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A Many-Headed Nomos: Athena's Body and the Monstrous Aegis

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A Many-Headed *Nomos*: Athena's Body and the Monstrous Aegis

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1. Introduction

1.1. 'A many-headed mode'¹

Why does Athena have two faces? In much archaic and classical Greek art, her graceful anthropomorphic head accompanies a second face that leers at the viewer from her chest, grimacing with lolling tongue or rows of fangs, eyes round and bulging. The gorgon head on Athena's aegis gives her body a second gaze; and the tangle of snakes which fringe the aegis are likewise monstrous and many-headed. These aspects are not ubiquitous or standardised in their appearance, even amongst representations of Athena of the same period and type.² This thesis explores the scope of literary and artistic representations of Athena in which her aegis constructs her body as a monstrous, boundary-crossing hybrid.

Scholars typically understand the aegis as a symbol of Athena's dominion over and appropriation of the power of the monstrous other, since multiple sources portray it as the trophy of a defeated monster.³ The fact that the aegis can make Athena *look* like a hybrid monster in art, or that its hybridity interacts with other aspects of her boundary-crossing character, has been neglected.⁴ Athena is a goddess of unusually diverse association "who eludes straightforward characterisation," and a mediator between categories such as humans and gods or men and women.⁵ As a patron of various heroes, she is often placed in proximity to the monsters they slay in representations of myth. As a class, monsters share this resistance to scholarly definition and association with the crossing or

¹ Pindar *Pythian* 12, 23: κεφαλᾶν πολλᾶν νόμον.

² Compare Athena in **Fig. 10** with Louvre [LP 1265], attributed to the same painter. The former has a cloth aegis with gorgoneion, the latter a gorgon-less scaled cape aegis. (Attic amphora; attrib. Andokides painter; ca. 515-510 BCE. Louvre [LP 1265].)

³ See Vernant 1991b, 148; Rynearson 2013, 17.

⁴ One exception is Ogden 2013a, 216 in the context of monster-slaying, but he does not discuss this aspect in depth.

⁵ Deacy 2008, 6; see also Deacy 2008, 5, and Detienne and Vernant 1978, 117. On mediation: Niels 2001, 220; Murnaghan 1995, 61.

disruption of taxonomic cultural boundaries.⁶ The aegis' hybrid appearance and monstrous material draws these similarities into direct juxtaposition.

This thesis contends that ancient Greek authors and artists frequently deploy Athena's figure to explore the problematisation of cultural categories and boundaries, and that the hybrid-monstrous aspects of her aegis are a central part of this. In order to understand *why* aegis-bearing Athena is thusly 'good to think with,' I explore the various means by which the hybrid-monstrous aegis interacts with and shapes her body. These interactions invoke a variety of interrelated themes and contexts: gender, costume, dynamics of mythic narrative, and image ontologies. Rather than only symbolising Athena's opposition to and victory over the monstrous, my approach demonstrates that the hybrid aegis enables her image or character to function in a similar fashion to a monster.

1.2. Background and *status quaestionis*

The aegis is an object of polyvalent function, appearance, and origin in ancient sources, although it is consistently partially made from bodily matter. It first appears in the *Iliad* as a military instrument of terror, given to Zeus by Hephaestus and used by Athena and Apollo.⁷ Here it is adorned with golden tassels (not snakes) and the gorgoneion.⁸ In art, the aegis is almost exclusively Athena's attribute, first depicted in the early 6th century as a snake-fringed cape [see **Figs. 1** and **5**].⁹ Different aegis styles develop throughout the century, such as a *peplos* overfold or a bib. It is sometimes scaled [**Figs. 4, 7, and 12**] or speckled like animal hide [**Figs. 13.1** and **14.1**], and the gorgoneion blazon appears in about 550-540.¹⁰ Although implicitly made by Hephaestus in the *Iliad* and frequently born with Athena in vase painting [see **Figs. 3** and **6**], the aegis is fabricated from a monstrous body in some literary sources. The Athenian poet Pherecydes was possibly the first to have Perseus grant

⁶ See Atherton 1998, ix; Lada-Richards 1998, 42.

⁷ *Il.* 15. 307-311.

⁸ *Il.* 2.446-459; *Il.* 5.741.

⁹ Marx 1993, 240.

¹⁰ See again Marx 1993, 240-1; also Villing 1992, 58-62.

Athena Medusa's head to place on the aegis, and Euripides in the *Ion* tells that Athena slaughtered an earth-born gorgon to create the garment (993-996).¹¹ The 6th-5th century comic poet Epicharmus makes it the skin of the giant Pallas.¹² The word probably derives from αἴξ ('goat'), and real goatskin aegides may have been ritual objects.¹³

Scholars have studied the aegis as a religious object, or in relation to Athenian politics. These studies have informed my research, but none of them focus on the relationship between the aegis and the monstrous. From a religious studies perspective, Robert Luyster analyses the aegis and gorgoneion as apotropaic devices, and Noel Robertson reconstructs a goat sacrifice for weather and fertility magic as the aegis' origin.¹⁴ Their discussion of material surrounding the gorgoneion and aegis has been useful to me, even if their conclusions are not relevant to my approach. Due to Athena's status as patron goddess of Athens, various scholars have sought a political motive for the introduction of the gorgoneion to the aegis.¹⁵ However, all three works on this topic find completely different correspondences between politics and the development of iconography. Monique Halm-Tisserant believes that the gorgoneion first appeared in red-figure and was connected to Pisistratean propaganda, Kim Hartswick that it appeared on earlier black-figure vases and stemmed from Pisistratus' alliance with Argos, and Patricia Marx finds evidence that the aegis-gorgoneion was unpopular during Pisistratus' reign and relates it to the Persian wars.¹⁶ Although Marx' catalogues of material are the most extensive and useful, the inconsistency of these conclusions suggests to me that the aegis-gorgoneion cannot be understood via Athenian politics alone. Hartswick notes that minor arts were unlikely to have represented civic concerns, and Alexandra Villing finds that details of Athena's costume, including the various appearances of the aegis, were interchangeable and varied within the same types or scenes on Attic vase painting from the same periods.¹⁷ I do not feel,

¹¹ Pherecydes Fr. 11 (Fowler).

¹² Epicharmus Fr. 135 (PCG); cf. Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1.6.2.

¹³ See Robertson 2001, although he draws on late evidence.

¹⁴ Luyster 1965, 160-2. Robertson 2001, 46;

¹⁵ Halm-Tisserant, 1986, 277; Marx 1993 265-266; Hartswick 1993, 278.

¹⁶ Halm-Tisserant, 1986, 277-278; Hartswick 1993, 278-282; Marx 1993, 263 and 265.

¹⁷ Hartswick 1993, 285; Villing 1992, 70.

therefore, that this political approach is relevant to my material and arguments. The religious connotations of the aegis and its relationship to Athena's role as civic goddess are important contextual frameworks, but they form only the background to my study.

1.3. Method and materials

I aim to contribute primarily to scholarship on monstrosity and hybrid bodies in Greek art, literature, and thought. Here, I depart from prevailing structuralist methods of understanding ancient monsters through binary conceptualisations of self and other, monsters and gods. Structuralist scholarship has a knack for conclusions, because its consistent and highly structured systems work like mathematical formulae. Thus, Ismene Lada-Richards views monstrosity as a culturally determined other to the norm, and Greek cultural thought as "neatly ordered" into categories of the human, animal, and divine.¹⁸ If these compartments are the norm, then it follows that the monstrous is whatever other disrupts or exists outside this taxonomy. However easily my questions might be answered by this formula, ancient Greek cultural thought was not so 'neatly ordered.' Ancient material suggests far more slippage between the categories of beast, monster, and god than structuralist compartmentalisations usually acknowledge. The alterity of divine bodies, such as the polymorphic Dionysus, Zeus-as-thunderbolt, or hybrid gods like Pan, suggest an ill-defined line between divine and 'monstrous' appearances. Gods raise monsters and send them against humans, and the gorgoneion in the *Iliad* is a 'portent of Zeus.'¹⁹ Rather than a strict dichotomy between well-defined gods and uncategorisable monsters, both can be arranged into various configurations of opposition and alliance as strange and fearsome supernatural powers. The mere fact that Athena's aegis can so closely resemble a hybrid body in art suggests that a systematically binary formulation of self-other, god-monster, Olympian-chthonic does not account for how these images might have been viewed in their ancient context.

¹⁸ Lada-Richards 1998, 42, 46.

¹⁹ Hesiod, *Theogony* 327-9; *Il.* 5.742.

Rather than applying preconceived taxonomical structures to ancient Greece, I explore the notion of social or ontological categorisation as it appears in my sources by examining visual and symbolic patterns or correspondences within and between artworks and texts. Rather than rigid categories, these correspondences create frameworks for understanding figures or elements which the everyday world around them reinforces. For instance, a 6th century Athenian sees only men wearing armour in real life, and thus associates armour with masculinity in art. It retains this categorisation when placed on women, and this incongruity with reality also marks armoured female figures as mythical or divine, other to the everyday norm. I think through a dynamic (not a hard boundary) between alterity and normality, but one grounded in layers of reality rather than an oppositional taxonomy of self and other. This acknowledges the uncertain space that fantastic iconography (of gods or monsters) occupies within normative visual experience, ever-present and demanding attention, but removed from the real or the possible. Figuring boundaries as normative rather than prescribed allows us to better understand their constant re-negotiation and the integrity of instability and transgression to any system of categorisation.

The corpus of material for this study is a combination of Homeric to 5th century literature and a selection of 6th century Attic vase paintings. The hybrid-monstrous aegis can be used to a similar end in literature and iconography: to portray Athena as a figure who probes and transgresses boundaries between categories of being. The *Iliad* and Euripides' *Ion* are my main literary sources, containing the most extensive extant discussions of the (hybrid-monstrous) aegis from the archaic and classical periods.²⁰ They bookend the aegis' representations in literature and art during this period, the *Iliad* forming a starting-point and framework, and the *Ion* receiving and exemplifying its subsequent development. My visual material is a selection of 6th century Attic vase paintings which portray the hybrid-monstrous aegis. The aegis first appears in art in the 570s, and the variety of forms which it assumes in later representations develop throughout this century. My selection charts this

²⁰ Some speculate that the aegis-gorgoneion in the *Iliad* is an interpolation, because of its late appearance in art (Marx 1993, 260; Hartswick 1993, 278). Considering the significance of other resonances between the gorgon and Athena (see 5.2), I do not take this as fact.

development, from the early cape-aegis to the first appearances of the gorgoneion blazon to the scaled bib-aegides more common in later art. Although sculpture, non-Attic art, and later material are interesting for my general inquiry, these temporal and geographical limitations ensure continuity within my corpus. Vase painting is the medium in which the development of the aegis can most clearly be charted, and in which its presence in narrative scenes is most complex and charged.

