

# LIZARDS, LIONS, AND THE UNCANNY IN EARLY GREEK ART

## ABSTRACT

An examination of the lizard in the imagery of Archaic Greek vase painting suggests that it was a figure of power and portent and often an omen of disaster. It is argued that the lizard should be ranked among such uncanny beasts as Gorgons, sphinxes, and at least one monumental feline from the Archaic Athenian Acropolis.

Around the middle of the 7th century B.C., a member of a small but impressive group of Middle Protocorinthian vase painters stylistically related to the Chigi Painter—perhaps the Chigi Painter himself—created a fine aryballos, said to have been found at Thebes, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Figs. 1, 2).<sup>1</sup> The pictorial zone is full of dot-rosettes, crosses, and *Mischwesen* (composite beings). Two staid sphinxes heraldically flank a floral column on the back of the flask. On the front, in the space between the sphinxes' backsides, a confrontation takes place between two other fabulous beasts: the winged horse Pegasus, with Bellerophon on his back, flies in from the right to face the Chimaera, who stands firmly with all four paws on the ground.

Set strategically between the hybrid creatures, below an even smaller bird, is a lizard or, specifically, a gecko.<sup>2</sup> The reptile is seen as if from above, with its body and tail snaking along and its four legs flexed and splayed on both sides. The lizard is invariably rendered this way on Middle and New Kingdom Egyptian reliefs as well as in Near Eastern art: on a possibly North Syrian bronze bowl in the Princeton University Art Museum, for

1. Boston 95.10. Amyx 1988, p. 37 ("the Chigi Group," no. 2).

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and for his scholarly assistance, and the participants (especially Richard Neer) for their comments then and after. I also appreciate the useful comments and criticisms of the two anonymous *Hesperia* reviewers.

2. Geckos are small, generally nocturnal lizards characterized by relatively large heads and padded feet, with tiny

hooklike projections that, acting like an adhesive, allow them to climb up smooth surfaces such as house walls (or vase walls). Ancient Greek has many words for lizard, including σαῦρος, σαύρα, κροκόδειλος, ἀσκάλαβος or ἀσκαλαβώτης (spotted lizard or gecko), and γαλεώτης (gecko).



Figure 1. Middle Protocorinthian aryballos, Chigi Group, 650–640. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Catherine Page Perkins Fund 95.10. Photo courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

example, a lizard crawls up the side of the bowl in the midst of a lion hunt (Fig. 3), a violent context not unlike that often found for lizards in early Greek art.<sup>3</sup> The impact of the Orient upon the art of Orientalizing Greece is undeniable, but it is unlikely that any Greek artist needed foreign instruction to portray a lizard, one of the more ubiquitous creatures in the dry, rocky Greek landscape and a common invader of the rural home.<sup>4</sup> At all events, there is a spatial contradiction here. The lizard crawls up the side of the aryballos, asserting its reality as a hard surface, as if it were a rock or house wall. At the same time, the mythological narrative into which it has intruded depends upon the viewer imaginatively dissolving the surface of the vase into air. Pegasos and Bellerophon's long spear (as well as the little bird) need empty space to fly through. The lizard needs a solid surface to climb. The space between the Chimaera and Pegasos is read both ways, as air and wall at once.

3. Schäfer 1974, pp. 150, 163; Germond and Livet 2001, pp. 101, 110, figs. 117, 129; Padgett 2003, pp. 124–126, no. 9, dated to ca. 700 B.C.

4. The most familiar species of Greek lizard are the archetypal wall

lizard (*Podarcis muralis*) and the so-called ruin lizard (*Podarcis sicula*), typically green or spotted and often found scurrying over old stone walls or darting into the chinks of ruins; see Mattison 1989, pp. 143–144. For

lizards and geckos in the ancient world, see *Der Neue Pauly* 3, Stuttgart 1997, p. 910, s.v. Eidechse (C. Hünemörder) and Keller [1909–1913] 1963, pp. 270–281; for lizards in general, see Pianka and Vitt 2003.



