deposits of superb pottery, the tumuli and the rich early chamber tombs obviously belonged to powerful men from the upper echelons of the local society. In particular the varied and lavish pottery – which combined Minyan and polychrome features, Cycladic inspiration and Cretan influences, as well as imitations and imports – all attest to the cosmopolitan climate of the era and date the Kadmeian buildings and graves to the transitional Shaft Grave period and the early centuries of the Mycenaean civilisation (17th-15th c. BC).

A little later, in the early and middle Mycenaean years (16th-15th c. BC), wealthy chamber tombs were built at Kolonaki, which is right opposite, on the southern and highest part of the Kadmeia, and on the hill of Kastellia. The so-called “Treasure of Thebes”, a hoard of precious gold rings and jewellery that was acquired by the Benaki Museum in 1935, originated in tombs of Theban princes from the same period. Findings from Thebes and Orchomenos dating from that period resembled those of other ruling centres on the southern Greek mainland. Large, gold-decorated weapons and valuable utensils that were tokens of power and prestige, and a multitude of miscellaneous luxury objects, small-scale art and gold artifacts, culminating in signet rings bearing scenes and symbols from the Creto-Mycenaean religion are characteristic of the strength of Helladic kingdoms in the 15th cent. BC.

The fact that such objects have also been found in Boeotia reveals the movement of ideas and works of art and the enterprise of artisans from Crete and mainland Greece in its wealthiest pre-palatial Mycenaean centres. Artisans and ideas would arrive in Thebes and Orchomenos by land and sea from the Euboean Gulf coasts, from ports on the Corinthian Gulf and from Attica. In the transition from the Middle Helladic and Early Mycenaean period, the origin of precious artifacts and craft objects varies. Apart from the local jewellery and pottery found in royal tombs, most of these objects originated from Crete, a few from the Cyclades and the islands near the coast, while others reveal their origin or manufacture from beyond the Aegean. The slow influx of Minoan features became a flood in the 16th cent. BC and brought about a complete change in the traditional establishment. A primary role was played by the islands of Kythera, Aegina and Kea, all located near the mainland coast. Thera had already been destroyed by its volcano. These islands were the bridges with the Aegean and the civilisations across the sea. It goes without saying that the continuous, essential and profitable contacts with Crete and the islands of the archipelago that had fallen under Minoan sway created in time a strong heritage of ideas, know-how and values among the mainland



*Jewellery of gold, sardonyx and blue glass paste.  
Found in graves dating to the beginning of the  
Late Bronze Age in Thebes and Eutresis.  
17th-16th cent. BC.*



Greeks as well as splendid opportunities for accumulating wealth by offering brokerage and other services. Cretan craftsmen worked in mainland Greece, and obviously in Boeotia as well, where they introduced and created fine quality pottery in the Minoan tradition that can be found simultaneously with Middle Helladic decorative motifs and shapes in local imitations and styles. Sophisticated examples of the naturalist style of Cretan pottery are also known from Thera, where superb vases in the Marine and Palace styles have been found.

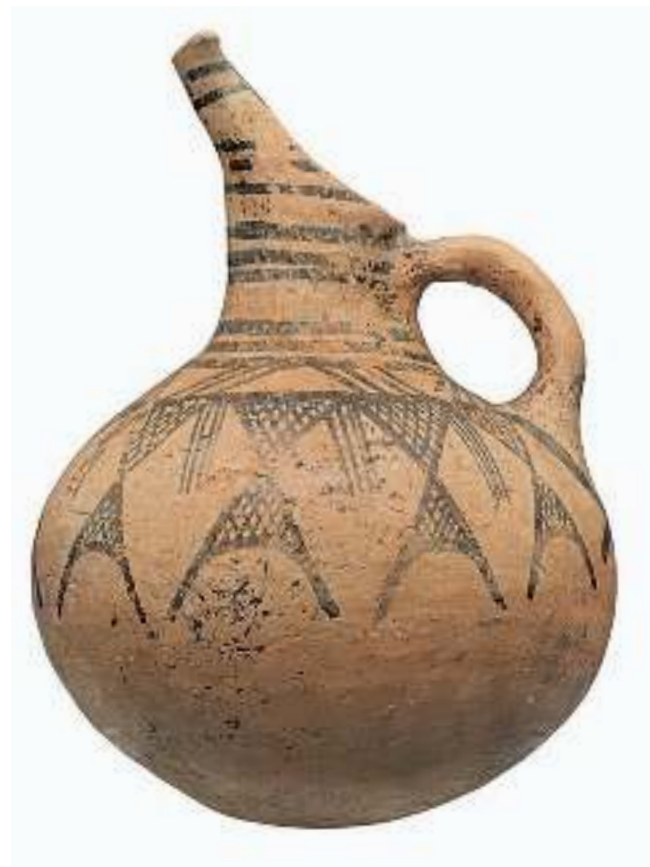
On the Greek peninsula and on its neighbouring islands, as well as at Knossos, a marked syncretism of ideas and artistic expression prevailed in the 15th cent. BC. The full and constant assimilation of elements from the Cretan culture caused artistic and intellectual creation to acquire an undifferentiated Creto-Mycenaean character. The mainland Greek social and cultural environment, which was by then permeated with Minoan features, had already, a few decades before the Mycenaean palace period, begun to manifest some of the latent trends characteristic of its later art and ideology: i.e. stylization, abstraction and tectonicity.

The emergence of Creto-Mycenaean art cannot be explained without permanent, vital relations and exchanges with Crete. There newer palaces and luxury villas continued to thrive; Linear A script was widely used and disseminated to the “Minoan” trading posts of the Aegean (Kythera, Kea, Melos, Thera, Samothrace, Miletus), and arts and crafts flourished to serve the ordinary, everyday needs for





*Five vases found in graves from the beginning of the Late Bronze Age on the citadel of Thebes (Kadmeia) and a jug (prochous) from Pelagia in Phthiotis (LOWER RIGHT), 17th cent. BC.*



decoration, worship and the display of power. The Minoan Linear A script slowly gave way to Linear B, a valuable tool in rendering the early form of the Greek language. Minoan script was adapted to meet the needs of the early Mycenaean Greek dialect in a place and under conditions that are unknown to this day. However, many strong indications point to Knossos and to the possible establishment of mainland princes there.

The heyday of wealth and power expressed in the tombs, buildings and objects found at Thebes and Orchomenos was the natural concomitant of their upward course, which was manifested in all sectors in a continuous and dynamic manner, from the 17th to the 15th cent. BC. At the end of the period, developments in Boeotia had come full circle, paving the way for the brilliant Mycenaean palatial period (c. 1400-1200 BC) to follow.

*Storage stirrup jar in the "Marine" style and a three-lug piriform jar in the "Palace" style from the Mycenaean cemeteries of Thebes. 16th-15th cent. BC.*





Early Mycenaean vases (stirrup jar, piriform jar and jug) of the "Palace" style found in cemeteries of the period in Thebes. 16th-15th cent. BC.



Early Mycenaean vases (prochoi, alabastron and goblet) from the cemeteries of the period in Thebes. 16th-15th cent. BC.



# CITADELS, PALACES, ARCHIVES

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## *The heyday of Boeotia in the Mycenaean palatial period*

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**T**HE LAST THREE CENTURIES (14TH-12TH) OF THE BRONZE AGE IN THE AEGEAN ARE BEST KNOWN IN RELATION to the centuries immediately before and after. In addition to material remains, light has also been shed on this culture by comparison with contemporary data from the broader eastern Mediterranean region. However, regarding the 14th and 13th centuries BC, during which the Mycenaean palatial centres operated in mainland Greece (Argolis, Boeotia, Messenia, Laconia, Magnesia) and on Crete (Knossos, Chania), a third source of authentic information has been added to the two cited above: the texts of archives in Linear B script. Ancient Greek literature, especially epic poetry, contains only dim reflections of the material and intellectual culture of the early historical period and has thus made no more than a minimal and rather symbolic contribution to clarifying their obscurities.

By the second half of the 15th cent. BC, after more than two centuries of schooling in the Minoan civilisation, the inhabitants of regions in the southern and central part of mainland Greece had absorbed most of its features, and, in conjunction with their own, older wellsprings, had shaped their particular cultural identity, a fresh and potent amalgam of choices and values. Then it appears that the conditions were ripe for establishing organised political and administrative systems modelled on those of the Cretans and the peoples of the East.

Thus, by about 1400 BC, or shortly afterwards, monumental tholos or chamber tombs had already been built on the main sites on which the local monarchies flourished in the early Mycenaean period, the first citadels were constructed, usually fortified with Cyclopean walls, and magnificent palaces were being planned. Some decades later and throughout the following century, in all the emerging palace centres, Linear B script began to be disseminated, a tool appropriate for the rudimentary recording of the Mycenaean Greek dialect and for keeping administrative and accounting records. The precise order and dynamics of these developments in governance, accounting and technology, as well as the officials that gradually implemented them in the different palace centres during this particular period, are still unknown.

At that time, a few local princes appeared to have acquired sufficient wealth, power and influence to enable them to impose their rule over the others. Several devastating conflagrations in important early centres like Thebes may be signs of civil power struggles. The result of the changes and the full spectrum of the new, centralised political system are revealed in the following 13th century BC, which coincides with the maximum sphere of Myce-

*Ivory plaque showing a hunting or procession scene. The Mycenaean (princes?) are depicted without a helmet, mounted on a chariot (diphros). Included as part of the scene are hunting dogs and curved altars. From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.*



*Minoan-type limestone “horn of consecration” from the Mycenaean citadel of Gla. The other half of the pair has not been preserved. They may have crowned the roof of a palatial building. 13th cent. BC.*



*A fragment of a stone window or door frame with spiral decoration. From the Mycenaean palatial building of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.*

naean influence on the mainland and around the coast of the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Then, before any signs of decline had appeared and before attrition set in – after which the countdown began for the dissolution of the palaces and the political and economic system that sustained them – intense construction activity can be observed throughout Mycenaean territory. At critical points, new walled citadels were built or old ones expanded with monumental entrances, underground springs, gateways and tunnels; roads, bridges and watchtowers were inaugurated, and finally major land improvement, road-building, fortification and construction works were carried out in the Copais Basin and on the island of Gla (now Kastro) in Boeotia. At that same period, and specifically in the first half of the 13th century, a few more monumental tombs were built, such as the glorious and highly decorated tholos tomb of Orchomenos, as well as new additions to palaces or renovations to the older ones on the chief Mycenaean sites, among which were Mycenae, Tiryns, Pylos, Ayios Vassilios in Laconia near Sparta, Thebes and Orchomenos.

The use of Linear B script was now widespread around the main palatial complexes for keeping records and marking the stirrup jars that contained goods to be transported. There are in fact grounds for suspecting that precisely dated groups of texts are limited to the 13th cent. BC. It is noted indicatively that in Thebes, archival texts have been found at seven different places in the walled acropolis, quite far apart, and all dated to this period. Moreover, the Kadmeia at Thebes has yielded more painted jars for transporting oil and more clay sealings inscribed in Linear B script than any other site in the Mycenaean world. At the same time it is in third place, after Knossos and Pylos, in terms of the number of tablets bearing texts in Linear B.

According to information derived from the archives, the Mycenaean citadels and main palatial complexes, like their eastern contemporaries and older Min-

oan models, retained a large workforce that included senior officials, many functionaries, priests, soldiers and seamen, artisans of all skills, farmers and stock breeders, and personnel of both sexes, who were required to support and run the political, economic and administrative sector of the centralized system at home, as well as its enterprises overseas. From comparison with the data from Pylos, it has been calculated that there were between eight and ten thousand people in the service of the palace or dependent on it, within and around the acropolis of Thebes.

From the outset, Heinrich Schliemann turned his excavating interest towards Boeotia, to which the epic narratives of the Theban and Minyan myths ascribed a primary role. Accompanied by his wife Sophia, he excavated the famous tholos tomb of Orchomenos (1880), part of whose entrance and lintel had always been visible. The fact is that Boeotia constituted a primary seat of authority and cornerstone of the Mycenaean palatial world and, during its two-century heyday, boasted at least two primary, sovereign centres, Thebes and Orchomenos, each one an important focal point of power on its own territory. There are also indications of another two active, perhaps secondary, contemporary centres, one in Eutresis, near historic Leuctra, the other in the Tanagra region.

Thebes and Orchomenos controlled the crucial hubs of communication with the hinterlands and outlets to the sea, with many settlements in between and ports on the north and south Euboean Gulf, as well as communications beyond, with the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean. In addition, Thebes had access to the Corinthian Gulf through Eutresis, and to the ports and routes to Kreusis (Livadostra), for contacts with the Peloponnese.

The leading role of Thebes is undisputed and is embodied in the three basic features of its palatial power. It had a spacious walled citadel, royal tombs and a palace with multiple sections and outbuildings, and extensive archives. Its internal and overseas financial and cultural contacts are corroborated by inscriptions and finds. Built on a fertile and attractive site, it was for many years a prosperous, extensive settlement and ultimately constituted a robust palatial centre, capital of a large territory. Safe in its citadel, it developed slowly into a political and military power that dominated central Greece and appears to have played a significant role among the contemporary great powers (Hittites, Egyptians, Assyrians, Syrians and Palestinians). A network of dependent primary and secondary, inland, coastal and border settlements on the plains and in semi-mountainous regions linked it with all of Boeotia and perhaps with much of central mainland Greece, Euboea, Attica and the Peloponnese, thus reinforcing its contacts with other powers on the Greek peninsula, with the Aegean and through it with countries on the eastern Mediterranean coast.

The densely-built Kadmeia was laid out amphitheatrically on the uneven contours of the acropolis and occupied almost its entire area. It is surmised that it housed not only the workshops and outbuildings of the palace but also lodgings for the numerous staff members, who were somehow dependent on it. Traces of the various palatial structures, which suffered the devastating effects of a fire in about 1200 BC, provide a reliable picture of their construction, as well as of the wealth, power, organisation and international contacts of their lords. The sections of the main buildings of the palatial complex that have been excavated to date are not, however, sufficient to provide us with the complete ground plan of an organic whole, such as the one found at Eglanos near Pylos.

The building unearthed by the Keramopoulos excavation, known as the “House of Kadmos”, appears to have had the infrastructure and contents of a special workshop and storeroom, possibly with some religious associations and functions. Finds of a similar nature were discovered in the “Armoury” and on the ground floor of the stout central complex known as the “New Kadmeion” palace, of which only the “Treasury” and “Storeroom of the Pithoi” have come to light, and perhaps the section where wool was processed in the so-called “Archives”.



Another well-constructed building near the highest point on the citadel has some impressive features, despite the fact that it is almost totally in ruins. Its heavy roof of cover tiles and pantiles, the precursor of the tiling system of the historic period, was supported by thick walls.

Many of these buildings were decorated with wall paintings of all sizes which, in terms of their high quality and multiple themes, rivalled those of the great palatial centres of the Peloponnese. In the unlooted layers left by the sudden destruction of the palace buildings, a multitude of objects have been preserved from people's daily lives, revealing their occupations, religion, military activity, leisure and entertainment. A few choice weapons, pieces of jewellery or personal goods were intended to demonstrate the power, luxurious living and prestige of the lords.

Through the wealth, art, intellectual and possibly political leadership of the Thebes palace, Mycenaean Boeotia is presented overall as a multiple and powerful art workshop, where technological and ideological innovations developed uninterruptedly over about 200 years, in the 14th and 13th century BC. Apart from the enormous quantities of pottery of all sizes and shapes – especially the characteristic symposium ware and containers for the perfume trade, ordinary drinking cups and storage stirrup jars respectively, where the pictorial style is rare, especially scenes of people and animals – objects of daily use, for decoration, as toiletries and as tokens of prestige or luxury, are displayed in an endless parade.

The central palatial buildings at the same time played a role corresponding to that of storerooms or vaults today (Homer's word is *thalamos*). According to the customs prevailing then, they contained hoards of precious jewellery, new, old or defective utensils, measures of weight, wooden furnishings and fittings for chariots with valuable inlays, equestrian equipment, military gear, defensive and offensive weapons and toys, but also costly precious or semi-precious raw materials. These objects, some of which were real heirlooms used to display one's prestige, were found lying in a frequently undifferentiated relationship with piles of utilitarian or useless objects, and residues from the processing of exotic materials.

During the excavations, some artifacts came to light in groups or categories, just as they had been stored and hoarded. The collection of ivory artifacts from the "Armoury" is associated with prestigious harness fittings for princely chariots or the decoration of furniture with attachments and inlays in wood. One is reminded of the lines from the Iliad about the role of similar royal heirlooms in Archaic societies.

*... clear ivory  
to be the cheekpiece of a chariot team.  
though troops of horsemen long to bear it,  
the artifact lies in a storeroom, kept  
for a great lord, a splendour doubly prized –  
his team's adornment and his driver's glory.*

(ILIAD 4, 142-145)

Likewise important, and linked with the previous group, was another large but less numerous collection of defensive and offensive weapons from the same site. Indicative of aristocratic requirements, it contained armour for two or three men, each of whom owned one or more chariots. The spear and arrowheads signify military operations, parades and the hunts for wild boar or deer that were so popular among the elite. The weapons and har-



PAGES 67–69: Fragments of a miniature wall painting depicting a boar hunt, from Orchomenos. 13th cent. BC.





ness fittings found in Thebes had counterparts at Mycenae and Hattusa, the Hittite capital, and may have been brought to Kadmeia as imports or exotic gifts.

Also hoarded and mostly imported from the eastern ports of the Mediterranean were the precious gold jewellery, exotic blue stones (lapis lazuli) and cylinder seals of Oriental origin, as well as local seals from the “Treasury”. This was part of a magnificent building, whose ground floor was built entirely of stone, with an upper floor, ground-floor storerooms and archives of Linear B tablets and similarly inscribed sealings. The finds and construction of the building argue for its candidacy as the central palatial building on the Kadmeia.

The groups of Theban tablets and sealings bearing inscriptions in Linear B offer abundant proof of the panorama of activities by the palace’s administrative and bureaucratic system, which employed a large number of well-trained officials and clerks in its daily operation. There are occasional references in their texts to locations inside and outside Boeotia, to religious events, secular ceremonies and product offerings to the personnel of the religious sphere, which is understood as integrally linked with politics and was probably an extension of it. On the contrary, the large group of commercial stirrup jars – which bear painted inscriptions in Linear B, declaring the origin, ownership or organisation responsible for their dispatch – confirms the large-scale importation of olive oil from western Crete to Boeotia.

The beautiful grave goods that were salvaged from the plundered cemeteries of chamber tombs around the Kadmeia included artifacts credited to the high art of the palace workshops as well as some objects from overseas contacts and exchanges. Moreover, the particularities of grave monuments and funeral practices in Thebes, Orchomenos and especially Tanagra resulted from different sources and objects and at the same time introduced a plethora of new data regarding the earthly life of the lords and their subjects, embellished and grafted with the worries and beliefs of other places and peoples about their fate after death.

The total absence of tholos tombs in Thebes, unless it is due simply to the difficulty of finding the appropriate construction material, is indeed surprising. But the chamber tomb on the hill of Megalo Kastelli, the largest of its type, unique also owing to the rich painted decoration of its interior walls and entrance, very probably belonged to the supreme ruling local elite, as attested by the valuable but scanty remains of its grave goods. From these meagre data, it can be concluded that both this and the other monumental chamber tombs in Thebes apparently met the needs of the local dynasty. However, notwithstanding its painted decoration, this princely tomb, like the others in Thebes and the Peloponnese similar to it, lacks the magnificence and brilliance of the tholos tomb in Orchomenos, famous for its architecture and sculpted decoration, the legendary “Treasury of Minyas”, an exact parallel of which is the famous “Treasury of Atreus” at Mycenae.

The monument and its unique relief decoration, which covers the facing of the lateral burial chamber, could alone have proved the presence of a powerful and refined elite in the palace of Orchomenos, whatever their as yet undefined relations with the Theban dynasty may have been. The arguments, as well as the questions, about the role of Orchomenos are increasing. The palace building and famous royal tomb belonged to it; and the gigantic drainage and land-improvement works in the Copais Basin, crowned by the enormous citadel at Gla, with its odd

administration buildings and granaries, were also situated in the direct sphere of Orchomenian influence. The unprecedented decoration of the megalithic tomb, the miniature wall paintings of the hunt from the palace quarters near the church of the Panaghia at Skripou and their contemporary seascapes from the official buildings at Gla testify to a known, common cultural and artistic tradition dating to the years of the most widespread Mycenaean influence. Themes and models that originated in Crete were initially shaped in the large palatial centres of the Peloponnese, then, both early and later, travelled to Thebes and ended up even farther north at Orchomenos and Gla, in the remotest nook of Copais.

From the archival evidence, the information about the world around the Mycenaean, the visible monuments and the excavation discoveries, some conclusions can be reached about the elite in the dynastic centres of the Peloponnese, Crete and Boeotia, and probably of southeastern Thessaly as well. Power in small or large states was wielded by ruling groups with a pyramidal organisation, headed by the *Fanax* (king), while administrative and other duties in the centre or periphery were assigned to other holders of office through blood, marriage or lineage, in accordance with the models of the great powers of the era in the broader Aegean region.

The economy too was centralized and controlled by officials of the palace bureaucracy, likewise modelled on contemporary eastern monarchical systems. They were firmly rooted in primary agricultural and livestock production but were sustained by other, vibrant resource sectors. Crafts and fine arts supported the intermediary, land-based and above all overseas trade. At the end of the 13th century, or a little later, the foreign branch of trade may have been disrupted and even wiped out altogether, owing to unforeseen developments and a series of setbacks in either its traditional seat of authority or in distant destinations.

The causes and details of the decline, destruction and definitive abandonment of the Mycenaean palatial complexes and the walled citadels around them at the end of the 13th century BC, are not known and may never be known. There are, however, many different hypotheses to explain this historical phenomenon. The real reason, consisting probably of multiple factors and situations, eludes us. The decline and fall of these hydrocephalous centralized systems, together with any achievements they preserved and enjoyed, naturally created conditions of degradation and stagnancy in all realms of the cultural spectrum. In the century to come, the 12th cent. BC, there were some temporary glimmers of light, solely local in range and of limited economic significance; but they were unable to stop or even to influence the new historical and social conditions either geographically or chronologically.



*Necklace of gold amphiconical beads from the Mycenaean cemeteries of Thebes. 14th-13th cent. BC.*

Gold-mounted lentoid sealstone of agate showing a lion attacking a bull. From Orchomenos. 14th cent. BC.



Gold-mounted lentoid sealstone of jasper depicting two animals. From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 14th-13th cent. BC.





Lentoid sealstones of agate from Orchomenos (LOWER LEFT) and from the Mycenaean cemeteries of Thebes (ABOVE, BELOW, MIDDLE AND RIGHT). They portray a seated deer, a running bull with its head turned back, pigs and a lion with marked torsion of the body. 15th-13th cent. BC.



FOLLOWING TWO PAGES: Necklace of faience beads (LEFT) and gold necklace beads (RIGHT) from the acropolis and the Mycenaean cemeteries of Thebes. 15th-13th cent. BC.









Gold necklaces and necklace beads from the acropolis  
and the Mycenaean cemeteries of Thebes.  
15th-13th cent. BC.



NEXT TWO PAGES:  
*Gold jewellery from  
the acropolis and the Mycenaean  
cemeteries of Thebes. 15th-13th cent. BC.*



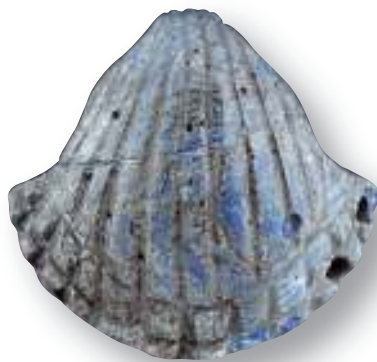




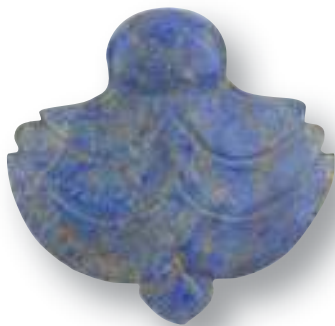
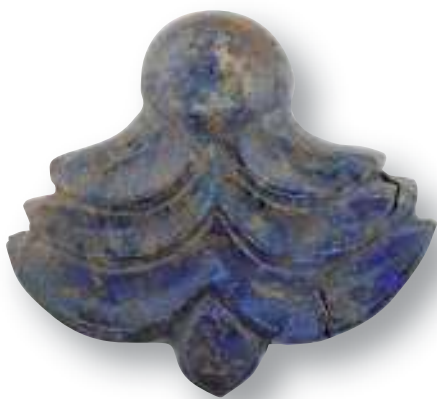
Necklace beads and sealstones of agate. The sealstones depict a griffin and a bull-leaping scene.  
From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.



Agate plaques bearing the head of a lioness and part of a wing, perhaps belonging to an imaginary creature.  
From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes.  
14th-13th cent. BC.



Jewellery of blue glass paste and lapis lazuli. From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.





Kassite (LEFT) and Hittite (RIGHT) cylinder seals of lapis lazuli from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. The former depicts a bearded god holding two rivers in his hands. On the latter are Hittite deities with their attributes. 14th and 13th cent. BC respectively.



Cypriot (LEFT) and Kassite (RIGHT) cylinder seals of lapis lazuli from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. On the former, a sphinx is leaning on the knees of an enthroned female divinity. The latter depicts a bearded god, two rivers and a two-headed hawk. 13th cent. BC.





Mitannian (ABOVE LEFT) and Kassite (ABOVE RIGHT, TWO VIEWS) cylinder seals of lapis lazuli from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. On the former, griffins are holding a throne under a winged sun. On the latter, a hero is holding two wild goats. The scene is flanked by a sacred tree. 14th and 13th cent. BC respectively.



Cypro-Aegean type (LEFT) and Cypriot (LOWER RIGHT) cylinder seals of lapis lazuli from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. On the former is a griffin attacking a deer. On the latter a winged female figure is holding a kid and dog. 14th and 13th cent. BC respectively.



NEXT TWO PAGES: Synthesis of scenes from the Oriental cylinder seals found in the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes.









Two pieces of decorative ivory elements from an item of unidentified furniture. From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.



Decorative ivory pieces of exceptional quality and workmanship imitating the goldsmith's art. From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.



LEFT PAGE: Superbly worked ivory plaque with a heraldic scene of antithetically grouped wild goats. From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 14th and 13th cent. BC.





Part of an ivory handle bearing a relief griffin's head. From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. A work probably imported from the East (Syria). 14th-13th cent. BC.



Group of lead, haematite, basalt, steatite and probably marble weights. Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.

Ivory pyxis with pairs of heraldic sphinxes on two of its sides and tiny shell-shaped handles. From a royal tomb in Thebes. 14th-13th cent. BC





*Lid of an ivory pyxis showing a lion mauling a bull. From the Mycenaean cemeteries of Thebes. 14th-13th cent. BC.*





*Bronze utensils and tools (two-edged axes, chisels, sickles), as well as the handle of a phiale decorated with relief shells (MIDDLE RIGHT), from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.*



Harness accessories from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes: ivory and bronze cheek pieces (ABOVE) and bronze bridle (BELOW). 13th cent. BC.



Bronze knife with an ivory handle attached to the blade by three bronze studs. From an annex of the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.



Bronze Mycenaean spear and arrowheads from the palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.





*Large page-shaped Linear B tablet from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. It records the delivery of hides to artisans for processing. 13th cent. BC.*



*Intact leaf-shaped Linear B tablet from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. It records the dispatch of wine from the palace to another place in the state, perhaps a sanctuary. 13th cent. BC.*



*Intact page-shaped Linear B tablet from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. It records the distribution of seed grain and edible olives from the palace to various places, among which are Thebes and Eleon. 13th cent. BC.*



*Upper right fragment of a large page-shaped Linear B tablet from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. The names of men are recorded individually or in groups. 13th cent. BC.*



*Virtually intact leaf-shaped Linear B tablet from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes, recording 13 pieces of woven goods. 13th cent. BC.*



*Virtually intact Linear B tablet from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. It records the dispatch of wool from the palace to two female weavers, one of whom was in Amarynthos (Euboea). 13th cent. BC.*



Clay sealings inscribed in Linear B script from Mycenaean palatial buildings of Thebes. The middle one was stamped with a gold ring. They depict: bull-leaping (LEFT), donkey-headed daemons in front of a seated deity (MIDDLE) and a god with a sacred sphinx (RIGHT). 13th cent. BC.



Clay sealings with inscriptions in Linear B script from the palatial buildings of Thebes. The upper one records the place name "Karystos"; the one below, the name of Thebes with the suffix -de (Thebasde, to Thebes). 13th cent. BC.



Clay sealings from the palatial buildings of Thebes. The one above bears a heraldic representation of two lions with the same head standing on a bull's head. The one below was stamped by a gold signet ring with a heraldic scene of bulls on either side of a tree. 13th cent. BC.



Inscribed clay sealing from the Mycenaean palatial building of Thebes. The side stamped with the seal bears the ideogram of a ram, and on one of its sides is the inscription "ιερό" (i.e. sacred). 13th cent. BC.



RIGHT PAGE: Storage stirrup jars inscribed in Linear B script, from the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. The inscriptions refer to the producer of the commodity (oil), the site of its production and its sender. In one case, (BELOW) the commodity is described as being "of the palace". 13th cent. BC.





Rectangular clay object with two holes for hanging and painted representations of fish on all its sides. Perhaps part of a Mycenaean game. From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.

Part of a clay bathtub with a fish painted inside it. From the Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.





Rectangular clay object with painted palm trees and chequerboards alternating on its long sides. Perhaps part of a Mycenaean game. Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.



Head of a wheel-made, cylindrical, anthropomorphic figurine. From the Mycenaean acropolis of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.



Elaborate stone vase of serpentine, with an added neck fitted onto its body. From a Mycenaean palatial building of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.

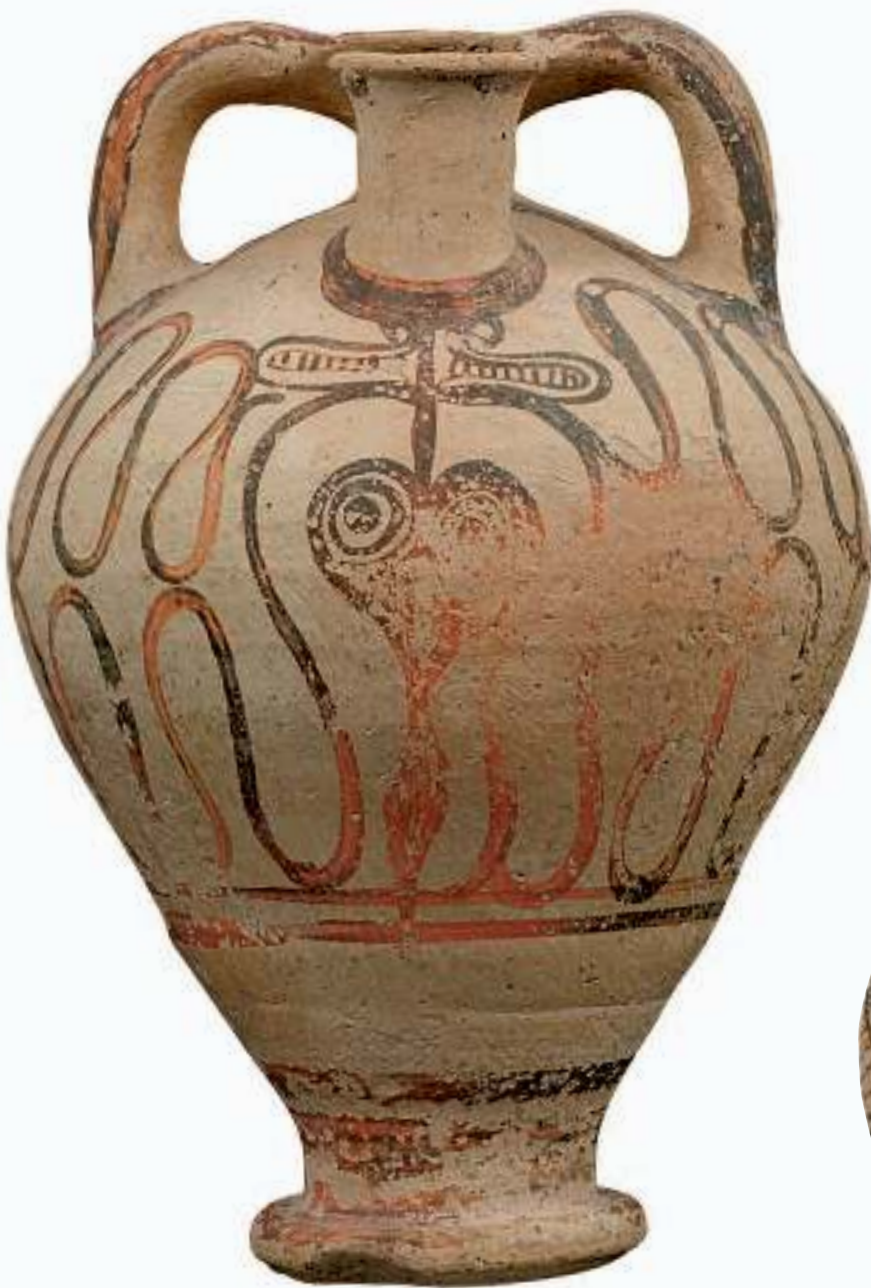




Twin alabastron-shaped pyxis from the Mycenaean cemetery of Tanagra. 13th cent. BC.