1.4. Outline

The following chapters explore four interrelated aspects of the relationship between Athena's aegis and hybrid-monstrosity, each of which invokes themes of liminality and boundary-crossing. Firstly, I discuss the aegis-gorgoneion and Athena's gendered assemblage, drawing on her arming scene in *Iliad* 5 to analyse its simultaneous associations with martial masculinity and female monstrosity. The correspondences between Athena's androgynous gender presentation and the aegis' hybrid nature are central to this work. The second chapter explores the ways in which the aegis does – and does not – make Athena's body look like a hybrid. I consider its simultaneous representation as a body and a garment, and Greek views on women's layered bodies. Chapter three explores these analyses in narrative contexts, investigating how the hybrid-monstrous aegis draws visual parallels between Athena's appearance and that of a monster in scenes of heroic monster fights and raises questions about the categorisation of bodies. Finally, chapter four will explore the underlying connection between monstrosity and a figure's existence/manifestation as an image, which I argue is relevant to both Athena and Medusa and exemplified by the aegis-gorgoneion. In each context, the monstrous aegis places Athena in multiple categories at once: masculine and feminine, hybrid and humanoid, god and monster, image and moving body. It is an agent of transformation. I conclude that this polymorphism grants Athena a similar fantastical or unrealistic body to a hybrid monster. She is an excellent vector for artistic and literary explorations of the nature, limits, and transgression of cultural and ontological taxonomies.

2. The Gorgon Androgynous

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will investigate the ways in which Athena's androgynous (or 'hybrid') gendered appearance interacts with the hybrid monstrosity of the aegis, establishing a crucial framework for reading this hybridity overall. Any discussion of Athena's iconography, roles, and attributes would be incomplete without a consideration of gender. Athena's masculinity – her martial appearance and prowess as a warrior, her rejection of subjugation to men through marriage – has been broadly construed by scholars as unproblematic in the system of Ancient Greek thought about gender.²¹ Although she transgresses the limitations placed on human women, her loyalty to her father ensures that she never destabilises the patriarchal Olympian order.²² Whilst this reading matches Athena's role in texts such as the *Odyssey* or Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, other ancient sources imply that her androgynous appearance was not unproblematic to the Greeks. Aristophanes disparagingly compares it to culturally aberrant male femininity in the *Birds*, and Herodotus and Plato require an explanation for why Athens' patron goddess dresses like a man.²³ Both locate this aetiology at a distance from contemporary Greek civic society. Plato claims that women were warriors in ancient Athens, and Herodotus says that Athena's attire (including the aegis) originated amongst Libyan women.²⁴ Rather than being unquestioningly accepted, Athena's gender nonconformity marks her as an outsider to human society despite her importance as a civic deity. It emphasises her simultaneous immanence and distance. The composite appearances of monsters and hybrids also situate their 'reality' at a distance from civilisation. You can see an *image* of a gorgon on the Acropolis, but the real ones live only in Libya.

The aegis-gorgoneion gives Athena a dual association with masculine militarism and female monstrosity, aligning her non-normative gender presentation with the monster's non-normative

²¹ E.g. Deacy 2008; Niels 2001; Murnaghan 1995; Zeitlin 1978.

²² Murnaghan 1995, 62; Zeitlin 1978, 172.

²³ Aristophanes, *Birds* 829-831.

²⁴ Plato, *Critias* 110b; Herodotus, *Histories* 4.189.

body. I first analyse the martial masculine associations of the gorgoneion in the *Iliad*, closely reading its role in Athena's gender-transformative arming scene in Book 5. Later material, visual and textual, picks up on these military connotations, but also expands on Medusa's nature as a dangerous and aberrant female monster. I argue therefore that in 6th century art, the gorgoneion on Athena's aegis holds the simultaneous charge of military masculinity and aberrant female monstrosity in one. This duality makes the aegis the only part of Athena's ensemble which is neither solely masculine nor feminine. To contemplate it is to contemplate the complexities of Athena's gender nonconformity, simultaneously potentially unproblematic and potentially aberrant. This is the first way in which the hybrid-monstrosity of the aegis constructs Athena's nature as a boundary-crossing figure, and it underlies other applications of the motif.

2.2. The *Iliad* and the military gorgoneion

In Athena's arming scene in *Iliad* 5, the aegis-gorgoneion is one of the accessories that enables her transformation from a more feminine aspect into a masculine warrior body. Rather than aberrant monstrous hybridity, it signifies supernatural divine power, particularly of Zeus. Here, Athena and Hera are both preparing to enter the battle, but only Athena receives a formulaic arming scene like that of a male hero.²⁵ The passage is bookended by an emphasis on Athena's paternity: she is the κούρη Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο ('daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus') at line 733, and ὄβριμοπάτρη ('mighty-fathered') at line 747. The deployment of Zeus' epithet αἰγιόχοιο ('aegis-bearing') from the outset associates Athena's martial accessories with her father's power:

αὐτὰρ Ἀθηναίη κούρη Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
πέπλον μὲν κατέχευεν ἑάνον πατρὸς ἐπ' οὔδει
ποικίλον, ὃν ῥ' αὐτὴ ποιήσατο καὶ κάμε χερσίν:
ἦ δὲ χιτῶν' ἐνδῦσα Διὸς νεφεληγερέταο

²⁵ Paris, *Il.*3.330-338; Agamemnon, *Il.*11.17-45; Patroclus, *Il.*16.131-139; Achilles, *Il.*19.369-74 and 380-383.

τεύχεσιν ἐς πόλεμον θωρήσσετο δακρυόεντα.
ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρ' ὤμοισιν βάλετ' αἰγίδα θυσσανόεσσαν
δεινήν, ἣν περὶ μὲν πάντη Φόβος ἐστεφάνωται,
ἐν δ' Ἔρις, ἐν δ' Ἀλκή, ἐν δὲ κρυόεσσα Ἴωκή,
ἐν δέ τε Γοργεῖη κεφαλὴ δεινοῖο πελώρου
δεινὴ τε σμερδνὴ τε, Διὸς τέρας αἰγιόχοιο.
κρατὶ δ' ἐπ' ἀμφίφαλον κυνέην θέτο τετραφάληρον
χρυσείην, ἑκατὸν πολίων πρυλέεσσ' ἀραρυῖαν:
ἐς δ' ὄχεα φλόγεα ποσὶ βήσετο, λάζετο δ' ἔγχος
βριθὺ μέγα στιβαρόν, τῷ δάμνησι σίχας ἀνδρῶν
ἠρώων, οἷσιν τε κοτέσσεται ὀβριμοπάτρη.

But Athena, the daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, cast down her fine iridescent robe onto her father's floor, which she had made herself and worked by hand. Then putting on the tunic of cloud-gathering Zeus, she equipped herself with armour for tearful battle. Around her shoulders she threw the terrible tasselled aegis, which fear encircled all around, and on it was strife, on it was resilience, on it was chilling rout, and on it was the head of the terrible monster, the gorgon, awful and terrifying, the portent of aegis-bearing Zeus. On her head she placed the golden dog-skin helmet, double-horned, quadruple-bossed, fitted with warriors of a hundred cities. Into the gleaming chariot she stepped, grasping a huge, heavy, sturdy spear, with which she subdues the ranks of mortal heroes with whom she, the mighty-fathered, is angry. (*Iliad* 5.733-47)²⁶

Unlike the male heroes, Athena transforms from femininity to masculinity. She must discard her πέπλος ('robe') (5.734) before she can assume her armour, a garment which explicitly signifies her

²⁶ All translations are my own.

active participation in the female activity of weaving (5.735) and her aspect as a craft goddess.²⁷ This emphasis on her place in the female sphere suggests that it is as central to her character as her masculine warriorhood, but she cannot wear both forms at once. Her assumption of a different robe, the χιτῶνα Διὸς ('Zeus' tunic') (5.736) compares these two sides of Athena's character to emphasise their difference, again marking her masculine accoutrement as inseparable from her father's power.

Next comes the aegis. It is emphatically a military tool, part of Athena's τεύχεσιν ἐς πόλεμον ('armour for battle') (5.737). Although the noun *Gorgo* is feminine, the gorgoneion is a masculine signifier in the *Iliad*, also associated with the assemblage of a warrior's body in Agamemnon's arming scene at 11.15-46. In Book 8, the raging Hector 'has the eyes of the gorgon or of Ares,' the interchangeability cementing the gorgon's connection to the physicality of the male warrior.²⁸ The aegis' description echoes Agamemnon's gorgon-bossed shield at 11.36-7, cementing its martial functionality within generic language. The verb στεφανῶ ('encircle') describes the blazons of both objects (5.739, 11.36), and the preposition περὶ ('around') introduces the presence of Φόβος ('fear') upon them (5.739, 11.37). The function of the gorgoneion is also similar: it is terrifying to look upon, δεινὴ τε σμερδνὴ ('awful and fearful') (5.742), and βλοσυρῶπις... δεινὸν δερκομένη ('grim-looking... glowering awfully') (11.36-7). This emphasis on the gaze recalls Hector's gorgon-like eyes at 8.350. Jean-Pierre Vernant connects the gorgon in all its aspects, auditory and visual, to the fear provoked by the battle-rage of the warrior, and indeed the word σμερδνὴ ('fearful') (5.742) can refer to fear produced by either sight or noise.²⁹ This is interesting, both since the Gorgons retain an association with terrible noise in Hesiod and Pindar and because a cognate word describes the fear produced by the sight of Athena in armour in *Homeric Hymn 28* (11).³⁰ In archaic poetry, this semantic field unites

²⁷ For the garment's association with Athena, see Llewellyn-Jones 2001, 241.

²⁸ *Il.* 8.350.

²⁹ Vernant, 1991a. 117; see *Il.* 15.687, σμερδνὸν βοῶων ('awful cry'). Σμερδαλέος also describes a serpent at *Il.* 2.309, and the aegis again at *Il.* 21.401.

³⁰ Hesiod, *Shield of Heracles* 232-235; Pindar, *Pythian 12* 20-21.

the gorgon's terrifying gaze, the terror produced by warriors in battle, and the sight of the aegis and Athena in armour.

The gorgoneion is also the Διὸς τέρας αἰγιόχοιο ('the portent of aegis-bearing Zeus') (5.742), again grounding Athena's military power in her connection to her father. His epithet here reminds us that Athena's aegis is his aspect and tool, rather like the *chiton* she dons. The deployment of the epithet as Athena puts on the garment almost turns *her* into the Διὸς τέρας ('portent of Zeus'), a fearsome extension of his powers whose terrifying gaze has similar properties to the gorgoneion.³¹ Yet what kind of a monstrosity is this? Rather than a force of chaos opposed to Olympian power, the gorgoneion represents the fearsome alterity of the gods: the eyes of Ares, the terror-inducing form of Athena, the instrument with which Apollo puts men to rout and Zeus strikes up thunderstorms.³² In the *Odyssey*, it is Persephone's instrument of terror in the underworld.³³ This is not a divine appropriation of a monstrous power (no mention is made of Medusa as the entity from whom the gorgoneion is derived), but an aspect of divine power, emphasising the awesome might and terror of the gods. The gorgoneion-bossed aegis is a focal point of Athena's transformation, invoking a variety of complex associations with the power of Zeus and the attributes and physicality of the male warrior. In this passage, the aegis and the gorgoneion have more bearing on Athena's boundary-crossing gender presentation than her relationship to monstrous alterity. They signify her close connection to Zeus, the condition under which her masculinity is enabled and legitimated.

Archaeological finds and the iconographic record corroborate the gorgoneion's association with the warrior's body. Gorgoneia have been found on greaves, breastplates, and real shields, as well as appearing frequently on shields in art.³⁴ The earliest extant depictions of the aegis-gorgoneion come from scenes of the birth of Athena [Figs. 3 and 6], in which she emerges fully armed just like in *Homeric Hymn 28* (15-16) or Hesiod's *Theogony* (929-930). Euripides' *Ion* represents the aegis as a

³¹ See *Il.*1.200, where Athena's eyes 'flash terribly.'