Figure 2. Middle Protocorinthian aryballos. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Catherine Page Perkins Fund 95.10. Photo courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Figure 3. North Syrian(?) bronze bowl, ca. 700. Princeton University Art Museum, Carl Otto von Kienbusch Jr. Memorial Collection Fund 2001-169. Photo courtesy Princeton University Art Museum

The lizard does more in this example than simply get perilously in the way or introduce the ambiguity of pictorial space, and its precisely central position between the Chimaera and Pegasos argues against its use as a mere “filling ornament.” In fact, the lizard and the bird participate in a visual simile. Reptiles do not attack birds. Birds attack reptiles. And that is what the bird, despite its diminutive size, must be doing here. The confrontation between airborne bird and earthbound reptile thus establishes a comparison with the battle between winged horse and grounded monster that frames it: the bird is to Pegasos as the lizard is to the Chimaera, and like the monster the lizard is slated for death.<sup>5</sup>

A series of lizards on other works suggests that in Archaic Greek art the creature is more symbol than filler, more omen than ornament. On the neck of a well-known early-7th-century Cycladic relief pithos in the

5. For other similes in Archaic art, see Hurwit 2002, p. 2, n. 6.



Figure 4. Cycladic relief pithos, detail, 675–650. Musée du Louvre CA 795. Photo courtesy Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York

Louvre, for example, a hero uses a long sword to cut off the head of another *Mischwesen*—this time a human animal, a woman/horse (Fig. 4).<sup>6</sup> That the human half of the hybrid is indeed female is clear from her long dress and dotted nipples (though, curiously, another dotted nipple decorates the backside of the hero's loincloth). The hero wears a traveler's hat and boots, carries a strapped pouch (κίβισις) over his shoulder, and turns his head away from the creature as he slits her throat—unmistakable signs that this is Perseus beheading Medusa.<sup>7</sup> Behind her a tall flower droops, as if in sympathy.<sup>8</sup> Above Medusa's hindquarters a spotted lizard crawls horizontally toward her about-to-be-severed neck, focusing our attention upon it and Medusa's fate.

Lizards repeatedly show up in Archaic scenes of present or potential violence, as on a fragmentary bronze shield band in the Getty Museum, dated around 590–570 and signed by Aristodamos of Argos (Fig. 5).<sup>9</sup> In a panel placed above a scene of Deianeira riding Nessos, Menelaos, having recovered Helen, leads her forcefully by the wrist to Athena, who is labeled. This is the terrible night of the sack of Troy, and in the field between the estranged husband and wife (Menelaos still grips his unsheathed sword, and Helen is not yet safe), a lizard descends toward what appears to be a winged insect. As in the case of the Bellerophon aryballos, the juxtaposition creates a simile: Menelaos is to Helen as reptile is to insect. On another shield band with a Trojan theme, this time from Delphi (and datable to around 560), the lesser Ajax strides forward and seizes Cassandra's wrist as she kneels before the Palladion (Fig. 6). Between warrior and victim, below their grasp, a lizard scurries up the field toward a bug—another

6. Louvre CA 795; Snodgrass 1998, pp. 84–85.

7. In the late 8th and early 7th centuries, before conventions for representing some mythical creatures had been settled upon, horsiness or four-footedness is almost by definition a sign of the

monstrous (cf. Boardman 1998, p. 86, fig. 174), and Gorgons are sometimes depicted with equine hindquarters even later, e.g., the series of 6th-century gems in Boardman 1968, pp. 27–28, pl. II.

8. For other examples of the “pathetic fallacy” in early Greek art,

see Hurwit 1982.

9. J. Paul Getty Museum 84.AC.11. See also *Getty Handbook*, p. 33, no. 84.AC.11; Padgett 2003, pp. 194–195, no. 36. The shield band is inscribed with the earliest-known signature of a Greek metalworker.



Figure 5. Fragmentary shield band by Aristodamos of Argos, ca. 590–570. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection 84.AC.11. Photo courtesy J. Paul Getty Museum

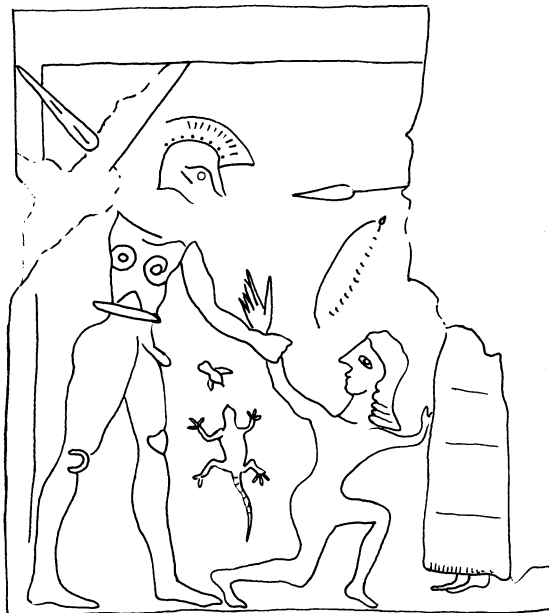


Figure 6. Shield band, ca. 560. Delphi Museum 4479. K. Ibach, after Scheffold 1966, pl. 77



