

Herakles at Olympia: The Sculptural Program of the Temple of Zeus

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The Sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia was established in the far western corner of the Peloponnese in a fertile and hospitable part of the country. Control of the sanctuary was the subject of bitter enmity between Pisa and Elis, the two regions bordering the area of Olympia. Following a struggle in which Elis was victorious, the sanctuary's most prominent structure, the Temple of Zeus, was built. The temple was built by a local architect, Libon of Elis, from limestone quarried in the region. It was of typical Doric design and on a grand scale. While the limestone was covered in stucco, the temple's tiles, gutter and sculpture were crafted of Parian marble shipped from the island of Paros at vast expense. The temple's traditional Doric plan was enlivened by the fine sculpture that decorated both of its pediments and its front and back porches. The themes represented in the pediments and metopes formed a comprehensive program of mythic subjects that were of significance to the region and to a broader, Panhellenic audience. An examination of the Centauromachy in the west pediment is the focus of this article, but relies on an understanding of the sculptural program as a whole.

The East Pediment: The Chariot Race between Pelops and Oinomaos

The east pediment (Fig. 12.1) is the better preserved of the two, although the subject matter is not common. It would have been difficult to identify were it not for Pausanias.¹ The traveler writes:

Regarding the sculpture in the gables: In front is represented the chariot race between Pelops and Oinomaos, just as it is about to begin; both are getting ready for the race. In the middle of the gable stands an image of Zeus. Oinomaos, wearing a helmet on his head, stands on the right of Zeus and next to him stands his wife Sterope, one of the daughters of Atlas. Then Myrtilos, who drove the chariot of Oinomaos,

sits in front of the horses; the horses are four in number. After him are two men. They are without names, but I suppose that they were commissioned by Oinomaos to take care of the horses. On the outermost edge, the Kladeos is lying. After the Alpheios, the Kladeos is the river most honored by the Eleans. On the left of Zeus are Pelops and Hippodameia, and the charioteer of Pelops and the horses and two men who are probably his grooms. And likewise, the gable goes down to a narrow point and there the Alpheios is represented. The name of Pelops' charioteer, according to the Troezenians, is Sphaerus; but the guide at Olympia told me that his name was Cillas.

The figures in the front gable are by Paionios, a native of Mende in Thrace; the figures in the back are by Alcamenes, a man of the same age as Pheidias and second only to him as a sculptor.

In the middle of the gable is the battle of the Lapiths against the Centaurs at the wedding of Peirithoos. In the middle of the pediment is Peirithoos himself. On one side of him is Eurytion, having snatched the wife of Peirithoos and Kaineus coming to the aid of Peirithoos. On the other side is Theseus warding off the Centaurs with an ax. One Centaur has seized a maiden, another Centaur has seized a blooming youth. It seems to me that Alkamenes portrayed these events having learned in the writings of Homer that Peirithoos was the son of Zeus and because he knew that Theseus was the great-grandson of Pelops.

(5.10.6–8)²

Because of the care that was taken when the program of the Temple of Zeus was planned, it is necessary to examine the east pediment in order to understand the west. The details of the chariot race and the events surrounding it can be pieced together from a variety of literary sources. The Hesiodic *Ehoiai* (Hes fr 259a ed. Merkelbech-West) makes mention of the ill-fated race and lists some of the other suitors who have competed for the prize.³ In Pindar's first *Olympian Ode*, Pelops visits Poseidon to ask for his help

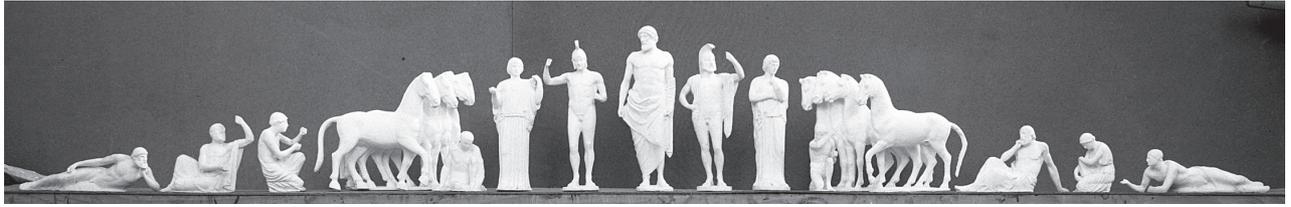


Fig. 12.1 Temple of Zeus at Olympia, East Pediment, Reconstruction. Photo after Ashmole and Yalouris, 1967, fig. 15.



Fig. 12.2 Temple of Zeus at Olympia, West Pediment, Reconstruction. Photo after Ashmole and Yalouris, 1967, fig. 16.

in winning the race. As a youth, Pelops was the *eromenos* of Poseidon and for this reason Poseidon gives him magic horses. He wins the race and marries Hippodameia and has six strong sons. Pindar does not give any of the unpleasant details that are prevalent in other versions, however. Both Sophocles and Euripides composed tragedies on the subject that are no longer extant.⁴ Apollodoros (ApE 2.4–9) says that Oinomaos is reluctant to give his daughter in marriage because he is in love with her himself. Furthermore, he received an oracle saying that he would meet his death at the hands of his son-in-law. Pherekydes, cited in the scholia to Apollonios of Rhodes, (AR 1.752=3F37a) names Oinomaos' charioteer Myrtilos a key player in the events. In this version of the myth, Hippodameia, who has fallen in love with Pelops, asks Myrtilos for his help in defeating her father in the race. Because he is in love with her himself, or because Pelops promises him half the kingdom (Hyg *Fab* 84), Myrtilos substitutes the lynchpins in his master's chariot wheels with pins made of wax. After the race is won and Oinomaos is dead (ApE 2.3–9), Myrtilos tries to collect his prize but is thrown into the sea by Pelops.⁵ As he dies, Myrtilos curses Pelops and his descendants and it is this curse that falls upon the houses of Atreus and Thyestes. Pausanias (6.21.10–11) names 17 doomed suitors who came before Pelops. He also notes, when describing the chest of Kypselos, that the horses of Pelops were winged (5.17.7).

The myth deals with various transgressions but one of the most prominent is that of marriage and the violations of its precepts. This can be further classified as a violation of *xenia*. The Greek marriage was an institution which had little to do with affection but much to do with business and social connections. Gifts were exchanged and a contract drawn up. If the woman did not produce

offspring, the husband had the right to return her to her family. Likewise, if she were mistreated in any way, the woman's family could take her back, along with her dowry. This legalized exchange of women was done to strengthen ties of friendship, to extend the family and to ensure the production of legitimate children. The result of a successful marriage was a stronger *oikos* that, in turn, resulted in a better *polis*. Oinomaos, by refusing to release his daughter to a husband and new home in the normal way, violates one of the most basic laws of *xenia*: the lawful exchange of women. In keeping his daughter to himself, either out of lust or fear for his life, Oinomaos avoids making connections with other families, thereby shutting out the friendly relationships forged with marriage ties. In lustfully keeping his daughter within his own household, he also commits a sexual violation of the normal relationship between a father and daughter and deprives the *polis* of legitimate offspring. In short, Oinomaos is among those who are "violators of human culture, foreign to proper exchange, [and] anti-marriage."⁶

Including the central figure of Zeus and the two river gods, there are thirteen human figures in the east pediment. On either side of the god stood a four-horse chariot team, though whether the chariots themselves were represented is not known. The organization of the east pediment's figures has caused endless discussion and reconstructions. The problem lies chiefly with the misleading description of the pediment by Pausanias who names the figures in relation to their position on either side of the central figure of Zeus. The difficulty lies in whether Pausanias, in designating right and left, meant it in relation to himself or the god.⁷ Pelops (figure G) and Oinomaos (figure I) have both suffered damage, particularly the figure of Pelops



Fig. 12.3 Temple of Zeus at Olympia, East Pediment, Figure I. Alison Frantz Collection.

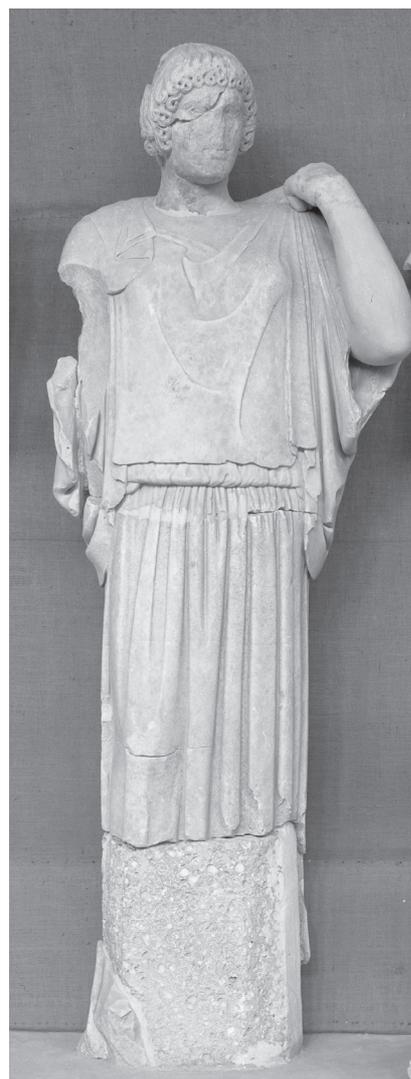


Fig. 12.4 Temple of Zeus at Olympia, East Pediment, Figure K. Alison Frantz Collection.

(Fig. 12.6). Enough of their heads survives, however, to distinguish the older, heavily bearded face of Oinomaos in contrast with the younger, lightly bearded Pelops. Both of the figures wear helmets, making Pausanias' comment that Oinomaos was helmeted seem an odd distinction.⁸ Oinomaos stands draped in a short mantle (figure I) while Pelops stands nude or in the bronze corselet added later.

Opinion is divided on which of the female figures is meant to represent the bride and which is her mother, Sterope. Figure F has little remaining of her head, but her body and pose are well preserved (Fig. 12.5). Her pose has been identified as one of anxiety or even mourning, perhaps foreshadowing the ruin that will result from the race.⁹ She is probably the mother of Hippodameia and wife of Oinomaos. Figure K is quite complete and wears a distinctive belted peplos. She also has her left hand raised to her shoulder where she plucks at her garment in a girlish gesture.¹⁰ It is therefore likely that she is the young bride Hippodameia (Fig. 12.4).