³² Apollo wields the aegis thus at *Il.*15.307-311, and Zeus uses it to create a storm at *Il.*17.593-596.

³³ *Od.*11.634-635.

³⁴ See Fig. 2 and *LIMC IV 2*, Gorgo 158, 253, 350, pp. 174, 180, 188 for gorgons on real shields and armour.

battle-trophy of Athena's own victory over a gorgon.³⁵ The aegis-gorgoneion retains a masculine, martial association in both visual and literary material beyond the *Iliad*.

2.3. Medusa and female monstrosity

It is strange that no mention is made of Medusa in relation either to the gorgoneion or to Perseus in the *Iliad*, leading scholars to speculate that this myth developed later than the epic oral tradition and the iconography of the gorgoneion.³⁶ The emergence of this myth in post-Homeric material connects the aegis-gorgoneion to the conventional Greek association between female masculinity and monstrosity. In literature, violent women who act or think like powerful men are frequently compared to monsters, such as Medea and Clytemnestra in Attic tragedy.³⁷ The ancient Greeks legitimated social control of women by representing those who adopted masculine roles as monstrous and violent abusers of power.³⁸ Despite being a warrior woman with a monstrous head on her chest, most scholars agree that Athena's masculinity presents no threat to the patriarchal order and has no aberrant charge.³⁹ The aegis-gorgoneion is conventionally taken as a symbol of the subjugation of chaotic and powerful female monstrosity, assimilated to Olympian power as Athena assimilates the furies to the Athenian state in the *Eumenides*.⁴⁰ Murnaghan believes that Athena's disavowal of marriage allows her to remain purely loyal to her father (rather than to husband or child), and that rather than a dangerous appropriation of masculine power "her unique combination of male and female traits makes her the ideal child for Zeus, one who resembles her father but does not threaten to displace him or to disturb the world order he controls."⁴¹

³⁵ Euripides, *Ion* 983-997.

³⁶ Hopkins 1934, 343.

³⁷ Euripides, *Medea* 1343; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1234, *Libation-Bearers* 831-832.

³⁸ Zeitlin 1978, 152.

³⁹ Eg. Deacy 2008, 31; Murnaghan 1995, 62; Zeitlin 1978, 172.

⁴⁰ Eg. Vernant 1991b, 148; Rynearson 2013, 17.

⁴¹ Murnaghan 1995, 62.

Athena may not *act* to disrupt the Olympian patriarchal order in canonical literature, but it is how she *looks* that poses problems for writers like Aristophanes, Herodotus, and Plato. Two out of three discuss her appearance as a statue: Plato mentions τῆς θεοῦ σχῆμα καὶ ἄγαλμα ('the goddess' appearance and statue') and Herodotus τὴν δὲ ἄρα ἐσθῆτα καὶ τὰς αἰγίδας τῶν ἀγαλμάτων τῆς Ἀθηναίης ('the clothing and aegides of the statues of Athena').⁴² I argue that the appearance and presence of the aegis-gorgoneion in art poses questions about the nature and legitimacy of Athena's masculine attire, suggesting an alignment with the threat and aberrancy posed by female masculinity by associating her with Medusa.

The aegis-gorgoneion gives Athena two different faces, one divine and one monstrous, which suggests a duality to her character and a tension between the two. In the *Iliad*, the gorgoneion's association with battle-rage, martial terror, and the power of Zeus reinforce the martial masculinity of Athena's helmeted head rather than problematise it. In 6th century art, the gendered charge of the gorgoneion becomes more complex. It does retain its military associations, but the iconography of Medusa is now prevalent as an image of grotesque, aberrant, monstrous, and often masculine womanhood. Medusa and her sisters are frequently bearded in art, an attribute which disappears when they lose their grotesque faces in the 5th century.⁴³ **Figs. 10** and **11** are rare but significant examples of bearded aegis gorgoneia. These gorgoneia stare characteristically outwards, confronting the viewer as Athena's other head turns to the side. This head is helmed in both cases, the conventional, familiar form of her masculinity. The bearded gorgoneia, affixed to Athena's body and with a far more forceful gaze, perhaps compel the viewer to re-think the helmed head. Does Athena represent a tamed and conventional manifestation of divine female masculinity, or is her androgyny still indissoluble from aberrant gender nonconformity and the threat it poses to the social order? Is she beautiful to look at, or is she a grotesque hybrid?

⁴² Plato, *Critias*, 110b; Herodotus, *Histories* 4.189.

⁴³ See **Fig. 1** and *LIMC IV 2*, Gorgo, 293, 313, pp. 183-184; compare with *LIMC VII 2*, Perseus 142a, 147, pp. 296-297.

Even when beardless, the aegis-gorgoneion can still pose questions about Athena's gender in vase painting. On **Figs. 3, 12, and 15**, the gorgoneion is painted white, a conventional signifier of womanhood. Athena's white skin often differentiates her starkly from armed male figures [**Fig. 12**], and the colouring of these gorgoneia emphasises their fleshiness and encourages us to read them as part of her body. It is their intended 'ugly' appearance that differentiates them from normative depictions of women, again reminding us that Athena's armed body is not normative either. Even if the aegis-gorgoneion can symbolise victory over female monstrosity, it makes this same monstrosity part of Athena's body and image. Her armed appearance draws this conjunction into the conventional association between female masculinity and monstrosity. Athena's image thus flickers between two modes, embodying both the taming of female monstrosity/masculinity, and its lingering threat.

2.4. Conclusion

The aegis-gorgoneion makes Athena's gendered body complicated to read. In the *Iliad*, it allows her to transgress gendered boundaries and assume the insignia and power of a masculine warrior's body. Whilst it retains this martial association in subsequent art and literature, the development of Medusa's story and iconography introduces a stronger association with female monstrosity and aberrant androgyny. In 6th century Attic vase painting, the aegis' gorgoneion's association with Zeus through its Iliadic connections or imagery of the birth of Athena legitimises her masculine power and accoutrement, whilst the *appearance* of the head unsettles this legitimacy. Its grotesque nature and physical androgyny denote the threat that female masculinity poses to systems of cultural order and categorisation.

Athena's appearance in 6th century vase painting can be divided neatly into overt masculine and feminine attributes: helmet, spear, shield on one side, *peplos*, hair, and skin on the other – except for the aegis. It has a martial function, but it *isn't* normal armour which adorns a mortal warrior's

body. It features a female figure, but one associated with androgyny and military insignia. It is Zeus' instrument, but visually exclusively appears on Athena's body, and bears a connection with aberrant female monstrosity. Emma Aston describes Medusa's hybridity thus: "her anatomy does not present the viewer with a clear conjunction of animal and human half: rather, she is a tangle, a confusion, of the two elements, and all the more dangerous for that."⁴⁴ This, I contend, is what the monstrous aegis (especially with the gorgoneion) does to Athena's gendered hybridity. Our literary sources suggest that Athena's androgynous appearance set her outside the gendered social structure of the city, relegating any living embodiment of female militarism to the distant past or the edges of the known world. The aegis-gorgoneion reinforces this gendered alterity from mortal life by associating it with the supernatural. In her nature as a figure who crosses between and transcends gendered social categories, Athena becomes socially and taxonomically akin to a monster.

⁴⁴ Aston 2011, 40.

3. Athena's Body in Layers

3.1. Introduction

I turn now to the snakes and the skin of the aegis to explore another boundary which it challenges: that between body and clothing. The aegis is made from parts of different bodies, which structure Athena's shape and often appear to be alive, prompting questions about the body's limits and construction. Layering and adornment is a gendered discourse in ancient Greece, connected to anxieties about women's 'deceptive' beauty hiding disruptive personalities. Where does Athena, Olympus' good girl *par excellence*, wearing a monstrous body *over* her dress, fit within this paradigm?

I first discuss the construction/creation of Athena's body from her clothing and attributes, drawing on scholarship about theatrical satyr costumes as a framework for thinking about clothing and hybrid bodies in ancient Greek visual culture. I then analyse a selection of vase paintings to explore how the aegis simultaneously presents itself as potentially a living part of Athena's body, and as an inanimate and constructed garment. I next turn to layering and gender, arguing that the specific hybridity invoked by the aegis is inextricable from ancient Greek thought about women and clothing. Here, I draw on Pandora's birth in Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Creusa's gorgon venom plot in Euripides' *Ion*. The problematisation of the body/costume binary is another crucial framework for understanding the nature and function of the monstrous aegis, and another way in which it represents Athena as a liminal figure whose body is never entirely one thing or another.

3.2. An animate garment

Costume is body for all gods, but especially Athena. Anthropomorphic gods were made identifiable in Greek art by the addition of attributes or accessories to 'generic templates' of bodies: young

women, young men, older men.⁴⁵ A divine body is a combination of the idealised artistic body of its period and a selection of objects, garments, animals, attendants, or contextual mythical frames. Since the divine body manifests only in art or literature it is, like the monstrous, ontologically inseparable from the practice of its representation.⁴⁶ Athena's body is constructed by layers upon layers of garments and attributes, more than any other divinity.⁴⁷ Her 'generic template' is the beautiful young woman, and Llewellyn-Jones has noted that the young female body in archaic art is "inseparable from its formal clothing."⁴⁸ Athena is indeed marked as female by the amount that she wears. **Fig. 16** provides a good contrast between her fully draped body and the bare legs of the male heroes. This long *peplos*, however, is overlaid by Athena's aegis and offset by her helmet. Her individual appearance emerges through a tension between contrasting gendered attributes, which draws attention to the importance of these attributes in defining her identity. We will return to this gendered discourse later, but there is more to Athena's 'extra created' body: the appearance of the monstrous aegis frequently suggests that her clothing is not just essential to her identity, but even animate itself, perhaps part of her flesh.⁴⁹

From the *Iliad* onwards, the aegis almost always has some organic component.⁵⁰ Pherecydes and Epicharmus represented it as comprised of Medusa's head and the skin of a giant respectively, and Euripides draws these aetiologies together in the *Ion* to present the gorgon as an earth-born ally of the giants whose entire body constituted the aegis.⁵¹ In early 6th century art, when the aegis first appears, it is sometimes exclusively marked by the snakes protruding from Athena's back [see **Figs. 1, 2.2, 5**]. Purely fabric aegides become more common after the archaic period, but Villing finds that

⁴⁵ Aston 2011, 312.

⁴⁶ See Aston 2011, 27.

⁴⁷ Deacy 2008, 7.

⁴⁸ Llewellyn-Jones 2001, 236.

⁴⁹ For 'extra created' see Aston 2011, 25.

⁵⁰ The gorgoneion at *Il.*5.742 could be an image, but the comparison of the gorgon's eyes to Ares' at *Il.*8.350 suggests animacy.