Skyphos with painted spiral decoration from the excavation of the sanctuary of Heracles on the south side of the Kadmeia (Thebes). 13th cent. BC.



Storage stirrup jar decorated with a stylised octopus motif. Mycenaean palatial complex of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.



Ring-shaped askos decorated with fish drawn in outline and with shading. From the Mycenaean cemetery of Tanagra. 13th cent. BC.



Figurines of the Psi and T type from the Mycenaean cemeteries of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.

Head of a wheel-made figurine of an ox from the Mycenaean acropolis of Thebes. 13th cent. BC.





Clay coffin (larnax) with cover and four moulded winged, hybrid creatures in its corners. From the Mycenaean cemetery of Tanagra. 13th cent. BC.



Clay larnax from the Mycenaean cemetery of Tanagra with representations of scenes from the life of the dead person, from his funeral and graveside lamentation. This particular burial larnax contained the body of a young man and some scenes on it may have been related to rites of passage. They include representations of mourners, boxing, bull-leaping, hunting and a chariot procession. On the narrow sides are mourners and the burial of the deceased. 13th cent. BC. On the following pages are details of these scenes.





















Clay larnax from the Mycenaean cemetery of Tanagra. Mourning women are depicted on its four sides. Detail on the previous page and on the two following ones. 13th cent. BC.







Clay larnax from the Mycenaean cemetery of Tanagra with women lamenting, human figures and bulls on both sides of a palm tree. 13th cent. BC. On the next page are details of the scenes.







Clay larnax from the Mycenaean cemetery of Tanagra. On one long side is depicted the laying out (prothesis) of the deceased. Detail (ABOVE) of the main scene. 13th cent. BC.





Clay larnax from the Mycenaean cemetery of Tanagra. On the long sides are processions of women in the characteristic gesture of mourners. The next two pages show details of the mourners' procession heading to the right. 13th cent. BC.







Clay larnax from the Mycenaean cemetery of Tanagra. Three female figures in profile are visible behind a window. (Detail on the right page.) 13th cent. BC.







Clay larnax from the Mycenaean cemetery of Tanagra. On each of its long sides a sphinx is depicted on the left, between palm trees and subsidiary motifs. One of the sphinxes (ABOVE) is bearded (male sphinx). 13th cent. BC.



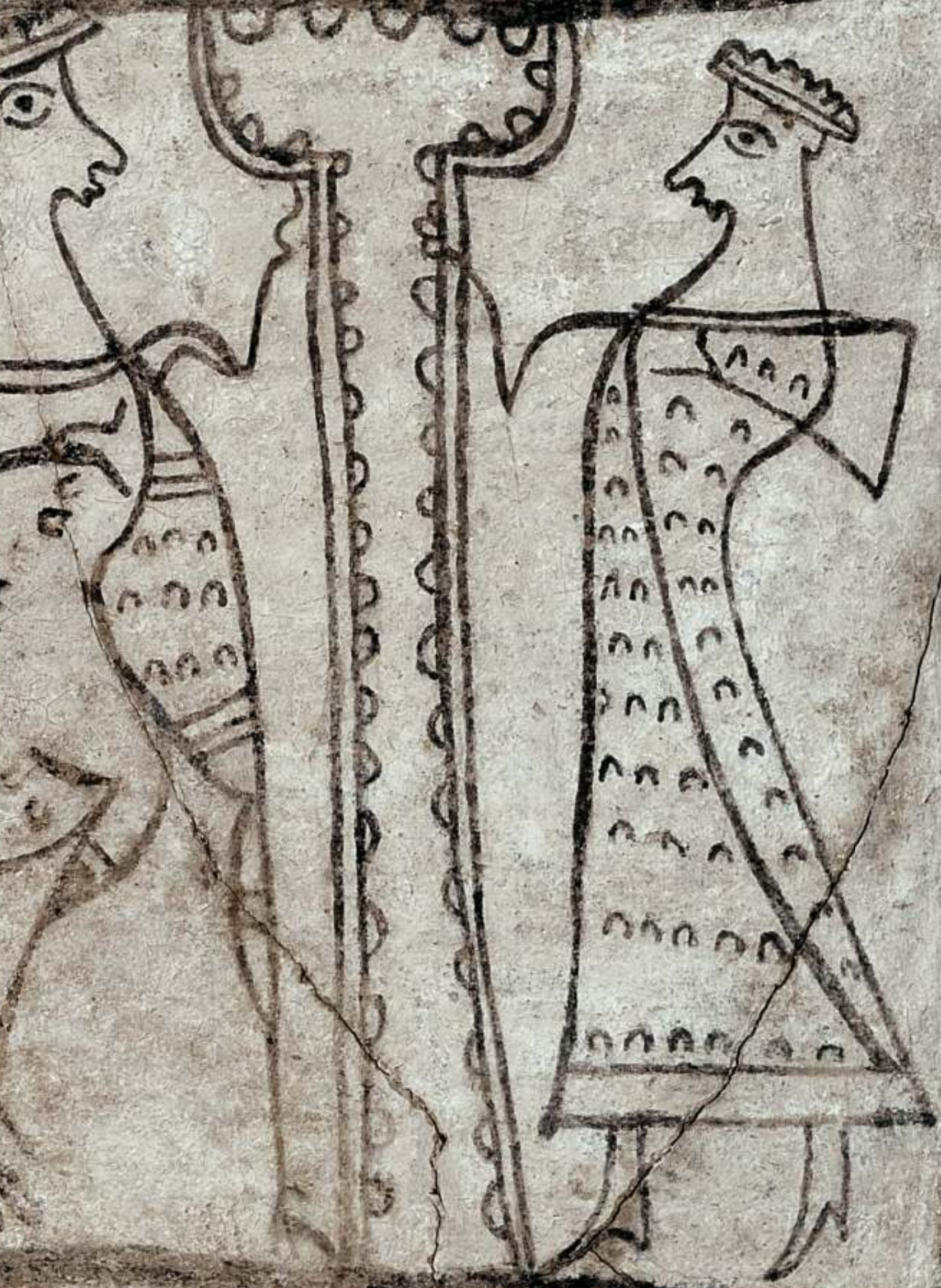


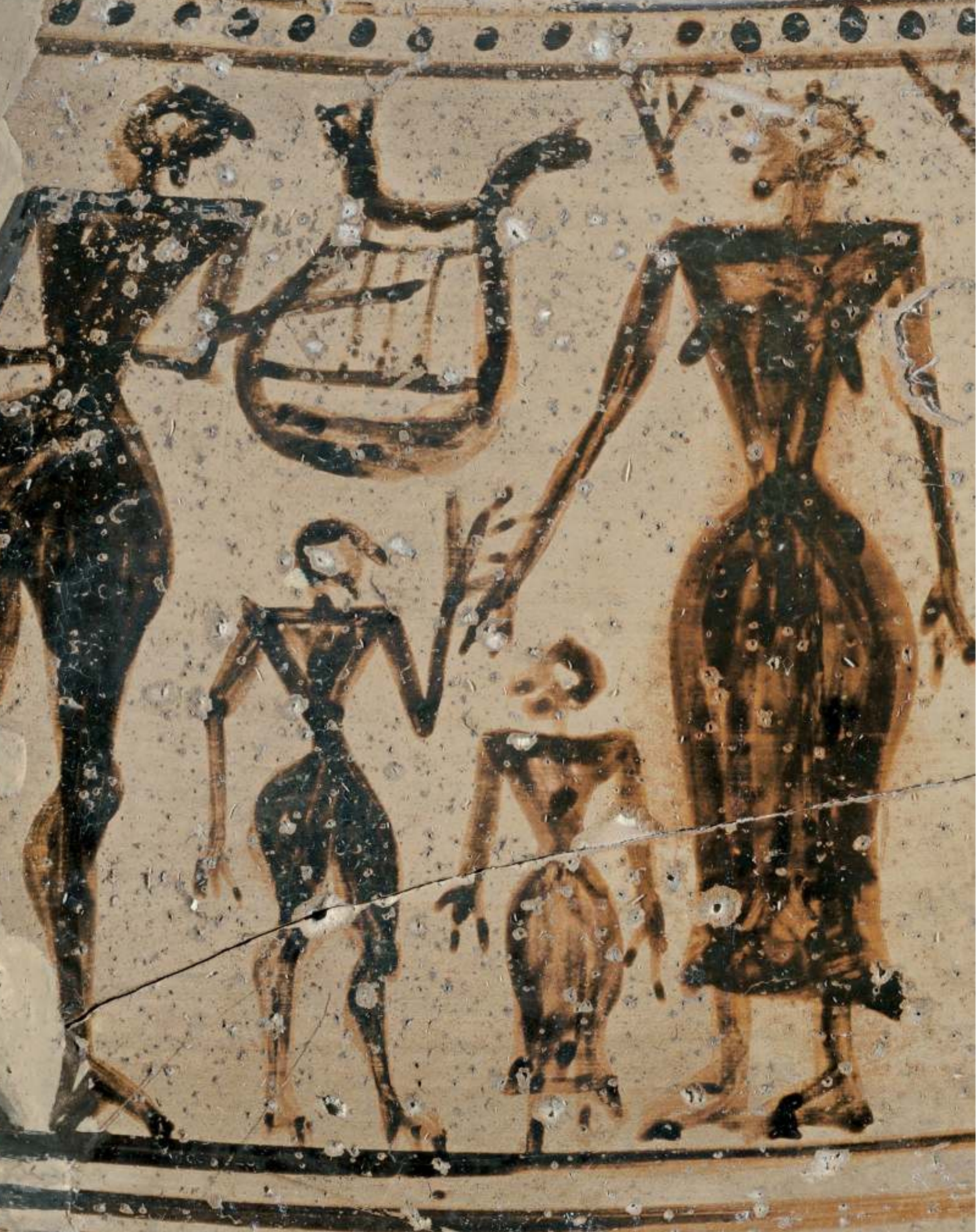
Clay larnax from the Mycenaean cemetery of Tanagra. A human figure and a sphinx of hybrid elements (horse and bird) are standing on each side of a sacred column. (Detail of the scene on the following two pages.) On the other side are four human figures in pairs flanking a similar column. 13th cent. BC.











# FROM THE PALACE TO THE CITY

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## *The epic period in Boeotia*

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### **AFTER THE MYCENAEAN PALACES**

**T**HE DESTRUCTION OF THE PALACES AND THE ENSUING DECLINE OF VIRTUALLY ALL PALATIAL SITES IN MAINLAND Greece, and perhaps also in Crete, took place during approximately the same twenty-year interval between 1200 and 1180 BC. The causes of this precipitous decline are as yet unknown, but are being sought in one or more agents of the period, such as the Peoples of the Sea, the populations on the periphery of the Mycenaean world, internal upheaval and perhaps other causes as well.

As the palaces were coming to an end, Boeotia – which for two consecutive centuries had been the cornerstone of the centralised administration system in Central Greece, the chief focal points of which were Thebes, Orchomenos and the walled islet of Gla in Lake Copais – found itself caught up in the whirlwind of social and political ferment that followed. Throughout the entire 12th century BC, the sparsely inhabited land was dotted with many small settlements, whose indigenous inhabitants, in the absence of central coordination of productive, craft and commercial activities, were inevitably driven to a state of bare subsistence, destitution, the gradual abandonment of their traditional hearths, and random migration.

The Mycenaean citadel of Thebes, whose Cyclopean walls had been demolished, witnessed limited reconstruction and habitation until it was virtually deserted a few decades later. The buildings in Orchomenos and the acropolis of Gla were never rebuilt after being deliberately burnt down. The large-scale engineering projects in the Copais basin fell into disuse, with the result that the lake once again encroached on the land, restoring its initial, marshy nature. The population of the Boeotian and other Helladic centres vanished or dispersed and established similar small inland, coastal or island communities which experienced some limited development and created short-lived local pottery styles and commercial contacts of limited range with the Aegean, Cyprus and, through the latter, with the powers of the broader region of the Aegean and the East that had survived the storm of recent, successive invasions by the Peoples of the Sea.

A number of different terms have been used to describe the Greek culture of the transitional period from the final fall of centralised Mycenaean power (c. 1200/1180 BC) to the appearance and functioning of the organised

*Detail of a late Geometric storage jar (pithos) from Thebes (see also p. 132). A man is depicted holding a lyre in the presence of two females. Between them are two smaller figures (children or worshippers). On the other side, dancing women. Second half of the 8th cent. BC.*



*Protogeometric vases: a cup (skyphos) from Kolonaki near Thebes, and a lekythos (BELOW) from Tilphousion (Petra). 10th cent. BC.*



*Late Geometric amphora from Thebes with birds and linear decoration. Late 8th cent. BC.*



Greek city, the use of alphabetic script to write the early texts, and the composition of the epics of Homer and Hesiod (c. 750-700 BC). The subdivisions of this long period of time have been variously named: the minor Mycenaean *koine*, the sub-Mycenaean, Protogeometric, Geometric period or early Iron Age, the transitional Dark Ages, the early Hellenic or Homeric age, the heroic or epic period and the Greek Middle Ages.

During this period, particularly in the interval between 1200 and 900 BC, there is a slow but widespread movement of the populations that had been living around the periphery of the Mycenaean palatial centres toward the central regions of the Greek world, and vice-versa, from the hinterlands toward the coasts of mainland Greece, Asia Minor and southern Italy, to the islands and to Cyprus. Migrations of northern tribes pushed other Greek-speaking peoples and tribes towards southern Greece, thereby setting in motion a series of population movements. In this way, the dissolution of the centralised palace system was inevitably followed by the rallying together of any surviving earlier inhabitants into small self-sufficient settlements around the edges of walled citadels, in valleys, on plateaux or on coastal sites, before they had yet intermarried with the incoming strangers.

Today there is very little archaeological or any other historical evidence of post-palatial Mycenaean, sub-Mycenaean or early Hellenic art in Boeotia. In Thebes, as perhaps in other main centres of Mycenaean palace governance, after the final destruction of the palaces, their archives and stored goods, there was a definite shrinkage of habitation in the Kadmeia, with limited pottery production and the sparse use of chamber tombs. The population dwindled, some of whom appear to have moved to small towns on the surrounding plain. One of these has been found on the site of ancient Potniai (Tachi), before it merged into a *synoikismos* with Thebes. The reference in Homer's Catalogue of Ships to "the people of Lower Thebes, the well-built city" (*Iliad*, 2, 505) accurately describes the small settlements in the lower town, huddled around the ruins of the once-walled citadel, in which grave goods from that period have been found; it also provides a general picture of the agricultural and stock-breeding households of the era, which aimed to be self-sufficient by ensuring the production of adequate staple products.

Finds dating prior to the Geometric period proper (c. 900-700 BC) are fairly rare in Boeotia and have come mainly from graves. Regarding houses, it has been hypothesized that none have been found in excavations, either because they were built of perishable materials that have left no traces or that the new inhabitants were still travelling as nomads and warriors. Although the data are skimpy, their significance is great, because they are rare and because they mark the transition from the late Mycenaean culture to the dawn of Hellenic history. In the brief Sub-Mycenaean period and in the transition to the Protogeometric, some built tombs have come to light, usually without grave goods, in the ruins of the Mycenaean palace and the post-palatial buildings of the Kadmeia. Small clusters of them have been found near the Elektra Gate, in the Mycenaean "Armoury", and in isolated spots near the Museum and elsewhere on the acropolis. Those with grave goods contained a few bronze rings, pins and chiefly small vases. Their pottery combines decorative features of the late Mycenaean output of the 12th cent. BC with those that were to evolve and dominate the following, Protogeometric period.

Sporadic finds from the rest of Boeotia have revealed that the weapons and attire of some warriors were different from those of the typical late Mycenaean period, and were in fact of northern origin. It is an attractive theory to correlate them with the gradual descent of the Boeotians and their settlement on a virtually deserted land. The gaps created in the once centrally-administered regions of the Mycenaean world, in Boeotia above all, attracted tribes that lived around the periphery of the Mycenaean world and participated to some degree in its civilisation, while also maintaining contacts with Balkan and central European regions.

Irrespective of the chronological pattern of movements by the various tribal groups as handed down by ancient authors, which is frequently embellished with scholarly associations, poetic fantasy and political propaganda, it is possible that the Thessalians, under pressure from the Thesprotians, initially invaded Arni in Thessalotis and displaced the Boeotians who had likewise come from Pindos and had only recently moved there. The Boeotians in turn migrated towards what had once been Kadmeian territory, from which they pushed out the Thracians and Pelasgians and perhaps the Phlegyes and Minyans, who later settled in the region of Orchomenos. The land had once been inhabited to some extent by the Boeotians, who had called it Boeotia. This version of the tradition, which is only partially plausible, is reported by Thucydides: “Sixty years after the fall of Troy, the modern Boeotians were driven out of Arni by the Thessalians, and settled in what is now Boeotia, and used to be called the country of the Kadmeians; part of the race had settled there before this time, some of whom joined the expedition to Troy.” (*History*, I.12.6).

Modern historians justly point out that the descent of the Boeotians took place very slowly and continued over a period of centuries. At about the same time, either together or separately, other Hellenic tribes were moving southwards, creating the impression of general confusion and radical regroupings in the region. These movements, which were not an organised invasion in any systematic form, had begun before the end of the Mycenaean palatial period. Even if they were not exclusively responsible for the decline and eventual dissolution of the Mycenaean administration centres, their role was certainly decisive since they created realignments resulting in the complete disruption – and eventually total annihilation – of the existing political and social setting during the last decades of the 12th century BC.

The incoming ethnic groups left no noteworthy tangible evidence of their passage through or even their habitation of Boeotian land. They moved to culturally related regions and at a slow pace, with the result that they were readily incorporated into older communities. Thus the changes registered in the distribution of settlements, in habitation, in the arts and in the religious and burial customs between 1200 and 900 BC were not new, which means that they cannot be attributed exclusively to the invaders. It is, however, almost certain that this was the moment when successive waves of Greek-speaking groups were also on the move, and that they too became established as part of a significant pre-existing populace. From the intermingling of new and old inhabitants, in the newly established, rather limited but independent and sovereign territories, the basic features of the Hellenic political culture were to emerge: the gradual evolution of systems of governance, civil and intellectual freedom and the value attributed to the individual personality.

## GEOMETRIC PERIOD

**T**HE EPILOGUE TO THE COLLAPSE OF THE MYCENAEAN palatial centres was written at the end of the 12th century, during the transitional Sub-Mycenaean period (c. 1100-1050 BC), in the midst of the general changes and regroupings brought about by the successive movement of regional and nomadic populations onto the Greek mainland. These conditions continued into the following, Protogeometric period (c. 1050-900 BC), when pottery, an industry that survived by adapting to new production conditions and decorative styles, while retaining the features of the late Mycenaean tradition, at the same time learned innovative technical and aesthetic improvements, thus acquiring its Geometric character.

The society and art of the Geometric period (900-700 BC) in Boeotia were shaped by the new general context resulting from the changes in the social and financial sector, in conjunction with the renovation of the governing institutions that were replaced by tribal states headed by a king, a council of nobles and an assembly of warriors. The community, culture and ideology of the new political entities are recorded in the epics of Homer and Hesiod, which belong to the end of the period, especially the former, on the boundary between the two worlds: the Bronze Age that had already passed and the rising Archaic Hellenic world. In the 8th century BC, a period of developments and transformations, significant intellectual gains were made that laid the early, solid foundations for the unhindered evolution of the Hellenic civilisation: the development of the alphabet and dissemination of script, the emerging institution of the city-state, the founding of panhellenic and local sanctuaries, the establishment of regular athletic contests and the development of art. The Homeric poetry that over the centuries “educated Greece” (Plato, *Republic* 606e), and the Hesiodic a little later, used the vehicle of script and set out the precepts by which the citizens were educated theologically and morally, while giving a decisive thrust to the hero-worship that would be consolidated in the Archaic period to follow.

The common, basic features of the new era were clearly established from the beginning of the Geometric period. The economy, based primarily on agriculture and stock-breeding, was self-sufficient and closed in nature; its nucleus was the plot of land belonging to the household (*oikos*). The combined output of the family economy was processed by male and female household members alike, while crafts were confined to the goods needed for daily survival. The existence of military action – as training in virtue, social solidarity, valour and self-sacrifice – can be concluded, among other things, from the scenes depicted in art and from the discovery of weapons in warriors’ graves or as votive offerings in early sanctuaries. At that period, a phenomenon of multiple significance with enormous repercussions in the history of the Hellenic world was the development of intense trading and colonising activity



*Handmade tripod pyxis with lid from Tilphousion (Petra). Protogeometric period. 10th cent. BC.*





*Late Geometric oval pyxis from Thebes decorated with animals, birds and linear patterns. Second half of 8th cent. BC.*



*Late Geometric/sub-Geometric amphora depicting a centaur armed with branches of trees, from Thebes. On the following page is a detail of the main scene. Late 8th cent. BC.*

by the cities of mainland Greece, which gradually extended overseas.

No settlements of the early Hellenic centuries in Boeotia have been explored systematically. So everything we know about the period has come from cemeteries, sanctuaries, isolated buildings, groups of pottery and surface explorations. Also reported are traces of habitation and ceramic finds from Thebes, specifically from the area around the sanctuary of Apollo Ismenios, from the sanctuary of Heracles at Elektrai, from Pyri, in the lower town and Tachi (ancient Potniai), from Eleona, Aulis, Yliki and Paralimni, from Akraifnio near the Copais shores, from Kastro, the sanctuary of Apollo and of the hero Ptoios, from Orchomenos, Chaeronea, Askra and Plataea. Moreover graves dating to the long period between the end of the Mycenaean centres and the late Geometric period have been found in clusters or by themselves at Tanagra, Akraifnio, Thebes and its suburbs, Tachi and Pyri, on its plain, on the Ayia Eleousa site, at Paralimni, Thespies, Ellopia, Kastro and Vranezi and at Orchomenos, Chaeronea and the Kephissos Valley. Taken all together, the habitation remains, dedications in sanctuaries and the picture derived from cemeteries presuppose the existence of many small settlements and households which, towards the end of the period, were organised gradually into independent city-states by means of *synoikismois*. Among all these cities, Thebes and Orchomenos were most distinguished, i.e. the two Boeotian centres that soon quarrelled over control of the Archaic sanctuaries and spheres of influence.

At the foot of Mt Tilphousion near Petra – site of the last battle of Greek independence in 1829 – a cemetery was explored containing Proto-geometric cremations covered by small tumuli of soil and stones, as described in the Homeric epics. Their grave goods were clay vases and jewellery in



bronze and gold. The cemetery and its settlement were located in the narrow pass between Mt Helicon and the lake, on the road which, according to tradition, was followed by the Boeotian tribes in their slow march southwards. The site is located between the largest Archaic sanctuaries in Boeotia: that of Athena Itonia and Alakomeneia and that of Poseidon at Onchestos, and reveals their early strategic establishment there.

The pottery of this period is embellished with concentric circles and semi-circles drawn with the help of a compass in the band between the handles on drinking cups (*skyphoi*) and on the shoulder of closed vases. It is a landmark in the evolution of decoration and shapes, and presaged the Geometric style that was to prevail in the centuries to come. This decorative style attests to the contacts of Boeotia with Attica and especially with Euboea, as Boeotia appears to have been part of the network of contacts that was developed at that period between settlements around the Euboean Gulf.

During the Early and Middle Geometric period (9th cent. BC), Boeotian pottery was subject to influences from the Euboean Gulf region and from Attica, whereas during the Late period, the influence of Athenian workshops predominated and determined the decorative trends and basic shapes. It was then that scenes of hunting, dancing, wrestling, warriors, horses and funerary rituals first appeared on vases. Some of the motifs and details of the figures were proper to Boeotian output, although differentiated from their initial models. Boeotia was then influenced by Corinth, as can be seen from the typical vases of the Thapsos type, and by Argolis. Towards the end of



Handle of a Late Geometric vase portraying a warrior, from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes. Second half of the 8th cent. BC.



Late Geometric storage jar (pithos) from Thebes with women dancing. (See other side on page 124.) Second half of the 8th cent. BC.

the period, however, Boeotian pottery suggests the region's vital artistic contacts with Euboea and the Cyclades, as can be seen in the shape of the large storage jar (*pithamphora*). This influence continued until early in the following century. On two vases of this type from Thebes we encounter scenes with a mythic or religious theme: a centaur on an amphora in the Thebes Museum, and Artemis depicted as "mistress of animals" on an amphora in the National Archaeological Museum.

Towards the end of the Geometric and during the following Archaic period, craft production flourished in Boeotia. Clay figurines were found beside pottery in graves and repositories in sanctuaries that prove the developing quality of the local production centred around Thebes, Ritsona, the Akraifia region and Tanagra. Characteristic examples are the bell-shaped dolls (*plaggones*), with a wheel-made body, painted decoration and added movable limbs, from the late 8th and early 7th cent. BC.

Boeotian Geometric workshops also played a leading part in the domain of metalwork, producing bronze clasps, statuettes, tripods and cauldrons. The Greek peplos was a garment that had to be fixed to the shoulders with pins or clasps (*fibulae*). The craftsman's imagination could transform these utilitarian accessories into true jewels. Clasps of the Attic-Boeotian type replaced the earlier bow-shaped fibulae. On the new type, the wide plate was often decorated with scenes of mythological content, as well as animals or other creatures. These fibulae appeared in Boeotia in the 9th cent. BC and continued to be produced until the end of the period. In fact, specific artisans have been identified in Theban workshops, such as the Artist of the Lion, of the Swan and of the Ship, who were active until the early 7th century BC. And finally there are two lovely bronze groups of a doe and her calf; one, from Kamilovrysi near Paralimni, is in the Thebes Museum, and another similar one is exhibited in the Boston Museum.



Late Geometric vases from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes: detail of a krater showing a row of deer and a krater depicting birds on both sides of the spout (DETAIL BELOW). Second half of the 8th cent. BC.

In the middle of the 8th cent. BC, significant habitation, financial and social changes were obviously taking place in Boeotia, and are associated with the establishment of organised settlements on the sites of later historic Boeotian cities. At this time, the city was inaugurated as a type of “state” and coincided with the stabilisation of the household as its social unit and with the rise of the aristocracy. According to Aristotle (*Republic* 1253 ff.) the city (*polis*) is a composite community consisting of households established by the human need for a self-sufficient life. The concept is identified with that of the state (*politeia*), the dominant element of which is the political system; it is distinguished by the homogeneity of its inhabitants, their common customs and manners and the specific land (*chora*) over which their jurisdiction extends.





Two late Geometric high-handled cups (kantharoi) from Kamilovrysi near Paralimni, one with the Boeotian shield, and three late Geometric/sub-Geometric vases from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes: cup, trefoil oinochoe and hydria. Late 8th-early 7th cent. BC.



RIGHT PAGE: Fragments of a late Geometric kantharos from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes, depicting men dancing on one side (ABOVE) and a boar hunt on the other (BELOW). Second half of the 8th cent. BC.





*Sub-Geometric amphora with lid from Thebes. Decorated with birds, four-petal rosettes and subsidiary linear motifs. Early 7th cent. BC.*



*Late Geometric vases from a wealthy woman's grave in Kamilovrysi near Paralimni. Above is a krater used as a grave marker, with warriors on both sides of a horse and groom, and below is a pyxis with horses on its lid, from an Attic workshop. Second half of the 8th cent. BC.*





Bell-shaped, wheel-made figurine (doll) from Thebes. The arms are painted, while the legs, moulded separately, were moveable.  
Late 8th- early 7th-cent. BC.





Gold and bronze jewellery from the Geometric period: gold earrings and clasp from Agoriani; bronze buckles from Akraifnio and bronze ring with spiral decoration from Thebes (Tachi). Gold band with stippled decoration from the grave of a wealthy woman in Kamilovrysi near Paralimni.



Bronze figurine of a horse, from the handle of a tripod cauldron (lebes). Sanctuary of Apollo on Mt Ptoon. Mid 8th cent. BC.

Protogeometric bronze sword from Ellopia. 10th cent. BC.





Bronze pin (perone) from Akraifnio; on the left, detail of its head (second half of the 9th-early 8th cent. BC). Three bronze Protogeometric pins from Ellopia. Their head and upper section are depicted. 10th cent. BC.







Bone seal with a double representation of a chariot from Thebes (Tachi, ancient Potniai).  
Second half of the 8th cent. BC.



Porous limestone tripod  
cauldron (lebes) from Plataea  
and details of its incised  
decoration on the left page.  
8th cent. BC.



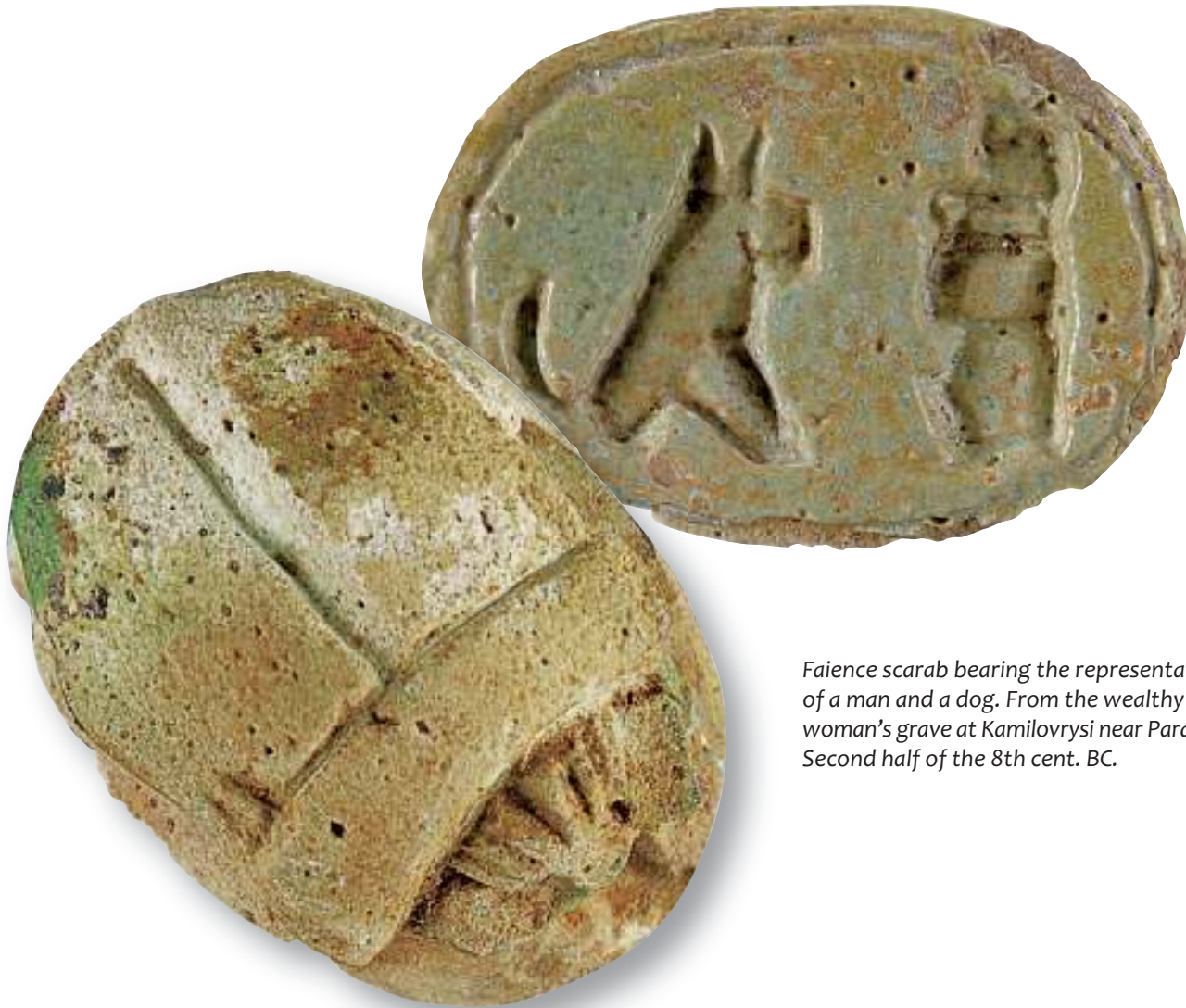
*Ivory seal from Thebes (Tachi, ancient Potniai), depicting a sphinx and a tree, with a relief lion on the upper surface.*

*Sealstone from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes, depicting an animal and a relief finial on the upper side. Second half of the 8th cent. BC.*





Seal depicting three figures and a relief crouching lion on the top surface. From the wealthy woman's grave at Kamilovrysi near Paralimni. Second half of the 8th cent. BC.



Faience scarab bearing the representation of a man and a dog. From the wealthy woman's grave at Kamilovrysi near Paralimni. Second half of the 8th cent. BC.



# CITIES EVOLVE AND THE LEAGUE IS ESTABLISHED

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## *The Archaic period in Boeotia*

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**T**HE ARCHAIC PERIOD, A CRUCIAL ERA IN ANCIENT GREEK HISTORY AND ART, DAWNED IN ABOUT 700 BC, together with the outstanding poetic epics *Theogony* and *Works and Days* by Hesiod who lived in the Boeotian village of Askra on the eastern foot of Mt Helicon. The period covers the 7th and 6th century BC and ends with the victorious outcome of the Persian Wars, after the epic naval battle of Salamis (480 BC) and the final battle at Plataea (479 BC). During this period of two centuries and more, the Hellenic world was to match and surpass all its previous intellectual and artistic achievements, and to lay strong foundations for science, philosophy and democracy.

