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**THESEUS AND THE MINOTAUR:  
A QUESTION OF ICONOGRAPHY IN  
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**Elizabeth Ann Szufnar**

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of the requirements for

Master of Arts degree in History of Art

Major professor

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**THESEUS AND THE MINOTAUR:  
A QUESTION OF ICONOGRAPHY IN  
GREEK VASE PAINTING**

By

**Elizabeth Ann Szufnar**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THESESUS AND THE MINOTAUR: A QUESTION OF ICONOGRAPHY IN GREEK VASE PAINTING**

**By**

**Elizabeth Ann Szufnar**

**The labyrinth at Knossos was inhabited by a half-man, half-bull creature known as the Minotaur. Theseus liberated the Athenians, killing the Minotaur in the confines of the maze. This theme is popular in Greek vase painting of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. Most extant vase painting depicts Theseus killing the Minotaur with a sword; however, on several vases, Theseus uses a club.**

**This thesis examines the development of the Theseus myth, literary and artistic, the promotion of Theseus as the Athenian national hero and the parallels between Theseus and Herakles. Central to this study are the iconographical issues related to the club that Theseus occasionally wields against the Minotaur.**

*To me there is no past or future in art.  
If a work of art cannot live always in  
the present it must not be considered at  
all. The art of the Greeks, of the Egyptians,  
of the great painters who lived in other times,  
is not an art of the past, perhaps it is more  
alive today than it ever was.*

**–PABLO PICASSO (1923)**

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## KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in this study:

<b>AA</b>	<b>Archäologischer Anzeiger</b>
<b>AJA</b>	<b>American Journal of Archaeology</b>
<b>ABV</b>	<b>Beazley, J.D. <i>Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters</i>. Oxford, 1956.</b>
<b>ARV<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Beazley, J.D. <i>Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters</i>. 2 vols. Oxford, 1963.</b>
<b>BICS</b>	<b>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</b>
<b>Brommer, <i>Heracles</i></b>	<b>Brommer, Frank. <i>Heracles: The Twelve Labors of the Hero in Ancient Art and Literature</i>. New York, 1979.</b>
<b>Brommer, <i>Theseus</i></b>	<b>Brommer, Frank. <i>Theseus: Die Taten des griechischen Helden in der Antiken Kunst und Literatur</i>. Darmstadt, 1982.</b>
<b>Brommer, <i>Vasenlisten</i></b>	<b>Brommer, Frank. <i>Vasenlisten zur griechischen Heldensage</i>. 3rd ed. Marburg, 1973.</b>
<b>CVA</b>	<b>Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum</b>
<b>JHS</b>	<b>Journal of Hellenic Studies</b>
<b>MonPiot</b>	<b>Monuments Piot</b>
<b>MusHelv</b>	<b>Museum Helveticum</b>
<b>Para</b>	<b>Beazley, J.D. <i>Paralipomena Additions to Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters and to Attic Red-Figure Painters</i>. 2nd ed. Oxford, 1971.</b>
<b>POxy</b>	<b><i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Part XXVII</i>. Edited with Translations and Notes by E.G. Turner, John Rea, L. Koenen and Jose M<sup>a</sup> Fernandez Pomar. London, 1962.</b>
<b>RA</b>	<b>Revue Archéologique</b>
<b>REG</b>	<b>Revue des Etudes Grecques</b>
<b>RhM</b>	<b>Rheinisches Museum für Philologie</b>
<b>Schefold, <i>GH</i></b>	<b>Schefold, Karl. <i>Gods and Heroes in Late Archaic Greek Art</i>. Cambridge, 1992.</b>
<b>Schefold, <i>ML</i></b>	<b>Schefold, Karl. <i>Myth and Legend in Early Greek Art</i>. New York, 1966.</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The mythological figure of Theseus was known as early as the seventh century B.C. at which time he appeared in the art of the Peloponnesians. Prior to 520 B.C., Theseus was known primarily for the battle he fought against the Minotaur. Black-figured pottery illustrates this well. The sword is the weapon of choice; either Theseus threatens the Minotaur with his sword or he is depicted in the act of slaying the hybrid creature.

Towards the end of the sixth century B.C., Theseus was given a new image - he was glorified as an Athenian hero and patriot. The addition of the deeds he performed on his way from Troizen to Athens supplemented his famous battle with the Minotaur. These deeds were recounted in the pictorial art, or more specifically Attic pottery of the period, and by 510 B.C. whole cycles were illustrated. There exist many of these so-called cycle vases, mostly cups, and they are spread across the whole of the fifth century, but with the greatest concentration at the beginning of this epoch.

As mentioned, before the creation of this new Theseus, the battle against the Minotaur was the story by which Theseus was usually known and its popularity continued even after the hero's transformation in the classical epoch. In several instances, though, there can be noticed a change in the iconography of this famous encounter. In most extant examples of black-figured pottery, the Minotaur is slain by a sword; in red-figured examples, too, Theseus brandishes a sword. However, in both styles he occasionally uses a club to slay the creature.



The question arises as to why this iconographical change occurred. There are several possible hypotheses which may explain this. Could this change be the result of the cycle cups and the deeds depicted on them? In this period, the image of Theseus is transformed - his previous exploits are not forgotten, but rather new deeds are added. Specifically, the relevance of Periphetes must be addressed. Periphetes was also known as Korynetes after the club - koryne - which he used to kill travelers. Theseus acquired the club after the defeat of this opponent. Is there any connection between this club and the club which Theseus brandishes against the Minotaur in several red-figure vase paintings? This question will be addressed in chapter four. Or, perhaps, might the club which Theseus wields be a reference to Herakles, the pan-Hellenic hero? This possibility will be considered. The two heroes have much in common - most notably the deeds of Theseus which resemble the twelve labors of Herakles. Plutarch notes that Theseus was eager to emulate Herakles, and claims that he inspired the phrase "ἄλλος οὗτος Ἡρακλῆς" (*Theseus* 29.3). The Athenians were content to model their national hero, Theseus, after Herakles. But when and how did his role as a national hero evolve? Peisistratos, Kleisthenes and Kimon have all been identified by modern scholars as those who may have been responsible for the promotion of Theseus. The influence of Herakles, which may even extend to the use of the club by Theseus, must be explored. The seemingly sparse examples in which Theseus uses a club to slay the Minotaur should not be a deterrent, but rather this deviation deserves further consideration.

CHAPTER 1  
THE LIFE OF THESEUS

"Loose not the wine skin's jutting neck, great  
chief of the people,  
Until thou shalt have come once more to the city of  
Athens." (Plutarch, *Theseus* 3.3)

This message the Pythian priestess delivered to Aegeus, king of Athens. Aegeus, however, did not understand this message and sought the advice of his friend, Pittheus, the king of Troizen. Pittheus understood the oracle and persuaded Aegeus to spend the night with Aethra, his daughter. Learning that he had consorted with Pittheus' daughter, Aegeus then proceeded to hide a sword and a pair of sandals under a great boulder. Telling no one but Aethra, Aegeus instructed her that if she bore a son, when the child was old enough, he should be able to lift the rock and recover the tokens. The son should then proceed to Athens and seek his father.

Aethra did bear a son and he was named Theseus. Aethra kept his true birth concealed. The child was raised by Pittheus who reported that Theseus was the son of Poseidon. Poseidon was highly regarded by the Troizenes - he was the patron deity of the city. When the youth came of age, Aethra brought him to the rock and revealed the truth about his birth. Theseus put his shoulder to the rock, easily raising it up, and discovered the tokens, or *gnorismata*, placed there by Aegeus many years before.

Aethra begged Theseus to make the journey to Athens by sea - the safest route. It was difficult to make the journey to Athens by land, since no part of it was clear nor without peril from robbers and miscreants. Theseus refused and chose the overland route. The youth had heard of the numerous villains that beset this route and, in admiration of

Herakles, wished to prove himself. Theseus had long been fired by the glory of Herakles.

Herakles and Theseus were, in fact, related.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, Plutarch writes:

[H]e thought it a dreadful and unendurable thing that his famous cousin should go out against the wicked everywhere and purge land and sea of them, while he himself ran away from the struggles which lay in his path, disgracing his reputed father by journeying like a fugitive over the sea, and bringing to his real father as proofs of his birth only sandals and a sword unstained with blood, instead of at once offering noble deeds and achievements as the manifest mark of his noble birth. (*Theseus* 7.1-2)

Theseus first encountered Periphetes in the region near Epidaurus. Periphetes used a club as his weapon and was thus called Korynetes, or "club-bearer". Theseus killed the villain and thereafter carried the club as his own, emulating Herakles who wore the skin of the Nemean Lion.

On the Isthmus of Corinth lived Sinis, nicknamed Pitokamptes, or "pine-bender". Sinis accosted travelers and made them assist him in bending a tree down whence he released it suddenly, hurling the victim into the air; else he attached his victim to two pine trees and then, releasing the trees, tore the person in two. Sinis was killed by Theseus in the very manner in which he had killed.

The Krommyon sow was a fierce animal which ravaged the country. This sow, named Phaia, Theseus went out of his way to encounter and kill for Theseus did not wish people to think that he performed all his exploits under compulsion. Another version exists in which a depraved woman, who was nicknamed the sow, roamed the countryside and it was this woman that Theseus killed. In addition, in some accounts Phaia was the "caretaker" of the sow.

As Theseus entered the territory of Megara he came to the Skironian cliffs which overlooked a bay. Here lurked Skiron. He robbed travelers and then forced them to wash his feet. As they performed this task, the victims were kicked over the cliff and subsequently devoured by a great turtle who lived below. Theseus pretended to comply, but

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<sup>1</sup> Plutarch writes, "And besides, they were kinsmen, being sons of cousins-german. For Aethra was daughter of Pittheus, as Alcmene was of Lysidice, and Lysidice and Pittheus were brother and sister, children of Hippodameia and Pelops." (*Theseus* 7.1)

as he kneeled before Skiron, the youth seized Skiron's legs and hurled the villain over the cliffs to feed the deadly turtle.

At Eleusis Theseus faced his next competitor. The king of Eleusis was Kerkyon, a fine wrestler. He forced strangers to wrestle with him and Theseus was no exception. Theseus, however, was victorious.

Theseus was accosted by Prokrustes at Erineus. Prokrustes compelled travelers to lie on a short bed if they were tall or on a long bed if they were short. Each victim was then either stretched or their limbs were cut off to fit the bed. Theseus killed Prokrustes in the same manner.

When Theseus arrived in Athens, things were in turmoil. Aegeus had no lawful son and the fifty sons of Pallas were plotting to seize the throne. On the occasion of Theseus' arrival he was warmly welcomed by the Athenians, but he did not reveal his identity. However, the wife of Aegeus, Medea, recognized the youth and convincing the king that Theseus was consorting with the sons of Pallas, persuaded Aegeus to poison the visitor. This was averted when, during the course of the banquet, Theseus drew his sword whereby Aegeus recognized his son. In a ceremony soon after, the king formally recognized his son and named him as the heir to the Athenian throne.

The fifty sons of Pallas had hoped to gain possession of the kingdom when Aegeus died without an heir. When Theseus was proclaimed successor to the throne of Athens they openly rebelled, realizing that their hopes of ever ruling were jeopardized by Theseus. The sons divided themselves into two forces - twenty-five sons marched with their father from the city of Sphetteus; the other twenty-five gathered at Gargettus where they lay in ambush, waiting to attack. This plan was foiled however and Theseus fell upon the forces at Gargettus and killed them all; the remaining forces dispersed.

Theseus then went to Marathon in search of a wild bull which was ravaging the region. This very bull was allegedly the animal which Herakles had brought to Greece as his

seventh Labor and which subsequently had made its way to Attica. Theseus made his way to Marathon, captured the bull and drove it to Athens where it was then sacrificed to Apollo.

"Not long afterwards there came from Crete for the third time the collectors of the tribute." (*Theseus* 15.1) The son of King Minos of Crete, Androgeos, had been sent by Aegeus to kill the Marathonian bull; Androgeos died in the attempt. Consequently, Minos had imposed upon Athens a tribute - every nine years, seven youths and seven maidens were to be taken to Crete and confined in the labyrinth where they would either be killed by the Minotaur or perish within, unable to find their way out. One tradition asserts that King Minos specifically demanded the inclusion of Theseus in the tribute. However, according to Plutarch's biography of Theseus, most authors write that the Athenian citizens were angry that Theseus should be exempt from inclusion among the victims because he was the king's son whereupon Theseus volunteered to be a part of the tribute. The distraught king then requested of Theseus that if he should return alive, he was to change the color of the ship's sail from black to white, or scarlet according to Simonides.

There are conflicting traditions whether the youths of the tribute were taken to Crete in an Athenian or a Cretan ship. If the ship were Cretan, the story exists that King Minos tried to interfere with one of the females - Eriboiea. Theseus defended the girl and Minos became angry. The two argued and at one point Theseus claimed to be the son of Poseidon. The king, throwing a gold ring into the sea, demanded that the youth prove this by retrieving the trinket. Theseus was born by dolphins to the undersea palace of his father where he was greeted by Amphitrite, the wife of Poseidon, and cloaked in a purple garment and given a rose wreath to wear. Theseus then returned to the ship.

Before leaving for Crete, the pious youth made offerings to Apollo and Aphrodite. Theseus had requested the assistance of Aphrodite and it was because of the love of a woman - Ariadne - that Theseus was successful. The Minotaur was a half-human, half-bull creature; he was the offspring of Pasiphae, the wife of King Minos, and a bull. Minos commissioned Daedalus to construct a labyrinth in which the creature was imprisoned.

Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, had obtained from Daedalus information on how to escape from the labyrinth - simply, fasten a thread to the entrance and thence follow it back. Ariadne then introduced herself to Theseus and after he had promised to marry her, gave to him a ball of thread. Leaving the youths at the entrance to the labyrinth, Theseus found the Minotaur in the confines of the maze and then killed the creature. He then returned to the labyrinth entrance and fled with Ariadne and the youths. During the night the Athenians set sail for home.

They first reached the island of Dia where they went ashore. When they sailed on, Ariadne was left behind. The earliest version of Ariadne's desertion suggests that Theseus simply forgot her. Later authors, however, say that Theseus fell in love with another woman, Aegle, and deliberately left Dia without Ariadne. Homer says that Dionysus was responsible for the death of Ariadne by asking Artemis to kill her; this Homeric account may be an earlier version of the tradition which relates how Dionysus himself went to the island and took Ariadne to become his queen.

The party, after leaving Dia, next landed on the island of Delos. It was here that the Athenians performed the Crane Dance, recounting their experiences in the twisting passages of the Cretan labyrinth.<sup>2</sup> From Delos, they sailed home to Athens. Theseus, however, in his excitement, forgot to change to sail of the ship; Aegeus saw the black sail and concluding that Theseus was dead, flung himself from the cliffs. Upon the death of his father, Theseus became king of Athens.

Theseus then embarked on an expedition against the Amazons. He captured one of their leaders, Antiope; either she fell in love with him or else when the Amazons sent gifts to Theseus, he invited the bearer of the gifts to board his ship and then sailed off. The Amazons were angered by this action and pursued Theseus. They invaded Attica and besieged Athens itself. The Amazons occupied the hill of the Pnyx and the Acropolis and it

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<sup>2</sup> This dance is depicted on the François Vase.

was on the ground between the two hills that Theseus and the Amazons engaged in combat. Theseus was victorious.

Theseus' greatest friend was Peirithoös, king of the Lapiths. Theseus had a great reputation and hearing of Theseus' heroic qualities, Peirithoös was determined to meet him. He schemed to drive Theseus' herds of cattle away from Marathon. Peirithoös did not flee when he learned that Theseus was pursuing him, but rather turned back and met him. When the two did meet, they did not fight. Peirithoös extended his hand to the Athenian and instead of punishing him, Theseus took his hand and the two swore eternal friendship. Thereafter, the two men were involved in many exploits together, including the battle against the Centaurs which occurred at the wedding of Peirithoös and Hippodamia.

Theseus eventually married a woman named Phaedra who bore him two sons - Akamas and Demophon. Sometime after this marriage, Pallas and his sons made one last attempt to gain the throne of Athens, but Theseus killed Pallas and his remaining family. Because Theseus had murdered his kinsman, he was sentenced to one year's exile from Athens. Theseus took his family to Troizen; it was here that Hippolytos, the son which Antiope had born to Theseus, was living.

Hippolytos was a shy youth and a favorite of Artemis, goddess of the hunt. He scorned Aphrodite and consequently this goddess caused Phaedra to fall in love with him. Hippolytos learned of Phaedra's desire and though he was shocked, vowed to keep the matter secret. Phaedra, however, hearing of Hippolytos' scorn, hanged herself and left a note in which she accused Hippolytos of trying to seduce her. Reading the letter, Theseus pronounced a curse on his son and asked Poseidon, god of the sea, to contrive his death. As Hippolytos rode in his chariot along the coast, a huge monstrous creature rose from the sea and frightened the horses; Hippolytos was thrown from the chariot. He died soon after, but before he expired the truth of the situation was told to Theseus by Artemis.

Both Theseus and Peirithoös were now widowers; they agreed to help each other win new wives. Helen was chosen to be Theseus' bride and although she was not of

marriageable age, her beauty was renowned. Theseus and Peirithoös went to Sparta, seized the girl and fled with her to Aphidnae in Attica; she was then placed in the care of Theseus' mother. Aethra, until she should be old enough to marry Theseus. The two men then made their way to the Underworld for Peirithoös had chosen Persephone, the wife of Hades, to be his bride. Hades pretended to receive the two men respectfully, but when he invited them to sit down they discovered themselves locked into their seats; Peirithoös remained in the Chair of Forgetfulness forever, but Theseus was freed by Herakles who had descended to the Underworld to capture Kerberos.

Theseus returned to Athens only to find the city in turmoil. The Spartans, led by the Dioscuri, the brothers of Helen, had invaded Attica, besieging Aphidnae and taking Aethra captive. Athens itself had been assailed by Menestheus, a descendant of King Erechtheus, who ingratiated himself to the people of Athens. The nobles had long been hostile to Theseus and Menestheus convinced the Athenian citizens that they had been robbed of their native homes so that in place of many kings of their own blood, the Athenians had to obey one master - Theseus - who, himself, was an immigrant and an alien.

Theseus was forced to flee Athens. He sent his two sons to Euboea and he took refuge on the island of Skyros where he had inherited estates from his grandfather. The king of Skyros was a man named Lykomedes and he, either because he feared so powerful a man such as Theseus, or as a favor to Menestheus, led Theseus up to the cliffs, ostensibly to show him his estates. Lykomedes then pushed Theseus over the edge. So died the hero of Athens.



## CHAPTER 2

### THESEUS AND THE MINOTAUR: LITERARY EVIDENCE

Martin P. Nilsson has demonstrated that nearly all Greek cycles have a foundation in the Mycenaean period and this is true of Theseus, too.<sup>3</sup> Theseus belongs to the earlier generation of heroes.<sup>4</sup> Theseus is a figure of legend and only gradually has he acquired a complete life story.

