

# HUNTING THE ESCHATA

## AN IMAGINED PERSIAN EMPIRE

### ON THE LEKYTHOS OF

### XENOPHANTOS

#### ABSTRACT

The so-called lekythos of Xenophantos presents an image unparalleled in Greek vase painting. In a scene that belongs fully to neither the world of reality nor that of myth, Persians hunt griffins, among other prey. The author offers a new reading of the scene as a fictionalized account of Persian conquest, in which the borders of the empire have reached the edges of the earth, the *eschata*. Such a scenario has parallels in Herodotos's stories of the Persians' (inappropriate) territorial aspirations; in these accounts, as Persians seek to expand their power beyond its natural limits, they are met with failure and punishment.

#### THE LEKYTHOS OF XENOPHANTOS

A 4th-century B.C. squat lekythos in St. Petersburg is the largest of its kind to survive, and, decorated in red-figure and with relief appliqué, paint, and gilding, it is also one of the most ornate (Figs. 1–3).<sup>1</sup> A relief frieze at the shoulder of the vase features a Gigantomachy and a Centauromachy, separated by Nikai driving chariots, and above these figures is the signature of the potter, Xenophantos the Athenian (ΞΕΝΟΦΑΝΤΟΣ ΕΠΟΙΗΣΕΝ ΑΘΗΝ).<sup>2</sup> It is the image on the body of the vessel, however, that sets this opulent vase further apart from its contemporaries. In a scene unique in the extant Hellenic visual tradition, Persians—on foot, on horseback, and in a chariot—hunt a variety of prey within a detailed landscape setting; the prey includes two boars, a deer, and, most unusual among the game, two griffins.

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Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

2. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum Π1837.2 (St. 1790): *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1407, no. 1; most recently, Cohen 2006, pp. 140–142, no. 37. Lezzi-Hafter (2008, p. 184) argues for a date around 400 B.C. for the vase. The lekythos was

acquired by the museum in 1837; see Cohen 2006, p. 141. As for the signature, the ethnic is complete (ΞΕΝΟΦΑΝΤΟΣ ΕΠΟΙΗΣΕΝ ΑΘΗΝΑΙΟΣ) on a second lekythos from the same region of Pantikapaion: St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum 108i: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1407, no. 2; Zervoudaki 1968, p. 26, no. 36.



Figure 1. Persian hunt. Red-figure and relief squat lekythos, ca. 400–380 B.C., signed by Xenophantos (potter): front view; detail of hunter labeled “Cyrus.” St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum Π1837.2 (St. 1790). Photos © State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 2. Persian hunt. Red-figure and relief squat lekythos, ca. 400–380 B.C., signed by Xenophantos (potter): view from left; detail of griffin. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum Π1837.2 (St. 1790). Photos © State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg





**Figure 3. Drawing of the Xenophantos lekythos, St. Petersburg Π1837.2 (St. 1790).** Stephani 1866, pl. IV. Photo courtesy Boston Public Library, Fine Arts Department

This image has eluded explanation, in part because it incorporates Greek and Persianizing elements, and in part because it combines features that belong to the world of reality and to the imaginary. From the “real” world are the landscape elements (which, as we will see, were familiar in Greece) and the Persians, with whom the Greeks had very real interactions; from the fantastic imaginary are the griffins, wild beasts encountered only in stories of exotic and distant—indeed, unreachable—lands. In this way, the image does not easily conform to the traditional classification of the subjects of vase painting as either representations of myth or reflections of daily life. But as scholars have come, in recent years, to explore more fully the potential for images to fall outside of these categories, the time is ripe for a reconsideration of this long-known scene.<sup>3</sup> Here, I investigate the points at which these features of myth and reality come together, as well as the kind of tradition that may be expressed visually by this scene.

The hunt takes place, I shall argue, in the land of the Hyperboreans, a favorite sanctuary of the Greek god Apollo located at the northern edges of the earth, near which the griffins are said to live. This was a place that the Greeks themselves could only imagine, since it was so distant that Greek travelers never managed to reach it. Persians, however, did come into contact with the occupants of similarly exotic lands as their borders and imperial aspirations increased, and as they sought to incorporate even the extremities of the world—the *eschata*—into their empire. I interpret the Xenophantos lekythos as a visual conceptualization of such Persian imperial expansion, in

3. On the move away from the restrictive division of vase painting into “myth” and “genre” scenes, see Bazant 1981; Harvey 1988 (who introduces “fantasy” as a third category of representation); Sourvinou-Inwood 1991, pp. 63–64 (regarding an emblematic category of representation); Ferrari 2003.

which their conquered territory has swelled to include the very edges of the world. Despite appearances, however, this accomplishment does not bode well for the Persians: by intruding upon the land of the Hyperboreans, a place sacred to Apollo, they have overstepped limits set in place by the gods and by nature. In Greek literary sources, this kind of unrestrained conquest is an act of hubris, and such an offense does not go unpunished; as in the literary accounts, the Persians of the Xenophantos vase are sure to receive their inevitable comeuppance. A representation of neither myth nor reality, this image may be seen as a kind of fictional exemplum, in which the setting evokes Greek conceptions of natural boundaries, and the Persians illustrate the kind of men that transgress them.

The lekythos of Xenophantos belongs to a group of six similar lekythoi, each of which depicts a hunt (of boar, lion, or deer), and all of which have been attributed to a single workshop.<sup>4</sup> The St. Petersburg vase was found near Kerch at the site of ancient Pantikapaion in the Crimea, and three others of the group are also from this region; the other two were found in Italy.<sup>5</sup> The location of Xenophantos's workshop is unknown. The lekythoi may have been produced in Athens for export, which might explain Xenophantos's inclusion of *Athenaios* in his signature; alternatively, the workshop may have been located outside of Athens, and the ethnic may have distinguished him as an Athenian among local competition.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the location of Xenophantos's workshop, the wide geographical distribution of the findspots suggests that these lekythoi were not produced with an exclusive Black Sea market in mind.<sup>7</sup> Xenophantos's notable emphasis on his Athenian identity supports the premise put forth by Margaret Miller that the cultural context against which the lekythoi of the Xenophantos group should be considered is an Athenian one.<sup>8</sup> I return to this point below.

Although a part of this group of six, the St. Petersburg lekythos is quite distinct from the others: it is the largest (0.38 m high), and, in terms of the decoration, the most complex and detailed, including more figures than the others, a special type of prey (the griffin), and specific and prominent landscape features, the incorporation of which is not common in vase painting. The decoration is also particularly sumptuous. Eight of the 13 hunters and all of the prey are moldmade relief figures. These figures were painted in various colors (white, red, blue, and green) and portions were gilded. Other elements, such as the hunters' weaponry and the landscape features, were rendered with extruded clay and also included gilded detailing.<sup>9</sup> The remaining five hunters, who appear at the edges of the scene, are depicted in red-figure, as is the elaborate vegetal decoration located under the vessel's handle.

4. Zervoudaki 1968, pp. 26–28, nos. 35–40 (Workshop I); see also Lezzi-Hafter 2008, p. 179.

5. Those, in addition to our primary lekythos, from the Black Sea region: Zervoudaki 1968, p. 26, no. 36 (from Kerch); p. 27, no. 37 (from Varna); p. 28, no. 40 (from Apollonia). Those

from Italy: Zervoudaki 1968, pp. 27–28, no. 38 (from Ruvo); p. 28, no. 39 (from Canosa).

6. This issue is much debated; see Gerhard 1856; Stephani 1866, p. 140. Peredolskaya (1945) argues that the clay is Attic, and this is accepted in Cohen 2006, p. 142. See also Tiverios (1997),

who argues in favor of a workshop located in the Crimea.

7. Miller 2003, pp. 31–33.

8. Miller 2003, p. 33.

9. See Cohen 2006, pp. 141–142, and Lezzi-Hafter 2008, pp. 178–184, for details of technique.

Seven of the hunters are labeled, and of those, five have Persian or Eastern-sounding names: Atramis, Abrokomas, Seisames, Darius, and Cyrus.<sup>10</sup> The latter two, of course, are names belonging to historical Achaemenid royalty, and were well known to ancient Greeks, as they are to modern scholars.<sup>11</sup> The other two named hunters are labeled as Euryalos, a name shared with one of the Epigoni, who was also an Argonaut (Apollod. 1.9.17) and who led the Argives at Troy (Paus. 2.20.5; Apollod. 1.9.13, 3.7.2; *Il.* 2.565), and Klytios, the name of one of the brothers of King Priam of Troy (*Il.* 3.146). The labels reinforce the Eastern identity of these figures, but even without them, the hunters in relief are easily recognizable as Persians. All wear a long-sleeved tunic over leggings and, on their heads, the *kidaris*, a soft hat whose peak falls forward. Some also wear a *kandys*, a cape with sleeves that are left unused, and that are often visible billowing behind the figure.

