SPECIAL TOURS
MYTHOLOGY

Gallery of Greek and Roman Casts

*Battle of the Greeks and Amazons*

- Temple of Apollo at Phigaleia (Bassai)
  Greek, late 5th c. B.C.

- The Mausoleion at Halikarnassos
  Greek, ca. 360-340 B.C.

Myth: The Amazons lived in the northern limits of the known world. They were warrior women who fought from horseback usually with bow and arrows, but also with axe and spear. Their shields were crescent shaped. They destroyed the right breast of young Amazons, to facilitate use of the bow. The Attic hero Theseus had joined Herakles on his expedition against them and received the Amazon Antiope (or Hippolyta) as his share of the spoils of war. In revenge, the Amazons invaded Attica. In the subsequent battle Antiope was killed. This battle was represented in a number of works, notably the metopes of the Parthenon and the shield of the Athena Parthenos, the great cult statue by Pheidias that stood in the Parthenon. Symbolically, the battle represents the triumph of civilization over barbarism.

*Battle of the Gods and Giants*

- Altar of Zeus and Athena, Pergamon (Zeus battling Giants)
  Greek, ca. 180 B.C.

Myth: The giants, born of Earth, threatened Zeus and the other gods, and a fierce struggle ensued, the so-called Gigantomachy, or battle of the gods and giants. The giants were defeated and imprisoned below the earth. This section of the frieze from the altar shows Zeus battling three giants. The myth may reflect an event of prehistory, the arrival ca. 2000 B.C. of Greek-speaking invaders, who brought with them their own gods, whose chief god was Zeus. Symbolically, the myth stands for the triumph of civilization over barbarism. The use of the myth on the Pergamene altar represents the victory of the Pergamenes over the Gauls, who had invaded in the second half of the third century B.C. It suggests a comparison between the victories of mortals and triumphs of the gods. The myth had appeared already in the sixth-century frieze of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi.
Gallery of Greek and Roman Casts

Trojan War

- Laokoon and his Sons
  By Hagesandros, Polydoros and Athanadoros
  Roman, late 1st c. B.C. to early 1st c. A.D.

Myth: Laokoön, a Trojan priest, warned the Trojans not to accept the wooden horse offered to them by the Greeks, saying that either Greeks were concealed inside, or it was a machine made to act against the walls of Troy, or some trick was hidden inside. He threw a spear into the side of the wooden horse. Later, as Laocoön was sacrificing a bull, the gods sent two sea serpents who killed Laokoön and his two sons. The Trojans, thinking that Laocoön was punished by the gods for sacrilege against the Greeks’ gift, disregarded Laokoön’s advice and brought the horse inside the walls of Troy. The Greeks, who were hidden inside, opened the gates of the city for the Greek army, and thus Troy fell. The story is told in Vergil’s Aeneid, Book II. It does not appear in Homer’s Iliad.

"The Birth of Aphrodite"

- The Ludovisi Throne
  Greek, ca. 460 B.C.

Myth: Aphrodite, goddess of love, was born full grown from the foam of the sea. She came ashore on Cythera and on Cyprus. This enigmatic relief may represent her birth.

Battle of Centaurs and Lapiths

- Temple of Zeus, Olympia, West Pediment (Heads of Hippodameia, Theseus, Lapith youth and woman; standing figure of Apollo)
  Greek, ca. 465-457 B.C.

- Parthenon, Metope
  Greek, ca. 447-443 B.C.

Myth: Centaurs, half man, half horse, lived on the slopes of Mt. Pelion and, except for the wise centaur Chiron, were considered wild and violent
SPECIAL TOURS
MYTHOLOGY

Gallery of Greek and Roman Casts

Battle of Centaurs and Lapiths, cont.

beings. Their nature was fully expressed at the wedding of the Lapith king Peirithoos to Hippodamia. The centaurs got drunk and attempted to carry off the Lapith women. A great battle ensued in which the Lapiths were eventually victorious.

Labors of Herakles: the Apples of the Hesperides

- Olympia, Metope from the Temple of Zeus
  Greek, ca. 465-457 B.C.

Myth: The Hesperides, the three daughters of Night, lived in the far west where they guarded a tree of golden apples. With the help of Atlas and Athena, Herakles brought the golden apples back to King Eurystheus for whom he had to perform twelve labors. The Olympia metope shows one version of the story in which Herakles took up the burden of the world, helped by Athena, while Atlas went to fetch the apples. The metope shows the point where Atlas has returned and offers the apples to Herakles. The apples symbolize immortality; thus this labor represents victory over death.

The Birth of Athena

- Two Goddesses
  Parthenon, East Pediment
  Greek, ca. 437-432 B.C.