Theseus has very obscure beginnings in Homer. He is specifically mentioned only once in the *Iliad*.<sup>5</sup> Nestor extolled the virtues of the men with whom he battled against the centaurs saying:

Never  
yet have I seen nor shall see again such men as these were,  
men like Peirithoos, and Dryas, shepherd of the people,  
Kaineus and Exadios, godlike Polyphemos,  
or Theseus, Aigeus' son, in the likeness of the immortals.  
(*Iliad* 1.261-265)

Theseus was a friend and companion of Peirithōos and their two names are again, as in the *Iliad*, paired in the *Odyssey*. At the conclusion of his descent into Hades, Odysseus laments

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<sup>3</sup> According to Nilsson, the importance of a location in myth corresponds to its importance in the Mycenaean culture. There is a close relationship between myth and Mycenaean sites. See Martin P. Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology* (Berkeley, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Kretschmer has differentiated between two series of heroic names. He concludes that names ending in *-eus* go back to a period before Homer; the names of the sons of these mythical persons are common compound names, for example: Odysseus and Telemachus; Atreus and Agamemnon; Neleus and Nestor, Oeneus and Meleager. Names ending in *-eus* are difficult to explain etymologically whereas the younger series is more clear and explicable. The latter are regarded to be the sons or descendants of the former. See Paul Kretschmer, *Glotta* X (1920): 305ff.

<sup>5</sup> Homer basically disregards Attic mythology and there is little mention of Theseus. The Athenian contingent at Troy is led by Menestheus, the deposer of Theseus. In addition, Theseus' sons, Akamas and Demophon, who fought at Troy, are unknown in the *Iliad*. See Denys Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Berkeley, 1959) 145-147, 172-175, n.79.

that he had not seen, "Peirithōos and Theseus, gods' glorious children." (*Odyssey* 11.631)<sup>6</sup>

These few allusions to Theseus show that there was knowledge of Theseus in the eighth century.

In both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the slaying of the Minotaur is not specifically mentioned. However, book 11 of the *Odyssey* presents the tale of Ariadne. Odysseus recounts:

I saw Phaidra and Prokris and Ariadne, the beautiful  
daughter of malignant Minos. Theseus at one time  
was bringing her from Crete to the high ground of sacred Athens,  
but got no joy of her, since before that Artemis killed her  
in sea-washed Dia, when Dionysos bore witness against her.  
(*Odyssey* 11.321-325)

She arrived on the island of Dia after departing Crete and we are told that Theseus was intending to take her to Athens. The Cretan adventure is thus understood in this connection between Theseus and Ariadne, yet there is no evidence that the story of the Minotaur was a part of the legend in the Homeric era.

The lyric poets, especially Bakkhylides, add much to the legend of Theseus. Bakkhylides was a fifth century poet and was considered a slightly younger contemporary of Pindar. Eusebius gives his *floruit* as c. 467 B.C. (Olympiad 78.2). In 1896, a papyrus manuscript was discovered at Al-Kussiyah, Egypt. The fifteen epinician odes and six dithyrambs, "considerably enlarged not only the known body of work of the poet, but also the sum of early works dealing with Theseus."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Some scholars regard these references to Theseus as later additions to the epics. 1.265 in the *Iliad* is not found in the better manuscripts. See G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol.1:books 1-4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Ludwig Radermacher, *Mythos und Sage bei den Griechen*, 2nd ed. (Vienna, 1943) 249-250; Albrecht Dihle, *Homerprobleme* (Opladen, 1970) 29-34, 103. All Homeric references to Theseus are regarded by Stephani and Jahn as Peisistratid additions. See Otto Jahn, *Archäologische Beiträge* (1847): 271, n. 40; Ludolf Stephani, *Der Kampf zwischen Theseus und Minotaurus*, 6f. See also Hans Herter, *RhM* 88 (1939): 245-6. According to Plutarch (*Theseus* 20.1), who quotes Hereas of Megara, 11.631 in the *Odyssey* is a Peisistratid addition. See William B. Stanford, ed., *The Odyssey of Homer* (New York, 1967) 404. Jenifer Neils states, however, that the trend is now against interpolation. See J.A. Davidson, *TAPA* 86 (1955): 17; Marchinus Van Der Valk, *Reserches II* (Leiden, 1964) 436, 519ff.

<sup>7</sup> Jenifer Neils, *The Youthful Deeds of Theseus* (Rome, 1987) 8.

Two dithyrambs of Bakkhylides specifically deal with Theseus. Dithyramb 17 is titled *The Youths and Theseus* and tells of Theseus' voyage to Crete. Theseus and fourteen Athenian youths are mentioned - passengers on a ship under the command of King Minos.<sup>8</sup> Theseus boasted to Minos of his divine descent saying, "I also myself come from the daughter of wealthy Pittheus when she lay with the lord of the sea, Poseidon." (ll. 32-35). Minos demanded a sign from Zeus to prove the youth's divine origin and then, throwing a gold ring into the sea, challenged Theseus to retrieve it. Theseus jumped into the sea and was born by dolphins to the home of his father, Poseidon. At the *megaron theon* he was met by Amphitrite who clothed him in a purple cloak and a rose wreath. Theseus then reappeared on the deck of the ship, bedecked in his new finery - a, "wonder to all." (ll.123)

Dithyramb 18 records Theseus' journey from Troizen to Athens and is simply titled *Theseus*. Aegeus, king of Athens, tells of a man and his mighty deeds:

He has killed overpowering  
Sinis, once the greatest in strength  
of men, being son to Kronid Lytaíos  
(earthshaker, that is Poseidon);  
killed, too, the man-slaughtering wild boar  
in the valley of Krémmyon, and killed  
wicked and cruel Skiron.  
He has abolished the wrestling-ring  
of Kérkyon. The Pounder has dropped  
Polypémon's strong hammer from hand. (ll.19-28)<sup>9</sup>

This ode, according to Jenifer Neils, "fills the chronological gap between his birth in Troizen. . . and his first Athenian adventure, the voyage to Crete."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bakkhylides mentioned fourteen youths, so Theseus must have volunteered to be a part of the tribute. This is the literary tradition followed by Plutarch (*Theseus* 17.2). Some authors write that Theseus volunteered for the mission whereas others relate that Theseus was one of the fourteen youths chosen by King Minos himself as part of the tribute.

<sup>9</sup> The absence of Periphetes may have been because the ode addresses the Isthmian deeds; Periphetes inhabited the region near Epidauros which is located before the Isthmus and Timothy Gantz suggests that this may be the reason Periphetes is not mentioned in Bakkhylides' ode. See Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore, 1993). In Bakkhylides account, he does not mention the character of the villain, their locale nor the method by which each was killed. Neils says that this is because he was not interested in this, but rather in heightening the dramatic situation to demonstrate the physical strength of Theseus. According to her, this heightening would, in a sense, set the scene for the arrival of Theseus in Athens.

<sup>10</sup> Neils, 11.

It is difficult to date these two odes by Bakkhylides. Bakkhylides' work spans a period from approximately 480 to 431 B.C. It has been suggested that Dithyramb 17 was written between 478 and 470 B.C. The last lines of this ode are addressed to Apollo and it is probable that the ode was composed for a Delian festival.<sup>11</sup> Dithyramb 18 was composed at about the same time. The dating of these odes is contemporary with an important event in Athenian history - the return of Theseus' bones from the island of Skyros by Kimon in 474/3 B.C.<sup>12</sup> It is important to recognize that these odes reveal a new image of the Athenian hero and indicate an increased interest in him during this period.

In addition to the odes of Bakkhylides, there are three fragments of the Cretan adventure attributed to Simonides, a widely traveled and well-known poet who was thought to have lived from about 556 - 468 B.C. These fragments, however, show a decided interest in Aegeus, with the slaying of the Minotaur and other events treated rather superficially.<sup>13</sup>

Theseus was a major figure in Athenian history and Attic historians included the Cretan adventure in their accounts. Pherekydes was a fifth century historian; Eusebius gives his *floruit* as Olympiad 81.1, or 456 B.C. His work deals with the myths of Athens and its tribes. Only a few fragments of his works survive. The major fragment, fragment 148, is a more detailed account of the story of Theseus as found in book 11 of the *Odyssey*.<sup>14</sup> Ellen Young notes that the Minotaur and labyrinth are, in this account, well established.

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<sup>11</sup> The lines read as, "Delian, lord, your own heart softened by the chorales of the Keans, grant a god-speed happening of success." (ll.130-132).

<sup>12</sup> See Plutarch, *Theseus* 36.1. The Delphic Oracle, which advised the Athenians to retrieve Theseus' bones is, according to Plutarch, dated to 476/5 B.C. The importance of Kimon and his promotion of Theseus as an Athenian hero will be discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>13</sup> The principal fragment describes the sail given by Aegeus to the captain of the ship which sailed to Crete with Theseus and the youths of the tribute. The name of ship's captain - Phereklos the son of Amarsyas - according to Simonides is also preserved by Plutarch. A third fragment concerns the messenger sent to Aegeus; this fragment is preserved in a scholiast on Sophocles' *Ajax*, l.740. See J.M. Edmonds, *Lyra Graeca II* (London, 1924) 318, fr. 62, 63 and 64 respectively.

<sup>14</sup> The essential points of the story may be related as follows: Theseus was among the youths taken to Crete by King Minos to be sacrificed to the Minotaur; Ariadne, who fell in love with the hero, gave him the thread which she had received from Daedalos; Theseus was instructed to tie the thread to the door of the labyrinth, find and slay the Minotaur and sacrifice his locks to Poseidon; Theseus then escaped from the island with Ariadne and the Athenians in the middle of the night; they stopped on the island of Dia where Athena commanded Theseus to abandon Ariadne. Dionysus then married her.

Hellanikos, a contemporary of Herodotus, was another historian who wrote of Theseus.<sup>15</sup> His history of Athens was published at the end of the fifth century. Plutarch preserves Hellanikos' references to Theseus which are found in this history.<sup>16</sup> There is only one reference to the Cretan adventure in the surviving fragments; according to Plutarch, Hellanikos said that Minos himself came to Athens to select the youths for the tribute - there was not a lottery - and the king chose Theseus first of all.

The fragmentary accounts of these two historians differs. There is no single canonical form of the Cretan adventure, yet these fragments indicate that this myth was established by the beginning of the fifth century.

Both Sophocles and Euripides composed several plays entitled *Theseus*. There are fragments from a lost play preserved in the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 2542. These fragments have been attributed by various scholars to either Sophocles or Euripides; E.G. Turner attributes the fragments to Sophocles on the basis of language, whereas T.B.L. Webster suggests Euripides was the author based on one particularly Euripidean word and the relation of the fragments to other Euripidean fragments as preserved by other writers.<sup>17</sup> There are six fragments of the papyrus large enough to be interpreted. Fragment one is part of a speech given by a person whose name ends in "seus". This same person recollects earlier victories in fragment three and includes references to the Isthmian cliffs and Sinis, the Krommyon Sow and Skiron. Fragment six, a messenger's speech, may, according to Young, report Theseus' slaying of the Minotaur or may describe the confrontation with King Minos. This fragment is a report of an act of a *xenos* - a stranger in the land. The setting of the play as preserved in the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 2542, it may be concluded, was Crete.

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<sup>15</sup> There is not much information on the career of Hellanikos, but he was still active in 406 B.C.

<sup>16</sup> See Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker* (Berlin-Leiden, 1923-1958) fr. 323a.

<sup>17</sup> *POxy*, edited with translations and notes by E.G. Turner, John Rea, L. Koenen and Jose M<sup>a</sup> Fernandez Pomar (London, 1967) 1-20. T.B.L. Webster notes, "[a]s therefore at least one usage, the repeated κατελέσαστε of *P.Oxy* 2542 fr.5, II is certainly Euripidean, the papyrus should be tentatively considered with the fragments of Euripides' play." See T.B.L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London, 1967) 106.

Several fragments from Euripides' drama, *Theseus*, survive. August Nauck listed ten fragments from this play.<sup>18</sup> Webster reconstructed a tragedy combining the ten fragments, as indicated by Nauck, with the Oxyrynchus Papyrus 2542 fragments.<sup>19</sup> The slaying of the Minotaur is, according to Webster, the focus of the play despite the fact that few of the fragments directly address Theseus and the Minotaur. The editors of the Oxyrynchus Papyri have assigned five fragments from a second papyrus - 2461 - to Euripides (the editors assigned papyrus 2542 to Sophocles). The papyrus is a dialogue in which a questioner elicits a description of the Minotaur. "The fragments preserved from Euripides' *Theseus* tell us little; only that the play concerned Theseus, and his activities in Crete."<sup>20</sup> The story of Theseus gradually evolved from its early references in Homer to the fifth century B.C. By the end of the fifth century, the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur had acquired the form which was preserved by authors of the Roman era. Before addressing these authors, mention must be made of the *Theseid*.

Several scholars believe that an epic - the *Theseid* - devoted to the life of the hero was composed at the end of the archaic period due to an increased interest in the hero.<sup>21</sup> The Theseus saga would have competed with the Herakles cycle as a subject for epic. This epic, scholars suggest, was not only the source for poems like those of Bakkhylides, but also for the cycle of deeds devoted to Theseus in the arts.<sup>22</sup>

There is no surviving evidence, however, for an epic devoted to the life of Theseus from the end of the archaic period. Aristotle's *Poetics* (8.1451-19) is the earliest reference to

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<sup>18</sup> August Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1926) fr. 381-390.

<sup>19</sup> Webster, 105-109

<sup>20</sup> Ellen Roberts Young, *The Slaying of the Minotaur: Evidence in Art and Literature for the Developments of the Myth, 700 - 400 B.C.* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1972) 34.

<sup>21</sup> See Ludwig Radermacher, *Mythos und Sage bei den Griechen*, 2nd ed. (Vienna, 1943) 252-253; Charles Dugas, *REG* 56 (1943): 18. Dugas notes, "on a l'impression d'une introduction assez soudaine dans la conscience légendaire, qui suggère l'influence d'une source littéraire. Or il semble qu'à la fin du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle un auteur inconnu ait justement composé une *Théséide*; cet auteur, s'il n'a pas inventé les exploits du voyage autour du golfe, a probablement vulgarisé des traditions jusqu'alors peu répandues." Hans Herter believes that the Athenian tyrant, Peisistratos, strongly influenced the development of Theseus as an Attic national hero. He has proposed that the *Theseid* was written for Peisistratos and this epic established the cycle of deeds. See Hans Herter, *RhM* 88 (1939): 282-285.

<sup>22</sup> These cycle cups first appeared c. 510 B.C.; they will be discussed at length in chapter 3.

a *Theseid*.<sup>23</sup> A *Theseid* is also mentioned by Plutarch who attributes such an epic to the author of *The Insurrection of the Amazons*.<sup>24</sup> But the validity of Plutarch's statement is questioned because this Amazon story is, except for Plutarch's mention, unknown, thus it is difficult to give a specific date to such an epic as the *Theseid*. As such, there is very little evidence to support the notion that a *Theseid* was composed around the end of the archaic period.

Neils suggests that there is evidence to the contrary of such an epic composed at this time. She refers to the works of the fifth century historian Pherekydes to illustrate her point. Only a few fragments of his work are preserved. There is no mention of any deeds of Theseus and thus Neils concludes, "[h]ad such an epic been written in the late 6th, its reflection would surely be found in the writings of the Athenian historian Pherekydes."<sup>25</sup> However, it must be pointed out that Pherekydes work is, indeed, fragmentary and it is possible that he did address these deeds in an unpreserved work. Furthermore, Neils asserts, the possibility of an epic composed at the end of the archaic period is diminished when the artistic evidence is examined. The cycle cups, which first appeared around 510 B.C. and continued to be produced until about 410 B.C., do not display any canonical order of the Isthmian deeds. Had such an epic existed, it would be reflected in the art of the period. But, again to refute this, one need only to look at Bakkhylides' Dithyramb 18. The cycle cups produced after about 470 B.C. - the date suggested as the writing of the ode - do not exhibit a canonical order either. So, even when a standardized story is established, this need not be reflected in contemporary or later vase painting.

The complete life story of Theseus is preserved in the works of later authors - Apollodorus, Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch. These three accounts are, in general, similar,

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<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, according to Lesky, faults the writers of such epics as the *Heracleid* or *Theseid* for not limiting their subject matter. See Albin Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature* (New York, 1966).

<sup>24</sup> This story deals with Theseus, Antiope and Herakles. In *Theseus* 28.1, Plutarch writes, "[f]or the 'Insurrection of the Amazons,' written by the author of the *Theseid*, telling how, when Theseus married Phaedra, Antiope and the Amazons who fought to avenge her attacked him, and were slain by Heracles has every appearance of fable and invention." Even in this statement, Plutarch is very vague about such an epic as the *Theseid*.

<sup>25</sup> Neils, 12.

yet they differ in specifics. Apollodorus was a second century B.C. Athenian author. The legendary history of Athens is retold in *The Library*, or the *Bibliotheca*, and presents the story of Theseus from a mythological viewpoint. Apollodorus' account is brief and without much elaboration. The Minotaur is killed by jabs of Theseus' fists.<sup>26</sup>

Diodorus Siculus wrote of Theseus from a historical perspective. He includes a brief biography of the hero in his *Library of History*, written circa 60-30 B.C. The slaying of the Minotaur is simply recounted; Diodorus only states that Theseus killed the Minotaur.<sup>27</sup>

The work of Plutarch is perhaps the most detailed and well-known biography of the Athenian hero. A citizen of Athens, Plutarch was surrounded by monuments to the legendary hero. Literature, too, provided inspiration, from the earliest references in Homer to Theseus' portrayal in Attic tragedy. The desire of Plutarch was to write a credible account of Theseus' life. Undertaking a biography of the Athenian hero, Plutarch hoped, "to make myth submit to reason and take on the appearance of history."<sup>28</sup>

In most of his biographies, Plutarch was content to retell the traditional stories. In *Romulus*, the companion work to *Theseus*, Plutarch cited other authors six times; however, in *Theseus*, there were fifty-one citations of twenty-five different authors. Plutarch, "may also have thought that some special show of erudition was necessary for such a difficult topic involving the founding hero of the Greek world's first city."<sup>29</sup> Regarding Theseus, with the wealth of material available it was difficult to reconcile conflicting traditions. For example, Plutarch was familiar with two stories surrounding the outcome of the Cretan adventure. From art and literature survived the tale of Ariadne's thread and the slaying of the Minotaur in the labyrinth. Plutarch, in addition, also included the account of Philochorus.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Apollodorus, *The Library*, Epitome 1.9.

<sup>27</sup> See Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 4.61.

<sup>28</sup> Frank J. Frost, "Plutarch and Theseus," *Classical Bulletin* 60 (1984): 66.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>30</sup> The inclusion of Philochorus is noteworthy. Plutarch rarely cited the works of the Attidographers in his other works. Cited only twice in Plutarch's entire corpus, Philochorus is cited six times in the *Theseus*. In another instance, Hellanikos was cited five times in the *Theseus*, twice elsewhere. In addition, Pherekydes and Herodotus are not mentioned in any of the other works of Plutarch, save for the *Theseus*.



The resulting account reads as follows:

When he reached Crete on his voyage, most historians and poets tell us they he got from Ariadne, who had fallen in love with him, the famous thread, and that having been instructed by her how to make his way through the intricacies of the Labyrinth, he slew the Minotaur and sailed off with Ariadne and the youths. . . but as Philochorus tells the story, Minos was holding the funeral games, and Taurus was expected to conquer his competitors in them, as he had done before, and was grudged his success. . . Therefore when Theseus asked the privilege of entering the lists, it as granted him by Minos. And since it was the custom in Crete for women to view the games, Ariadne was present, and was smitten with the appearance of Theseus, as well as filled with admiration for his athletic prowess, when he conquered all his opponents. Minos was also delighted with him, especially because he conquered Taurus in wrestling and disgraced him, and therefore gave back the youths to Theseus, besides remitting his tribute to the city. (Plutarch, *Theseus* 19.1-3).

