

GREEK & ROMAN STUDIES 209
SELECT OLYMPIANS: *Artemis & Apollo*

Assigned Reading: Chapters I.10, “Artemis”, and I.11, “Apollo”,
in Mark Morford et al., *Classical Mythology* (11th ed.), pp. 223-280



*Apollo (with lyre) and Artemis (with leopard skin and quiver and slung over her shoulder),
In the company of their mother Leto (left). Detail of Attic red-figure amphora,
c. 520-500 B.C. British Museum, London.*

“Leto of the beautiful ankles bore two children who are by far
the best of the immortals in sagacious thought and action.”

Homeric Hymn to Artemis 27 (cf. Morford, p. 224)

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Olympian Twins

In Hesiod’s account of Zeus’ Olympian children, the king of the gods sired several sets of triplets (the Hours, the Graces, the Fates) but only one set of twins (#1 below). These were Apollo and Artemis, whose mother was Leto, daughter of the Titans Coeus and Phoebe. They supply an interesting case of sibling parallels—sharing, among other emblems, their far-shooting bows—as well as important distinctions. Common to all their myths, however, is their filial devotion to Leto, whose honour they often defend.

1. “And Leto mingled in love with Zeus who holds the *aegis*, / and bore Apollo and Artemis delighting in arrows, / children lovely above all the Uranians.” Hesiod, *Theogony* 918-920 (not in Morford)

2. “Rejoice, O blessed Leto, since you have borne splendid children, lord Apollo and Artemis, who take delight in arrows; Artemis you bore in Ortygia and Apollo in rocky Delos* as you leaned against the great and massive Cynthian** hill, right next to the palm tree near the stream of the Inopus.”

Homeric Hymn to Apollo 3.1-18 (Morford, p. 247)

* The Homeric Hymn situates Apollo’s birth on an island (Delos) in the middle of the Aegean Sea. A separate island, Ortygia (of unknown location), is said to be Artemis’ cradle.

Later authors collapsed the two stories into one; historically Delos always claimed to be the birthplace of both gods. **One of Artemis’ epithets was Cynthia, from this Delian hill.

A Wandering Island

3. “Delos contains the temple of Apollo and the *Lētōon* [temple of Leto]; overhanging the city is a naked and rugged mountain, the Cynthus. Anciently, even from the heroic times [*hērōikoi chronoi*], this island has been held in veneration on account of the divinities worshipped here. Here, according to the myth [mytheutai], Leto was delivered from her labour pains, and gave birth to Apollo and Artemis. ‘Before this time,’ says Pindar [5th-cent. poet], ‘Delos was carried about by the waves and by winds blowing from every quarter, but when the daughter of Coeus set her foot upon it, who was then suffering the sharp pangs of approaching childbirth, at that instant four upright columns, resting on adamant, sprang from the depths of the earth and retained the island fast on the rugged rock. There she brought forth here children and beheld her happy brood.’”

Pindar, fragment 88.5, in Strabo, *Geography* 10.5.2

(tr. adapted from H.C. Hamilton; not in Morford)



(above centre) Map of the ancient Aegean Sea, with Delos at the centre of the Cyclades Islands.

(left) View from Mt Cynthus on Delos, looking westward towards Mykonos;
(right) the sanctuary of Apollo on Delos, at the foot of Mt Cynthus.

Hera's Jealousy

A recurring motif in Greek mythology is the jealous wrath of Hera, usually occasioned by her husband Zeus' numerous infidelities. It is rarely inflicted on Zeus himself, however; rather, on his lovers. While Leto, for example, was pregnant with Zeus' twin children, she was forced to roam throughout Greece in search of a resting place that might permit her, at last, to give birth. Every famous location, fearful of Hera's vindictiveness, refused her sanctuary. Only tiny, insignificant Delos—itself, according to Pindar, a wandering island unmoored, as yet, to the seabed—showed Leto compassion (#3 above; cf. the only slightly less fanciful account in Morford, p. 248). Even so, the queen of the gods continued to persecute Leto, obstructing her own daughter (*Eileithyia*, goddess of midwifery) from attending the birth of Apollo on Delos (#4). As with all such mythical attempts to thwart the rise of the next divine generation, this proved to be in vain (#5).