The main characters of the scene appear remarkably untroubled. Helmut Kyrieleis notes that the posture of Oinomaos (figure I) with his hand resting on his hip, generally interpreted as one of arrogance, is in fact one of relaxation.¹¹ Oinomaos knows that he has little cause for concern, confident in his magic horses and his success in the previous races. His relaxed bearing is in marked contrast to the alert demeanor of Pelops (figure G) who appears ready for the trial that is about to begin. This is in keeping with the mythic tradition which relates that Oinomaos gave the suitors a head start while he performed sacrifices to Zeus (Diod 4.73.1–6). Thus, while Oinomaos is still covered in his chlamys, Pelops stands stripped and ready to mount his chariot. The god himself stands between the contenders. The object of the action, Hippodameia herself (figure K), seems wholly carefree in the face of the forthcoming events. She stands erect, demurely fingering her veil in the gesture traditional to representations of brides.



Fig. 12.5 Temple of Zeus at Olympia, East Pediment, Figure F. Alison Frantz Collection.



Fig. 12.6 Temple of Zeus at Olympia, East Pediment, Figure G. Alison Frantz Collection.

Given the tension of such a moment, the preparation for the fateful chariot race in the east pediment reflects a nearly palpable stillness. Most of the participants appear unaffected by the drama that is about to unfold and observe the central group from relaxed sitting positions. A young boy plays absent-mindedly with his toes (figure E). Anxiety is expressed by only two of the figures: Sterope, the wife of Oinomaos (figure F) and the Old Seer (Fig. 12.7) (figure N). Jeffrey Hurwit has effectively demonstrated that it is the presence of the seer in the east pediment that helps set a tone of foreboding.¹² Figure N sits behind his master's chariot, leaning on a staff (now lost) with his hand to his cheek in a gesture of extreme alarm. His eyes are fixed and staring beneath his furrowed brow, as though at the sight of the disaster that will shortly occur. Sterope's gesture is further suggestive of alarm. Her right arm is tucked protectively close to her body beneath her breast while her left is clenched beneath her chin. She too seems to have a premonition of the misfortune to come

and reflects it in her guarded body language. Although she cannot predict the tragic outcome of this race for her husband, she has stood in this position many times before and watched young men go to their deaths.

It is not certain on what tradition of myth the Olympia sculptor based his representation in the east pediment. It is only the version given in Pindar's *Olympian 1*, however, that gives no hint of treachery plotted by either Hippodameia or Pelops. It is therefore certain that viewers would be aware of the duplicity that lay on both sides in most versions. Oinomaos was the obvious villain, but Pelops and even Hippodameia herself are not irreproachable. Because of their involvement, the destruction visible to the Old Seer would affect generations of their descendants as a result of the curse of the dying Myrtilos. Despite the tense stillness of these figures, there is violence inherent to the myth itself that would have made an impression on any viewer familiar with the story.

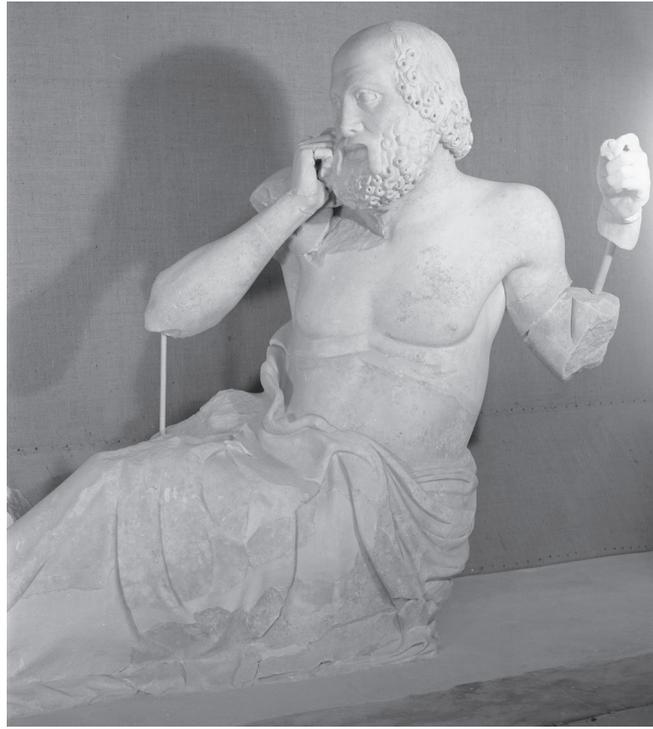


Fig. 12.7 Temple of Zeus at Olympia, East Pediment, Figure N, Old Seer. Alison Frantz Collection.

The West Pediment: The Centauromachy at the Wedding

In contrast to the latent menace of the east pediment, the frantic activity of the west pediment is almost a relief (Fig. 12.2). Here, the threat is far more evident and is manifested in the form of the Centaurs. Men are shown struggling with creatures who embody all that is uncivilized within themselves: the brutish inclination to seize and rape women who don't belong to them. These are proclivities that men of this new and enlightened age would be anxious to suppress. As in the east pediment, the figures of the west pediment are arranged around a formidable divine presence, the god Apollo (figure L).¹³ The statue itself, like its complement in the east pediment, stands far taller than the surrounding figures (Fig. 12.8). In his left hand there remains elements of an attribute that is thought to be a bow.¹⁴ His posture is erect and he turns his head sharply towards his right, following the direction of his outstretched arm. There have been a number of interpretations of Apollo's gesture.¹⁵ Blinkenberg thinks that Apollo is making a gesture of protection.¹⁶ Ashmole and Yalouris suggest that Apollo is intervening in the action and trying to bring it to a halt, but Tersini, who has examined the fragments that remain of the right hand of Apollo, interprets the gesture differently.¹⁷ Her examination revealed that the fingers of the hand were curled loosely against the palm except for the index finger which was extended in a pointing gesture.¹⁸ Thus, she argues, that as a guardian of *dike* and a hater of *hybris*, Apollo points his hand in the direction of those who are

committing injustices.¹⁹ Figures K and M are the primary heroic combatants of the battle, a fact that is accentuated by their back-to-back fighting pose and mirrored actions. Figure K has one arm raised as though wielding a sword, a pose that may be mirrored by figure M, who Pausanias tells us brandished an axe. There is very little remaining of figure K apart from his head and arms and a portion of his left leg (Fig. 12.9). Figure M retains a large portion his torso, an arm and both of his legs. His head is also well preserved and depicts a young man with a smooth cap of hair that was probably bound with a wreath or fillet (Fig. 12.10). Both heroes have drapery wrapped around their arms and legs.²⁰ Figure K comes to the aid of a woman being attacked by a Centaur whose head bears drill holes indicating that he once wore a crown or wreath.²¹ This is surely the Centaur Eurytion, and the woman he has seized must therefore be the bride (Fig. 12.11). I propose that Figure K is therefore the principal hero of the event and contrary to Pausanias' identification of the figure as the Lapith hero Kaineus coming to the aid of Peirithoos, he is Herakles, a hero known to protect women from Centaurs. Herakles, like Pelops, was one of the founding heroes of the sanctuary of Olympia and his appearance in the west pediment balances the appearance of Pelops in the east.

The Temple of Zeus in the center of the Panhellenic sanctuary of Olympia was begun shortly after Elis defeated its neighbor Pisa in 471/70 and regained control of both the region and the sanctuary itself. Because of the importance of the Olympic games, together with their domination of the sanctuary, the Eleans were assured of



Fig. 12.8 Temple of Zeus at Olympia, West Pediment, Figure L, Apollo. Alison Frantz Collection.

increased power, respect and revenue. The construction of the Temple of Zeus was a reflection of these recently acquired benefits and paid homage not only to the Eleans themselves, but also to Zeus, the patron god of Olympia, to Pelops, mythic founder of the region of the Peloponnese and to Herakles, Dorian hero of Panhellenic prominence. Both Pelops and Herakles were the heroes most honored at Olympia. Pelops is credited with founding the Olympic games in honor of the death of his father-in-law Oinomaos, slain in the chariot race waged for his daughter's hand. Pausanias related that Pelops was the hero most honored at Olympia, just as Zeus was the most revered of the gods (5.13.1). Herakles, who was venerated throughout the Greek world, had special ties to Olympia as well. He too is credited with founding the Olympic games,

as a compensation for the death of Pelops, his great-grandfather.

...and after him was Pelops; when he went to the Greek land, he then established a festival and contests for the dead Oinomaos; third after them Herakles, the son of Amphitryon, established a festival and games for the dead Pelops, the son of Tantalos, his maternal relative.

(Phlegon *FGrHist* fr 1, lines 30–34)

Pindar (*OI* 10) described how the hero created the sanctuary by clearing a space in the grove, laying out the boundaries of the Altis and establishing games in honor of his father, Zeus.²²

And then, Zeus' brave son gathered together the whole army and all the booty in Pisa,

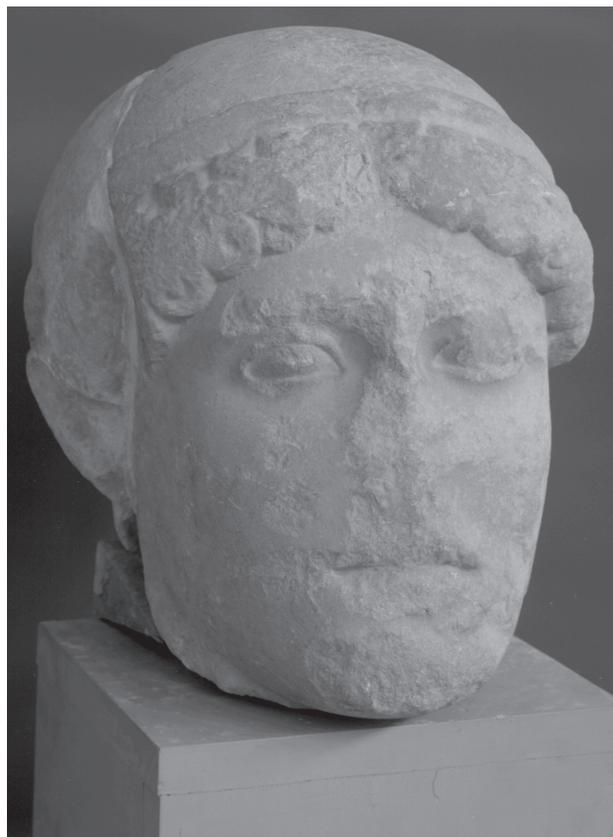


Fig. 12.9 Temple of Zeus at Olympia, West Pediment, Head of Figure K, Herakles. Alison Frantz Collection.

and he measured out a sacred precinct for his most powerful father.