⁵¹ Pherecydes Fr. 11 (Fowler); Epicharmus Fr. 135 (PCG); Euripides, *Ion* 989-997.

even in the early classical period over half of the aegides in vase paintings have hide-like dots, and about a third have scales.⁵²

Before analysing the interactions between this corporeality and Athena's body, I wish to introduce an additional critical framework: Anna Uhlig's work on the *perizoma*, animal-skin shorts with horse tail and phallus worn by satyr play choreuts. The *perizoma* allows an actor to perform a hybrid body, but it is also made from animal skin, juxtaposed with the naked torso and legs of the choreut. Uhlig calls this 'hybrid nudity:' "the *perizoma* combines with the exposed limbs of the choreut to represent a truly composite body: part mimetic, part 'real'; part covered, part exposed; part animal, part human; part dead, part living."⁵³ Rather than imitating the bare skin beneath the garment, the hybrid-monstrous aegis suggests a physicality and integrity to Athena's overabundant layers. As with the satyr choreuts, the contradictions of this embodiment (flesh and garment, hybrid monstrosity and divine anthropomorphism) remain simultaneous and unresolvable. Instead of exploring the construction of the dramatic body, the tension between animacy and intimacy which the aegis embodies in vase painting plays with the embodiment of divine identity in its attributes. The bodies of aegis-bearing Athena and the satyr choreut both suggest that the layered body extends beyond flesh, and they do so by drawing attention to its simultaneous nature as organic and inanimate.

Like the *perizoma* in later vase painting, the aegis in the 6th century is frequently represented both as a garment made of dead skin, and as a potential part of its wearer's body which has a kinetic animacy of its own. The aegis often shapes Athena's body, defining her silhouette. In **Figs. 4, 13.1, and 14.1** especially, it gives her torso a blocky or rounded shape. Although this extending property suggests that the aegis is not her own flesh, it is all we can see of her upper body. In all these examples it is scaled or made from dotted animal hide. We are denied all knowledge of Athena's potential body under her layers, but the body-ness of these layers is highlighted.⁵⁴ In these examples and when it fits more closely to her torso [see **Figs. 12 and 15**], the aegis is usually distinguished

⁵² Villing 1992, 58-59.

⁵³ Uhlig 2018, 159.

⁵⁴ See Llewellyn-Jones 2001, 241-242.

from Athena's body by bands or hems which suggest the edge of fabric, and by the difference between its black slip and her white-painted skin. In **Figs. 12** and **15** however, the white-painted gorgoneia draw the garment into the same field of visual signification as Athena's flesh, disrupting the boundaries which the hems erect between garment and body. Gorgoneia, which usually face outwards and confront the viewer when Athena looks to the side [**Figs. 10, 11, 12, 15**], have an agency and a connection to the real world which Athena's other face lacks. In their ability to engage and return the viewer's gaze, they are more alive than her anthropomorphic face.

Even more pronounced is the animacy of the aegis' snake-fringe. On older cape-aegides it often protrudes from Athena's back as if growing there [**Figs. 1, 2.1**], swirling around her with a dynamism and irregularity that suggests movement [**Figs. 1** and **5** especially]. In **Fig. 1**, the length and sweeping movements of the snakes mirror the motion of Athena and Perseus' flight, and in **Fig. 5** they coil in different patterns, appearing individualistic and curious. In this painting, the snakes clearly end in triangles of fabric, creating a confusing image of the aegis as living garment. **Fig. 13.1** has a similar effect, contrasting the animacy of the snakes with the round hems which attach them to the aegis. In **Fig. 10**, the snakes sprouting from the gorgon's head encourage us to assume that the aegis snakes likewise protrude from a body, marking a contrast with the painting's fabric aegis. The aegis snakes often flicker indefinably between ornament and body. In **Figs. 3, 10**, and **16**, they are arranged partially in a repeated identical pattern, suggesting ornamentation and inanimacy, which is then broken by one or two snakes, suggesting life. They compel the viewer to look closely and ponder the nature of Athena's body.

Athena's aegis in 6th century art is not represented as definitively part of her flesh, but its simultaneous nature as both garment and living creature suggests the potentiality of her hybrid body. It disrupts the categorical separation of bodies and objects. The hybridity which it suggests is the essential hybridity of all divine bodies (and perhaps all human bodies, too), which are constructed and identified as much by their attributes and accessories as their flesh. The aegis'

supernatural animacy and movement places Athena's divine hybridity beyond the realm of *human* costuming (like the *perizoma*), emphasising the unreality of her body.

3.3. Layering and gender

This layering-as-hybridity and the integrity of clothing to the body is also relevant not only to Athena's divinity but also her gender, ever an important framework for understanding Athena's image. We have noted that women's bodies are by definition covered and draped in archaic art, and Llewellyn-Jones also connects the inseparability of Athena's body from her clothing with her virginal modesty: even without the aegis, her *peplos* is still a protective layer.⁵⁵ This may be accurate, but the layered and adorned body is often cause for paranoia about women's deceptive beauty in Greek literature. Aston notes that this paranoia is relevant to the study of animal hybridity: the beauty of Pandora in *Works and Days* and Helen in the *Iliad* conceal animalistic characters within.⁵⁶ Athena is an important agent in making Pandora's body one with its beautiful adornment: πάντα δέ οἱ χρῶϊ κόσμον ἐφήρμοσε ('all these she affixed to her skin as adornment').⁵⁷ This attachment of *kosmos* to flesh is directly followed by Hermes giving her ψεύδεά θ' αἰμυλίους τε λόγους καὶ ἐπίκλοπον ἦθος ('lies and manipulative words and a wily nature').⁵⁸ Athena's conjunction of adornment with body is juxtaposed with the revelation that Pandora is *not* what she seems. Her body is entirely *kosmos*, which conceals her κύνεός νόος (67) ('doglike/shameless mind'). This cultural context surely problematises and complicates Athena's layered body, itself both gender-nonconforming and suggestive of the potentiality of monstrous hybridity.

Euripides' *Ion* contains the most informative discussion of the relationship between Athena's layered body and tropes of women's violence and deception. This is a late text in comparison to the rest of

⁵⁵ Llewellyn-Jones 2001, 236, 242-244

⁵⁶ Aston 2011, 329-330.

⁵⁷ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 76.

⁵⁸ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 78.

my material, but Euripides invokes various motifs present in older material, such as the aegis' military connotations and an association between female monstrosity and female violence which threatens the patriarchal order. In this passage, the Athenian princess Creusa is trying to murder Ion, whom she thinks is her husband's illegitimate son. He is in fact hers from her rape by Apollo. The collapsing of boundaries between bodies and ornament implicates Athena in Creusa's murderous plot:

Πρεσβύτης: ὦμοι, κακίζη: φέρε, σὺ νῦν βούλευέ τι.

Κρέουσα: καὶ μὴν ἔχω γε δόλια καὶ δραστήρια.

Πρεσβύτης: ἀμφοῖν ἂν εἶην τοῖνδ' ὑπηρέτης ἐγώ.

Κρέουσα: ἄκουε τοίνυν: οἴσθα γηγενῆ μάχην;

Πρεσβύτης: οἶδ', ἦν Φλέγρᾳ Γίγαντες ἔστησαν θεοῖς.

Κρέουσα: ἐνταῦθα Γοργόν' ἔτεκε Γῆ, δεινὸν τέρας.

Πρεσβύτης: ἦ παισὶν αὐτῆς σύμμαχον, θεῶν πόνον;

Κρέουσα: ναί: καὶ νιν ἔκτειν' ἡ Διὸς Παλλὰς θεά.

Πρεσβύτης: ποῖόν τι μορφῆς σχῆμ' ἔχουσαν ἀγρίας;

Κρέουσα: θώρακ' ἐχίδνης περιβόλοις ὠπλισμένον.

Πρεσβύτης: ἄρ' οὐτός ἐσθ' ὁ μῦθος ὃν κλύω πάλαι;

Κρέουσα: ταύτης Ἀθάναν δέρος ἐπὶ στέρνοις ἔχειν.

Πρεσβύτης: ἦν αἰγίδ' ὀνομάζουσι, Παλλάδος στολήν;

Κρέουσα: τόδ' ἔσχεν ὄνομα θεῶν ὅτ' ἦξεν ἐς δόρυ.

Πρεσβύτης: τί δῆτα, θύγατερ, τοῦτο σοῖς ἐχθροῖς βλάβος;

Κρέουσα: Ἐριχθόνιον οἴσθ', ἦ — ; τί δ' οὐ μέλλεις, γέρον;

Πρεσβύτης: ὃν πρῶτον ὑμῶν πρόγονον ἐξανῆκε γῆ;

Κρέουσα: τούτῳ δίδωσι Παλλὰς ὄντι νεογόνῳ —

Πρεσβύτης: τί χρῆμα; μέλλον γάρ τι προσφέρεις ἔπος.

Κρέουσα: δισσοὺς σταλαγμοὺς αἵματος Γοργοῦς ἄπο.

Πρεσβύτερης: ἰσχὺν ἔχοντας τίνα πρὸς ἀνθρώπου φύσιν;

Κρέουσα: τὸν μὲν θανάσιμον, τὸν δ' ἀκεσφόρον νόσων.

Πρεσβύτερης: ἐν τῷ καθάψασ' ἀμφὶ παιδὶ σώματος;

Κρέουσα: χρυσοῖσι δεσμοῖς: ὁ δὲ δίδωσ' ἐμῷ πατρί.

Πρεσβύτερης: κείνου δὲ κατθανόντος ἐς σὲ ἀφίκετο;

Κρέουσα: ναί: κάπτι καρπῷ γ' αὐτ' ἐγὼ χερὸς φέρω.

Πρεσβύτερης: πῶς οὖν κέκρανται δίπτυχον δῶρον θεᾶς;

Κρέουσα: κοίλης μὲν ὅστις φλεβὸς ἀπέσταξεν φόνω —

Πρεσβύτερης: τί τῷδε χρῆσθαι; δύνασιν ἐκφέρει τίνα;

Κρέουσα: νόσους ἀπείργει καὶ τροφὰς ἔχει βίου.

Πρεσβύτερης: ὁ δεύτερος δ' ἀριθμὸς ὧν λέγεις τί δρᾷ;

Κρέουσα: κτείνει, δρακόντων ἰὸς ὧν τῶν Γοργόνας.

Πρεσβύτερης: ἐς ἓν δὲ κραθέντ' αὐτὸν ἢ χωρὶς φορεῖς;

Κρέουσα: χωρὶς: κακῷ γὰρ ἐσθλὸν οὐ συμμείγνυται.

Πρεσβύτερης: ὧ φιλότατη παῖ, πάντ' ἔχεις ὅσων σε δεῖ.

Κρέουσα: τούτῳ θανεῖται παῖς: σὺ δ' ὁ κτείνων ἔση.

Old man: Alas, you cower: come, plan something now.

Creusa: I've got one already, treacherous and sound.

Old man: I'd be your assistant in both respects.

Creusa: So listen: do you know the giant war?

Old man: Yes, when the giants stood against the gods at Phlegra.

Creusa: Earth bore the gorgon then, a terrible monster.

Old man: As an ally for all her children and a bane for the gods?

Creusa: Yes — and the goddess Pallas, Zeus' daughter, killed her.

Old man: What body of savage shape did it have?

Creusa: A breastplate equipped with the coils of a viper.

Old man: Is this the story which I heard of old?

Creusa: That Athena keeps its on her chest.

Old man: They call it the aegis, Pallas' raiment.

Creusa: It has this name because she darted to the battle of the gods.

Old man: What harm though, daughter, is this to your enemies?

Creusa: You know Erichthonius – but what wouldn't you know, old man?