After establishing themselves on the land, the Boeotians remained there and largely cultivated it themselves. Subservient classes of inhabitants, comparable to the helots in Laconia and the *penestes* in Thessaly, never existed in Boeotia. The direct result of the Boeotian way of life was that the inhabitants were constantly engaged in their agrarian tasks, in accordance with Hesiod's teachings, thus ensuring a satisfactory living and at the same time preventing them from being absent for long periods of time on expeditions, conquests and overseas operations far from their homes.

The change in economic conditions that resulted from the creation of new markets, the specialization of production and the trading activities that carried the Hellenic world to the ends of the Mediterranean led Hellas to new social and political realignments that had an impact in Boeotia as well. There, as in almost all Hellenic territories, kings were initially appointed, but by the last century of the Geometric age, the institution had degenerated. Thus power passed slowly into the hands of a wealthy, land-owning aristocracy. In the tribal states, the major social conflicts between the few (*oligoi*) and the many (*plethos*) became more acute when military tactics changed in the Archaic period. The old heroic manner of waging war based on single combat was abolished. Clashes on the battlefield were now collective, as the phalanx consisted of a large number of heavily armed infantry (*hoplites*). Their obligation to provide their own expensive arms and armour created corresponding rights that led directly to political systems in which honours were distributed according to property (*timokratika*). As time passed, all the political systems of the Archaic period were at risk of being overthrown by powerful and ambitious men whose goal was to establish a tyranny, i.e. rule by one man. Boeotia, however, never had such a political system, indeed in quite a few of its cities, oligarchic governance continued to exist even after the mid-5th century BC.

*Detail of a black-figure lekythos depicting women at a fountain, from Ritsona. 500-490 BC. (See full scene on pages 190-191.)*



On the social level, the special relations between colony and metropolis, the agreements between newly established cities, religious associations, panhellenic games, major oracles, festivals and sanctuaries not only retained but actually enhanced the cohesion and national awareness of the Hellenes. Worship of the Olympian gods held an eminent position in social behaviour and life in the Archaic period and was manifested in the works of Homer and especially those of Hesiod, as well as in the worship of local or occult deities. Archaic piety was legendary in the land and from then on, Boeotia as a whole was regarded as the cradle of the Archaic Hellenic religion.

The tribal state of the Boeotians gradually split up into many small regions that slowly evolved into city-states even before the end of the Geometric period. First among these were the cities of Thebes and Orchomenos, followed by Thespies, Tanagra, Plataea, Akraifia, Aliartos, Coronea and others of minor importance, including the towns of the Tanagran *tetrakomia*, as well as Levadeia, Kopai, Chaeronea, Askria and Thisbe, together with Oropos, Hysiai, Erythrai and Eleutherai on the frontier with Attica.



*Part of a prochous decorated with fish in the outline technique from the sanctuary of Heracles at Thebes. 7th cent. BC.*



Part of a cauldron (dinos) depicting a ship, from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes. The oarsmen are shown as well as the boatswain at the helm, a passenger disembarking and a figure already standing on the shore. Late 7th cent. BC.



Colonette with a votive inscription referring to the battle between the Boeotians and Athenians in 507/506 BC. It may have been erected in a sanctuary after the Athenians freed their Boeotian prisoners upon payment of a ransom. Lower town of Thebes. Circa the end of the 6th cent. BC.



The political scene in Boeotia in the early Archaic years was dominated by the rivalry between Thebes and Orchomenos, the two oldest and largest powers in Boeotia, which culminated in military conflict early in the 7th century BC. In the struggle to prevail over the other for control of the important Boeotian sanctuaries, Thebes emerged the victor. The Orchomenians who, from that time on, were supported by forces outside Boeotia, were eventually humiliated in the 6th century BC at Kerissos, near Thespies, where they were crushed, together with their Thessalian allies. Through their political confrontation with Thebes, they unwittingly favoured the establishment, in about 520 BC, of the Boeotian League, a strong political and military organisation. In the same antithetical way, the Plataeans also contributed to the new form of the confederacy when, at that time or a little later, they complied with the urgings of the Lacedaemonians and Corinthians, and concluded a defence pact with the Athenians. With the help of the latter, not only did they successfully ward off a Theban attack, they also extended their sovereignty and influence from the border region between Attica and Boeotia to the south bank of the Asopos River.

However despite the early conflicts, which must have been fairly frequent and successive, as each political entity sought to gather as many communities as possible under its leadership, the initial unity of the Boeotians was not completely shattered. On the contrary, in about 520 BC, the Boeotian cities, apart from Orchomenos and later Plataea, succeeded in setting up the Boeotian League, i.e. perhaps the first political federation in history, modelled on the earlier alliance of Peloponnesian cities. In the meantime, the political bonds between the cities had been reinforced and, despite the rivalries,

RIGHT PAGE: *Inscribed potsherds from vases dedicated mainly to Heracles; from his sanctuary in Thebes. One of the sherds bears a dedication to the hero's first wife Megara. 6th cent. BC.*

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Sections of the legs of clay tripod stands from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes, decorated with panels depicting a gorgon's head and horse. 7th cent. BC.



there were powerful connecting links between them as well, including their common origin and dialect, the common calendar, cults and feasts at the two age-old Boeotian sanctuaries: the Itonion near Coronea and the Poseidoneion, the sacred grove of Onchestos, near Aliartos, which was also the seat of an amphictyony. Particular importance is attributed to the Panboeotian games that were held every year, in the month of the same name in the ancient sanctuary of Athena Itonia, under the supervision of a religious amphictyony, which is believed to have been made up initially of representatives of the cities, later the *Boeotarchs*. In Onchestos an ancient joint festival had been instituted in honour of Poseidon, under the supervision of the local amphictyony. It had the reputation of dating back to the Bronze Age, as it was also open to non-Boeotian residents of the country, and later retained the institution of the Archon of the Onchestos.

Also contributing to unity, although to a lesser extent, and as a reminder of the common origins of the Boeotians, were the festivals in the sanctuary of Apollo at Ptoon, together with the twin sanctuary of the hero Ptoios that was then under Theban control, the worship of Apollo Ismenios, the cult of the law-giving deities Demeter and Kore, of Heracles and his descendants in Thebes and of the Cabiri in its immediate vicinity. Also significant and ancestral were the feasts of the Daedala in honour of Hera at Plataea and of the Muses and Nymphs of Mt Helicon in their respective sanctuaries, in the Valley of the Muses and in the Leibethrion Cave.

The city of Thebes is known to have faced an acute social problem, at least in the mid-7th century BC, owing to the fragmentation of land holdings and the growing landless class. It was even rumoured that the exiled legislator Philolaos, of the Bacchiades family of Corinth, was recalled to solve it. The rationale behind Philolaos's reforms, as well as of those of Pheidon, legislator of Corinth, can be concluded from the few hints provided by



*Potsherd with black-figure representation of a tripod from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes. 6th cent. BC.*



*Potsherd depicting a flute-player from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes. 7th cent. BC.*

Aristotle. It appears that both were based mainly on limiting births and on encouraging childless, land-owning people to adopt the children of their landless relatives.

After the mid-6th century, political institutions in Boeotia had crystallised. The Boeotian League, an alliance of sovereign states under the leadership of the Thebans, appears, at least from 520 BC on, as a strong confederacy with its own archons and a common currency. Years later, the first coins of the League, modelled on those of Aegina, bore on their obverse the symbol of the Boeotian shield and on their reverse an incuse stamped monogram of the main Boeotian cities, with the exception of Thebes and Orchomenos. The latter was not at that time a member of the League, but joined it later. As can be concluded from the historical circumstances that preceded and followed the establishment of the Boeotian League, which was now purely political and military in nature and organisation, its aim was to keep the country safe from the expansionist policy of the Athenians to the south and the Thessalians to the north. The Plataeans, the Orchomenians and later the Thespians, each for different reasons,

soon disputed the despotic behaviour of the Thebans towards the federated cities, as well as Theban sovereignty over all of Boeotia. As punishment, these peoples suffered repeated destruction of their cities, slavery and long periods of exile, precisely the same fate that history later dealt to the Thebans.

The description by Herodotus (*History* V, 74 ff.) probably expresses the Athenian version of historical events. However, finds from excavations, among which are inscriptions of major importance on stone or bronze and of course coins, add valuable authentic data to our knowledge of the history of the Boeotians during the critical decades of the waning 6th century BC. Evidence about political and religious institutions, the rich intellectual and artistic output, public and private life, the finances of cities, sanctuaries and aristocratic families, as well as social conditions, land ownership, the commissioning and placement of works of art in sanctuaries, city markets and cemeteries has now been corroborated, albeit still incompletely, by texts from the written tradition and by a wide range of inscriptions, coins and archaeological finds.

Some of the new inscriptions found in Thebes shed light on hitherto unknown aspects of significant historical and social events. Among them is the votive inscription referring to the dramatic military events of 507/6 BC, when the allied forces of the Boeotians and Chalcidians – after temporary successes against the border fortresses of Attica, in coordination with the unsuccessful expedition of king Cleomenes as far as Eleusis with the primary purpose of restoring the rule of the Peisistratids – were wiped out by the army of the newly constituted Cleisthenian state, in two battles near the Euripus Strait. It is possible that the oldest known coinage minted by the League, which was struck in accordance with the Euboean system of measurement and bore the Chalcidian X on its incuse reverse, was associated with the temporary and inglorious alliance between the Thebans and the Chalcidians in the events of 507/6 BC. On a grave stele dating to these years, the dead are referred to as having been “killed in war”; and on a bronze sheet from the same period found in the city treasury, a dispute is reported between the Megarians and the Thebans over the former’s detachment of what were obviously border territories near the later Attic deme of Eleutherai, which seem to have still belonged to Boeotia.

Art flourished in Archaic Boeotia, expressing the vigour of the main cities and the rise and wealth of a cluster of sanctuaries in the surrounding area, for whose needs the Boeotians worked together with artisans brought in from Attica, the northeastern Peloponnese and especially from the Cyclades. Boeotia produced remarkable pottery and clay statuary and, especially during the 6th century, was home to major workshops that produced large-scale sculpture and metalwork.

In pottery, from the beginning of the 7th century BC, the austere Geometric shapes of vases were replaced by freer, curved and sensuous forms and by decorative motifs that were now being placed freely on the surface, without the strictly determined positioning of old. In Boeotian pottery, where Oriental influences are more visible and pronounced than in other branches of art, two styles can be distinguished: the sub-Geometric, with now corrupted Geometric decorative motifs, and the Orientalising, early Archaic style, which was in step with the more general trends in Greek pottery painting of the times. Typical examples of the latter are the two fragmented symposium vessels (*dinoi*), from the famous cult site of Heracles near the Elektra Gate of Thebes, which are decorated with highly significant mythological scenes. The first depicts the abduction of Deianira by the centaur Nessos, who had already been fatally pierced by Heracles’ arrows. On the other, a ship is portrayed, manned by its crew and oarsmen, and a warrior who has disembarked and is standing on the shore. The technique employed to paint the figures, partly blocked in and partly in outline, reflects developments in proto-Attic pottery painting, while the



*Fragments of a skyphos with two male figures, perhaps from a mythological scene involving action by Heracles. From his sanctuary in Thebes. 7th cent. BC.*

Oriental influences are reserved for the supplementary palmette ornaments. The zoomorphic spout on the vase that depicts the killing of the centaur is reminiscent of the moulded heads on Orientalising bronze cauldrons from the sanctuaries of Delphi and Olympia.

In the early 6th century BC, the black-figure style was adopted in Boeotian pottery painting under the influence of Corinthian and Attic imports. It was very probably introduced by pottery painters from Attica, such as the so-called Constantinople Painter who was likely from the circle of the Athenian Gorgon Painter and Horse-bird Painter, who has many small oil jars (*alabastra* and *aryballoi*) to his credit and can probably be identified as the Athenian Dresden Lekanis Painter. It is also possible that other pottery painters later moved from Attica to Boeotia, such as the Camel Painter, who usually decorated drinking cups (*skyphoi*) with two or three male figures in loosely structured athletic scenes, and who may have belonged initially to the circle of the pupils of Lydos. Contacts with Attica are also indicated by the group of vases with revellers, a favourite theme in Boeotia. A particular style came into being that was a product of the various external influences on the pottery painters of Boeotia; it was characterised by local production with special preference for the depiction of the labours of Heracles, the pre-eminent local hero, and of themes from the farming and herding life or inspired by Attic subject matter. Boeotian pottery is likewise characterised by output from different local workshops, such as those of Thebes, Tanagra and Akraifia, which in the space of half a century (575-525 BC) produced a wealth of vases, among which are the famous *kylikes* or fruit bowls, decorated with birds, vessels which, with their contents, were offered ritually to the gods and to the dead.



Together with the craft of pottery, small-scale sculpture also developed, an old and famous branch of the Boeotian artistic tradition that also distinguished itself in later years. The production of horse figurines, with or without riders, and chariots started in the mid-7th century BC and continued into the 6th, with many famous examples from the cemeteries of ancient Mykalessos (Ritsona), Tanagra and Akraifia.

The production of seated or standing terracotta plank-shaped figurines, known as *papades* or priests because of their high polos headdress, began in the early 6th century. Their main features were frontality and the abstract shaping of the body. At the beginning, in the first half of the century, the heads of these figurines were cast in moulds but later the plank shape prevailed with handmade bird-shaped or mouse-shaped heads that were the largest, most representative category of Boeotian figurines at that time. In the middle of the same century, faces made in moulds re-appeared alongside large-scale works of sculpture, as shaped by influences from eastern Greece from 530 BC on. Clothing, jewellery and facial details were painted in bright colours that have often been preserved virtually unchanged. The decoration of clothing on figurines was either simple, with geometric designs, or with plant and bird motifs.

Typical works of Boeotian small-scale sculpture in the early 5th cent. BC, which continued the Archaic tradition, were the human figures depicted in assorted everyday occupations. There are figurines of women, usually holding babies in their arms or kneading bread, and men performing agrarian or other tasks, such as shearing, roasting or grating cheese. There are also clay busts and figurines from this period, which either originated in Attica or are imitations of Attic models. They mainly depict female figures with elaborately dressed hair, seated on thrones with winged backrests and made entirely from moulds.

The art of large-scale sculpture, which produced many remarkable artists over the centuries, had strong, old roots in Boeotia. Its first creations can be traced to the second half of the 7th century with works from the environs of sanctuaries and cemeteries. It appears that the Boeotians were taught the art fairly early, initially at the side of famous sculptors of the age. Later they set up their own schools. From inscriptions found in the sanctuary of Apollo on Mt Ptoon, near ancient Akraifia (today Akraifnio) the names of Theban artists like Onasimos became known, as did the people who commissioned them, such as Epichares. In addition, as early as the 7th century BC, the custom of offering statues of *kouroi* as votive offerings to the deity worshipped in the sanctuary brought both marble and sculptors to Boeotia from Athens and the Cyclades, Naxos in particular, which had the greatest influence on local production. Particularly characteristic of the Boeotian *kouroi* of the 6th century BC that have been found in Eutresis, Thespies and Orchomenos are the relatively realistic rendering of the anatomy, their simplicity, their almost exaggerated strength and their vitality. This local style flourished chiefly in the early decades of the 6th century, but also later around 540 BC. There are large numbers of *kouroi* attributed to the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios, since at least 90 have been counted and the final number may be as high as 120.

No information has been forthcoming from excavations regarding Archaic cult statues of deities. It is however speculated, according to explanatory hypotheses, that they were not related to our known *kouroi* or *kores*. According to written sources and to scenes painted on ancient vases, wooden cult images (*xoana*) were regarded as the most ancient, *diipeti* (i.e. sent by the gods), and were believed to have fallen from heaven. The head and limbs were of various materials, porous limestone, marble, clay or ivory, and sometimes a painted clay mask took the place of a face. The result was dressed in lavish clothing and fitted onto a wooden body: these are the so-called acrolith statues. A painted clay head, probably of Heracles, found on the hero's cult site in Thebes, appears to meet



Silver coins from a hoard of coins found in Agoriani.  
 UPPER LEFT: A drachm from Tanagra (600-480 BC) with a shield on the obverse and an incuse square on the reverse.  
 UPPER RIGHT: Obol of Orchomenos (550-480 BC) with a grain of barley on the obverse and an incuse square on the reverse.

RIGHT: Persian daric (480 BC).



the specifications for such usage, as it has preserved the points at which pieces of another material were attached to a torso. This and some other fragments of porous limestone, possibly pedimental compositions, and decorated roof sections of an Archaic temple have been dated to the period between the two Archaic centuries and contribute valuable data to our knowledge of early sculptural art and of Boeotian religious architecture, specifically that of Thebes, about which only later, controversial information has been found.

A significant position in the earliest sculpture of Boeotia is held by gravestone reliefs or sculptures in the round. Apart from the well-known stele of the Tanagran brothers Dermys and Kittylos, which dates to the first half of the 6th century BC, there are also older, post-Daedalic sculptures from the same region that have been dated with comparative certainty to the second half of the 7th cent. BC. The fact that they were found on the site of the city's extensive cemeteries leaves no doubt of their use on graves. Another grave marker was the *kouros* whose head was used in building a Hellenistic grave in the northeastern cemetery of Thebes. A relatively recent find (1992) from the necropolis of Akraifnio, a relief stele decorated with palmettes that was erected between 520-515 BC over the grave of the dead Mnasitheos by his friend Pyrichos, surpasses every other known work of the period from Boeotia in terms of quality, emotional substance and integrity. The stele was signed by the known Athenian sculp-

tor Philergos (Philorgos, Philourgos) and, according to the epigram that accompanies it, it was the beautiful monument put up by Pyrichos on the road to Thebes to commemorate his old friendship and affection for Mnasitheos.

Metalwork shops, influenced especially by the Peloponnese, operated continually from the Geometric period on in different cities of Boeotia, as well as in the environs of its major sanctuaries (Ptoon, Cabirion, Onchestos). Much of the jewellery from the Archaic period that has been found periodically in Boeotia, mainly elaborate necklaces, rings, earrings and clasps; mirrors, decorative furniture accessories, vases and other personal items, have usually come from graves. But the workshops near the major sanctuaries produced a variety of bronze votive offerings (statuettes, replicas of animals, tripods, discs and chariots, bowls, sacrificial knives, inscribed metal sheets, keys and other objects) used for religious requirements.

The Archaic period was significant for the Hellenic world as a whole and contained the potential, the seeds of the Classical Greek miracle. Its variety was remarkable in literary genres as well, in authors, artists, works and ideas, but also deeds, since to this period fell the burden of repelling the Persian invasion. At this time, the fertile contacts with the Orient favoured intellectual quests. For the first time, philosophy, history, medicine and other disciplines moved away from their mythical and poetic tradition, placed their trust in rationalism and utilised prose discourse.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Krater stand decorated with plant and animal motifs from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes. 7th cent. BC.



*Part of a skyphos sherd decorated with facing horses, from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes. First half of the 7th cent. BC.*





*Clay head, most likely of Heracles, from a cult statue made of another material, found in the hero's sanctuary in Thebes.  
Late 7th-early 6th century BC.*



*Bronze sheet decorated with the mythological scene of Ajax's suicide, from Thebes. 6th cent. BC.*



Bronze sheet with an embossed gorgon's head from Akraifnio. 6th cent. BC.

Archaic bronze objects from the pyre of Heracles on Mt Oita: drinking cup (kylix, ABOVE), lamp (lychnos, MIDDLE) and figurine of a horse.





ABOVE: Bronze spatula from the Archaic period; its handle is decorated with a relief woman's face, from the sanctuary of Apollo on Mt Ptoon. RIGHT: Detail of the face.  
BELOW: Bronze pins of the Archaic period, from the sanctuary of Apollo on Mt Ptoon.







Part of a bronze “Homeric” key with an inscription, from the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios. 6th cent. BC.



Bronze statuettes of the early Classical period. To the left, detail of a statuette from the pyre of Heracles on Oita, and to the right, the statuette of an athlete from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes. Early 5th century (c. 470 BC).



Bronze sheet depicting Theseus wrestling with the Minotaur in the presence of Ariadne, from Akraifnio. Second quarter of the 6th cent. BC.



LEFT: Bronze statuette of Heracles in an attack stance, of the early Classical period; TO THE RIGHT, an arm wielding a club from another bronze statuette of the hero. Both are from the pyre of Heracles on Mt Oita (c. 470 BC).





Votive offerings of the Archaic period from the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios. ABOVE: Bronze sheets cut out in the shape of a male figure and a helmeted head. BELOW: Arms from bronze statuettes.

Bronze sheet cut out in the shape of a male figure of the Archaic period. From the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios.

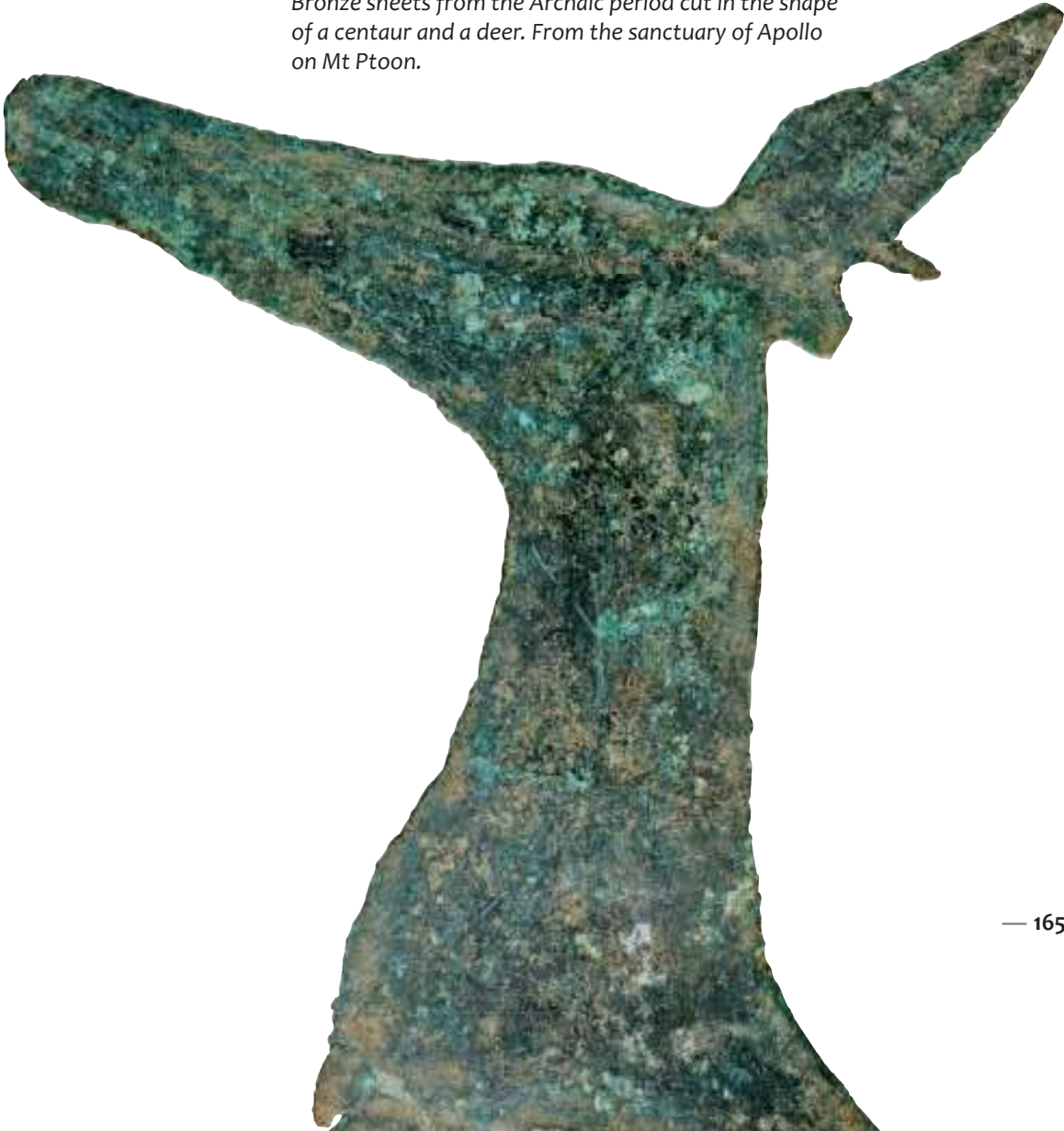




*Eyelids and lashes from a bronze statue of the Archaic period. From the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios.*



*Bronze sheets from the Archaic period cut in the shape of a centaur and a deer. From the sanctuary of Apollo on Mt Ptoon.*







Two inscribed bronze sheets from a built public treasury in the lower town of Thebes (Pyri). The inscriptions refer to matters related to the financial and political life of Thebes in the late 6th and early 5th century BC. The one below, which also retains the link by which it was hung, contains an account of the receipt or payment of public money. The one above, which is intact and written on both sides, is a list of properties that were confiscated or sold by the city for unknown reasons.





Kantharos with black-figure scene of facing lions from Ritsona. On the other side of the vase are facing sphinxes. Detail on left page. 580-570 BC.



Black-figure kantharos from Ritsona decorated with two friezes. On the upper frieze a dance of revellers is shown, and on the lower one, sphinxes and lions are lined up in facing formations. On the following two pages is a detail of the scene. 570-550 BC.









Tripod unguent box  
(exaleiptron) with lid from  
Ritsona. Decorated with  
scenes of reveller, a lion and  
a Medusa (detail left) on  
the panels of its three legs.  
570-550 BC.



Boeotian kylix from Ritsona (RIGHT) and skyphos from Akraifnio (BELOW) with characteristic decoration of polychrome palmettes. Middle 6th cent. BC.



Boeotian kylix typically decorated with birds and palmettes, from Akraifnio. Middle 6th cent. BC.





*Black-figure Boeotian kanthariskoi from Eleon, with characteristic decoration and rendering of figures with shading, without incision. Centaurs, birds, warriors and a ship are depicted. 6th cent. BC.*





*Black-figure Boeotian kanthariskos from Eleon. One side depicts the battle between a warrior and a centaur (probably Heracles and Nessos respectively); on the other a row of runners, and a row of birds with a lion between them. 6th cent. BC.*





*Black-figure cup (pinakion) from Akraifnio decorated with a garland of lotus blossoms on the outside and a seated lion in the medallion on the inside bottom. 6th cent. BC.*

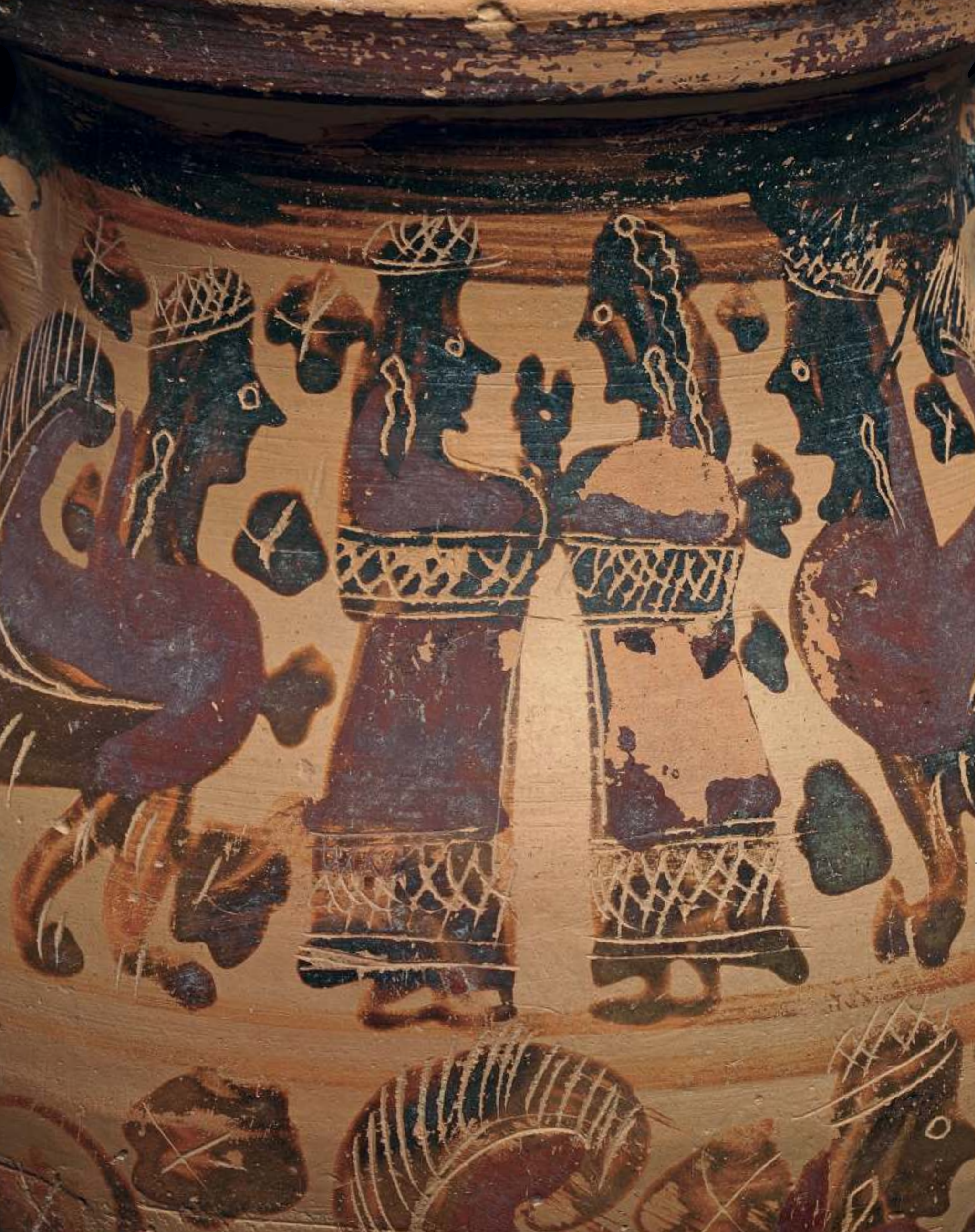




ABOVE: Unguent box (exaleiptron) decorated with black-figure plant and linear motifs, from Akraifnio. 6th cent. BC.  
BELOW: Black-figure pinakion with aquatic birds inside, from Eleon. 6th cent. BC.