**Figure 7. Middle Protocorinthian aryballos, side view, Chigi Group, 650–640. Musée du Louvre CA 931.**  
Photo courtesy Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York

implicit comparison and possibly a predictor of the blasphemy and rape that will shortly follow.<sup>10</sup>

Lizards often appear alone in the field of battle, darting above or between battling hoplites, on shield bands and vases of the 7th and 6th centuries.<sup>11</sup> For example, on the side of another Middle Protocorinthian aryballos by a member of the Chigi Group, a vessel best known for its spout molded in the form of a quintessentially Daedalic head, a lizard descends between a striding warrior on the left and another warrior, who bends to aid a fallen comrade, to the right (Fig. 7).<sup>12</sup> On a Middle Corinthian round aryballos a lizard is squeezed between a horseman and a hoplite about to throw his spear.<sup>13</sup> And on a Lakonian cup by the Naukratis Painter, yet another lizard, stretched thin like a spearpoint, hovers behind a kneeling hoplite (facing left) and a horseman (moving right).<sup>14</sup> The

10. Delphi Museum 4479. Scheffold 1966, pl. 77 (right); Kunze 1950, p. 26, no. XXIV:y, p. 162, pl. 50; *LIMC* VII, 1994, p. 961, no. 49:a, pl. 673, s.v. *Kassandra I* (= *Aias II*, no. 49) (O. Paoletti). On another band, a lizard is shown in the field while Herakles

brings the Erymanthian boar back to Eurystheus (Kunze 1950, p. 36, no. XXXVIII:a, pp. 105–106).

11. For such a shield band, see Kunze 1950, p. 32, no. XXXI:a, p. 183, pl. 58.

12. Louvre CA 931; Amyx 1988, p. 38, no. 6; Richter 1968, pl. V:a.

13. Louvre MNC 632; Amyx 1988, p. 164 (no. B-1); Ghiron-Bistagne (1973, pp. 312–313, figs. 13–14) interprets the lizard on this vessel as an apotropaic symbol.

14. Stibbe 1972, pp. 216–217, no. 36, pl. 18:3.



Figure 8. Lakonian cup by the Naukratis Painter. Pratica di Mare E1986. After Boardman 1998, p. 206, fig. 414

Lakonian Arkesilas Painter painted a lizard behind Herakles, who is shown defeating two Amazons on a cup in the Villa Giulia, and it is worth noting that, according to Pausanias, Herakles himself did battle with a villain or monster known as Sauros (Lizard) near an eponymous ridge along the border of Arkadia and Elis.<sup>15</sup>

Lizards are especially common sights on Lakonian cups, even in non-violent scenes. On a cup from Pratica di Mare (Lavinium), for example, the Naukratis Painter depicted in a tiered composition a symposium populated by komasts and reclining bearded banqueters (Fig. 8).<sup>16</sup> They are joined by snakes and lizards—one is set strategically between the faces of the symposiasts as well as between two birds, who seem ready to attack it—and *Mischwesen* in the form of winged demons or spirits hover in the air above. These spirits are common in Lakonian art, and here as elsewhere they may be benevolent.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, they suggest that this

15. Stibbe 1972, p. 279, no. 193; Edlund 1980, p. 33 (the “Stefani cup”); Boardman 1998, p. 209, fig. 423. Although Pausanias (6.21.3) says that the ridge was named after the bandit, it is more likely that the bandit was named

after the ridge, which may have resembled a lizard’s back.

16. Boardman 1998, p. 206, fig. 414; Pipili 1987, p. 118, no. 195; Stibbe 1972, pp. 71–72, 270, no. 19.

17. Pipili (1987, pp. 71–76) con-

cludes that the winged demons found here and elsewhere on a variety of Lakonian vases are not, as sometimes thought, the souls of the dead or Erotes but “nature spirits and attendants of Orthia” (p. 76).



**Figure 9.** Departure of Amphiaraios, Late Corinthian krater, ca. 575–550. Once in Berlin, Staatliche Museum F 1655. After Furtwängler and Reichhold 1921, pl. 121

is not a normal or “real” symposium (unless such spirits were considered features of everyday life in ancient Sparta) and so the uncanniness of the scene remains.