4. “Leto or nine days and nine nights was racked by desperate pains in her labour. All the greatest of the goddesses were with her—Dione, Rhea, righteous Themis, and sea-moaning Amphitrite—and others, too, except for white-armed Hera; for she sat at home in the house of Zeus the cloud-gatherer. Eileithyia, the goddess of pangs of childbirth, was the only one who had not heard of Leto’s distress . . . [For] white-armed Hera kept her [on Mount Olympus] because she was jealous that Leto of the beautiful hair was about to give birth to a strong and noble son.” *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 3.89ff. (Morford, p. 249)

Apollo's Delian Birth

5. "As soon as Eileithyia . . . came to Delos, the pains of labour took hold of Leto, and she was anxious to give birth. And she threw her arms about the palm tree and sank on her knees in the soft meadow, and the earth beneath her smiled. The baby sprang forth to the light, and all the goddesses gave a cry. There, O mighty Phoebus, the goddesses washed you with lovely water . . . and wrapped you in white swaddling clothes . . . And his mother did not nurse Apollo of the golden sword, but Themis from her immortal hands

gave him nectar and delicious ambrosia. And Leto rejoiced because she had borne a strong son who carries a bow.”

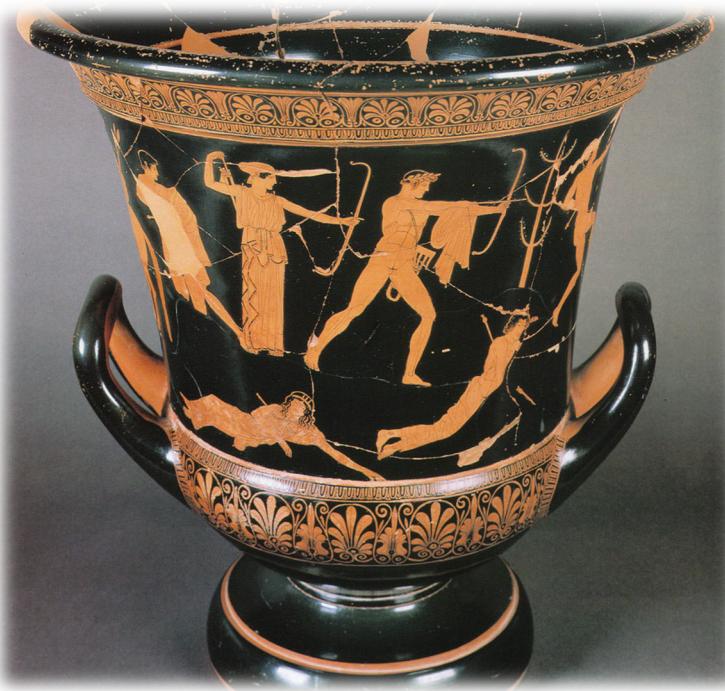
Homeric Hymn to Apollo 3.113ff. (Morford, p. 249)

Leto's Honour

More than once, Leto's children will come to the defence of their mother's honour. They saved her from being raped by the giant Tityos, though not before he had assaulted her. Tityos paid for that outrage by being imprisoned in the Underworld, where Odysseus witnesses his eternal torture (#6). On another occasion, Leto was denigrated by her distant cousin, Niobe, who boasted of greater beauty and more numerous offspring. Niobe's children, unfortunately, had not Zeus for their father but a mere mortal, Amphion (king of Thebes), rendering her seven sons and seven daughters all too liable to death at the hands of Leto's avenging twins (#7 and photo below).

6. [Odysseus speaking:] “I saw Tityos also, son of the mighty goddess Gaia; he lay on the ground, his bulk stretched out over nine rods [approx. 270 meters or 900 feet]. Two vultures, one on each side of him, sat and kept plucking at his liver, reaching down to the very bowels; he could not beat them off with his hands. And this was because he had once assaulted a mistress of Zeus himself, the far-famed Leto, as she walked towards Pytho through the lovely spaces of Panopeus.”