*Black-figure jar (pelike) from Akraifnio with two friezes of facing women and sphinxes. On the left page, detail of the scene.  
First half of the 6th cent. BC.*

*Detail of the black-figure scene on the shoulder of an amphora, from Thebes. Two facing wild boars are depicted.  
First half of the 6th cent. BC.*



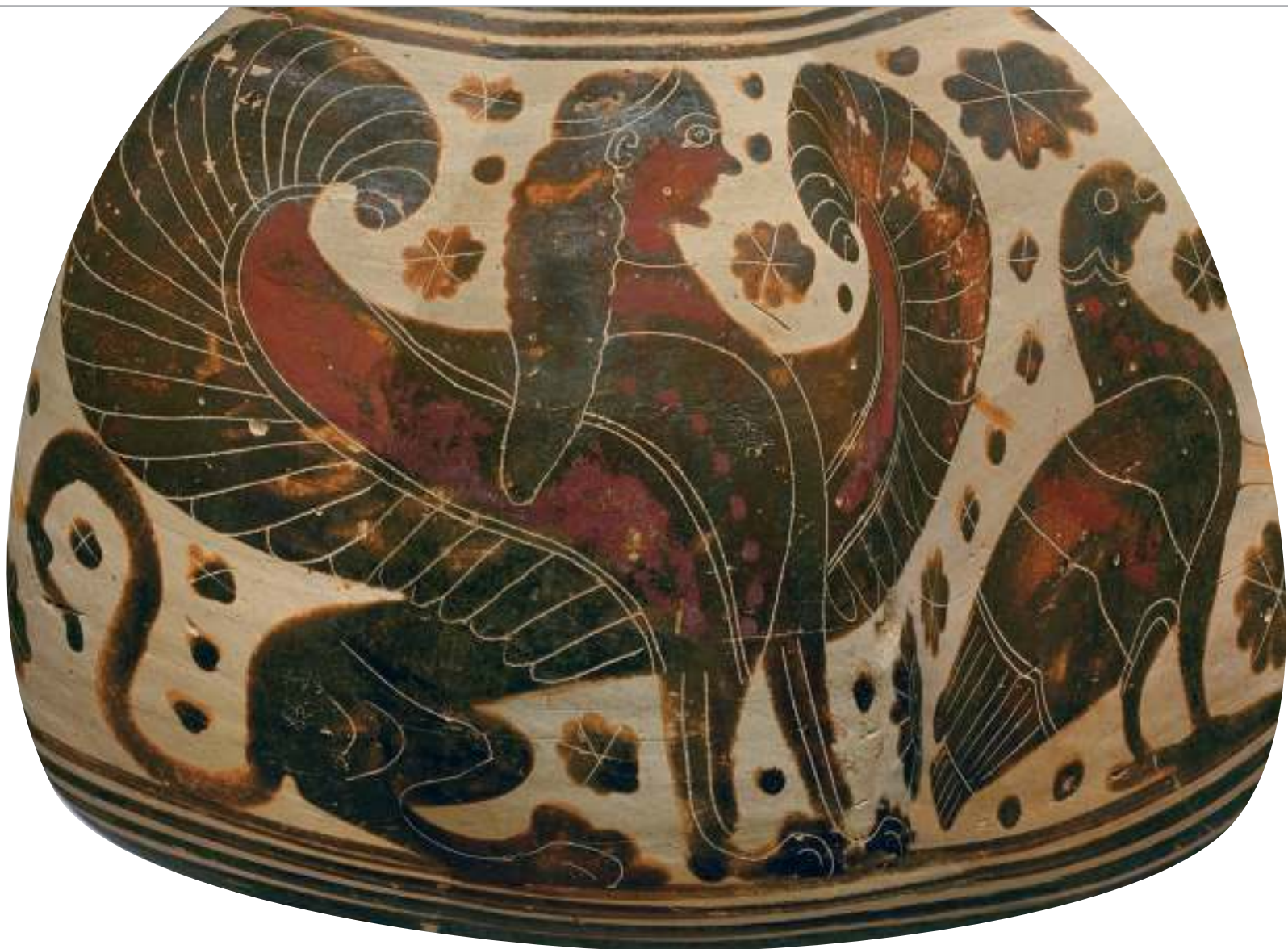


*Globular Corinthian scented oil jars (aryballoi) from Ritsona with a black-figure scene of a panther and swan (ABOVE) and sphinx (BELOW). First half of the 6th cent. BC.*

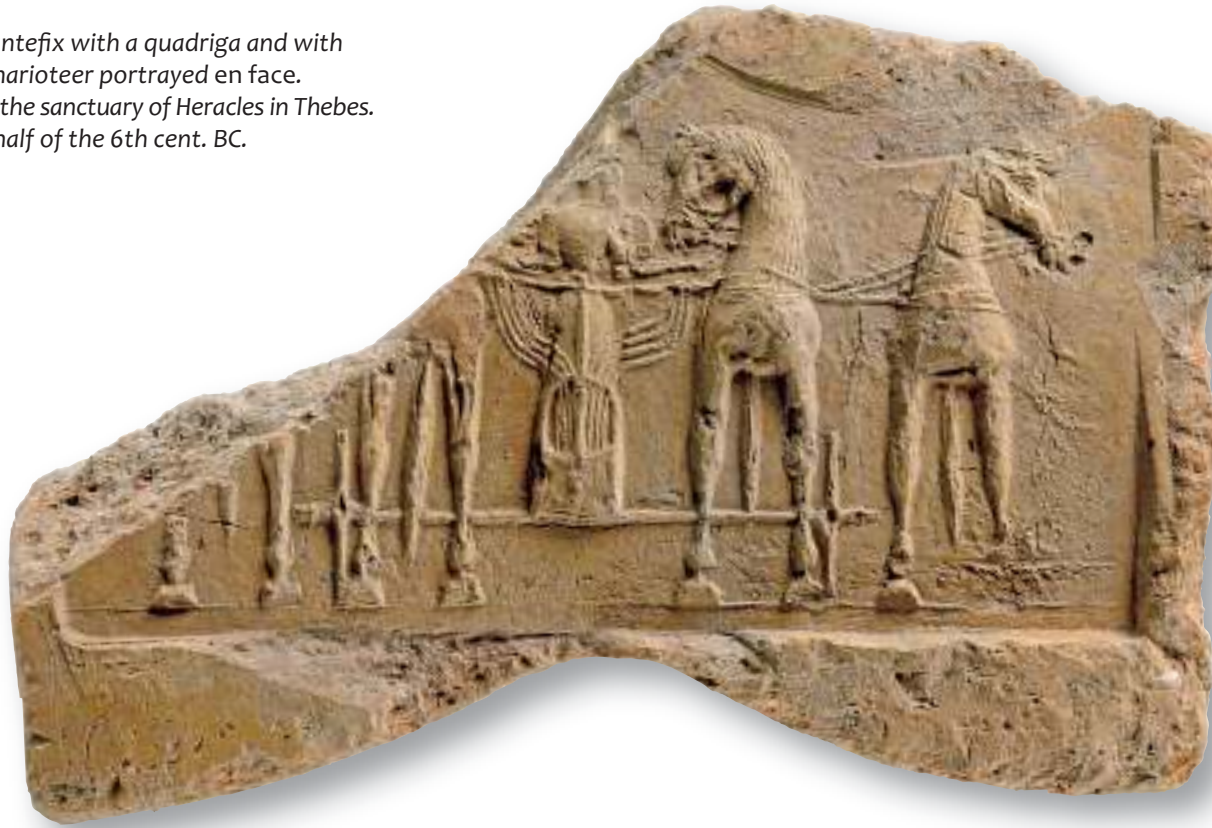




Three Corinthian scented oil jars (alabastro) bearing a black-figure sphinx (LEFT AND DETAIL BELOW), a winged lion (CENTRE), and an owl between facing panthers (RIGHT). The former comes from Thebes, the other two from Ritsona. Early 6th cent. BC.



Clay antefix with a quadriga and with the charioteer portrayed en face.  
From the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes.  
First half of the 6th cent. BC.





Kantharos with a black-figure quadriga, from Thebes. LEFT PAGE: detail of the quadriga with the charioteer and groom. Second half of the 6th cent. BC.



Attic trefoil oinochoe from Ritsona, with black-figure scene of a ship with an oarsman who is being crowned by another man seated in the prow; a winged Nike is leading the way. The scene may possibly refer to victory in a naval battle or nautical contest. Below, detail of the scene. Attributed to the Athena Painter, early 5th cent. BC (490-480 BC).





Panelled kylix from Akraifnio with a black-figure frieze (deer between facing birds) in the panel between the handles.  
Mid 6th cent. BC.

RIGHT PAGE: Detail from the scene on a black-glazed kantharos from Thebes. An athlete is shown holding jumping weights (halteres). Rendered by incision over added white clay slip (Six technique). Second half of 6th cent. BC.



Black-figure skyphos by the Camel Painter, from Akraifnio, depicting a scene with athletes.  
On pages 186 and 187 are details of the scene. Second half of the 6th cent. BC.











Three black-figure lekythoi from Ritsona. The one on the left is decorated with a female bust amid snakes (Medea?), in the middle are two warriors in combat (detail on page 195) and on the right, a scene of women at a fountain (full scene on pages 190-191). The first two date to the late 6th century (510-500 BC) and the third to the early 5th century (500-490 BC).



*Black-figure skyphos with Dionysiac scene from Ritsona. Dionysus is depicted on a donkey accompanied by maenads and satyrs. Late 6th cent. (510-500 BC).*







ABOVE: Black-glazed kylix from Ritsona depicting inside a rider and chariot (c. 500 BC). BELOW: A black-glazed kylix of the Siana type, also from Ritsona, with a scene from athletic contests on the outside (mid-6th cent. BC).



Red-figure eyed kylix from Akraifnio. Late 6th cent. BC.



*Detail of the swimmer on a black-figure skyphos from Ritsona. Early 5th cent. BC.*







Black-glazed kantharos from Ritsona with an inscription at the bottom of the body ΤΕΙΣΙΑΣ ΕΠΟΙΕΣΕ (Teisias made me). (See detail above).  
Teisias was an Athenian pottery painter who moved to Boeotia. Circa 500 BC.



RIGHT PAGE: Detail from the single combat of warriors depicted on a lekythos from Ritsona. (See page 188.)



Red-figure kylix from Thebes, with a battle scene on one side and a symposium on the other (detail on following pages).  
Late 6th cent. BC.













Red-figure skyphos by the Athenian Brygos Painter, from Ritsona.  
On one side is an ithyphallic satyr, on the other a young warrior.  
The shape of the handles is noteworthy, one is horizontal,  
the other vertical. Circa 480 BC.







Clay figurine of a chariot with two female figures, probably goddesses, and a groom, from Thespies. Probably associated with the Great Daedala, the feast of Hera, when the daedala (i.e. wooden figures in the form of a bride and bridal attendant) were carried on a chariot. 6th cent. BC.





Two views of the figurine of a mounted warrior and his groom, from Akraifnio. 6th cent. BC.





*Plank-shaped figurines of women wearing a polos headdress, from Ritsona. Facial features and decoration of the clothing are rendered in rich colours. Late 6th cent. BC.*



LEFT PAGE: Plank-shaped female figurines wearing a polos headdress, from Ritsona, Thebes and Akraifnio, some with naturalistic faces cast in moulds and others with hand-made, bird-like faces. The group of three figurines with raised arms over the discoid base from Thebes, is noteworthy.

Detail of the figurine from Akraifnio with the naturalistic face and brightly coloured decoration. 6th cent. BC.



Details of two of the plank-shaped female figurines with naturalistic faces on p. 206: one from Ritsona (LEFT), the other from Thebes. One is holding an infant. Second half of the 6th cent. BC.



Figurine of a female seated on a throne,  
made in a mould, from Akraifnio.  
Early 5th cent. BC.







Attic moulded oinochoe from Ritsona with a body in the shape of a female head. 480-470 BC.



Vase in the shape of a Sphinx from Thebes, 6th cent. BC.



Vase in the shape of a foot from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes. Early 5th cent. BC.



Views of the miniature figurine of a nude youth with long hair, from Thebes. 6th cent. BC.



Three sides of a plank-shaped figurine from Ritsona. 6th cent. BC.



*Daedalic clay head that decorated the neck of a vase from Halai. Probably an authentic Cretan work. Late 7th cent. BC.*

*Figurine of a man grating cheese. From Ritsona, distinguished by the excellent preservation of its colour, its plasticity and its realistic rendering. Circa 500 BC.*



Figurine of a ram from Ritsona and two foals from Akraifnio (ABOVE RIGHT) and Thebes (BELOW). 6th cent. BC.





Figurine of a silenus. From Ritsona. 6th cent. BC.



Moulded vase-whistle from Thebes (ABOVE) and figurines of a dove, stylised bird and horseman from Ritsona. The figurine of the rider which stands out for its plasticity, retains parts of the horse's bronze bridle. 6th cent. BC.





Head and upper part of a Daedalic female statue from Liatani, near Tanagra. Second half of 7th cent. BC.



Part of a pediment of Parian marble depicting the battle against the Amazons (Amazonomachy), from the Kastro of Copais. A wounded Amazon wearing a short tunic and a Phrygian cap has fallen to the ground and, with her right hand, is trying to pull an arrow from her quiver. The leg of another figure can be discerned moving to the right. Circa 520 BC.



Head of a marble kouros from Thebes. Late 6th cent. BC.  
Found being re-used in building a Hellenistic grave.



FOLLOWING TWO PAGES: Statue of a kouros from the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios, made of whitish Boeotian marble. The left arm is missing, as are the legs from the knees down. This is an exceptional work showing the strong influence of Cycladic art, particularly that of Naxos. Slightly later than the mid-6th cent. BC.









Statue of a kouros from the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios, made of white marble, probably from Naxos. The head and shoulders, and the legs from the knees down are missing. An artistically mediocre Boeotian work showing Naxian influence. Just after the middle of the 6th cent. BC.

Statue of a kouros from the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios, made of white marble from an island. The head is missing as are the legs from the knees down. Remarkable work, probably from Naxos. 550-540 BC.





*Statue of a kouros from Eutresis, made of white marble, probably Boeotian. Missing are the head, arms and legs below the knee. Although the statue retains the usual frontal stance of the kouros, it is distinguished by the innovative features of its sculptural rendering and its movement. The arms were not held down beside the trunk as was customary. The right arm was raised to shoulder level and the left one bent at the shoulder, the hand resting on his waist, as indicated by a small piece that has been preserved on the torso. The figure was probably carrying a bow and a spear, and represented Apollo. Also worth noting is the absence of long hair. Work very probably by an Ionian sculptor of the early 5th cent. BC.*



*Statue of a kouros from the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios, made of greyish-white Boeotian marble. The face and legs below the knees are missing. On the right is a detail of his hair. Just before the mid-6th cent. BC.*



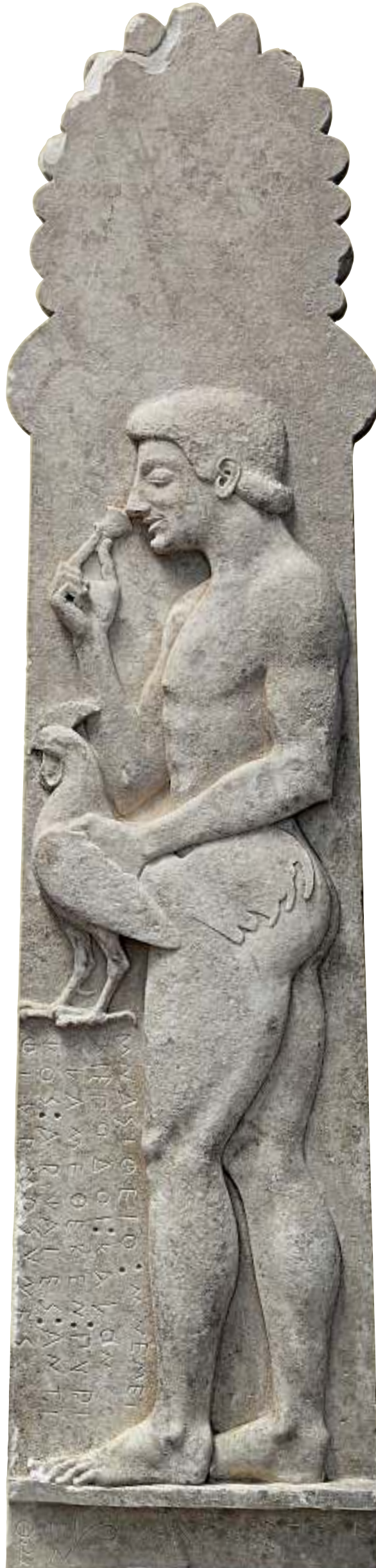
Statue of a kouros from the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios, made of whitish-grey Boeotian marble. Most of the head is missing, as are the arms from the elbow down, and the legs. Remarkable Boeotian work indicating Parian influence. Circa 530 BC.



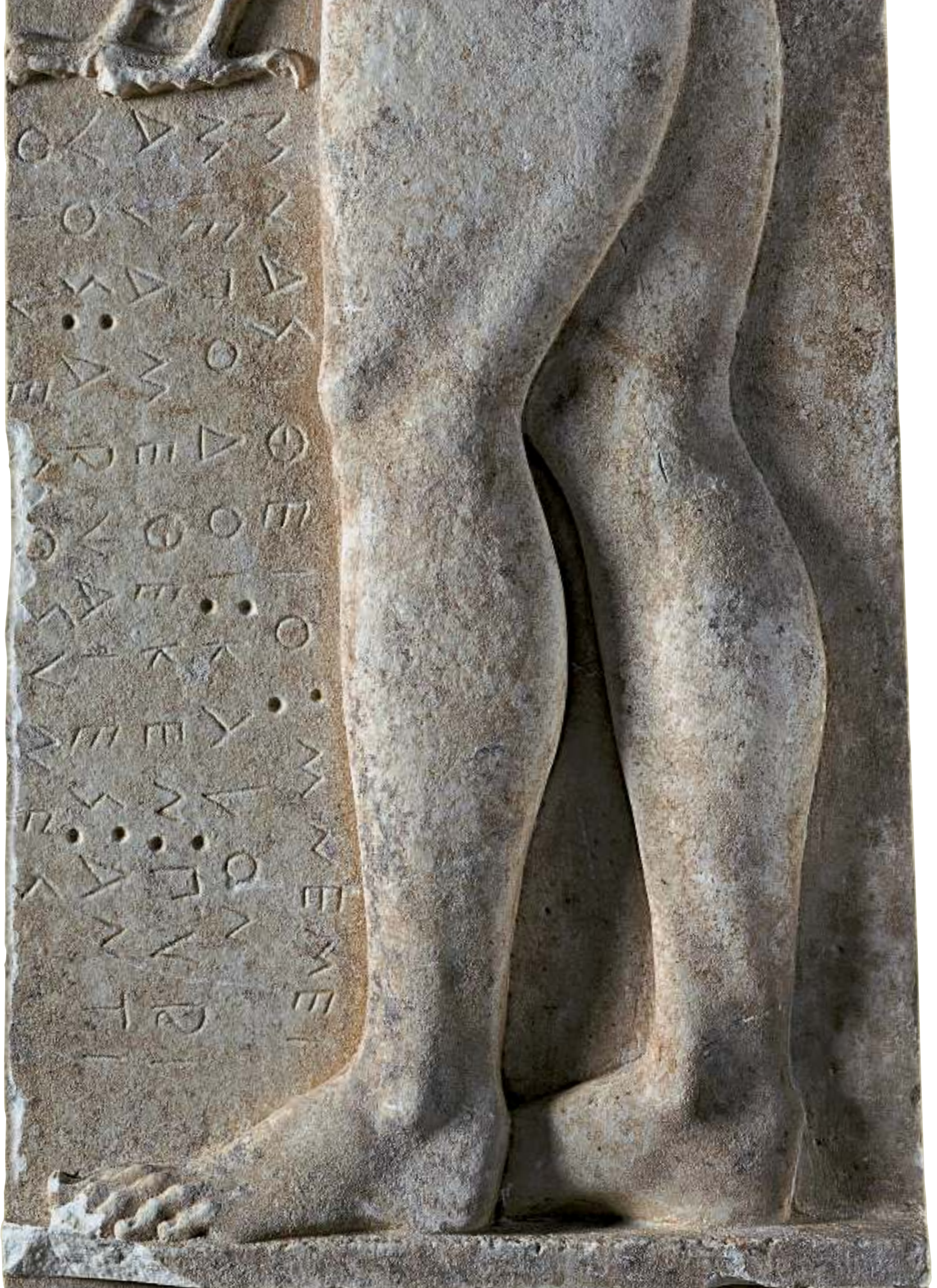


*Part of a grave stele from Thebes,  
made of Pentelic marble.  
The dead man is depicted as  
a hoplite holding a spear.  
This is very probably an Attic  
work of the early 5th cent. BC.*





Palmette grave stele from Akraifnio. It depicts a young man holding a rooster in his left hand and smelling a flower with his right. In the detail to the right, the inscription on the stele can be discerned, in which the work is dedicated to the memory of Mnesitheos by his friend Pyrichos, and is signed by the known Athenian sculptor Philourgos. Circa 510 BC.



⊙ I V O P A O S : F P O I T T  
N



Two sides of a marble capital with a dedicatory inscription from the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios. According to the epigram, the capital constituted the base of a kouros statue, a dedication by the aristocratic Athenian family of the Alkmaeonids to Apollo (550-540 BC).

I am a beautiful statue of Phoebus [Apollo] son of Leto.  
The son of Alkmaeon commissioned me, following a victory  
with his swift steeds  
driven by Knopiades  
at the feast of Athena Pallas [Panathenaea].



Part of a Doric column of the Archaic period from the sanctuary of Apollo Ismenios in Thebes. The two-line dedicatory inscription declares that it was a votive offering from the residents of Potniai, the sacred district to the south of Thebes. 6th cent. BC.



Monolithic Doric column from the Archaic period from the sanctuary of the hero Ptoios at Kastraki (Akraifnio). The votive inscription states that the offering, which obviously stood on the column, was dedicated by the inhabitants of Akraifia to the sanctuary. Last quarter of the 6th cent. BC.



ΕΕΝΟΚΡΑΤΙΩ  
ΟΕΟΠΟΜΤΟΚ  
ΜΝΑΣΙΛΑΟΚ

ΑΝΗΑΤΟΣΤΑΔΙΑΣΕΚΡΑΤΕΙΔΟΥΤΗΚΑΚΙΣΕΙΑΕΝ  
ΕΕΝΟΚΡΑΤΕΡΚΥΑΡΟΙΣΗΝΙΤΡΟΓΑΔΑΕΥΕΙΝ  
ΕΤΟΝΑΓΕΥΡΟΤΑΔΕΙΣΔΕΣΤΟΑΘΟΝΟΥΔΕΛΑΚΑΝ  
ΑΣΤΔΑΘΗΡΑΤΟΚΡΕΙΣΣΟΝΕΣΕΝΤΟΛΕΜΑ  
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ΟΥΔΣΤΑΜΕΙΝΟΝΔΑΔΕΥΤΕΡΟΙΕΛΛΑΝΟΜΕ

# FROM THE VICTORY OF PLATAEA TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THEBES

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## *The Classical centuries in Boeotia*

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### BOEOTIA IN THE ORBIT OF SPARTA

**A**CCORDING TO HERODOTUS (*HISTORY* 9, 86-88), THE VICTORS AT PLATAEA MARCHED TO THEBES AND DEMANDED that the ringleaders of the alliance with the Persians be handed over immediately. The Thebans refused. After a siege of about 20 days, the allies laid waste the surrounding farmland, and attacked the city walls, at which point the few collaborators with the Persians were delivered to the Spartan leadership, taken to the Isthmus of Corinth and executed. Although the fight against the Persians continued outside mainland Greece until the age of Alexander the Great, the victory at Plataea was a crowning landmark in the course of Greek history and civilisation.

The end of the war left Boeotia in a state of profound political, economic, social and moral crisis. The most important Boeotian cities, specifically Thespies, Plataea, Tanagra and Thebes, together with the countryside surrounding them, had suffered the consequences of the hostilities and had been either abandoned by their inhabitants or sacked and burned by one or the other of the warring parties. As was to be expected, Thebes forfeited its leadership of the confederacy and its prestige was gravely damaged. Tanagra, by contrast, increased its influence in Boeotia, expanded its territory as far as the Euripus Strait and, very probably with the complicity of the Athenians, successfully claimed the leadership of the Boeotian League. This significant political change in the twenty-year period between 479 and 458 BC is reflected in the three types of silver *staters* (didrachms) struck by the League, the obverse bearing a Boeotian shield and the initials *T-A*, and the reverse the initials of the name of the Boeotians. The above data have been correlated with Thucydides' references to the Spartan occupation of Tanagra before the homonymous battle in 458/57 BC, and perhaps with the demolition of its walls by the Athenians immediately after the battle of Oenophyta a few months later.

A piece of information passed on by Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica*, 81, 2-3), which he drew from Ephorus, the 4th cent. BC historian, is of the utmost significance to political developments in Boeotia from 458 to the end of the 5th cent. BC at least. Diodorus reports that, after the battle of Tanagra, the Thebans could not stand being displaced from the leadership of the Boeotians, asked Sparta outright to reinstate them, and assumed sole responsibility for defending their own country against the expansionist ambitions of the Athenians. He added that the Spartans then extended the fortification wall around Thebes.

*Inscribed funerary cube with the names of three distinguished Theban casualties in the battle of Leuctra (371 BC): the boeotarch Xenokrates and two strategoi (generals) Theopompos and Mnasilaos. The epigram praises the valour and glory of those who fell in battle, and of all Theban warriors. It was found in Pyri, in the lower city of Thebes.*



Silver Boeotian three-obol coin. FRONT: Kantharos, club and inscription ΘΕ-ΒΗ. BACK: Boeotian shield. 426-395 BC. From Thebes.



Athenian bronze weight of the 4th cent. BC. It belonged to the state (ΔΗΜΟ), as written in the corners of its upper surface. It was equal to one-quarter of an Attic mna (104.43 gr.). Where it was found is unknown.



This meant, in short, that at the most critical point in the tug-of-war between Athens and Sparta for the leadership of Hellas, Thebes like a *deus ex machina* offered Sparta a strong alliance, and the pledge to be a bulwark at the Athenians' back, cutting off Attica from the north. This plan does not contradict the news reported by Thucydides (*History* III, 62, 5 and IV, 92, 6) that Boeotia was, at that time, living in a state of constant civil strife and political unrest. He also predicted what was to follow in the decades to come. Thus, irrespective of the criticism expressed in the historical sources, it is a fact that from then on Thebes, and with it Boeotia, the third power in Greece, were bound somewhat diffidently at first, but later openly, given the opportunity, to the chariot of Sparta. Thebes remained an unwavering ally and faithful supporter of the Lacedaemonians for almost 50 years, until the final fall of Athens in 404 BC.

However, the political and military conjuncture of that earlier period favoured the grandiose plans of the Athenians. The Boeotians were decimated at Oenophyta (457 BC) and their military forces were dispersed; their cities declined and fell into anarchy in the absence of strong League leadership. The victory of Myronides at Oenophyta gave the Athenians control of Boeotia and its League for the decade between 457 and 446 BC. Boeotian cities had to accept political systems with leaders approved by the Athenians. During this period, Thebes, Aliartos, Tanagra and Akraifia minted their own coins, which bore the common symbol of the Boeotian shield on the obverse and the initials of each city on the reverse. However, the inability of Athens and the political systems it imposed to ensure effective governance of the Boeotian cities, through its shadowy occupation of the country, intensified disorder and anarchy and eventually conduced to ending this transitional state.

The effect of the bloody battle of Coronea (446 BC) and the treaty that followed was to secure the universal but orderly withdrawal of Athens from Boeotia. Its direct consequence was to upgrade the confederacy of Boeotian cities on the initiative of the Thebans and under their leadership. In this way, in the second half of the 5th cent. BC, there was a powerful, hostile state on the northwestern borders of Attica that could cut off the Athenians' communications with Phocis, Locris and the northern Hellenic world. As noted earlier, the Boeotian League was prepared to enter into an alliance with Sparta. And in 446 BC, right after the Athenians were driven out of Boeotia, the star of Thebes rose brightly and shone alongside that of Sparta for almost half a century. That year (446/445 BC) during the Thirty Years' Peace, in addition to the traditional members of the Peloponnesian alliance, the allies of Sparta included the Megarians and the Boeotians. From then until the peace of Antalcidas (387/386 BC) the only coinage minted in Boeotia was the Theban stater (didrachm) with the shield of the Boeotians on one side and either Heracles, protector of the city, or its local god Dionysus on the other.



*Part (right half) of an inscribed bronze sheet. The inscription probably refers to Heracles as an excellent and immortal hero, and to his children. It was a votive offering dedicated by a Theban boeotarch. Early 5th cent. BC.*

*Stele on which is inscribed a list of dedications by Thespians to the sanctuary of Hera in the ancient city of Korsiai. From Prodromos (Chostia) in Boeotia. 4th cent. BC.*

Then, events in central Greece followed their known and generally tragic, although not unforeseeable, course. In short, the dispute of the Thebans, Aeginetans, Megarians, Corinthians and Lacedaemonians with the Athenians and their allies led to history's most devastating confrontation between Greeks, in terms of both duration and intensity, with incalculable and adverse effects on its civilisation. Symbolically, either fortuitously or deterministically, the Peloponnesian War started in Boeotia, initially with the siege (431 BC), defeat and sacking (427 BC) of the sacred city of Plataea by the Thebans and Spartans. Also in Boeotia, a few years later, the disastrous battle of Delion was fought (424 BC), immediately after which Thespians was destroyed by the Thebans.

The long Peloponnesian War ended with the surrender of Athens and with the proposal by Thebes to wipe it out forever by selling all its citizens into slavery. This proposal expressed the intensity of the era's passions and chaos, the likes of which led the classical Hellenic world, at the peak of its glory, to internecine civil war and to deeds that would sully its superb civilisation forever after. A year later, in 403 BC, Theban citizens supported the Athenian democrats in their effort to abolish the rule of the thirty tyrants whom Lysander had installed. It is in fact said that, from that time on, although formally still allies of Sparta, the Boeotians no longer complied with their obligations in that direction.



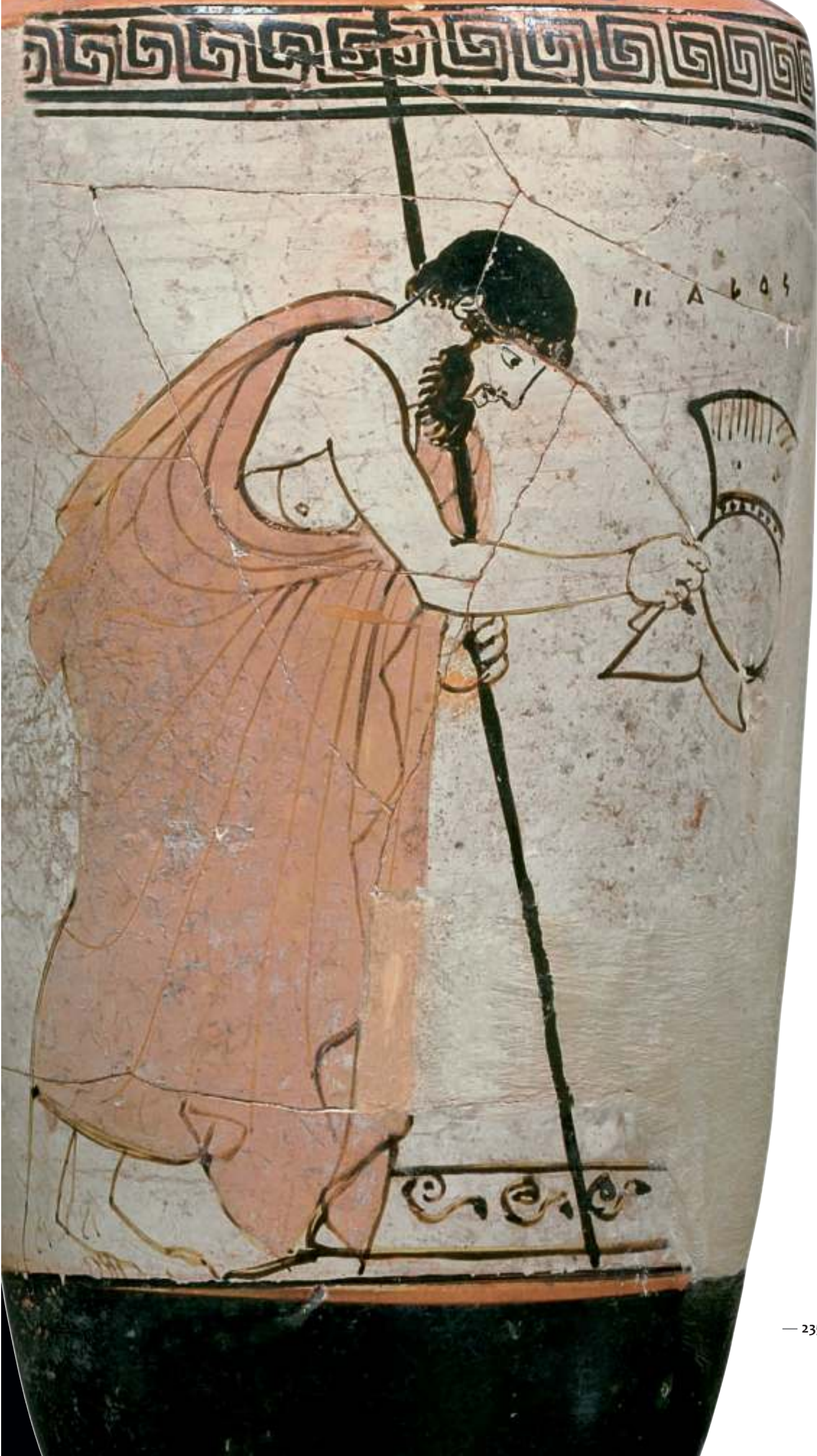
Two red-figure lekythoi. On the right is Zeus in one of his amorous adventures, pursuing a young woman who is trying to elude him. On the left, an armed woman is doing the pyrrhic dance accompanied by a double flute. Both vases were decorated by a Boeotian pottery-painter, faithfully imitating the Athenian Achilles Painter. From the polyandron of Thespies. Circa 424 BC.



Attic white-ground lekythos.  
Male figure visiting a grave.  
From the northeast cemetery  
of Thebes. 5th cent. BC.



Attic white-ground lekythos. Depicts an elderly male figure leaning on a staff and holding a Corinthian-type helmet that he is obviously placing on the grave of a fallen warrior. From the northeast cemetery of Thebes. 5th cent. BC. The word ΚΑΛΟΣ (handsome) is inscribed on the white ground. Detail on p. 235.