Perhaps the most instructive or suggestive lizards in Archaic art appear on a well-known (if long lost) Late Corinthian krater depicting the story of Amphiaraios, once in Berlin and dated ca. 575–550 (Fig. 9).<sup>18</sup> In a palatial setting, the huge hero resentfully mounts his chariot as he prepares to go off to Thebes, where he (a seer as well as a warrior) knows he will die. Sword drawn, he glares back over his shoulder at his wife Eriphyle, who has betrayed him for the necklace of Harmonia. His small son Alkmaion (unlabeled) begs him to stay. Alkmaion is ignored, but he will grow up to murder his mother in revenge (every family has its ups and downs). In front of the chariot lies the distraught seer Halimedes, who also knows Amphiaraios’s fate and brings his hand to his bowed head in a conventional gesture of foreboding and grief.

Around, above, and below the human figures is a large menagerie of assorted creatures: a scorpion on a column of the propylon in front of the chariot, an owl above the horses’ heads, a bird and snake above Halimedes, a lizard behind the palace, and beneath Amphiaraios himself a hare, a hedgehog, and another lizard. The snake is usually considered a chthonic sign, of course, and often a symbol of the spirit of the dead.<sup>19</sup> Birds are common omens in Archaic art; and in this image—an image of prophecy and certain death—the lizard surely functions as such an omen, too, a promise of disaster.<sup>20</sup> The same story was told in a similar (though not identical) way on the roughly contemporary Chest of Kypselos: Pausanias, whose description is all we have left of it, does not mention lizards as part of the Amphiaraios scene on the chest, but one or two might have been

18. Berlin, Staatliche Museum F 1655; Amyx 1988, p. 263, no. 1, pp. 390–391.

19. Vermeule 1965, p. 45.

20. Edlund (1980) interprets the animals on the Amphiaraios krater (and elsewhere) differently, rejecting their

ominous connotations and arguing instead that the hedgehog is a symbol of wisdom and courage, the hare a symbol of speed, and the lizard a symbol of endurance or action. The hare, however, though certainly quick, is a timorous beast and, with Troilos, flees Achilles

on a cup by the C Painter in New York; see Beazley 1986, pl. 17 (top). Edlund does not discuss the snake, scorpion, bird, or owl or the tragic implications of the scene depicted on the Amphiaraios krater.



there.<sup>21</sup> In any case, it is probably no coincidence that a snake and lizards appear so prominently in the representation of a hero who would himself be swallowed up by the earth and become a chthonic oracular deity.<sup>22</sup>

This is by no means a complete catalogue of lizards in Archaic art, and there are, admittedly, cases in which the presence of a lizard seems benign. On a number of Corinthian oinochoiai and aryballoi, for example, lizards are set between symmetrical cocks or panthers and there is nothing overtly ominous about them.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, on a Lakonian cup by the Spiral Frieze Master, alternating lizards and cocks rotate harmlessly around the interior of the bowl, and the effect seems primarily decorative.<sup>24</sup> On amphoras in Tarquinia and Florence by The Affector, lizards are found in the company of Poseidon, Hera, Zeus, and Hermes, but they cannot imply that anything unpleasant is going to happen to the gods.<sup>25</sup> On perhaps the most famous of all Lakonian cups, the name vase of the Arkesilas Painter,<sup>26</sup> a lizard crawls up the field behind Arkesilas, king of Cyrene, who is shown beneath an awning supervising the weighing and loading of cargo: no foreboding here, it would appear. Finally, on the interior of an Athenian cup in Berlin potted by Nikosthenes in the late 6th century, lizards help fill a field marked by youths plowing, sowing, and hunting, and the reptiles' presence may have been intended simply to give the viewer a sense of what life in the country was like: this is a farm, and one can expect to find lizards in the fields.<sup>27</sup>

The iconography and meanings of the lizard are thus complex, and its symbolism no doubt evolved over the course of the long Archaic period, and the Classical period as well. Nevertheless, there may be more to some of these apparently mundane scenes than at first meets the eye. Cocks are noted for their belligerence, for example, and like other birds are lizards' natural enemies: on Corinthian vases and on Lakonian cups the juxtaposition of cock and lizard may be potentially violent. Although the scene on the Arkesilas cup seems innocuous, a suspiciously large number of animals (lizard, birds, monkey) are present in the field, recalling the strange menagerie on the Amphiaraios krater (Fig. 9). Moreover, Arkesilas is probably Arkesilas the Second, who ruled Cyrene only briefly (ca. 566–560), was nicknamed the Cruel, and was opposed, defeated, and murdered by his brothers.<sup>28</sup> If the vase was painted ca. 560 (as usually dated), at or after the end of Arkesilas the Cruel's reign, the lizard and birds (who are pointed out by a worker and who loom over or fly toward the king in a menacing way)