Plutarch suppressed stories which he considered "too fabulous". Frank Frost notes that, "[i]n the *Theseus* he has made an honest attempt to treat the period as a historical one; therefore all fable, all marvels, all episodes that smacked too much of the supernatural must be avoided, or at least explained in a logical way."<sup>31</sup> To illustrate this point, according to Hellanikos, Minos came to Athens and personally selected the youths for the tribute. Plutarch, however, related the tradition that the youths were chosen by lot and then delivered to King Minos of Crete. This version thus omits a rather famous tale - the visit of Theseus to the undersea home of his father, Poseidon. This visit was the subject of Bakkhylides' Dithyramb 17. In art, this event was depicted on vases and may have been the theme of a wall painting in the Theseion. Plutarch, however, evidently questioned the validity of this adventure and chose instead a more "realistic" explanation. Plutarch's biography of the Athenian hero, "is unique in the sense that no extant author of antiquity ever attempted to make a reasonable and sensible history out of the corpus of fables surrounding a legendary figure."<sup>32</sup>

From obscure beginnings in Homer to the subject of several fifth century Attic tragedies, the legend of Theseus has evolved. This legend was elaborated, added to and

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<sup>31</sup> Frost, 70.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

enhanced by poets until it could be stated by Isokrates, a fourth century orator, that Theseus was as renowned in literature as Herakles and the Trojan heroes. In the eighth century, the exploits of Theseus and Peirithöos were recounted and the Cretan adventure was understood in the connection between Theseus and Ariadne. However, there was, at this time, no mention of the Minotaur. By the fifth century, the Minotaur encounter had become an integral part of the Theseus legend. In Bakkhylides' work, the slaying is implied in the youth's voyage to Crete and in the fragmentary accounts of Pherekydes, the Minotaur and the labyrinth are well-established. But only in the works of later authors can a complete account of the hero's life can be found - Plutarch's *Theseus* is perhaps the most comprehensive version. This is a detailed biography and the Minotaur slaying is included.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THESEUS AND THE MINOTAUR: ARTISTIC EVIDENCE

In Greek art prior to 520 B.C. Theseus is portrayed in either one of two ways. The two categories of representation are: the Cretan adventure including the slaying of the Minotaur and his involvement with Ariadne; and his adventures with Peirithōos which include the abduction of Helen, the descent into Hades and the battle against the centaurs. The two categories have only Theseus as a common factor because as Neils notes, "[t]here is nothing in the early literary and artistic evidence which necessitates the equation of the Minotaur slayer and the companion of Peirithōos."<sup>33</sup> This same division is also made in Homer as has already been demonstrated. The François vase is the first artistic example in which Theseus is, in a sense, given a single identity. Theseus is depicted twice: with Ariadne and the Athenian youths performing a victory dance; and with Perithoos and other Lapiths. Yet, within a relatively short time period, the representations of Theseus in Attic art are reduced to depictions of the Minotaur slaying - the episode of greatest importance to the Athenians.

The battle between Theseus and the Minotaur first appeared in the art of the Peloponnesians - five gold plaques, dated to the mid-seventh century, survive (Figures 1-2). Representations of Theseus, the Minotaur and Ariadne decorate these plaques. Theseus grabs the horn of the Minotaur with his left hand and with his right hand he plunges the sword into the chest of the creature.<sup>34</sup> Behind Theseus stands Ariadne, her left arm

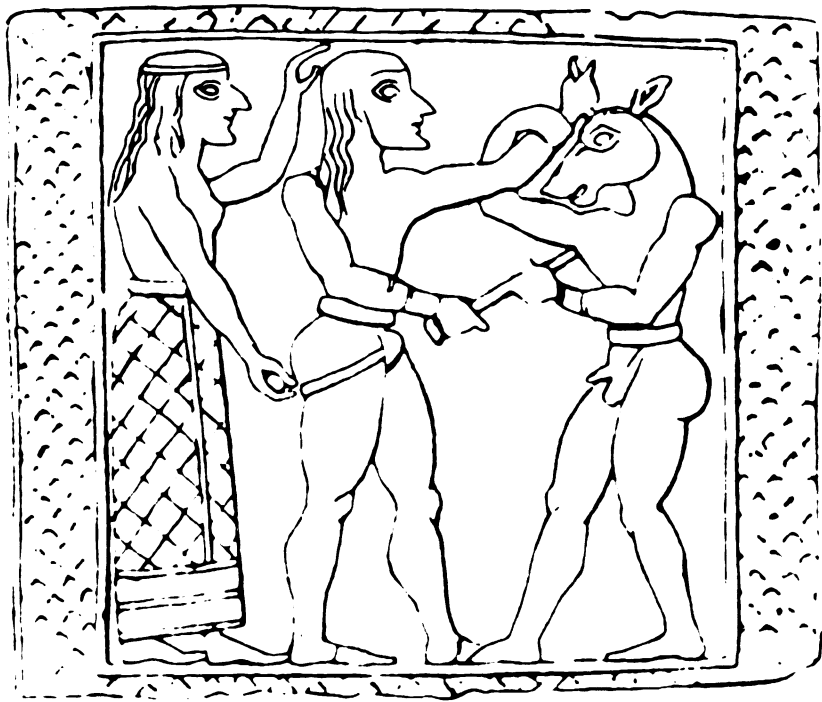
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<sup>33</sup> Neils, 29-30.

<sup>34</sup> This becomes the standard canonical form as will be seen later.



FIGURE 1 Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Gold relief plaques from Corinth. Mid-seventh century B.C. Berlin, Staatliche Museum G1332-336.



**FIGURE 2**      **Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Gold relief plaque. Illustration.**  
**Mid-seventh century B.C.**

upraised and in her right hand, a round object generally regarded to be a ball of thread.<sup>35</sup> This theme is again repeated, with a few compositional variations, on numerous bronze shield bands from Olympia (Figure 3). These bands range in date from the beginning to the middle of the sixth century.<sup>36</sup> Differing from the Corinthian plaques, the Minotaur is larger in scale compared to Theseus and the creature is pictured in the typical archaic running pose. This *Knielauf* pose is necessary to accommodate the Minotaur to the space. The representations on the gold plaques and the bronze shield bands establish the canonical formula for this battle: Theseus advances towards the Minotaur on the right; in his left hand he grasps the creature's horn and in his right, the hero brandishes his sword. Several examples of the slaying of the Minotaur survive in Corinthian vase painting (Figure 4).<sup>37</sup> These works, contemporary with the gold plaques and bronze bands, depict much the same scene. Metalwork and vase painting are the two media in which there are extant examples of the Minotaur slaying in Peloponnesian art.

By the sixth century B.C., the story of Theseus and the Minotaur was widely known and depicted in art throughout Greece. Surprisingly, the Peloponnese, and not Attica, was the first to produce artistic representations of this confrontation. There is no evidence as Young states, "for any special Attic interest in the story at this period."<sup>38</sup> In Attic art, the slaying of the Minotaur does not appear before the development of the black-figure technique.

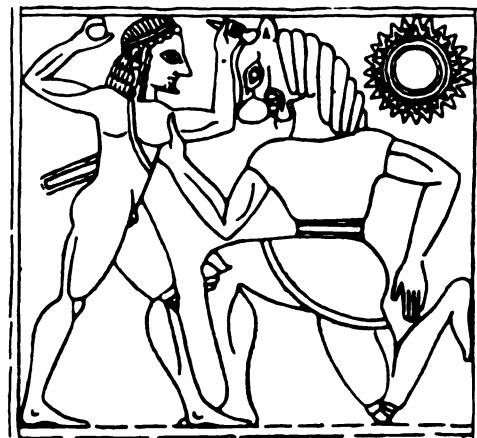
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<sup>35</sup> The woman cannot be positively identified as Ariadne, but has been always been assumed to be her. This gesture has been viewed by some as one of encouragement. See Neumann, *Gesten und Gebärden* (Berlin, 1965). Conversely, this gesture has also been interpreted as a gesture of terror. Pierre Devambez and Francois Villard note, "*Thésée, suivi de près par deux spectatrices dont les gestes manifestaent l'effroi*." See Pierre Devambez and Francois Villard, *MonPiot* 62 (1979): 22.

<sup>36</sup> Emil Kunze has catalogued and discussed these bands in his work *Archaische Schildbänder*, *OlForsch* 2, (Berlin, 1950).

<sup>37</sup> Gorgoneion cup in Brussels, Musées Royaux A1374. See Humfry Payne, *Necrocorinthia* (Oxford, 1931) 133, no. 986, pl.34.6; Karl Schefold, *ML* (New York, n.d.) pl.58b.

<sup>38</sup> Young, 128.



**FIGURE 3** Bronze shield bands from Olympia. Early to mid-sixth century B.C.  
Olympia, Olympia Museum B969.



FIGURE 4 Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Corinthian bowl. c.690 B.C.  
Brussels, Musées Royaux A1374.



The slaying of the Minotaur is represented on over two hundred black-figure vases. The earliest Attic example is a large bandcup signed by the potters Archikles and Glaukytes (Figure 5).<sup>39</sup> This cup, now in Munich, dates from the second quarter of the sixth century B.C. All figures on this vase are labeled, as was common in early black-figure work. Theseus engages the Minotaur in combat; Theseus advances from the left and grasps the Minotaur with his left hand. In his right hand he clutches his sword, ready to plunge it into the half-man, half-bull hybrid who attempts to flee. Behind the Minotaur stands Ariadne, holding a ball of thread in her outstretched right hand and a wreath in her left hand. Athena, holding Theseus' lyre, regards him from behind. Surrounding this central group are twelve spectators - generally regarded as some of the youths of the tribute.

A Tyrrhenian hydria from the second quarter of the sixth century B.C. also provides a full account of the battle (Figure 6).<sup>40</sup> As on the Munich bandcup, Theseus and the Minotaur are flanked by Athena and Ariadne. Behind Athena stands Hermes and King Minos is placed behind Ariadne. Of particular interest is that Minos faces a seated woman who, according to Neils, appears to be judging the contest between Theseus and the Minotaur. Again, the names of all the figures are inscribed, including the five spectators. The bandcup in Munich and the Tyrrhenian hydria, "are the two most elaborate Attic versions of the Minotaur slaying. They exhibit, not unexpectedly, an interest in the more Athenian aspects of the story, the tribute of the youths and maidens and the patronage of the goddess Athena."<sup>41</sup> Soon, however, artists lose interest in the subsidiary details of the myth and focus on the battle between Theseus and the Minotaur. In general, in subsequent representations, Theseus and the Minotaur occupy the entire pictorial field.<sup>42</sup> Theseus, as described on the Munich cup, advances from the left and grips the Minotaur with his left hand while in his right hand he holds a sword. The Minotaur attempts to flee; the creature

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<sup>39</sup> Munich, Antikensammlungen 2243; *ABV* 163, no. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Leiden, Rykamuseum PC47; *ABV* 104, no. 126.

<sup>41</sup> Neils, 25.

<sup>42</sup> Ariadne is occasionally added, but usually without her attribute(s) and as many "spectators" as can be accommodated in the available space.



FIGURE 5  
 Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Bandcup signed by the potters  
 Archiktes and Glaukytes. Second quarter of the sixth century B.C.  
 Munich, Antikensammlungen 2243.



FIGURE 6    Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Hydria. Unattributed.  
Second quarter of the sixth century B.C. Leiden, Ryksmuseum PC47.

kneels and his right arm reaches back towards Theseus. The battle format quickly becomes standardized - a stock motif - after *circa* 550 B.C.

The Minotaur theme reached its greatest popularity in the period 540-530 B.C., most notably in the work of the Group E painters.<sup>43</sup> The Group E workshop produced no less than twenty-two paintings of the subject although the group's most famous artist, Exekias, seems not to have favored this subject.<sup>44</sup> As can be expected, the battle form is standardized. However, of particular interest is a vase in New York.<sup>45</sup> Theseus, bearded and clothed in an animal skin, wields the sword above his head as if to strike the Minotaur; this pose recalls the hero, Herakles. Young notes:

The vases of Group E may represent the height of the influence of Herakles on the Theseus myth, since he most often appears as a hefty, bearded man on Group E vases, but before and after he is more often beardless. The animal skin, which is another indication of the influence of Herakles, appears intermittently throughout the black figure period.<sup>46</sup>

The art of the period from around 575 - 525 B.C. focused on one particular event in Theseus' life - the battle against the Minotaur. As Neils mentions, "[e]ssentially, Theseus is just another Bronze Age hero, neither particularly distinctive nor specifically Athenian."<sup>47</sup> But in the last quarter of the sixth century, there develops an interest in other details of the hero's life.

The image of Theseus was transformed in the final quarter of the sixth century.

This transformation, "involves an elaboration of his persona by the addition of new

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<sup>43</sup> Young suggests, "it is logical to suppose that this was a period when Attic nationalism and interest in the national hero were high." (Young, 139). She believes that Peisistratos promoted the hero.

<sup>44</sup> An amphora fragment in Lund (Lund University 655; *ABV* 145, no. 17) depicts Theseus greeting his sons, Akamas and Demophon. His sons are depicted as warriors, walking next to their horses, on another amphora now in Berlin (Berlin, *Antikensammlungen* 1720; *ABV* 143, no. 1). According to Neils, "both images fall in line with Exekias' taste for restrained yet dignified scenes, for 'a scene from the heroic life when at its simple everyday level.'" (Neils, 28; Neils cites J.D. Beazley, *The Development of Black-Figure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 66).

<sup>45</sup> New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 41.162.143; *ABV* 134, no. 25.

<sup>46</sup> Young, 135. The parallels between Theseus and Herakles will be discussed in chapter 6.

<sup>47</sup> Neils, 1.

deeds."<sup>48</sup> The previous exploits of Theseus are not forgotten and the popularity of the Cretan adventure remains; to this established rep  toire are added a series of deeds - a cycle - completed on the road from Troizen to Athens. It is during the period 510 - 500 B.C. that the cycle cups first appear.

The deeds of Theseus are combined in a cyclical fashion on a series of Attic red-figure vases and are thus often termed cycle cups. Olto  s was perhaps the first to paint a "cycle" cup, although he did not depict any of the youthful deeds of the hero; rather, he revived older themes concerning women.<sup>49</sup> On a cup in London, the obverse shows Theseus' abduction of the Amazon queen, Antiope.<sup>50</sup> The tondo depicts two figures facing each other - a youth playing a lyre and a female holding a flower. J.D. Beazley believes the two figures to be Theseus and one of the youthful females of the tribute and cites the Fran  ois Vase as a comparison; the figures may be Theseus and Ariadne as Alexander S. Murray had originally supposed.<sup>51</sup> We are thus presented with a vase on which two episodes from the life of Theseus are depicted. The reverse is incomplete. The remains show a male figure speaking to a female facing him - similar to the scene on the interior. Flanking the couple are a pair of nude horsemen. These youths may be the Dioscuri coming to rescue their sister, Helen.<sup>52</sup> If this interpretation is valid, then the London cup combines three events from Theseus' life.

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>49</sup> J.D. Beazley originally attributed this cup to Olto  s, but this attribution has been questioned. See A. Bruhn, *Olto  s and Early Red-Figure Vase Painting* (Copenhagen, 1943) 117. Bruhn states, "the composition of the interior is incompatible with Olto  s' usual compositions for this part of the vase. Apart from the two plates, none of Olto  s' works have two figures on a baseline." More recently, this cup has been attributed to Euphronios. See Martin Robertson, *Getty Museum Journal* 9 (1981): 29 and n. 2 and 34 postscript.

<sup>50</sup> London, British Museum E41; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 58, no. 51.

<sup>51</sup> See Alexander S. Murray, *Designs from Greek Vases in the British Museum* (London, 1894) 23, no. 6. Murray is supported by Pierre de la Coste-Messeli  re, *RA* (1947): 156.

<sup>52</sup> Neils says, "the placidity of the scene does not argue for such an interpretation, unless one were to suppose that the artist was attempting to present the episode in a manner more favorable to the protagonist." (Neils, 34).

The slightly younger contemporaries of Oltos were the first to develop true cycle cups. The earliest cycle vase, now in Florence, dates from around 510 B.C. and is signed by the potter Kachrylion (Figure 7).<sup>53</sup> Kachrylion's cup is very innovative because it combines six deeds and iconographical schemes were invented to identify each of the villains. On the exterior are depicted Sinis, the Minotaur and Prokrustes on one side and Skiron, Kerkyon and the Marathonian bull on the other side. Theseus, instead of dispatching the Minotaur with his sword, is shown wrestling with the creature. This confrontation with the Minotaur is unusual. The typical battle format is depicted on a second cycle cup in London. This cup, London E36, is contemporary with the Florentine vase (Figure 8).<sup>54</sup> The exterior is devoted to five adventures of Theseus: Prokrustes; Kerkyon; the Minotaur; the Marathonian bull; and the Krommyon sow. The portrayal of the killing of the Minotaur is typical as Theseus advances from the left with his sword drawn. The Minotaur attempts to flee, but Theseus grabs his right wrist and prevents the creature's escape.

Interestingly, Kachrylion the potter signed both the cup by Oltos and the Florentine kylix; the London kylix was potted by the Chelis group. Kachrylion and Chelis were from the same workshop and thus it has been suggested that Kachrylion may have been instrumental in the development of the cycle cups. The two earliest true cycle cups - Florence 91456 and London E36 - are different in their choice of deeds, however, both include the Minotaur. The Minotaur combat is perhaps added to the Isthmian deeds because it is the feat *par excellence* of the youthful hero - so as to, "fortify the equation between the Minotaur slayer of long-standing and the new, young hero born in Troizen."<sup>55</sup> To confirm the parallel between the Minotaur slayer and the youthful Athenian, two cups by the Kleophrades Painter should be examined. On a fragmentary cup in Paris, the tondo is reserved for Kerkyon.<sup>56</sup> A second cup in Bologna reflects the more familiar tondo

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<sup>53</sup> Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco 91456; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 108, no. 27

<sup>54</sup> London, British Museum E36; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 115, no. 3

<sup>55</sup> Neils, 37.

<sup>56</sup> Paris, Cabinet des Médailles 536; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 191, no. 104.



**FIGURE 7** Cycle Cup. Kylix signed by the potter Kachrylion. c. 510 B.C.  
Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco 91456.



FIGURE 8    Cycle Cup. Kylix. Unattributed. c. 510 B.C. London, British Museum E36



representation of Theseus and the Minotaur.<sup>57</sup> Rather than view the Kerkyon tondo cup as exceptional, Young instead notes, "[t]hese two cups indicate how complete the Minotaur myth was considered by the artist as one of a group of deeds, since in one case he chose the Minotaur for his central representation; in another he chose another deed, the wrestling match with Kerkyon."<sup>58</sup>

The most obvious source for the deeds of Theseus are other heroic legends, particularly those of Herakles. The Marathonian bull episode is almost certainly derived from Herakles' encounter with the Cretan bull.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, the Krommyon sow is of Heraklean origin, modeled after Herakles' capture of the Erymanthian Boar.<sup>60</sup> The similarity between the wrestling match of Herakles and Antaios and Theseus and Kerkyon is less obvious, but still derivative.<sup>61</sup> The episodes involving the three other villains - Sinis, Skiron and Prokrustes - are more original. However, they share several similarities which may be an indication of contemporaneous origins. All three episodes involve specific topographical features - the tree of Sinis, the cliff of Skiron and the bed of Prokrustes - and Theseus dispatches each of the brigands employing their own methods. It must be noted, however, that in each instance, the sword can be substituted as a weapon. The sword, recall, was one of the *gnorismata* of the hero. These three villains bear names which are either derived from their locale or from their actions. These deeds are not directly modeled on the labors of Herakles, but they do resemble the Dorian hero's confrontation with the highwayman Kyknos and Alkyonaïos, the herdsman. These six deeds coupled with the

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<sup>57</sup> Bologna, Museo Civico PU270; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 192, no. 107. Theseus and the Minotaur are first depicted in the tondo on a cup by Apollodorus (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 303; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 120, no. 7.) This theme is a popular tondo motif in the cycle cups.