Similarly, the means of hunting, particularly the use of the axe and chariot, have Eastern associations. The clothing and the equipment and methods of hunting are not only a fairly accurate reflection of Persian dress and practice, but such details are also familiar from representations of Persians on 5th-century Attic vases.<sup>12</sup> As Miller discusses, however, while such precise depictions of Persians are typical in vase paintings of the 5th century, they are widely replaced in the 4th century by generic Oriental figures, who often wear highly patterned clothes and carry a pelta; they may be easily confused with Amazons because they are frequently clean-shaven (an example is illustrated in Fig. 4, below).<sup>13</sup> The hunters on Xenophantos's lekythos are therefore all the more remarkable for the careful attention paid to their appearance, which, along with their Persian names, leaves no doubt that they represent elite men of the Persian Empire.

The figures are distributed throughout the horizontal field, and are divided between its upper and lower sections. The division of the figures into these levels suggests their respective positions in space, so that while the landscape elements go "up," reaching from the front ground line and through the height of the field, the upper figures should be read as further "back," or more distant from the viewer. This arrangement is similar to that employed by the Meidias Painter, or, as it seems from Pausanias's description, to Polygnotos's lost painting of the *Ilioupersis* for the Knidians at

10. Atramis may come from the city Adramyttion, located near the Hellespont in the Phrygian satrapy, through which Xerxes' army passed on his way to Greece (Hdt. 7.42). Abrokomas and Seisames were satraps of Syria and Mysia, respectively. For Abrokomas, see Xen. *An.* 1.3.20; for Seisames, see Sekunda 1998, p. 93; Aesch. *Pers.* 322 (ca. 472 B.C.), all cited in Miller 2003, p. 22, n. 9. In addition to these identifications, men with similar names were known in the high levels of the Persian army: an Abrokomes was a son of

Darius killed at Thermopylae (Hdt. 7.224), and a Sisamnes was a Persian officer in Xerxes' army (Hdt. 7.66).

11. Two Cyruses and two Dariuses were well known in Greece by the early 4th century: Cyrus II, the Great (reigned ca. 559–539), the founder of the Persian Empire, fictionalized and idealized in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*; Darius I (reigned ca. 521–486), best known for his invasion of Greece in the 490s; and Cyrus the Younger (died 401), son of Darius II (reigned ca. 423–404), and best known for his rebellion against

his brother Artaxerxes II, in which the army of Ten Thousand Greeks, led by Xenophon, participated.

12. Miller calls these figures "reasonably convincing renderings" in their representation of Persians (2003, p. 22). As she notes, the fact that Abrokomas both drives his own chariot and spears a boar "strains believability," but the chariot, certainly, has Eastern and even royal Persian connotations. The only other "inaccuracy" is a pelta, carried as a shield by the red-figure assistants.

13. Miller 2003, p. 22.

Delphi (Paus. 10.25).<sup>14</sup> Darius and Abrokomas are located directly across from the vessel's handle and, therefore, in the "central" position of the hunting scene. Darius, riding on horseback to the left in the upper part of the field, spears a deer. Below, Abrokomas rides to the right in the chariot, which he drives with his left hand while spearing a boar with his right.

Two of the landscape features bracket these central figures: on the left is a tall, thin palm tree, and on the right, an acanthus column topped with a tripod (one of two in the scene). On the other side of this column, in the upper part of the field, Euryalos and Klytios, both armed with spears, hunt a boar with the assistance of a youth rendered in red-figure. Below, and to the right of Abrokomas, a relief figure, Seisames, pursues one of the two griffins in the scene.<sup>15</sup> His arms are raised over his head, though the axe he should be holding is not visible (whether it was lost or never included is unclear). Two assistants in red-figure join him; one wields a spear and carries a pelta and the second carries a bow and arrow. The lion-griffin hunted by Seisames is an unusual composite animal. He has the body of a lion and the wings of an eagle, as one expects of a griffin, but he has curved horns and a humanoid face. Seen from the front, the face features pointed ears, eyes covered by brows, a bulbous nose, and heavy jowls. He opens his mouth, from which his tongue protrudes, perhaps an indication either of his monstrous nature or of his impending death.<sup>16</sup>

In the upper part of the field, to the left of Darius, the figure labeled Cyrus strides to the left with his right arm raised; in his left hand, he holds an axe. Cyrus seems to direct a youth, who restrains a dog. This young hunter is the only unnamed figure in relief. An additional assistant in red-figure approaches from the far left, also carrying a hunting axe. On the ground line below, to the left of Abrokomas, Atramis hunts the second griffin. This figure of Atramis is made from the same mold as Seisames, the other griffin hunter, and so, like Seisames, Atramis lunges forward on his left leg, his *kandys* billowing behind him, and he raises his arms above his head. Again, here, the axe he would use against the beast is not included. As for Atramis's prey, his body is that of a lion, while both the wings and head are those of an eagle. From behind Atramis, to the left, a red-figure hunter approaches, carrying a spear and pelta. Behind the griffin, and extending to the upper boundary of the pictorial field (between Cyrus and the relief figure with the hound), is another acanthus column. This one, too, is topped by a tripod. The detailed landscape setting, therefore, is made

14. See, e.g., Cleveland, Ohio, Cleveland Museum of Art 82.142; *CVA*, Cleveland 2 [USA 35], pls. 72 [1818]:1–4; 73 [1819]:1, 2; 74 [1820]:1, 2; Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum 259; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1315, no. 1, 1690; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1321, no. 1. Lezzi-Hafter (2008, pp. 180, 182) notes that lines suggesting a hilly landscape are also visible, if faint, under certain figures on the lekythos.

15. The label "Seisames" is included above and to the right of the griffin's head, and there is some confusion in the scholarship as to which hunter it refers to. The name is nearest a red-figure hunter to the right of the griffin, and Tiverios (1997, p. 270) identifies this man as Seisames; others, including Miller (2003, p. 21, n. 5) and Zervoudaki (1968, p. 26), however, attach the name to the relief figure with the axe.

Here, I follow those who link the name to the hunter in relief, since none of the other red-figure participants are named, but the positioning of the label is certainly ambiguous.

16. See Frontisi-Ducroux 1995, pp. 82–94, for discussion of the use of the frontal face in vase painting to signal extreme states, including death and impending death.

up of a palm, two acanthus columns and their tripods, and it also includes two thin trees with branches bearing leaves and small fruits; one is located to the left of Atramis, and one beside Seisames at the right.

The subject of the lekythos is easy to recognize as a hunt; the meaning of this theme, however, and its unique combination of iconographic features have been less transparent, and modern explanations have been largely restricted to the mythic or the historical. Because of the appearance of the griffins, Ludolf Stephani, in his early publication of the vase, identified the hunters as the mythical Arimasps, a race of one-eyed men, who, in the Greek tradition, often engage in battle against griffins (Hdt. 3.116).<sup>17</sup> More recently, Michalis Tiverios has argued that the hunting Persians, certain of their inscribed names, and the lush landscape setting evoke a historical hunt, held in an Achaemenid *paradeisos* in the late 5th century.<sup>18</sup> *Paradeisoi*, large parks attached to Persian royal and satrapal palaces of the Persian Empire, functioned primarily as botanical gardens, but the complex of the *paradeisos* could also include hunting reserves that were stocked with game for the entertainment and exercise of Persian royalty.<sup>19</sup> According to Tiverios, the hunt on the lekythos represents a gathering of high-ranking men of the Persian court, including the son (Darius) and brother (Cyrus the Younger) of the Great King Artaxerxes II, and the contemporary satrap of Syria, Abrokomas. This event would have taken place before Cyrus's death (in a rebellion against Artaxerxes) in 401, and, Tiverios ventures, it might have occurred at Kelaenae in Phrygia, where Cyrus had both a palace and a *paradeisos* (Xen. *An.* 1.2.7).<sup>20</sup>

Such a historical scenario, however, fails to fully account for the prominence of the griffins in particular, for the names of the other figures, and for the detailed landscape, which includes sacred elements uncommon in the *paradeisoi*.<sup>21</sup> Even Tiverios acknowledges that the griffins introduce a mythic atmosphere to the scene; he suggests that the griffin hunters are ancestors of the historical hunters, and compares their appearance here to the inclusion of gods and the Athenian eponymous heroes as part of the painted Battle of Marathon that hung in the Stoa Poikile in Athens (Paus. 1.15.3).<sup>22</sup> Miller, who, like Stephani, more readily embraces the fantastic nature of the event, offers a kind of compromise between the historical and mythical explanations. She sees in the hunters a conflation of historical Persians with the Arimasps, the one-eyed men mentioned above. For Miller, this blurring of the lines between the real Persian and the mythical Arimasps in the lekythos conforms to the 4th-century trend away from the 5th century's precise renderings of Persians and toward an increasingly nonspecific Oriental type. She argues, further, that this preference for the representation of Persians as generic Orientals reflects a conceptual transformation of Persians into the stuff of mythology; as mythic figures, they could not pose a tangible threat to the Greeks. This intriguing argument may hold true elsewhere, but it is not entirely satisfying in the context of this scene. The hunters are not, after all, the representations of generic Orientals that predominate in contemporary vase painting but, by Miller's own description, "reasonably convincing renderings" of Persians, supplemented by labels that assign to the figures Persian names.<sup>23</sup>

17. Stephani 1866, p. 147. He considers the names as an attempt on the part of the artist to simply convey the barbarian nature of these men.