He enclosed the Altis, and set it apart in the open
and he established the surrounding plain
as a resting place for banqueting,
honoring the stream of the Alpheos
along with the twelve ruling gods.
And he named the Hill of Kronos,
for before then it had no name, when, during Oinomaos' rule,
it was covered with much snow.

At the founding ceremony, the Fates stood nearby,
as did Time, the only one speaking the indisputable truth.
And going forward, he revealed clearly
how Herakles divided up the gift of war
offering up the first fruits and how he then
founded the quadrennial festival with the first Olympiad
and its victories.
(*OI* 10.43–59)

The poem describes how Herakles was not paid for cleaning the stables of Augeias and subsequently killed Kteates and Eurytos, the Aktoriones-Moliones. It is following his war with Augeias, the “guest-cheating king of the Epeians” that Herakles decides to build the sanctuary. Pindar also related how the hero, dissatisfied that there were no trees for shade, journeyed to the land of the Hyperboreans and brought back the olive trees that



Fig. 12.10 Temple of Zeus at Olympia, West Pediment, Figure M. Alison Frantz Collection.

today grow in such abundance in the sanctuary (*OI* 3). One of these trees stood at the west end of the Temple of Zeus and was considered sacred. The poet related that it is from these trees that the crowns for the victorious athletes were made.

...the grey-colored arrangement of olive
which once the son of Amphytrion brought from
the shady springs of Ister, as the most beautiful
memorial of the games at Olympia
(*OI* 3.12–15)

Because of the regional connections and the participation of Pelops and Oinomaos, the chariot race is therefore a natural choice as the subject of the east pediment.

Although Centauromachies had appeared in architectural sculpture before, the myth represented was commonly the battle between Herakles and Centaurs at the cave of Pholos. In the west pediment, the battle is one that has not, to our knowledge, appeared previously. The addition of women in the scene as the source of conflict may be new to architectural sculpture and indicates that the context of the battle is not that which took place at the cave of the Centaur Pholos. However, the fragmentary remains of a decorated cornice from the Archaic Temple of Artemis at Ephesos may be an earlier example of women present at a Centauromachy (Fig. 12.12). A. S. Murray's reconstruction drawing of the fragments is tantalizing, to be sure, showing a bent horse's knee resting on the ground and a human hand holding a branch above. There are further remains of a male's feet and head and the feet

and heads of at least two females.²³ There is insufficient evidence with which to identify the hero securely, but it is surely Herakles. The women standing nearby do not appear to be in any immediate peril from the Centaur and they may be goddesses or simply bystanders. Furthermore, there is nothing surviving to indicate that the context of the encounter was a wedding. Nevertheless, it is important that such a tableau with women present exists in the sixth century since it may indicate that a tradition in which women were rescued from Centaurs existed in architectural sculpture before the west pediment of the Temple of Zeus.

In the mythic tradition there are two known altercations between heroes and Centaurs that take place at a wedding celebration. Herakles rescues the daughter of Dexamenos, King of Elis, from the Centaur Eurytion during a wedding ceremony. In another version, Lapiths battle Centaurs at the wedding of their chief, Peirithoos. This latter version frequently features the hero Theseus as an ally to his



Fig. 12.11 Temple of Zeus at Olympia, West Pediment, Figures H and I. Alison Frantz Collection.

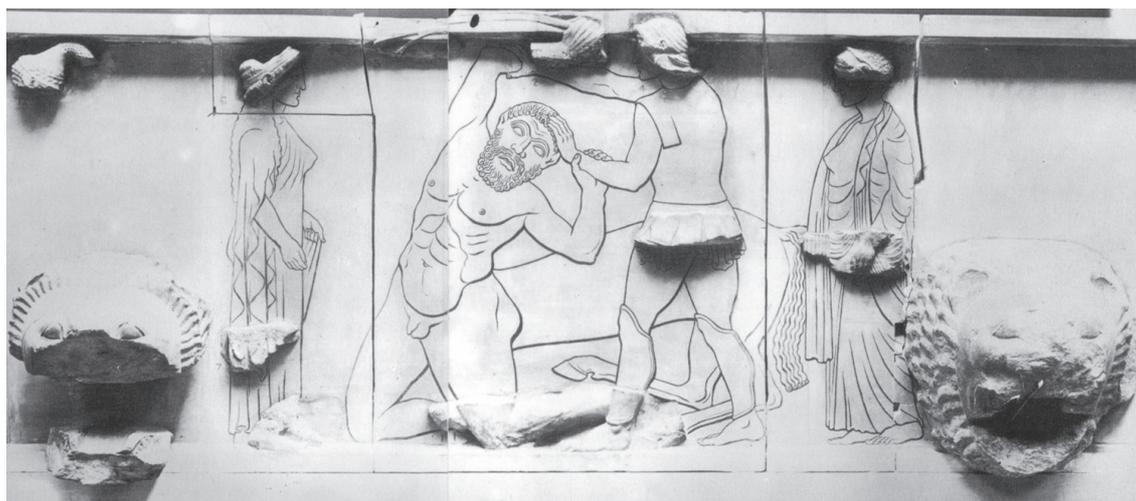


Fig. 12.12 Reconstruction (Murray) of sculpted *Sima*, Archaic Temple of Artemis, Ephesos, Hero battling Centaur with two females observing, ca. 550–540 BC. Photo after Muss 1994, fig. 57.

friend Peirithoos and takes place in Thessaly. Pausanias identified the altercation represented in the west pediment as the version in which Peirithoos and Theseus are the heroes. It is far more logical, however, that the battle represented is that which takes place in Elis featuring Herakles, a hero of great importance at Olympia. Not only is the hero honored, but the patrons of the temple, the Eleans, honor themselves by placing him in the context of a local story.

The construction of the Temple of Zeus provided an opportunity for the Eleans to venerate the gods and heroes most important to themselves and to the sanctuary while placing them within a context that would resonate locally as well as Panhellenically. This was achieved in several ways. First, the temple was dedicated to Zeus, the patron god of Olympia. Second, the two founders and eponymous heroes of the Olympic games, Pelops and Herakles, were chosen as the subjects of the temple's elaborate sculptural program. In the east pediment, Pelops is represented in the moments preceding the most important trial of his life, the chariot race between him and Oinomaos, king of Pisa, for the hand of his daughter Hippodameia. In the west pediment, the hero Herakles rescues the daughter of Dexamenos, king of Elis, from the Centaur Eurytion who wishes to take her as his bride by force. Each of these myths is a foundation legend for the establishment of the sanctuary and its games. Finally, Herakles appears again in the twelve sculpted metopes that decorate the front and back porches of the temple, carrying out the labors assigned to him by Eurystheus.

The identification of the subject depicted in the temple's west pediment has been a source of speculation in scholarship for many years. Although the suitability of the Elean Centauromachy as the subject of the west pediment is indisputable, a formidable opposition remains. Pausanias identified the scene as a different Centauromachy, the

battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs at the wedding of Peirithoos. While the theme of the battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs is iconographically similar to the events portrayed in the west pediment, the myth and its participants have no strong connection to either the region or the sanctuary. This is in marked contrast to the subjects portrayed in the east pediment and in the metopes, both of which work well in tandem on a local and Panhellenic level. In her discussion of the temple's sculptural program, Nancy Tersini remarked "[i]n view of the remarkable stylistic uniformity of the pedimental sculptures and metopes of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, the apparent disunity of their themes is surprising."²⁴ Views such as this have long been the party line in discussions of the west pediment. Pausanias himself seemed to grasp at straws when he suggested that the choice of the Thessalian Centauromachy was made because of a genealogical link between Peirithoos and Zeus and Theseus and Pelops. Yet, with one exception, his identification has been universally accepted, despite misgivings voiced by many scholars. That the subject of Herakles and Eurytion in the house of Dexamenos might be the theme for the west pediment, however, was suggested in 1895 by Wilamowitz in his commentary to *Herakles Furens*.²⁵

Was dieser giebel darstellt, ist gänzlich ungewiss. Herakles ist nicht zu erkennen, die überlieferte deutung auf Theseus und Peirithoos verkennt notorisch eine hauptfigur und kommt offenbar nur daher, dafs eine Kentaumachie, auf welcher Herakles fehlt, die thessalische sein müßte. An diese in Olympia, unterhalb der Pholoe, zu denken, ist eine tollheit, zu der nur ein archaeologe kommen kann, der nichts von geschichte weiß. dargestellt ist die eleische Kentaumachie in der form welche Herakles erst verdrängt hat. Unmittelbar übrigens haben die leute von Phigaleia auf dem friese ihres Apollontempels dieselbe Kentaumachie verstanden, mochten auch die athenischen künstler eine andere gemeint haben.

This suggestion, that the Centauromachy depicted in the west pediment was set in Elis and featured Herakles, was not further investigated either by its author or anyone else. It certainly did nothing to further his cause that Wilamowitz later abandoned this theory in favor of another interpretation.²⁶ Furthermore, Wilamowitz was a scholar well known for his contempt of Pausanias, a fact that may have caused other scholars to reject his proposal as being little more than an anti-Pausanias rant. Nevertheless, he recognized the incongruity of the Thessalian Centauromachy in the Olympian sculptural program, theorizing that the Elean Centauromachy featuring Herakles was a better fit. Both of these observations are sound, regardless of Wilamowitz's opinion of Pausanias, and although he did not refer to it, there is ample evidence for the Elean Centauromachy in both Archaic vase-painting and in contemporary literature.