Myth: The goddess Athena sprang fully armed from the head of her father Zeus. Her birth was represented on the east pediment of the Parthenon, her great temple in Athens. Although the central figures of the pediment disappeared when the temple was converted into a Christian church, enough remains of the sculptures on the sides to show that the moment represented is just after Athena's birth when the news is spreading. The two goddesses face outwards and have not yet received the news, while a third seated goddess (not in the Cast Collection) turns back towards the center.
SPECIAL TOURS
MYTHOLOGY

Saul and Gladys Weinberg Gallery of Ancient Art

_Trojan War_

- Black-figured lekythos (oil vessel): Achilles and Ajax playing a board game
  Greek, late 6th c. B.C. (82.299)

- Moldmade relief bowl: Achilles dragging the body of Hector
  Greek, late 3rd or early 2nd c. B.C. (61.26)

- Votive Shield with relief decoration: fighting warriors
  Greek, Hellenistic period, late 2nd c. B.C. (57.17)

- Relief Mirror: Paris on Mt. Ida
  Roman, ca. A.D. 130-160 (77.124)

Myth: The Roman mirror belongs at the very beginnings of the saga. Paris' choice of Aphrodite as the most beautiful of three goddesses (Athena, Hera and Aphrodite) precipitated the war. Aphrodite promised to give Paris Helen, wife of the Spartan king Menelaus. Paris seduced Helen and took her back with him to Troy. To recover her, the Greeks joined Menelaus in an expedition to Troy that lasted ten years and resulted in the destruction of Troy and the Trojans. The statue group of Laokoon and his sons in the Cast Gallery belongs to the end of the epic, to the final destruction of Troy.

Two of the Greek heroes who played important roles in the war are shown on the black figure lekythos. Achilles and Ajax, the two greatest warriors on the Greek side, are playing a board game while Athena stands by. The episode presumably occurred either on the way to Troy, or perhaps in the Greek camp at Troy. The extant ancient literature does not record such an episode.

The votive shield shows groups of warriors fighting in battle, a generic reference to the war. The relief bowl, however, shows a specific and important episode. Hector, son of Priam king of Troy and the greatest Trojan champion, was killed in single combat by Achilles. Achilles tied the body to his chariot and dragged it to his hut. For twelve days thereafter he dragged the body around the tomb of his friend Patroclus, whom Hector had killed. On the bowl their names identify Hector and Achilles.
SPECIAL TOURS
MYTHOLOGY

Saul and Gladys Weinberg Gallery of Ancient Art

_The Labors of Theseus: the Marathon Bull_

- Black-figure oinochoe (jug)
  Greek, late 6th c. B.C. (66.309)

Myth: Like Herakles, Theseus, the national hero of Athens, completed a series of labors. One of these involved the capture of a savage bull that had been terrorizing the countryside around Marathon. Theseus captured the bull, drove it back to Athens and there sacrificed it to Zeus. Images of Theseus became more popular in Greek art in the late-6th century, reflecting Athenians' pride in their own culture. These images equate Theseus with the great hero Herakles.

_Battle of Griffins and Arimaspians_

- Gilded reliefs
  Greek, ca. 350-320 B.C. (62.1)

Myth: The Arimaspians were a mythical one-eyed people who lived in the far north. They battled griffins guardians of a hoard of gold. Griffins, part-lion, part-eagle, originated in the Near East and were adopted by the Greeks into their artistic repertoire. Griffins also decorate the large storage amphora from Crete that dates to the 7th century B.C., or Orientalizing period.

_Battle of Gods and Giants_

- Red-figure kylix (drinking cup): armed satyr
  Greek, ca. 520-510 B.C. (75.81)

Myth: See account in the section on the Cast Gallery. The satyr on this cup carries a Scythian type of shield known as a _pelta_. Armed satyrs may be a shorthand reference to the battle of the Gods and the Giants. Late-sixth century vase-paintings depicting this battle often show satyrs participating with the god Dionysos. Satyrs are frequently associated with the god and his circle of followers.

MAA 11/97
SPECIAL TOURS
MYTHOLOGY

Saul and Gladys Weinberg Gallery of Ancient Art

**Calydonian Boar Hunt?**

- Red-figured kylix (drinking cup): boar hunt
  Greek, ca. 440 B.C. (66.2)

Myth: The myth as told in the *Iliad* (Book IX.553-572) recounts how Artemis sent a huge boar to ravage the land of the Calydonians during the war between the Calydonians and a people called the Curetes. Meleager, son of the king of the Caledonians, killed the boar and led the Calydonians into battle against the Curetes. Meleager's mother laid a curse on her son, because of the murder of her brother (in later accounts accidentally killed by Meleager) and called on Hades to kill him. Meleager withdrew from the battle in anger but later relented and returned to save Calydon. A monumental wall painting in Athens showed the boar hunt and may have influenced the composition of the scene on this Attic cup.