Homer, *Odyssey* 11.576 (tr. W. Shewring; not in Morford)



Apollo and Artemis, avenging their mother Leto, slay the children of Niobe.

Attic red-figure calyx-krater, c. 455 B.C. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

(Cf. Morford, p. 225)

7. [Niobe boasting:] “Why is Latona [i.e., Leto] worshipped at the altars, while as yet my godhead [*numen*] is without its incense? Tantalus is my father, who is the only man to eat the food of the gods. My mother is one of the seven sisters, the Pleiades. Great Atlas, who carries the axis of the heavens on his shoulders, is one of my grandfathers. Jupiter is the other, and I glory in having him as my father-in-law as well [M]y beauty [is] worthy of a goddess; add to this my seven daughters [and] as many sons, and soon my sons- and my daughters-in-law! Now, ask what the reason is for my pride [*superbia*], and then dare to prefer Latona to me, that Titaness, daughter of Coeus, whoever he is. Latona, whom the wide earth once refused even a little piece of ground to give birth on! . . . Imagine that some of this host of children could be taken from me; though bereaved, I would still not be reduced to Latona's two!”

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.171ff. (tr. adapted from A.S. Kline; not in Morford)

Artemis the Hunter

An early reference to Artemis is in Homer's *Odyssey* (ninth or eighth century B.C.), where she is the object of one of the poet's famous similes, in this case, comparing young Nausicaa (a princess whom Odysseus meets on the island of Phaiacia) with the huntress goddess (#8 below). The archaic pictorial representations of her on the *François Vase* (c. 575 B.C.; see photos below) are only slightly more recent than Homer, but their iconography (Artemis as Potnia theron, 'Mistress of the Wild Animals') goes back as far as the Neolithic period or even earlier.

8. "Nausicaa and her handmaids threw off their head-gear and fell to playing at ball, and white-armed Nausicaa was leader in the song. And even as Artemis, the archer, roves over the mountains, along the ridges of lofty Taygetus or Erymanthus, joying in the pursuit of boars and swift deer, and with her sport the wood-nymphs, daughters of Zeus who bears the *aegis*, and Leto is glad at heart—high above them all Artemis holds her head and brows, and easily may she be known, though all are beautiful—so amid her handmaidens shone the maid [Nausicaa] unwed." Homer, *Odyssey* 6.102-9 (not in Morford)



(left) Artemis as Potnia theron ('Mistress of the Wild Animals'), on the handles of the *François Vase*. In each case, the same scene from the Trojan Cycle of myths is represented below her: Ajax' rescue of the body of Achilles from the battlefield of Troy. Details of Attic black-figure volute-krater, c. 570-565 B.C., signed by the potter Ergotimos and the painter Kleitias; found in Chiusi, Italy. Archaeological Museum, Florence. (Cf. Morford, p. 229)

Artemis the Virgin

Artemis was one of only three virgin goddesses in the Olympian pantheon (the others being her aunt, Vesta, and her half-sister, Athena). Of the numerous myths regarding Artemis' custody of her virginal purity, the most dramatic is the one Ovid relates (#9). The Theban prince Actaeon, himself a hunter, lost his way in the woods with his hounds. Coming upon a grotto in whose pool Artemis and her companion nymphs were bathing, he accidentally witnessed the goddess' nude body. So that he might not recount what he had seen, she turned him into a stag, the very prey he had been hunting earlier. The Roman poet's full account may be found in Morford (pp. 225-7); its climax is repeated below.

9. "While [Actaeon, now in the form of a stag,] stood undecided [what to do], his hounds saw him Eager for the prey, they hunt him over rocks and cliffs, by rough tracks and trackless ways, through terrain rocky and inaccessible. He fled, by ways where he had often been the pursuer; he fled, pursued by his own hounds! He longed to cry out, 'I am Actaeon; obey your master!' He longed—but could utter no words . . . [T]he pack came up and all sank their teeth into his body. His whole body was torn by the hounds."