Old man: He whom the earth sprouted, the first-born of your family?

Creusa: When he was a baby, Pallas gave him-

Old man: What? You're piling on these roundabout words.

Creusa: - two drops of blood from the Gorgon.

Old man: What power do they have against the human constitution?

Creusa: The one is lethal, the other cures illnesses.

Old man: On what did she fasten them around the child's body?

Creusa: On golden chains: and he gave them to my father.

Old man: And when he died they passed to you?

Creusa: Yes: and I carry them on the wrist of my hand.

Old man: So how is the goddess' duplicitous gift used?

Creusa: This, which dripped from the hollow vein at its slaughter -

Old man: How is it used? What power does it carry?

Creusa: - wards off illnesses and has nourishment for life.

Old man: What does the second one you spoke of do?

Creusa: It kills, since it is the poison of the gorgon's snakes.

Old man: Do you carry them mixed or separate?

Creusa: Mixed: for evil does not mingle with good.

Old man: Oh dear girl, you have everything you need.

Creusa: The boy will die by this: and you will be the killer. (Euripides, *Ion* 984-1019)

The passage establishes the aegis as a device which disrupts the boundary between adornment and body, tool and agent. Before the gorgon is slaughtered, it looks like θώρακ' ἐχίδνης περιβόλοις ὠπλισμένον (993) ('a breastplate equipped with the coils of a viper'). Its aegis-like appearance in life (unusual for depictions of gorgons) heavily emphasises its corporeality as Athena's accessory. This corporeality is further highlighted with the body-language of δέρος ἐπὶ σέρνοις ('skin on her chest') (995) when Athena dons it. She then gives two drops of the gorgon's blood to the baby Erichthonius, Creusa's ancestor (1000), held by ornamental golden chains (1107). The phrase καθάψασ' ἄμφι παιδὶ σώματος ('fastening them around the child's body') (1006) recalls the wording of Athena's adornment of Pandora in *Works and Days* (76), combining a verb denoting attachment/affixing and a noun implying the physical body. Its attachment to Creusa's flesh is also foregrounded at line 1009, which repeats two body-part words: καρπῶ... χερὸς φέρω ('I carry it on the wrist of my hand'). With the double powers of the gorgon's blood and venom (1005), this golden bracelet becomes an extension of the aegis, both monster and armour, adornment and weapon, protective and aggressive. This pseudo-aegis has another connection to Creusa's body: her grandfather Erichthonius was earth-born like the gorgon. This is emphasised by the verbal echoes of ἔτεκε γῆ ('the earth birthed') (989) and ἐξανῆκε γῆ ('the earth sprouted') (1000). The inherited aegis-bracelet is 'related' to Creusa by familial blood and venom.

The gendered dynamics of this passage are complex. Creusa's murderous intent is framed as 'monstrous' by her use of a monster's bodily matter which is both affixed to her flesh as adornment and permeates her flesh body through blood relation. With a similar dynamic to Pandora's 'deceptive' layers, Creusa's ornamental golden bracelet contains something monstrous just as the body it decorates conceals both a monstrous heritage and a murderous mind. What of Athena? The aegis here is tightly associated with her masculinity. She kills it herself in war (991), and it takes the form of a θώραξ ('breastplate') (993), a real piece of masculine armour rather than a cape, bib, or

sash. It is even named from Athena's eagerness to do battle (997).⁵⁹ It is because Athena slays this monster and makes it part of the assemblage of her body that its power is passed down to Creusa, who uses it for a violent act which threatens to destabilise the patriarchal ancestral structure of the Athenian state. Much emphasis is placed on how essential the bracelet is for Creusa's plan (984-985, 1023-1024). This passage problematises Athena's role and status as foundational city goddess. She, in a gender-transgressive manner, incorporates a monstrous body into her own and passes it down to her foster-family, resulting in its attempted deployment in a 'monstrous' violent action which almost destroys this family. Yet Athena initially killed the monster in order to help secure Olympian power. Euripides thinks through the aegis as body to explore (amongst other things) Athena's implication in this misogynistic discourse of the layered body and female violence/treachery. She remains an ambiguous figure, reversing the conventional paradigm of good exterior, bad interior. Her internal intention in slaying the gorgon bolsters Olympian/patriarchal power, but the external monstrous layers she assumes eventually come to potentially disrupt it.

3.4. Conclusion

The monstrous aegis invokes hybridity. Its ontological polyvalence clearly made it a useful signifier of ambiguity in bodies and stories. In visual material, it has features of both garment and living body, both attached to and distinguished from Athena's flesh. In literature it participates in the discourse of female adornment and beauty as layers which unite body and clothing to conceal a disruptive personality. The hybridity of the monstrous aegis is connected to its nature as a garment. It embodies the construction of bodies from disparate parts and grants these parts an animacy of their own and a potential integrity to the bodies they adorn. This question of integrity versus adornment is inextricable from Athena's gender nonconformity, and Euripides' *Ion* shows us how the previous chapter's identification of the aegis as simultaneously signalling martial masculinity and female

⁵⁹ ἤξεν comes from αἰσσω ('leap, spring'), which has the same initial sound as *aegis*.

monstrosity plays out in context. This double vision of Athena's body as potentially hybrid and potentially layered again distances her from human society and social categorisation. She exists in-between hybrid and humanoid form, and between gendered bodies: armed and military but also layered and adorned, the polyvalent aegis uniting these two semiotic fields. Athena can be multiple *types* of body at once, and the monstrous aegis' simultaneous nature as body and costume is vital to this process.

4. Athena's Monstrous Doubles

4.1. Introduction

In multiple pieces of ancient art, the hybrid-monstrous features of the aegis are drawn to precisely resemble the body of another depicted monster, putting Athena in direct visual parallel with monstrous forms. When Athena is juxtaposed with a monster she is usually assisting the hero who confronts it, so this dialogue extends between multiple bodies in the scene, prompting questions about which bodies and appearances belong to which kinds of being: gods, heroes, monsters, men, women. These images frequently destabilise the binary visual oppositions between categories such as hero and monster. Athena's masculinity as a non-normative 'hybrid' attribute which nevertheless also places her in visual parallel with an armed male hero is important here. With the monstrous aegis, she bears the visual attributes of hero and monster simultaneously, complicating their overtly oppositional relationship as well as probing the limits of her divine body. Once again, it allows her to embody multiple categories of being at once.

This chapter explores Athena's juxtaposition with two heroes and the monsters they confront. I discuss Heracles' fight with the hydra to explore how the hybrid-monstrous aegis enables the visual representation of the dynamics of monster-fights, engaging with questions about heroic bodies and the hero's relationship to the monster. I then turn to Perseus' flight from Medusa's sisters. These monsters have a charged connection to Athena, and these scenes put chapter two's analysis of the aegis as hybrid body into play. Confrontations with monsters are a major context in which the arguments of this thesis are enacted: that the monstrous aegis enables Athena's figure to disrupt taxonomical categories and that it aligns her as much with monstrous bodies as with divine.

4.2. Heracles and the Hydra

During a heroic monster fight, the definitions of types of being are both articulated and blurred. It sets the gods and their protégé heroes against monstrous forces, but the hero must match and

exceed a monster's power in order to defeat it, bringing him closer to its own nature. Monsters in Greek art and literature "exceed nature".⁶⁰ They are superfluous in size, number of body parts, or animal hybridity, and this excess extends into supernatural strength or power.⁶¹ Daniel Ogden (specifically on dragon-fights) notes a symmetry to these battles.⁶² Slayers consistently utilise the same techniques deployed by the dragon, be this fire, poison, or a curved sickle which mirrors the snake's coils.⁶³ Ogden understands the monstrous aegis in these terms, stating that "when Athene dons the aegis she could be thought to take on the attributes of the anguiform monster of which it is the trophy."⁶⁴ More often than she slays monsters herself, Athena constantly provides the tools and clever tricks which allow heroes to match a monster's excesses. This derives from her embodiment of μῆτις (cunning), which encompasses the uses of both technology and trickery, and which is associated with success in ambiguous situations in which physical odds are stacked against the hero.⁶⁵ In the words of Detienne and Vernant, "in order to dominate a changing situation, full of contrasts, it (*metis*) must become even more subtle, even more shifting, more polymorphic than the flow of time."⁶⁶ A monster fight, therefore, requires identities and bodies to become fluid and transformative. The explicit configurations of allegiance and opposition in which the participants are placed are destabilised by their appearances and actions.

In literature, the myth of Heracles and the hydra is suffused with themes of monstrous superfluity, allegiance, and force versus cunning. In the earliest literary account of the myth, Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the monster is overcome by βουλήσιν Ἀθηναίης ('Athena's contrivance') (318). The giant crab which aids the hydra as a match for Heracles' assistant nephew, Iolaus, first appears in 6th century art, and a later tradition has this labour discounted by Eurystheus because of Iolaus' assistance.⁶⁷

The monstrous 'team' mirrors the pair of heroes. Early visual representations of the hydra's defeat

⁶⁰ Aston 2011, 33-34.

⁶¹ Felton 2012, 104.

⁶² Ogden 2013a, 215.

⁶³ Ogden 2013b, 7; see also his schema of symmetrical dynamics at Ogden 2013b, xii.

⁶⁴ Ogden 2013a, 216.

⁶⁵ Detienne and Vernant 1978, 12-13.

⁶⁶ Detienne and Vernant 1978, 20.

⁶⁷ Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.5.2.

by fire and Hesiod's mention of Athena's plan suggest that the fractal sprouting of the hydra's heads was a known detail of the story in the 6th century.⁶⁸ It is a prime example of the failure of the hero's brute strength to overcome a monster of enormous physical superfluity, and its defeat by applied cunning associated with Athena, polymorphic *metis*.

Fig. 16, a late 6th century Attic lekythos, exemplifies these tensions between hero, monster, and Athena in Heracles' fight against the hydra. It embodies these 'matchings' between heroic and monstrous sides with a complex network of visual parallels. Athena's hybrid-monstrous aegis is the main verb in this sentence of symbolic language, articulating the question of who *looks* like who and what this says about various categories of being. There are five bodies on the lekythos: two different types of monster, two different types of hero, and Athena – whose figure visually echoes three of the other four. It is a slim vessel, prompting the viewer to turn it around and look closely in order to view the entire scene. It demands attention and thought.

Firstly, Athena's masculinity both aligns her with the heroes and differentiates her divine body from theirs. Three figures in almost identical poses surround the hydra, stretching out towards it. Iolaus on the right visually mirrors both Heracles and Athena. He has a conventional heroic masculine body, with helmet, cloak, armour, sword, and beard. Athena mimics Iolaus' pose exactly with her outstretched arm, helmet, and cloak, which falls in strikingly similar drapery to his. Athena's pose, with aegis slung over arm, is common in depictions of the gigantomachy, invoking her aggressive and martial aspect.⁶⁹ Athena's masculinity and her similarities to Iolaus simultaneously highlight the gendered difference of her long *peplos* and beardless face. Her gender transgression marks her as 'other' from the human social system of which defines the men on the vase, emphasising her divinity. In some sources, Iolaus is the one to contrive the plot to burn the hydra's necks, so it may

⁶⁸ See **Fig. 16**, cf. *LIMC V 1*, Herakles 2014 and 2015, p. 37.