The Elean Centauromachy in Literature

Even before the Archaic period, a *topos* in both literature and art was that of a Centaur abducting a mortal woman. Since female Centaurs were not imagined until the painter Zeuxis created them in the early fourth century in his renowned painting of a Centaur family, Centaurs had to pursue mortal women if they wished to reproduce.²⁷ Those with manners went about this in a civilized way. Cheiron and the mortal woman Chariklo lived together and had daughters (Pindar, *Py* 4.102–5).²⁸ Those without manners, and this was the majority, tried to take their brides by force, most often choosing the brides of other men. In order to emphasize the theme of the mortal bride violated by a Centaur, the scene of the attempted abduction was often set in the context of a wedding celebration. The earliest reference to a Centaur who misbehaves at a feast can be found in the *Odyssey* (21.295–303), in which the Centaur Eurytion was thrown out of the house of Peirithoos and grossly disfigured because he did “bad things.” According to a scholiast to the *Odyssey* commenting on this passage, another Centaur named Eurytion appeared at a wedding feast in the Peloponnese. The scholiast relates that this story was told in a poem of Bacchylides:

Bacchylides considers his Eurytion a different one. For he says that Eurytion, having been entertained in Elis by Dexamenos, insolently laid hands on the daughter of his host and because of this was killed by Herakles, who by good fortune happened to be at the house.
(See Bacchylides ed. Snell-Maceler fr 44)

This passage probably refers to the following poem, fragments of which were recovered from a papyrus found at Oxyrhynchus. These fragments make up the speech of a distressed speaker who tells someone else that a Centaur has arrived uninvited at a feast and wants to take away his daughter to Malea as his bride. The speaker is unwilling to let him do so and the Centaur is angry. The reference to Malea clearly indicates that this is a myth of the Peloponnese. Furthermore, Malea is the location to

which the Centaurs fled, when driven from Mount Pholoe by Herakles and where Cheiron took refuge after he was driven from Mount Pelion by the Lapiths (ApB 2.5.4):

...at heart...again with violence...vexed...
nor did (he?) approach...; and he said this: “I am
grieved at heart...: uninvited (he came) to the
lovely feast, the Centaur whose bed is in the mountains...
and he asks me for my (slender-ankled?)
daughter, wishing to take her as his bride to Malea;
but to me (this is repellent), and since I am unwilling
(he threatens me) more harshly (saying?)...
(You) acted very foolishly; but I...you...Would
that...blameless...”²⁹
(fr 66 POxy 2395 fr 1 = PMG 924)

This version of the myth resembles that which is related in full in Diodoros in which the daughter of Dexamenos (here named Hippolyte) is marrying a man named Azan.³⁰

After this Herakles, going back to the Peloponnese, made war against Augeas on account of his defrauding him of his reward. Having come to a battle with the Eleans, and having no success with it at that time, he returned to Olenos to the house of Dexamenos. His daughter Hippolyte was getting married to Azan, and Herakles, as he was a guest at the wedding feast, observing the Centaur Eurytion violating Hippolyte and being forceful with her, killed him.³¹
(Diod 4.33.1)

Another variant survives in Apollodoros. Here, it is the Centaur himself who is the groom, although Dexamenos is not happy at the prospect of having the Centaur as his son-in-law. When Herakles appears, the frantic father begs the hero to help him extricate himself from this sticky situation. Herakles obliges by killing Eurytion when the Centaur arrives to collect his bride:

...and Herakles went to Olenos to the house of Dexamenos. And there he found him on the point of betrothing his daughter Mnesimache, against his will, to the Centaur Eurytion and being called upon by Dexamenos to help, Herakles killed Eurytion when he arrived for his bride.
(ApB 2.5.5)

The mythographer Hyginus mentions the myth of Eurytion twice in his *Fabulae*. In *Fabula* 31, while relating the various victims of Herakles, the woman ravished by the Centaur Eurytion is named Deianeira:

...he killed the Centaur Nessos because he wished to violate Deianeira. He killed the Centaur Eurytion because he sought the hand of Deianeira, daughter of Dexamenos, his hoped-for bride.
(Fab 31)

Hyginus gives a more complete telling of the myth in *Fabula* 33:

When Herakles had come to the household of the king Dexamenos, and had violated his daughter Deianeira, and had given a pledge that he would marry her, after his departure, the Centaur Eurytion, son of Ixion and Nephele, sought the hand of Deianeira as his wife. Her father, fearing violence, promised to hand her over. When the appointed day arrived,

Eurytion came with his brothers for the wedding. Herakles stepped in and killed the Centaur and married his betrothed bride.

In the same way at another wedding, when Peirithoos was marrying Hippodameia, the daughter of Adrastos, the Centaurs, full of wine, tried to rape the wives of the Lapiths. The Centaurs killed many of them, but were destroyed by them.

(*Fab* 33)³²

The myth of Eurytion in the house of Dexamenos has some variation in its details. In every extant version of the myth the daughter has a different name (Hippolyte, Mnesimache and even Deianeira) and only the Bacchylides version takes place in Elis. The others are in Olenos, a city in nearby Achaia.³³ Yet the fundamental details of the Eurytion myth are always the same as those in Bacchylides: the Centaur Eurytion tries to abduct or marry the daughter of Dexamenos and Herakles kills him.

The Centauromachy at the wedding of Peirithoos and Hippodameia in Thessaly was an artistic “double” of the Centauromachy at the wedding in Elis.³⁴ In the pattern of Centauromachies, it is significant that it was the hero Herakles who rescued the daughter of Dexamenos, not only because he encountered and killed Centaurs frequently, but also because he was well known as the model on which the deeds of the Athenian hero Theseus were based, beginning in the sixth century. Ancient authors made connections between the myth of Eurytion and Herakles in the house of Dexamenos and the disrupted wedding festivities of Peirithoos and Hippodameia. The scholiast to the *Odyssey* was careful to point out that Bacchylides had made a distinction between the Thessalian Eurytion in Homer and the Elean Eurytion who appeared in his story. Hyginus related the events of the Thessalian wedding immediately following his account of the Eurytion myth.

Such a pattern is apparent in artistic representations as well. Because the deeds of Theseus were modeled on those of Herakles, it was not uncommon for parallel episodes to be depicted together.³⁵ Plutarch (*Thes* 6–7) pointed out that Theseus emulated the older hero and was inspired to tackle the bandits of the Saronic Gulf out of his admiration for the deeds of Herakles. Plutarch tells us that the Athenians even called Theseus “another Herakles” (*Thes* 29.3). While Herakles fought Centaurs on a number of occasions, however, Theseus was involved in a battle with Centaurs only once. Furthermore, when Theseus aided his friend Peirithoos and his fellow Lapiths, who were often plagued by the tribe of Centaurs inhabiting the surrounding mountains, it was initially in a secondary capacity. It was not until he gained his reputation as the foremost hero of Athens that Theseus took a primary role in the Centauromachy. Nor did early descriptions of this battle, as in *Iliad* 1 (262–70), refer to weddings or abducted brides as the catalyst for the conflict. It was not until the middle of the fifth century that Theseus began to be represented protecting women from Centaurs, although his predecessor Herakles was depicted doing so nearly a century earlier.

Visual Representations of the Elean Centauromachy

There are Archaic Attic vase-paintings depicting Herakles defending a bride from a Centaur that date to the second quarter of the sixth century. A number of Tyrrhenian amphorae dating *ca.* 565 depict Herakles attacking a Centaur with a sword (Figs 12.13–16). On the Centaur’s back is a young woman. In some of these depictions the offending Centaur wears a wreath on his head, indicating that the wearer is participating in festivities of some kind, such as a wedding or symposium (Figs 12.13–15). Some of these vases also depict other Centaurs coming to the aid of their comrade (Fig. 12.14).³⁶ There are human onlookers as well. An old man is always a spectator and often other young women are present, their hands sometimes raised in alarm. Gods, such as Athena, Apollo and Hermes, are sometimes depicted as well³⁷ (Fig. 12.15). These vases have nearly all been identified by scholars as representing the killing of Nessos.³⁸ One of the vases even bears the appropriate inscriptions, labeling Deianeira, Herakles, Nessos and Oineus, as well as other spectators³⁹ (Fig. 12.16). Yet there is little about the iconography of this scene that is consistent with the literary versions of the Nessos myth, in which the Centaur carries Deianeira across the river Evenos and tries to rape her. He is then shot by Herakles from the opposite bank with arrows dipped in the venom of the hydra. As he lies dying, Nessos tells Deianeira to collect his blood and use it as a powerful love potion, though in fact it will result in the death of Herakles.

The only version of the Nessos story that varies from these fundamental details is found in Bacchylides (ed. Snell-Maceler fr 64). In the Bacchylides fragment, the weapon used by Herakles is the club. This implies that Herakles was on the spot at the time of the attempted rape and makes the story’s role in his future destruction immaterial, since there is no poisoned arrow and therefore no love potion.⁴⁰ Every version of the story includes the river crossing and this is certainly the defining element of the myth. Yet the Louvre amphora, despite its identifying inscriptions, has no indication of a river. There are a number of other people present as well. In no extant literary version of the myth does Nessos attack Deianeira at a wedding or at a feast in front of her father and other guests.⁴¹ In fact, the characters are nearly always limited to Herakles, Nessos and Deianeira. There is only one exception, found in Diodoros (4.36.5), in which the couple’s infant son Hyllus is also present. Furthermore, several of these Tyrrhenian vases depict fellow Centaurs joining the fray (Fig. 12.14).⁴² Herakles is often depicted using his sword against the Centaur, resulting in no poisoned arrow and therefore no love charm. Indeed, if it were not for the inscriptions on the Louvre amphora, this event would be far more appropriately identified as the slaying of the Centaur Eurytion in the house of Dexamenos. Because of their similarity to the inscription-bearing Louvre amphora, however, the other Tyrrhenian

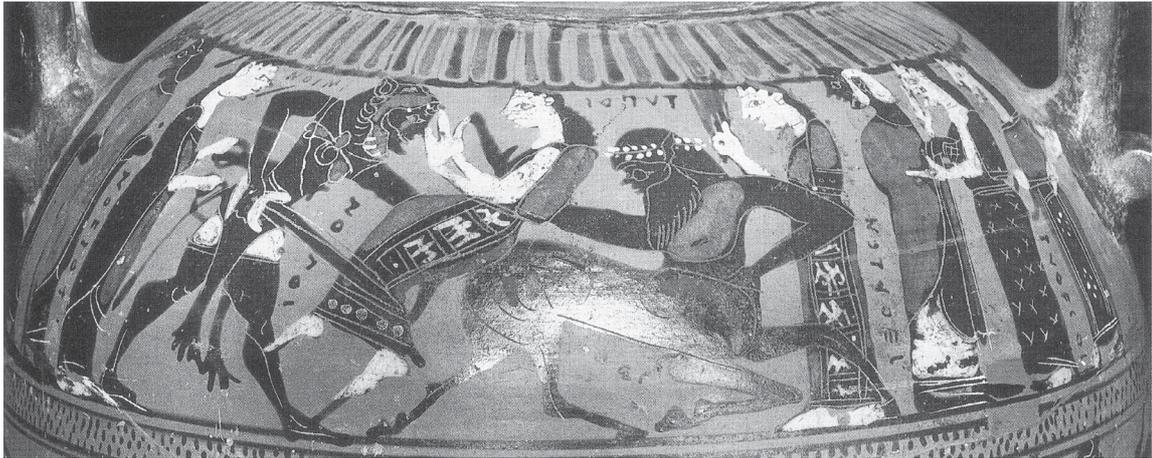


Fig. 12.13 Attic Black-figure Amphora, Tyrrhenian Group, ca. 565. The Hague Meermanno-Westreenianum W608 126. Photo after LIMC Nessos 6.