21. Paus. 5.17.7–9. See now Splitter 2000.

22. There is, incidentally, another grouping of at least one snake and two lizards on a fragmentary Late Corinthian column krater in the Princeton University Art Museum (2002-157), and though the subject is unclear—chariots and long-robed pedestrians are depicted—in the light of the Amphiaraios krater, the mood should perhaps be taken as similarly dark and foreboding. For another vase representing the

Amphiaraios myth, see Oakley 1990.

23. Amyx 1988, p. 671, n. 146; Amyx (p. 672) finds “no conclusive evidence” that the lizard had any particular symbolism at all in Corinthian vase painting.

24. Stibbe 1972, p. 288, no. 339, pl. 122.

25. Mommsen 1975, nos. 1 (Tarquinia 625) and 14 (Florence 92167), pls. 15, 23:b; Edlund 1980, pp. 32–33. Lizards are also found beside gods (such as Poseidon) on votive plaques

from Penteskouphia; see Furtwängler 1885, pp. 48–105; also Pernice 1897 and Geagan 1970.

26. Cabinet des Médailles 189; Boardman 1998, p. 187, fig. 420; Wachter 2001, pp. 160–162; Stibbe 1972, pp. 115–117, 279, no. 194, pls. 61, 62.

27. Staatliche Museum, Berlin 1806. *ABV* 223, no. 66; Osborne 1987, p. 19, fig. 4.

28. Hdt. 4.160.



Figure 10. Attic black-figure amphora, detail, ca. 540–530. Musée du Louvre F 99. Photo courtesy Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York

could be omens of the king's violent end, a prophecy in hindsight. On the Nikosthenic cup, the lizards may actually have been intended to undercut the innocent pastoralism of the image, introducing an element of the strange and disturbing, just as centuries later on the Ara Pacis lizards and snakes (one slithers toward helpless nestlings as the mother bird flees) are probably signs that dangers and threats are found even in the Augustan paradise.<sup>29</sup>

So, too, on a Corinthian olpe in Athens a lizard (labeled *askalabos*) appears in front of a chariot driven by Akamas. Although the reptile has been taken to symbolize “the energy and stamina” that the charioteer will need in the race, the identity of Akamas is unclear.<sup>30</sup> He may be Theseus's athletic son. But he could also be Akamas, the son of Antenor, who in the *Iliad* (16.342–344) is killed by Meriones as he tries to mount his chariot. In that case, the lizard takes on a very different meaning. Similarly, on another amphora by The Affecter in the Louvre and on an unattributed black-figure amphora in Munich, lizards seem to lend dark notes to the departure of warriors.<sup>31</sup>

The weight of the visual evidence, then, suggests that in the iconography of the Archaic period the lizard is usually a portent, an omen of death or disaster, a chthonic symbol. Like a snake, it disappears into the ground or beneath rocks or into the cracks of stones and walls. The lizard may be an incarnation of malevolent powers or, simply, an incarnation of power itself, a fearsomely protective talisman or apotropaic device. An apotropaic function can surely be attributed to the lizards on an Attic black-figure amphora in the Louvre (Fig. 10); on that vessel, two lizards appear within

29. Cf. Toynbee 1973, pp. 216–217, who considers lizards apotropaic.

30. Tzachou-Alexandri 1989, p. 132, no. 27. Athens NM 521. *LIMC* I, 1981, p. 437, no. 4, s.v. Akamas and Demophon (U. Kron); Wachter 2001, p. 93, no. COR 87, pp. 322–323, n. 1185; Tzachou-Alexandri 1989, p. 132, no. 27; Amyx 1988, pp. 580–581, 646.