⁶⁹ Villing 1992, 15.

be that the mirroring between him and Athena is a visual representation of this bestowal of divine cunning, the slippery nature of *metis* embodied in her uncategorisable form.⁷⁰

Yet Athena's aegis – so big and prominent here – adds her to the catalogue of monstrous as well as heroic bodies here. The monstrosity of the giant crab is signalled purely by its unusual size. The hydra's 'body' mimics the roundness of the crab, but its tangle of heads renders it formless and strange, disrupting any conventional idea of what a body should look like. It looks something like an insect or a jellyfish, but its multiple heads place it beyond the normal or natural. Additionally, if you were to turn the vase around to show mostly Heracles and the hydra, the aegis' snakes and scales would protrude just behind him. They are drawn in precisely the same style as the swirling snakes and scales on the monster's body, and look like another monster emerging from behind Heracles. The artist has deployed the same techniques for representing a serpentine body for both entities, drawing Athena into the representational field of the monster. This aligns well with Ogden's thesis that a serpent is the best weapon against a serpent, yet everything that we have deduced so far indicates that Athena's similitude to the realm of the monstrous is always ambiguous, suggesting a close affinity as well as the power to conquer.⁷¹

The snakes of Athena's aegis are adjacent to the tail of Heracles' lion skin, which curls in the same s-shape, a visual parallel uniting god, hero, and monster. Heracles' body is not like that of Iolaus: instead of a helmet, he is crowned with the head of a monstrous animal whose hide he wears, and carries a club instead of a sword. Heracles is an ambiguous figure, who subdues monsters as a 'civilising' force, yet is uninhibited in his behaviour and famous for his uncontrollable rage.⁷² One of the monstrous beasts he slays becomes a hybridising layer over his mortal body as he blurs the boundaries between man, beast, god, and monster. Juxtaposed with Athena's aegis, a garment with similar associations and properties, Heracles and his half-sister match and reinforce one another's liminal, potentially hybrid bodies: she with her gender transgression, he with his similitude to an

⁷⁰ See Plato, *Euthydemus* 297c; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.5.2.

⁷¹ Ogden, 2013a 216.

⁷² Kirk 1974, 206; Frontisi-Ducroux 1989, 162.

animal, and both with a tight association with monstrosity and its superfluous, category-disrupting properties.⁷³

The lekythos questions how different types of being look both by setting them in opposition and by constructing visual similitudes between them. This matches the essential dynamic of heroic monster fights. The hydra's formless body and Iolaus' conventional masculine heroism form two ends of a scale, but a binary distinction between them is problematised by Athena and Heracles' similarities to both. Athena's hybrid-monstrous aegis is a central device here, connecting monster to god, god to hero, hero to monster. Once again, the garment allows her to occupy or align with multiple categories of being at once, and this unstable and transformative aspect corresponds well with the importance of adaptable *metis* in outwitting metamorphic and superfluous monsters. This instability of categorisation is vital to the scene.

4.3. Perseus and the gorgons

Rather than the heroic body, the focus turns to Athena's divine alterity when the aegis mimics monstrous bodies in scenes of Perseus' pursuit by the gorgons. These images deploy the previous chapter's arguments about the slippery distinction between body and costume and its relation to female monstrosity. The gorgons have a particular association with Athena through her role in their myth and the aegis-gorgoneion. Athena's assistance in Medusa's slaughter is first attested in extant literature in the late 6th or early 5th century, but she appears on the 7th century Eleusis Amphora and other earlier depictions of the myth such as **Fig. 1**.⁷⁴ **Figs. 1, 13, and 14** all depict the snakes on Athena's aegis in the same visual style as the snakes protruding from the gorgons. This is not consistently the case elsewhere, and is therefore a marked choice by these painters.⁷⁵ In all three

⁷³ See also **Fig. 5**, where the animacy of the aegis' snakes forms a transitional step between the many-limbed and winged Geryon and Heracles covered by his lion skin.

⁷⁴ See Pindar *Pythian 10*; Pherecydes Fr. 11 (Fowler).

⁷⁵ See for instance Louvre [CA 2588.2], on which the aegis' snakes look very different to those around the gorgons' waists (Attic pyxis lid; ca. 470 BCE. Louvre [CA 2588.2].); and MFA, Boston [01.8070], in which

cases, Athena's white-painted skin differentiates her from Perseus and makes her far more visually similar to the approaching gorgons at a glance, engaging again with her fraught relationship to female monstrosity.

Fig. 1, with its bearded gorgons, invokes themes of gender. Both the aegis and the gorgons' serpents are prominent and ornate, swirling up in the same curves from behind the figures' backs. The eyes and muzzles of all the snakeheads have the same decorative flourish. Hermes and Perseus run in front of Athena, wearing the same winged boots and with their bearded faces and hairstyles drawn identically, a male pair which balances out the gorgons behind. Although she runs with Perseus and Hermes, Athena is visually closer to the gorgons with her snakes and white skin, an in-between figure with features of both a heroic man (weaponry) and a monstrous woman. Her shield and spear are juxtaposed with the bearded gorgons in that tension between monstrous and divine female masculinity discussed in chapter one. Her gender and her gender nonconformity mark her as other, and the serpentine aegis places this otherness in the same visual field as the monsters.

On **Fig. 1**, the shape of the cup allows Athena to be seen right next to the gorgons. On **Figs. 13** and **14**, the immediate visual connection between them that her white skin and aegis snakes create is broken by the shapes of the vessels. Like **Fig. 16**, they ask to be turned around, inviting comparisons between the two sides in the chase. On **Fig. 14.2**, the gorgon sister has two sweeping snakes protruding from her back, and a tangled cluster of snakes on the top of her head. The two larger snakes are similar in style and shape to those protruding from the top of Athena's aegis, which also has a tangle of smaller snakes down its lower sides. On **Fig. 13.2**, the gorgons each have two snakes sticking upright in a curl from the tops of their heads, a shape which is again imitated by the top two snakes of Athena's aegis. In both cases, the matching aegis and gorgon snakes are beardless, whereas all the other snakes on Athena's aegis have beards. The resemblance is not coincidental.

Athena's figure very deliberately parallels Medusa's, but the fringe of her aegis is not even serpentine. (Boeotian bowl; late 5th century BCE. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [01.8070].)

These vases deploy the complexities of the aegis' hybridity, its ability to blur the lines between body and costume. The hems of the aegis and the gorgons' *chitons* on **Fig. 13** are decorated with the same white dots, which simultaneously suggests that the aegis is made from fabric and aligns it with monstrous bodies. The gorgons' snakes are perched atop their heads rather than being interwoven with their curly hair, and the regularity of the snakes' poise suggests something decorative and crown-like despite their representation of bodily hybridity. Body and ornamentation are closely aligned. The serpents of the aegis appear less decorative, irregular and suggestive of movement, even though the hems which affix them to the garment are clearly drawn. On **Fig. 14.2**, some of the gorgon's snakes protrude directly from her hair, whereas the most prominent two (which mirror the aegis snakes), emerge from behind her back. Most of the snakes on the aegis emerge from the fabric-like hem, but the top two (although the vase is damaged and the details difficult to see) do not. The left snake is behind the hem and the right is bisected by another snake and its attachment to the aegis hidden. They thus protrude from behind Athena's back just like the gorgon's snakes, and for both bodies the invisibility of their attachment suggests the difficulty of telling body from clothing, from differentiating between monster and god.

The mythic association and visual similarities between Athena's aegis and the gorgons means that the underlying questions with the hybrid-monstrous aegis raises are prominent in conjunction with these monsters. Their grotesque female monstrosity and masculinity creates a visual tension with the armed but 'beautiful' Athena, and the potential for hybridity that the serpentine aegis suggests is particularly obvious when accompanied by a monster with similar but incorporated appendages. As with Heracles and the hydra, Athena's semi-hybrid appearance is perhaps indicative of her usefulness as an ally against a serpentine monster. Nevertheless, her visual similarities with the gorgons' bodies enhance the alterity and ambiguity of her divine body, placing her once again in-between categories of being and their types of body.

4.4. Conclusion

Confrontations with monsters are perhaps the most prominent context in which the hybrid-monstrous aegis is deployed in the manner contended by this thesis: as an object which draws Athena into visual parallels with hybrid-monstrous bodies in order to explore the boundaries of social/ontological categories and their transgression. The aegis allows Athena to resemble a monster whilst remaining obviously divine, and it connects the social alterity of her gender nonconformity with the supernatural alterity of her divinity. Athena's place in these images suggests that the 6th century Greeks did not have a clear answer to the question of whether monsters were a totally different and diametrically oppositional category to the Olympian gods. Instead, they probed and renegotiated the distinctions and similarities between these beings, deploying liminal figures like Athena and Heracles, who move between categories or exist in more than one at once, to explore the taxonomies and construction of bodies.

5. 'Zeus' Gorgon-eyed Daughter'⁷⁶

5.1. Introduction

The hybrid-monstrous aegis' positioning of Athena as a liminal figure within images and texts has an additional self-referentiality to Athena's manifestation *as* an image. Two of the literary sources which wrestled with how to explain Athena's masculinity approached her as a statue.⁷⁷ Both Herodotus and Plato use the word ἄγαλμα, which refers specifically to cult statues, potential manifestations or vessels of the god as well as embodiments of their presence in the civic community. Athena's manifestation as an image is important for how the Greeks thought about her.

The similarities between Athena and Medusa as characters uncover something fundamental to the relationship between Athena and monstrosity which the hybrid-monstrous aegis embodies. Both are associated, through the medium of the gaze, with the agency of images, a power which problematises the boundaries between representation and reality. It is via the gaze that an image can appropriate living agency and action, replicating and mirroring the viewer's engagement. The impossible or unnatural nature of hybrid-monstrous bodies also draws attention to their construction and existence as images, and I argue that this underlies the relationship between Athena's alterity and her manifestation as an image.⁷⁸ This chapter first investigates Athena and Medusa's shared association with the gaze and the ways in which the aegis connects the two and embodies the impact that Athena's statues have on reality. I then turn to representations of the birth of Athena which draw together these associations between monstrosity, image-making, and the creation of hybrid bodies. Representations of Athena inhabit a liminal space between inanimate image and living body, and the hybrid-monstrous aegis is instrumental to this categorical disruption.

⁷⁶ Sophocles, *Ajax* 450.

⁷⁷ Plato, *Critias*, 110b; Herodotus, *Histories* 4.189.

⁷⁸ Aston 2011, 27.