<sup>58</sup> Young, 146.

<sup>59</sup> This derivation has resulted in much confusion and conflation in the identification of the scene. Neils gives as an example a red-figure cup by the Delos Painter (Switzerland, private collection; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 172, no. 4). See Karl Schefold, *GH* (Cambridge, 1992) fig. 127. This cup depicts the Cretan bull, but without the accompanying inscription the scene might easily be identified as Theseus and the Marathonian bull. The figure is beardless and the scene is similar in appearance to Florence 91456.

<sup>60</sup> On London E36, a live boar is dragged away by its hind legs; occasionally, Herakles' capture of the Erymanthian Boar is depicted in this manner during this period. See John Boardman, *Attic Black Figure Vases* (New York, 1978) fig. 166; Karl Schefold, *GH* (Cambridge, 1992) fig. 119. Later representations of Theseus differ in that the animal, a sow, is being killed.

<sup>61</sup> Theseus and Kerkyon wrestle standing, whereas Herakles and Antaios are prone.

slaying of the Minotaur and the capture of the Marathonian bull comprise the cycle of Theseus' deeds as depicted in art from the end of the sixth century to the mid-fifth century B.C.

The cycle is not depicted in its entirety until the mid-fifth century.<sup>62</sup> The deeds are elaborated and many details - such as the turtle of Skiron and Phaia - are added. The most comprehensive cycle cup is attributed to the Penthesilea Painter (Figure 9).<sup>63</sup> This kylix dates to around 460 - 450 B.C. Theseus appears in eight separate episodes arranged around the interior tondo. This cup merits further elaboration because of its nature. The beginning of the cycle is indicated by a tree in which hangs the youth's cloak and scabbard; propped against the tree is a club. Theseus grabs the right leg of Skiron and upends him. In the next scene, a clothed hero raises his club overhead and attacks the sow. Behind the sow stands Phaia. Another tree indicates the palestra of Kerkyon. The two adversaries wrestle. In the fourth scene, Prokrustes kneels on his wooden bed and gestures towards Theseus. Theseus approaches him from the left, hammer raised in a similar manner to the sow episode. Beyond Prokrustes' bed is a tree; Theseus pulls down a limb of the tree and clutches Sinis with his left hand. Sinis falls towards the tree. Behind Theseus a woman moving off to the right is observed. In the next episode, Theseus holds the horn of the fallen Minotaur with his left hand and in his right hand he grasps his drawn sword. King Aegeus greets Theseus on the next episode.<sup>64</sup> The expedition to Marathon completes the cycle of deeds depicted. Here, Theseus leads the bull into Athens. He is greeted by Aegeus who confronts another man, possibly Pallas.

The presentation of Theseus' deeds in a cyclical fashion is unique to the hero. This type of narration is usually termed an Hellenistic invention as observed by Kurt

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<sup>62</sup> Periphetes is rare, so he is not included as a cycle character in this context.

<sup>63</sup> Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina 44885; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 882, no. 35.

<sup>64</sup> This scene has been variously interpreted. The elderly man holds a scepter which is indicative of his royal status. Theseus moves off to the right and grips his sword. According to Neils, he, however, is not threatening the older man because the sword is positioned upright. Thus the scene can be interpreted as Theseus' arrival in Athens. Conversely, Evelyn B. Harrison has suggested that the elderly man is King Minos based on his close proximity to the Minotaur and that Minos is chasing Theseus from Crete. The similarity between the king in this scene and the one in the next scene substantiates the identification of the king as Aegeus.



**FIGURE 9** Cycle Cup. Kylix by the Penthesilea Painter. c. 460 - 450 B.C.  
Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina 44885.

Weitzmann.<sup>65</sup> "The depictions of Theseus' deeds in a series of consecutive compositions on cycle cups with the protagonist repeated in each are unparalleled."<sup>66</sup> This type of representation was entirely suited to Herakles, yet there is only one extant example in which several of his labors are combined - a vase by the Kleophrades Painter. The Kleophrades Painter, however, experimented with such representations and his example is not typical. One may wonder why Herakles' labors are not united cyclically in vase painting. Simply, the labors were not invented as Theseus' deeds had been around 510 B.C.; therefore, the pan-Hellenic hero did not require a medium such as the cycle cups. The cycle cups associated with Theseus were used to promote the newly created deeds of the youth - to prove that he performed these deeds in addition to his well-known encounter with the Minotaur.

The early fifth century was a period of great artistic activity. The vessels of Myson and his contemporaries, painters of kraters, eschew the Isthmian deeds. In their choice of subject matter, they limit themselves to two themes - the abduction of Antiope and the capture of the Marathonian bull. The late black-figure painters exhibit a decided interest in Theseus' adventure involving the Minotaur and the bull of Marathon. Conversely, the cycle cup painters demonstrate a special interest in Theseus' Isthmian deeds. "The Attic cup painters of the early years of the fifth century B.C. exhibit originality not only thematically, but also in their attempts to improve upon the compositional schemes of their predecessors, notably. . . the painters of the cycle cups in Florence and London."<sup>67</sup> These innovations were not exclusive to the cup painters however. The early fifth century was a creative period. Artists were presented with the problem of how to present two figures fighting and as a result there was much experimentation with the composition in the vases of the late archaic red-figure period. As an example of a new composition, there is a stamnos in London by the Kleophrades Painter.<sup>68</sup> The Minotaur is frontal, having fallen to one knee. Theseus stands behind him, to the left. He grabs the creature by the snout and the

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<sup>65</sup> Kurt Weitzmann, *Illustration in Roll and Codex*. (Princeton, New Jersey, 1970).

<sup>66</sup> Neils, 147.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*, 57.

<sup>68</sup> London, British Museum E441; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 187, no. 57.

Minotaur reaches up to Theseus' arm. Theseus holds the sword in his right hand, but the weapon is not directed at the Minotaur. Additionally, some painters add details to their depictions to suggest a location. On a pelike by the Syleus Painter, the Minotaur rests his hand on a rock pile which may, according to Ellen Young, allude to the location of the combat.<sup>69</sup> An Ionic column is present on a stamnos by the Copenhagen Painter.<sup>70</sup> The same features can be seen on contemporary late black-figure vessels. On a fragmentary skyphos from Athens which dates to around 500 B.C., Theseus greets Athena beside a monument which is decorated with meanders and spirals; the Minotaur is not represented.<sup>71</sup> Painted sometime after 500 B.C. is a lekythos by the Beldam Painter.<sup>72</sup> The Minotaur is dragged by Theseus from behind a monument covered by meander lines and a zig-zag motif. "The combination of Minotaur and monument on the later vases indicates that this structure is meant to represent the labyrinth also when the Minotaur is not shown."<sup>73</sup> Innovations such as these marked the early years of the fifth century. Interest in the Minotaur is sustained while the popularity of the Isthmian deeds continues to increase.

The period 480 - 450 B.C. marks the peak interest in the youthful Theseus. It was during this period that the bones of the hero were brought back to Athens by Kimon.<sup>74</sup> Neils states, "[s]urely such an event would have aroused extensive curiosity about the life of the local hero and prompted Athenian artists to elaborate pictorially his legend."<sup>75</sup> The Penthesilea cup is the most elaborate example in Attic vase painting. In sculpture, the Hephaisteion represents the culmination of interest in the hero. The Hephaisteion was commissioned to celebrate the youthful deeds of Theseus. The foundation of this temple

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<sup>69</sup> Vatican, Museo Vaticano, no inventory number; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 250, no. 23.

<sup>70</sup> Switzerland, private collection; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 257, no. 11.

<sup>71</sup> Athens, Acropolis Museum 1280; *ABV* 249, no. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Athens 1061; no *ABV* number.

<sup>73</sup> Young, 148-49.

<sup>74</sup> See Plutarch, *Theseus* 36.1-4. The importance of Kimon will be addressed in chapter 5.

<sup>75</sup> Neils, 79.

dates to the 450's.<sup>76</sup> Prokrustes, Kerkyon, Skiron, the Krommyon sow, Periphetes, Sinis, the Marathonian Bull and the Minotaur decorate the eight metopes on the north and south flanks.<sup>77</sup> The various episodes depicted on these metopes, in a sense, go one step further than the most elaborate cycle cup of the Penthesilea Painter. "This cycle is to date the most complete rendering of the youthful deeds of Theseus and it is appropriate that it should have graced a major Athenian temple."<sup>78</sup>

Conversely, during this period, interest in the combat between Theseus and the Minotaur decreases. The artists are, instead, more concerned with his Athenian connections, especially his relationship with Poseidon. Poseidon is, of course, prominent as the god of the sea. He was also regarded as the divine father of Theseus.<sup>79</sup> As Plutarch writes, "Aethra kept his true birth concealed from Theseus, and a report was spread abroad by Pittheus that he was begotten by Poseidon." (*Theseus*, 4.1) Plutarch continues, "Poseidon is highly honored by the people of Troezen, and he is the patron god of their city." (*Theseus*, 4.1) Troezen was the savior of the Athenians during the Persian wars, receiving the Athenian women and children who were evacuated before Salamis. The Persian fleet

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<sup>76</sup> William B. Dinsmoor gives the foundation date as 449 B.C. See William B. Dinsmoor, *The Architecture of Ancient Greece* (London, 1950) 179-182. Neils says that this date is overly precise based on the lack of any epigraphical evidence. She further emphasizes that, iconographically, the subject matter of this temple is more akin to Kimon's interests rather than Perikles. Perikles' interests focused on the polis as compared to a single individual. In addition, the position of the Hephaisteion in the vicinity of the Agora is more similar to the building programs of Kimon than of Perikles who focused his attention on the Acropolis. Rhys Carpenter, however, argues to the contrary. See Rhys Carpenter, *The Architects of the Parthenon* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

<sup>77</sup> The identity of Periphetes is uncertain. Based on Plutarch's *Theseus* 1.2, scholars have suggested that the first metope on the south side is Periphetes. See Homer A. Thompson, *AJA* 66 (1962): 341; Charles H. Morgan, *Hesperia* 3 (1963): 212-214; H. Koch, *Studien zum Theseustempel in Athen* (Berlin, 1955) 121-125, pls. 24-27. Neils is certain that Periphetes was invented to fill this metope. She states, "since Theseus has already been shown wielding a club, usually driving the Marathonian bull and since at times Sinis and Skiron were given this weapon as an attribute, the idea of a 'clubman' was eminently feasible. Besides it had the allusion to neighboring Herakles to recommend it. That it was specifically invented for this purpose is evident from the fact that it never reappears in the pictorial tradition." (Neils, 127.)

<sup>78</sup> Neils, 128.

<sup>79</sup> Theseus' divine descent is alluded to as early as the eighth century. In book 11.631 of the *Odyssey*, Homer describes Theseus as one of the gods' glorious children.

was destroyed by a violent storm near Athos. Herodotus relates:

[o]n the second day of the storm, the look-out men on the Euboean hills came hurrying to the Greeks and described in detail the destruction of the Persian ships. On hearing the news, they offered prayers of thanksgiving and libations of wine to Poseidon their savior. . . From that day to this they have always addressed Poseidon by the title of Savior. (*The Histories*, 7.192-193.)

"In 480, it must have seemed that Theseus' father Poseidon was protecting the Greek fleet."<sup>80</sup> As the son of Aegeus, king of Athens, Theseus is connected to the city; in addition, Theseus' relationship with Poseidon further attests to the hero's affiliation with Athens.

This is reflected in contemporary vase painting. Around 480 B.C., Theseus' visit to Poseidon's palace became popular in red-figure vessels. Ode 17 by Bakkhylides describes:

But the sea-people, the dolphins,  
nimble carried tall Theseus  
to the house of his horseman father.  
He came into the gods' palace.  
There looking about him in fear  
he saw the fabulous daughters  
of rich Nereus, and from their glorious  
bodies the light glanced shimmering  
as of flame, and on their locks were circled  
gold-implicated  
ribbons, as they refreshed their hearts  
with dancing, lithe-footed.  
He looked on the stately true wife of his father  
in that alluring house,  
Amphitrite the ox-eyed,  
who cast about him a robe, purple with sea-dye,  
  
and laid upon the curls of his hair  
the wreath, unflawed,  
that once at her own marriage  
beguiling Aphrodite rose-crowned had given her. (ll. 95-114)

This scene is represented on the interior of a cup by Onesimos, circa 490 B.C.<sup>81</sup> Amphitrite welcomes Theseus to the undersea palace; the location is suggested by dolphins included in the representation. Between the hero on the left and Amphitrite who is seated to the right stands the goddess Athena. A calyx krater in Paris depicts his meeting with Poseidon.<sup>82</sup> This vessel dates from around 470 B.C and is attributed to the Syriskos Painter. Seated on

<sup>80</sup> H.A. Shapiro, *AA* 20 (1982): 294.

<sup>81</sup> Paris, Musée du Louvre G104; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 318, no. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Paris, Cabinet des Médailles 418; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 260, no. 2.

a throne in the center of the composition is Poseidon. He holds his trident in his left hand. With his right hand he grasps the outstretched hand of Theseus. The divine descent of the youth is proclaimed and his relationship with Poseidon solidifies the connection between Theseus and Athens.

Increasingly, Theseus is a combatant in what Neils has described as the "big battles" - the Amazonomachy and the Centauromachy. As a participant in these battle, Theseus' Athenian ties are again emphasized. The interior wall paintings of the Theseion reflect this. The Theseion was most likely constructed around 475 B.C.<sup>83</sup> This repository for the bones of the Athenian hero was decorated with murals which were described by Pausanias as depicting an Amazonomachy, a Centauromachy and Theseus at the bottom of the sea. In the Theseion, the painting of Theseus at the bottom of the sea is not described by Pausanias, rather he relates the story of Theseus and King Minos.

When Minos brought Theseus to Crete with the shipload of boys and girls, he fell in love with Periboia, but Theseus strongly resisted this. Minos flung many angry taunts at Theseus, including this: Theseus was no son of Poseidon because he was unable to recover the signet ring Minos was wearing, if Minos dropped the ring, the legend is that when Theseus came out of the water he had the ring and a golden wreath, a present from Amphitrite. (*Guide to Greece* 1.17.3)

The expedition to Crete is understood in this context. However, it was not the actual battle against the Minotaur that concerned Athenian artists. The consequences of the Minotaur slaying were more important than the actual slaying - the implications versus the deed itself. This wall painting is indicative of the early classical attitude towards the Minotaur slaying - interest in the combat has decreased.

Unlike literary accounts, the Minotaur encounter is a frequent subject in art early on - the first representations of this can be found on five Peloponnesian gold plaques from the mid-

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<sup>83</sup> Pausanias says that the, "sacred enclosure of Theseus at Athens was founded after the battle of Marathon, when Kimon son of Miltiades devastated Skyros in revenge for the death of Theseus, and brought home the bones to Athens." (*Guide to Greece* 1.17.6) Hans Herter believes that Peisistratos built a Theseion because Aristotile referred to it in his discussion of the tyrant indicating that in the sixth century there was already a building there. See Hans Herter, *RhM* 88 (1939): 288. Karl Schefold believes Kleisthenes was responsible for such a building; Kleisthenes had the Theseion built and it was decorated with deeds of Theseus which then inspired vase painting. See Karl Schefold, *MusHelv* 3 (1946): 75f.



sixth century. The Minotaur theme reached its greatest popularity around 540 - 530 B.C. In the last quarter of the sixth century, the image of Theseus is transformed and this directly affects representations of the Minotaur. This theme is now incorporated as one of a series of deeds illustrated on the so-called cycle cups. This integration combines the older image of Theseus as Minotaur slayer with the new concept of the youthful hero of the Athenians. Gradually other themes supersede the Minotaur as favorites of the artists, but the slaying of the Minotaur continues to decorate Greek vases.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SWORD VERSUS THE CLUB

The iconography of the Minotaur slaying is familiar and basically remains unchanged in both black and red-figured vessels. In most extant black-figured examples, Theseus uses a sword to kill the Minotaur. This weapon is not confined strictly to depictions in connection with the Minotaur, however. Theseus carried the sword with him - it is one of his *gnorismata*.<sup>84</sup> Neils confirms this, stating that the sword is closely associated with Theseus, "not only as the weapon used against the Minotaur. . . but also as one of his *gnorismata*."<sup>85</sup> The weapon is a frequent attribute and the use of the sword to slay various villains whom he encountered, in addition to the Minotaur, is predictable.

The use of a sword to kill the Minotaur is indicative of the Theseus narrative. In two examples, however, Theseus uses a club and this deserves further consideration. On a seventh century Sicilian stamnos from the Orientalizing period, Theseus and the Minotaur face each other and behind Theseus stand two women (Figure 10).<sup>86</sup> In his left hand, Theseus grips what is unmistakably a club. Pierre Devambez and Francois Villard describe Theseus as follows:

*En travers de la poitrine passe un baudrier sans que pourtant on aperçoive dépassant la cuisse gauche le bout d'une epee; dans la main gauche baissée, il tient une massue dont il assommera son adversaire, de l'autre, il a saisi la corne du monstre.*<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> The *gnorismata* can simply be defined as the tokens of recognition.

<sup>85</sup> Neils, 34.

<sup>86</sup> Paris, Musée du Louvre CA3837.

<sup>87</sup> Pierre Devambez and Francois Villard, *MonPiot* 62 (1979): 22.



FIGURE 10 Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Stamnos. Unattributed. Seventh century B.C. Paris, Musée du Louvre CA3837.

Frank Brommer concurs with this description, yet notes, "*das ist merkwürdig, denn eine Keule ist sonst bei diesem Thema erst sehr viel später zu beobachten.*"<sup>88</sup> He gives no reasons, however, why the appearance of the club in the seventh century is so unusual.

From the mid-sixth century B.C. an amphora by the Affecter painter survives (Figures 11-12).<sup>89</sup> On the B side of this amphora, now in the Bareiss collection, Herakles and a centaur - most likely Nessos - are pictured. The obverse depicts the now familiar confrontation between Theseus and the Minotaur, but Theseus wields a club over his head, ready to strike the fleeing creature. The appearance of the club, according to Brommer is "thoughtless" - "*eine Keule in die Hand gegeben, vermutlich in einer gewissen Gedankenlosigkeit, weil Herakles auf der anderen Seite der Vase eine Keule hat.*"<sup>90</sup> It is difficult to accept Brommer's statement. The Affecter painted six additional Minotaur scenes. His familiarity with the story is evident when four of these other scenes are examined (Figures 13-17).<sup>91</sup> In three of the depictions, Theseus uses a sword and in one, a spear. The club on the Bareiss amphora is not a careless rendering, but rather a deliberate attempt to associate Theseus with Herakles. One may be inclined to see in this association a promotion of Theseus as the national hero of Athens by Peisistratos, the Athenian tyrant.<sup>92</sup> The parallel that the artist is trying to draw between Theseus and Herakles is obvious.<sup>93</sup>

One may argue that the rendering of a club instead of a sword on the Bareiss amphora was accidental. True, the two figures of Theseus and Herakles are similar in appearance, yet there are several differences. Theseus wears what appears to be winged boots, the hairstyles of the two heroes differ and the left arm of Herakles is bent down at an

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<sup>88</sup> Frank Brommer, *Theseus* (Darmstadt, 1982) 39.