Fig. 12.14 Attic Black-figure Amphora, Tyrrhenian Group, ca. 565 Munich 1433 Jahn 126. Photo after CVA Munich.

amphorae of this type have been identified as representing the Nessos episode.⁴³ The basis of this identification disregards the presence of wedding iconography, such as wreaths and torches, and the lack of such elements crucial to the myth of Nessos as the river crossing and the use of the bow and arrow. Admittedly, the use of other weapons besides the bow and arrow exist, perhaps in two of the most famous illustrations of this story; the neck amphora by the Nessos painter (Athens 1002) and the New York Nessos amphora (New York 11.210.1).⁴⁴ The Bacchylides fragment discussed above (fr 64) indicates that authors

were familiar with the variations of these myths and clearly artists were as well.

In another Tyrrhenian amphora one of the young women looking on while Herakles dispatches Eurytion is depicted holding a torch, iconography that is consistent with marriage rituals (Fig. 12.13).⁴⁵ In his discussion of this vase, Baur dismissed the detail of the torch as “merely a whim of the artist” since, as he rightly argued, there would be no call for wedding torches in the story of Nessos.⁴⁶ Because a wedding torch would be perfectly appropriate to a depiction of the wedding in the



Fig. 12.15 Attic Black-figure Amphora, Tyrrhenian Group, ca. 565. Indiana University, Bloomington. Photo after LIMC Nessos 4.



Fig. 12.16 Attic Black-figure Amphora, Tyrrhenian Group, ca. 565. Paris Musée de Louvre E 852. Photo after LIMC Nessos 1

house of Dexamenos, it is therefore likely that this is a representation of the Eurytion story.

This tableau was not limited to vases of the Archaic period, though some of the later vases may indicate that the myth acquired some variation over time. An Attic red-figure stamnos by the Polygnotos Group from ca. 450–430 depicts the familiar group of Herakles, draped in his lion skin and armed with his club, about to strike a Centaur who is trying to grab a young woman (Fig. 12.17).⁴⁷ An old man behind Herakles has an arm outstretched in the direction of the action. The figures are labeled and the inscriptions indicate that this myth had developed even further by the mid-fifth century. Here, the old man is labeled Oineus, the young woman Deianeira and the Centaur Dexamenos. This representation is nearly identical in composition to a vase by Polygnotos from the same period (Fig. 12.18).⁴⁸ The Polygnotos vase does not have any inscriptions and Herakles, though he can be identified by his club, does not wear his lion skin. Rainer Vollkommer pointed out that although scholars such as Beazley and Shefton considered

the labeling of the Centaur “Dexamenos” an error, there was a Middle Comedy by Timokles called *The Centaur or Dexamenos*. Furthermore, a Scholiast to Kallimachos’ *Hymn 4* indicated that a Dexamenos mentioned in line 102 was a Centaur, a fact that is not evident from the poem itself:

...and Bura, the cattle-stead of Dexamenos, son of Oeceus...
(*Hymn 4, To Delos*, 102)

OR

Boura, a city in Achaia, which Dexamenos the Centaur inhabited; and there he kept watch over his cattlesteads.
(Scholiast to Kallimachos, *Hymn 4*, 102)

While the characters Deianeira and Oineus are consistent with the myth of Herakles and Nessos, Dexamenos is a character from the myth of Herakles and Eurytion. There is so little known about a Centaur named Dexamenos that it is impossible to assess if his story resembled that of Eurytion, assuming that the scholiast was correct in

assuming that this Dexamenos even was a Centaur. The patronymic son of Oikeus” presents a problem for this identification. If the Dexamenos in this passage were a Centaur, he could not be the son of Oikeus. The only known Centaurs who were *not* the grandchildren of Ixion and Nephele and sons of Kentauros were Cheiron and Pholos, who were the sons of Kronos and Silenos, respectively.⁴⁹

While the myths of the Centaur Eurytion and the Centaur Nessos are fairly consistent in the literary tradition, there seems to have been a great deal of variation in their representations in the artistic tradition. There exist at least two examples, however, that illustrate the Eurytion story without doubt. A fragment of a bell krater by the Nausikaa Painter dating to *ca.* 450–440, depicts a Centaur and bearded man sharing a couch (Fig. 12.19).⁵⁰ The Centaur is smiling broadly and gesturing towards a young girl who kneels at the foot of the couch. Behind the couch stands Herakles and behind the girl stands a young man with his hand to his head in a gesture of dismay (Iolaos or Azan?). The man on the couch, who is certainly Dexamenos, also has a hand raised as though in alarm. There can be little doubt that this is a representation of Eurytion in the house of Dexamenos offering himself as husband and son-in-law. His horse’s body is discreetly draped with a cloth and only his tail emerges from under it, betraying his unique physiognomy. Unfortunately the fragmentary state of the vase prevents us from learning what other characters and events were portrayed. Another fragment of an Attic red-figure vase from *ca.* 475–450 depicts a young girl wrapped in a veil sitting next to a couch on which a Centaur awkwardly lies, his long horse’s legs drawn up to his chest (Fig. 12.20). This too is surely a depiction of the Centaur Eurytion courting the daughter of Dexamenos.⁵¹

Judging from the previous examples, Herakles’ rescue of a young woman from a Centaur had a long history in visual representations. The Attic vases from the sixth century that depict the scene have sufficient wedding

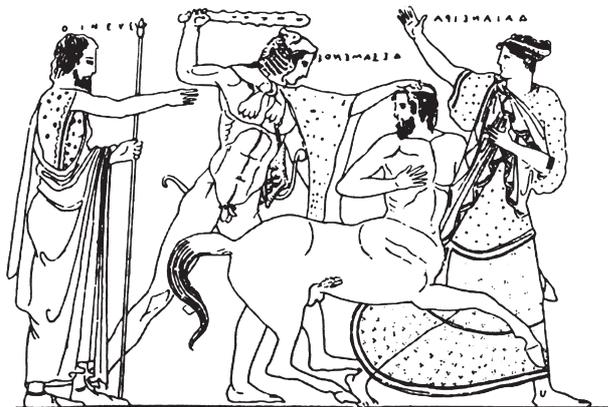


Fig. 12.17 Attic Red-figure Stamnos, Polygnotos Group, *ca.* 450–440. Naples H 3089. Photo after Vollkommer 1988, figure 36.

iconography, such as wreaths, torches, attendant gods and guests (both human and equine), to indicate that the scene of the abduction was a wedding ceremony. The existence of these early visual depictions together with the poem of Bacchylides relating the event, provide a solid precedent for the use of the theme of the Elean Centauromachy in the west pediment of Olympia’s Temple of Zeus.

If the west pediment is a depiction of the Elean Centauromachy, then where is Herakles? Herakles, though known as a slayer of monsters, has characteristics in common with the Centaurs. He wears animal skins, fights with a tree trunk, and takes whatever women strike his fancy. He is also known to over indulge in drink, often leading to acts of violence. His role in the Elean Centauromachy, however, is a redeeming one. Here, the hero is represented as a defender of women against Centaurs who wish to violate the sacred laws of marriage. He is depicted fighting with a sword, and his less civilized attributes of the club and lion skin have been put aside. Herakles is represented in a similar way in the twelve metopes that also decorate the Temple of Zeus. In none of these metopes does he wear the lion skin and his age varies from a young, beardless youth to an older, bearded man. In fifth-century vase-paintings depicting Herakles and Eurytion, he is sometimes shown as a beardless young man, and without his lion skin (Fig. 12.18) though in the earlier depictions of the sixth century he is more often depicted as older, wearing the skin and bearded (Figs 12.13–16). There appears to be no consistency in the hero’s appearance in depictions of this myth. He is shown both young and old, bearded and beardless, fighting with

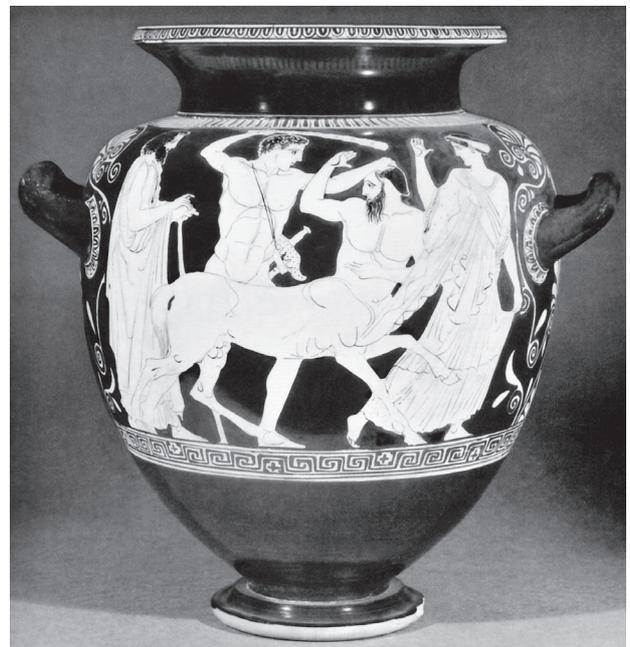


Fig. 12.18 Attic Red-figure Stamnos, Polygnotos, *ca.* 450–440. London BM 98.7–16.5. Photo after CVA, London, British Museum.