5.2. Eyes and images

Athena and Medusa have similarly potent gazes. Medusa's ability to petrify is first attested by Pindar, but Perseus looks away from her on even the oldest extant depiction of her slaughter.⁷⁹ The gorgoneion on Agamemnon's shield in the *Iliad* is βλοσυρῶπις ('grim-looking') (11.36) and δεινὸν δερκομένη ('glowering awfully') (11.37). Wide, staring eyes are the most prominent feature of any archaic 'grotesque' gorgoneion: Medusa's gaze is dangerous and terrifying. Athena's eyes have similar power. At *Il.*1.200, δεινὴ δέ οἱ ὄσσε φάανθεν ('her eyes flashed terribly') – the adverb δεινῶ ('terribly') recalls δεινός ('awful'), which is used repeatedly of the gorgoneion's gaze or fearsome appearance.⁸⁰ Athena's common Homeric epithet γλαυκῶπις ('bright/ flashing-eyed') refers to her attendant owl (a creature often represented with similar wide frontal eyes to a gorgon), and is probably derived from a verb denoting burning or shining.⁸¹ Athena's burning gaze is, like Medusa's, a typical feature of a *drakon*, a word which the ancient Greeks etymologised from δέρκομαι ('to look at').⁸² Athena and Medusa share an iconographic and literary association with serpents which manifests in the dangerous power of their eyes.⁸³ The gaze sometimes connects the two very explicitly in literature, with Euripides and Sophocles both referring to Athena as γοργῶπις ('gorgon-eyed/faced').⁸⁴

Medusa's fearsome eyes are key to her power as an image. This begins with Agamemnon's shield-boss at *Il.*11.36-7 and expands throughout archaic iconography of gorgoneia with grotesque frontal faces and huge eyes.⁸⁵ Scholars argue for various functions of the gorgoneion: an apotropaic device, a reflection on the process of image-making, or a distorted mirror-image of humanity's ultimate 'other.'⁸⁶ Whilst a universal function cannot be confirmed for every gorgoneion in every context,

⁷⁹ Pindar, *Olympian* 10, 49; Cycladic pithos, ca. 670 BCE. Louvre [CA 795].

⁸⁰ *Il.*5.741 and 742, *Il.*11.37; *Od.*11.634.

⁸¹ Luyster 1965, 151.

⁸² A dragon, serpent, or serpentine monster; Ogden 2013a, 173, 237-238.

⁸³ See Ogden 2013a, 195; Luyster 1965, 145.

⁸⁴ Euripides, *Helen* 1315; Sophocles, *Ajax* 450.

⁸⁵ See *LIMC* IV 2 (Gorgo), pp. 164-167.

⁸⁶ On apotropaism: Luyster 1965, 160-161 and Mack 2002, 152-574; image-making: Mack 2002, 589; alterity and gorgon-as-mirror: Frontisi-Ducroux 1989, 157-159 and Vernant 1991b, 144.

their confrontational gazes inevitably demand to be looked at. They simultaneously retain an association with the *repulsing* of vision: the gorgon as instrument of battle-fear or petrification. Gorgoneia reach out from the realm of images to directly affect the viewer. In Homer, the gorgoneion functions as aggressive protection, adorning Agamemnon's shield and Athena's aegis, and guarding the borders of Hades.⁸⁷

The aegis-gorgoneion makes Athena's terrible gaze manifest on her statues, its confrontational frontality granting them this function of protection-through-aggression. This brief digression into sculpture forms the framework for this chapter's subsequent analysis of vase painting. Many statues of Athena share the gorgoneion's role as a threatening image with a protective function. The *promachos* pose, Athena armed and aggressive with spear raised, is heavily associated with the palladium, ultimate symbol of Athena's civic protection, and the cult statue which Cassandra supplicates to escape Locrian Ajax [Fig. 2.1].⁸⁸ Our three earliest extant images of the aegis-gorgoneion are on Athenas of the *promachos* type: Figs. 3, 6, and 8. Athena in Fig. 2.1 also bears an enormous gorgoneion on her shield. The confrontational or animate nature of these statues in the 7th-6th century imagination is further underscored by Alcaeus' fragment 298, in which the Trojan statue is described as γόργωπις (24) ('gorgon-eyed') and Athena's gaze as δεινός (24) ('awful'). A clear connection is drawn between the gorgon's gaze and that of Athena's statue, both possessing the same power to stimulate fear. The Athenian *Athena Polias* statue acquired a gorgoneion by at least the late 5th century, perhaps detachable and made of gold.⁸⁹ Marx thinks that it was affixed in about 540, when aegis-gorgoneia first appear in Athenian vase painting, and since aegis-gorgoneia take up a lot of space on the aegis in early vase painting, she extrapolates this feature to the *Polias*.⁹⁰ The 6th century so-called *Endoios Athena* also bears the traces of a huge gorgoneion. It seems that early 6th century aegis gorgoneia in statuary were intended to be highly

⁸⁷ *Il.*5.38-42; *Il.*11.36-37; *Od.*11.634.

⁸⁸ See Robertson 1996, 391, 428.

⁸⁹ Euripides, *Electra* 1254-1257; Plutarch, *Themistocles* 10.4.7.

⁹⁰ Marx 1993, 523.

visible and confrontational in their gaze, just as Athena's eyes are fearsome and gorgon-like in archaic poetry.

The aegis-gorgoneion and Athena's gorgon-like gaze epitomise the power of her statuary over the world and the viewer in the archaic imagination. Being represented is a crucial part of what both Athena and Medusa *do* as cultural figures. Aspects of their representation invoke a protective hostility connected to the dangerous or frightening power of the image's gaze, which mimics a living body through the effectiveness of its confrontational frontality.

5.3. Athena's sculptural birth

I now return to vase painting and the theme of monstrous hybridity. The aegis-gorgoneion's embodiment of the potency of Athena's statuary plays into a particular association between monsters and the act of image making. According to Aston, "monsters, of course, because they do not occur in nature, are 'extra created' and have an especially strong relationship with the act of manufacture."⁹¹ The representation of hybrid bodies, with their supernatural assemblages of disparate or superfluous parts, is always an act of creation.⁹² The ancient Greeks broadly perceived strange births as portents of chaos and the disruption of nature, yet the unusual birth narratives of monsters in myth also appear self-referential to the hybrid body as a manufactured image.⁹³

Athena's birth in art and literature recalls the crafted nature of hybrid bodies as well as their unusual means of reproduction. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, it has textual similarities to the birth of Medusa's children. Athena emerges from a head (924), Pegasus and Chrysaor from decapitation (281), and where she is born in armour (292-30), Chrysaor carries a sword (284).⁹⁴ In 6th and 5th century art, both scenes deploy the same iconography of a tiny figure stepping out of their parent's head or

⁹¹ Aston, 2011, 25.

⁹² Aston 2011, 255.

⁹³ See Aston 2011, 33; Felton 2012, 105.

⁹⁴ Deacy 2008, 134.

neck.⁹⁵ In *Olympian 7*, Pindar describes Athena emerging Ἀφαίστου τέχναισιν χαλκελάτῳ πελέκει (35-6) ('by the skills of Hephaestus with bronze-wrought axe.') The craft-god with his tools is her midwife. Uhlig notes that Hephaestus often carries what appears to be a hammer at Athena's birth in art, associated with metalworking and thus highlighting the conjunction between her body and armour.⁹⁶ Chrysaor and Pegasus are also birthed by a tool, albeit one of violence rather than craftsmanship.

The two earliest extant visual representations of the aegis-gorgoneion appear in scenes of Athena's birth. It glues together Athena's manifestation and power as an image with this connection between 'hybrid' births and image-making. In **Figs. 3** and **6**, Athena emerges from Zeus' head in the *promachos* pose, associated in contemporary 6th century art with lost statue types, representations of Athena's Trojan statue or the palladium, and her statuesque formulaic pose on Panathenaic vases.⁹⁷ If indeed vase painting adopted the aegis-gorgoneion from free-standing sculpture, this referentiality to a statue or image-type is further strengthened.⁹⁸ The representation of hybrid gods in narrative scenes, says Aston, frequently calls their ontology into question. For example, the man-faced-bull god Achelooos is often frontal-facing and detached from the narrative scene in relief sculpture, encouraging the viewer to question whether his image represents the god himself, or an image of the god.⁹⁹ I suggest that something similar is happening in **Figs. 3** and **6**. In both, Athena is born 'unnaturally' in full armour in a pose associated with isolated representations of the goddess, with the aegis-gorgoneion strengthening her potency as image and the aegis serpents reminding us of the constructed and inhuman nature of her body.

The gorgoneion and the aegis have a paradoxical effect on Athena's body. They appear to be living, moving, looking, but this appearance distances her figure from reality and relegates her to a realm of

⁹⁵ Compare **Fig. 3** with Attic lekythos; ca. 500 BCE. Metropolitan Museum [06.1070].

⁹⁶ Uhlig 2020, 63.

⁹⁷ Robertson 1996, 391; **Fig. 2.1**, compare *LIMC I*, Aias II 18, 19, 22, 23, 28, pp. 154-155; **Fig. 8**, compare *LIMC II* 2, Athena 118, 119, p. 716.

⁹⁸ Marx 1993, 98.

⁹⁹ Aston 2011, 296.

supernatural alterity only ever glimpsed in images. Athena's birth is a particularly fraught and important site for this process, since its resonances with monstrous birth both in manner (Pegasus and Chrysaor) and in implication (Athena's body as a crafted image) firmly establish her otherness from mortal bodies. Her birth in the aegis overemphasises the integrity of Athena's accoutrement to her body. Although Athena is portrayed as a living character within the narrative scene, the viewer knows, as with an image of a monster, that the painter created her body.

5.4. Conclusion

Athena's association with monstrosity, embodied visually by the hybrid aegis, manifests significantly in the ontology of her image. On the one hand, her cult statues and literary or visual representations of her cult statues have a particularly powerful impact on the material world. They confer protection on a city or individual, and directly engage (and perhaps disturb) the viewer when affixed with the glaring frontal gorgoneion. On the other hand, Athena's body is difficult to slot into mortal frames of reference due to her gender nonconformity and the aegis' animate appearance. The problem for Plato and Herodotus is whether her image can refer to any 'real' human body. They conclude that if it did, these bodies would be either distant and foreign or long dead. The problems which Athena poses to binary categories of masculinity and femininity or body and clothing associate her with the fantastic and image-bound bodies of hybrid monsters, but images like Athena's statues which are thought to affect the real world are themselves agents of boundary-crossing, disrupting the distinction between reality and representation. Like the gorgon, Athena's nature is associated with her representation as an image, but these representations encroach powerfully on the world around them.

6. Conclusion: The Transformative Aegis

This study provides a new perspective on Athena's relationship to monstrosity which accounts for material in which she is positioned within or adjacent to the realm of the monstrous as well as in opposition to it. I do not seek to entirely supplant scholarship on Athena's role as a force for normative order and the subjugation of chaotic monstrosity in ancient literature and art, but rather to add an additional layer of complexity to this reading. I aim, furthermore, to push against scholarly conceptions of a rigid binary between Olympian powers and monstrous or hybrid figures in 7th-4th century Greek thought. By refusing to apply this binary as a pre-conceived framework, I have found that the invocation of hybrid-monstrous bodies is instead a common signifier of Athena's *divinity*, showcasing her supernatural and superhuman nature and her distance from humanity.

On a 6th century Attic skyphos, two Athenas chase one another in an endless circle around the vessel, one on each side [Fig. 7]. Both are helmeted and wear the same clothes, and their poses are almost identical. One Athena carries a spear and a shield, but the shield-arm of the other is covered by a great scaled and snake-fringed aegis. The aegis-bearing Athena has large, curling wings. This vessel is a succinct demonstration of my contentions: that the aegis with its corporeal or hybrid-monstrous features functions repeatedly in archaic and classical Greek art and literature as a signifier of the alterity and polymorphism of Athena's body. On the skyphos, the aegis across Athena's arm balances the curl of her wings, aligning it with her appearance as a divine hybrid body, capable of physical transformation. Yet it also takes the place of her shield, simultaneously signifying a body, tool, and costume. The skyphos implies that Athena's assumption of the aegis is akin to a bodily transformation, a switch between pure anthropomorphism and supernatural hybridity.