<sup>89</sup> Greenwich, Bareiss 20; *Para* 111, no. 14.

<sup>90</sup> Brommer, 42.

<sup>91</sup> Paris, Niarchos, no inventory number; *Para* 111, no. 85. Kassel, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen T679; *Para* 111, no. 25. Taranto, Museo Nazionale 117234; no ABV number. Munich, Antikensammlungen 1405; ABV 245, no. 61.

<sup>92</sup> The rise of Theseus to the status of Athenian national hero will be discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>93</sup> The parallel between Theseus and Herakles will be discussed at length in chapter 6.



FIGURE 11 Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Amphora by the Affecter Painter. Side A. Mid-sixth century B.C. Greenwich, Bareiss 20.



FIGURE 12 Herakles and a Centaur. Amphora by the Affector Painter. Side B. Mid-sixth century B.C. Greenwich, Bareiss 20.



**FIGURE 13** Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Amphora by the Affecter Painter.  
Side A. Mid-sixth century B.C. Paris, Niarchos (no inventory number).



**FIGURE 14** Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Amphora by the Affecter Painter.  
Side B. Mid-sixth century B.C. Paris, Niarchos (no inventory number).





FIGURE 15 Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Amphora by the Affecter Painter. Mid-sixth century B.C. Kassel, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen T679.



**FIGURE 16** Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Amphora by the Affecter Painter. Mid-sixth century B.C. Taranto, Museo Nazionale 117234.



**FIGURE 17** Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Amphora by the Affecter Painter. Mid-sixth century B.C. Munich, Antikensammlungen 1405.

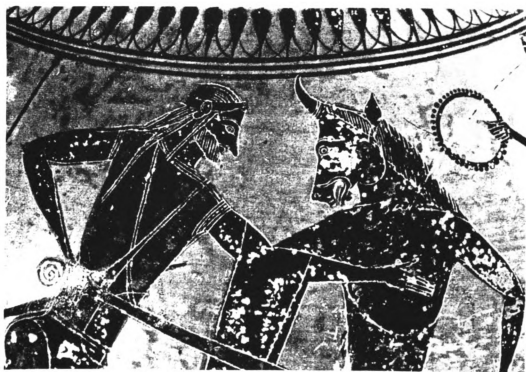
awkward angle, touching the flank of the centaur. In addition, the pose of Theseus may further disprove the notion that the club was unintentional. As mentioned previously, Theseus wields the club over his head on this particular amphora - a normal pose for such a weapon. Typically, Theseus holds the sword at his waist; however, on the three other vessels in which the hero uses a sword, the same pose, similar to the Bareiss amphora on which Theseus uses a club, is observed. Particularly interesting is the amphora in Taranto (Figure 16).<sup>94</sup> Side A is similar in appearance to the Bareiss amphora and side B also depicts Theseus and the Minotaur, but Theseus holds the sword at his waist and is about to run the animal through (Figure 18). This is the standardized form which was discussed earlier. One is thus inclined to question the depictions in which Theseus wields the sword over his head and wonder, perhaps, if the Affecter did not intend the sword to be a club.

In red-figure, depictions of the slaying of the Minotaur remain unchanged from black-figure - Theseus invariably uses a sword to kill the beast. Yet, as had occurred in black-figure, there are exceptions. On a cup by the Meleager Painter and a later calyx krater of the L.C. Group, Theseus wields a club (Figures 19-20).<sup>95</sup> There are several hypotheses which may explain the appearance of the club. Could this be the result of the cycle cups and the deeds depicted on them? These cycle cups transform the image of Theseus in the period around 510 B.C. His previous deeds are not forgotten, but rather new deeds are added and certain deeds may offer clues, more specifically the relevance of Periphetes and the bull of Marathon.

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<sup>94</sup> Taranto, Museo Nazionale 117234; no *ABV* number.

<sup>95</sup> London, British Museum 1917.7 - 26.3; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1414, no. 92. Athens, National Museum 12541; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1457, no. 10.



**FIGURE 18** Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Amphora by the Affector Painter. Detail. Mid-sixth century B.C. Taranto, Museo Nazionale 117234.



**FIGURE 19** Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Interior of a kylix by the Meleager Painter. First third of the fourth century B.C. London, British Museum 1917.7-26.3.



**FIGURE 20** Theseus Slaying the Minotaur. Calyx krater by the L.C. Group. c. 370 - 320 B.C. Athens, National Museum 12541.

Periphetes was a villain who lived in the region of Epidauros. Plutarch relates

Theseus' encounter with Periphetes as follows:

And so in the first place, in Epidauria, when Periphetes, who used a club as his weapon and on this account was called Club-Bearer, laid hold of him and tried to stop his progress, he grappled with him and slew him. And being pleased with the club, he took it and made it his weapon and continued to use it. . . and so Theseus carried the club to show that although it had been vanquished by him, in his own hands it was invincible. (*Theseus* 8.1).

The hero acquired the club after he defeated this opponent and thereafter carried it as his own. This club and its deadly capabilities is mentioned by Euripides in his tragedy, *The Suppliant Women*. Euripides refers to an Epidaurian club wielded by Theseus against the Thebans writing:

Then he seized  
His Epidaurian weapon, a ghastly club,  
And swung it right and left, dealing his blows  
On heads and necks together; the wooden blade  
Mowed off and snapped their helmets."  
(*The Suppliant Women* ll.713-716)

Is there a connection between this club and the club which Theseus brandishes against the Minotaur in two red-figure vase paintings?

Periphetes is a late-comer to the cycle. He is not mentioned in the odes of the lyric poet, Bakkhylides. Two odes by this poet are dedicated to Theseus; the hero's voyage from Athens to Crete is described in Dithyramb 17, "The Youths and Theseus" and Dithyramb 18, simply titled "Theseus", details his journey from the Isthmus to Athens. Timothy Gantz notes that Periphetes may be absent from Dithyramb 18 because the chorus records the hero's journey from the Isthmus to Athens. Recall that Periphetes was from the region near Epidauros, which geographically is located south of the Isthmus. The complete biography of Theseus, however, is preserved only in the works of the later authors - Apollodorus, Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch. All mention Periphetes in their respective works and this man is the first villain Theseus encounters on his journey from Troizen to Athens.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Neils mentions that in Diodorus' account, Periphetes is the only villain without a locale and this, according to her is another indication that he is a late-comer to the cycle.



A late black-figure pelike from around 510 - 500 B.C. was originally considered to be the first to depict Periphetes (Figure 21).<sup>97</sup> On this vessel, now in Laon, a beardless youth dressed in a chiton draped around his waist wrestles with a bearded, nude male. Behind the hero stands an unidentified woman, her left arm upraised. Above the nude figure is suspended a bow and a quiver and in the lower right corner a club is positioned. The identity of these two figures is difficult to determine.

A beardless hero, dressed in a similar manner and depicted with the same weapons (bow, quiver and club) as on the Laon pelike is found on a contemporary black-figure pelike now in Athens.<sup>98</sup> The hero on this vessel, who has been positively identified as Theseus, holds an ax in his hand which he brandishes against his adversary, Prokrustes. On the Laon pelike, the bow and the quiver should not preclude the hero's identity as Theseus.

*"Il est donc également possible que le peintre du vase de Laon ait voulu représenter une lutte de Thésée; que, sur ces deux pélikés, les peintres, influencés par le schéma traditionnel des luttes d'Héraclès, en aient gardé certains accessoires."*<sup>99</sup>

The club, which has no apparent significance on the pelike in Athens, might in fact lead one to conclude that the villain on the Laon vessel is, indeed, Periphetes. Yet, the club on the Laon pelike might also be simply due to an instance in which the artist borrowed a particular Heraklean attribute.

Brommer originally interpreted the scene as the contest between Theseus and Periphetes.<sup>100</sup> According to Dietrich von Bothmer, the scene illustrates the battle between Herakles and Antaios.<sup>101</sup> Von Bothmer has based his identification of the hero as Herakles on the bow and quiver which hang in the tree; the bow and quiver are not often attributes associated with Theseus, but, as Brommer has indicated, these attributes are found on the pelike in Athens. The hero in the Laon depiction wears a chiton draped around his waist; Herakles is frequently clothed in the familiar skin of the Nemean Lion which is neither worn

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<sup>97</sup> Laon, Musée de Laon 37978; no ABV number.

<sup>98</sup> Athens, Agora Museum P12561; no ABV number.

<sup>99</sup> Juliette de la Genière, *CVA France* 20 (Paris, 1963) 10.

<sup>100</sup> See Frank Brommer, *Vasenlisten*, 3rd ed. (Marburg, 1973) 244, no. 1.

<sup>101</sup> See Dietrich von Bothmer, *AJA* 61 (1957): 105.



FIGURE 21 Pelike. Unattributed. c. 510 -500 B.C. Musée de Laon 37938.

by this hero nor found hanging in the tree.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, in most extant black-figured examples, Herakles wrestles with the giant Antaios in the nude.

The identity of the woman who stands behind the hero is puzzling. The goddess Athena is a protectress of Herakles and is repeatedly seen in the company of him. Upon close examination of the woman's feet, one notices that they are turned away from the wrestling match - perhaps fleeing the scene. Athena would not be depicted in such a fashion and to identify the woman as this goddess would be inaccurate. Juliette de la Genière notes, "*une femme s'écarte vers la gauche en contemplant la scène, avec un geste d'effroi*..<sup>103</sup> This "gesture of terror" might initially lead one to conclude that the woman is Ariadne. This scene is repeated on many early black-figure vessels in which Ariadne reacts to the slaying of the Minotaur. But, Ariadne is a spectator at the battle between Theseus and the Minotaur which occurred only after Theseus had traveled the road from Troizen to Athens. Thus the identity of the woman still remains to be decided. A calyx krater by Euphronios depicts a woman very similar in appearance to the woman on the Laon pelike - the woman's left arm is upraised and her feet are positioned away from the action taking place in the center of the composition (Figures 22-23).<sup>104</sup> Interestingly, the central scene on this krater shows the wrestling match between Herakles and Antaios. Furthermore, Euphronios' krater and the Laon pelike were produced around the same time - 510 B.C. The similarity between these two vessels is noteworthy. The woman on the Laon pelike does not provide a definite answer as to the identity of the hero, but her presence does seem to favor Herakles.

Neils has identified the figures as Theseus and Kerkyon. She bases her conclusions on the age difference between the two figures and, referring to the club, says that this weapon can be admitted, as evidenced by the pelike in Athens, into encounters between Theseus and other villains. Finally, as Brommer had originally suggested, the two figures may be Theseus and Periphetes. This episode has been encountered neither in literature

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<sup>102</sup> On a vessel in Munich (Munich, Museum Antiker Kleinkunst 1417; *ABV* 367, no. 86), Herakles is dressed in a chiton, similar to the hero on the Laon pelike.

<sup>103</sup> De la Genière, 10.

<sup>104</sup> Paris, Musée du Louvre G103; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 14, no. 2.



**FIGURE 22** Herakles and Antaios. Calyx krater by Euphronios. c. 510 B.C. Paris, Musée du Louvre G103.

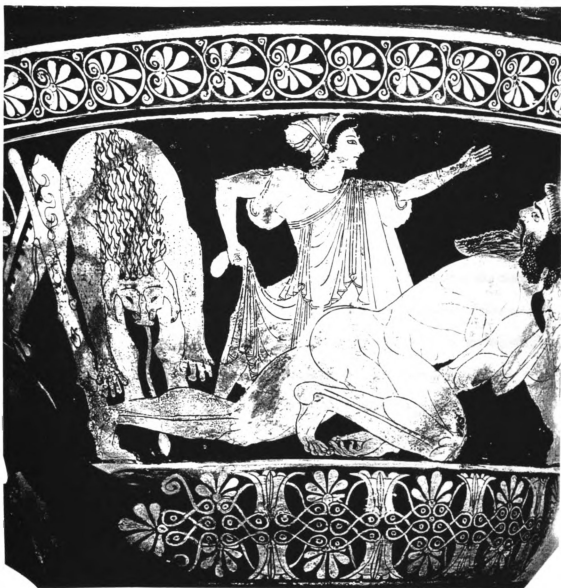


FIGURE 23 Herakles and Antaios. Calyx krater by Euphronios. Detail.  
c. 510 B.C. Paris, Musée du Louvre G103.

nor in vase painting thus far, so if Brommer's original interpretation is correct then this vase is the earliest representation of this particular deed. The fact that these two figures appear to be wrestling does not automatically preclude Periphetes. If this vase indeed is the first extant depiction, there are obviously no previous examples on which to base the appearance of Periphetes and it is therefore difficult to eliminate him solely because of this.

The club remains to be explained. If the pelike does indeed depict Theseus and Periphetes, the club is appropriate. Yet the club may be, as indicated by Neils, an extraneous weapon or, as de la Genière has suggested, a Heraklean attribute. The interpretation of the scene should not be based on the club alone. The painter of this pelike has conflated this scene and a clear and decisive interpretation cannot be made. Herakles and Antaios, Theseus and Kerkyon or Theseus and Periphetes, the question remains. Yet, the possibility that Periphetes is portrayed on this pelike cannot be dismissed.

Periphetes is not present in most cycle cups. The kylix by the Penthesilea Painter, *circa* 460 - 450 B.C., is the most complete cycle cup in terms of depictions of the numerous deeds which include the following: Skiron; the Krommyon sow; Kerkyon; Prokrustes; Sinis; the Minotaur; and the Marathonian bull (Figure 9). Periphetes is not depicted and Neils concludes that the absence of this individual is proof that Periphetes did not "exist" at this time. She notes that there is, "no sign of the elusive Periphetes, who surely, if he were known, would be included in this, the most complete cycle cup."<sup>105</sup>

A possible exception is a kylix by the Pistozenos Painter from 450 B.C. (Figure 24).<sup>106</sup> Beazley identifies the deeds as follows: on side A, the Minotaur and Prokrustes; on side B, Skiron and Periphetes. Neils, however, does not concur with Beazley's identification of Periphetes and instead names Sinis. She reasons that the weapon - a "club" - which Theseus wields is unlike any other club depicted, but rather that

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<sup>105</sup> Neils, 120.

<sup>106</sup> Munich, *Antikensammlungen* 2670. *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 861, no. 13.



FIGURE 24 Cycle Cup. Kylix by the Pistozenos Painter. c. 450 B.C.  
Munich, Antikensammlungen 2670.

it resembles the branch of Sinis' pine tree.<sup>107</sup> To substantiate her claim, she points to a kylix from Vulci as a possible motive for this mistake (Figure 25).<sup>108</sup> On this kylix, the midsection of the tree branch is missing and, "such a void may have misled our artist into thinking of the branch as some sort of weapon."<sup>109</sup> The peculiar shape of the club on the Pisto Xenos Painter's vessel betrays its origins. This "club", Neils concludes, was allegedly derived from the tree branch of Sinis and, "so it seems justified to omit the otherwise undocumented Periphetes identification from this cup."<sup>110</sup> This conclusion seems a bit implausible. On the kylix from Vulci, Theseus grips Sinis with his right hand and holds a tree branch with his left. The tree branch, which according to Neils, was the inspiration for the weapon, hangs straight down. No weapon is held in that manner and the club depictions seen thus far substantiate this - the club is either wielded over or behind the head. On the cup by the Pisto Xenos Painter, where the identity of Periphetes is questioned, Theseus holds the weapon in his right hand and his left hand is empty. Most notably, he holds the weapon behind his head as if to strike the victim. Theseus' victim is correctly identified as Periphetes. Neils concludes that the villain in question is not Periphetes based simply on the fact that Periphetes is not depicted in art before the middle of the fifth century.<sup>111</sup> Because Periphetes is not a popular subject, there are few depictions of him; therefore, there are few preconceived notions as to the appearance of the villain. As a result, in instances where a club is evident, the possibility that the scene may depict Periphetes must be considered.

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<sup>107</sup> According to Neils, the "club" is unlike any of the knotty clubs depicted in earlier scenes. A kantharos (Munich, Museum Antiker Kleinkunst 2565; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 889, no. 169) offers proof of this; Theseus holds a club in his right hand, very much like the knobby club Neils refers to. However, there is no standard appearance of Theseus' club. On occasion the club is long and knobby, like Herakles', whereas other times it may be short and smooth or any combination thereof. To base the identification of one figure on the appearance of an accessory, which is itself questionable in appearance, is not sound.

<sup>108</sup> London, British Museum E74; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 965, no. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Neils, 122.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> She concedes that Periphetes does appear on one of the eight Hephaisteion metopes. Regarding the sculpture, she says that Periphetes was specifically invented to simply fill the eighth metope. See Neils, 127.





**FIGURE 25** Cycle Cup. Kylix attributed to the workshop of the Penthesilea Painter. c. 450 B.C. London, British Museum E74.

In red-figure painting, the club appears in Theseus' encounters with two other villains: Sinis and Prokrustes. The club appears in context with Prokrustes on the late black-figure pelike in Athens discussed earlier in connection with the Laon pelike (Figure 21). The club on the Athens pelike is placed in the corner of the composition. This accoutrement is not normally associated with Prokrustes and thus it may possibly be regarded as an attribute derived from Herakles. The Penthesilea Painter produced a vase painting around 450 B.C. (Figure 26).<sup>112</sup> On this kantharos, now in Munich, Theseus bends a tree and looks towards Sinis who is retreating from the hero, a club in his right hand. A contemporary of the Penthesilea Painter was the Euaion Painter. In two works by this painter - a skyphos in Berlin and the interior tondo of a kylix in Paris - the club is associated with Sinis (Figures 27-29).<sup>113</sup> Sinis was shown either at the moment before the battle with Theseus or engaged in the battle itself. The Euaion Painter chose to capture the moment before and the encounter shown on the Berlin skyphos is divided between the two sides of the vessel. On one side Sinis is seated on a rock and in his left hand he grips the end of a long, knotty club; on the reverse, Theseus, dressed in traveler's clothes, stands holding two spears in his right hand. This meeting is duplicated in the Paris tondo with two noticeable differences: Theseus has only one spear; and Sinis does not grasp the club, but rather the weapon leans against the rock upon which the villain is seated.

"Given the club as an attribute of the nude. . . man, it might be tempting to regard (these works by the Euaion Painter) as the first appearance of the villain known from much later literary sources as Periphetes, the 'club-bearer'," Neils concedes and this, indeed, is plausible.<sup>114</sup> These two vessels date from around 450 B.C. The kylix by the Pisto Xenos Painter, on which Brommer has positively identified Periphetes, is contemporary with the Euaion Painter's works. In sculpture, Periphetes is the subject of one of the Hephaisteion metopes; these metopes, too, are dated *circa* 450 B.C. However, above the head of the

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<sup>112</sup> Munich, Museum Antiker Kleinkunst 2565; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 889, no. 169.