18. Tiverios 1997. Tripodi (1991, pp. 163–165) also believes the hunt takes place in a *paradeisos*, and he associates what he sees as the most important figure—Darius—with the earlier historical Great King by that name.

19. For extensive treatment of the *paradeisoi*, see Tuplin 1996, pp. 80–131.

20. Tiverios 1997, p. 273.

21. See Tuplin 1996, pp. 107, 116–118, for the secular function of *paradeisoi*, and the Greek attitude toward these spaces.

22. Tiverios 1997, pp. 279–280.

23. Miller 2003, pp. 22, 44.



These previous interpretations of the vase, both the mythological and the historical, frame certain questions about the unusual subject matter. What does it mean that the griffin hunters are *Persians*? Must the hunt be either historical or mythological, or is it something else? And where does it take place? The following interpretation hinges on what I identify as the three major iconographic components of the scene; thus far, interpretations of the hunt have failed, to my mind, to account for all parts of the scene and their very deliberate combination. These components, according to which I divide the following investigation, are the landscape (which itself is made up of several distinctive elements), the griffins, and the Persians.

## AN APOLLINE LANDSCAPE

Scholars have long acknowledged a connection of the landscape elements on the Xenophantos lekythos (palm, acanthus column, and tripod) to the god Apollo, but this association warrants revisiting, since recent studies have preferred to attribute certain elements of the landscape to the influence of Persian imagery, and particularly of glyptic.<sup>24</sup> While I depart from Miller's primary interpretation, which depends on the conflation of Persians and Arimasps, I do follow her approach to the Xenophantos vase as a work produced by an Athenian, and that includes, therefore, iconography that is best considered against the background of Athenian visual vocabulary.<sup>25</sup> Miller, who convincingly defends this premise and considers the hunt and hunters as part of the Classical Athenian visual traditions, argues that the scene's palm and acanthus columns draw not from this Athenian context, but instead from features that appear on Persian seals. In the case of the acanthus columns in particular, she cites as a possible model a seal that includes stylized trees with cauldronlike designs at the top that could be tripods. But the acanthus column is known elsewhere in Classical Athenian imagery, and the other landscape elements are familiar in this context as well. The Athenian visual tradition, in fact, not only provides a wealth of parallels for the use of acanthus columns, tripods (including the tripod-topped column), and palm trees, but it also offers the means—through Apollo—to bring these elements together as a single landscape type, in which the hunt is set.<sup>26</sup>

24. Tiverios (1997, pp. 272–273) attributes the appearance of the palm to the influence of Persian seals, while he recognizes the acanthus columns as appropriate to sanctuaries of Apollo. Miller (2003, pp. 36–39) argues that both the palm tree and the acanthus columns are indebted to the inclusion of landscape features on Persian seals.

25. Miller (2003, pp. 31–33) identifies Athens in the late 5th century as the “determinative social and cultural context” of the lekythos, though she

also identifies a secondary context, the western Achaemenid Empire. This exception allows departure from the Athenian context in certain cases, particularly related to the landscape elements, which I will take up below.

26. A connection of the landscape to sacred spaces of Apollo has been previously proposed: Stephani 1866; Ducati 1916, p. 295; Tripodi 1991, p. 164. Miller (2003, pp. 36–38) rejects a connection to Apollo, and suggests

inspiration from Persian glyptic. Tiverios (1997, pp. 272–273) also attributes the palm in particular to its appearance on Persian seals in which royal hunts feature. Even so, he links the other elements to Apollo, and explains why they—referring as they do to this god—are appropriate for the representation of the *paradeisos* at Kelaenae, since this *paradeisos* is the place where Apollo flayed Marsyas (Xen. *An.* 1.2.8; see also Hdt. 7.26.3).

Although I proceed to address each of the landscape elements separately, and although some of the individual elements do indeed have broad semantic fields, I argue below that their appearance together underscores their shared connection to Apollo, and that the result is a distinct and coherent conceptual unit, a specific type of landscape that is special to that god. Apollo is also, as we will see, the common denominator that binds the landscape and the griffins, and it is through him that we might understand these major iconographic components of the lekythos.

Of the landscape elements, the palm is arguably the most prominent and the most familiar, and the appearance of these trees in Greek art has long been the subject of scholarly attention. The most common interpretation of a single palm as, primarily or exclusively, a marker of exotic, foreign space, is not satisfying in many of the cases in which this tree appears. Recent studies have emphasized, instead, the strong association of this tree with Apollo and Artemis through their birth at Delos, where the “Delian palm” helped Leto to deliver the twins (*Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 17–18; Callim. *Hymn* 2.4).<sup>27</sup> The palm accompanies these three divinities, as individuals or as a family group, in multiple visual examples, as, for example, on a pyxis in Ferrara attributed to the Marlay Painter.<sup>28</sup> In this scene, Apollo, Artemis, and Leto are shown at an altar, behind which a labeled personification of Delos is seated; adorning the sanctuary are a palm and tripod.

While the palm is connected to both Apollo and Artemis through the sacred island, tripods enjoy a stronger association with Apollo than with his sister, a relationship that stems, in part, from the use of the tripod to communicate with the god’s oracle at Delphi as well as Herakles’ theft of the vessel from Apollo’s sanctuary, a scene well known in Greek imagery.<sup>29</sup> There is, certainly, ample evidence that tripods were appropriate dedications to Apollo. Of Delphi, for example, Bacchylides writes that “gold shines with flashing light from the high elaborate tripods standing in front of the temple where the Delphians tend the great sanctuary of Phoebus by the waters of Castalia” (*Ep.* 3 = *Olym.* 2.17–21).<sup>30</sup> Golden tripods were given as offerings at Delphi by Croesus (Hdt. 1.92) and by Gelon and Hiero (Ath. *Deip.* 6.232a, b; Bacchyl. *Pyth.* 3.17–22; Diod. Sic. 11.26.7). After the Battle of Plataea, a coalition of Greek cities dedicated a tripod mounted on the famous serpent column at Delphi (Hdt. 9.80–81; Paus. 10.1.9; Diod. Sic. 11.33.2). In other sanctuaries of Apollo, too, tripods were familiar: victors dedicated tripods to the god at the Triopian Games (Hdt. 1.144.1), as did the priests of Apollo at Thebes (Paus. 9.10.1). Certainly, these vessels were common dedications in sanctuaries belonging to other gods as well (they are well known at Olympia and on the Athenian Acropolis, for example), and as the prizes for Homeric funeral games and the Dionysian dithyramb, they also had the potential to evoke other contexts. Even so, in Greek imagery, the tripod remained a common attribute of Apollo, and on the lekythos, the appearance of tripods in the company of a palm tree reinforces their particular association with that god.<sup>31</sup>

In the hunting scene on the lekythos, each tripod is set atop a column with acanthus leaves along the shaft. The acanthus column is unusual, appearing less frequently than the palm or tripod in Greek imagery, and the lekythos offers an early example of the extant representations of this

27. For the strong association of the palm with Apollo and Artemis, see Sourvinou-Inwood 1991, pp. 99–121; Hedreen 2001, pp. 68–78; see also Ahl 1982, pp. 380–383.

28. Ferrara, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 20298: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1277, no. 22. Other examples include London, British Museum E274: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 604, no. 3; Paris, Musée du Louvre G164: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 504, no. 1; and Palermo, Museo Archeologico Regionale 2187: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1321, no. 9.

29. Hedreen 2001, pp. 68–69. See also Sakowski 1997, pp. 113–168, and for limited association with other gods, pp. 169–173; Papalexandrou 2005, pp. 189–216.

30. Trans. D. A. Campbell, Cambridge, Mass., 1992.

31. Wilson Jones 2002, p. 376. Papalexandrou (2005, pp. 189–209) emphasizes the connection of the tripod with Apollo as the god of Delphi. For the inclusion of multiple landscape elements as a guide to the viewer’s interpretation, see n. 42, below.

type.<sup>32</sup> When it appears in visual contexts of the later 4th century, the acanthus column, like the tripod, is especially linked to Apollo, and in particular to the god's sanctuary at Delphi.<sup>33</sup> On a 4th-century krater in the Athens National Museum, for instance, an acanthus column, topped by a tripod, stands between Apollo and Dionysos, the god with whom Apollo shared his Delphic home.<sup>34</sup> The best-known acanthus column, of course, is the one dedicated by the Athenians and erected in that sanctuary.<sup>35</sup> The fluted shaft of the column consists of five drums, the base of each encircled by a band of acanthus; additional acanthus springs from the column's base and capital. At the top, three sculpted maidens dance, lifting their right hands toward the sky. Facing outward, these dancers surround a small, plain pillar that rests on the acanthus capital. The column served as the base for a tripod, the legs of which rested between the maidens, so that their raised hands would have seemed to support the bowl of the vessel.<sup>36</sup>

Now widely believed to date to the last third of the 4th century, this monument could not have served as the singular model for the columns on the Xenophantos lekythos, which was produced in the early part of that century.<sup>37</sup> But the columns included in the setting for the hunt need not *represent* the Delphic column; both the pair of columns on the lekythos and the monumental column may, instead, reflect a common way of representing something else. Gloria Ferrari has recently identified Delphi's Acanthus Column as the representation of the celestial *terma*, the point at which the sun changes direction as it annually proceeds across the horizon like a chariot on a hippodrome track.<sup>38</sup> As for the three maidens who seem to float at its top, she identifies them as stars, suspended in a dance around this hinge of the earth (Plin. *HN* 4.89).<sup>39</sup> I return below to the celestial implications of the acanthus columns for the Xenophantos scene, but the column at Delphi contributes to our current concerns in two ways. First, the Delphic column links the individual features of acanthus column and tripod, relating them to one another and to Apollo through his sanctuary at

32. One of the anonymous reviewers for this article directed my attention to an acanthus column on a fragmentary funerary stele in the British Museum; there, it supports the central of three lekythoi. The column is flanked by two rampant griffins, and the relief is therefore intriguing in the context of the lekythos, which combines similar elements. Unfortunately, the context of the relief's production and use, as well as the meaning of its iconography, is unclear. London, British Museum 1905.0518.1: Smith 1916, pp. 72–73, fig. 4; Paspalas 2008, p. 304, fig. 3.