31. Louvre F 27 (see Mommsen 1975, no. 5, pl. 18:a) and Munich 1404 (*CVA*, Munich 1, pl. 32:3,4). See also Wrede 1916, pp. 301–304, for the view that in such departure scenes, lizards are omens of death.

the curves of the Gorgon's great snaky locks—an association of apotropaic symbols, *Mischwesen* and reptile, that, as we have seen, goes back at least as far as the early-7th-century relief amphora with Perseus and the hippomorphic Medusa (Fig. 4).<sup>32</sup>

This symbolic constellation is what we would expect from ancient attitudes toward the lizard as revealed in many, though admittedly much later, texts and papyri that present the lizard as a hateful or noxious creature whose sinister influence can be marshaled against the Evil Eye.<sup>33</sup> These attitudes survive even in modern Greek superstition, which regards the lizard as a “prophet of doom.”<sup>34</sup> There is, to be sure, the humor of Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, in which a lizard (called an *askalabotes* and a *galeotes* in the same passage) distracts Socrates by defecating on his head and thus robs him of a brilliant idea.<sup>35</sup> But it is surely significant that in both Ovid’s and Antoninus Liberalis’s *Metamorphoses*, the rude boy Ascalabus, who mocked Demeter as she sought Persephone, was punished by being turned into a spotted lizard or newt, to be hated by gods and men.<sup>36</sup> Clearly, the ancients had no fondness for the creature even as they recognized its wondrous character and magical properties. Not only does it shed its own skin, like a snake, but, according to Aristotle and Pliny, the lizard will survive even if its tail is cut off and, according to Aelian, even if it is sliced in two its halves will miraculously grow back together and live on.<sup>37</sup> According to magical texts, Greeks and Romans burned lizards over hot coals as part of erotic spells.<sup>38</sup> And according to one ancient recipe, four geckos dissolved in sugar make a nice aphrodisiac if spread over the right big toe (lizard sauce spread over the left big toe cancels the effect).<sup>39</sup> That the Greeks and Romans regarded the reptile as generally portentous (good or bad) is indicated by a number of additional sources: Cicero, for example, who evidently believed in the lizard’s power to give omens;<sup>40</sup> a statue (seen by Pausanias at Olympia) of an Elean seer or diviner named Thrasyboulos that had a gecko (*galeotes*) crawling on his shoulder;<sup>41</sup> the *testimonia* for a whole family of Sicilian interpreters of portents known as the *Galeotai*;<sup>42</sup> and, perhaps, the statue with the most famous Greek lizard of all, the *sauros* the young Apollo is (according to the usual interpretation) about to kill in the much-replicated statue attributed to the Late Classical sculptor Praxiteles.<sup>43</sup>

32. Louvre F 99 (related to the BMN Painter). For the prophetic or apotropaic nature of lizards, see Ghiron-Bistagne 1973, p. 313, n. 1; also Kunze 1950, pp. 105–106, n. 2; Méautis 1931, p. 246; also Bonner 1950, pp. 69–71.

33. Nock 1972.

34. Amyx 1988, p. 672. I am told that in Greece today green lizards can also be signs of good luck, which suggests a dual symbolism for the creature. Like any apotropaic beast, it is protective because it is fearsome.

35. Ar. *Nub.* 169–173.

36. Ov. *Met.* 5.446–461; Ant. Lib. *Met.* 24.

37. Arist. *Hist. an.* 508b7; Plin. *HN* 9.86, 11.264; Ael. *NA* 2.23.

38. Faraone 1999, p. 66.

39. Nock 1972, p. 275. It is perhaps the lizard’s erotic associations that explain its appearance on some cups alongside the cock, a common love gift; see above n. 24.

40. Cic. *Div.* 2.62; Nock 1972, p. 274.

41. Paus. 6.2.4; Bodson 1978, p. 64, n. 44.

42. Bodson 1978, pp. 65–68.

43. See now Preisshofen 2002. Ridgway (1997, 265) questions the attribution, pointing out that it largely depends upon Pliny (*HN* 34.70), who assigns the statue to Praxiteles immediately after attributing to him the Late Archaic Tyrannicides Group (certainly by Antenor). That error does not inspire confidence. An ancient bronze Apollo Sauroktonos attributed to Praxiteles has recently been acquired by the Cleveland Museum of Art (Severance and Greta Milliken Purchase Fund 2004.30); for the Cleveland Apollo, see <http://www.clevelandart.org>.