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.203ff. (Morford, p. 226)

Far-Shooting Apollo

The first god to whom we are ever introduced in Greek literature is Apollo, in the opening lines of Homer's *Iliad* (9th cent. B.C.). The earliest divine epithets of which we ever hear are applied to him: 'far-shooting' (*hekēbolos*), 'god of the silver bow' (*argyrotoxos*), and 'Sminthean' (*Smintheus*), of which the first two are self-explanatory: like his sister, Apollo is an archer. 'Sminthean', however, is more mysterious. It may be a placename for some long-forgotten shrine that once belonged to the god, or it may be derived, instead,

from a Mysian word, *sminthos*, meaning ‘mouse’. Was Apollo originally a god of pestilence? So it seems, for his arrows, in this case, are metaphorical. He has aimed a plague at the Achaean army which is being decimated in front of Troy. Thousands are dying, though not gloriously in battle; rather, the angry god sent disease to punish the Greeks for having kidnapped the daughter of his priest, Chryses (#10 below).

10. “Zeus’ son and Leto’s, Apollo, in anger at Atreus’ son [Agamemnon, leader of the Greeks,] drove a foul pestilence along the host, and the people perished, since Atreus’ son had dishonoured Chryses, priest of Apollo, when he came beside the fast ships of the Achaeans to ransom back his daughter, carrying gifts beyond count and holding in his hands wound on a staff of gold the ribbons of Apollo who strikes from afar . . . [After his supplication is refused, Chryses prays to Apollo:] ‘Hear me, lord of the silver bow . . . Smintheus, if ever it pleased your heart that I built your temple, if ever it pleased you that I burned all the rich thigh pieces of bulls, of goats, then bring to pass this wish I pray for: let your arrows make the Danaans [Greeks] pay for my tears shed.’” Homer, *Iliad* 1.9ff. (tr. Richmond Lattimore; not in Morford)

Phoebus

Next in Homer’s narrative occurs the epithet ‘Phoebus’ (Gk. *phoibos*, ‘bright’), easily the god’s most frequent descriptor. It is the feminine form of *Phoebe*, the name of Apollo’s Titanic aunt, the moon goddess. Since Apollo inherited the Olympian portfolio of the sun-god from Helios and Hyperion, it is fitting that he, too, should possess an epithet that indicates radiance and light. In visual representations of the god, he often sports a hair-knot (*krobylos*) like his sister; his probably symbolizes the beams of the sun, hers the rays of the moon (see photos on next page).



11. “So Chryses prayed, and Phoebus Apollo heard him. Angry at heart, he strode down from the peaks of Olympus, having his bow slung from his shoulder and his hollow quiver. The arrows clashed loudly upon his shoulders as he strode in his anger, and like night did he go. Then he sat apart from the ships and shot an arrow; terrible was the twang of his silver bow. First he shot the mules and the swift dogs, and next he shot his sharp arrow at the men. Constantly were the funeral pyres burning in great numbers.” Homer, *Iliad* 1.35-52
(Morford, p. 487)

(left) Apollo ‘Belvedere’, so called from his present location in the Cortile del Belvedere in the Vatican Museum. His left hand has been restored; it might originally have held a bow. Notice his quiver strap, which along with the *krobylos* (solar ‘hair-knot’) confirms that this is Apollo the Far-Shooter. (Cf. Morford, p. 268)

Apollo of the Lyre

12. “And straightway Phoebus Apollo exclaimed . . . ‘Let the lyre and curved bow be dear to my heart, and I shall prophesy to human beings the unerring will of Zeus.’ With these words Phoebus, the far-shooter with unshorn hair, strode on the ground that stretches far and wide; all the goddesses were amazed, and the whole of Delos blossomed . . . as she [Delos] beheld the son of Zeus and Leto, in her joy that the god had chosen her among all islands and mainland sites to be his home, and loved her most of all in his heart.”

Homer, *Hymn to Apollo* 3.128-139 (Morford, pp. 249f.)

It is with his lyre that Apollo soothes the quarrelsome gods seated at their banquet table at the end of Book I of the Iliad (#13 below). The same god who stirred up death and mayhem at the beginning of the poem is here associated with harmony and laughter! In similarly paradoxical fashion, the god of plague will become associated with healing, when he sires Asclepius, the god of medicine (cf. Morford, pp. 261-263).