33. The acanthus column's connection to Apollo has been noted in some studies of the lekythos: Ducati (1916, p. 91) connects the entire landscape to the popularity of Milesian Apollo in the Bosphorus. Tripodi (1991, p. 164)

and Tiverios (1997, p. 273) also acknowledge such a connection, despite their identification of the setting as a Persian *paradeisos*. For the limited appearance of acanthus columns elsewhere, see Homolle 1908, pp. 216–224. On the Panathenaic amphoras of 363/2, acanthus columns, on the top of which a Nike, wielding a sword, alights, flank the figure of Athena. See Eschbach 1986, pp. 42–45.

34. Athens, National Museum 12253; *LIMC* II, 1984, p. 279, no. 769, pl. 250, s.v. Apollon (W. Lambrinoudakis et al.).

35. For the Acanthus Column generally, see Homolle 1908; Pouilloux and Roux 1963, pp. 122–149; Vatin 1983; Martinez 1997.

36. For reconstructions, see Homolle 1908. Martinez (1997) argues

that the marble omphalos, also well known from Delphi, was set within the tripod atop the Acanthus Column.

37. Pouilloux and Roux 1963, pp. 123–145. See also Ridgway 1990, pp. 22–25; Martinez 1997, p. 44, n. 27.

38. Ferrari 2008, pp. 141–147. In support of this identification of the *terma*, Ferrari cites a pyxis lid in Berlin, on which Eos, Selene, and Nyx race their chariots: Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, F2519: *CVA*, Berlin Antiquarium 3 [Germany 22], pl. 138 [1067]:2–4. Marking the turning point around which Nyx and Eos race is a column capital, from which leaves spring; on it is mounted a smaller, plain pillar, similar to the upper pillar on the Acanthus Column.

39. Ferrari 2008, pp. 146–147.

Delphi. Second, as an Athenian dedication, the Acanthus Column reflects what Athenians considered as appropriate in a sanctuary to this god.

We return, then, to the importance of the Athenian context for the interpretation of the Xenophantos lekythos. Each of the discrete landscape elements discussed thus far maintains an independent association with Apollo and his sanctuaries, particularly to the Athenian mind. If we are left in any doubt as to the association of the space of the hunt with this particular god, however, the additional trees provide even further confirmation of its Apolline nature. They are laurels, and their traditional and consistent role as the tree belonging to Apollo is beyond question.<sup>40</sup> Branches of laurel are used for the victors' wreaths in Apollo's Pythian Games, and they are often held either by a devotee as an offering to the god, or by the god himself.<sup>41</sup> Even the first temple of the god was said to have been fashioned from laurel brought from Tempe, where Apollo famously defeated Python (Paus. 10.5.9).

This is not the place to proceed further with an in-depth investigation of each of these landscape elements and its place in the visual tradition. Certainly, when considered individually, each has a field of possible meanings, not all of which are necessarily connected to Apollo. But the appearance of these elements in combination demands that each be read as only one part of a larger and coherent landscape type, and foregrounds their shared association with a single god.<sup>42</sup> The identification of the setting as a space belonging to this god is underscored by the inclusion of not just one or two, but *four* elements (palm, acanthus column, tripod, and laurel), each of which reinforces the Apolline associations of the others. The intended reading of the landscape as a particular type of space is also visually suggested by the formal arrangement of the elements. The columns, topped with tripods, flank the central palm, and the laurels are further "outside" the columns, creating a double parenthetical formal arrangement that carefully positions each element as an integral part of the whole. The landscape of the hunt on the lekythos, therefore, is not dependent on the influence or misunderstanding of foreign motifs, and it is neither a Persian nor a simply neutral space. It is a space that holds powerful resonance in the Athenian mind in connection to Apollo.

40. See, e.g., Plin. *HN* 12.2, 16.40; Paus. 9.10.4. Laurel and olive can be difficult to distinguish in visual depictions, since they both have flat leaves along a thin branch, and they both bear small fruit, that of the laurel usually extending evenly along the branch rather than in a cluster. Though the full trees are rarely depicted, the tall, thin nature of the laurel and its fewer branches correspond better to the saplings of Xenophantos's scene. See, for a comparison, the representation of the laurel tree and branches held by Apollo in Thebes, Archaeological Museum 190: *CVA*, Thebes [Greece 6], pls. 84 [362]:1–4, 85 [363]:1–3.

41. See Blech 1982, pp. 35–62, esp. figs. 17, 18, and pp. 137–138, on

the wreath for the Pythian Games. Examples of the laurel, including Apollo or a devotee of Apollo holding a laurel, are abundant. See, e.g., a volute krater featuring a draped youth holding a laurel branch and standing next to a shrine to Apollo: Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico 269: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 599, no. 8.

42. See Sourvinou-Inwood 1991, p. 11. Every sign, as Sourvinou-Inwood discusses, is polysemic, and its value depends on two interactions: the first is between the element and its semantic field; the second is between the element and the other elements in the representation, as well as with those elements that *could* have been included, but were not. In his investigation of landscape

elements in 5th-century vase painting, Hedreen (2001, pp. 68–78) has indeed found this to be the case, so that the pairing of a single landscape element with certain other features guides the interpretation of a represented space. While the palm, for instance, can appear in a variety of contexts, Hedreen's work indicates that when it appears with elements that mark the space of a sanctuary (an altar, for example), that sanctuary belongs to one or both of the twin gods, Apollo and Artemis. The same is true of the tripod, which, when it appears alongside other elements appropriate in a sanctuary setting, most often indicates that the space belongs to Apollo.

## GRIFFINS AND THE NORTHERN ESCHATA

The hunt's exotic and distinctive prey, the griffins, allow us to locate the setting even more precisely. These beasts, which have the body of a lion and the wings and head of an eagle (Paus. 1.24.6), are well known in Greek literature for the extreme nature of their habitat. They live at the very edges of the earth, in the far north and in the distant east, in or beyond India. Aristotle explains that the existence of composite beasts in these regions is due to the interbreeding of different species that gather at the few springs in these countries (*Gen. an.* 746b7–13).<sup>43</sup> Diodoros takes a slightly different tack, explaining that the existence of goat-stags, antelopes, and other creatures that combine in one body the parts of different animals is due to the extensive exposure of this land to the generative strength of the sun (2.51.2–3). Because of its substantial size, he says, India, the easternmost country of the earth, takes in a greater extent of the sun's course than any other part of the world (2.35.2).

Although griffins are not specifically mentioned by Diodoros or Aristotle, they are, as composite, biform creatures, at home in those distant lands. In Ktesias's *Indika*, they are birds with the feet and claws of a lion, and they inhabit the mountains and engage in battle with men who try to collect the gold that flows through the rivers there (F45 sect. 26; Ael. *NA* 4.27). Aelian dismisses this claim that the griffins guard the gold (a story of the Bactrians, he says), and is convinced instead by the Indian explanation that the griffins fight invaders only to protect their young (*NA* 4.27).<sup>44</sup>

Like Ktesias, other classical literary sources also describe the griffins as guardians of gold that flows from the earth, a role that brings them most frequently into conflict not with Indians, but with the Arimasps, the race of one-eyed men mentioned above (Aesch. *PV* 803–807; Hdt. 3.116, 4.13, 4.27; also Paus. 1.24.6). These men were the subject of a poem, the *Arimaspeia*, by Aristetas of Prokonnesos, who learned of the Arimasps while visiting the land of the Issedones (Hdt. 4.13, 4.27). Herodotos locates both of these tribes in the north. The Arimasps, he says, dwell beyond the Issedones, who in turn live in the region beyond the Scythians.<sup>45</sup> These lands most distant from the Greeks are particularly exotic to the Greek mind, and in these extreme places, boundaries become increasingly vague, and their occupants increasingly fantastic.<sup>46</sup> For his part, Herodotos expresses doubt as to whether the existence of a race of one-eyed men is possible, but admits that the “most outlying lands, though, as they enclose and wholly surround all the rest of the world, are likely to have those things which we think the finest and the rarest” (3.116.3).<sup>47</sup>

Encounters between griffins and the Arimasps are depicted in Greek vase painting, where these men are represented as generic Oriental figures—the kinds of figures with which, according to Miller's proposal, the Persian

43. Romm 1992, pp. 88–91.

44. The association of griffins with India continues in later sources. In the 2nd century A.D., for example, Philostratus's Apollonius describes the griffin as one of the many fascinating animals in India, where, he says,

the griffin is also regarded as sacred to the sun (*VA* 3.48).