**Sirens**

- Black-figured lekythos (oil vessel)
  Greek, ca. 590-580 B.C. (78.30)

- Handle attachment for a situla (bucket)
  Etruscan, ca. 360 B.C. (73.217)

Myth: Sirens were dangerous creatures who lured men to their deaths by the beauty of their song. In Homer, they are human in form, but in popular tradition they are birdlike with women's heads. The siren on the Greek vase has a complete bird body. The Etruscan version is more womanly, since she wears a tunic, but her bird feet betray her as a siren. The most famous episode with sirens occurs in the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus succeeds in sailing safely past them by stopping up his men's ears with wax so that they cannot hear the song. He leaves his own ears unstopped but has himself bound to the mast. He can hear but is restrained from casting himself into the sea and thus perishing on the rock.
SPECIAL TOURS
MYTHOLOGY

Saul and Gladys Weinberg Gallery of Ancient Art

Deeds and Labors of the Hero Herakles/Hercules

- Baby Hercules Strangling Snakes
  Roman, first c. (98.1)

Myth: Herakles' strength and courage became evident at an early age. Shortly after he was born, the goddess Hera sent two snakes to kill Herakles and his mortal twin brother Iphikles. The 5th c. B.C. poet Pindar, the earliest extant written source for the myth, recounts how Herakles took hold of the serpents and twisted their throats until they were dead. Seeing the miraculous heroism of the child he thought was his son, his mortal father Amphitryon summoned the seer Tiresias who foretold the future exploits of Herakles and how, eventually, after many struggles he would be received into Mt. Olympus with the gods where he would marry the goddess Hebe and be accepted by his true father, Zeus king of the gods.
SPECIAL TOURS
MYTHOLOGY

Gallery of European and American Art

Deeds and Labors of the Hero Herakles/Hercules

- Hercules Slaying the Nemean Lion (67.67)
  School of Heinrich Aldegrever, German, 1502-1561

Myth: One of the twelve labors that Hercules (Herakles) was required to perform was the slaying of a lion that lived near the sanctuary of Nemea in the Peloponnesos. In one version of the myth, he killed the lion with a wooden club. In another version, the lion is invulnerable, and Hercules has to strangle it before flaying the skin which he then took back to Eurystheus. After this Labor, the lionskin and club became attributes of the hero, who is frequently shown wearing the skin and carrying the club. A Greek, bronze handle attachment for a situla, on exhibit in the Weinberg Gallery, depicts the head of Herakles wearing the lion skin.

- Hercules Slaying the Giant Antaeus (66.354)
  School of Heinrich Aldegrever, German, 1502-1561

Myth: One of the deeds of Hercules concerns the giant Antaeus, son of the god Poseidon and of Ge (Earth). On his way to the garden of the Hesperides to collect the golden apples, Hercules entered Antaeus' kingdom of Libya. Antaeus, who wrestled with all who entered his kingdom, was invincible, because if thrown to the ground he regained strength from his mother (Earth). Hercules conquered him, however, by holding him up from the ground and crushing him to death.

Trojan War

- Cassandra, ca. 1895 (79.75)
  Max Klinger, German, 1857-1920

Myth: Cassandra, one of the daughters of Priam king of Troy, was beloved of the god Apollo, who gave her the ability to tell the future. Rejected by Cassandra, Apollo added a terrible curse to his original gift, namely that no-one would ever believe Cassandra's prophecies. Thus, although she correctly foretold the fall of Troy and warned the Trojans not to accept the Greeks' gift of the Trojan horse, she was not believed, and Troy fell to the
Greeks. Cassandra herself was given to King Agamemnon as a prize of war and was murdered with him at Mycenae by his wife Clytemnestra. In the *Odyssey*, Agamemnon's ghost tells Odysseus of his own and Cassandra's murder. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Cassandra foretold her own and Agamemnon's death.

*Athena and Hephaestus*

- **Athena Scoring the Advances of Hephaestus**, ca. 1555-1560 (61.78)
  Paris Bordone, Italian, ca. 1500-1571

Myth: This myth concerns the birth of Erichthonius, a figure in early Attic mythology. Hephaestus made advances to Athena, and when she scorned him, his semen fell to the ground. From it sprang Erichthonius. The element *chthon* of his name means earth or underground. He was brought up by Athena and became king of Athens. While king, he founded the Panathenaic festival and set up the wooden statue of Athena on the Acropolis.

Originally, this painting was believed to represent the story of Thetis and the armor of Achilles. Thetis, mother of Achilles, brought new armor to Achilles from the god Hephaestos. Achilles had lent his original armor to his friend Patroclus whom the Trojan prince Hector killed in battle. Hector robbed Achilles' armor from the corpse of Patroclus.

*Io*

- **Mercury, Argus, and Io in an Italianate Landscape**, ca. 1650 (81.48)
  Jan Both, Dutch, 1618-1652; Nikolaus Knüpfer, Dutch, 1603-1655;
  Jan Baptist Weenix, Dutch, 1621-1663

Myth: Io, a priestess of Hera, was loved by Zeus. In revenge, Hera turned Io into a white cow and set Argus to guard her. Argus had many eyes (from 4 to 100 depending on the source) and thus could watch Io at all times. Hermes, sent by Zeus to rescue Io, lulled Argus to sleep by telling him stories and then cut off his head. Subsequently, Hera set Argus' eyes in the tail of the peacock, the bird especially associated with her.