The Apollo Sauroktonos (Lizard-Killer) has often been considered a burlesque, either a proleptic parody of (or metaphor for) the adult Apollo's cosmic battle against the fierce Python of Delphi, or an unflattering portrait of a mean boy-god, teasing the unsuspecting reptile with bait in one hand while he prepares to spear him with an arrow in the other (or perhaps the boy tries to catch it in a noose, so that it can dangle in the air for his amusement).<sup>44</sup> Again, we should not assume that the symbolism of a 4th-century lizard was necessarily the same as that of a 7th- or 6th-century one, or even that every *sauros* carried the same meaning as every *askalabos* or *galeotes*. But perhaps the ancient reputation of the lizard would have made the statue no joke. The apparent cruelty would have been justified, with the future god of prophecy eliminating or taunting a hatefully portentous reptile.<sup>45</sup> That Apollo was identified with the sun as early as the 5th century, and that the lizard was often regarded as the enemy of the sun (despite the fact that it likes to bask in its rays), may not be beside the point, either.<sup>46</sup>

Whatever symbolism it later acquires, in Archaic art the lizard, though no *Mischwesen* itself, belongs in the same strange, fabulous category as the composite beasts and demons in whose company it is often found (Figs. 1, 4, 8, 10): that is, it belongs to the realm of the weird, the eerie, the supernatural. The uncanniness of *Mischwesen* is clear and familiar: the Gorgon, with its dual apotropaic functions "of averting evil and procuring good";<sup>47</sup> the sphinx, found in cemeteries and sanctuaries and atop temple roofs, as the marker of special places, of sacrosanct and inviolable zones;<sup>48</sup> the double sphinx, one of which, I have argued elsewhere,<sup>49</sup> may function as a boundary between mortal and heroic realms. But there is one more Archaic beast that might be considered a creature of the uncanny, and it is the lion—rather, one lion in particular.

This is not the place to review the history of the lion in early Greek art or the evidence for and against the existence of real lions in early Greece.<sup>50</sup> It is, in the end, likely that lions existed in the Aegean during the Bronze Age (lion bones have been found at Mycenaean sites, though more than one explanation can be given for that). Lions probably roamed northern Greece at least as late as the late 5th century; according to Herodotos, lions attacked Persian camels during the invasion of 480, and at the end of the 5th century the great pankratiast Poulydamas is said to have strangled a lion from Mount Olympos with his bare hands, and is shown doing so on

44. See, e.g., Ridgway 1997, pp. 265, 283–284, n. 76; also Ajootian 1996, pp. 116–122.

45. Alternatively, Dümmler connects the statue to the myth of Askalabus, who ridiculed Demeter, and interprets Apollo as an ephebe punishing or threatening the lizard in the service of the goddess; *RE* II, 1896, pp. 1607–1608, s.v. *askalabos* (F. Dümmler). But Preisshofen (2002, pp. 51–53) distinguishes between *askalabos* and *sauros* and interprets the relationship between Apollo and the lizard positively: the

boy-god is a symbol of the coming of spring, the *sauros* is a *Sonnentier* (cf. Deonna 1919, pp. 145–146, where the lizard is regarded as a symbol of the sun), and Apollo is a friend to the lizard, not an enemy, awakening and stimulating it after winter (when lizards, it was said, go torpid and blind) with his own symbol, an arrowlike beam of light held in his right hand. Even if Preisshofen is correct (and why Apollo in this interpretation should be a boy, or why the statue should have been known in antiquity as the lizard-

killer, is unclear), the lizard remains a special, uncanny creature, a symbol of the sun and an associate of a god.

46. Ajootian 1996, p. 120; Nock 1972, pp. 271–273.

47. Childs 2003, p. 50.

48. On sphinxes, see most recently Tsiafakis 2003, pp. 79–83.

49. Hurwit 2002, pp. 18–19.

50. For which, see, e.g., Hurwit 2002, pp. 10–11, n. 36; Thomas 1999; Bloedow 1992; Warren 1979, p. 123, n. 29; Gabelmann 1965; cf. Keller [1909–1913] 1963, pp. 24–61.



Figure 11. Attic Late Geometric II terracotta stand, ca. 725. Kerameikos 407. Photo J. M. Hurwit

a later base in Olympia.<sup>51</sup> It is also the case, however, that the appearance of lions in Archaic art—and in particular the degree of zoological accuracy with which they are represented—is not a reliable guide to the issue. One can certainly point to predators such as those shown savaging a man on a krater from 10th-century Knossos or those on a stand from the late-8th-century Kerameikos (Fig. 11) and conclude that the vase painter had never seen a real lion.<sup>52</sup> Of course one could as easily point to the human figures on these works and conclude that the artist had never seen a real man. Whether such later Archaic artists as, for example, the Chigi Painter had seen a real lion or not, the beasts they represented were still often based on foreign (for example, Neo-Assyrian) models.<sup>53</sup>

At all events, there is one monumental Archaic lion that is also a *Mischwesen*—not because it is a combination of different beasts, but because it is a combination of different genders. It is a hermaphrodite—a lion/lioness. It filled most of the center of a pediment of the temple to Athena built somewhere on the Acropolis around the middle of the 6th century, the so-called Hekatompedon (Fig. 12).<sup>54</sup> Assisted by another virtually lost lion on the left, the gigantic creature crumples a terrified, bellowing bull beneath it. Like many lions in contemporary Attic vase painting, it is in almost every way a very lionlike lion—its ferocity, claws, pose, and powerful musculature are all convincing—except that this lion has both a mane *and* teats, the markers of both sexes.