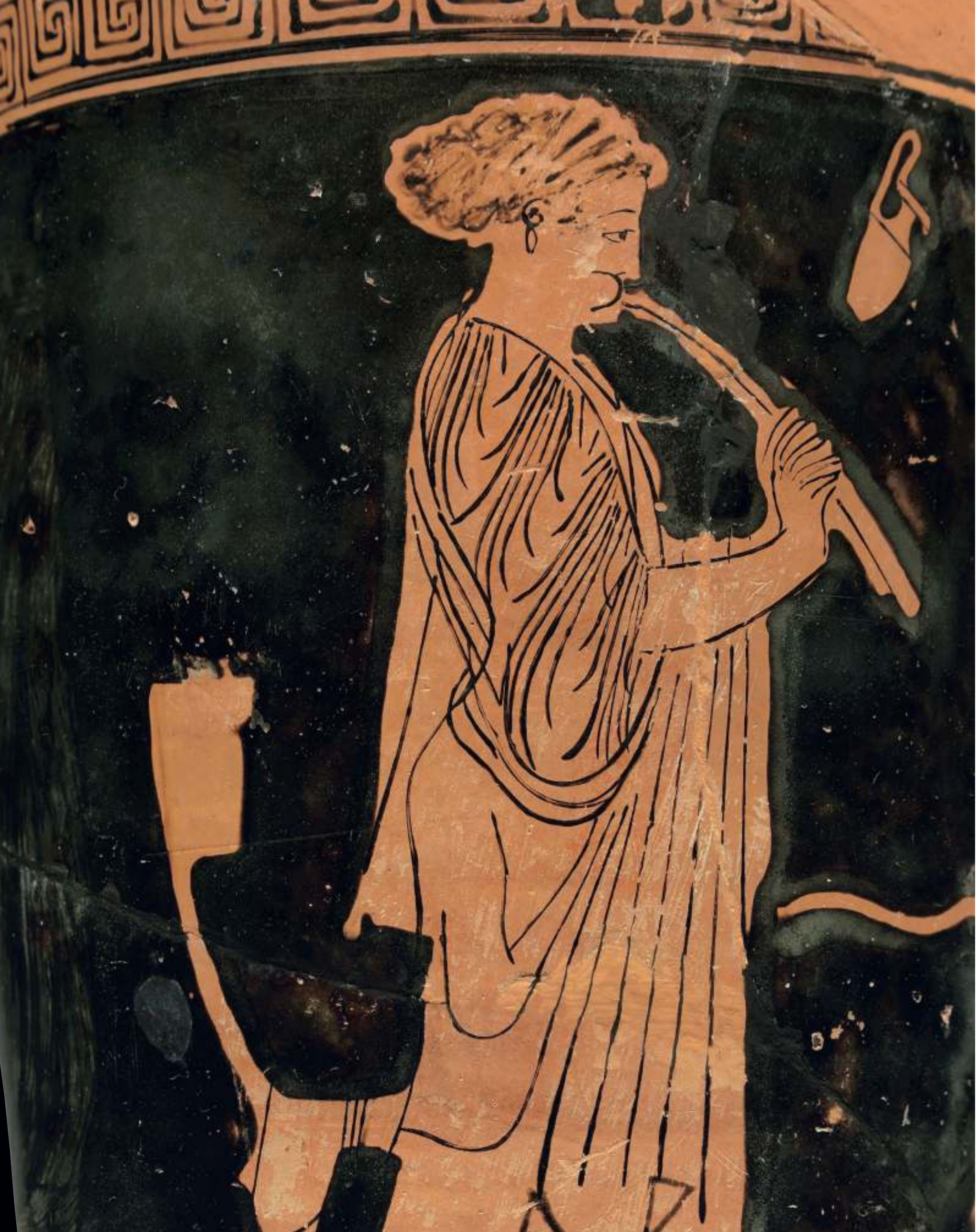
## THE COURSE LEADING THEBES TO HEGEMONY AND ITS TRAGIC DESTRUCTION

**H**ELLENIC POLITICAL AFFAIRS LOOK ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT IN THE 4TH CENT. BC, WITH THE BOEOTIANS following the steady and justifiably anti-Laconian policy that they had instituted at the end of the previous century. By means of this policy, the Thebans enhanced their influence and self-confidence and, two decades later, it led them through alliances and clashes on battlefields, headed by the brave and visionary leaders Pelopidas and Epaminondas, to victory and hegemony, albeit short-lived, over all of Greece. Internal dissension in Thebes and constant friction with the Phocians and Locrians on its border accelerated the rift between the Boeotians and Lacedaemonians. When the Boeotians invaded Phocis, Sparta responded by sending allied troops to central Greece. The battle at Aliartos (395 BC) ended in victory for the Thebans, with the help of the Athenians, and in the inglorious death of Lysander, who had won the battle at Aegospotamoi as commander of the Spartan fleet. But the events in Boeotia made it possible to form a broader anti-Spartan coalition of Hellenic states and resulted, in addition to other fierce battles in the Corinthian region, in the bloody battle of Coronea (394 BC) on Boeotian soil.

The operations by Lysander and Agesilaus in Boeotia were followed by the dissolution of the Boeotian League, in accordance with the peace terms dictated by the Persian king (387/6 BC), which Sparta undertook to impose on all Greek cities. At the Sparta conference, the Thebans sought in vain to save the Boeotian League, by requesting that they alone sign the treaty as representing all Boeotians. During the years that followed, the minting of League coins ceased as each city issued its own coinage up to 374 BC. During this period coins struck by Levadeia, Thespies and Plataea appeared for the first time. The latter city was re-established in 381 BC, after having been deserted for 50 years, on the initiative of the Spartans who were now enemies of Thebes. After Thebes was freed (379 BC) from the Spartan garrison that had been stationed on the Kadmeia by Phoebidas (382 BC), the Theban silver *staters* (didrachms), now minted on behalf of the Boeotian League acquired significance and widespread circulation.

The form of governance of the first Boeotian Federation in the early 4th century BC, i.e. just before its abolition in 387/86 BC, is described on a papyrus found in the Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus, on which a passage written by an ancient historian has been preserved. Boeotia had been divided into 11 districts, based on the location of its cities, each one of which contributed a *boeotarch* or chief magistrate. Thebes had four, two for the city itself and two more for the cities that belonged to it, including Plataea. Orchomenos contributed two *boeotarchs*, Thespies with Eutresis and Thisbe two; Tanagra one; Aliartos, Levadeia and Coronea together one; and finally Akraifia, Kopai and Chaeronea one. The above allocation also suggests the comparative power of these cities, as well as their hierarchical position in the League. The *boeotarchs* constituted the supreme federal authority. In addition to them, each of the eleven members provided 60 *bouleutes* (council members) who would gather together and meet in the Kadmeia. The army organisation was based on the same division, since each district provided a thousand foot and a hundred horse. The local assemblies (*boules*) of the cities, in which propertied citizens participated, would meet together in Thebes to take final decisions.

*Detail from Zeus' pursuit of the young woman on the lekythos on p. 234. The female figure is often identified as Aegina.*



The Spartan intervention in Boeotia, the sudden seizure of Thebes and its three-year occupation (382-379 BC), which damaged the city severely and cost the lives of many dissident citizens, ultimately influenced the flow of historical events only briefly. From 379 to the summer of 371 BC, when the decisive battle of Leuctra was fought, the Thebans warded off many attacks by the Spartans and their allies, overthrew the pro-Laconian and anti-Theban regimes in Boeotian cities, re-organised their federation and destroyed Plataea once again, severely jeopardising their relations with Athens at a period critical to the rise of Thebes.

The new Boeotian League, which had lasted unchanged until the battle of Chaeronea, was divided into seven districts that provided as many *boeotarchs*, four of whom were Thebans and three were from other Boeotian cities. The Thebans now had absolute control of the League since it had the majority of *boeotarchs*, two of which – Pelopidas and Epaminondas – were first-class leaders on a panhellenic scale. Applying a new military tactic with an oblique phalanx, the Thebans won the decisive battle of Leuctra (371 BC). The overwhelming defeat of the Spartan army dealt the final blow to Sparta’s dreams of rule and hegemony over Greece. The significance of the event is rendered in a most lyrical way on the funeral epigram for three official Thebans who fell in battle, the *boeotarch* Xenocrates and the generals (*strategoí*) Theopompos and Mnasilaos, whose names are carved on a stone stele in the Thebes Museum.

*When Sparta was (still) all-powerful, then  
it chanced to Xenocrates to bring the trophy to Zeus  
without fearing the army from the Eurotas, or  
the shields of the Laconians. The Thebans are superior in war!  
The trophy of the victory at Leuctra trumpets it.  
Not even to Epaminondas were we second!*

The glorious victory allowed the Thebans to claim first place among the Hellenic city-states from the viewpoint of military capability and influence on Greek territory. During the period of their hegemony, from 371 BC to the battle of Mantinea (362 BC) in which Epaminondas was killed, the Thebans heading the Boeotian League, to which Orchomenos now belonged, fought continuously on many fronts, with expeditions to the Peloponnese, Thessaly and Macedonia. The most important and permanent results of their wars were: the decimation of Spartan military might, the liberation of Messenia and their contribution to establishing the city of Messene and Megale Polis (Megalopolis) in Arcadia.

The year 364 BC was marked by two events, independent of each other but unfortunate for the fate and image of Thebes. One was the death of Pelopidas in the battle at Cynoscephalae in Thessaly; the other was the Theban army’s ruthless destruction of Orchomenos and the sale of its inhabitants into slavery. That was when it began to be apparent that the military and financial forces of Boeotia, with its closed rural economy, could no longer bear the burden of panhellenic hegemony. Thus the city’s power and its leadership of the League lasted for just nine

*Detail of the female flute-player in the pyrrhic dance scene on p. 234.*



Bronze mirror with handle in the form of a statuette of a maiden, and decorated with a sculpted sphinx, cupids, palmettes and a fox chasing a hare. From the cemetery of Akraifnio. Circa 460 BC.

years and then began to decline, when the stars of its two great leaders set, first that of Pelopidas in Thessaly (364 BC) and then of Epaminondas at Mantinea in Arcadia (362 BC).

A few years later, Thebes – head of and dominant power in the Boeotian League, which was still strong and active in central Greece – provoked the third sacred war and fought on the side of Philip II of Macedonia (356-346 BC). This was a bloody war that lasted for a long time, was waged over a large geographical area, and ultimately handed Philip an opportunity to extend his sphere of influence to the political and religious affairs of Thessaly and central Greece. In the battle of Chaeronea (338 BC) between the Boeotian League – with Athens and other southern Greek cities as allies – and Philip’s army and allies, the superior military planning and new tactics of the Macedonian king triumphed.



*Red-figure Attic kylix. Scene from daily life at home (woman between a chair and a basket). From the NE cemetery of Thebes. 5th cent. BC.*





After heavy losses on the battlefield, the Boeotian cities surrendered immediately. Philip treated the Thebans severely, as ringleaders, and the other Boeotian cities more mildly, without dissolving their League. He established a Macedonian garrison on Kadmeia and repopulated the cities of the Plataeans and Orchomenians that had been devastated. The Theban champions of the war were put to death, whereas the friends of the Macedonians and the oligarchs were reinstated in the leadership of the Boeotian cities, which had in the meantime been granted autonomy. Federal coins were issued in Thebes until 335 BC. Then the League's seat was transferred to Onchestos, as Thebes had been levelled by Alexander the Great after its revolt. In any event, from 338 BC on, the cities of Boeotia for the first time minted bronze coins with their own initials on the reverse and the League shield on the obverse.

The tragedy that had begun at Chaeronea with the sacrifice of the Sacred Band, the loss of many Boeotian and Athenian fighters and the harsh repercussions of the defeat for Thebes, continued with the untimely revolt of the Thebans against Macedonian supremacy and their irrational resistance, unto death, against Alexander (335 BC). In this way, the city was led to the fate that, some years earlier, she herself had unsuccessfully sought for Athens (404 BC), and suffered the devastation she had inflicted on Plataea (427 and 373 BC), on Thespies (424 and 371 BC) and on Orchomenos (364 and 346 BC). For Thebes, the classical period ended tragically and ingloriously. Cassander re-built it in 316/5 BC as part of his policy of fighting the house of Alexander, with the substantial support of the Athenians and the Messenians and with the help of many Greek and some Cypriot cities. But the once glorious and powerful city of Thebes never recovered from the destruction and slaughter or slavery of its population, nor did it ever regain its earlier brilliance and greatness.



## INTELLECTUAL AND ARTISTIC ACTIVITY



IN THE IDEOLOGICAL AND INTELLECTUAL LEVEL, THEBES was regarded by 5th-century Athenian tragic poets as the pre-eminent rival city, in which *hubris* (wanton violence), *eris* (strife) and *stasis* (sedition) reigned. Indeed, Boeotia in its entirety was presented in Attic and Atticizing literature as a place inhabited by crude, rapacious peasants and arrogant, quarrelsome and mutinous citizens, in contrast to the ideal of the classical Greek citizen with the ancestral virtues of the long-standing, happy and fair-minded inhabitants of Athens. Ancient historians and geographers, and modern researchers in particular, justly dispute these views. Many inscriptions and works of art attested in the sources show the Boeotia of the Classical period – specifically Thebes, Thespies, Plataea, Tanagra, Akraifia, Aliartos, Levadeia, Orchomenos and Anthedon – as a region with a multitude of art works, mainly votive offerings to deities.

In the climate of constant and fierce confrontations between Boeotian cities, ideas and artistic trends were generated that started out from the robust local tradition, with influences from various schools and workshops abroad. Artistic innovations and know-how originated mainly from Athens which, before and after the Persian Wars, maintained preferential relations with some Boeotian cities

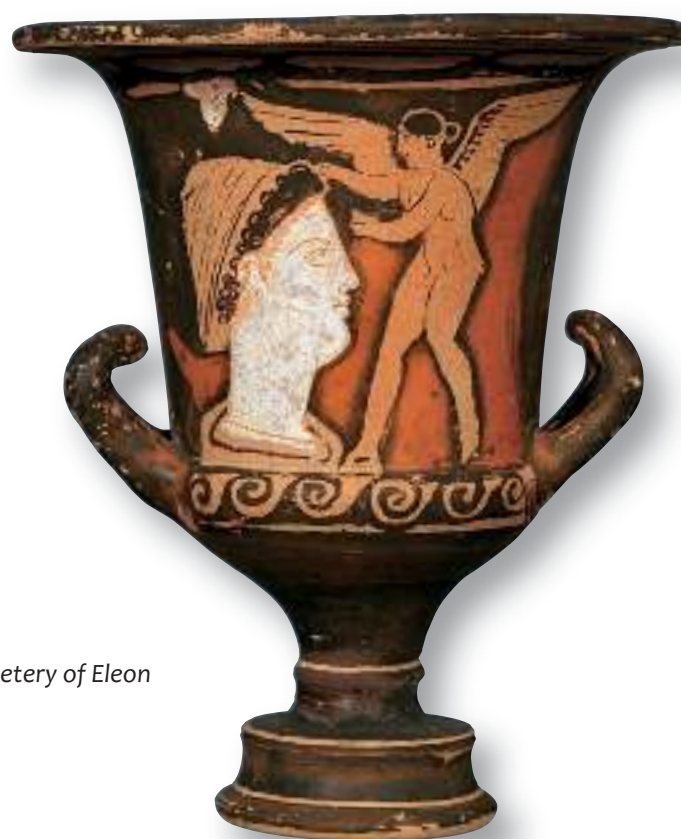


Red-figure Boeotian toiletries box (pyxis) with lid. Depicts a wedding procession. The groom is leading the bride to her new home, accompanied by women playing music, holding lighted torches and carrying fruit, pottery and myrtle branches. From the region of the Thebes cemeteries at the Kanapitsa site. 430-425 BC.

ABOVE: The complete scene on the vase.



Red-figure calyx-kraters with Dionysiac scenes from the NE cemetery of Thebes. The krater on the left depicts a young man, a maenad and a silenus; on the right are Eros playing a double flute, a maenad and a satyr. Detail on p. 245. Middle 4th cent. BC.



Red-figure calyx-krater with a female head and Eros from the cemetery of Eleon Thebes. Detail on p. 247. Mid 4th cent. BC.



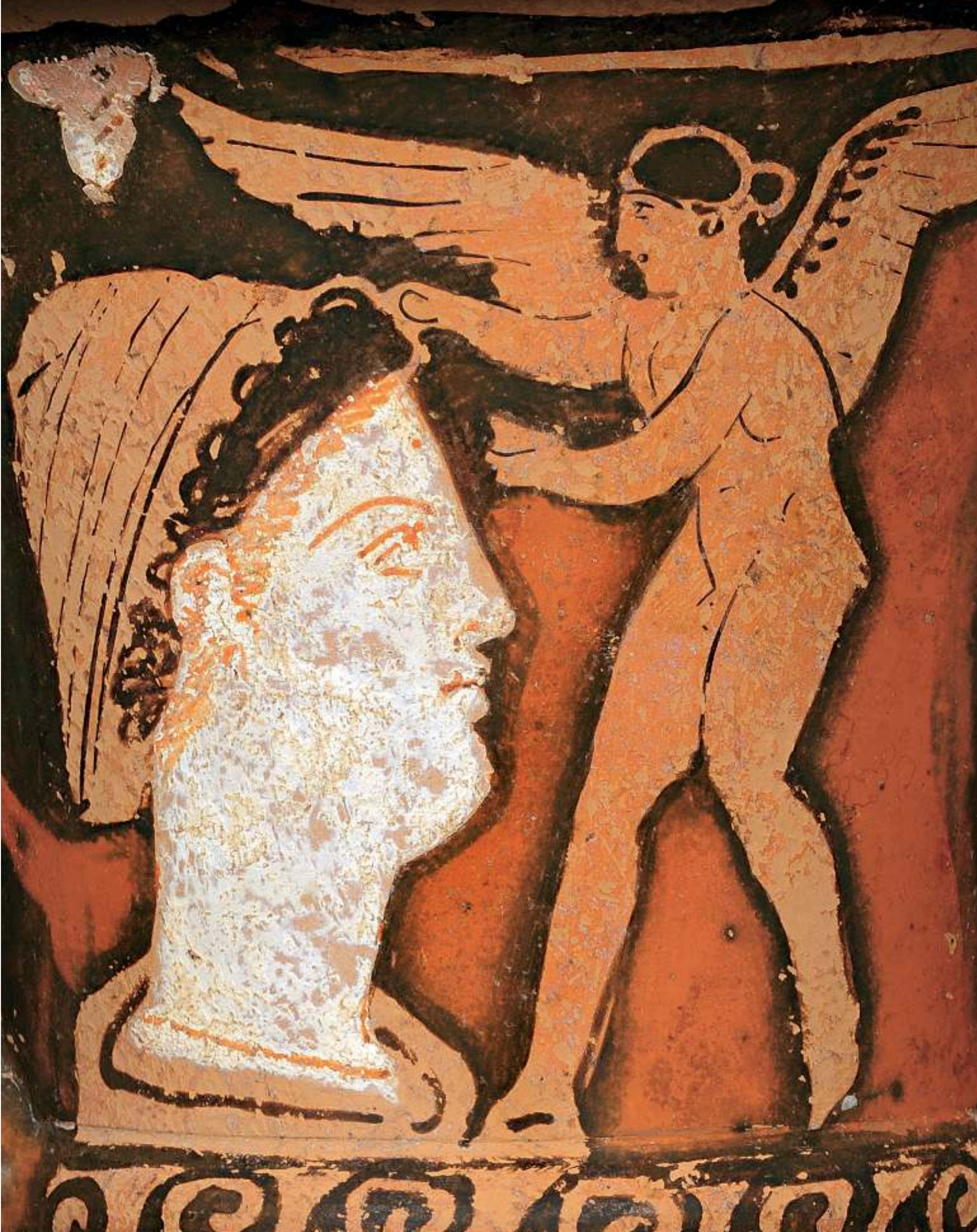
(Thespies, Plataea, Tanagra), and for many years regulated their policies and welcomed most of the dissident Boeotians exiled from their homeland. Ideological and artistic currents from Attica, the northeastern Peloponnese, Aegina, Euboea and the Aegean islands, from Locris, Phocis, Thessaly, Ionia, Cyprus, north Africa and lower Italy permeated Boeotia from one end to the other and became diffused through its cities, settlements and sanctuaries as early as the Archaic period. As attested by written records and finds, throughout almost the entire Classical period, Boeotia presented an intense flow of ideas, different in each city, making it a cultural crossroads.

The characters and incidents in the Theban mythological cycle became known through exceptional works of dramatic art, through the fine arts of ancient Greece, Etruria and Rome and from there they were passed on to the scholars of Byzantium and the Renaissance, thus becoming part of the timeless heritage of civilised humankind. Moral teachings relevant to all people are contained in the extant eight Attic tragedies whose themes and plots unfold in mythical Thebes. They contain celebrated passages about love, friendship, valour and affection for parents and family, as well as the noblest sentiments and ideals of love for one's homeland, freedom, peace, and respect for the law, the dead, strangers, the elderly and those who suffer through no fault of their own. In addition, the poetry of Hesiod, which preserved some earlier epics that have been lost today, provided the solid foundation for ancient and subsequent culture and education. Even the famous hymn to Athens: "O rich, violet-crowned and celebrated Athens, eternal support of Hellas, divine city..." is owed to the Theban poet Pindar. (*Dithyrambs* Fragment No. 64).

Boeotia and its cities, especially Thespies, Tanagra, Plataea, Akraifia but also Thebes, were not far removed from the cultural and artistic uplift of the 50-year period of Athenian greatness, even though the 5th century BC was a period of suspicion, hostility and even armed conflict amongst themselves and with Athens. On the contrary, in the 4th century BC, when Athens developed special relations with the Boeotians, art and other cultural achievements were disseminated with greater ease and speed on their territory, where a number of Athenian artisans worked.

The contribution of Boeotian art to the Classical period in Greece's artistic heritage remained obscure or even unknown for a long time. Our knowledge of Boeotian pottery of the Classical era has been significantly enriched by recent excavations of Theban cemeteries. Thus it was confirmed that in the first half of the 5th cent. BC, the influence of Attic pottery workshops was so strong that it displaced all other influences (from Corinth, Euboea, and eastern Greece) that had preceded it. The need for decorated pottery was now covered either by Attic imports or by the black-figure and especially the black-glazed vases produced locally. The black-figure technique which, under the direct influence of the Attic style, had been established in Boeotia in the previous century, continued to be produced until about the mid-5th century BC.

Just before the last quarter of the 5th cent. BC, Cabirian vases appeared, in particular a special category of deep cups (*skyphoi*), that were obviously made to serve the religious needs of the sanctuary of the Cabiri near Thebes. The decoration is black-figure but the techniques of outline and shading (*skiagraphia*) are also used. Their subject matter, in addition to plant decoration (ivy, grapevine), includes mythological or religious scenes rendered in a playful and jocular mood. Some scholars believe that certain of these scenes depict cult rituals in the sanctuary. Cabirian vases were being produced until the mid-4th or 3rd century BC. At the same period, the older technique of *skiagraphia* was revived on small vases decorated with palmettes and less frequently with figures, and sometimes the outline technique was also used. Vases decorated with palmettes were customary grave goods in





the Classical period, but were no longer produced by the 4th cent. BC. Black-glazed pottery became established in the 6th cent. BC through the influence of Athenian potters, one of whom, Teisias by name, actually moved to Tanagra, where he signed some lovely vases produced there. The decoration of black-glazed vases in the 5th century BC was limited to a few ornaments, with added violet colour and impressed motifs. The dominant shape was the two-handled cup (*kantharos*) which is associated with the local Boeotian cults of Dionysus and Heracles.

The production of Boeotian red-figure vases began hesitantly in the second quarter and had gained momentum by the middle of the 5th century BC, with the decisive influence of Attic workshops. As in the case of Teisias, an Athenian vase-painter known as the Argos Painter moved to the Thebes region and decorated local pottery related to the cult at the Cabirion. This category of ceramics was produced mainly in Theban but also in other local Boeotian workshops, as was the black-figure style. Despite the re-location of Athenian artisans to the region,



Two views of a red-figure bell-krater. It depicts a woman's head on the front and a palmette on the back. From the NE cemetery of Thebes. Mid 4th cent. BC. Detail on p. 248.



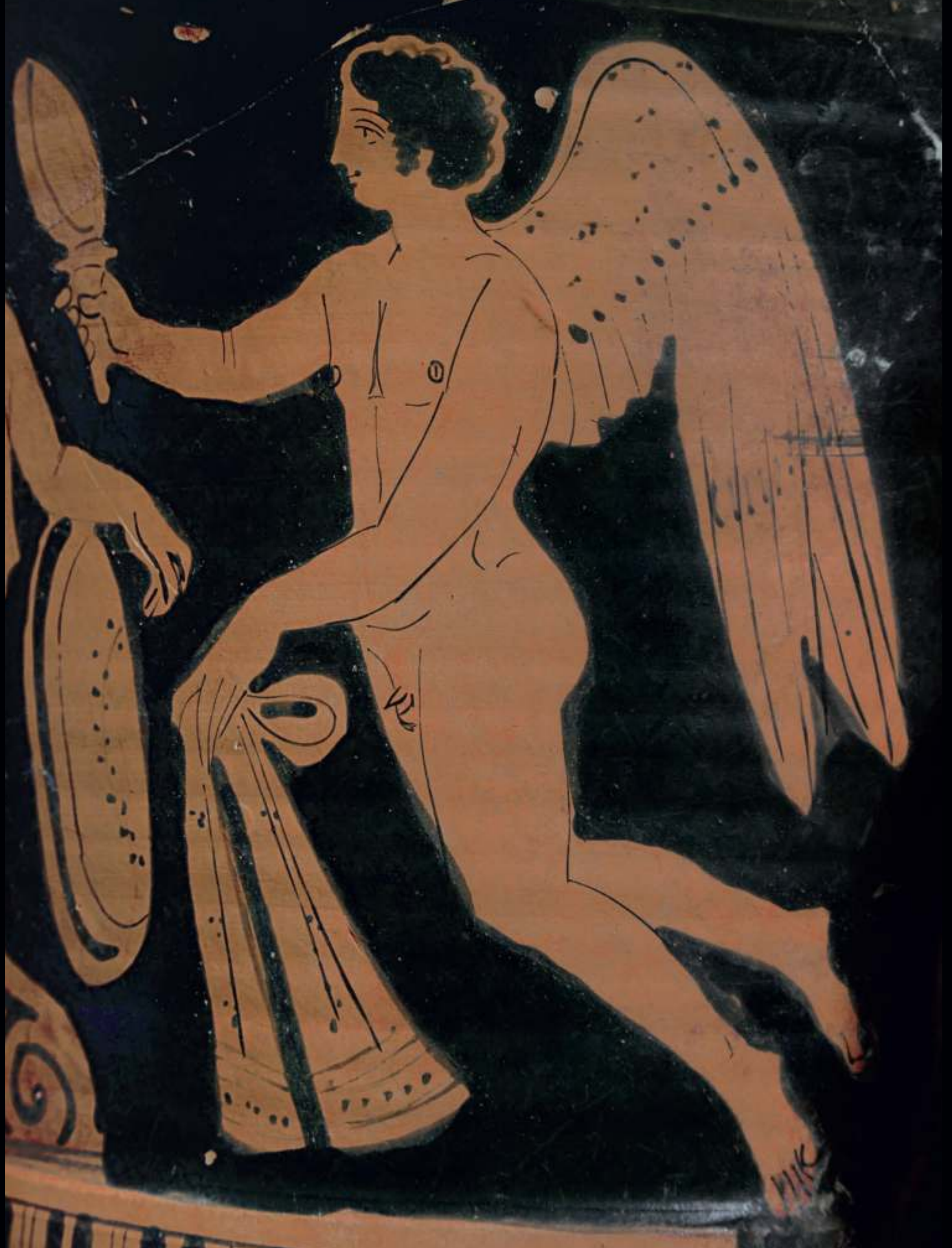
Red-figure calyx-krater. Calm Dionysiac scene with a seated maenad holding a thyrsus, leaning on a drum and looking complacently into the mirror held by a cupid. From the northeast cemetery of Thebes. 4th cent. BC. Details on pp. 250-251.

the nature of Boeotian red-figure vases retained its own characteristic features. Two parallel trends can be observed in Boeotian red-figure vases. One consists of the fairly faithful imitation of Attic vase-painting, while the other leans toward independence from Attic models and toward the creation of works influenced by the Boeotian ceramic tradition, with scenes from religious or daily life that are rendered in a light-hearted and genuinely comic way. Representatives of this trend are vase painters known by the following names: the Argos Painter, who worked in the Cabirian workshop of the Initiates Painter and was of Attic origin, the Judgement of Paris Painter, the Dancing Pan Painter and the Large Athenian Kantharos Painter, whose pottery workshops were located in the Thebes area.

In the second half of the 5th century BC, very few Attic vases reached Boeotia, although in the first quarter of the 4th century BC, imports increased greatly owing to the good relations established between Athens and Thebes after 403 BC. During the period of the hostilities, the pottery output of Boeotia was qualitatively and quantitatively sufficient to cover the needs of the local clientele. In his *Acharnians* (902 ff), Aristophanes humorously depicted a Boeotian saying indicatively that he did not need to bring earthenware back with him from Athens, since there was plenty at home. In Boeotia, as in Attica, the red-figure style continued and gradually declined during the 4th century BC, a period of close relations between Athens and Thebes. Some workshops were producing small funnel-shaped mixing bowls (*krateres*) that cannot be identified with certainty as either Attic or Boeotian. The subject matter depicted on these vases and the recent finds from quite a few Theban graves reinforce the view that they were produced in Boeotia.







Finds from old and more recent, large-scale archaeological exploration prove that during the 5th and 4th century BC, the art of making small-scale sculpture, which was profoundly rooted in the Boeotian Geometric and Archaic past, demonstrates creativity and typological diversity while maintaining its high quality. Small-scale sculpture is known to be related, owing to its material and size, to the pottery that accompanied offerings in graves and sanctuaries, while also retaining close links with large-scale sculpture.

The plundering of thousands of graves and sacred repositories, especially during the 19th century, contributed to supplying museums and private collections with a multitude of earthenware works of art, but unfortunately without data regarding the conditions under which they were found. On the contrary, excavations in Ritsona (Mykalessos), Halai, Tanagra and Akraifnio as well as the re-examination of finds from the Thespian Polyandron and the Theban Cabirion have made it possible to date the main types of Boeotian small-scale sculpture on the basis of other findings in closed funerary complexes. The rich harvest of finds from recent excavations in cemeteries (Thebes, Aliartos, Tanagra) and sanctuaries (Orchomenos) has corroborated and fine-tuned dates already proposed.

In the first half of the 5th century BC, the output of figurines was rather standardised and based on Attic or Ionian models adapted to the local preferences. The standing female figures are faithful representations of an Athenian model wearing a high headdress (*polos*). The male figures represent mainly youths who are nude or wearing a long tunic and holding a cockerel or a lyre. Bearers of water-jars (*hydriai*) appear almost exclusively in sanctuaries in which the law-giving deities Demeter and Kore were worshipped or that were associated with nymphs (Eutresis, Thebes, Orchomenos, Coronea). Among the original creations of the 5th and the early 4th cent. BC are earthenware busts of Dionysus, Demeter and other deities, as well as Europa riding on the back of the bull.

In the early 4th century BC, Boeotian small-scale clay sculpture expanded its product range while maintaining the high quality characteristic of its work. This output aimed beyond the local needs, as can be seen by the fact that its products have been found in a number of different places in the Hellenic world. The types of figurines that were now being reproduced in many copies show the close relationship to large-scale sculpture. In the late Classical period, figurines of female dancers, youths and peplos-clad maidens of various sizes, with hair elaborately dressed and bearing symbols alluding to initiation or wedding ceremonies, are common. Until the threshold of the Hellenistic period, local workshops continued to create and produce original works with a special technical and morphological vocabulary.

From the Persian Wars on, a great gulf opened up between the official religion in the cities and the genuine faith of the farmers and stock-breeders that was peculiar to Boeotia. The official religion consisted of establishing temples with sculpted decoration and votive offerings, usually marble or bronze statues and reliefs, and of organising processions, costly sacrifices and entertainments that served the ambitions of the political leadership and showed off its power. On the contrary, the people's religious practices were of an occult and sometimes metaphysical nature and were related to the productivity of the land, human fertility and the memory of the dead. The use of figurines and amorphous stones (*baityloi*) was directly linked with the people's faith and religion. In Orchomenos, three amorphous stones were reported from the shrine of the Graces; in Hyettos an unhewn image of Heracles; in Thespies a stone on the Eros site; in Thebes a stone near the chamber of Alcmene and a wooden cult statue (*xoanon*) among the ruins of the chamber of Semele, alongside statues by major artists.



Two red-figure bell-kraters and one calyx-krater. LEFT: A conversation scene. CENTRE: A satyr is chasing a maenad. RIGHT: A Dionysiac scene with a maenad and satyrs in ecstasy. From the NE cemetery of Thebes. 4th cent. BC.

Monuments and written sources reveal that in the odd setting of the Boeotian cities, where fragmentation and fierce conflicts were primary components of daily life, alongside creations by great artists of the period, mainly Athenians, there was a remarkable local output of funerary and votive reliefs. Sculpture was an old tradition and highly developed in the most important Boeotian cities of Thebes, Tanagra and Thespies where, whenever political and financial circumstances permitted, there were functioning workshops staffed by competent artists. Cities not infrequently called in famous foreign statue-makers, especially from neighbouring Athens, and accepted their influence.

The information available about works of Classical art in the 5th and 4th centuries BC in Boeotian cities is generally fragmentary, and originated much later when, in the meantime, many of the once flourishing cities had dwindled and their sanctuaries had declined. The ancient written sources provide no more than a vague picture of the monumental and artistic wealth of a dozen or so Boeotian cities, many of which were later destroyed or sacked in civil clashes or foreign incursions. Thebes, Thespies, Aliartos, Plataea, Orchomenos, Akraifia, Coronea, Levadeia,



*Scene of a satyr pursuing a maenad. Detail of the krater on the previous page.*

Tanagra and Anthedon had all hosted significant works of bronze and terracotta sculpture, as well as painted works; indeed some of these cities had old and active workshops for the *in-situ* production of sculptures and reliefs.

We learn from Pausanias that at Plataea, the first stop on his tour of Boeotia, there were Archaic and Classical works of sculpture and painting dedicated in the temples of Hera and Athena. In Thespies, Thebes and Levadeia, stood famous works by Praxiteles. Cult statues of deities, works by unknown artists, are reported in Onchestos, Alalkomenes, Levadeia, Laphystio, Akraifnio, Thisbe, Chaeronea, Orchomenos, Larymna and Anthedon.