45. Like the griffins, Scythians live either in the north, as in Herodotos (4.17–23), or in the east. Diodoros says that Scythians inhabit the country that borders India, and that the descendants

of the first kings of Scythia advanced their empire as far as the ocean in the east (2.43.5).

46. Romm 1992, p. 14, n. 14.

47. Trans. A. D. Godley, Cambridge, Mass., 1920.



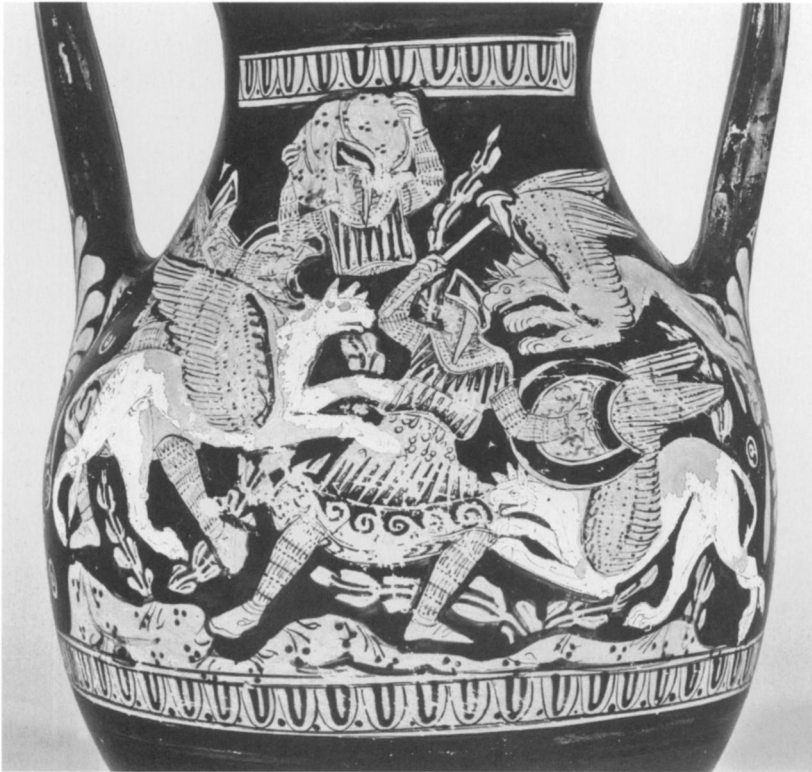


Figure 4. Arimasps battling griffins. Attic red-figure pelike, ca. 400–360 B.C. London, British Museum E434. Photo © Trustees of the British Museum

hunters of the Xenophantos lekythos have been conflated.<sup>48</sup> In these images, the griffins and Arimasps are shown confronting one another in direct combat. A red-figure calyx krater in London depicts a typical encounter, in which a rearing griffin lays his front talons on a lone Arimasps.<sup>49</sup> On other vases, multiple Arimasps and multiple griffins are included. On a pelike in London, an Arimasps fights off three griffins with an axe (Fig. 4).<sup>50</sup> Two of the griffins lower their heads and appear to bite the figure, while the third beast rears and attacks the victim's torso. Two additional Arimasps, wielding a spear and a boulder, come to their companion's rescue. In these examples and in others, the griffins are consistently shown engaged in confrontation with the Oriental figures, and they are even aggressive.

The context in which the griffins appear on the Xenophantos lekythos does not correspond to these Arimaspsian battles as they are described or depicted. In the above examples, the griffins are fierce guardians of gold, and they confront their attackers, often even getting the best of them. On the lekythos, the griffins are instead cast as one of three types of animals hunted, the other two of which are well-known prey in sport hunting, both in the Persian and Hellenic worlds. The appearance of these beasts in a hunt casts the griffins as quarry, on par with the boar and the deer alongside which they appear. Griffins may, indeed, be dangerous or challenging prey, but they are prey—*game*—nonetheless, playing a role very different from that of the guarding of gold that leads to battle with the Arimasps. Likewise, Arimasps, while they do battle with the griffins, are not griffin *hunters*, and the figures on the lekythos are, in any case, carefully designated as Persians, as discussed above.

48. The Oriental figures are sometimes identified as Amazons rather than Arimasps; see Miller 2003, pp. 39–44.

49. London, British Museum 1931.1-13.1: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1455, no. 2.

50. London, British Museum E434: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1474. For other examples of the Arimasps-griffin battle, see *LIMC* Suppl. VIII, 1997, pp. 609–611, s.v. Gryps (M. Leventopoulou). They include Warsaw, National Museum 138531: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1478, no. 10; and Paris, Musée du Louvre G529: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1470, no. 162.

Other images provide visual contexts outside of the Arimasbian battles in which the griffin appears and plays a central role. Most significantly for us, they frequently appear, like the landscape elements discussed above, in the company of Apollo. A hydria in Berlin features a scene of Kadmos fighting the dragon, surrounded by a number of gods who have assembled to watch the event.<sup>51</sup> Here, Apollo is seated above one of the handles. A tripod on a column stands to the left of the handle on the lower ground line, and below the handle is a griffin, suggesting, by such proximity, its connection to the god. A similar arrangement can be found on a gold cup in Bucharest, in which Apollo is seated with a griffin lying below.<sup>52</sup> In the first half of the 4th century, staters of the city of Abdera feature a winged griffin on the obverse and a laureate head of Apollo on the reverse, and New Style Athenian tetradrachms feature a representation of the statue of Apollo of Delos, in which the god, holding a bow, is flanked by griffins.<sup>53</sup> On the interior frieze and pilaster capitals of the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, griffins flank lyres or vegetal features.<sup>54</sup>

The role of the griffin as an attribute of Apollo stems from his association with the land of the Hyperboreans, pious devotees of the god, who live in the distant north—further, even, than the Arimasps, and just beyond the griffins (Hdt. 4.13). Each winter, a griffin carried Apollo from his Hellenic home at Delphi to the country of the Hyperboreans.<sup>55</sup> This yearly journey is thought to be the subject of vase paintings in which Apollo, often armed with his lyre and a laurel branch, rides a griffin (Fig. 5).<sup>56</sup> The Hyperboreans are also closely linked to the foundation of Apollo's sanctuaries at Delos and Delphi. Pausanias records a tradition in which the Delphic oracle of Apollo was established by these people, including a man named Olen, who was the first prophet at the site and the first to give oracles in verse (10.5.7–8).<sup>57</sup> Offerings sent by the Hyperboreans were said to make their way through nations of men to arrive at Delos, passing first to the Scythians, and then into Greece, from Dodona to Euboea, and through the Hellenic cities until the Tenians brought them to the sacred island (Hdt. 4.33).<sup>58</sup>

51. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, F2634: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1187, no. 33.

52. For the Bucharest cup, see Farnell 1907, p. 342, pl. XXXVI:b.

53. For the coinage of Abdera generally, see May 1966; Kraay (1976, pp. 152–157) offers a revised chronology. Griffins appear on the obverse of Abdera's coinage from its earliest types, but they are consistently paired with the head of Apollo in May's period VIII, ca. 375/3–365/60 B.C. (see May 1966, pp. 264–285, nos. 462–528). For the New Style Athenian tetradrachms, see Lacroix 1949, p. 203, pl. XVII:1.

54. Wiegand and Knackfuss 1941, e.g., pls. 112–114, 116, 121–125. These

griffins take different forms, with either the head of an eagle or that of a lion. The rebuilding of the temple probably began in the late 4th century, but the interior reliefs may date as late as the 2nd century B.C.

55. See Farnell 1907, pp. 313–315. An alternative mode of transportation, a chariot pulled by swans, is mentioned by Alkaios in his *Hymn to Apollo*, preserved in Himerios's *Orationes* 48.10–11 (= Alkaios 307c). Some sources indicate the swan's special status as the prophetic bird of Apollo (Callim. *Hymn* 4.249–255 and 2.4–5; Pl. *Phd.* 84d), and others connect the swans to the worship rituals of the Hyperboreans (Ael. *NA* 11.1). See also Ahl 1982, esp. pp. 380–394.

56. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 202: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1523, no. 1. London, British Museum E543: *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1348, no. 1. See Delplace 1980, pp. 366–367; Farnell 1907, p. 313, note e.

57. They are connected to the foundation of the games at Olympia as well: it is from Hyperborea that Herakles brought the olive spray, from which the victors in the games were crowned (Pind. *Ol.* 3.31–33).

58. Pausanias offers an alternative route: the Arimasps receive the first fruits from the Hyperboreans and deliver them to the Issedones; from there they pass to the Scythians, to Sinope, and to Prasiae, and the Athenians carry them to Delos (1.31.2).