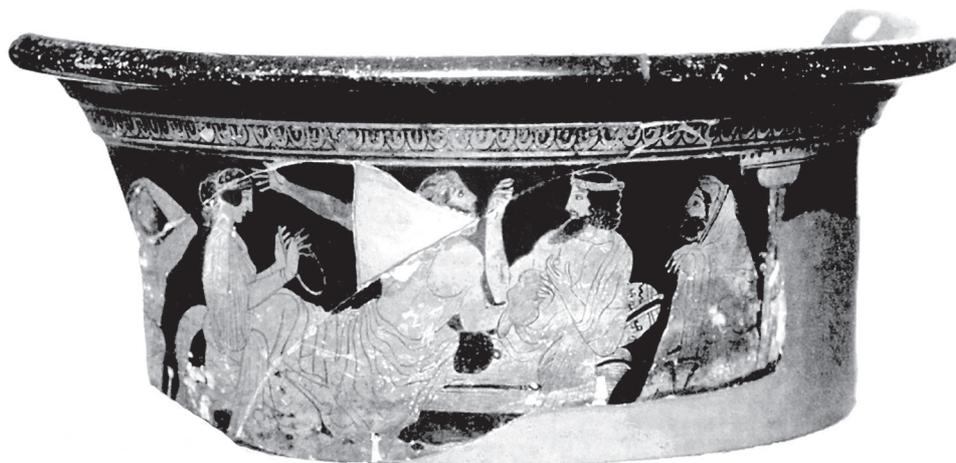


Fig. 12.19 Attic Red-figure Bell Krater Fragment, Nausikaa Painter, ca. 475–450. Paris, Musée de Louvre G 345. Photo after CVA, Paris, Louvre.

a sword or his club, and with and without his lion skin. Yet in the metopes of the Temple of Zeus, Herakles does not once appear wearing his lion skin, and he varies in age throughout. The beardless face of figure K (Fig. 12.4) and the lack of lion skin thus present no impediment to the identification of this figure as Herakles. Given that his role in the myth was the rescue of the bride from the Centaur Eurytion and it is surely Eurytion, the potential bridegroom, who would wear the metal wreath indicated by the drill holes, it is therefore most likely that Herakles is represented by figure K in the west pediment, coming to the aid of the young woman seized by Centaur I (Fig. 12.11). His companion, figure M, may well be his nephew Iolaos, a faithful companion to his uncle through many of his labors and adventures (Fig. 12.10). The two friends are shown fighting Centaurs in a similar back to back pose on a red-figure kylix by the artist Pamphaios, from ca. 510 (Los Angeles A 5933.50.21) (Fig. 12.21).⁵²

Finally, the central figure of Apollo lends his divine authority to the battle being carried out. Like Herakles, Apollo is a son of Zeus and he stands by his brother during the fray, in much the same way as Athena does in the temple's metopes. Apollo appears frequently in wedding scenes and it is not at all surprising that he would be a guest at this wedding (Fig. 12.15). Apollo is the divine ancestor of the royal house of Elis, the father of Lapithus, who was the father of Phorbas. Phorbas migrated to the Peloponnese from Thessaly and became king of Elis and thus an ancestor of Dexamenos (Paus 5.1.11).

The encounter between Herakles and the Centaur Eurytion at the marriage of the daughter of Dexamenos, king of Elis, is appropriate as the subject of the west pediment for many reasons. First, the two most important heroes of the sanctuary, Pelops and Herakles, are depicted in myths that took place locally, in Pisa and in Elis. Yet both heroes are important outside of the region of Elis as well. The Peloponnese, or the island of Pelops, was named for Pelops while Herakles was a Dorian hero of



Fig. 12.20 Attic Red-figure Fragment, ca. 475–450. Hamburg Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe 1937.3. Photo after Woodford 2003, fig. 146.

Panhellenic importance whose labors took him frequently to the Peloponnese, and to the regions of Elis and Arkadia in particular. Thus, the Eleans chose the themes to be represented in the pediments of the Temple of Zeus in order to emphasize both the foundation of the sacred cults of Olympia and the heroes who established them, as well as to reflect matters of cultural and historical importance. Furthermore, the theme of a threat posed to the sanctity of marriage is significant in both the east and the west pediment and was one to which any visitor to the sanctuary could personally relate.

Given that the use of a local legend that features Herakles, the founder of both the sanctuary and the games, suits the program far better than the Thessalian Centauromachy, it is perhaps surprising that scholars were not willing to accept Wilamowitz's proposal of an Elean Centauromachy.⁵³ Clearly, the identification of the scene as the Thessalian Centauromachy by Pausanias has

been a formidable stumbling block. In the chronology of the Centauromachy in architectural sculpture, however, the primary position of the Temple of Zeus perhaps explains how such an identification came about. Pausanias visited the sanctuary over 600 years after the temple was built. In the second century CE, the Thessalian Wedding Centauromachy was prevalent in architectural sculpture and vase-paintings. Yet this was not the case at the beginning of the fifth century. The Elean Wedding Centauromachy, however, had been a prominent theme in vase-painting since the middle of the sixth century. Like the chariot race between Pelops and Oinomaos found in the temple's east pediment, however, the Elean Centauromachy was a subject that was chosen especially for its local significance, while at the same time resonating Panhellenically. Once the battle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs featuring Theseus began to use the context of the disrupted wedding ceremony as well, together with the increasing popularity of the young hero and his patron city of Athens, the Thessalian Centauromachy became more prevalent architectural sculpture. It was not until after the Elean Centauromachy at the wedding appeared in the west pediment of the Temple of Zeus, however, that Theseus began to appear defending women from Centaurs. Given the established pattern in artistic representations of Theseus engaged in deeds that mirror those of Herakles, it is logical to assume that Theseus was shown protecting women from Centaurs because Herakles was depicted doing so.

This is not to say that Theseus and Centaurs were not depicted before the middle of the fifth century. The Thessalian Centauromachy that included Theseus began to be represented in the early sixth century with the François vase and continued through the Archaic period.⁵⁴ Later Archaic examples invariably followed the model set by the François vase: the Centaurs, using trees and boulders, fight Lapiths armed as hoplites in an outside setting. The attack on the invulnerable Lapith warrior Kaineus by Centaurs was usually the focus of the composition. It is difficult to know whether Theseus is included among the other

warriors in the Archaic vases. If Kleitias had not labeled all of the figures in his depiction of the subject, we would not have been able to identify him on the François vase either. The François vase is the earliest depiction of the Thessalian Centauromachy definitely to include Theseus.

In these Archaic examples of the Thessalian Centauromachy there is no indication of the disrupted wedding that will become prominent in the iconography of the latter half of the fifth century. A krater by the Florence Painter,⁵⁵ ca. 460, is perhaps the first surviving example of the disrupted wedding of Peirithoos and Hippodameia (Fig. 12.22). The central figure, a young man, draws back his fist to strike a Centaur who has a vase raised over his head. A young woman has fallen to the ground and her dress has slipped off her shoulder. Another youth has a Centaur, who is brandishing a small table, in a headlock.⁵⁶ The fight is clearly an impromptu affair, more of a brawl than the formal battles of earlier depictions, and the young men use techniques culled from wrestling and boxing while the Centaurs use whatever they can lay their hands on. The lack of formal weapons, the nudity and the use of household implements indicate that the battle broke out in a domestic context. Furthermore, the presence of a woman, whose disheveled clothing implies that she has been sexually assaulted, perhaps indicates that the occasion was a wedding. These details all point to a new direction in the artistic depictions of the Thessalian Centauromachy. The use of boxing and wrestling moves suggests that this may be the Centauromachy involving Theseus since the cycle cups depicting his deeds, most prevalent at the turn of the sixth century, were often showcases of such athletic maneuvers. Theseus was not a hero of brute strength, like Herakles, and relied a great deal on agility and cleverness to overcome his opponents. Because of this, he was frequently represented, beginning in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, using techniques mastered in the gymnasium rather than on the battlefield.⁵⁷

It is clear that the parallels between the two heroes and their interactions with Centaurs were evident to artists in

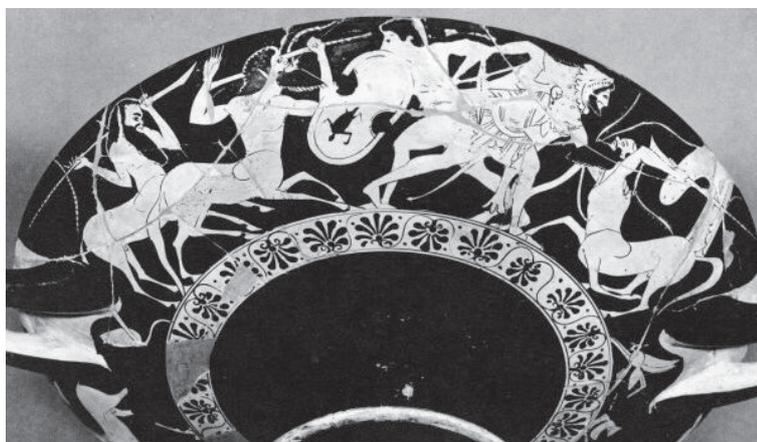


Fig. 12.21 Attic Red-figure Kylix, Pamphaios, ca. 510. Los Angeles A 5933.50.21. Photo after CVA, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum.

the Archaic period. Just as Hyginus associated Herakles rescuing women from Centaurs with the Centauromachy in Thessaly in his *Fabula* 33, these two themes were also clearly associated in the minds of ancient artists as early as the middle of the sixth century. A Tyrrenian amphora depicts the familiar group of Herakles, Eurytion and the daughter of Dexamenos in the center with the old man to the right between two women, one of whom carries wreaths in her hands (Fig. 12.15).⁵⁸ To the left, two Centaurs armed with stones approach the central group. One of them wears a wreath on his head and Eurytion does as well.⁵⁹ On the other side of the Munich amphora is a depiction of a Centauromachy of the type associated with Archaic depictions of the Thessalian. Fully armed men dressed as hoplites battle Centaurs who are armed with stones and tree trunks. Over a century later, two red-figure cups by Aristophanes in Boston depict a Centauromachy on the exterior in which nude young men crowned with wreaths battle Centaurs with swords, axes and other implements.⁶⁰ It seems clear that a feast setting was intended since one of the Centaurs fights with a broken pot. There are no women represented, however. In the tondoes of these vases a nude and beardless young man raises his club against a Centaur who carries a young woman (Fig. 12.23). These figures are labeled Herakles, Deianeira and Nessos. Shefton argued that the painter made an error when painting the inscriptions and that the young man in the tondo was actually Theseus defending Hippodameia.⁶¹ Because of the tradition linking the exploits of Herakles and Theseus, however, the inscriptions are certainly correct. By painting the two heroes battling Centaurs on the same vase, Aristophanes was perpetuating a long-standing practice.