<sup>113</sup> Berlin, Antikensammlungen F2580; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 797, no. 143. Paris, Musée du Louvre G462; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 794, no. 95.

<sup>114</sup> Neils, 117.



FIGURE 26 Theseus and Sinis. Kantharos by the Penthesilea Painter.  
c. 450 B.C. Munich, Museum Antiker Kleinkunst 2565.



FIGURE 27 Sinis (?). Skyphos by the Euaion Painter. c. 450 B.C.  
Berlin, Antikensammlungen F2580.



FIGURE 28 Theseus and Sinis (?). Skyphos by the Euaion Painter. Detail.  
c. 450 B.C. Berlin, Antikensammlungen F2580.



**FIGURE 29** Theseus and Sinis. Kylix interior by the Euaion Painter. c. 450 B.C. Paris, Musée du Louvre G462.

villain on the Paris kylix is inscribed "ΣΙΝΙΣ". This inscription certainly precludes any identification of the villain as Periphetes, the club-bearer. The Berlin skyphos, though, is not inscribed and the identity of the villain is not positive - it may, in fact, be Periphetes. Of the nearly one hundred fifty extant cups attributed to the Euaion Painter, only a few depict the youthful deeds of Theseus and of these, the artist does not seem to have an interest in any one particular deed; in other words, the artist did not have a favorite theme which he repeatedly illustrated.

Neils has identified the villain on both of the Euaion's vessels as Sinis. The inscription certainly offers proof on the Paris kylix interior. She bases her conclusions on the presence of the tree in the scene and states that the club is appropriate to Sinis. The tree, however, does not automatically identify Sinis. Trees are present in many of the scenes of Theseus' youthful deeds; these trees are used as scene dividers and thus the tree does not necessarily allude to Sinis. According to Neils, the club is indicative of Sinis. She reasons that the wooden club is an extension of the pine tree used by Sinis to dispatch travelers. This argument concerning the identity of the villain on this vase is weak. The figure on the Berlin skyphos may possibly be Periphetes.

A second possible explanation for the use of a club to slay the Minotaur may be the Marathonian bull depictions. The bull of Marathon was a savage creature which ravaged the Attic countryside. Upon the arrival of Theseus in Athens, he set out to capture this bull and this deed is recounted in numerous black and red-figured vases.<sup>115</sup> It is probable that the club should first appear in this bull scene because not only is it an adventure similar to the one of Herakles, but also one that demands a weapon powerful enough to tame a large, raging animal.<sup>116</sup> Neils claims that the club, "is used first, logically, in attacks against wild

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<sup>115</sup> In the three accounts of Plutarch, Diodorus Siculus and Apollodorus, only Apollodorus places this event before Theseus' recognition, for according to Apollodorus, this adventure was the first attempt by Medea to get rid of the hero; only when this failed did she resort to the poison attempt.

<sup>116</sup> The capture of the Bull of Marathon imitates Herakles' encounter with the Cretan Bull. Neils notes that this leads to much conflation and confusion in properly identifying the scene. As evidence, an early red-figure cup by the Delos Painter (Switzerland, private collection; ARV<sup>2</sup> 172, no. 4): this cup depicts the capture of the Cretan Bull, yet without its inscription, this scene could easily be mistaken for Theseus and the Marathonian Bull.

animals (sow and bull), and becomes even more frequent when the bull adventure changes from a roping to a taming scene."<sup>117</sup>

Theseus and the bull appear on a stamnos in Philadelphia which dates from around 490 - 480 B.C. (Figure 30).<sup>118</sup> This combat scene is paired with Herakles and the Nemean Lion on side A of the vessel. There is no question as to the identity of the characters, for the physical appearance of each is distinct - a bearded Herakles versus an unbearded, youthful Theseus. Both heroes wield clubs, yet these weapons are differentiated in their appearance. Herakles is given a club which is exceptionally long and knobby; Theseus carries a shorter, more smooth club. This stamnos by the Kleophrades Painter, Neils claims, "shows the first undisputed representation of Theseus with the club as his weapon."<sup>119</sup> Although this statement is no longer valid in light of the black-figured works previously mentioned which depict Theseus with a club, this stamnos may offer a clue in the appearance of the club on two red-figure works.

The Meleager Painter was active in the first third of the fourth century. On the interior tondo of a cup, Theseus is depicted with the Minotaur (Figure 19). Theseus grabs the horn of the hybrid with his left hand. The Minotaur has fallen to one knee and with his right hand he reaches back to the hero who steps on the Minotaur's extended right leg. Theseus holds in his right hand a short, smooth club; he does not wield the club over his head however. This particular club, Neils has suggested, is properly called a *lago-bolon* - a type of herding stick. This herding club is entirely suited to depictions of Theseus and the Marathonian bull, but the question arises as to why the club appears in context with the Minotaur. Interestingly, in the extant examples of Theseus and the Marathonian bull, the club which Theseus uses to tame the animal is unlike the *lago-bolon* seen in the Meleager

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<sup>117</sup> Neils, 145. The representations of the bull episode on the two earliest cycle cups - Florence and London - are not alike; one depicted the actual pursuit of the animal, the other, the captured bull. A slightly later representation on a calyx krater by the artist Phintias is dramatically different - the act of tying up, or roping, the bull is shown. This scheme is adopted by later artists.

<sup>118</sup> Philadelphia, University Museum L64.185; ARV<sup>2</sup> 187, no. 62.

<sup>119</sup> Neils, 69.





**FIGURE 30** Theseus and the Bull of Marathon. Stamnos by the Kleophrades Painter. c. 490 - 480 B.C. Philadelphia, University Museum L64.185.

Painter's tondo. Most clubs used against the bull of Marathon are long and smooth or they may have a knobby tip, but the club in the Meleager Painter's work is unique.

Perhaps a clue to its appearance may be found in the cycle cup by the Pistozenos Painter (Figure 24). The club which Theseus brandishes over his head is short and smooth and the tip is enlarged. The appearance of this club closely parallels the club on the Meleager vase. However, the weapon on the Pistozenos Painter's vessel is used against Periphetes, not the Minotaur or the Marathonian bull. If this club appeared in context with the Marathonian bull, then it might be possible to conclude that the Pistozenos Painter's vessel inspired the Meleager Painter, but this is not the case. In all likelihood, depictions of Theseus taming the bull influenced the rendering of the club on the Meleager Painter's vessel, but a source cannot be definitely ascertained.

Vases of the L.C. Group date from about 370 - 320 B.C. Also known as the Kerch style, this period represents the last phase of Athenian vase painting. On the calyx krater by the L.C. Group, Theseus is shown wielding a club against the Minotaur (Figure 20). Theseus stands over the Minotaur, grabbing one of the creature's horns with his left hand, the club in his right hand. The Minotaur has fallen to his knees and reaches his right hand back to Theseus - an imploring gesture. The long and knobby appearance of the club may be indicative of its origin. It is similar to the club used by the hero to tame the Marathonian Bull in later depictions. In addition, the club looks very much like Herakles' club. That the club wielded by Theseus is derived from Herakles is entirely feasible. Theseus had superseded Herakles as the national hero of the Athenians and had become known as a second Herakles. It is possible that the artist borrowed a Heraklean attribute, namely the club, as may have been the case on several vessels previously discussed - Laon 37978 and Athens P12561.

In Greek vase painting, four examples are noted in which Theseus uses a club, not a sword, to kill the Minotaur. From the seventh century a stamnos survives. One may be inclined to simply dismiss the use of a club on this vessel because the vase was produced in

Sicily, yet it is interesting to note how the legend was recounted in art not of the mainland. The Bareiss amphora, painted by the Affecter Painter in the mid-sixth century, is noteworthy. The depiction of Herakles on the reverse and the similarities in appearance between Theseus and Herakles is indicative that the artist was consciously equating the two heroes. That the Affecter produced six other vessels on which Theseus either uses a sword or a spear to kill the Minotaur confirms this. The appearance of a club in the kylix tondo by the Meleager Painter is difficult to ascertain and cannot be positively confirmed. It is likely that depictions of the Marathonian bull or the particular appearance of the club used by Theseus against Periphetes on the kylix by the Pistozenos Painter were creative sources. Finally, the club on the calyx krater by the L.C. Group is definitely derived from Herakles. The physical appearance of the club on this vessel and the weapon which Herakles carries is very similar. The presence of the club in these works is deliberate.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE RISE OF THE ATHENIAN HERO

"Theseus was destined for greatness at Athens for no other reason than the absence of a rival there."<sup>120</sup>

The rise of Theseus to the prominence of Athenian national hero is remarkable. By the middle of the fifth century, Theseus had become the Athenian hero *par excellence*. But who was responsible for this? Various scholars have named Peisistratos, Kleisthenes and Kimon. Theseus' rise cannot be credited to one individual, rather each person, "could adopt the hero as its own and promote those aspects of his career which best suited its purposes."<sup>121</sup>

Peisistratos may have been the first Athenian ruler to exploit Theseus. Regarding the tyrant, Herodotus writes:

Peisistratus with a view to seizing power for himself . . . devised the following ruse: he cut himself and his mules about the body and then drove his cart into the market square, and pretended that he had escaped from his enemies who tried to kill him as he was driving out of town. Then, relying on the reputation he had won. . . he asked the people to give him a guard. The Athenians, who were taken in by the trick, consented, and told off a number of men for his bodyguard, who followed him armed with clubs instead of spears. With their assistance, Pisistratus captured the Acropolis, and from that moment found himself master of Athens.  
(*The Histories*, 1.59.5-6)

Peisistratos ruled Athens from 560-556 B.C.; he was expelled in 556 B.C., but several years later, in 546 B.C., he returned. He re-established his power at a battle at Pallene.

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<sup>120</sup> Wm. Blake Tyrrell, *Amazons A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore, 1984) 3.

<sup>121</sup> H.A. Shapiro, *Art and Culture Under the Tyrants in Athens* (Mainz am Rhein, 1989) 146.

Interestingly, Theseus defeated the Pallantidae at Pallene.<sup>122</sup> The weapons of the Athenians were confiscated after the battle by Peisistratos and there is some doubt as to the location of this event. Aristotle notes that this occurred at the Theseion, but others name the Anakeion as the setting.<sup>123</sup> In either instance, a sanctuary of Theseus did exist for, "Aristotle would not have reported it in this form if the Theseion had not been a conspicuous location in the time of Peisistratos."<sup>124</sup> Plutarch does mention a *temenos* set aside for Theseus after his return from Crete; here, sacrifices were made by the families of the youths of the tribute.<sup>125</sup> Theseus was a presence in Athens during the tyranny of Peisistratos.

Scholars, most notably John Boardman, have argued that Peisistratos associated himself with Herakles. This, unquestionably, is true. In Athenian art of the period, the popularity of Herakles cannot be denied - for every Athenian vase which depicted Theseus, there were eight depicting Herakles. On the archaic Acropolis, the exclusion of heroes other than Herakles from the pedimental sculpture affirms Peisistratos' bias towards the Dorian hero. In contrast, the mid-fifth century building program of Perikles is less dependent on personal patronage than earlier endeavors, namely the building schemes of the Peisistratids. Thus, in the sixth century, the themes incorporated in building programs and in vase painting have direct political connotations. But why would Peisistratos choose Herakles? Simply stated, Athena was the divine protectress of Herakles - "[e]very reason, then, for the aspiring Athenian leader to seek identification with Athena's favorite hero."<sup>126</sup> Prior to about 550 B.C., Herakles' Introduction to Olympus, as depicted in art, has Athena leading Herakles before Zeus. In the 550's the Athenian artists experimented with the

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<sup>122</sup> John Boardman, however, says that this similarity is not a true indication of a conscious effort by Peisistratos to associate himself with Theseus. He admits that this might be a parallel between the two, but conversely, Herakles had also fought at Pallene in another time, helping the Gods defeat the giants. See John Boardman *RA* 1 (1972): 57-72. See Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 4.15.

<sup>123</sup> See Aristotle, *Politeia* 15.4.

<sup>124</sup> Shapiro, 145.

<sup>125</sup> See Plutarch, *Theseus* 23.2.

<sup>126</sup> Boardman, *RA* 1 (1972): 59.

representation of this episode. They began to illustrate the formation of a procession by chariot.<sup>127</sup> Athena either mounts the chariot or, having already mounted, holds the reins. Standing beside her in the chariot or on the ground is Herakles. Herakles' Introduction to Olympus can be related to an event in Peisistratos' career. As Herodotus relates:

In the village of Paenia there was a handsome woman called Phye, nearly six feet tall, whom they fitted out in a suit of armour and mounted in a chariot; then, after getting her to pose in the most striking attitude, they drove into Athens, where the messengers who had preceded them were already, according to their instructions, talking to the people and urging them to welcome Pisistratus back, because the goddess Athene herself had shown him extraordinary honour and was bringing him home to her own Acropolis. They spread this nonsense all over the town, and it was not long before rumour reached the outlying villages that Athene was bringing Pisistratus back; and both villagers and townfolk, convinced that the woman Phye was indeed the goddess, offered her their prayers and received Pisistratus with open arms. (*The Histories*, 1.60)

Peisistratos was again restored to power. This was achieved in a way similar to Herakles' Introduction to Olympus. As Boardman notes, "Peisistratos is thus installed again in his new Olympus."<sup>128</sup> What Olympus was to Greece, the Acropolis was to Athens. The similarities between Peisistratos and Herakles do not conclude with the manner of the tyrant's return. The bodyguards of Peisistratos were given clubs to carry. Herakles, too, carries a club as his weapon and in vase paintings he is often attended by his bodyguard, Iolaos. On occasion, Iolaos carries the hero's club, usually when Herakles is engaged in combat. On at least one vase, however, both Herakles and the other figure, who is most likely Iolaos, carry clubs.<sup>129</sup> Thus, "[i]t is difficult to see how any mid-sixth century Athenian viewing such scenes could fail to associate them with the story of Peisistratos' return."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> All such chariot scenes with Herakles do not necessarily imply this event, but in the instances where other deities are shown escorting the hero this is true. See Brommer, *Vasenlisten*, 124.

<sup>128</sup> Boardman, *RA* 1 (1972): 62.

<sup>129</sup> Paris, Musée du Louvre F295; *ABV* 260, no. 31.

<sup>130</sup> Boardman, *RA* 1 (1972): 63. R. M. Cook contradicts Boardman. He says that there is no suggestion that before the fifth century, the Greeks would have tolerated the equation of a living individual with a hero or god. The question is raised as to who would have devised or adopted such subjects for use as political propaganda - the court of Peisistratos, the patrons of the potters, or the potters themselves. He concludes that it is difficult to believe that the

The Peisistratan patronage of Herakles is obvious, but what of Theseus? Can Peisistratos be credited with the promotion of Theseus to the status of national hero? H.A. Shapiro has suggested that it must have disturbed the sixth century Athenians that Theseus was not mentioned in the *Iliad*.<sup>131</sup> To these ends, Plutarch records two instances in which Peisistratos is reputed to have tampered with ancient texts - he is said to have added a reference to Theseus and Peirithōos in the *Odyssey* and allegedly deleted a line from a verse by Hesiod which told of Theseus' desertion of Ariadne.

"Dreadful indeed was his passion for Aigle child of  
Panopeus."

This verse Peisistratos expunged from the poems of Hesiod, according to Hereas the Megarian, just as, on the other hand, he inserted into the *Inferno* of Homer the verse: -

"Theseus, Perithoos, illustrious children of Heaven, "  
and all to gratify the Athenians. (Plutarch, *Theseus* 20.2)

The Peisistratid interpolation has its proponents and opponents.<sup>132</sup> Interestingly, two of the strongest supporters of the Peisistratid promotion of Theseus agree that this interpolation is unlikely. Hans Herter says that Hereas of Megara was hostile towards the Athenians and therefore such a statement by him would be unlikely. Friis Johansen adds that the interpolation is impossible to confirm.<sup>133</sup> The importance of Herakles to Peisistratos is unquestionable, however it is possible that the tyrant may have also promoted Theseus. While this promotion is not as obvious as that of later Athenian rulers, most notably Kleisthenes and Kimon, Peisistratos may have been the first to exploit Theseus and elevate him to a higher status.

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Peisistratid family gave direct instructions to the artisans. Customers were influential, but there is little evidence that they requested special orders. This contradicts T.B.L. Webster's statements in *Potter and Patron in Classical Athens* (London, 1972) 52, 62. Finally, in regards to the potters themselves, Cook does not believe that they would promote the tyranny in such an oblique way. See R.M. Cook, *JHS* 107 (1987): 167-169. John Boardman asserts his position in a later article and concludes, "taken as a whole the Herakles phenomenon in sixth-century Athens seems inexplicable in any other terms." (Boardman, 159) See John Boardman, *JHS* 109 (1989): 158-159.

<sup>131</sup> The Athenian contingent at Troy is led by Menestheus, the deposer of Theseus. See *Iliad* 2.557. Shapiro says that the Athenians may have rationalized this exclusion by assuming that Theseus was of an earlier generation of heroes. This would appear to concur with P. Kretschmer who suggests that names ending in *-eus* go back to a period before Homer. *Supra* n. 4.

<sup>132</sup> *supra* n. 6.

<sup>133</sup> See Friis Johansen, *Thésée* 55; Hans Herter, *RhM* 88 (1939): 264.

Kleisthenes first became archon in 525/4 B.C. He was opposed by the relatives and supporters of the Peisistratids and by a majority of the aristocracy. The Alkmeonids had no connections to local cults in Attica which was a way in which to establish power; they were not descended from mythical ancestors who had established cults in the area and thence transmitted control to their descendants.<sup>134</sup> J.K Davies states that the political techniques employed by the Alkmeonids:

[A]re the hallmark of a family bent on maintaining and extending its power, prestige and political influence, but precluded from exercising effective power in its own homeland through cults and phratries in the way which was open to the old established units of Athenian politics.<sup>135</sup>

The Alkmeonids, instead, drew their power from another source - Delphi. Exiled to Delphi in 514 B.C. after Hipparchos was murdered, the Alkmeonids were very influential there.

Restoring the Temple of Apollo had won favor with the priests. The Pythia, Apollo's priestess, was bribed by the family and she urged the Spartans to assist the Alkmeonids in the liberation of Athens from the tyranny. Herodotus states:

The Athenians say that these men, during their stay at Delphi, bribed the Priestess to tell any Spartans that might happen to consult the oracle, either on state or private business, that it was their duty to liberate Athens; and the Spartans, as a result of the constant repetition of the same injunction, sent Anchimolius. . . at the head of an army to drive out the Pisistratidae. (*The Histories*, 5.63)

Hippias, Peisistratos' son, was expelled in 510 B.C. Kleisthenes consolidated his power and then instituted some of the most renowned constitutional reforms in the history of Greece.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> The Alkmeonids trace their lineage back to Alcmeon who lived during the time of Theseus. See J.K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families, 600-300 B.C.* (Oxford, 1971).

<sup>135</sup> Davies, 370.

<sup>136</sup> The four ancient Attic tribes were superseded by ten new tribes, which contained 140 *demes*. The *demes* became the basic political, social and religious subdivisions of Attic society, replacing the aristocratic phratries and clans. A new Council of Five Hundred was formed and the powers of the Assembly were enlarged. This was the most democratic form of government the Athenians had yet experienced.