Figure 5. Apollo riding a griffin.  
Attic red-figure cup, ca. 400–300 B.C.  
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum  
202. Photo © Kunsthistorisches Museum,  
Vienna

Sources tell, too, of the Hyperborean celebrations in honor of Apollo, in which the god found his greatest satisfaction (Pind. *Pyth.* 10.35). Diodoros says that all the inhabitants are priests of Apollo, and they praise the god daily with songs and the continuous playing of the kithara in his temple, which is adorned with votive offerings (Diod. Sic. 2.47.2–3). The hero Perseus visited this land, and found its people, crowned with golden laurel, sacrificing hecatombs to the god and dancing to the lyre and to flutes (Pind. *Pyth.* 10.31–44). Their lives are endlessly joyous and blessed: they live longer and more happily than other mortals (Pomponius Mela, *De chorographia* 3.36), and they are entirely free from sickness and old age, and from toil and strife and sorrow (Pind. *Pyth.* 10.31–44; Plin. *HN* 4.89).

When the Hyperborean devotion to Apollo and the relationship of these people to his sanctuaries at Delos and Delphi are not the interests of the ancient writers, the extreme location of their land is the primary concern. Their very name situates them beyond the North Wind, Boreas. Herakles pursued the Keryneian Hind here, to a land near the sources of the Danube and beyond the cold blasts of Boreas, and it is from this place that he brought olive trees to plant at Olympia (Pind. *Ol.* 3.14–16, 24–33). The Hyperboreans are thought to live on the northernmost edges of the world, beyond the other nations of men, past the Issedones and the Arimasps (Hdt. 4.13.1), where the earth ends and the Ocean begins.<sup>59</sup>

The significance of the location of this northern land is illuminated against the backdrop of larger concepts in Greek geography. Homer's

59. Pomponius Mela describes their location as “beyond the north wind, above the Rhiphaean Mountains, and under the very pole of the stars where the sun rises, not every day as it does for us, but for the first time at the vernal equinox” (*De chorographia* 3.36, trans. F. E. Romer, Ann Arbor, 1998). Romm (1992, pp. 64–65) also discusses their location.

description of the Shield of Achilles, on which Hephaistos rendered the Ocean around its outermost rim, illustrates the belief that the earth is an island surrounded on all sides by a single body of water (*Il.* 18.607).<sup>60</sup> This Ocean encloses all nations of men, and it is within this conception of the island earth that the borders, the *peirata* or *eschata*, take on a special role. Herodotos indicates that this construction continues to be popular in his time—"the Greeks say that the Ocean flows from the place where the sun rises around the whole earth" (4.8)—although he is skeptical, given the impossibility of empirically proving such claims. Even he conceives, however, of the most distant places of the earth as borders (*eschatai*) that surround and enclose the rest, whatever the nature of the Ocean that flows beyond (3.116).<sup>61</sup>

Despite Herodotos's discomfort with it, the notion of earth bounded by Ocean continues, and thrives, in popular thought, and it is to this Homeric model that even Strabo adheres.<sup>62</sup> Before Strabo, Alexander the Great was said to have pushed his men to reach the eastern Ocean, "the sea that Nature has decreed should be the boundary of human affairs" (*Curt.* 9.3.13).<sup>63</sup> According to Arrian, the conqueror even planned to return from India to Greece via the Ocean, which he thought flowed to the Persian Gulf, around Libya, and then to the Pillars of Herakles (*An.* 5.26.1–2).

This great voyage never took place because Alexander's men revolted, complaining that during these campaigns in the east, they were dragged "beyond the constellations and the sun" (*Curt.* 9.4.18).<sup>64</sup> This choice of phrase, which reveals both the aspirations of the Macedonian king and the tired desperation of his army, also hints at the perceived proximity of the distant parts of the earth to the workings of the cosmos. The *eschata* of the world are, in fact, not only the point at which the Ocean begins, but they are also the place where the heavens are closest to the earth. In Homer, the sun and stars rise from and set into the Ocean, which reached to the edges of the celestial dome (*Od.* 5.273–275; *Il.* 18.483–489).<sup>65</sup> In a passage cited by Strabo, Sophocles tells of the abduction of Oreithyia by Boreas, who carried the maiden "over the whole sea to the [*eschata*] of the earth and to the sources of night and to the unfoldings of heaven and to the ancient garden of Phoebus" (7.3.1), offering a vivid description of the edges of the world as a place where the earth and cosmos meet and to which Apollo has special attachment.<sup>66</sup>

Situated at the northernmost edge of the earth, the country of the Hyperboreans is not only a favorite place of Apollo (perhaps even the garden mentioned by Sophocles), but it is also a significant point in the proper movements of the celestial bodies.<sup>67</sup> By virtue of its extreme location, this

60. The Shield of Herakles (*Hes. Sc.*), based on the Homeric Shield of Achilles, likewise places the Ocean around the rim, enclosing the figures and activities of the earth.

61. On Herodotos's position on the Ocean and on the *eschatai*, see Romm 1992, pp. 32–41. Herodotos makes

three statements about the circularity of the Ocean at 2.23, 4.8 (above), and 4.36.

62. Romm 1992, pp. 41–44.

63. Trans. J. C. Wolfe, Cambridge, Mass., 1946.

64. Trans. J. C. Wolfe, Cambridge, Mass., 1946. See also Curtius 4.8.3

for Alexander's desire to see Ethiopia, which drew him "almost beyond the limits of the sun."

65. Romm 1992, p. 15.

66. Trans. H. L. Jones, Cambridge, Mass., 1924.

67. Ferrari 2008, pp. 145–146.

land was thought to be the location of the *cardines* (hinges or pivots) on which the world turns and around which the stars revolve (Plin. *HN* 4.89). This is the site at which the solar chariot, on its annual race across the heavens, makes its turn at the *terma*, the landmark represented at Delphi by the Acanthus Column.<sup>68</sup>

Here at the northern *eschata*, at the pivots of the cosmos, the Hyperboreans dwell, and it is here that two of the major components of the scene on the Xenophantos lekythos—the landscape elements and the griffins—come together. The Apolline elements offer a very fitting representation of the Hyperborean landscape, which should look, according to the Greek imagination, like Delos and Delphi, the spaces most sacred to the god within Hellas, and the sanctuaries that the Hyperboreans themselves helped to establish. Stephani long ago recognized the location of the hunt as Hyperborean on this basis.<sup>69</sup>

Griffins, of course, do not appear exclusively in the land of the Hyperboreans. They are equally at home in India, as we have seen, and their presence there may lead us to consider whether a landscape sacred to Apollo might also be appropriate in that easternmost region. Certainly, Apollo might have general business there, since India is the country closest to the sunrise (Hdt. 3.98), and is famous for its intense and prolonged exposure to the sun (Diod. Sic. 2.35.3, 2.51.2–3). For the Xenophantos lekythos, however, the case for a Hyperborean landscape is stronger. Apollo does not have an established presence in the east in the same way that he does in the country of the Hyperboreans, and India is more closely associated with Dionysos, who is said to have traversed the whole of that region (Paus. 10.29.4; Apollod. 3.5.2). Given the unequivocal links between Apollo and the palm, acanthus column, tripod, and laurel represented in the lekythos, the Hyperborean landscape is a setting preferable to the more generalized possibilities offered by a sun-drenched India. Griffins might indeed belong equally in both places, but the landscape elements point north.

## PERSIAN INTEREST IN THE ESCHATA

The hunt on the Xenophantos lekythos seems to take place in the land of the Hyperboreans. But the hunters are not Hyperboreans, who, in any case, are not griffin hunters any more than the Arimasps are. The hunters are Persians, and they are clearly represented and labeled as such. The question is not, then, who the hunters might be, but instead, why have Persians come to the land of the Hyperboreans?

I have found no source that mentions Persian contact with Hyperboreans, or even with griffins, nor have I located any indication of special Persian interest in or association with sanctuaries of Apollo (aside from their transport of the bronze statue of Apollo from the temple at Didyma to Ecbatana: Paus. 1.16.3, 8.46.3). Greek literary sources do, however, tell of Persian experiences at other geographical edges of the earth and with the people who are imagined to live there, and they reveal a Persian interest in exploring the limits of the world. The army of Cyrus the Great, for instance, stranded in the desert on campaign, was saved by Arimasps,

68. Ferrari 2008, pp. 141–147.

69. Stephani (1866, pp. 146–147) made his connection of the lekythos's landscape to Hyperborea based on the laurel, tripod, and palm (the Acanthus Column was discovered at Delphi some decades later, in 1894). He connects the griffins to the space not through Apollo, but through the Arimasps, which leads to his identification of the hunters as these kinds of men.



whom Cyrus renamed “the Benefactors” (*Euergetas*) (Diod. Sic. 17.81.1). We know the Arimasps, of course, as the race of one-eyed men, who do battle with the griffins for gold; they are a mythical race that lives near the edges of the earth.