The bronze statue of Poseidon that was found on the coast at Ayios Vassilios, site of the Plataean seaport on the Corinthian Gulf, dates to the decade between 480-470 BC, shows influences from different schools of bronze statuary and was dedicated in the sanctuary of the god in thanksgiving for the victory of Plataea in 479 BC. Today it is in the National Archaeological Museum. At about the same time a tripod was made to support the gold cauldron that was a votive offering by the victors in the same battle to the sanctuary at Delphi. Its serpentine base, on which the names of the cities have faded, is located in the park of the Hippodrome (At Meidan) in Istanbul. At Plataea, statues were put up in the age-old temples of Hera and Athena, depicting the former seated, with the epithet of Bride, a work by Kallimachos; the latter was portrayed in a gold-plated *xoanon*, an acrolith of Pentelic marble by Phidias. The statue of Hera appears to have been at the centre of the feast called Daedala. The wall paintings on the temple by the artists Polygnotos and Onasias belong to the same period. Statues of Hera, with the epithet Spouse, i.e. a wife subject to a husband, and of Rhea giving Cronos a rock wrapped in swaddling clothes instead of the newborn Zeus, both works by Praxiteles in Pentelic marble, adorned the Heraion.

Pausanias mentions significant sculptural works of the Classical period in Thebes as well, which at that period had been reduced to a village on the hill of Kadmeia. Two statues of Hermes and Athena stood at the entrance to the sanctuary of Apollo Ismenios and were works by Phidias and Scopas respectively, while the wooden statue of the god has been attributed to Kanachos, Sicyonian sculptor in bronze. The hero's Labours, which were portrayed on the pedimental sculptures of the Heracleion in Thebes, according to Pausanias, were works by Praxiteles. The colossal Pentelic marble reliefs of Heracles and Athena that were dedicated in the hero's shrine right after the fall of the Thirty Tyrants (403 BC) were works by Alcámenes, pupil of Phidias. Thrasybulus and his comrades commissioned it, on the occasion of the restoration of democracy in Athens with the support of Thebes. The acrolith statues of the group with Tyche and Plutos that stood in the centre of Thebes must belong to the second quarter of the 4th cent. BC. They were works by the Athenian Xenophon who, during the years of the Theban hegemony worked in the Arcadian city of Megalopolis with Kephisodotos, and by the Boeotian Kallistonikos. In the Classical period, a statue of Artemis Eucleia, a work by Scopas, was placed in the *agora* in the lower city of Thebes.

After the battle at Mantinea (362 BC), statues of Epaminondas and the famous flute-player Pronomos – about whom it is said that his music accompanied the ceremony establishing the city of Messene (369 BC) – were erected in the centre of Thebes. It is also known that a statue of Pelopidas, a work by Lysippus, was put up in Delphi (368 BC). Pindar mentions the sanctuary of the Great Mother and the seated statue of the goddess, a work by his contemporary Theban sculptors Aristomedes and Sokrates. After praising king Arkesilas of Cyrene, winner of the Pythian Games in 462 BC, the poet commissioned a statue of Zeus Ammon, a work by the famous sculptor Kalamis. To the same artist are attributed the statues of Hermes holding a ram and of Dionysus in Tanagra, a city with many sanctuaries and an artistic centre of Boeotia, with strong Attic influences throughout the entire historical period.



In Thespies, the pre-eminent artistic centre of Boeotia, which was also strongly influenced by Athens, where many of the local artists had moved or apprenticed as a result of the disasters suffered by their city, there were sculpture workshops and statues of various divinities. There was a famous statue of Eros, a work by Praxiteles of Pentelic marble, which was donated to the city by his friend, the famous courtesan Phryne, whose origins were from Thespies. A bronze statue on the same theme was also created by Lysippus.

In the Valley of the Muses, there were statues of the Muses made by the sculptors Kephissodotos, Strongylion and Olympiosthenes, which may have been dedicated in the sanctuary in the first half of the 4th century BC. Some of these statues were brought to Constantinople in 330 AD, where they were burned in a popular uprising against the emperor Arcadius and his consort Eudoxia (404 AD). There were also two statues of Dionysus in the sanctuary, one of which was a work by Lysippus, the other by Myron. The latter, a superb work by this outstanding sculptor was, according to Pausanias, dedicated by Sulla to the muses of Helicon, after he had removed it from Orchomenos.

Between Helicon and Lake Copais, at Itonion, the ancient Boeotian sanctuary near Coronea, stood bronze statues of Athena and Zeus, works by Agorakritos, a pupil of Phidias. In Coronea, Pausanias describes an “ancient” statue of Hera holding Sirens, and attributes it to the Theban sculptor Pythodoros of the late Archaic period. In Levadeia, sacred city of Boeotia, in the region of the oracle of Trophonios, he reports a statue by Praxiteles to the herogod, among other dedications to Cronus, Zeus, Hera and Demeter Europa. Some headless statues of *peplos*-clad maidens dating to the same era depicting Demeter and other female deities have been found in the vicinity of the Herkyna springs.

Great sculpture by eponymous local and guest artists included a plethora of works that are unknown today, since neither the works themselves, their inscribed bases nor any other information about them have been preserved. Alongside the outstanding achievements of sculpture there were also many other remarkable Boeotian works, mainly votive and funerary reliefs, which provide us with valuable information about creations by the ordinary, anonymous craftsmen of the period, and often confirm the high quality of their workmanship.

Votive reliefs were dedicated to many deities: Zeus, Aphrodite, Artemis, Demeter, Dionysus, Cybele, Asclepius and Heracles, together with other divinities such as Pan, the hero Hippeus and Agathos Daemon. The majority of them were created in the 4th cent. BC.

Relief grave stelae were more numerous, some of which were crowned with palmettes. The ban, under Cleisthenes’ sumptuary law, on costly grave monuments in Attica, their re-appearance after the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, and their production until the prohibitive decree of Demetrius Phalereus (317 BC) had an analogous influence on the corresponding art in the cities of Boeotia that were inspired by Attica.

A good number of grave stelae of the 5th and 4th centuries BC came from Thespies and, even though they were imitations of contemporary Attic works, they lack the latter’s quality. However, in the 4th cent. BC, the workshop in Thespies presented certain special features that were probably attributable to its artisans’ personal

*Dionysiac scene with the group (thiasos) of the maenad and satyrs in ecstasy. Details from the krater on p. 253.*



preferences or perhaps to the choices of their clients, with the result that they departed visibly from their Attic models, in a period when Athens had become estranged from its former ally. Relief grave stelae were made in workshops in Thebes, Akraifia, Tanagra and eastern Locris, continuing the tradition of the late Archaic period. Boeotian stelae usually depicted the dead person, alone or with other family members, with emotional simplicity and immediacy, refined by death and the artisan's chisel.

Parallel to the relief stelae, at the end of the 5th century BC and the early decades of the 4th, some stelae were engraved on dark grey limestone in an original and rare technique that is more appropriate to painting than sculpture. The scenes were engraved on the stone using fine dots or continuous lines. These engraved stelae are exceptional works of art and portray dead warriors with a natural vitality at the crucial moment of battle. Details of the scene and decoration have been rendered with remarkable delicacy and unrivalled grace. It is believed in fact that the workshop in which they were produced may have been associated with Aristides, the Theban bronze sculptor, artist, and pupil respectively of Polyclitus and the painter Euxenidas, a contemporary of Zeuxis, Parrasios and Timanthes, whose works date to the late 5th century BC. The Theban school established by Aristides acquired a high reputation owing to the fact that among those who apprenticed there were the sculptor in bronze and painter Euphranor, Antenorides and Aristides' sons, Nikeros, Ariston and Nicomachos. The latter was probably the son of Ariston and father and teacher of Aristides the Younger, a famous painter at the time of Alexander the Great. Pliny (*Natural His.* XXXV, 122) attributes the invention of the encaustic painting technique to one of the two, probably to the leader of the Theban school, Aristides the Elder. So it is very likely that the revival of this technique, the obvious Attic influence, the limited number and short interval in which these engraved works were produced, and perhaps the painted stelae in the Thebes Museum, confirm the hypothesis that their invention and unique decoration can be attributed to the Theban school, which was associated with the names of great painters towards the end of the 5th and into the 4th century BC.



*Black-glazed Boeotian high-handled cup (kantharos) with a high foot and the incised dedication KABIPO.  
From the sanctuary of the Cabiri near Thebes. 5th cent. BC.*



*Black-glazed Boeotian kantharos with a low foot and handles of the Cabirian type. Bears the incised inscription HIAPOΣ.  
From the sanctuary of the Cabiri near Thebes. 5th cent. BC.*





Red-figure Attic drinking cup (skyphos) depicting an owl. From the cemetery of ancient Eleon, near Thebes. 5th cent. BC.



Black-figure Cabirian skyphos. Worshippers are heading towards the sanctuary. From the sanctuary of the Cabiri near Thebes. Last quarter of the 5th cent. BC. LEFT PAGE: Detail of a figure wrapped in a mantle.



Black-figure Cabirian skyphos. Swans in a vineyard. On the front is the cartoon-like depiction of a symposium with a reclining male figure, a nude female flautist and a nude man in an amorous mood. From the sanctuary of the Cabiri near Thebes. Last quarter of the 5th cent. BC. ON THE NEXT TWO PAGES: Previous scenes shown in full.







*Sherd of a Cabirian skyphos with a black-figure scene. Female flute-player.  
From the sanctuary of the Cabiri near Thebes. Middle 4th cent. BC.*



*Sherd of a Cabirian skyphos with a black-figure depiction of a flute-player.  
From the sanctuary of the Cabiri near Thebes. 4th cent. BC.*





*Sherd of a Cabirian skyphos with a black-figure scene. Donkey in a vineyard. From the sanctuary of the Cabiri near Thebes. 4th cent. BC.*

*Sherd of a Cabirian skyphos with a black-figure satyr. From the sanctuary of the Cabiri near Thebes. 4th cent. BC.*





Votive relief stele with a representation of Cybele enthroned holding a phiale and a drum, and with a lion cub on her lap. Worshippers are approaching the goddess from the left to pay their respects. From Thebes. 4th cent. BC.





Relief scene of a banquet for the dead. The hero is depicted reclining on a couch with worshippers approaching from the left to pay their respects. To the right, the young cup-bearer may be a copy of some major sculptural work. From Thebes. Second half of the 4th cent. BC.

PAGE 268: Inscribed pedestal of a statue, bearing the signature of the famous sculptor Praxiteles. The pedestal was used three times. It initially bore the bronze portrait statue of Thrasymachos, son of Charmides, which was dedicated to the gods by Archias and Anaxareta, son and sister respectively of Thrasymachos. It was used the second time as the base of the marble statue of an unknown person, which was most likely replaced later by a third statue. The inscription on the pedestal (Made by Praxiteles the Athenian) was carved for its initial use in the mid 4th cent. BC. From Thespies.

Part of a grave stele. A youth is depicted wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a cloak. The stele is bordered by Doric colonettes. The youth is holding a bird in his right hand. From Palaeohori near Martino. Boeotian work. Early 4th cent. BC.



Part of a grave stele with a seated female figure. The dead woman is lifting her mantle and holding a pomegranate. Boeotian work from the Thespies region. First half of the 5th cent. BC.







PAGE. 272: Stele marking the grave of a youth. The dead young man gazes into infinity, emphasising his isolation from the world of the living. Beside him is his young slave. The inscription Th[eom]nistos was carved in the Roman period. Of unknown origin. Late 5th-early 4th cent. BC.

Part of a grave stele depicting a breastplate-clad warrior. In his left hand he is holding a sword, and in his right, the reins of his horse, which have not been preserved. Boeotian work from Thespies. Late 5th-early 4th cent. BC.



Grave stele of a seated woman. The dead woman lifts her mantle and receives the hairband offered by her standing slave. The inscription on the epistyle is later, from the Roman period. Boeotian work from Thespies. Late 5th cent. BC.





*Part of a grave stele depicting a standing nude youth. The sigmoid stance of his body testifies to the influence of Praxiteles' works. Boeotian work of the mid-4th cent. BC from Thebes.*

Grave stele of Philotera. She is seated, with her baby on her lap. The dead woman gazes sadly into the distance, emphasising the sense of her departure from the world of the living. From Alyki near Xironomi (ancient Siphai). Boeotian work dating to the early 4th cent. BC, influenced by counterpart Attic gravestones.



Grave stele of a seated female figure. She is sitting on a chair and lifting her mantle with her left hand. In the 1st cent. BC, it was used again as a grave marker for Aphrodisia and an inscription was carved beside the face of the dead woman. From Thespies. Second half of the 5th cent. BC.





*Large marble palmette from the crowning of a grave stele, probably from Plataea. The front of the plinth bears the inscription ΕΠΙ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΩΙ.  
Attic work of the 4th cent. BC.*



*Grave stele from the Tanagra region. The lower body of the seated dead woman has been preserved and that of her standing servant. Attic work of the late 5th cent. BC.  
Detail of scene on the next page.*



Grave cube bearing a scene with a dog sniffing the ground uneasily in search of his master, Deinomachos. The depiction of the loyal animal alone, without his owner, makes the absence of the dead person more marked. From Akraifnio. Boeotian work of the late 5th cent. BC.



Grave stele with pedimental crown and representation of a seated dog, loyal guard of his dead master's grave. Unknown origin. Mid-4th cent. BC.







PAGE 283: Inscribed grave stele of Mnason carved on black stone. The dead man is depicted at the height of battle holding a spear in his right hand and a shield and sword in his left. On his head he is wearing a helmet of Boeotian type. From the cemeteries of the region of Pyri near Thebes. Work of the last decades of the 5th cent. BC. ABOVE: Artist's reconstruction of the carving on the grave-stone of Mnason.



Grave stele of a warrior carved on black stone.  
The dead man is depicted in battle with a spear,  
shield and helmet of the Boeotian type. Work of  
the late 5th cent. BC from Thebes.



Carved black stone stele over the grave of Rynchon. The dead man is shown in battle with a shield, javelin and sword. He is wearing a conic helmet of the Boeotian type and a cloak billowing in the background. On the crown is a scene from the life of the dead man. A work of the late 5th or early 4th cent. BC from Thebes. Detail on the following pages.









*Fragments of female busts in clay. From a rural sanctuary in Orchomenos. Second quarter of the 5th cent. BC.*





*Fragment of a clay female bust.  
From a rural sanctuary in  
Orchomenos. Second quarter  
of the 5th cent. BC.*



*Clay votive wreaths adorned with flowers.  
From a rural sanctuary in Orchomenos. 5th cent. BC.*





Clay bust of a woman. From the grave enclosure at Aliartos. Third quarter of the 5th cent. BC.



Terracotta female figurines. The figure on the left is standing; the one on the right is seated on a throne without armrests.  
From the NE cemetery of Thebes. Mid-5th cent. BC.



Clay bust of a bearded Dionysus. Portrayed as a mature man, dressed in a mantle and holding a kantharos in his right hand.  
From Larymna. 5th cent. BC.





*Terracotta figurines of standing women. The one on the left is lifting her mantle and leaning on a herm; the one on the right is holding a phiale and an unidentified plant. From the NE cemetery of Thebes. 5th cent. BC.*



*Terracotta figurines of standing women. On the left is a peplos-clad woman with the characteristic high Boeotian hair style of the 5th cent. BC. The figure on the right is holding a band across her torso. 4th cent. BC. From the NE cemetery of Thebes and the grave enclosure of Aliartos respectively.*



*Terracotta figurines of a standing woman and the goddess Athena. The woman is wearing a high polos headdress, while Athena is clad in a conic helmet and holding a shield. From the NE cemetery of Thebes, 5th cent. BC.*

Terracotta figurine of a standing woman. A little girl is sitting on her left shoulder.  
From the NE cemetery of Thebes. 4th cent. BC.



Terracotta figurine of a standing woman holding a basket  
(a Hesperis?) and picking fruit from a tree. From the grave  
enclosure of Aliartos. 4th cent. BC.

Terracotta figurine of a standing woman. She is striding to the right with her mantle billowing out behind her.  
From the NE cemetery of Thebes. 4th cent. BC.





*Terracotta figurine of a standing youth. He is nude apart from the cloak falling from his shoulders. In his left hand he is holding a cockerel. From the NE cemetery of Thebes. 5th cent. BC.*



*ABOVE: Terracotta figurine of a seated boy playing with a goose. 5th-4th cent. BC. BELOW: Clay group of a couple on a bed. The man is semi-reclining; the woman is sitting on the edge of the bed. From the NE cemetery of Thebes. 5th cent. BC.*





*Clay figurine of Io. She is pulling her mantle and running away from the terrible fate that Hera has in store for her because she was wooed and won by Zeus. She has already started to sprout horns on her head, as she is being metamorphosed into a cow. From the cemetery of Aliartos. First half of the 4th cent. BC.*



LEFT PAGE: Clay half-statue of Athena. The goddess is wearing an aegis and a polos instead of a helmet. In this case, she is depicted as a chthonic deity rather than a military one. From the cemetery of Aliartos. 5th cent. BC.



Clay figurines of Pan and doves. From the NE cemetery of Thebes. 5th cent. BC.



Clay figurines. Above, a boy is riding a goose (two views); in the centre is a standing grotesque actor with a lyre; below a seated grotesque female figure. From the NE cemetery of Thebes. Late 5th-early 4th century BC.



Two views of the terracotta figurine of an enthroned female with arms articulated at the shoulder. She is wearing a diaphanous tunic with her feet on a foot-rest. The throne is richly decorated with palmettes, rosettes and sphinxes. From the NE cemetery of Thebes. 4th cent. BC.







Red-figure lekythos with the moulded representation of a winged Eros in an idyllic landscape. The young god is wearing only a mantle and riding on the blue waves of the sea amongst dolphins. The playful theme provides an opportunity to show the strong S curve formed by the god's body as he tries to balance by holding out his arms. From the cemetery of Akraifnio. Last third of the 4th cent. BC.

BELOW: The back of the lekythos decorated with painted palmettes.







# MACEDONIAN SUCCESSORS AND ROMAN POLEMARCHS

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## *The history and art of Boeotia in the Hellenistic period*

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### HISTORICAL REVIEW

**T**HE END OF THE CLASSICAL ERA AND OF THE GREEK CITY-STATE, THE BATTLE OF CHAERONEA (338 BC) and Alexander's destruction of Thebes (335 BC) left Boeotia disorganized and devastated. Ancient authors report that the events in Thebes caused Hellas to lose its "moon", while Athens, its bright "sun" was in graver danger than ever before from precisely the same mortal peril. The re-building of the Boeotian cities destroyed by the Thebans, i.e. Plataea, Thespies and Orchomenos, which were now all allies of the Macedonians, and the improvements to Tanagra, Thespies and Levadeia began with the encouragement and support of the new lords of Boeotia right after the battle of Chaeronea, and continued after the destruction of Thebes. It was then that the land of the Thebans was divided up among its neighbours, allies of the Macedonians, who usurped and cultivated it, while its inhabitants, at least those who survived, were either sold into slavery or exiled. From that time on, and throughout the long Hellenistic period, Boeotia was to suffer the progressive dwindling of its population, the decline of most of its cities, with very few exceptions, poverty, the abandonment of many settlements in the countryside, and continuous battles, looting and mobilisations. In the subsequent centuries prior to the Roman conquest, Boeotia as a whole was transformed into a theatre of war and an enormous field on which the grim reaper cut down human lives like stalks of wheat.

After Thebes was eliminated, the cities that were rebuilt acquired political and economic substance, increased their revenues and were independent as well. These cities were Tanagra, Orchomenos, Thespies, Levadeia and Plataea, which minted their own bronze coins from 338 to 335 BC, in some cases, for the first time in their history. Throughout the duration of Alexander the Great's expedition and rule, the site of Thebes appears to have been uninhabited. The re-establishment of the city in 316/5 BC by Antipater's son Cassander, the primary strong man in Macedonia, does not directly mark any noteworthy change in Boeotian affairs, despite the great symbolic and historic significance that is sometimes attributed to it. In addition, the city must have been rebuilt in stages, and obviously had to follow the pace set by the assistance of other cities and princes. Almost from the outset, Athens undertook to build the defensive wall around it, while Messene, Megalopolis and cities from distant Cyprus, among others, contributed to reconstructing its public buildings. The decision to re-establish Thebes may not have been

*Detail of the painted bust of a youth on a grave stele on which his name is written: ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ ΧΑΙΡΕ, from the lower town of Thebes. See page 321. Second half of the 1st cent. BC.*



Stele with a pedimental crown from Thespies. On the pediment is depicted a relief lyre, a tripod and an omphalos; also carved on it is a decree by the deme of Delphi to honour Thespian judges after the hearing of cases related to the sanctuary. Hellenistic period.

due solely to the city's former reputation, but also to fierce intra-dynastic conflicts and to Cassander's aspirations to the throne of Macedonia; in this way he hoped to acquire fame and arouse sympathy among the other Greeks. The fact, however, is that Thebes was rebuilt without the consenting opinion of the Boeotians and their League as a whole, perhaps under pressure from the citizens of Athens, to which thousands of expatriate Thebans had flocked. Indicative of the feelings of the other Boeotians about the prospect of Thebes arising from its ashes with the help of Athens was to form an alliance with Antipater against the Athenians in the Lamian War (323-322 BC). The final defeat of the Athenians preserved the *status quo* in Boeotia.

After the battle of Chaeronea and the subsequent destruction of Thebes, the Boeotian League took on a new form, which was retained until 172 BC. Its seat was now in Onchestos, in the Aliartos region, with its age-old

sanctuary of Poseidon, where intense construction activity was taking place at that very moment. The parts of Boeotia that were represented in the League were then usually seven. According to epigraphic evidence, however, in addition to the *boeotarchs* at that time, there were also the *aphedriateuontes*, i.e. magistrates with mainly religious duties, who were equal in number to the *boeotarchs*. The number of archons was increased by one or two at certain periods, perhaps to reflect the territorial fluctuations of Boeotia at different political conjunctures. In the 3rd century BC, Opuntian Locris for example, and sometimes Oropos, belonged to Boeotia, as did Chalcis and Eretria for a very brief interval in the late 4th century. However it would seem that the most important Boeotian cities of the period were solidly represented by law in the League but that some archons may have been elected in assemblies and not directly by their cities.

Despite the reconstruction of the fortified wall around Thebes and the immediate or gradual restoration of its other public functions, such as that of the mint, the city never, either then or later, regained the territory it controlled during the Classical period. Most of the plains that had once belonged to Thebes were now in the hands of the Plataeans, Thespians, Tanagrans and perhaps also the Orchomenians, to whom they had been distributed immediately after the destruction of Thebes. In addition, Akraifia and Anthedon, which had once also belonged to Thebes, were now independent cities like the others. In 313/312 BC, the Boeotian League joined up with Antigonos and his nephew Ptolemy, who set out to liberate the cities of central Greece from Cassander's control. That was when the Macedonian garrison was expelled from the Kadmeia citadel.

While the clashes between the Macedonians and the other Greeks continued after the Battle of Ipsus (301 BC), the Thebans revolted against Macedonian rule twice, in 292 and 291 BC, and their city was captured by Demetrius Poliorketes (the Beseiger). It appears that the other Boeotians did not allow the Thebans to join the League until 288/7 BC, when Demetrius reinstated their political system (Plutarch, *Life of Demetrios*, 46, 1: "The Thebans restored their state"). In the meantime there seems to have been a reconciliation with the Plataeans regarding Theban participation in the Daedala feast in honour of Hera,



*Headless marble larger-than-life statue of a woman from Thespias. Probably represents a muse holding a lyre or small kithara. Dates to the 2nd century BC (150-125 BC).*



*Male portrait from Atalanti. Belonged to a medallion (imago clipeata) of Mithridates VI or to the statue of a king or prince of the early Hellenistic period.*

which in addition to political events such as the resistance against Demetrius Poliorketes, together with the three decades that had elapsed since the re-founding of the city, had blunted passions and hatreds, and had strengthened Thebes, making possible its re-entry into the Boeotian League.

Even in 287 BC, the kings Pyrrhos and Lysimachos, allies against Demetrius, were said to have contributed to building the city. An indicative anecdote is reported in Athenaeus (I, 34, 19c) that in 305 BC, a Theban rediscovered, in the tunic folds of a statue, a treasure he had hidden there before Alexander destroyed the city, i.e. some 30 years earlier. The rebuilding of the city seemed initially to have served basic military needs of the Macedonians in southern Greece. Thus Thebes was used as Cassander's base of operations in the so-called four-year war against Athens and Demetrius (308-304/3 BC). It was here that Demetrius of Phaleron sought refuge in 307 BC, when his fellow citizens expelled him. In the first phase of its occupation by Demetrius Poliorketes in 304/303 BC, Thebes once again played the role of the bulwark, this time against Cassander; from 294 BC it was at the centre of Macedonian operations in central Greece, and in Macedonian possession, which it tried to shed in two uprisings (292 and 291 BC), winning at least the sympathy of the other Boeotians and its subsequent entry into the League.

In the years that followed, Boeotia frequently found itself in dire economic straits because in the 3rd and 2nd century BC, there were frequent battles, lootings and mobilisations on its territory and many food shortages were recorded. In fact, decrees have been preserved from the end of the 3rd and throughout the 2nd century BC in honour of guests from the Black Sea region and Crimea; others record the measures instituted to deal with food shortages in various cities of Boeotia (Oropos, Thespias, Chorsiai and Akraifia). It is likewise known that in the Hellenistic period, Boeotia's significant strategic position was often exploited by its

powerful neighbours and aspiring Greek and foreign conquerors, with the result that it became a battlefield, the “dance-floor of Ares” and was further undermined. Thus it comes as no surprise to us that the League frequently changed alliances at this period, a fact that, according to Polybius (*Histories* 20, 4-5) was due largely to the “weakness” of the Boeotians.

The main military and political events that marked the fortunes of Boeotia during the 3rd century BC were the same ones that debilitated the Hellenic world in general and led to its gradual subjugation to Rome. The year 300 BC found Boeotia, Phocis and Aetolia allied against Cassander. In 293/2 BC, the Boeotians, with the help of Cleonymos of Sparta and under the leadership of Peisis of Thespies, rose up against Demetrius, but soon submitted after the siege and capture of Thebes, and had Macedonian garrisons stationed in their cities. The following year, they revolted again and were defeated by the army of Antigonos Gonatas, son of Demetrius Poliorketes, near Onchestos. Thebes fell once again into the hands of the Antigonids, entered the Boeotian League and was reinstated as a self-governing city (287 BC), while Oropos was annexed to Boeotia. It is even said that the Boeotians contributed a significant military force to fight the Galatian raid at the battle of Thermopylae (279 BC).

The rise of the Aetolians rallied the Boeotians and led them to an alliance with the Achaean League. But upon their defeat in the battle at Chaeronea in 245 BC, the Aetolians seized and occupied almost all of Boeotia for a decade, although without annexing it to their confederacy. In fact they gave it equality under the law and allowed the Boeotians to join the Amphictyonic council of Delphi that was held under Aetolian supervision. Demetrius II, son of Antigonos Gonatas, invaded Boeotia and wrested it from the Aetolians in 235 BC. But after Demetrius’ death, Athens and Boeotia kept their distance from his successor, Antigonos Doson, and in 227 BC the Boeotians formed an alliance with Phocis and the Achaean League. During the wars between these alliances and until the defeat of

*Part of an altar from Thespies with a relief scene related to the Dionysiac cult. On the front is a scene rendered in perspective. There is an altar with a fire on it in the middle, to the left of which is the divine couple, Dionysos and Ariadne. Behind them are two indistinct maenads. To the right of the altar is a large krater together with a young satyr leading a goat to the altar to be sacrificed. A grape-laden vine flanks the scene. Religious motifs and symbols adorn the other sides of the altar. 2nd cent. BC.*





Headless basalt statuette of the Egyptian god Osiris. Found in Thespies. It dates to the Hellenistic period.



Headless statuette of Cybele of white Pentelic marble. The goddess is seated on a throne holding a lion whelp on her lap, and a large drum with her left hand. In her right hand she was holding a phiale. Found in Thebes and dated to the early Hellenistic period.

Cleomenes III of Sparta at Sellasia (222 BC), in which the Boeotian army took part, the Boeotians once again found themselves on the same side as the Achaeans and Doson.

Throughout this decade until 220 BC, according to epigraphic evidence, various Games were reorganized and acquired some prestige, as did the most important Boeotian sanctuaries. Included among these Games were: the Ptoian Games at Akraifia; feasts and contests in honour of Dionysus Kadmeian in Thebes; Games of the Muses in Thespies, Games in honour of Zeus Eleutherios and of Concord between the Hellenes, as well Panhellenic Games in Plataea. A little later, however, during the war between the alliances (220-217 BC), the Aetolians conducted raids on Boeotia and were accused of plundering the sanctuary of Athena Itonia near Coronea.

In the second Macedonian War of Philip V with Rome (201-196 BC), Boeotia was on the side of the former. During this war, the Romans captured Andros and Karystos and displaced their inhabitants to the east coast of Boeotia. The Boeotians – despite pressure from the Romans, whose base was in Elateia, and who asked them to fight with them – remained on the side of the Macedonians and after the defeat of Philip in the battle at Cynoscephalae (197 BC), elected pro-Macedonian Brachyllas, son of Neon, to the post of *boeotarch*. This leader was assassinated by his political adversaries and in the turmoil that followed the event, Roman soldiers were put to death in various parts of Boeotia and in particular in the regions of Akraifia and Coronea. In 196 BC, Titus Quinctius Flamininus invaded Boeotia and in reprisal for these latter deaths, ravaged the countryside and attacked Akraifia and Coronea. The worst was avoided, however as, during the conduct of the Isthmian Games, Flamininus declared the independence of the regions and cities of Greece that had been under Macedonian control.

Boeotia also became involved in the war of Antioch III with Rome (192/191 BC), since battles took place on her territory, prompting her to sign a friendship pact with the Seleucid prince. But, after the death of Philip, when his son Perseus ascended the throne of Macedonia (179 BC), the Boeotians did not hesitate to form an alliance with him before his desperate last battle against the Romans (172-168 BC). In this war, the Boeotian cities who were members of the League split into two camps, despite the efforts of the Theban Ismenias to preserve a common pro-Roman policy among all the Boeotians. Thespies, Chaeronea, Levadeia and Thebes entered negotiations with the Romans, while Thisbe, Coronea and Aliartos, on the contrary, supported Perseus. Thus, a Roman garrison was stationed in Thebes while Aliartos was totally destroyed by the Roman army under Gaius Lucretius Gallus. Onchestos, Thisbe and Coronea were also apparently levelled at that time (171 BC). After the Romans' victorious battle at Pydna (168 BC), the Boeotian League was reorganised, and the victor, Lucius Aemilius Paullus visited Levadeia (167 BC). It is even postulated, with sound arguments, that construction of the temple of Zeus Basileus, symbol of the anti-Spartan policy of the Boeotian League, which had perhaps begun after the victory against Cleomenes and on the initiative of the pro-Macedonian politicians Neon and Brachyllas, did not continue for political reasons after the 3rd Macedonian War, the defeat of Perseus and the total triumph of the Romans in Hellas.

The definitive, final blow against Boeotia was dealt by the Achaean War (146 BC) when, according to Pausanias (7, 15, 5), the Boeotians, in concert with the Achaeans, marched on Heracleia, in the Oita region, and were defeated at Scarpheia in Locris by Metellus, who also won the battle against the Arcadians at Chaeronea. Then, he hastened to Thebes, which had in the meantime been abandoned by its inhabitants. After the final defeat of the Hellenes at Isthmus and the destruction of Corinth (146 BC), the alliances of southern Greece, among which was the Boeotian League, were disbanded. Later, they were re-established but under the watchful eye of a Roman commander.







Votive relief depicting a funerary banquet, from Thebes (Kadmeia). Two mantle-clad men are reclining and a young cup-bearer is standing near a large krater. The heads of two horses can be seen through a window in the upper left corner, and in the middle are two shields belonging to the dead horsemen. Work of the late Hellenistic period.

PAGE 314, ABOVE: Votive relief from Thebes, dedicated to the cult of Zeus. The god is seated on a rock holding a phiale. A family of worshippers is preparing to sacrifice the piglet standing between them and the god. Early Hellenistic period (330-320 BC).

PAGE 314, BELOW: Votive relief, probably from the region of Thebes or Tanagra. Depicts a dead horseman who has been elevated to the status of hero in front an altar, and figures with offerings. Work of the Hellenistic period.



From then to 31 BC when, after the victory at Actium, the province of Achaëa was under the administration of the Roman Senate (27 BC), few incidents took place in southern Hellas, but they were highly significant and of vital importance to Rome.

The most serious of these was the Mithridatic War (88-86 BC), in which Boeotia was the main theatre of operations. Mithridates VI Eupator, king of Pontus, gathered a large army mainly from Asia Minor, and under his general Archelaos he seized Athens and several other regions in central Greece, including Boeotia. Lucius Cornelius Sulla sacked Athens and camped in Elateia (86 BC). By virtue of various stratagems and the bravery of his army, the Roman general succeeded in decimating the superior forces of his adversary in two decisive battles near Chaeronea and at Copais near Orchomenos. Trophies that sing of the two glorious victories by the Roman army were found where they had been erected, close to the respective battlefields at Chaeronea (Thourion) and Orchomenos (Pyrgos). The repercussions of the clashes between the two worlds of the era, the Hellenic East and the Roman West, were grave for Hellenism owing to the mobilisations, looting and reprisals that accompanied them. In particular for Boeotia which, destitute from the constant wars, shouldered the burden of the hostilities, the consequences were dire. Sulla's victory was celebrated at Thebes, half of whose land was seized and allocated to various sanctuaries.