It is possible to associate Kleisthenes with Theseus - Theseus having been responsible for the synoecism of Attica.<sup>137</sup> Plutarch says:

After the death of Aegeus, Theseus conceived a wonderful design, and settled all the residents of Attica in one city, thus making one people of one city out of those who up to that time had been scattered about and were not easily called together for the common interests of all, nay, they sometimes actually quarreled and fought with each other. (*Theseus*, 24.1)

Theseus, "cannot be anybody else's mythical prototype but Cleisthenes, since it is Cleisthenes who is the sixth century historical counterpart of the mythical synoecist of Athens."<sup>138</sup> The parallels between Theseus' synoecism of Attica and Kleisthenes own democratic reforms are evident and this personal association between Theseus and Kleisthenes is more fully argued by Karl Schefold.<sup>139</sup> It is not inconceivable that the idea of Theseus' unification of Athens was made up during the time of Kleisthenes to, "counter memories and deflect credit from Peisistratid national policy," as Jeffrey Hurwit suggests.<sup>140</sup> That Kleisthenes himself was the principal mythmaker may possibly be reflected in the work of Plutarch. Plutarch writes of Theseus:

He promised government without a king and a democracy, in which he should only be commander in war and guardian of the laws, while in all else everyone should be on an equal footing. . . Accordingly, after doing away with the town-halls and council-chambers and magistracies in the several communities, and after building a common town-hall and council-chamber for all on the ground where the upper town of the present day stands, he named the city Athens. (*Theseus* 24.2-3)

Theseus turned down the kingship of Athens and turned the city into a democracy. In addition, he also built a statehouse and a council hall; the construction of these buildings

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<sup>137</sup> Although we know it not to be true, tradition accords the Attic consolidation to Theseus. The *Synoika* was a festival which celebrated the synoecism of Attica. During the time of Thucydides, the Athenians hosted a state festival to Athena under the name *Synoika*; at some point in history, the Athenians had resolved to celebrate the union of Attica in honor of the city's goddess, but a specific date is unknown. Thucydides accepts the origins of the festival as dating from Theseus, stating, "from him (Theseus) dates the feast of the Union of Attica which the Athenians still hold today in honour of Athene." (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.15.2). See H.W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (Ithaca, 1977) 31-32.

<sup>138</sup> Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, *JHS* 91 (1971): 99.

<sup>139</sup> See Karl Schefold, *MusHelv* 3 (1946): 59-93.

<sup>140</sup> Jeffrey Hurwit, *The Art and Culture of Early Greece, 1100-480 B.C.* (Ithaca, 1985) 315.

echoes the building program of Kleisthenes. The actions of Theseus are very similar to the reforms of Kleisthenes.

The first years after the establishment of Kleisthenes' power were significant. This is reflected in the art; it is during this period that the cycle cups make their appearance. Regarding the cycle cups, "it seems likely that they, too, represent attempts on the part of, if not the Alkmeonids themselves, then at least their allies, to promote the cause of the Attic hero."<sup>141</sup> Foremost, these cycle cups promote the youthful hero. Prior to about 520 B.C., Theseus had been depicted, in Attic vase painting, as either the Minotaur slayer or abductor of women. New deeds are invented around 510 B.C. and these deeds are proof, suggests Hurwit, of Kleisthenes promotion of Theseus. Hurwit adds that Theseus' defeat of the various brigands on the road from Troizen to Athens may be a parallel to the Alkmeonids' struggle in the early years of the democracy or else a metaphor for the difficulties the Alkmeonids had to overcome before their return to Athens.

The creation of the deeds may also represent a compromise between Troizen and Athens. The Athenians had to remove the Troizenes as a competitor for the citizenship of Theseus. An agreement was reached - Theseus was born and raised in Troizen and then went to Athens to claim his patrimony.<sup>142</sup> Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood says that the deeds are, "also the compromise through which the Troezenian claims to the hero were met and which allowed the Athenians to annex him definitely."<sup>143</sup> The narration in art of Theseus' journey then is a compromise between the claims of the two cities.

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<sup>141</sup> Neils, 149. The lack of written historical evidence should not be a deterrent, for, as in the case of Peisistratos and Herakles, the evidence should be read in the arts.

<sup>142</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood says that Theseus remained in Troezen because of the threat of the Pallantidae. "Eventually Theseus had to qualify as a man strong enough to face the danger, go to Athens and assume the responsibilities of his position." (Sourvinou-Inwood, *JHS* 91 (1971): 99.) The tokens left by the hero's mortal father, Aegeus, would confirm his status. Aegeus had given instructions to Aethra not to reveal the identity of the boy's father until Theseus was old enough. When Theseus came of age, Aethra related the story of his birth. Theseus lifted the rock, an act which Inwood mentions as his transition from boyhood to manhood, and this qualified him as an Athenian, for the *gnorismata* were given to him by an Athenian.

<sup>143</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood, *JHS* 91 (1971): 99.

The appearance of these new deeds again causes one to question the existence of a Theseus epic - the *Theseid*.<sup>144</sup> Hurwit states that Theseus', "heroism was probably now canonized by the composition of a (or the) *Theseis* - an episodic poem that, if it did not make a particularly good epic, must have made an excellent artistic sketchbook."<sup>145</sup> In the last years of the sixth century, myths of Theseus were invented and disseminated. "The epic magnified a city's or a family's traditions. . . and conferred upon them the legitimacy of age."<sup>146</sup> This certainly would seem to apply to the Alkmeonids. The family was precluded from exercising power because they could boast of no descent from mythical ancestors, ancestors who had established cults and subsequently transferred their power to their descendants.

In addition to the relevance of the cycle cups as a means for Kleisthenes' promotion of Theseus, the Athenian Treasury at Delphi must be examined.<sup>147</sup> The Alkmeonids' influence at Delphi is irrefutable as we have seen. The Athenian Treasury at Delphi was constructed around 500 - 490 B.C. Six of the thirty metopes are reserved for Theseus; the most striking metope shows Athena and Theseus standing quietly opposite each other. This appears to be a deliberate way of presenting Theseus as the special protégé of Athena and thus as the Athenian national hero. By the end of the sixth century B.C., the democratic reforms of Kleisthenes had been instituted and by the beginning of the fifth century, this synoecism was expressed in architecture. It is natural that Kleisthenes would choose to promote Theseus. Theseus was a parallel to Kleisthenes. The young hero's popularity continued to rise and he increasingly came to be associated with democratic Athens, a polis which was the result of Kleisthenes' reforms.

After their victory over the Persians in 479 B.C., the Athenians became aware of the paucity of their heroic past. New myths were desired to substantiate the new power of the Athenians and to establish credibility in the Greek world. The promotion of Theseus as the

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<sup>144</sup> The possible existence of such an epic is explored more fully in chapter 2.

<sup>145</sup> Hurwit, 314.

<sup>146</sup> Tyrrell, 4.

<sup>147</sup> The Athenian Treasury will be discussed in chapter 6.

Athenian national hero had begun during the tyranny of Peisistratos and was continued by Kleisthenes. However, the efforts of Kimon were decisive in Theseus' rise to the prominence of Athenian national hero.

"In a move combining religious piety with mythic propaganda and naked imperialism, the Athenians obtained a Delphic oracle charging them with returning Theseus' bones to a place of honor in Athens."<sup>148</sup> Plutarch relates:

Indeed an oracle had once been delivered to the Athenians commanding them to bring the remains of Theseus back to Athens and honour him as befitted a hero, but they did not know where he lay and the people of Skyros would neither own to any knowledge of the matter nor allow any search to be made. Now however Kimon threw everything into the enterprise and the place of burial was discovered after much toil. (*Life of Kimon* 8.6-7)

Kimon captured the island of Skyros, sold the non-Greeks into slavery and colonized the island with Athenians. He found the bones of Theseus and returned with them to Athens. Plutarch recounts this event, writing:

Cimon. . . being ambitious to discover the grave of Theseus, saw an eagle in a place where there was the semblance of a mound, pecking, as they say, and tearing up the ground with his talons. By some divine ordering he comprehended the meaning of this and dug there, and there found a coffin of a man of extraordinary size, a bronze spear lying by its side, and a sword. When these relics were brought home on his trireme by Cimon, the Athenians were delighted, and received them with splendid processions and sacrifices, as though Theseus himself were returning to his city. (*Theseus* 36.1-2)

The transportation of the bones, "was a gesture with a specific political significance and was bound to be stressed and glorified."<sup>149</sup>

Theseus' bones were placed in the Theseion - a commemorative shrine built especially for the hero. The location of the structure is unknown today, but probably lay to the southeast of the Agora.<sup>150</sup> The Theseion was a magnificent building, the interior decorated with murals illustrating events from the life of the hero: the battle against the

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<sup>148</sup> Tyrrell, 10.

<sup>149</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood, *JHS* 91 (1971): 109.

<sup>150</sup> Plutarch says the Theseion was, "ἐν μέσῳ τῇ πόλει παρὰ τὸ νῦν γυμνάσιον." According to Pausanias, the Theseion was, "πρὸς τῷ γυμνασίῳ," which is the Gymnasium of Ptolemy more specifically. See R.E. Wycherly, *JHS* 79 (1959): 155; H. Plommer, *Gnomon* 29 (1957): 33.

Centaurs at the wedding of Peirithōos; the Amazon invasion of Attica and the recovery of the ring of Minos.<sup>151</sup> Pausanias records:

Beside the gymnasium is a sanctuary of Theseus. The pictures are Athenians fighting Amazons. . . The battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths is also painted in the temple of Theseus. . . To anyone unacquainted with the legend the painting on the third wall is confused, partly through time, and partly because Mikon has not painted the whole story. When Minos brought Theseus to Crete with the shipload of boys and girls, he fell in love with Periboia, but Theseus strongly resisted this. Minos flung many angry taunts at Theseus, including this: Theseus was no son of Poseidon because he was unable to recover the signet ring Minos was wearing, if Minos dropped it in the sea. With these words Minos dropped the ring, and the legend is that when Theseus came out of the water he had the ring and a golden wreath, a present from Amphitrite. (*Guide to Greece*, 1.17.1-3)

The subject of the fourth wall is not known. Pausanias continues:

About the death of Theseus there are many inconsistent legends, for example that he was tied up in the underworld until Herakles should bring him back to life. (*Guide to Greece*, 1.17.4)

Some scholars say that Pausanias' digression into a story regarding Herakles' rescue of Theseus from the Underworld is an indication that this was the episode illustrated. This subject would certainly be appropriate, serving as a good mythic parallel to Kimon and the recovery of Theseus' bones from the island of Skyros.<sup>152</sup> The themes of the three other walls, in addition, might be construed as further parallels to Kimon. According to David Castriota, "Kimon and his aristocratic supporters were well-attuned to the enormous political value of manipulating mythic analogues in this fashion."<sup>153</sup>

The enshrinement of the bones of Theseus continued the state practice of absorbing aristocratic cults.<sup>154</sup> "The return of the bones of Theseus completes the hero's new ideology

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<sup>151</sup> For a full discussion of the interior decoration see J.P. Barron, *JHS* 92 (1972): 20-45.; Susan Woodford, *JHS* 94 (1974): 158-165.

<sup>152</sup> Johannes Overbeck and Heinrich Brunn argue that the painting was of Theseus' death. See Johannes Overbeck, *Die Antiken Schriftquellen zur Geschichte d. bild. Künste bei den Griechen* (Leipzig, 1868) 208, no.1086; Heinrich Brunn, *Geschichte der Griechischen Künstler*<sup>2</sup> (Stuttgart, 1889) 17. J. Six has suggested that the painting was of Theseus' resurrection, or return, from Hades. See J. Six, *JHS* 39 (1919): 130-43. Six's interpretation is the one commonly accepted by scholars today.

<sup>153</sup> David Castriota, *Myth, Ethos and Actuality: Official Art in Fifth-Century B.C. Athens*. (Madison, 1992) 7.

<sup>154</sup> This practice was begun by Peisistratos in the sixth century. The owners of the rites of Theseus, the Phytadae, were made caretakers of Theseus in 475 B.C.

by making a place for him inside the city in imitation of archaic 'founder-heroes' whose tombs and cults. . . played an active role in archaic politics and history."<sup>155</sup> The *Theseia*, also known as the festival of Theseus, was made a part of the religious calendar for the eighth day of *Pyanopsia*; this was the day after the *Schophora* - already a festival dedicated to the hero. The *Theseia* was instituted in 475 B.C. as a festival of the Athenian state.

Kimón used Theseus to promote his own political causes through either direct association with Theseus or family members. The return of Theseus' bones and enshrinement earned Kimón permanent respect, "associating him in the popular imagination with the new conception of Theseus as the national hero of Attika."<sup>156</sup> This is clearly demonstrated in the Theseion. In literature, too, this link was cultivated. Ode 18 by Bakkhylides is filled with references to Kimón and his family.<sup>157</sup> It is even possible that the contemporary Attic historian, Pherekydes, attempted to trace Kimón's genealogy back to Theseus.<sup>158</sup> Kimón also used his family ties to promote Theseus. Miltiades was the father of Kimón and served as commander at the Battle of Marathon. It was at this battle that Theseus allegedly appeared, rising from the ground to ward off the enemy.

Many of those who fought at Marathon against the Medes  
thought they saw an apparition of Theseus in arms rushing  
on in front of them against the Barbarians (Plutarch, *Theseus* 35.5)

This event was commemorated by a painting in the Stoa Poikile. The Stoa was a civic building located across the Agora from the Theseion and was originally named the

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<sup>155</sup> Sarah P. Morris, *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1992) 348.

<sup>156</sup> Castriota, 7.

<sup>157</sup> Bakkhylides describes Theseus as wearing a Lakonian helmet over his red hair. About his body is a purple chiton, or woolly Thessalian cloak. His eyes flash Lemnian fire. The word used to describe the cloak is οὔλιος. Οὔλιος is usually translated as meaning terrible or destructive, but Barron concludes that this adjective is hardly appropriate and therefore the meaning must be woollen. Οὔλιος is also a proper name; in the work of Pherekydes, interestingly, one of the sons of Kimón was named Oulios. Kimón also had two other sons - Lakedaimonios and Thessalos. Barron proposes that the Lakonian helmet and the woolly Thessalian cloak are allusions to the three sons of Kimón. Further allusions to the family of Kimón may also be discerned. Theseus is described as having Lemnian fire in his eyes; Miltiades, the father of Kimón, had annexed the island of Lemnos for Athens. Finally, Bakkhylides writes that Theseus had red hair. Auburn hair is characteristic of foreigners. Kimón's mother was not a native Greek, but a Thracian. Was the mother of Kimón a red head and thus referred to in Bakkhylides ode? See J.P. Barron, *BICS* 27 (1980): 1-4.

<sup>158</sup> See Barron, *BICS* 27 (1980): 1-4.

Peisianaktios, after Kimon's brother-in-law, Peisianax. The paintings in this building are described by Pausanias:

On the middle part of the walls Theseus and his Athenians are fighting Amazons. . . Next to the Amazons, the Greeks have just taken Troy. . . The last part of the painting is the men who fought at Marathon. . . The hero Marathon, from whom the level ground got its name, is standing there, with Theseus rising out of the earth, and Athene and Herakles. . . In the picture of the fighting, you can most clearly make out Kallimachos. . . and General Miltiades. (*Guide to Greece*, 1.15.1-4)

E.B. Harrison has contended that Miltiades was a driving force of inspiration in the battle.<sup>159</sup> Similarly then, "[o]ne may readily conclude that the depiction of Miltiades in the Marathon painting was intended to reflect directly upon the aims and accomplishments of his son, Kimon."<sup>160</sup> The Stoa painting is paralleled by a Marathon monument at Delphi.

Pausanias says:

[T]hese images were dedicated from the tithes of Marathon: they represent Athene and Apollo and one of the commanders, Miltiades, and some divine heroes, Erechtheus, Kekrops and Pandion, Leos and Antiochos, (the son of Herakles by Phylas's daughter Meda), also Aigeus and Akamas (one of the sons of Theseus). . . There are also Kodros, son of Melanthos, and Theseus and Neleus, who are not yet name-heroes. (*Guide to Greece*, 10.10.1)

This statue group is directly related to the Stoa Poikile painting of the battle where the Marathonian exploits of Miltiades were juxtaposed with those of Theseus. Castriota has concluded that, "[i]n both these monuments, Kimon was an unseen presence, the final link in a chain uniting the remote and recent past with contemporary events."<sup>161</sup> He further adds that these monuments, "asserted that the legacy of the ancient Attic heroes and their progeny had been reborn in Miltiades and *his* son."<sup>162</sup>

Around 475 B.C. Kimon married Isodike - daughter of Euryptolemos, an Alkmeonid. "In allying himself with the Alkmeonids and marrying one of their daughters, Cimon apparently adopted the legendary figure connected with the glory of their family in the recent

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<sup>159</sup> See Evelyn B. Harrison, *AJA* 76 (1972): 356.

<sup>160</sup> Castriota, 80.

<sup>161</sup> *ibid*, 81.

<sup>162</sup> *ibid*.

past, Theseus, the mythical prototype of Cleisthenes."<sup>163</sup> In addition, Theseus would undoubtedly be a reminder of the battle of Marathon where he was alleged to have appeared on the plain. The glory of Miltiades was revived and consequently Kimon's popularity increased. Kimon used Theseus to promote his own causes. It is in this context, then, that the return of Theseus' bones should be viewed. Sourvinou-Inwood notes:

It becomes clear then that he had every reason for giving importance to the event and for trying to complement this gesture with the dedication of monuments representing Theseus which would commemorate the recovery of the bones and at the same time contribute to the further glorification of the hero.<sup>164</sup>

There is no questioning Theseus' rise in popularity to the prominence of Athenian national hero. This promotion cannot be attributed solely to one individual, but rather several men were instrumental - Peisistratos, Kleisthenes and Kimon. Peisistratos undoubtedly favored Herakles and promoted the Dorian hero, yet Plutarch records two instances in which the tyrant tampered with ancient texts in an effort to improve Theseus' image. The successor of Peisistratos, Kleisthenes, consciously associated himself with Theseus, relating his democratic reforms with the synoecism of Attica accorded to Theseus. In addition, the increasing popularity of Theseus is evident in the extant art, most notably the cycle cups and the Athenian treasury at Delphi, which may, indeed, be a reflection of Kleisthenes' attempts to glorify Theseus. The concept of Theseus as the national hero of the Athenians is fully realized during the time of Kimon. The bones of Theseus were retrieved from Skyros and enshrined in a building, located in the heart of Athens, dedicated to the hero. By the mid-fifth century, Theseus had become a part of the fabric of Athenian history - he had become the Athenian hero *par excellence*.

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<sup>163</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood, *JHS* 91 (1971): 109.

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*



## CHAPTER 6

### HERAKLES AS A PARALLEL FIGURE

"Ἄλλος οὗτος Ἡρακλῆς" (*Theseus*, 29.3)

Herakles is the most famous of all the Greek heroes. A panhellenic hero, Herakles was very popular in Athens in the second half of the sixth century B.C.<sup>165</sup> Gradually, however, Theseus superseded Herakles as the popular hero of the Athenians. Theseus reached his greatest popularity during the time of Kimon. The parallels between Theseus and Herakles are strong; Theseus was modeled after Herakles and thus the saying that Theseus was another, or a second, Herakles has some merit.