Cyrus’s successor, Cambyses, turned his attention to the south, and made contact with a mythic version of the Ethiopians, the Macrobian (“Long-Lived”), whose land he later tried to invade. These Ethiopians are the tallest and most handsome of men (Hdt. 3.20), they customarily live 120 years (3.23), and are buried in chambers that protect against decomposition (3.24). In Homer, they feast with the gods (*Od.* 1.21; *Il.* 1.424–425, 23.205–207).<sup>70</sup> I return below to Cambyses’ unsuccessful attempt to conquer this exceptional race of men, but despite this failure, Persian exploration of new and distant lands continues under his successor, Darius I. Darius expanded the Persian Empire in the north, across Thrace and up to the Danube, by defeating the Scythians (a people with whom the Greeks did have contact) (Hdt. 4.1).<sup>71</sup> The same Darius also sent ships, captained by the Ionian Skylax of Karyanda, to explore the coast between the Indus River and Arabia. Skylax sailed down the Indus, and then west until he came to the point from which the Egyptian king sent the Phoenicians to sail around Libya (Hdt. 4.44). The captain’s reports to the king, in the spirit of Archaic and Classical notions of distant lands, are a catalogue of wonders (men whose feet or ears are large enough to provide shade at noontime, and others that he calls one-eyed ear-sleepers, or simply freaks) (Tzetz. *Chil.* 7.629–639).<sup>72</sup>

In these Greek sources, as Persians attempt to expand their territory and influence from the center outward, they are imagined to come into contact with people and landmarks rumored to exist at the edges of the earth. In this respect, the Persians achieve something that no Greek ever does. One of the unique features of the ends of the earth, in fact, and particularly of the Hyperborean land, is that the Greeks hear about these places and their occupants from others. The *eschata*, these peripheries of the physical world, are so distant as to be inaccessible; they are never visited by even the most accomplished Greek travelers. Aristeas of Prokonnesos went no further than the Issedones, from whom he heard about the one-eyed Arimasps that are the subject of his poem (Hdt. 4.13.1). Even Alexander the Great, whose men complained that they were pushed beyond the constellations, never actually reached the Ocean in the east. The same is true in the west, where the Pillars of Herakles mark a point of the earth past which men do not venture.<sup>73</sup> The only figures to journey from Greece as far as the Hyperboreans or, for that matter, to the Ocean that borders the earth, are heroes and gods: Herakles, Perseus, Dionysos, and, of course, Apollo himself. But as their empire continually expands, the Persians do come into contact with those exotic peoples and places that are beyond the experience and the empirical knowledge of the Greeks.

It is in the spirit of such Persian exploits that we might begin to understand what the Persians of the lekythos are doing in the distant north. The hunting scene, I propose, represents a visual version of Persian imperial interests. On the lekythos, the empire has swelled to include even the sacred land of the Hyperboreans, the last point of earth before the Ocean and the

70. For the blessed lives and positions of peoples at the edges of the earth, particularly the Hyperboreans and Ethiopians (who share long lives and special relationships with the gods), see Romm 1992, pp. 45–81.

71. Briant 2002, pp. 142–146.

72. See Romm 1992, pp. 84–86.

73. Romm 1992, p. 18.

heavens begin. It is a place so distant that it is known to the Greeks only through hearsay, and so fabulous that the griffin is as common there as the deer or the boar. In this extreme northern country, Apollo is worshipped above all other gods, and he comes, yearly, to be among his favorite people. The lekythos presents a fiction, but it is Persian accomplishments—their very presence in this fabled, sacred land—and not the Persians themselves that are fictionalized.<sup>74</sup>

## PERSIANS AS EXEMPLA

This imagined feat, in which Persians have arrived in the land of the Hyperboreans and have the audacity to hunt the griffins there, presents intriguing implications for the Greek perception of imperial expansion. The sources cited above reveal the Classical concern with Persian interest in the edges of the world; other sources suggest what happens when Persians attempt to expand their power into these places. A particularly illuminating example is King Cambyses' attempt to conquer the Macrobian Ethiopians (Hdt. 3.17–25). Before invading, Cambyses sent emissaries who were charged not only with spying on his enemies but also with finding out about the legendary Table of the Sun, from which all of the Ethiopians feasted on meats that appeared daily, and that were said to be produced by the earth itself (3.18). These spies arrived before the Ethiopian king under the pretext that the Persians desired to become allies, and they presented him with extravagant gifts—gold jewelry, a purple-dyed robe, myrrh, and wine. The king, however, intuited the ruse. He criticized and rejected the gifts, which, except for the wine, had no value in his land, and he rebuked Cambyses, saying that “if he were just, he would not desire land other than his own, nor would he put into slavery men who had not done him wrong” (3.21). Thus insulted, Cambyses marched against Ethiopia, leaving in such a rush that he arranged no provisions for his army (3.25). He was not in his right mind, Herodotos says, but insane (*ἑμμανής*), and he pushed continuously forward, even when what provisions there were ran out. Only when his men were forced to resort to cannibalism did he turn back.

This episode is one instance of the Herodotean theme of ethnocentrism, in which a nation's perception of its geographic location in the center of the earth translates to an attitude of cultural superiority.<sup>75</sup> The Persians are particularly guilty of this conceit, Herodotos says, in that they honor

74. As one of the anonymous reviewers of this article pointed out, if my reading of the lekythos is correct and the Persians have indeed ventured as far as Hyperborea, this scene offers a remarkable parallel with royal Persian propaganda. In his inscription at Naqsi-Rustam (trans. Kent 1953, pp. 137–140), Darius proclaims himself to be the king of “countries containing all

kinds of men, king in this great earth far and wide” (DNa 8–12). Darius lists the countries that he seized and ruled because of the favor of Ahuramazda; they include Media, Babylonia, and Assyria, as well as Libya, Ethiopia, and various Scythias (DNa 15–30), and he assures the reader that the Persians have “delivered battle far indeed from Persia” (DNa 30–47). This emphasis

on the far reach of the empire may also be represented in the planning of the palace grounds. David Stronach has argued that the garden at Pasargadae was divided into four sections, and that these may have reflected Cyrus's rule over the four corners or quarters of the world (1990, pp. 174–176).

75. Romm 1992, pp. 54–55.

foreign peoples in proportion to their geographic closeness or remoteness to Persia, so that those most distant are held in the least esteem (1.134). When this presumption fuels unduly ambitious imperial expansion, as in the story of Cambyses' invasion of Ethiopia, the result is disastrous for the offenders. While the Greeks know the Ethiopians as the race of blessed men who feast with the gods, Cambyses is blinded by his perceived position of superiority and his own hubristic determination. The Ethiopian king's possession of the miraculous Table of the Sun, his rejection of the Persians' gifts, and his personal rebuke of the Persian king (not to mention Cambyses' own insanity) serve only to exacerbate the situation. Cambyses invades, and the disastrous, even tragic, result is not only his military failure, but also the barbaric state to which his men are reduced.

This ill-fated Ethiopian expedition is only one of a series of instances in Herodotos in which expansion for its own sake is punished. The Lydian king Croesus's invasion of the Persian Empire ends with the destruction of his own great kingdom (1.73–86), and Cyrus's campaign against the Massagetae ends not only with his army's defeat, but also with his own violent death (1.201–214). There is also, of course, the Persian attempt, under Xerxes, to conquer Greece—the overarching subject of the *Histories*. The Xerxes of Herodotos aspires not simply to expand his territory, but to conquer the world entirely, so that the heavens of Zeus would be the only boundaries to his empire (7.8)—and one wonders whether he would stop even there.<sup>76</sup> Herodotos's perception of Xerxes' aspirations is echoed by Aischines, who says that the Great King considered himself the ruler of all men “from the rising to the setting of the sun” (*In Ctes.* 1.132), an expanse that would encompass, in Greek geographical terms, all the lands from Ocean to Ocean, *eschata* to *eschata*, and, indeed, up to the very heavens.<sup>77</sup> The presumptuous pride of the Persian king is also, and famously, the theme of Aeschylus's tragedy *The Persians*, in which an impetuous Xerxes leads his armies “against all the earth” (73–80). Like Cambyses before him, Xerxes disregards the natural limits of his power, and attacks Greece; like Cambyses, he too is punished with defeat. In requital for his hubris, the gods bring him low with a devastating loss at the hands of the Greeks, even if his empire remains intact (800–844).<sup>78</sup>

These episodes resonate with a later tradition in which rulers of great empires seek the Nile's source, which, like the Macrobian and Hyperborean lands, is hidden at the mysterious and unreachable ends of the earth. These legendary quests are described in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. In book 10 of the poem, at a banquet held by Cleopatra, Caesar entreats the Egyptian priest Acoreus to tell him the mysteries of the Nile, in the hope that he might discover the sources of the great river. Acoreus agrees, touching first on the power of the heavens over the flooding and ebbing of the river before

76. Redfield 1985, p. 113.

77. See Tuplin 1996, p. 154, for discussion of the use of “the Great King” in Greek sources to elide the identities of individual Persian kings. As in this case, this elision allows for the identification of Darius III, who was then

fighting Alexander, with the unstable Xerxes. See above, n. 74, for possible parallels between Greek perceptions of Persian aspirations and Persian propaganda, in which such expansion stands as evidence for divine favor.