In the Roman civil wars, Boeotian cities suffered anew at the hands of the belligerents. In the clashes between Caesar and Pompey (48/47 BC), the Boeotians supported the latter with troops. After the victory at Pharsalos, Caesar re-captured Thebes and Orchomenos and met with no resistance. After the battle of Philippi (42 BC), Hellas came under the control of Mark Antony. Many Greek cities, including some in Boeotia, were forced to supply troops to Mark Antony, who was defeated at Actium (31 BC), in Rome's last major civil clash, the result of which was to place the seal of Roman sovereignty on the entire East, securing the *pax romana* throughout the known world.

*Votive stele dedicated to Zeus Karaios, from Thespias. Three sides of the stele are decorated with relief symbols of the sacrifice of animals (bull and wild boar). On this side are inscribed the names of eight messmates and a relief bucranium. 4th-3rd cent. BC.*

Herm with the figure of Heracles, from Thespies. The hero's head is covered with the lion skin that falls onto his shoulders. An inscription refers to the hero's dress. 1st cent. BC.



Herm with the figure of Heracles, from Thebes (Pyri). The head is missing, but most of the stele is presented as part of the hero's body, covered with his lion skin. 2nd cent. BC.



## ART AND CULTURE IN HELLENISTIC BOEOTIA

**T**HE CONTINUOUS MILITARY OPERATIONS AND THE DIRE ECONOMIC STRAITS OF MOST BOEOTIAN CITIES DURING the three centuries that elapsed between the destruction of Thebes and the full triumph of imperial Rome in the Greek East and the establishment of the peace of Augustus did not hinder the production of works of art in Boeotia. The elimination of Thebes at its peak, and its confirmed abandonment in the last two decades of the Classical period (335-315 BC) put a stop to its intellectual and artistic output, at a time when distinguished artists had made names for themselves in the city. Those who were not lost in the maelstrom of destruction, together with their workshops, fled to Athens or elsewhere. At the same time, however, there were sculpture and bronze workshops in other Boeotian cities as well – such as Tanagra and Thespies and later in Orchomenos – and perhaps in cities such as Plataea, Chaeronea, Akraifia, Aliartos and Levadeia that flourished anew towards the end of the Classical period. The capabilities of old and new workshops alike in the production of funerary monuments, pottery, figurines, jewellery and objects of daily use is attested chiefly by finds from the cemeteries of Boeotian cities.

*Palmette grave stele, from Thebes (Pyri). The inscriptions of the names of the dead are of a later date than the relief decoration. Hellenistic period.*

The art of the Hellenistic period reflects the financial and social state of the cities, sanctuaries and private citizens of Boeotia in that tumultuous era. However in the Hellenistic times, a “great new Hellenic world” (C.P. Cavafy, “In 200 BC”) came into being, of which Boeotia was no more than a small and rather inconsequential part, highly idiosyncratic, bound by ancient traditions, partitioned and sorely tried by political confrontations and military conflicts. The Hellenic world, after the dissolution of the Persian state, was truly vast, comprising great distances, countless multitudes of people and teeming cities with large-scale craft output and commercial enterprises. However, the religious faith of the Archaic and Classical periods had by then also changed, and had in the end declined. Even though dedications in sanctuaries and oracles were richer, temples more magnificent, public religious events more lavish than ever, and the number of athletic and musical contests large, the wealth, interference and instability of the period had profoundly shaken the foundations of morality and religion. Ostentation, megalomania and gigantism, hitherto unprecedented in Hellenic affairs, can be observed in all manifestations of life and constitute the characteristic feature of the period.

As an antidote to the above, as a reaction to the cosmopolitanism of the time and as an escape from everyday reality, the trend was reinforced to create small-scale art and for the painters, sculptors and scholars of the times to depict or describe the natural environment. In the visual arts as well, people at this time were being portrayed realistically, with their good points and bad, at good moments and bad. Some artists and authors in the Hellenistic period preferred to reproduce successful earlier works by the great Classical artists. Thus Classicism was re-introduced in order to create works of high art through the more or less faithful imitation of Classical models, and in this way it became entrenched and assumed major proportions in the imperial Roman years.

Boeotia and the rest of southern Hellas remained outside the spirit of the grandiose projects of the era, and were unaware of creations such as the Colossus of Rhodes, the Altar of Pergamon or the Pharos of Alexandria. One exception was the temple of Zeus Basileus in Levadeia, even though it remained in its initial stage of construction and was never completed. On the contrary, it appears that in Boeotia small crafts and arts were favoured, especially the creation of clay figurines, which had strong and ancient roots in the region, from at least the Geometric period on. Although it is difficult to identify specific workshops, there is no doubt that small-scale sculpture, gold- and silverwork, as well as precious jewellery of bronze and stone were all produced then with success and refinement in the two most important Boeotian cities, and in the rest of the Hellenistic world.

The pottery of the Hellenistic period is characterised generally by radical changes in relation to the Classical age. The main reason for the changes was that in palaces and wealthy residences, glass and precious metals had displaced the traditional pottery products, whose use was limited to the less affluent social strata and to mass dedications in sanctuaries. Changes can be found in the shapes, but above all in the decoration of vases, with the drastic reduction of painted scenes. In Boeotia, many independent workshops were in operation, which in the end followed the decorative vocabulary common to the rest of the Hellenic world. Pottery output focused on producing simple, utilitarian shapes, wheel-made black-glazed ware with painted decoration or vases cast from moulds and decorated with relief motifs (Homeric or heroic *skyphoi*).

The replacement of late Classical painted ware, while favouring the mass production of vases, left a huge vacuum as regards decoration with the narrative scenes that were so popular among the Greeks. By the late 3rd cent. BC, this gap had been covered by the production of relief *skyphoi*. In addition to these, the so-called West Slope ware also circulated in Boeotia, with simple designs, added white paint and incised lines. The most common

shapes were drinking cups (*kantharoi*, *skyphoi*, *kypella* and *kylikes*), vessels for beauty care (*pyxides*, *lekanides*), storage jars, jugs etc., including *amphorae*, *hydriai*, *oinochoai*, *lagynoi*, *lebetes*, *pinakia*, *lekythoi*, *askoi*, and cult vessels (incense burners, *lekanides* and *pinakia*) and finally undecorated cooking utensils (*chytrai*, *lopades*, etc.). Boeotia, which in the Classical period had been an important but secondary pottery production centre, was able in the Hellenistic years to cover local needs with products that compared favourably with the output of workshops elsewhere. The workshops of Tanagra appear to have been particularly active and also produced exceptional terracotta figurines.

This latter field produced a rich body of interesting and frequently high quality works that were sometimes reminiscent of major sculpture. At a time when Boeotia had become a field of constant military engagements, led first by Macedonian princes and later by Roman polemarchs, its artists found an outstanding and genuine means of expression in their small clay figurines. The noteworthy increase in their typological repertoire is obvious from the multitude of known themes: female figures wrapped in a peplos, standing or seated in various poses; boys and girls, some of whom are holding symbolic objects; youths, comedy masks, replicas of animals, etc.

Unprecedented in small-scale sculpture are the Tanagran figurines of females characterised by elegance, polychrome decoration and precision of technical details. Large quantities of them were found in illegal excavations in the cemeteries of Tanagra after the mid-19th century, and coincided with the preferences of collectors at that time, but their illegal removal deprived scholars of the valuable information that the Boeotian soil had carefully preserved for centuries. The recent systematic excavation of tombs and sanctuaries in the regions of Tanagra, Levadeia, Thebes, Akraifia, Aliartos, Eleon and Orchomenos has helped re-assess the Boeotian terracotta figurines of the Hellenistic period in the light of finds unearthed from the same period. This correlation led to the recognition of similar groups with morphological and technical features that can be attributed to specific workshops. The workshops of Tanagra, Thebes and Levadeia are characterised by the high quality of their products and the richly imaginative synthesis of pictorial types. Examination of the material, together with laboratory analyses, revealed other, smaller centres producing small sculptures, which contributed to the creation of special works, without being limited solely to their mechanical reproduction. Moreover, the confirmed circulation of models and know-how in the production of figurines is revealed in the existence of Boeotian trade with Attica, Euboea, Egypt, Asia Minor, Magna Graecia and Sicily between the late 4th and 1st century BC.

In the main cities of Boeotia in the late Classical and early Hellenistic period, i.e. in Tanagra, Thespies and Thebes, after the latter was rebuilt by Cassander (316/5 BC), there were sculpture and stone-carving workshops. The new trends that appeared in sculpture and bronze work in the Hellenistic world were rooted in significant changes introduced by pioneering artists. Some of them, such as Lysippus and Praxiteles, were active in Boeotia from the beginning to the end of their careers. Moreover, the works of Lysippus and Praxiteles marked the starting point of the two major currents in Hellenistic sculpture, from the early 3rd cent. BC to the Augustan period.

Although no original works of the Hellenistic period have been preserved from Boeotia, ancient written sources and inscriptions on statue bases, both within the region of Boeotia and outside it, confirm the abundant presence of art in its most important cities. Historians of the era, particularly those who describe the Roman conquest of Greece, frequently mention the theft of large numbers of works of art during the looting and the sacking of Boeotian cities. One need only read the historian Livy's description of the sack of Aliartos, whose treasures were sent to Rome. The same thing certainly happened in Coronea and Thisbe, which also experienced dispro-

portional vengeance by the Romans for their alliance with Perseus (171 BC). Treasures were robbed from the sanctuaries of northern Boeotia and the Itonion was totally stripped, according to the ancient sources, in the Aetolian raids (220-217 BC). The armies of Mummius (146 BC) and then Sulla (86 BC) are known to have removed many works of art from the agoras and sanctuaries of Boeotian cities, irrespective of whether these cities had acted in a friendly or hostile way towards Rome. Typical of such adventures were those of the Praxiteles statue of Eros of Thespies that was taken to Rome, Sulla's removal of the statue of Athena from Alalkomenai and his transfer of the statue of Dionysus, a work by Myron, from Orchomenos to the Valley of the Muses below Helicon.

Some names of sculptors have come to light with respect to the Theban portraiture of the Hellenistic period; these names are known and their works have been dated because of the inscriptions on their base. The following sculptors are cited as Thebans: Theoxenos (late 4th cent. BC), Alexarchos (3rd cent. BC), Dorian and Melas (240-200 BC), Eumares (second half of the 3rd cent. BC), Eutychides son of Dionysios (250 BC), Menecrates son of Sopater and Sopater son of Menecrates (2nd cent. BC), Myron (c. 240 BC) and Agatharchos (2nd cent. BC). Most of them worked outside Boeotia. There were many more marble carvers and sculptors, Boeotians and foreigners, scattered around Thespies and Tanagra.

Funerary monuments, a special and exceptionally interesting class of statuary, constituted the main output of Boeotian marble workshops in the Hellenistic period. The traditional workshops of Tanagra, Thespies and Thebes that monopolised Boeotian production for many centuries, from the late 4th century on, had ceased producing gravestones (*stelae*) with relief scenes. However, gravestones decorated with palmettes, among the most popular types of funerary monuments in Boeotia, were produced in the late Classical and



*Grave stele. On one side, within a carved border, is a painted portrait in an excellent state of preservation and the inscription ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ ΧΑΙΡΕ. On the other side, in a similar border, with no portrait, is the inscription ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ ΧΡΗΣΤΟΣ. The stele was probably used twice for members of the same family, first in the late Hellenistic period and later in the 1st cent. BC.*







Porous limestone grave stelae imitating the entablatures of temple-like buildings. They have an opening in the lower part so they can be fitted onto a high column, and the name of the dead person is inscribed on them. They are from the northeast cemetery of Thebes and date to the 3rd and 2nd cent. BC.



especially in the Hellenistic period. In fact when lavish grave markers stopped being produced in Attica – having been prohibited under the sumptuary law of Demetrius of Phaleron (317-307 BC), philosopher and governor (*epimeletes*) of the city of Athens – many Athenian marble carvers and sculptors moved to Boeotia, which welcomed the Attic artistic heritage of gravestones, received it and disseminated it through Central Greece. Later, in the mature Hellenistic period, funerary monuments were rudimentary and served solely to mark the grave, without sculpted decoration. But in this period (mid-3rd to first half of 2nd cent. BC), an active but short-lived workshop produced palmette stelae in Chaeronea, influenced by Thespian output, and sold its products in the region.

Funerary monuments of a new type were produced, probably exclusively in the workshops of Thebes, from the last quarter of the 3rd to the middle of the 2nd cent. BC, with a porous limestone architectural entablature. These monuments are generally agreed to be imitations of the facades of temple-like structures, probably the monumental tombs of the Macedonian ruling class. With their spectacular inventiveness and quality workmanship, they constituted the only outlet for sculptural expression in local workshops. Influences from the older, robust painting tradition of the late Classical and Hellenistic years are concentrated in the unique painted bust of Theodoros on a stele that was unearthed recently (2008) in the broader region of the Theban cemeteries, north-east of the city.

*Detail of the figurine of a standing female wearing a wreath of leaves and fruit on her head, from Aliartos. The figurine is shown in its entirety on p. 331. Late 4th-early 3rd cent. BC.*



*On this page and the one to the left are two similar figurines of a youth on a chariot being drawn by a ram and a male goat. They were both found in the same child's grave in the NE cemetery of Thebes. The only difference between these figurines lies in the polos worn by one youth on his head, while the other is wearing a wreath of leaves. Late 4th-early 3th cent. BC.*







*Detail of a standing female figurine wrapped in a mantle from the NE cemetery of Thebes. First half of the 3rd cent. BC. The red colour used on the hair is characteristic. The figurine is shown in its entirety on page 331.*



*Detail of a standing female figure from Thebes whose head is covered by a mantle over which is a wide conic cap with its bright reddish-orange colour preserved. First half of the 3rd cent. BC. The figurine is shown in its entirety on p. 331.*



On the left is a figurine of Aphrodite or a Muse, from the NE cemetery of Thebes. She is resting her left foot on a rock and bending forward. Her hair, dressed in the shape of a melon, is typical. Below, the figurine of a seated female from Thebes. First half of the 3rd cent. BC.







Cup (kylix) from Thebes, with the inscription *ΦΙΛΙΑΣ* (friendship), a customary grave object of the time. Hellenistic period.



Mask of a young, New Comedy actor. It was intended to be hung and has a wreath of leaves on its head. From the NE cemeteries of Thebes. Hellenistic period.

Vase with bronze and silver coins and gold jewellery from the hoard found near the Thebes Railway Station (1998). It was probably hidden in preparation for the Roman invasion in 148 BC.





Bronze coin of the Boeotian League, from Thebes. On the obverse is Athena wearing a Corinthian helmet and on the reverse a trophy and the inscription ΒΟΙΩΤΩΝ. 288-244 BC.

Bronze coin of the Boeotian League from Thebes. On the obverse is the wreathed head of Demeter or Kore and on the reverse is Poseidon standing on a rock holding a trident, with the inscription ΒΟΙΩΤΩΝ. 220-197 BC. The coin was struck over an older Macedonian one.



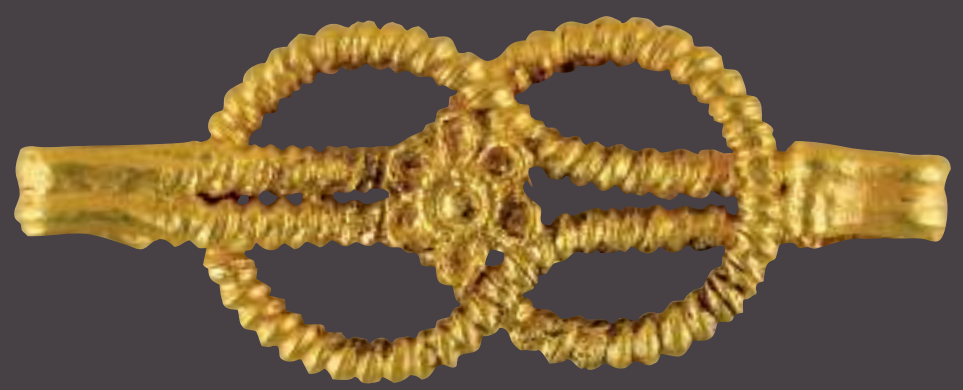
To the left, a silver three-obol coin of the Achaean League with the laurel-wreathed head of Zeus on the obverse (175-168 BC). Right, a silver three-obol coin showing the nymph Istiaea seated and the inscription ΙΣΤΙΑΙΕΩΝ on the reverse (178-146 BC). Both from the hoard found in the Thebes Railway Station (1998).



Silver hexadrachm of the Boeotian League from the Thebes Railway Station hoard (1998). On the obverse is the laurel-wreathed head of Poseidon in a dotted circle and on the reverse a winged Nike holding a trident and wreath. Bears the inscription ΒΟΙΩΤΩΝ. 197-146 BC.

ON THE NEXT TWO PAGES: Gold jewellery from the Thebes Railway Station hoard. Four sewn-on pieces, a pair of earrings with pendent cupids riding garnet dolphins, a necklace with heads of griffin-lions on the finial clasp, and a Heracles' knot from a necklace.





ETIENNA KAPITAN



# BOEOTIA UNDER THE ROMAN EMPIRE

## HISTORICAL EVENTS AND IMPERIAL POLICY

**T**HE VOLUME OF ANCIENT WRITTEN RECORDS ABOUT BOEOTIA THAT HAVE BEEN PRESERVED FROM THE YEARS of imperial rule – texts and mainly inscriptions – is large in comparison to the meagre and, until recently, neglected contemporary monumental remains in the region. However, despite their number, the inscriptions are usually concerned with private matters and offer little assistance in making a full and comprehensive reconstruction of Boeotian history under Roman rule. These remarks are reinforced by the frequently contradictory assessments, judgements and statistics cited by ancient authors regarding Boeotia under imperial rule and in particular regarding its cities.

Strabo, who lived from 64 BC to 23 AD and travelled to Greece in 29 BC, reports in his *Geography* (9, 2, 5 and 9, 2, 25) that during his years in Boeotia, there were only two cities, Thespies and Tanagra, and that of the others, only their ruins and names remained. He does however point out that Thebes, which continued to decline after Cassander, as well as the other cities, had all become small villages. The decline and abandonment of some Boeotian cities with a glorious past was not an unusual phenomenon in the region and was largely due to military and less frequently to natural disasters.

Following the battle of Actium (31 BC), and after a long series of clashes, mainly civil in nature – initially among the successors of Alexander the Great and then between them and the Romans, and finally between the Romans and any would-be usurpers of their power – Boeotia was virtually deserted. The devastating effects of the perpetual wars of the Hellenistic period on the cities and countryside were described in the 2nd century BC by the historian Polybius (36, 17, 5-7) who speaks of “deserted cities”.

Conditions in the early imperial age evolved differently, owing to the long and universal peace and the prudent governance of Augustus. The new policies and economic conditions are reflected indirectly in Pausanias’ account, as well as in the texts of Plutarch and many other authors of the period, both Greek and Latin. Pausanias describes the monuments, cults and local traditions associated with them, without digressing into topographical or other descriptions. So, when he arrived in Thebes, he became much more absorbed in its past, which although it was irretrievably lost, could feasibly be reconstructed from ruins and other vestiges of the once powerful and glorious city.

His testimony that the entire lower town had by then been abandoned, apart from the sanctuaries, and that only the citadel, named Thebes not Kadmeia, was inhabited reflects conditions at that time. Things were certainly better than what Sulla had left when he seized half the Thebans’ arable land and donated it to panhellenic sanc-

*Detail of the grave relief of a young woman from Thebes with the inscription on the epistyle. The entire relief is shown on page 359. Second or third decade of the 2nd cent. AD.*





tuaries, after having himself pillaged the cities and desecrated the sanctuaries of central Greece. It is also said that imperial governance restored these lands to the city and to their rightful owners.

After the battle of Plataea (479 BC), the most important military conflicts in Boeotia took place first at Thourion near Chaeronea and immediately afterwards near Orchomenos, both in 86 BC. On these two sites, the superior forces of Archelaos were routed by the Roman legions of Sulla, who erected a glorious trophy to his victory bearing inscriptions in Greek. The end of the Roman civil wars and the conquest of the Hellenistic East were both sealed by the events at Actium (31 BC). However, the Roman conquest of mainland Greece essentially took place in 146 BC, while Macedonia was fully subjugated to Rome in 168 BC. In the year 30 BC, Egypt became part of the Empire and at the same time the Roman Republic was transformed into a monarchy under Octavian Augustus. In 27 BC, the province of Achaia, i.e. all of Greece south of Thessaly, was placed under the authority of the Roman Senate.

After the establishment of the empire and the *Pax Romana*, few historical events occurred in Boeotia, a central part of the province of Achaia. From 22 to 19 BC, Augustus, guarantor of his subjects' peace and prosperity, visited the eastern provinces of his realm, among which was Greece. Many cities then aspired to win his favour, including Athens, which had supported Antony and Cleopatra before the decisive battle of Actium. Later the deputation is recorded of Epaminondas, son of Epaminondas, from Akraifia, on behalf of the Boeotian League to Caligula (37 AD), the result of which was the reinstatement of the games that were once held in the sanctuary of Apollo on Mt Ptoon and the construction of flood prevention works in Copais. In 66-67 AD, the emperor Nero, an admirer of Hellas, visited Greece and exempted many cities from taxation. That was when the city of Akraifia issued a decree to honour Zeus Eleutherios Nero for his proclamation of the Greece's freedom. It is likewise known that, in the early years of his rule, Vespasian revoked the privileges granted by Nero, because he needed the money. The emperor who was a true Philhellene and friend of Athens was Hadrian, in whose honour statues were erected in almost all Boeotian cities, and who visited the sanctuary of the Helicon Muses in 125 AD, where he had an epigram carved to Eros to commemorate a dangerous bear hunt.

The imperial peace was disturbed when, between 166 and 180 AD, hordes of Costoboci, who normally inhabited the delta of the Danube and the Crimean peninsula, descended on central Greece through Thermopylae. In Elateia they were confronted by the athlete Mnesiboulos who lost his life in the battle. The barbarians spread out all over Boeotia looting cities and sanctuaries, as far as Eleusis, before being crushed by the Roman army. In 240 AD, the Herulians started carrying out raids in Greece and plundered Boeotia in 267. In 301 AD, Diocletian's decree was issued regarding the regulation of prices of various products in the vast empire. Parts of copies of this decree were found in Boeotian cities.

These were the main historical and political events associated with Boeotia, in one way or another, while leaving no material traces, in the period from the elevation of Augustus to emperor of Rome (30 BC) to 11 May 330 AD when Constantine the Great inaugurated the New Rome, later called Constantinople, as capital of the Empire.

*Inscribed stele commissioned by Epameinondas, son of Epameinondas, famous citizen of Akraifia, to the sanctuary of Apollo at Ptoon. Inscribed on it is the speech made by the emperor Nero at the Isthmus of Corinth in 67 AD, in which he proclaimed the independence of the Greek cities.*



*Larger-than-life statue from Coronea. It probably depicts the emperor Hadrian in the type of Ares Borghese, nude, with his sword-strap across his chest and a breastplate beside his left leg. 2nd cent. AD.*

The emperors did not abolish institutions but retained and adjusted them to the needs of the times and of the empire. Often, albeit in appearance only or with ulterior motives, they allowed Greek cities to be administered by their own laws, as long as they did not affect the interests of Rome and its appointed representatives. By 73 BC, all of Boeotia was a Roman tributary. Among its cities, the exceptions were Tanagra, Thespies and Plataea, which had acquired autonomy and were exempted from taxes (*civitas libertas et immunis*), and perhaps later Levadeia. In 146 BC, Tanagra was Lucius Mummius' base of operations in the Achaean war, which ended in the subjugation of Greece. The city had the privilege of minting its own coin from the time of Augustus to that of Commodus (180-192 AD). Its obverse bore the head of the emperor and/or the inscription *Tanagraion*, while on the reverse were statues of the deities that adorned the city then, such as the young Dionysus with the reptilian Triton, a work by the sculptor Kalamis. The coins of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius depicted Artemis, Demeter, Hermes Kriophoros or Promachos, and Poimandros, mythical founder of the city, or the river Asopos.

A significant Boeotian city under the Roman Empire was Thespies. It is said that the statue of Eros was moved to Rome but there are several versions of this story. It is however known that in 47 BC, Caesar granted the city the title of *civitas liberta et immunis*, a privilege later ratified by the emperor Hadrian. Until the era of Domitian (81-96 AD), the city had the right to mint its own bronze coinage. Its two most common types depicted Apollo Kitharodos, standing or seated, and Aphrodite together with a smaller female figure. These were probably representations of the statues of the goddess and the famous courtesan Phryne that stood in the temple in which both were worshipped. In the Byzantine period, a defensive wall around the city was haphazardly built of ancient construction materials including many sculptures. Thus many ancient works of art were preserved that are today exhibited in the Thebes Museum.

Some of the cities around Copais and in the nooks created by the surrounding mountains, specifically Coronea, Orchomenos, Akraifia, Kopai, Levadeia, Chaeronea and Thisbe, continued to exist under the Roman Empire as well and retained the significance they had acquired during the Hellenistic period. Thisbe and Coronea were totally destroyed by the Romans in the same year that Aliartos fell (171 BC). Levadeia was sacked in 86 BC by the army of Mithridates, was generously treated by Sulla after his victories, but destroyed in 267 AD by the Herulians. Pausanias describes in detail the oracle of Trophonios which was important because it attracted public figures, and the city was regarded as sacred due to its presence.

After the civil wars were over, and in the first half of Roman rule, the cities of Boeotia experienced a period of stability, as can be concluded from the available epigraphic evidence and other archaeological finds. However, serious problems arose, then and later, when some lakeside cities of Copais were threatened with flooding, as lake or river waters would gobble up their arable land after the embankments collapsed, some of which had existed since the prehistoric period, while others had been built in the 4th cent. BC. Epaminondas, a wealthy citizen from Akraifia, repaired the main eastern embankment on the lake during the reign of Caligula. A number of inscriptions from Coronea testify that, between 124 and 135 AD, Hadrian undertook to construct major flood-prevention works at the expense of the imperial treasury, and to establish the bed of the three rivers that flowed into western Copais. The continuous requests by Coronea, the emperor's replies relating to this enormous project, and the settlement of disputes with Orchomenos and Thisbe, are recorded in the city archives. In 139 AD Antoninus Pius was the intermediary in a dispute between Thebes and Plataea and, again in 140 AD and 154 AD, of a quarrel between Coronea and Thisbe.



The emperors did not generally abolish the institutions they had inherited, but rather adapted them to the administrative and political needs of the empire. They sought to preserve some noteworthy sanctuaries, to continue existing athletic and artistic contests and establish new ones, and to enhance the production and sale of staple commodities. The Boeotian League survived, but its responsibilities were limited to organizing feasts and panhellenic games in most Boeotian cities, with artists from the entire Empire taking part. And finally the Boeotians sent two sacred secretaries (*hieromnemes*) to the Amphictyony of Delphi, where Plutarch served as priest of Apollo.

*Marble statue of Asklepios from the Asklepieion at Thespies. In one hand the god would have been holding his staff with the snake, and in the other a phiale, in the customary representation of the god. 2nd cent. AD.*

Large marble relief from Thespies. Portrays Nike beside a trophy, of which only the lowest part of an unfluted column has been preserved. 1st cent. AD.





*Larger-than-life headless marble statue from the sanctuary of Artemis at Aulis. It was found in the cella of the goddess's temple. Variation of the statue type that depicts Artemis or Persephone. Here the head was inset and perhaps depicted a Roman empress, either Livia or Agrippina the Younger. First half of the 1st cent. AD.*



Headless female statues from the sanctuary of Artemis at Aulis. Left, an Archaistic statue of Hecate, from the late Hellenistic period. Right: a pictorial statue of a woman from the same sanctuary. Represented as a muse of the Athens/Thebes type. First half of the 2nd cent. AD.





Two headless portrait statues of priestesses, in the type of the Small Herculaneum Woman, from the sanctuary of Artemis at Aulis. Roman works that reproduced the known sculptural type of the late 4th cent. BC. Late 2nd-early 3rd cent. AD.



Two marble portrait statues, now headless, from Thespies. The portrait heads were inset. First half of the 2nd cent. AD.

## SOCIETY AND ART IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

**M**ORE SIGNIFICANT THAN THE HISTORICAL EVENTS, HOWEVER, WERE THE GREAT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL issues of the times. Through the Empire's constant annexation of new territories, the already enormous geographical area and population of the Hellenistic world had kept expanding. The social and religious issues that had existed or been suppressed in the Hellenistic period either continued or were magnified under imperial rule. Among them were religious syncretism, mystical cults and emperor worship. In addition, monotheistic views, including those of Christianity, were constantly gaining ground at this time. Foreign cults, Egyptian, Oriental and monotheistic, can be found fairly early in Boeotia. The presence of Jews, especially in Oropos, is attested from the 3rd century AD; early Christian funerary inscriptions appear in Tanagra, Thespies, Thebes, Anthedon and Thisbe in the 2nd cent. AD.

The study of Greek letters became more widespread, as did the use of the Greek language and the love of Classical art. At the same time, Classicism was strengthened; Atticism and the Second Sophistic (rhetoric of high quality and refinement) prevailed, and copies of Classical works of sculpture were mass produced and found a place of honour beside contemporary original creations. Three outstanding figures in the letters of the Greco-Roman period were associated with Boeotia, either directly through their descent or indirectly through their work. Plutarch (45/50-120 AD), was the scion of an old and noble family from Chaeronea, where he spent most of his life. His writings made him a distinguished figure. He declared that he was primarily a biographer and that his aim was to teach through the lives of great men. He was honoured by his fellow citizens, by the inhabitants of Delphi and by the Romans who proclaimed him a Roman citizen and were generous to his birthplace. Pausanias, who lived in the 2nd cent. AD, demonstrated scholarly interest in the glorious past; his account in the relevant book of the *Guide to Greece* is a valuable source of information about ancient Boeotia. The work of the historian Flavius Arrian (95-175 AD) is likewise imbued with a critical spirit. He came from Nicomedeia in Bithynia, and has justly been compared to Xenophon. His description of the siege and fall of Thebes at the hands of Alexander provides the most credible source of information about these dramatic events.

Among the sanctuaries that continued to function and flourish in Boeotia in the imperial age were: the Trophoneion in Levadeia, the Cabirion near Thebes, the Amphiaraeion in Oropos, the Charopeion in Coronea, the Ptoon near Akraifia, the Delion, perhaps with the temple of Apollo, on the coast of Tanagra; the sanctuary of Artemis in Aulis, of the Muses at Helicon and of the Graces at Orchomenos. The written sources of the period also mention several other shrines of secondary importance. Some survived until the 4th century AD.

Under imperial Roman rule, the most noteworthy artistic output in Boeotia was sculpture, which included marble statues, pictorial busts and portraits of emperors and of common mortals in imitation of them. Among the works of art in stone that have been preserved are statues, the base or trunk of which is usually extant, without the head that had often been inset. The marble, the models to which they were related and their style all indicate that some of these statues – pictorial, idealised or portrait statues – were products of Attic workshops. The inscription on the base of a statue of the goddess Cybele (Great Mother) from Levadeia, which dates to the 2nd century AD, explicitly notes that the sculptor is the Athenian Hermeias, son of Anthesterios. The dedicator was Sosicleia, priestess of the goddess, and the original had been made for the Metroon in the Athens Agora by Agorakritos, a pupil of Phidias.



*Inscribed pedestal with the name of the muse Calliope from the temple of the Muses in Thespies. It was part of the group of statues of the nine Muses that Thespies commissioned during the reign of the emperor Augustus. On each pedestal there was an epigram by the poet Onestos.*

From the same period, the 2nd cent. AD, come the five headless statues from the sanctuary of Artemis of Aulis that are exhibited in the Thebes Museum and are attributed to Attic workshops. Three are of priestesses while a fourth depicts an Archaistic Hecate. The fifth, larger than lifesize, may portray an empress, either Livia, wife of Augustus, or Agrippina the Elder. There is also a male statue from Coronea and a female one from Levadeia, both of which are headless, and depict respectively Hadrian and an empress, perhaps Livia again. There are a total of 20 known portrait sculptures from Boeotia dating from the 1st to the 5th cent. AD. They are images of emperors or members of their families, as well as depictions of mortals imitating imperial types. Two portraits in the Museum of Chaeronea portray the great emperors Augustus and Hadrian, and came from northwestern Boeotia.

There are also other, equally little known funerary monuments of the era from Boeotia, including many funerary altars that have been found in the broader region of Thespies and date between the 2nd and 3rd cent. AD. They are made of limestone from Helicon and depict a hero-horseman with some chthonic symbols. Closely associated with these monuments is a single ossuary, with the same decorative motif, from Akraifia. In addition, a good many grave stelae with relief scenes have been preserved in the museums of Thebes and Tanagra (Schimatari) on which the names of the dead are usually inscribed. They are either rectangular or in the shape of a miniature temple (*naiskos*) crowned by a pediment. The material of which they were made – either white marble or the local grayish marble – and their iconography make it possible to attribute them to either Attic or local Boeotian workshops. It is speculated that some of the dead women belonged to the inner circle of a cult, as can be concluded from the symbols they are holding, while others, in the types of the Large and Small Herculaneum Woman, are dated between the era of Trajan and that of the Antonines. There are also a few examples from as late as 400 AD.

Sarcophagi are the significant and luxurious grave monuments of the period. Made of marble, their typology and style determine whether these sarcophagi were products of active Attic workshops or works produced locally. The period of their production and use covers most of the 2nd century AD up to the Herulian raids in 267. The Attic sarcophagi of Boeotia include in their sculpted decoration themes from Hellenic mythology, such as the Labours of Heracles, Iphigenia in Tauris, Hippolytus with Phaedra and the ransoming of Hector's body.