13. “Unquenchable laughter arose among the blessed gods Thus the whole day long till the setting of the sun they feasted, nor did their heart lack anything of the equal feast, nor of the beauteous lyre, that Apollo held, nor yet of the Muses, who sang, replying one to the other with sweet voices.”

Homer, *Iliad* 1.599 (not in Morford)

(right) *Apollo with a barbiton lyre. The palm tree is an emblem of the island of Delos, where Apollo and Artemis were born.* Attic red-figure lekythos (oil flask), attributed to the Nikon Painter, c. 460-450 B.C. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



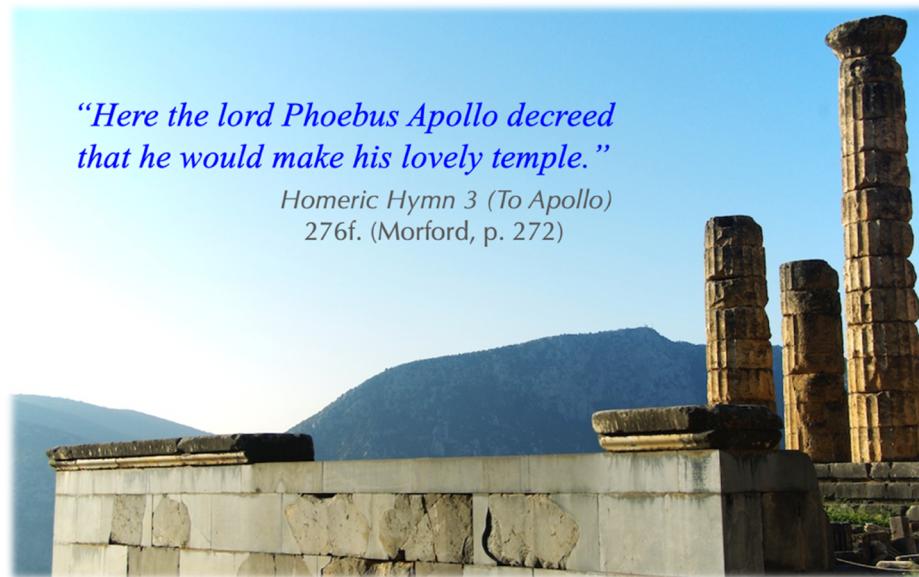
Apollo and Artemis with their characteristic hair-knots (krobyloi).
 (left) Detail of the Apollo Belvedere. (right) Marble head of Artemis, 3rd cent. B.C., from Apollonia. National History Museum, Tirana, Albania.

Unlucky in Love

While many of Artemis' tales involve the punishment of interlopers on her virginal sanctity, her brother's mythology features him being rejected by the object of his romantic affection (e.g., Daphne), or being cuckolded (e.g., Coronis), or losing his beloved to a violent death (e.g., Hyacinth). He is, it seems, eternally unlucky in love. Please read these accounts in your textbook (Morford, pp. 257-262).

Pythian Apollo

Finally, we must explain Apollo's most sacred title, Pythian, *inasmuch as it is tied to his pan-Hellenic sanctuary at Delphi (also known as Pythos)*. The Homeric Hymn from which we have quoted several times records that Apollo, mere days after he was born on Delos, went in quest of an ideal site for "his lovely temple". That perfect location turned out to be the slopes of Mount Parnassus, on Greece's mainland overlooking the Gulf of Corinth (#14). Delphi was also the seat of an oracle; perhaps it had been so long before Apollo's cult arrived (#15). The oracle in this case—i.e., the human who served as the god's mouthpiece—was a woman (known as the Pythia), although you would never know that from the Homeric Hymn, whose anonymous author seems to have written her out of his account. The Hymn's principal interest is to feature yet another mythical battle between a male and a monster (here, Apollo and the she-dragon [drakaina], Python; see #16 and the full account in Morford, pp. 270-276).



Remains of the temple of Apollo at Delphi (5th cent. B.C.), with the great Altar of the Chians in the foreground.