78. Hall (1989, pp. 69–70) recog-

nizes in these kinds of accounts a “fundamental Greek law” to which the Persians of literature are particularly subject. According to this law, extensive wealth breeds unwarranted pride, and this pride is ultimately punished by the gods.

turning to an account of those kings who have previously and recklessly sought the Nile springs (10.268–285). Each of these kings—the Egyptian Sesotris, the Persian Cambyses (whom we have encountered already in Herodotos), and the Macedonian Alexander the Great—was unsuccessful in this quest; no race, the priest cautions, will glory in the possession of the Nile. The failures of these kings impart a lesson: knowledge of the springs of the Nile is the object of uncontrolled ambition and is sought by those who hunger for the personal glory that such conquest bestows.<sup>79</sup> For James Romm, this passage in Lucan implies a distinction between expansion carried out for the benefit of society at large, and the kind of expansion undertaken by these kings for the sake of self-aggrandizement.<sup>80</sup> Such imperial ambition, fueled by delusion and the desire for personal glory, is, Lucan hints, a kind of insanity; Cambyses is mad, *vaesanus* (10.279–280), and Alexander is earlier called *proles vaesana Philippi* (10.20). Acoreus's story also serves as a cautionary tale for Caesar, warning that he, like those before him, will fail if he undertakes this quest.<sup>81</sup>

For Lucan, then, the failures of these kings serve as a warning for those who seek to possess the secrets and wonders of a distant land, and Herodotos's earlier stories of Persian invasions have a similar lesson. In this respect, these stories of disastrous conquests share certain features with the genre of fable.<sup>82</sup> A fable can take various forms, but its defining feature is that it functions as an exemplum, either as a positive model or as a caution that exposes the negative consequences of inappropriate behavior.<sup>83</sup> For the Greeks, the Persians are an ideal agent to communicate such an exemplum, since they are both familiar and foreign, and since they frequently come into contact with people and places that are beyond the experience of the Greeks themselves. Even in antiquity, in fact, a similarity between Herodotos's techniques and those of Aesop, the best known fabulist, was acknowledged: Plutarch compares the use of barbarians—Scythians, Persians, and Egyptians—in the *Histories* to Aesop's famous use of crows and monkeys as the characters for his fables (*De malign. Herod.* 40 = 871D).<sup>84</sup>

79. See Romm 1992, pp. 152–156. This topic was relevant, too, for the current emperor, Nero, who also sent an expedition to find the sources of the Nile: in Pliny the expedition is explained as, in part, a reconnaissance mission prior to the invasion of Ethiopia (*HN* 6.35.181).

80. Romm 1992, p. 155.

81. Ferrari 1999, p. 385.

82. See Adrados 1999, p. 401, who describes Herodotos's "abundance of anecdotes, either purely novellesque or by way of exempla, which in a certain sense are the same as fables."

83. The genre of fable is notoriously difficult to define. For an extensive summary of modern definitions of fable

as applied to the ancient world, see Dijk 1997, pp. 3–37. Many consider the defining trait of the fable to be that it functions as a moralizing lesson. See Janssens 1955; Blackham 1985, pp. xi–xxiv, 135–137, for the fable as representative of a "general truth"; Dijk 1997, pp. 112–115, 206; Carnes 2000, pp. 49–50. Others recognize metaphor or allegory as a component of fable; see, e.g., Perry 1936; Nojgaard 1964–1967; Todorov 1973, p. 64. Ancient definitions of fable are of little help in delineating the type. Aristotle calls it a *logos*, or story, that serves as an illustrative rhetorical tool to be used in persuasive argumentation (*Rb.* 2.20); Theon, whose *Progymnasmata* dates probably

to the 1st century B.C. or the 1st century A.D., calls a fable a *mythos*, and he identifies it as a fictitious story that is similar to reality (εικονίζων ἀλήθειαν) (*Prog.* 3). For discussion of these sources, see Dijk 1997, pp. 71–78, 376–380.

84. See Romm 1992, p. 77, where he discusses this comparison in the context of "distance" (geographic in Herodotos and taxonomic in Aesop) as a means of producing "satiric inversion." A recent study has investigated Aesop's influence on other literary genres: see Kurke 2006 for the impact of the Aesopic tradition on Plato's characterization of Socrates.

In Herodotos, as in Lucan, Persian kings transgress the earth's natural boundaries (both conceptual and literal) for the sake of personal glory, and, as in a fable, such a violation is rewarded with failure at best, and at worst, destruction.<sup>85</sup> But those Persians were not Herodotos's audience; his Persian tales are intended for Greek ears. Once the Persians were rebuffed in the first decades of the 5th century, Greece grew into its own moment of greatness, accompanied by an undercurrent of invincibility. Using the Persians like the animals of fables, Herodotos admonishes the Greeks, in their moment of greatest success and prosperity, not to repeat the hubristic recklessness that ultimately brought about the defeat of the great eastern empire.<sup>86</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Where does this leave the Xenophantos lekythos and its Persians, who have ventured to the northernmost part of the world? While there is a hint of Persian expeditions to the north from Diodoros, who mentions Cyrus's encounter with the Arimaspians, Herodotos does not include a Hyperborean pendant to Cambyses' Ethiopian expedition or to Skylax's exploratory voyage around the Arabian waterways. But a Persian conquest in the north (including or even culminating in a griffin hunt) may have circulated in popular knowledge as part of a larger tradition or genre of tales, incorporated by Herodotos, and later by Lucan, that use Persian behavior to illustrate and caution against overreaching ambition. We might consider the scene on the lekythos, therefore, as the representation of what may have been a specific story, as well as, more broadly, the visual expression of a familiar exemplum, the purpose of which is to convey a certain moral lesson. Here on the lekythos, the imperial ambition against which Herodotos so consistently cautions is put on display.

These Persians, like those of Herodotos, have come to a land that is not just mythical, but that is, as the Greeks recognize, an exceptional and sacred place. The Hyperboreans, like the Macrobian Ethiopians, are a pious race that enjoys a special relationship with the Olympian gods and a quality of life unlike that of other races. Part of the special nature of the country of the Hyperboreans is its inaccessibility and its remoteness from worldly strife; it is a sanctuary for Apollo away from the profanity of the rest of the world, just as Ethiopia, in Homer, is a kind of holiday destination for other Olympians.

85. Flory 1987, pp. 81–118, esp. p. 89. As Flory points out, these boundaries are not simply conceptual, but they are also explicitly marked in the geography of the earth. In each case in Herodotos when an "aggressor" attacks a "savage," he violates a physical boundary represented by a river: Croesus crosses the Halys River to invade the

Persians, and the Persians cross the Araxes, the Nile, the Ister, and the Hellespont in their respective (and, in each case, unsuccessful) invasions of the Massagetae, the Ethiopians, the Scythians, and the Greeks.

86. Redfield 1985, p. 115. See also Tuplin 1996, pp. 142–145, who discusses the role of Persia in Greek com-

edy as providing a "critical analogy" for Athens' international politics. In the case of *The Persians*, scholarship is divided on the question of whether this arrogance is a trait peculiar to barbarians, or one to which the Greeks might equally be subject; see Hall 1989, pp. 69–72, for discussion.



The Persians of Herodotos are blinded to the nature of these sacred places and their inhabitants by their own sense of ethnocentric superiority, and it is this arrogance that drives them to the extremes of both conquest and rationality.<sup>87</sup> As such, it is no small detail that the Persians on the lekythos perform their hunt on sacred land. The hunting of beasts special to Apollo within a sanctuary to that god reflects the Persian arrogance that is so palpable in Herodotos; in addition, their disregard for the sacred nature of this space may recall Persian mistreatment of another sanctuary—the sack of the Athenian Acropolis.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, while the Persian success in reaching the land of the Hyperboreans may seem to put them in the company of the gods and heroes who travel there, their very presence in this space foregrounds the Persian transgression of natural boundaries: this is a place where Persians are not *supposed* to be.<sup>89</sup>

Seen through such a lens, we arrive at a new understanding of the unique scene on the Xenophantos lekythos. Using the Persians as paradigms, the lekythos presents a distinctive and sophisticated means of visual communication that draws from traditions of the kind preserved in Herodotos, Greek attitudes toward imperial ambition, and an imagined world geography. The hunting scene, I believe, illustrates Persian territorial aspirations, which extend to the very limits and most extreme places of the world, and which, as the product of hubristic ambition, must ultimately go unfulfilled.

87. Romm 1992, pp. 54–55.

88. One of the anonymous reviewers of this article suggested this connection.

89. One might reasonably ask how or where in the lekythos the “comeuppance,” or the ultimate failure, of the Persians is illustrated. My reading, like the reading of many scenes in vase painting, depends on both the artist’s

and the viewer’s familiarity with a certain narrative or narrative structure, so that a single scene has the ability to prompt an entire story. Their “comeuppance” is, if we follow this way of thinking, foreshadowed by this very scene—the Persians’ presence in this land and, even more so, their inappropriate hunt of Apollo’s special beasts on his sacred ground.

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## Hallie Malcolm Franks

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

GALLATIN SCHOOL OF INDIVIDUALIZED STUDY

1 WASHINGTON PLACE

6TH FLOOR

NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10003

hmf2@nyu.edu