In the Boeotian art of imperial Roman times, there were no local particularities or works of special artistic interest. Clay vases were usually unpainted or painted red. Their undistinguished mass production was addressed,



*Marble head of a man, from Coronea.  
From a life-size statue. Mid 1st cent. AD.*



*Marble portrait of a man, from Atalanti.  
Follows the late Hellenistic tradition and  
depicts a contemporary of Octavian's  
in a realistic manner. Late 1st cent. AD.*

as it had been in the previous period, to social strata that could not afford expensive glass or metal (bronze and silver) utensils. On the contrary, the production of precious jewellery for the elite flourished near the urban centres. Luxury metals were combined with the widespread use of exotic precious and semi-precious stones, a practice that continued into the Byzantine period. And finally it is worth noting that the art of mosaic flooring flourished throughout Roman rule. Some mosaics dating to the 3rd-5th century AD are decorated with geometric and plant motifs, birds and fish, representations of months, seasons and occupations as well as mythological scenes.

Boeotia experienced the same fate as the other regions of the empire. During the final centuries of the Roman Empire and the early Byzantine period that followed it, the country prospered. On the sites of ancient cities and sanctuaries, the followers of the new religion which, in the 4th century AD had six bishoprics in Boeotia, built their churches, houses and defensive walls using ancient construction materials. Among them were many sculptures that were built into walls and thus preserved from certain destruction.



*Marble female portrait of unknown origin. Belongs to the period of the emperor Alexander Severus. (222-235 AD).*



*Marble female bust from Thebes. Depicts a priestess, as indicated by the headband (strophion) in her hair. Circa 150-160 AD.*



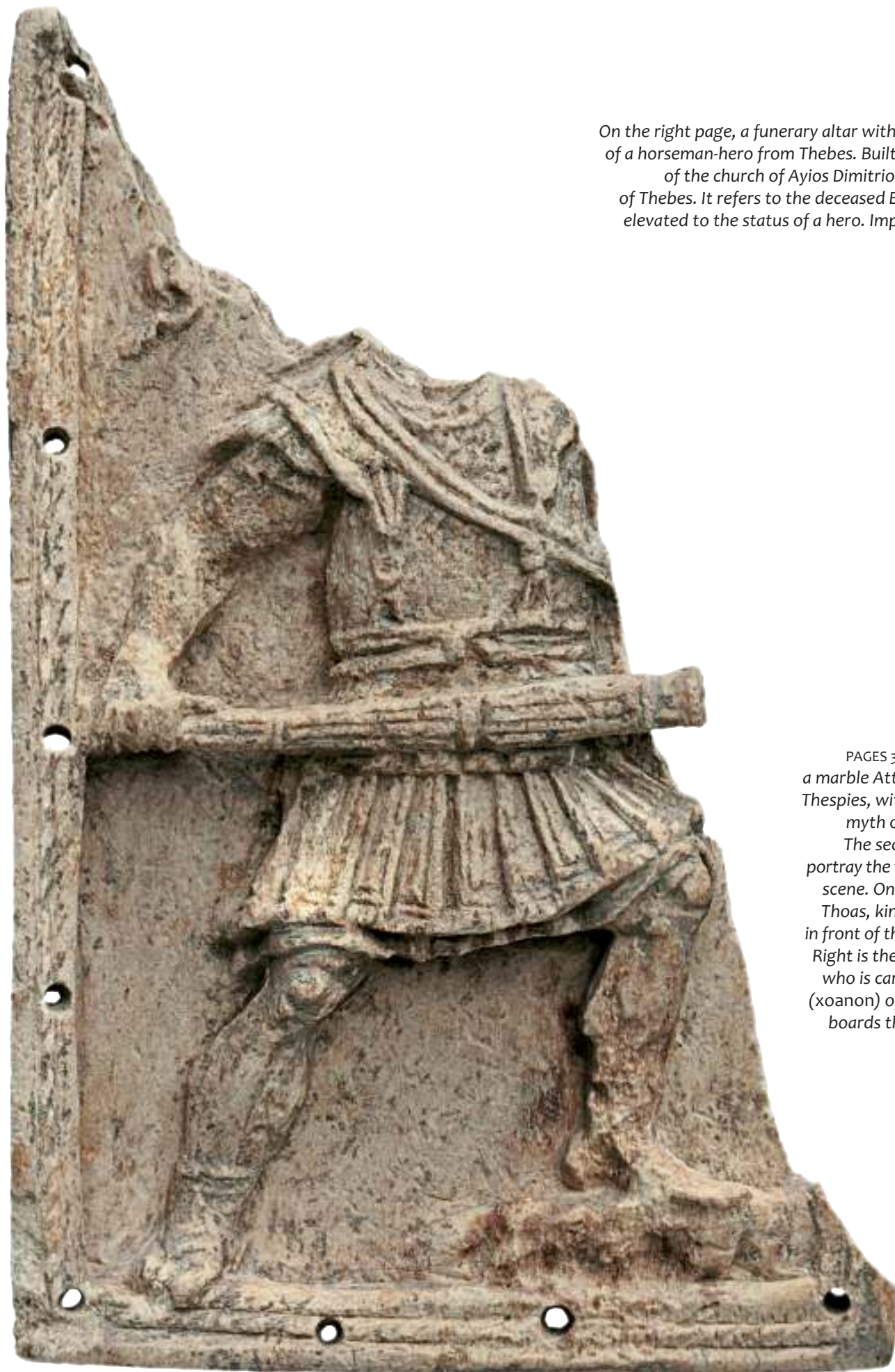


Marble ossuary bearing the representation of a horseman-hero from Akraifnio. Above it is an inscription elevating the dead man to the status of hero: ΕΠΙ ΠΑΝΦΙΛΩ ΗΡΩΙ. Mid-1st cent. BC.

On the left page, part of an Attic marble sarcophagus depicting the “Ransom of Hector”, from Thebes. Two women are represented in an attitude of mourning, one of whom, seated on the left, may be Andromache, and Priam is to their right. Second half of the 2nd cent. AD.



Ivory plaque showing a breastplate-clad man from Thebes. It was used as a decorative accessory applied to a small chest or piece of furniture. Probably from the late Hellenistic or early Roman period.



On the right page, a funerary altar with the representation of a horseman-hero from Thebes. Built into the south wall of the church of Ayios Dimitrios (Megali Panaghia) of Thebes. It refers to the deceased Epaphrion, who was elevated to the status of a hero. Imperial Roman period (2nd-3rd cent. AD).

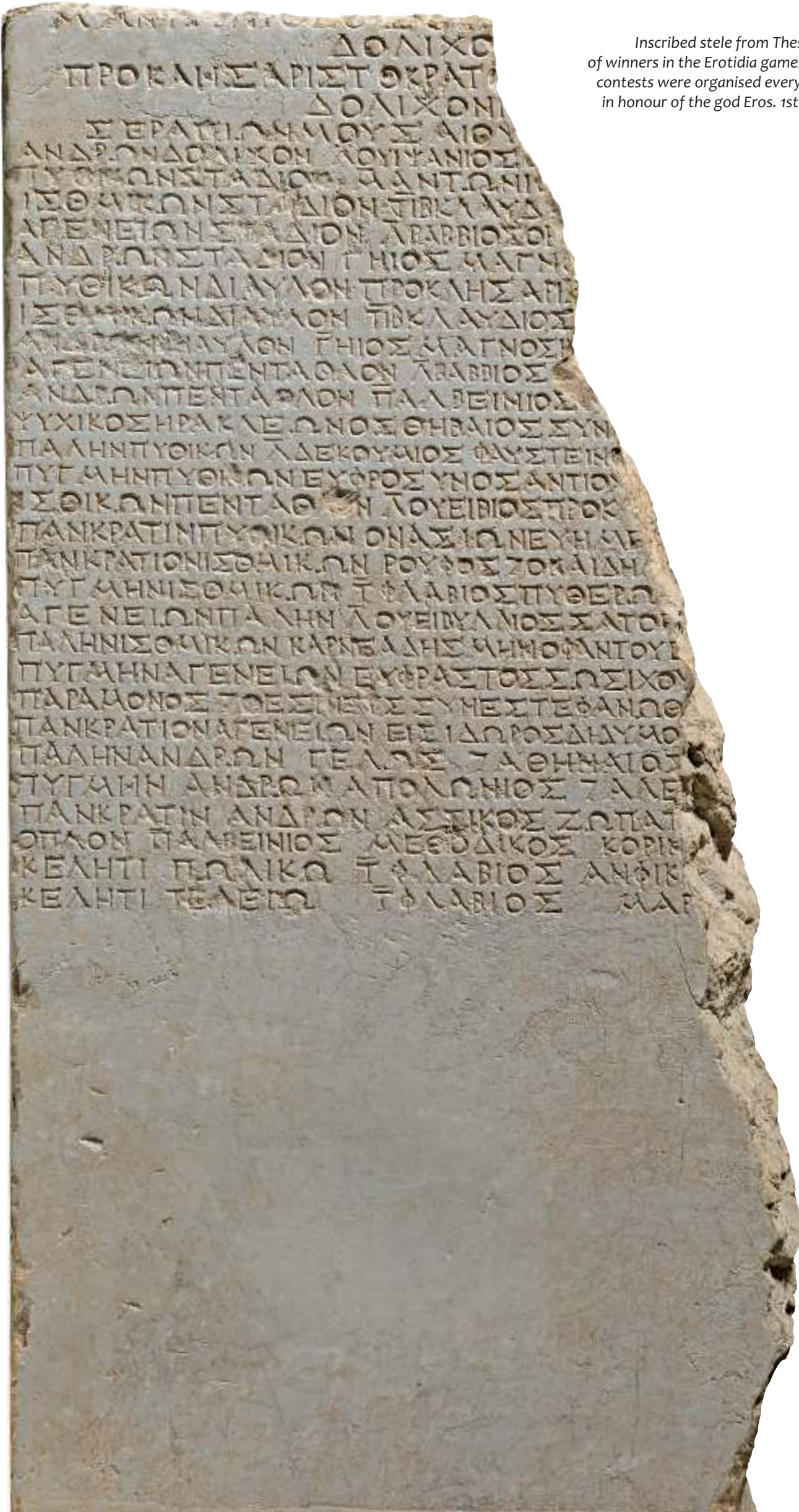
PAGES 356-357. Fragments of a marble Attic sarcophagus from Thespias, with episodes from the myth of Iphigenia in Tauris. The sections photographed portray the two sides of the main scene. On the left is a guard of Thoas, king of Tauris (Crimea), in front of the temple of Artemis. Right is the escape of Iphigenia, who is carrying the cult statue (xoanon) of the goddess, as she boards the ship. Last decades of the 2nd cent. AD.

ΕΠΙΛΑΦΙΩΝΑΙ









Inscribed stele from Thespies with a catalogue of winners in the Erotidia games. Musical and athletic contests were organised every five years in Thespies in honour of the god Eros. 1st cent. BC-1st cent. AD.

ΔΟΛΙΧΟ  
 ΠΡΟΚΛΗΣ ΑΡΙΣΤΟΚΡΑΤ  
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 ΠΑΝΚΡΑΤΗΝ ΑΝΔΡΟΝ ΑΣΣΙΚΟΣ ΖΟΠΑΤ  
 ΟΠΑΟΝ ΠΑΛΛΕΙΝΙΟΣ ΜΕΘΟΔΙΚΟΣ ΚΟΡΙΝ  
 ΚΕΛΗΤΙ ΠΑΛΙΚΟ ΤΕΛΑΒΙΟΣ ΑΝΘΙΚ  
 ΚΕΛΗΤΙ ΤΕΛΕΣ ΤΕΛΑΒΙΟΣ ΜΑΡ

Grave relief in the form of a naiskos from Thebes. The dead Eukarpo is depicted in the known type of the Small Herculeum Woman. Second or third decade of the 2nd cent. AD. Detail on page 336.



Cylindrical altar of Pentelic marble, decorated with eight-petal rosettes and garlands of fruit and leaves hanging from bulls' heads. Found in Thebes (Kadmeia), it is an Attic work dating to the first half of the 2nd cent. AD.



## “The Changing World...”

# CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS AND BYZANTINE ARTIFACTS IN THEBES

**T**HE TRANSFER OF THE IMPERIAL CAPITAL FROM ROME TO CONSTANTINOPLE COINCIDED WITH THE GRADUAL conversion of the state to Christianity. Constantine became emperor (324 AD) after defeating his adversaries. Prior to this, the state had been reorganised by Diocletian (284-304 AD) who is justly regarded as having restored order and peace. In general, the governance of these two great emperors has been praised as being a time in which the Empire was restored (*restitutio*) and revitalised (*renovatio*). After Constantine (306-337 AD), the state was divided into east and west, and after Theodosius (395), into two separate empires, whose seats were in Constantinople and Rome respectively. In 396/7 AD the Visigoths under Alaric invaded Boeotia and sacked many of its cities, with the exception of Thebes, which was saved by the stout walls of the Kadmeia, according to the historian Zosimos.

From the 4th to the 7th century AD, major changes were taking place in the eastern Mediterranean. Notwithstanding which, the most important Boeotian cities – Chaeronea, Levadeia, Coronea, Thespies, Thisbe, Thebes, Tanagra and Plataea – survived and were referred to by their ancient names in the 6th cent. AD text *Synecdemus* by Hierocles. The Boeotian ports on the Euboean and Corinthian gulfs operated as gateways to the country which, up to the 6th century, is portrayed as being densely populated and prosperous. However, from the reign of Justinian (527-565 AD) on, powerful earthquakes levelled the cities of northwestern Boeotia, while Avar and Slav invaders ravaged the Greek region of the empire.

From the late 7th century AD on, Thebes was the capital of the “Theme of Hellas” that extended from Thessaloniki to the Peloponnese. It was established for defence reasons, owing to its important strategic location. The city evolved into a major administrative and ecclesiastical centre and was confined to its ancient acropolis, the Kadmeia. From then on, Thebes was the economic centre of Boeotia as a whole, so that in the mid-Byzantine period (8th cent. AD -1204 AD), together with Athens, Patras, Corinth and Thessaloniki, it was regarded as one of the main political and financial centres of the Greek peninsula.

The peace and development of the mid-Byzantine period was cut short by the onslaught of the Normans in 1147, which resulted in the sacking of the wealthy city of Thebes. The Metropolitan Bishop Ioannis Kaloktenes, scion of an aristocratic family from Constantinople, undertook to rebuild it. Half a century later, almost coinciding with the sack of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204, Thebes devolved to Leon Sgouros initially and then to the crusaders

*Gold coins (solidi) from the reign of Justinian I (527-565 AD, ABOVE) and Theophilos (829-842 AD, BELOW) from Thebes. On the obverse of the former, the emperor is represented in battle dress holding a spear and on the reverse is an angel holding a long cross and a crossed orb. On the latter, the emperor and his two sons, Mikhail and Constantinos, are wearing official imperial dress.*



of Boniface of Montferrat. From 1210 to 1311, it was the seat of the Frankish duchy of Athens and Thebes under the French family of de la Roche. Nicholas Saint Omer, lord of Thebes, built a mansion in the middle of the Kadmeia on the site of the Mycenaean palace.

The Franks were succeeded by the Catalans, lords of Sicily and Aragon (1311-1387), following their victory at Almyros (1311). In 1387, members of the Florentine family of Acciaiuoli settled in Thebes and Athens, who between 1387 and 1394, instituted favourable regulations for the Orthodox inhabitants of the Duchy. However, after assorted military adventures, the new princes succumbed to the more powerful Ottoman Empire in 1460.

Finds from excavations, inscriptions and coins give us a fairly clear picture of the art, administration and daily life of the inhabitants of Boeotia during the transitional period between late antiquity and the Byzantine-medieval period. On the contrary, very few sculptural works of the period have survived, mainly funerary monuments. Two 5th-century AD busts exhibited in the Museum of Chaeronea, probably depicted distinguished citizens, perhaps philosophers. During this period, the re-use of marble sarcophagi for Christian burials can be observed, as in the case of the so-called *larnax* of Saint Luke the Evangelist in Thebes, a 2nd-cent. AD monument that had been associated, according to the local hagiographic tradition, with the remains of the Apostle before they were translated to Constantinople.

The output of the arts and crafts in the cities or near the large early Christian basilicas includes mosaics and a multitude of objects of everyday use (lamps, pins, crosses, storage jars and other useful vessels, as well as beehives). In the early Byzantine period, the local pottery workshops were engaged in trading their products over great distances. The art of enamelwork appeared, was perfected in Constantinople and became disseminated both inside the empire and beyond between the 7th and 9th cent. From then on it continued to evolve and be used, especially from the 11th to 14th century. And finally mosaic art, which had been widespread and popular in late antiquity, flourished in Theban workshops during the 5th and 6th centuries AD. On the mosaic floors of prestigious secular buildings and early Christian basilicas, decorative motifs are taken from nature or from the ancient mythological tradition.

The economic prosperity and burgeoning of faith that were characteristic of the mid-Byzantine years in Boeotia were also reflected in the art of the monuments at that time. In the 9th century, ecclesiastical monuments were built, which were decorated with sculpture created by local workshops. The themes of the sculpture were geometric and stylised compositions of flora and fauna. The churches of Ayios Grigorios Theologos (St Gregory the Theologian) in Thebes and of the Panaghia in Orchomenos (Skripou) belong to this early period of Byzantine architecture and sculpture (9th cent.). They were followed between the 10th and 13th century by the buildings of the Monastery of Osios Loukas, with its rich sculptural, mosaic and mural decoration, that is listed among UNESCO's World Heritage Monuments.

From the first moment it was conceived (19th cent.), the Thebes Museum was distinguished for its timeless spirit. Its collections have gradually incorporated the rich finds from excavations that document the history and heyday of both the city and the region as a whole during the thousand-year Byzantine Empire.



ABOVE: Marble semi-circular plaque with a relief of the Virgin in an attitude of prayer. From the church of Ayio Theodoroi of Thebes. 11th cent. AD. BELOW: Part of a marble epistyle with relief decoration, a mask in the middle with birds pecking grapes on both sides of it. From Thebes. 9th cent. AD.



Lead seal of the Metropolitan of Athens Mikhail Choniates, depicting the Panaghia Atheniotissa on the front and the inscription "Mother of God help me, your servant Mikhail Metropolitan of Athens" on the back. 1182-1204 AD.





Marble epistyle with plant decoration and relief animals in medallions. From the church of the Panaghia (Skripou) in Orchomenos. 873/874 AD.



Early Christian terracotta bread stamp from Levadeia. Bears a relief bird in a central medallion with the inscription "+Blessed is he who will come" around it. 5th-6th cent. AD.

Part of a marble epistyle with plant decoration and relief animals in medallions. From the church of Ayios Grigorios, the Theologian, in Thebes. 871/872 AD.





*Marble panel from Thebes depicting facing peacocks on either side of the Tree of Life. 12th cent. AD.*





Glazed clay cup (pinakion) with a very low relief representation of a hare. From Thebes. Late 12th-early 13th cent. AD.

Glazed clay cup with a roughly incised depiction of a bird. From Thebes. Late 12th-early 13th cent. AD.





Glazed clay cup with an incised representation of a fish. From Thebes. Middle 12th cent. AD.

Glazed clay cup with a very low relief representation of human faces. From Thebes. Late 12th-early 13th cent. AD.





*Marble capital with three angels and acanthus leaves.  
From the church of Ayios Georgios in Thebes. 13th cent. AD.*

*Both sides of a marble panel carved with facing peacocks and an idyllic landscape. Very probably  
from the church of Ayios Grigorios the Theologian in Thebes. 871/872 AD.*







Marble panel carved with a Greek cross on one side and facing peacocks on the other.  
From the church of Ayios Grigorios, the Theologian, in Thebes. 871/872 AD.



ON THE NEXT TWO PAGES: *Parts of a mosaic floor representing the months and a hunting scene from Thebes. Early 6th cent. AD.*

ΜΟΡΦΗ  
ΤΕΝΟΝΟΥΔΑΙΕΡΑΣ  
ΚΑΙ ΠΑΝΤΑ ΤΕΛΕΣΑ ΠΕΡΝΟΥΣΕΝ ΟΥΤΟ ΧΕΙΡΙ



ΔΙΜΗΤΗΡΟΣ ΜΕΝΕΜΟΝΟΙΣ ΛΕΙΠΗΝ ΔΑΦΝΗ  
ΤΑΥΤΗ ΔΥΠΟΥΡΓΟΣ ΠΙΦΑΝΤΕΣ ΝΟΧΙΑΡ  
ΠΑΥΟΛΑ ΕΙΔΑΝΤΑ ΜΑΤΙΩΣ ΤΟΝ ΕΥΡΥΠΕΡΗ  
ΕΡΕΤΤΕ ΚΑΘΕΙΒΑΝ ΛΟΓΟΝ ΜΑΔΑΓΚΙΑΣ



ΑΝΗΤΡΟΙΕΠΙΦΑΝΗΤΕΤΟΜΟΥΤΙΟΝΠΙΟΕΙ  
ΑΝΗΤΡΟΙΕΠΙΦΑΝΗΤΕΤΟΜΟΥΤΙΟΝΠΙΟΕΙ

ΑΡΚΩ  
ΛΟΣ





## MYTHS AND HEROES OF BOEOTIA



*“Happy is he who has learned history”*

EURIPIDES, Fragment 910

**B**OEOTIA IS GENERALLY REGARDED AS HAVING BEEN THE RICHEST WELLSPRING OF MYTHS OF THE ANCIENT Hellenic world. Its mythical traditions refer to its distant past, to the various tribes that inhabited it in prehistoric times, its ancient cities, its genealogies and the exploits of its heroes and kings, to military and other noteworthy incidents, to the origins of its religion and to the special features of its social and civic institutions. Among the multitude of myths and heroes that inundate the pages of ancient Greek and Latin literature, a good many are linked with the very broad Boeotian mythological background. Moreover, the numerous and multifarious myths of Boeotia are not confined to its own geographical area, but rather extend over a large part of pre-colonial Greece and sometimes even over its Mediterranean environment as a whole.

Evidence of the above can be found in the enormous geographical and morphological breadth of the mythical deeds and reputation of Heracles, a hero at once human and divine, whose origin, birth and life join together two of the most ancient and significant cities in Greece: Argos and Thebes. It is not perhaps accidental that both these cities, symbols of the archetypal, mythical and historical past, clashed with exceptional ferocity in mythical time that is indicatively dated just before the Achaeans' expedition to Troy.

Regarding dual or multiple homelands, many of the great heroes of ageless myth were *digeneis*, who either belonged to “two houses”, or frequently changed their place of sojourn. For this reason, any attempt to establish a precise determination of the locality and chronological starting point of the mythical archetype runs into insurmountable difficulties. Such is the case of Heracles who is shared by two great cities and is associated with achievements that were beneficial to people throughout the length and breadth of the land. Thus this immortal hero did not belong to cycles of local myths because his constant wandering went far beyond the boundaries of place and

*Detail from a red-figure lekythos from the polyandria of Thespias showing Heracles holding a phiale and Athena with an oinochoe. Third quarter of the 5th cent. BC.*



*Inscribed "heroic" skyphos with a narrative representation of the mythical foundation of Thebes by Kadmos. The inscription contains the story of the same myth. From the cemeteries of Tanagra. 2nd cent. BC.*



*Back and front of a bronze group of Heracles wrestling with the lion of Nemea, from the hero's sanctuary in Thebes.  
Late 6th-early 5th cent. BC.*

time, and in the end it was his destiny to be ranked among the gods of Olympus. Similarly, mythological traditions and their variations place the birth and action of characters as varying as Dionysos, Kadmos, Neleus, Jason, Tydeus, Oedipus, Bellerophon, Minos, Rhadamanthys, Sarpedon, Pelops, Daidalos, Kefalos, and others in many different places far apart. In addition, the death of heroes is frequently not an ordinary one, as is also the case with illustrious mortals. Heracles was deified on Mt Oita; Kadmos and Harmonia became serpents before going to the Islands of the Blessed; Theseus, the leading local hero of Attica, died ingloriously on Skyros, while the divine Achilles from Phthia, despite efforts to ward off his fate, was killed in the Trojan War. The arrogant and impious leaders of the expedition by the Seven against Thebes met their fate a long way from their “thirsty city” of Argos.

The most significant mythic cycles in Boeotia were Theban and Minyan. To the former, the scholarly tradition slowly added new myths, mainly from the environment of Dionysus and Heracles. The mythical Minyans and Phlegyans were associated with Orchomenos. In addition, the city's king Athamas married Ino, daughter of Kadmos. His children from his first wife Nephele were Phrixus and Helle who were involved in the myth of the Argonauts.

Disparate peoples and heroes ruled Thebes before the Boeotians appeared. Legend tells of Kadmos who slew the dragon that guarded a spring and had killed his men as they would go to fetch water. Athena appeared and told him to sow the dragon's teeth in the ground, from which sprang forth armed men, the so-called *Spartoi*, or Sown-Men. Reference is then made to the Kadmeian newcomers and the autochthon *Spartoi*, who were re-





Male head, probably Heracles, from Thebes.  
4th-3rd cent. BC.

garded as founders of the race of noble Thebans through virtually its entire historical period. Theban tradition recognises first of all Kadmos, who founded the first settlement of Kadmeia and introduced the alphabet that he had brought with him from Phoenicia. But this, the only possible interpretation, presupposes a serious and eloquent anachronism, a not unusual phenomenon in the ancient sources. The anachronism lies in the Boeotian participation in the expedition against Troy, which Thucydides explains by successive migratory waves. On the contrary, the story of the twin brothers Zethos and Amphion, whose base was at Eutresis, and who fortified Thebes, making it invincible, reproduced a number of features common to the heroes of many peoples and cultures. The same is true with several heroes from the Theban cycle, whether they originated from the family of Kadmos or were descendants of the Sown-Men, among whom were Amphion and Zethos, the sons of Antiope.

Thebes was the only historical Greek city to be founded in the following unusual, magical way. Kadmos was told by the Delphic oracle that he would find a heifer that he should follow until she lay down to rest, and on that spot he should build his city. The heifer led Kadmos on a journey from Phocis to Boeotia, and eventually to the highest point of what became known as the Kadmeian acropolis. This founding myth of Thebes is cited by many ancient authors of poetry and prose. The story provided subject matter for ancient art and was told by the Thebans to Pausanias when he visited their city during the imperial Roman era (2nd cent. AD). According to tradition, Kadmos the city founder originated from Phoenicia and had come to Greece in search of his sister Europa, who had been carried away by Zeus. However, the building of the defensive wall of Thebes to the sound of Amphion's music, verges on the realm of miracle and fairy tale (*Odyssey* 11, 263-5, Euripides, *Phoenician Women* 115-6 and 823-5).

During the period of the dynasty of Kadmos and his descendants, religious activities were reinstated, coinciding with the dissemination of the Dionysiac cult in Thebes. It was Semele, daughter of Kadmos and Harmonia, who brought the god Dionysos into the world under truly dramatic conditions.

Another of Kadmos' daughters, Agave, introduced the God's orgiastic cult and led the women maenads of Thebes in their frenzy to tear the king, her son Pentheus, limb from limb, as he had refused to be initiated into the new religion and its new mysteries.

Together with Dionysos and his cult, which according to epigraphic evidence in Linear B script, can be discerned in an embryonic form in the Aegean during the Mycenaean period, the myth of Heracles and his family appeared in Thebes. Amphitryon, his earthly step-father, and Alcmene, his mother, had arrived in Thebes as exiles from Argos. In Thebes, "a seven-gated city in which mortals give birth to gods", as Sophocles noted, Zeus lay with Alcmene who later gave birth to man's "greatest hero". In constant action, Heracles liberated the world from the natural, animal and human elements that caused people torments and disasters. The Demigod's deeds were rewarded by the gods who welcomed him to Olympus as their deputy, where he lived as an immortal with Hebe, eternal youth.

Many Attic tragedies told the tale of what had happened before and after the terrible fate of Oedipus the King who, after solving the Sphinx's existential riddle, involuntarily killed his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, thereby bringing down a curse on his own head and that of his family. Through the brilliant art of the tragic poets, the plot and lessons of the so-called Theban tragedies were preserved and took on ageless, universal dimensions. Some of the characters created by Attic tragedy, and above all their splendid discourse and deeds, constitute the quintessence of the culture and virtue of classical man. The mythical actions had a symbolic background, while Thebes – the rival of Golden Age Athens – provided the real setting. Thebes was the city of civil conflicts and turbulent passions in comparison with the prettified Athens of the poets, which had become substantially weakened and was caught up in the maelstrom of the Peloponnesian War. Mythical heroes and heroines such as Menoiceus, Haemon, Antigone, Ismene, Oedipus and his sons set an example and taught using the tragic, whether positive or negative, points of their lives and works, as did Plutarch, a Boeotian who later wrote about the lives of great men.

According to tradition, the tribulations of the Theban dynasty of the Labdacids continued with the expedition and siege of their city by the Seven against Thebes under Adrastus, king of Argos. The two Theban brothers Eteocles and Polyneices killed each other in single combat and the Argive army returned in defeat to Argos, following the death of their leaders. Later, however, the *Epigoni*, the sons of these seven dead chieftains, conquered and levelled Thebes, just before the Trojan War.

Orchomenos, the second largest city in Boeotia, appears in legend, first because it was associated with the expedition of the Argonauts, in which the city played a significant role, and second because its ancestral good relations with Thessaly, from which the Argonauts set out, are thus justified. Here too, the fierce confrontation between Orchomenos and Thebes is reflected and trumpeted throughout historical antiquity. Tradition places King Minyas with his untold wealth in Orchomenos, together with the mythical architects Trophonios and Agamedes. The former, a hero and prophet, was worshipped in Levadeia until late antiquity.

Tradition reports that Minyan Orchomenos was a powerful city in the very early years. It is not, however, known whether the reference was to the prehistoric or to the very early Hellenic period, since the city flourished in both eras. Erginos, the mythical king of the region, conquered Thebes and obliged it to pay a burdensome tribute. First, Heracles punished the emissaries of Erginos in an exemplary manner and then conquered the Orchomenians, destroying the unique prehistoric drainage works in the Copais Basin, so that the lake encroached



*Black-figure skyphos from Ritsona showing Heracles wrestling with the lion of Nemea, watched by Hermes holding the caduceus, and Iolaos holding the hero's club. Circa 500-490 BC.*



upon it once again. Natural disasters and the inevitable consequences of human weakness and obtuseness were usually attributed to the rage of the gods or local heroes.

Up to the 17th century, long before the prehistoric civilisations of the Aegean came to light, scholarly thought had rejected mythology, as certain pre-Socratic philosophers had done in antiquity. Their argument was always the same, i.e. that mythology was the product of superstitious and primitive minds. But the priceless prehistoric treasures unearthed in the excavations at Mycenae (1876) and Knossos (1900) and the numerous other prehistoric sites on mainland Greece, Crete and in the Aegean archipelago led many researchers of the period to identify the new data with references in the Homeric epics and many later ancient texts, thus reading the myths and their references as authentic historical sources and testimony. However, the generalised effort to create a pseudo-historical background for Hellenic prehistory by selectively upgrading mythological references to incontrovertible historical fact, together with the effort to determine the chronology of the myths, failed to produce convincing results.

The treasure of the Greek myths with their wealth of variations – an inexhaustible source of which was Boeotia, which supplied them generously – constitutes a unique cultural heritage with its own values. The myths do not relate history, nor do they constitute a reliable source of historical information. If the myths had reflected or concealed prehistoric or early historical facts that were in agreement with other, more authentic evidence, then they too would have contributed to the deeper understanding of early Hellenic societies and at the same time proven their potentially early creation.

The treasure of the Boeotian mythical cycles was sealed by the universal and timeless myth of the Theban Heracles. This strong and enduring hero was for centuries the champion and pre-eminent symbol of his city, well suited to its fortunes and misfortunes alike. The early worship of Heracles and his eight children in a shrine near the Elektra Gate, is sung superbly by Pindar (*Isthmian* 4, 66-77) and described by Pausanias (9, 11, 1-3). The architectural and movable finds and the large quantity of epigraphic evidence from the excavation of the sanctuary site have now been pieced together and correlated harmoniously and comprehensively with the testimony of ancient texts.

Myth, a creation of the mind and discourse (*nous* and *logos*), does not certify the historicity of its heroes, nor does the worship attributed to them necessarily indicate their actual material existence.







Part of a dinos from the sanctuary of Heracles in Thebes. Deianira is abducted by the centaur Nessos. Of Heracles, only a section of his bow, along with the arrow, has been preserved, on the left. 7th cent. BC.



Black-figure skyphos from Ritsona depicting Dionysos. On one side of the vase, the god is holding a rhyton in the shape of a horn, and on the other a kantharos. (Detail on next page). Circa 500-490 BC.







*Red-figure krater from Thebes depicting actors in costume taking part in a Dionysiac company (thiasos). 4th cent. BC.*



*Black-figure kylix with a chorus of old men in an ancient drama, from Tanagra. 6th cent. BC.*







*Black-figure skyphos from Ritsona representing Dionysus reclining with a kantharos in his hand. On either side of the scene are women musicians playing a kithara and double flute. 490-480 BC. Detail on page 388.*



Red-figure krater with a Dionysiac scene, from Thebes. Dionysus and Ariadne are shown seated on a rock with a panther between them. Dionysus is holding a thyrsus and a kantharos; Ariadne is holding a drum. Work by a Boeotian workshop (375-350 BC).  
Detail on next page.





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