Given the parallels between the Centauromachies of Herakles and Theseus, it should not come as a surprise that Pausanias confused the two. On a superficial level, one Centauromachy resembles another and many of the

sculpted Centauromachies that involved multiple Centaurs and women *were* the Thessalian, after the middle of the fifth century. Usually, in his Centauromachies Herakles either defended a woman from a single Centaur (Nessos) or defended himself against many Centaurs (Pholos). The exception was when Herakles rescued the daughter of Dexamenos from Eurytion at a wedding. The marital setting of this myth dictated that guests would be involved, both women and other Centaurs who, seizing the moment, would surely have entered the fray. Since the Centauromachy in Elis was one that had particular regional significance, it is not surprising that it was not used again in monumental sculpture, outside of Elis. I would argue, therefore, that Pausanias was justifiably mistaken in his interpretation of the Centaurs in the west pediment.⁶²

Overall, Pausanias' study of Greece is filled with important information that has aided archaeologists enormously and, given its size, is remarkably free of errors. Mistaken identifications and interpretations exist, however. His first and most obvious error is his identification of the Temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounion as the Temple of Athena (1.1.1). Later, he says that the temple at Tegea is the largest in the Peloponnese, though the temple of Zeus at Olympia is twice its size (8.45.5). Several of Pausanias' most glaring errors were made at Olympia, where we know that he had guides leading him around the sanctuary. This suggests that the knowledge of these guides was inconsistent.⁶³ Given that Pausanias visited Olympia nearly 600 years after the Temple of Zeus was built, it is certainly not surprising if his guides were not clear on details. The Temple of Zeus and its sculpture were problematic for both Pausanias and his guides.⁶⁴ In the east pediment they argued over the name of Pelops' charioteer and Pausanias erroneously identified the Old Seer (figure N) as a groom (5.10.8). Pausanias attributed the east pediment to Paionios and the west to Alkamenes, though scholars have since decided that these identifications are not convincing given the time period and unanimity of the sculpture as a whole.⁶⁵ The west pediment caused Pausanias the most problems of all and was discussed very briefly in comparison to his description of the east pediment. He identified the towering central figure in the west pediment, almost universally recognized as the god Apollo, as Peirithoos and figure K as Kaineus (5.10.8). It is his desire to include Kaineus in the tableau that is perhaps most telling. Apart from inscriptions, it is the figure of Kaineus being beaten into the ground by flanking Centaurs that undeniably identifies a Centauromachy as being the Thessalian. Beginning with the west frieze of the Hephaisteion in Athens, Centauromachies nearly always included him.⁶⁶ The fact that Pausanias looked for, but could not easily identify, Kaineus in the west pediment is understandable given his widespread appearance in Thessalian Centauromachies. Yet depictions of Kaineus are virtually unchanged from the Archaic period and figure K in the west pediment would be unprecedented as a Kaineus. It is far more likely that Pausanias was unable to identify Kaineus because he simply was not there. Not



Fig. 12.22 Attic Red-figure Column Krater, Florence Painter, ca. 460. Florence Museo Archeologico 3997. Photo after CVA, Florence, Archaeological Museum.



Fig. 12.23 Attic Red-figure cup, Aristophanes Painter, ca. 420–410. Boston 00.344. Photo after CVA, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.

because, as Ashmole argues, Kaineus was not essential to the story, but because the Centauromachy represented was not the Thessalian but the Elean.⁶⁷

The construction of the Temple of Zeus, therefore, provided an opportunity for the Eleans to venerate the gods and heroes most important to themselves and to the sanctuary while placing them within a context that would resonate locally as well as Panhellenically. This was important because of the thousands of visitors who would journey to the sanctuary from all over the Greek world. The goal of the temple sculptor was to plan a thematically significant program to ensure that any visitor to the sanctuary would respond to the program of the temple as a unified whole on a number of different levels. As he approached from the west, the visitor would see Herakles rescuing the bride of a local king from her unwanted suitor, a creature who dared to thwart the civilized and sacred rules of marriage. This heroic action would further be emphasized in the six sculpted metopes over the opisthodomos that depicted more of Herakles' encounters with untamed creatures, both in the Peloponnese and beyond. The visitor would then walk around to the east end of the temple, admiring the sacred olive tree planted by Herakles at the temple's west end, passing the shrine of Pelops established by Herakles in honor of his maternal ancestor, passing the shrine of Herakles himself, until he faced the east pediment.

There, Pelops himself would be evident as he prepared to overcome the King of Pisa and marry his daughter. Thus, the east and west pediments and the metopes incorporate these important heroes engaged in legends that were most significant to the Greeks, both locally and Panhellenically. The chariot race between Pelops and Oinomaos, the Elean

Centauromachy and the cleaning of the stables of Augeas would resonate on a local level, while the labors of Herakles and the themes of the sanctity of marriage and the victory of civilization over wildness would be significant to all of the visitors to the Sanctuary. Thus, despite the particularly local emphasis, the sculptural program is, overall, Panhellenic in its scope and was therefore as significant to the thousands of pilgrims visiting the sanctuary each year as it was to the Eleans themselves.

Notes

- 1 See Patay-Horvath 2004 for his argument that Pausanias is mistaken in his identification of the subject of the east pediment, which I also believe to be true of his identification of the subject of the west pediment.
- 2 Jones 1918.
- 3 Pausanias references the *Ehoiai* for the name Alkathoos as one of 17 suitors in his description of the Chest of Kypselos (6.21.10).
- 4 Calder 1974, discusses the possible production date of *Oinomaos*. He favors an early date (468) in the poet's career based on perceived "Aeschyleanisms" in the 18 lines that remain of this work. Euripides' production was performed in 409. See also Hurwit 1987, 7.
- 5 Myrtilos' fate is mentioned by the chorus in Sophocles' *Elektra* where he is described as being thrown from the chariot into the sea (505–15).
- 6 duBois 1988, 56. These are epithets reserved by duBois for Centaurs, Amazons and Barbarians.
- 7 See Säflund 1970 for an extensive treatment of this problem and illustrations of the many arrangements that have been devised for the east pediment. The slimmer, more youthful figure, G, is generally considered to be Pelops while the more mature body, figure I, is that of Oinomaos. Pausanias