51. Herodotos (7.125–126) also says that lions (and wild cattle) were plentiful in northern Greece in his own day. For Poulydamas (Olympic champion in 408) and lions, see Paus. 6.5.1–9; for the Poulydamas base, dated ca. 330, see Kosmopoulou 2002, pp. 73–74, 200–202.

52. Boardman 1998, pp. 22, 44, figs. 23.2, 66.

53. Hurwit 2002, pp. 10–11, n. 37.

54. For the Hekatompedon and its sculpture, see Hurwit 1999, pp. 106–112. The temple stood either on the north side of the Acropolis or, as most scholars believe, on the south side, where the Parthenon stands; see Korres 2003, p. 7, fig. 7.



**Figure 12. Lion/lioness from the Hekatompedon pediment, ca. 560. Acropolis Museum 4. Photo J. M. Hurwit**

This relief is not the only example of a hermaphroditic lion in Archaic art (a couple of others are found on vases by the Middle Corinthian Chimaera Painter, for example), and a few lionesses are depicted without teats or have them in the wrong place.<sup>55</sup> Most commentators not unreasonably conclude that this zoological confusion is the result of the Archaic artist's general ignorance of the beast (one is reminded of Dürer's famously inaccurate woodcut of a rhinoceros).<sup>56</sup> Yet it is curious that one can point to few such gross errors in Archaic depictions of lions; we might expect many more if zoological ignorance of the beast was genuinely so pervasive (Dürer's rhinoceros would influence European representations of the beast for almost 300 years). In any case, the Hekatompedon lion is a very large and prominent lion, and so the mistake, if it is one, is a very large mistake. Its sculptor was certainly not ignorant of the lion's power and violence and most of the anatomy is accurately depicted—its musculature and hair are no more stylized than those on other Archaic creatures, including human subjects. It could be, then, that by combining genders the sculptor was seeking to make the lion even more "awe-ful," mysterious, and strange than it otherwise is. The sculptural program of the Hekatompedon, after all, is full of *Mischwesen*. Bearded snakes occur (snakes do not have beards any more than a lioness has a mane or a male lion has teats, and any Greek knew that).<sup>57</sup> Herakles wrestles a fish-man or Triton in one angle of a pediment while the notoriously mixed-up "Bluebeard" fills the other. A Gorgon decorates one metope or relief, and sphinxes may have crouched on the roof as akroteria.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps all these biological impossibilities were special markers, their strangeness or their violence serving to ward off demonic threats to the sacred building and its territory, deflecting the effects of evil forces, and so procuring good for the holy site. Like the lizard in many Archaic images, the hermaphroditic lion of the Hekatompedon is one in a company of *Mischwesen*, and so belongs not to the realm of artistic error but to the realm of the uncanny.

55. See Amyx 1988, p. 168, nos. A-14, A-15, p. 663; also Gabelmann (1965, pp. 100, 106), who would reconstruct a maned "Leaina" (she-lion) on the Acropolis—the bronze statue was dedicated in honor of Aristogeiton's defiant courtesan of the same name (Paus. 1.23.2; Plin. *HN* 34.72)—and who points out that the zoological reality was theoretically known at least by Aristotle's day (cf. *Hist. an.* 579b11). For the statue of Leaina, see Boardman 1986.

56. Gombrich (1969, pp. 81–82) notes how difficult it is to represent the unfamiliar, and how dependent upon prior images the act of image-making is.

57. For the Hekatompedon snakes, see Brouskari 1974, p. 33, no. 41. Bearded snakes also appear in the Lakonian Chrysapha (and related) reliefs; see Ridgway 1993, pp. 242, 268, n. 6.65; Boardman 1978, p. 165, fig. 253; and Guralnick 1974, who argues for Egyptian precedents.

58. For a reconstruction of the northeast corner of the Hekatompedon (or Ur-Parthenon), see Korres 2003, p. 6, fig. 4.

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