This paper has examined various ways in which the hybrid-monstrous aegis emphasises Athena's movement between and disruption of various cultural categories in ancient Greek thought, aligning her with similarly functioning monstrous and hybrid bodies. It interacts consistently with her gendered appearance, which in turn interacts with her nature as a divine body, distant and distinct

from mortal social frames of reference. The aegis-gorgoneion with its masculine military associations forms part of Athena's gender nonconforming appearance, yet the garment's ability to lend her body the appearance of a hybrid plays into misogynistic cultural tropes which associate female masculinity with monstrosity. The aegis never makes Athena definitely or entirely anything: entirely masculine, entirely feminine, definitely a hybrid, definitely unproblematic and unthreatening in her disruption of gendered categories. These uncertainties play out in complex ways when Athena wears the hybrid-monstrous aegis in narrative scenes, such as heroic confrontations with monsters or depictions of her birth. Here, her appearance destabilises the categorising visual language spoken by the images. She looks both masculine and feminine, both monstrous and divine, both like a statue and a living body.

At the start of her book on Athena, Susan Deacy discusses the unusual diversity of her functions and associations. She has more attributes than any other god, and despite her distinctive and individual appearance, "Athena's multifaceted nature makes it hard for us to make definitive statements about her."¹⁰⁰ My research confirms this perspective, but I suggest that this polyvalency was central to ancient representations of Athena and the ways in which they reflect on the goddess' nature. By collapsing boundaries between categories of cultural thought, the hybrid-monstrous aegis suspends Athena in a perpetual state of transformation, always potentially many things at once. It can disrupt the fragmentation of her appearance into masculine and feminine attributes, cementing her liminal and androgynous gendered appearance. Its simultaneous nature as a garment and a living body renders her neither quite a hybrid or quite anthropomorphic, but both. Aston contends that the purpose of representing animal-hybrid gods is to portray metamorphosis and the fluidity of divine bodies: "As well as showing what cannot exist, a mixanthropic image shows what cannot be shown, movement and change."¹⁰¹ The hybrid-monstrous aegis effects this very powerfully with its portrayal of categorical simultaneity, forcing the process of transformation onto the viewer, the struggle to

¹⁰⁰ Deacy 2008, 5-8.

¹⁰¹ Aston 2011, 260, 311.

pin Athena's body down into a singular state or category. Aegis-bearing Athena is a visual/ textual manifestation of transformation and the instability of boundaries.

Through the aegis, monstrosity and hybridity become part of Athena's transformative and categorically liminal nature. This liminality places Athena in a similar position in the Greek cultural imagination to a monster, materially as well as conceptually. Athena appears in the Greek city, with her armour, her *peplos*, her two faces, her writhing snakes, in the form of statues and performances. These statues may be in temples or public places, and performances may be theatrical, ritual, and on one famous occasion, political.¹⁰² However, the multiplicity of her attributes, their integrity to her identity, and their gender nonconformity mean that more than any other Olympian, Athena looks nothing like a human that someone might encounter in day-to-day life. There is no common and normative human social role for the armed woman in archaic and classical Greece. Athena is recognisable and familiar only as herself. She shares with monstrous hybrids an epiphany only in representation, necessitated by an appearance which confounds the conventional construction and categorisation of bodies.

¹⁰² For priestesses donning the aegis or portraying Athena see Robertson 2001, 36, 45; for Pisistratus' ploy of disguising a local girl as Athena in order to legitimate his rule in Athens see Herodotus, *Histories* 1.60.

Appendix: Illustrations

Figure 1. Attic kylix; attrib. C Painter; ca. 575-550 BCE. Athena and Perseus flee the gorgons. British Museum [1885,1213.12]. Online image <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1885-1213-12> accessed 03.08.2022.



Figure 2. Attic kylix; ca. 570-560 BCE. Ajax and Cassandra by Athena's statue inside [2.1], a procession of gods outside [2.2]. British Museum [1885,1213.11]. Online images <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1885-1213-11> accessed 03.08.2022.

Figure 2.1.

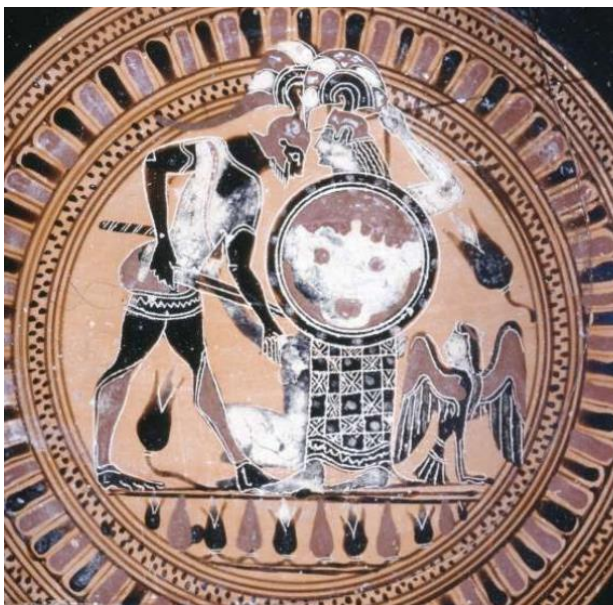


Figure 2.2.



Figure 3. Attic amphora; ca. 560-550 BCE. Birth of Athena. British Museum [1839,1109.1]. Online image <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1839-1109-1> accessed 03.08.2022.



Figure 4. Attic lip-cup; Phrynos painter; ca. 555-550 BCE. Athena leads Herakles to Zeus. British Museum [1867,0508.962]. Online image <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1867-0508-962> accessed 03.08.2022.



Figure 5. Attic amphora; ca. 550-540 BCE. Herakles fights Geryon with Athena's support. Cabinet des Médailles [Paris Medailles 202]. Online image <<http://medaillesetantiques.bnf.fr/ws/catalogue/app/collection/record/ark:/12148/c33gbdcgj>> accessed 03.08.2022.



Figure 6. Attic Amphora; ca. 540 BCE. Birth of Athena. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts [60.23]. Online image <<https://vmfa.museum/piction/6027262-8067521/>> accessed 03.08.2022 [6.1]; and my own digital overlay of <<https://www.theoi.com/Gallery/K8.11.html>> (accessed 12.05.2022) to make the aegis-gorgoneion more visible [6.2].

Figure 6.1.



Figure 6.2.



Figure 7. Attic skyphos ca. 540 BCE, two Athenas. Claudio Faina museum. Image from *LIMC II 2*, Athena 59, p. 710.



Figure 8. Attic pseudo-Panathenaic amphora; attrib. Princeton painter; ca. 540-530. Athena with gorgoneion on aegis. Metropolitan Museum [1989.281.89]. Online image <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/255967>> accessed 03.08.2022.



Figure 9. Attic amphora; ca. 530 BCE. Heracles wrestles the Nemean lion with Athena's support. Bologna Museum [18017]. Online image

<<http://www.museibologna.it/archeologicoen/percorsi/66287/id/75034/oggetto/75293/>> accessed 03.08.2022. For a better view of Athena's aegis-gorgoneion, see Halm-Tisserant 1986, Fig. 4.1.



Figure 10. Attic amphora; Andokides painter; ca. 530 BCE. Athena and either Artemis or the Pythia watch Heracles and Apollo wrestle over the Delphic tripod. Staatliche Museum [F2159]. Image from *LIMC II 2*, Athena 121, p. 717.



Figure 11. Attic amphora; attrib. Andokides painter; ca. 530 BCE. Athena and either Artemis or the

Pythia watch Heracles and Apollo wrestle over the Delphic tripod. Metropolitan Museum [63.11.6].
Online image <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/255154>> accessed 03.08.2022.



Figure 12. Attic calyx krater; attrib. Rycroft painter; ca. 520-510 BCE. Achilles and Ajax play dice as Athena watches. Toledo Museum of Art [1963.26]. Online image <<http://emuseum.toledomuseum.org/objects/56483/calyx-krater-bowl-for-mixing-water-and-wine-front-achil>> accessed 03.08.2022.



Figure 13. Attic amphora; attrib. Leagros group; ca. 510-500 BCE. Perseus, Hermes, and Athena on one side [13.1] with pursuing gorgons on the other [13.2]. British Museum [1836,0224.87]. Online images <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1836-0224-87> accessed 03.08.2022.

Figure 13.1



Figure 13.2



Figure 14. Attic amphora; ca. 500 BCE. Athena and Perseus on one side [14.1], decapitated Medusa and pursuing gorgon on the other [14.2]. British Museum [1875,0818.5]. Online images <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1875-0818-5> accessed 03.08.2022.

Figure 14.1



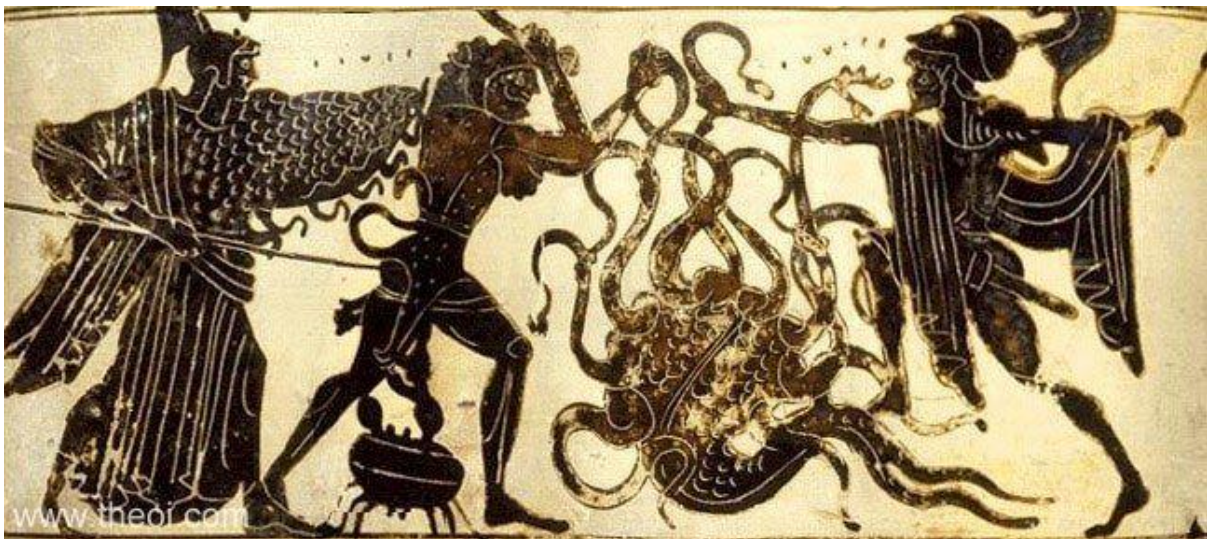
Figure 14.2



Figure 15. Attic loutrophoros fragment; late 6th century; found on the Acropolis. Image from *Die Antiken Vasen von der Akropolis zu Athen. I. Tafeln. 68.*



Figure 16. Attic Lekythos; Diosphos painter; ca. 500-475 BCE. Herakles fights the hydra with Athena and Iolaus. Louvre [CA 598]. Online image <<https://www.theoi.com/Gallery/M13.2.html>> accessed 03.08.2022.



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