- places the figure of Pelops in the same half of the pediment that contains the river Alpheios. He is usually identified as figure A, the more robust of the two river gods. This would place Pelops and Hippodameia on Zeus' right hand and the viewer's left, resulting in an "open" arrangement of the central figures. See also Ashmole and Yalouris 1967, Herrman 1987, 125–148 and Kyrieleis 1997, 13–27. It should be noted that the present arrangement in the Olympia Museum is the "closed" arrangement, not the "open" arrangement illustrated here in Figures 1 and 3.
- 8 Boardman 1991, 34, points out that a bronze corselet and helmet were added to the image of Pelops at a later date, but a helmet on his head carved in stone is clearly visible today. Perhaps in Pausanias' day only Oinomaos wore an additional helmet in metal which distinguished him from Pelops.
 - 9 Kyrieleis 1997, 19–20.
 - 10 See Squarciapino 1952–1954, 133–138 and Simon 1968, 149.
 - 11 Kyrieleis 1997, 20. Note that figure I is also known as J in some reconstructions.
 - 12 LIMC 1, 694 7. The seer as a sign of impending disaster was a device used on the Amphiaraios krater (Berlin F 1655, now lost) from ca. 570–550. Hurwit 1987. In this vase-painting, the old man is seated to the far right of the scene near Amphiaraios' chariot, and rests his head in his hand as though under the burden of his vision. Similarly, figure N sits behind the chariot of Oinomaos in the half of the pediment to the viewer's right.
 - 13 See Kardara 1970 for the suggestion that the figure may be a youthful Zeus. Pausanias' identification of this figure as Peirithoos will be discussed below.
 - 14 Sinn 1994, 593–6, in particular figures 7, 8 and 9. For a summary of scholarship on the identification of the central figure, see 592–8.
 - 15 Cahen 1937, 3–13, suggests that the posture and gesture are taken from an earlier representation of Peirithoos (the Theseion mural) and that it is for this reason that Pausanias made his error in identification Barron 1972, 28–9, points out, however, that Peirithoos would have been attacking a Centaur, not directing the action in this way.
 - 16 Blinkenberg 1934, 27–33.
 - 17 Ashmole and Yalouris 1967, 17 and Tersini 1987, 145–52.
 - 18 Treu 1897, 70, also observed that the god was pointing. For his drawings of Apollo see 69–72, figures 110–115.
 - 19 Tersini 1987 151–2.
 - 20 See Shefton for his discussion of this "himation motif" which he uses to identify these two figures as Peirithoos (figure K) and Theseus (figure M). As an heroic motif, it can, by the same token, be as easily applied to Herakles and Iolaos, or any other heroes in such a situation.
 - 21 Centaurs wearing wreaths at the wedding can be seen in Athenian vase-paintings from the sixth century and will be discussed below.
 - 22 This ode was written to celebrate a victory in the games in 476, the same year as *Olympian* 1, which relates the story of the chariot race between Pelops and Oinomaos, and *Olympian* 3, which describes how Herakles planted the sanctuary with olive trees.
 - 23 Murray 1889, figure 1.
 - 24 Tersini 1987, 139.
 - 25 Wilamowitz 1895, 60 n. 110.
 - 26 Wilamowitz 1925, 237, n. 2 retracted this suggestion and proposed a different scenario. Instead, he suggested that the pediment depicted a double wedding between the Elean princes Eurytos and Kteates (the Aktorione-Moliones slain by Herakles in Pindar's *Olympian* 10) to the daughters of Dexamenos. There is no literary evidence to support such a myth, however.
 - 27 The painting of the Centaur family is described by Lucian (*Zeuxis or Antiochos* 3) as being a novelty when it was shown for the first time.
 - 28 The poet does not specifically say that Cheiron and Chariklo are married, but they live in a cave together with Cheiron's mother Philyra and his daughters. Chariklo, in the form of a mortal woman, also appears with Cheiron in the procession at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis represented on the François vase (Florence 4209; *ABV* 76.1; *Paralipomena* 29–30; *Beazley Addenda*² 21), and in a vase of Sophilos (Athens Akr 587; *ABV* 39.15; *Paralipomena* 10).
 - 29 Page 1962.
 - 30 It is unclear whether this Azan is the same as the one mentioned by Pausanias (8.4.3–5) who was the son of the nymph Erato and Arkas, son of Kallisto. He goes on to say that the first funeral games were held for Azan which suggests that the hero was quite an old one and therefore from a generation too early to be involved in our story.
 - 31 Oldfather 1933.
 - 32 Hyginus' telling of the story resembles its predecessors but may have become conflated, over time, with the myth of Nessos. The victim of Eurytion's attack is now Deianeira. Since *Fabula* 31 mentions her as the victim of both Eurytion and Nessos, and *Fabula* 33 says that Herakles marries her, Hyginus clearly considers them the same woman. Yet she is named as the daughter of Dexamenos and not Oineus, who is traditionally the father of the Deianeira whom Herakles marries.
 - 33 See *RE* 34 (1937) 2442 s.v. *Olenos* 5 for the suggestion that, based on this evidence, there may have been an Olenos in Elis.
 - 34 See Nagy 1990, chapter 4, for a discussion of the process in which an earlier myth "fuses" with a later. The example used is the myth of Pelops as given by Pindar in *Olympian* 1, but the concept can be applied equally well to the myth of the Centaur Eurytion disrupting the wedding of the daughter of Dexamenos in Elis or Hippodameia in Thessaly.
 - 35 See Neils 1987. A Corinthian cup from ca. 570–60 (Brussels A 1374; *CorVP* 203) depicts Theseus and the Minotaur on one side and Herakles battling Acheloos on the other. Other artists liked to depict the heroes fighting their respective bulls. At the end of the sixth century the Athenian treasury displayed the deeds of the heroes in its metopes, a theme that was also used somewhat later on the metopes of the Hephaisteion in Athens.
 - 36 Several of these Tyrrhenian amphorae depict multiple Centaurs; Dresden ZV 1647 (*ABV* 105.1), Munich 1433, Jahn 126 (*ABV* 98.37; *Beazley Addenda*² 26) and Cassel T 385 (*ABV* 105.2; *Paralipomena* 40, *Beazley Addenda*² 28).
 - 37 Bloomington, Indiana University 73.6 LIMC 6, 839 #4 and pl. 535 for illustration.
 - 38 Baur 1912 and Diez de Velasco 1992, 844–47.
 - 39 Louvre E 852, *ABV* 96.13; *Beazley Addenda*² 25.
 - 40 In another poem (Ode 16), Bacchylides makes a reference to the fatal concoction give to Deianeira by Nessos, so clearly this detail was not unknown to the poet.
 - 41 It is interesting, however, that in *Trachiniae* 555–581 it

- is noted that the episode with Nessos took place shortly after Herakles and Deianeira were married and she was traveling with him as a new bride. This may be the version depicted in the New York Nessos amphora (*LIMC* 6, 840 #6 and pl. 541 for illustration) where Deianeira is depicted on a chariot holding the reins while Herakles dismounts to dispatch Nessos.
- 42 Munich 1433, Jahn 126, *ABV* 98.37; *Beazley Addenda*² 27. See also Dresden ZV 1647 (*ABV* 105.1) and Cassel T 385 (*ABV* 105.2; *Paralipomena* 40, *Beazley Addenda*² 28).
- 43 Díez de Velasco 1992, 844–47, admits that there is a great deal of ambiguity in the identification of the Nessos scene and other scenes in which a Centaur abducts a woman.
- 44 Athens 1002 *ABV* 4–5.1; *Paralipomena* 2.6; *Beazley Addenda*² 1–2; for illustration of New York 11.210.1 see *LIMC* 6, 840 #36 and pl. 541.
- 45 The Hague, Museum Meermanno-Westthreenianum Holwerda W608 (107), *ABV* 98.38; *Paralipomena* 37.
- 46 Baur 1912, 18.
- 47 Naples H 3089, *ARV*² 1050–1051.4; *Beazley Addenda*² 321.
- 48 London, BM 98.7–16.5, *ARV*² 1027.2; *Beazley Addenda*² 317.
- 49 Vollkommer 1988, 26–28. This title does not necessarily mean that the Centaur was named Dexamenos. Because of this inscription and somewhat slight literary evidence, Vollkommer names *all* of the Centaurs in this context Dexamenos, despite the rich literary tradition that names him Eurytion. He further argues that the paucity of literary evidence is no reason to distrust the inscription “since other writers also give varying names.” 27. Yet in every extant version of the myth, the name of the girl’s father is always Dexamenos and the name of the Centaur is always Eurytion. The name of the daughter is different in each case, and in Hyginus she is named Deianeira, but her father is still Dexamenos. While there may, at one time, have been a literary tradition about a Centaur named Dexamenos, we know nothing about him. Furthermore, the line in Kallimachos does not even say that Dexamenos is a Centaur and it is the Scholiast who tells us so.
- 50 Louvre G345, *ARV*² 1108.16; *Beazley Addenda*² 330.
- 51 Hamburg, Museum für Kunst un Gewerbe 1937.3
- 52 *ARV*² 124.11(13); *Paralipomena* 176. See Brauholtz 1923.
- 53 Ross Holloway 1967, 97–8 does not support Wilamowitz’s interpretation of the west pediment, in large part because of the youthful appearance of the two central heroes. He argues that the Olympia sculptor demonstrates great interest in depictions of youth and age, particularly in the progression of the aging Herakles in the metopes, and would therefore be unlikely to portray Herakles as one of the young men flanking Apollo. He also points out that it would be impossible to interpret the other youth as the King Dexamenos. It is certainly true that neither of these young men could be identified as Dexamenos, but the other young man could be Herakles’ companion Iolaos or even the bridegroom Azan, defending his bride. Furthermore, the “back-to-back” fighting pose of these two young men that is noted by Shefton as a defining posture of Theseus and Peirithoos in later depictions of the Thessalian Centauromachy is used earlier by Herakles and Iolaos when fighting Centaurs in a klix by Pamphaios. See Shefton 1962, 339 and 356–60 and Brauholtz 1923.
- 54 The plaque from Olympia (BE 11a) depicting Kaineus being beaten into the earth by two Centaurs is from the seventh century.
- 55 *ARV*² 541.1; *Paralipomena* 385; *Beazley Addenda*² 1658.
- 56 Cf Parthenon south metope 1 where the Centaur has the youth’s head locked in a similar way. This figural arrangement is adopted in many representations of the Centauromachy.
- 57 Beginning in the sixth century, Theseus’ heroic deeds were clearly patterned on those of Herakles although care was taken to downplay the older hero’s more brutish characteristics when modeling the deeds of the new Theseus. These are most evident in the “cycle cups” that depict the young hero wrestling with various opponents on his journey through the Saronic Gulf. See Neils 1987.
- 58 Munich 1433 Jahn 126, *ABV* 98.37; *Paralipomena* 37.37; *Beazley Addenda*² 26.
- 59 In most of the literary accounts, the only Centaur specifically described as present at the house of Dexamenos was Eurytion. The exception is in the version told by Hyginus in which Eurytion brings his “brothers” to the house of Dexamenos to be present at his marriage. We have no way of knowing if Eurytion brought any other Centaurs with him in the Bacchylides poem because of its fragmentary state and neither Diodoros nor Apollodoros mentions it. Yet it would certainly not be unusual for Eurytion to invite his kinsmen to his own wedding or at the least to bring some friends along to help him carry off the king’s daughter should Dexamenos offer any resistance.
- 60 Boston 00.344 and Boston 00.345, *ARV*² 1319.3 and 1319.2; *Paralipomena* 478, *Beazley Addenda*² 363.
- 61 Shefton 1962, 341–2. Shefton is bemused that the painter should make an “error” of this kind, since he considers the drapery that wraps around the hero’s arm and legs a clear indication that this is, in fact, a depiction of Theseus rescuing Hippodameia from Eurytion. It is more likely that the “himation motif” was rather copied from images of Herakles and used in later representations of Theseus and Peirithoos to tie them visually to earlier depictions of Herakles.
- 62 I am grateful to Christopher Jones who, in a very helpful conversation (May 2003), pointed out the difference between “identification” and “interpretation” when discussing Pausanias. While Pausanias, and indeed anyone, would have had no trouble *identifying* a scene as a Centauromachy, the *interpretation* of the scene was dependent on many variables.
- 63 His guides at Olympia were not always in complete accord when it came to iconography either. Pausanias mentions that the sacred guides at Olympia could not agree on the subject matter of some of the scenes represented on the Chest of Kypselos (5.18.6).
- 64 For further discussion of Pausanias, his sources, accuracy and methods, see Jones 2001, 33–39, Snodgrass 2001, 127–41 and Elsner 2001, 3–39.
- 65 See Morgan 1952, 295–339, Ashmole 1963, 213–33 and Stewart 1983, 133.
- 66 The coffers from the ceiling of the monument at Belevi are an exception. This is probably not meant to be a Centauromachy at a wedding, however, as it depicts warriors armed in contemporary armor engaged in duels with Centaurs. See *Österreichischen Archäologischen Institute* 1905 for Belevi. Coffers are reproduced in *LIMC* 8, 439–40 #217.
- 67 Ashmole 1967, 18.