14. “[Y]ou went further, far-shooting Apollo, and . . . arrived at Crisa beneath snowy Mount Parnassus . . . Here the lord Phoebus Apollo decreed that he would make his lovely temple and he said: ‘Here I intend to build a very beautiful temple, an oracle for mortals. Here all those who live in the rich Peloponnesus, in Europe, and on the sea-girt islands will bring perfect hecatombs and consult the oracle. To them I shall deliver my answers and ordain infallible counsel in my wealthy temple.’”

Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo 276-93 (Morford, pp. 271f.)

15. [Apollo's priestess addressing the audience:] “First . . . I give the place of highest honour among the gods to the first prophet, Gaia; and after her to Themis, for she was the second to take this oracular seat of her mother, as legend tells. And in third place, with Themis’ consent and not by force, another Titan, child of Gaia, Phoebe, took her seat here. She gave it as a birthday gift to Phoebus, who has his name from Phoebe.” Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 1-8 (adapted from Herbert Weir Smyth’s translation; not in Morford)

Delphi, according to Aeschylus, had originally been an oracle of Gaia (we know of several other oracles that belonged to her in ancient Greece), and only eventually had come into the possession of the Olympian (male) god, Apollo. This was not a hostile takeover, but a case of peaceful transfer of power. How different is the tradition represented by the Homeric Hymn with which we have been dealing!



(left) Apollo (still an infant!) slays the Python. Silver stater from Croton (Italy), 420 B.C.

(right) Apollo seated on the omphalos at Delphi (perhaps marking the grave of the Python), with bow and arrow. Silver tetradrachm of Seleucus III, from Antioch, 226-225 B.C.

16. “As for the she-dragon, whoever opposed her met the fatal day of death, until lord Apollo, the far-shooter, struck her with a mighty arrow. Racked by bitter pain, she lay gasping frantically for breath and writhing on the ground. An unspeakable and terrifying sound arose as she twisted and rolled in the forest; breathing out blood, she gave up her life, and Phoebus Apollo vaunted over her: ‘Now rot [pytheu] here on the ground that nourishes mortals. You shall not live any longer to be the evil ruin of human beings . . .’ Thus he spoke, boasting: and darkness covered her eyes and the holy might of Helius caused her to rot there. Because of this, now the place is named *Pytho*, and they call its lord by the title, Pythian, since the mighty glare of the burning sun made the monster rot on the very spot.”

Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo, 356-374 (Morford, p. 273)

Delphinian Apollo

The etymology supplied for ‘Pythian’ in the passage above sounds fanciful, though it is not impossible that some kind of rotten smell gave the area its first name. After all, it is now thought that gasses emitting from faultlines in the area caused the historical Pythia’s intoxication when she went into her oracular trances. The Homeric Hymn, however, offers a truly incredible explanation of the last of Apollo’s titles we shall examine, ‘Delphinian’. How did Delphi—and Apollo’s epithet derived from the placename—originate? You may read the elaborate etiological myth for yourselves (ll. 388-501; Morford, pp. 273-5). Here I shall quote the most pertinent lines:

17. [Apollo addressing the Cretan sailors who became his first priests:] “As I first leaped aboard your swift ship on the hazy sea in the form of a dolphin [delphis], so pray to me as Delphinius; furthermore, the altar itself will be Delphinius . . .”

Ibid. 493ff. (Morford, p. 275)

That Apollo should be associated with dolphins is not in itself fantastic. Many gods possess totemic animals (e.g., Zeus’ eagle and Athena’s owl); we know that one of Apollo’s emblems was the raven (cf. the Coronis myth; Morford, pp. 261f.). Why should the great ‘communicator’ not also have a link to an animal that is famous for its anthropomorphic qualities, among them the seeming ability to speak? There is, however, a



*Apollo playing his lyre, seated on a winged tripod,
riding over the sea with dolphins. Detail of Attic red-figure hydria (water jar),
c. 490 B.C. Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, Vatican. (Cf. Morford, p. 273)*

much more appropriate etymology for 'Delphi' and 'Delphinian'. It is the Greek word delphys ('womb'), which differs from delphis ('dolphin') by one letter only, but which makes much better toponomical and historical sense for an oracle first possessed by female goddesses, where one of the most notable landmarks was a large rock in the shape of an umbilicus!