Born in Thebes, Herakles was the son of Zeus and a mortal woman, Alkmene. Zeus admired Alkmene and disguising himself as her husband, Amphitryon, slept with her. Amphitryon, too, slept with Alkmene that night and she eventually bore twins - Herakles and Iphikles. Apollodorus relates:

Before Amphitryon arrived in Thebes, Zeus went there one night (making it three times the length of an ordinary night), took the shape of Amphitryon, and slept with Alcmene, to whom he recounted the adventures with the Teleboans. When Amphitryon reached home and saw that his wife was less than overjoyed to have him, he asked her the reason. She pointed out that he had just slept with her the previous night. Amphitryon then learned from questioning Teiresias that Zeus had made love to her. Alcmene bore two sons: to Zeus she bore Heracles, older than his brother by one night, and to Amphitryon she bore Iphicles. (*The Library*, 2.61)

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<sup>165</sup> John Boardman convincingly argues that Peisistratos consciously associated himself with Herakles. This association was discussed in chapter 5.

For every Herakles myth there often exist several different versions. By the Classical era his exploits had been categorized into three groups: the Labors which numbered twelve and were performed in the service of King Eurystheus; the Deeds which vary in number and were performed independently; and the Incidentals which occurred while the Labors were being completed.

The twelve labors, or Dodekathlos, are first represented in their entirety on the metopes from the interior porches of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. The temple dates from circa 470-456 B.C. Pausanias mentions the subjects of the six metopes on the west end and the five subjects on the east.<sup>166</sup> However, it is not certain that the order he relates was the original order. The order established by Apollodorus is the accepted canon.

The first task determined by King Eurystheus was to kill the lion from Nemea. Herakles wrestled the beast and finally killed it, thereafter wearing the skin of the lion as a cloak; the skin of the lion coupled with the club are the most common attributes associated with Herakles. The killing of the Hydra and the capture of the Kerynitian hind, sacred to Artemis, followed. Herakles' fourth task was to capture the boar which had been ravaging the countryside around Mount Erymanthos. This labor is a frequent subject in Attic black-figure vases from the second half of the sixth century. Herakles is either depicted carrying the boar around his shoulders or lifting the savage creature by its hind legs and pushing it forward. Following the capture of the Erymanthian boar, Herakles was given the task of cleaning the Augean stables and then to rid the region near Lake Stympthalos of a flock of bothersome birds.

The six labors recounted above constituted what is known as the Peloponnesian Group. The first of his non-Peloponnesian labors was the capture of the Cretan bull. In this seventh labor, Herakles drove the bull to Mycenae, presented it to King Eurystheus and then released the animal. This bull then, according to some accounts, made its way to Marathon where Theseus later subdued it. Herakles' capture of the Cretan bull is the subject of more

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<sup>166</sup> Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 5.10.9

than two-hundred Attic black-figure vases which mostly date from the last third of the sixth century or the early fifth century. There are similarities between these depictions and those showing Theseus and the Marathonian bull. Often only the quiver and bow seen hanging nearby serve to distinguish the two scenes. The next labor of Herakles was the return of the man-eating mares of Diomedes. Eurystheus then requested the belt of the Amazon queen, Hippolyte. For his tenth labor, Herakles was sent to Erytheia to retrieve the cattle of Geryon. The golden apples had been a wedding gift from Gaia to Hera; the apples grew in the garden of the Hesperides and Eurystheus requested that Herakles bring him these apples. During the course of this labor, Herakles encountered several notorious men, most notably Antaios. Herakles was forced to wrestle the giant - the son of Poseidon and Gaia - and this fight appears on both Attic black and red-figure vases from the last quarter of the sixth century and the first quarter of the fifth century. The twelfth and final labor of Herakles was the capture of Kerberos, the hound of Hades, and to bring him up from the underworld.

The appearance of Herakles has evolved in Greek art. Before the Geometric period, he is depicted without the skin of the Nemean lion or his club. In the seventh century, he uses a bow and this weapon soon becomes one of his attributes; a bow is mentioned in connection with Herakles in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.<sup>167</sup> The hero may begin to wear the lion skin in the second quarter of the sixth century in Attic art and the club appears around this time, too. Finally, in archaic representations he is usually bearded and this continues to characterize the hero, but on occasion he may appear as a beardless youth.<sup>168</sup>

Theseus' rise in popularity at the end of the sixth century is evident in art and suspected in literature. T.H. Carpenter notes that, "[t]he popularity of the hero Theseus as a subject for Attic vase-paintings approaches that of his contemporary Herakles at the end of the sixth century."<sup>169</sup> It was during this period that the cycle cups of Theseus first

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<sup>167</sup> *Iliad* 5.392. *Odyssey* 8.244; 9.606ff.

<sup>168</sup> This occurs in representations from the last decades of the sixth century and sometimes earlier when Herakles wrestles the Nemean Lion.

<sup>169</sup> T.H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece* (London, 1991) 160.

appeared, *circa* 510 B.C. These cycle deeds may be viewed as rivaling the labors of Herakles. Several of these deeds are indeed derived from Herakles' labors.

The most obvious derivation is the capture of the Marathonian bull, which imitates Herakles' encounter with the Cretan bull.<sup>170</sup> The similarities of the two episodes has resulted in much confusion in identifying the scene. The sow episode is likewise derived from Herakles' capture of the Erymanthian boar. This imitation is especially obvious on the early cycle cup in London (Figure 8).<sup>171</sup> Theseus drags away a live boar, not a sow, by its hind legs. Subsequent representations of this episode are depicted in a different manner which becomes the standard - the animal is a sow and is being slain. Finally, there exists a similarity between the wrestling match of Theseus and Kerkyon as compared to Herakles and Antaios. The derivative nature of this deed is not as obvious as the previous two examples. Theseus uses his skill as a palestra-trained youth to overcome Kerkyon, whereas Herakles relies on his brute strength to defeat the giant Antaios. Nonetheless, it is obvious that these deeds owe much to the representations of Herakles.

Theseus and Herakles are repeatedly juxtaposed in vase painting.

The similarity between Herakles and Theseus, both monster-fighters, was one which had been observed by artists long before any deeper significance was read into their relationship and without reference to any possible association in myth.<sup>172</sup>

This juxtaposition may first be evidenced on a Corinthian cup in Brussels.<sup>173</sup> This cup, *circa* 570-560 B.C., shows Theseus and the Minotaur on one side, Herakles and Acheloos on the other. Later, Herakles and the Nemean lion are linked with Theseus and the Minotaur.<sup>174</sup> In the late sixth century, Theseus and the Marathonian bull replace Theseus

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<sup>170</sup> Unlike most of the other cycle deeds, the capture of the Marathonian bull was popular in the black-figure period; the earliest depiction dates from 540 B.C.

<sup>171</sup> London, British Museum E36; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 115, no. 3.

<sup>172</sup> John Boardman, "Herakles, Theseus and Amazons," *The Eye of Greece: Studies in the Art of Athens*, edited by Donna Kurtz and Brian Sparkes (Cambridge, 1982) 2.

<sup>173</sup> Brussels, Musées Royaux A1374.

<sup>174</sup> The Group E Painters were especially fond of this juxtaposition. See Würzburg, Martin von Wagner Museum 248; *ABV* 134, no. 18. Rome, Conservatori 348; *ABV* 134, no. 19. Munich, Museum Antiker Kleinkunst 1397; *ABV* 134, no. 20. See Paris, Musée du Louvre F33; *ABV* 141, no. 3.

and the Minotaur as the counterpart to Herakles and the Nemean lion.<sup>175</sup> This juxtaposition is also observed in pairs of fighting/wrestling scenes - Herakles and Antaios compared with Theseus and Skiron or Theseus and Prokrustes.<sup>176</sup>

The parallel between Theseus and Herakles is foreshadowed in vase painting, but consciously spelled out in sculpture. The Athenian Treasury at Delphi and the Hephaisteion in Athens serve to illustrate this. The Athenian Treasury was constructed sometime around 500 - 490 B.C.<sup>177</sup> The treasury is located in the politically and religiously important center of Delphi and the themes chosen to decorate this structure are deliberate, telling us much about Athens. Of the thirty metopes, fifteen are reserved for Herakles, six for Theseus and regarding the sculpture Boardman notes that, "the iconographic futures of the old Herakles and the new Theseus are still being decided."<sup>178</sup>

The south metopes illustrate various Theseus encounters: Sinis, Kerkyon, Skiron, Athena, the bull of Marathon, the Minotaur and an Amazon. On the north side, Herakles appears with the Nemean Lion, a centaur, a horse (?), the Kerynitian Hind, Atlas, Kyknos and an Amazon. The six metopes placed on the eastern front of the treasury depicts an Amazonomachy. The Geryon adventure of Herakles decorates the six west metopes.

Neils says that the Athenian treasury, "acts as a propagandistic statement which consciously sets out a sophisticatedly unified program of sculpture which makes obvious. . . the parallels between the great Dorian Herakles and the young Athenian Theseus."<sup>179</sup> The

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<sup>175</sup> Rome, Marchese Giorgio Guglielmi, no inventory number, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 148, no.1. Leipzig T3625; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 148, no. 2. Philadelphia, University Museum L64.185; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 187, no. 62. Florence V 58; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 413, no. 24.

<sup>176</sup> Florence V; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 355, no.46. Athens, National Museum 1666; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1567, no.13.

<sup>177</sup> The date is questioned. Pausanias (*Guide to Greece*, 10.11.5) and the French date it to after Marathon based on spolia. Some scholars date the treasury to just before 500 B.C. and regard it as a statement against the tyranny of Peisistratos; "[t]he preeminence of Theseus in the metopes would thus be in the nature of an immediate anti-Peisistratid communiqué." (Hurwit, 318.) Most date the Athenian treasury to the first decade of the fifth century. See Evelyn B. Harrison, *Archaic and Archaistic Sculpture, The Athenian Agora*, vol.II (Princeton, 1965) 10-11; Brunhilde S. Ridgeway, *The Archaic Style in Greek Sculpture* (Princeton, 1977) 236; John Boardman, *Greek Sculpture, The Archaic Period* (New York, 1978) 159. For further discussion of the dating problem see Werner Gauer, *Weihgeschenke aus den Perserkriegen, IstMitt Beiheft 2* (Tübingen, 1968) 45-65.

<sup>178</sup> Boardman, 3.

<sup>179</sup> Neils, 51.

individual Amazonomachies of Theseus and Herakles, placed on the easternmost south and north sides respectively, demonstrate this parallel. They, "show how Theseus is deliberately cast in the image of another Herakles."<sup>180</sup> On the Athenian Treasury, the two heroes were equated; they were not portrayed as rivals, but rather Theseus was raised to the level of Herakles.

Yet, in spite of this parallel, the two heroes are clearly differentiated. Theseus' capture of the Marathonian bull is not reduplicated by Herakles' capture of the Cretan bull nor is the Centauromachy which involves Herakles. The boar and sow episodes of the two heroes are omitted entirely. It might even be argued that the treasury served to promote the Athenian over the Dorian hero. Athena appears only once in the sculptural decoration of the building - with Theseus in the *Sacra Conversazione*. Athena is the protectress of Herakles; the appearance of Athena had hitherto mostly been accorded to the Dorian hero. Instead, on the treasury, Athena accompanies Theseus. "This makes the whole design look very much like a presentation of Theseus the Athenian at the centre of the Greek world."<sup>181</sup>

"The Athenian Treasury was constructed in honor of Apollo but in celebration of Theseus and the city that intentionally bestowed Heraklean stature on him."<sup>182</sup>

Athenian artists had nothing against Herakles after the expulsion of the tyrants in 510, and to depict him was not an indication of sympathy for the old regime; the heroic protégé and the consummate workman of civilization simply could not be ignored no matter how he had been used before. But the young democracy needed a hero it could call its own, even if it had to create one in Herakles' own image.<sup>183</sup>

"It is remarkable that from this time forward various deeds of Theseus emerge in art and that they are immediately arranged in a series in metopes and in cyclical form in vase painting."<sup>184</sup> This is especially true in light of the sculpture of the Athenian Treasury. The treasury sculpture dates to the period around the time of the creation of the cycle cups. A

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<sup>180</sup> *ibid*, 50-51.

<sup>181</sup> Boardman, 4.

<sup>182</sup> Hurwit, 316.

<sup>183</sup> *ibid*, 311.

<sup>184</sup> Frank Brommer, *Heracles* (New York, 1979) 58.

cycle did not exist for Herakles. In vase painting a labor would sometimes be depicted on the obverse and reverse of a vessel, but this does not constitute a cyclical narration. On the Athenian Treasury, fifteen metopes were reserved for Herakles. There was certainly enough room to include all twelve of the hero's labors, yet, at the most, only eight of the labors are illustrated. Only the Temple of Zeus at Olympia presents the Dodekathlos in its entirety in all of Greek art.

The Hephaisteion was constructed around 450 B.C.<sup>185</sup> It commemorates the youthful deeds of Theseus. Like the Athenian Treasury, it, too, juxtaposes the deeds of Theseus with the labors of Herakles. Ten metopes are reserved for Herakles, eight for Theseus. The ten metopes on the east front depict the following labors of Herakles: the Nemean Lion; Hydra; the Kerynitian Hind; the Erymanthian boar; the capture of Diomedes' horses; Kerberos; an Amazon; Geryon; and the retrieval of golden apples of the Hesperides. The subject matter of the ten metopes devoted to Herakles are all taken from the Dodekathlos.<sup>186</sup> The deeds of Theseus are seen on eight metopes - four each on the eastern end of the north and south sides. The deeds are: the Krommyon sow, Skiron, Kerkyon and Prokrustes on the north side; Periphetes, Sinis, the Marathonian bull and the Minotaur on the south end. Greater prominence has been given to Herakles on the Hephaisteion, but Homer Thompson notes that this is a reflection of the literary tradition.<sup>187</sup> Brommer has said of the Athenian Treasury and the Hephaisteion that, "the attempt to create a Theseus cycle has influenced the representations of Heracles' deeds in a cyclical form."<sup>188</sup> This is evident when the Hephaisteion metopes are examined, but as

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<sup>185</sup> *supra* n. 76.

<sup>186</sup> Two of the ten metopes depict Herakles' capture of Geryon's cattle. This is rather unusual. On the Temple of Zeus, the adventure had been confined to one metope; on the Athenian Treasury, the six west metopes represented this, but this made sense because the labor was confined to one entire side of the structure.

<sup>187</sup> Regarding the literary tradition, Theseus is hospitable to Herakles and welcomes him at the end of Euripides' *Herakles*. Theseus also gives sanctuaries in Attica to the Dorian hero. See Euripides, *Herakles*, ll.1328-31. Plutarch notes, "[a]ll the sacred precincts which the city had previously set apart for himself, he now dedicated to Heracles." (*Theseus*, 35.2).

<sup>188</sup> Brommer, 58.

noted earlier, cyclical narration of Herakles' labors never becomes popular, in contrast to the canonical representation of the youthful deeds of Theseus.

Herakles was the pan-Hellenic hero after whom Theseus was modeled. Theseus' Isthmian deeds were a promotional vehicle based on the twelve Labors of Herakles. Several of Theseus' deeds, in fact, are directly descended from Herakles' Labors. The two heroes are juxtaposed in art. In sculpture especially, the parallels between Theseus and Herakles are proclaimed; the Treasury of the Athenians at Delphi and the Hephaisteion are notable examples. Theseus was ἄλλος οὗτος Ἡρακλῆς.



## CONCLUSION

Theseus was a figure of legend in Greek mythology. He is known primarily for the battle he fought against the Minotaur and this particular episode is frequently depicted in black-figure pottery. By the sixth century B.C., the story of Theseus and the Minotaur was widely known and depicted in art throughout Greece. The Peloponnesians were the first to produce artistic representations of this confrontation and five gold plaques from the mid-seventh century B.C. survive. On these plaques Theseus grabs the horn of the Minotaur and plunges his sword into the chest of the creature; this battle format becomes standardized *circa* 550 B.C.

The slaying of the Minotaur is represented on over two hundred black-figure vessels. The Minotaur theme reached its popularity in the period 540-530 B.C., particularly in the work of the Group E painters. Towards the end of the sixth century, Theseus was given a new image - he was heralded as the national hero of the Athenians. This elevation prompted the creation of a series of deeds which Theseus performed on the road from Troizen to Athens. The previous exploits of Theseus are not forgotten and the popularity of the Cretan adventure continues, but to this established repétoire are added the deeds. These deeds are combined in a cyclical fashion on a series of Attic red-figure vases and are thus often termed cycle cups; it is during the period 510-500 B.C. that the cycle cups first appear. The presentation of Theseus' deeds in a cyclical fashion is unique to the hero. The cycle cups associated with Theseus were used to promote the newly created deeds of the

youth - to prove that he performed these deeds in addition to his well-known encounter with the Minotaur.

The period 480-450 B.C. marks the peak interest in the youthful Theseus, yet, conversely, interest in the combat between Theseus and the Minotaur decreases. The artists are, instead more interested in his Athenians connections. The relationship between Theseus and Poseidon is explored and Theseus is, increasingly, a combatant in what has been termed the "big battles" of Greek history - the Amazonomachy and the Centuaromachy. Gradually, these themes supersede the Minotaur combat as favorites of the artists, but the slaying of the Minotaur continues to decorate Greek vases.

Particularly important to this study is the type of weapon wielded by Theseus against the Minotaur - a sword. In most extant black-figures examples, Theseus uses a sword to kill the Minotaur. In two examples, however, Theseus uses a club. On a seventh century Sicilian stamnos, the hero grips a club in his left hand and on an amphora from the mid-sixth century by the Affecter Painter, Theseus wields a club over his head, ready to strike the fleeing creature. In red-figured depictions of this same battle, the iconography remains unchanged from black-figured representations - Theseus uses a sword to kill the beast. Yet, as had occurred in black-figure, there are exceptions. On a cup by the Meleager Painter from the first third of the fourth century B.C. and a later calyx krater by the L.C. Group, Theseus wields a club.

The possible reasons for the appearance of the club have been explored - the relevance of the cycle cups and the deeds depicted on them and, more specifically, the pertinence of Periphetes and the Bull of Marathon and, secondly, the importance of Herakles. Periphetes was the first villain that Theseus encountered on his journey from Troizen to Athens; after defeating this club-wielding brigand, Theseus took the club and, thereafter, carried as his own. The Bull of Marathon was a savage creature which ravaged the Attic countryside and soon after arriving in Athens, Theseus set out to capture this bull. It is probable that a club should first appear in this context because it is adventure which

**demands a weapon powerful enough to tame a large, raging animal. In addition, this adventure is very similar to an event in the life of Herakles - the capture of the Cretan bull.**

**Parallels between Theseus and Herakles were evident in Greek art. The two heroes were juxtaposed on numerous painted vessels and in several sculptural programs, too, most notably on the Athenian Treasury at Delphi and the Hephaisteion in Athens. Herakles was the pan-Hellenic hero after whom Theseus was modeled. In fact, several of Theseus' youthful deeds are directly descended from the Labors of Herakles. Theseus was another Herakles and he eventually surpasses Herakles as the national hero of the Athenians. The efforts of Peisistratos, Kleisthenes and Kimon were instrumental in Theseus' prominent rise, for each man could adopt the hero as his own and promote those aspects which best suited his political purposes.**

**The appropriation of the club in four Greek vase paintings may be connected to depictions of Periphetes, the bull of Marathon and Herakles. The use of a club to slay the Minotaur should not be regarded as insignificant and these depictions merit the attention they have been given.**

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