

## WHAT WAS THE COLOUR OF ATHENA'S AEGIS?\*

**Abstract:** The aegis is Athena's most intimate and widely-discussed attribute, yet one of its vital aspects has so far been largely neglected: its colour. We shall argue that the nature and the role of the aegis and of its bearer are reflected not only in its shape and decoration, but also in its colour and luminosity. As with Athena's *glaukos* eyes, the key to chromatic characterization and meaning lies in brightness rather than hue. Most often in literature and art, Athena's aegis is characterized by a yellow or gold reminiscent of the gleam of the sun or of metal, which expresses a general divine gleaming brightness but also Athena's specific *charis*, namely the beauty, vitality and sparkling (or cunning) attractiveness that she can bestow on mortals under her protection. The dark or even black aegis (*kyanaigis* or *melanaigis*), by contrast, expresses the dark, wrathful and furious side of the goddess. Brightly shimmering or darkly obscuring, the aegis refers to Athena's protective, yet also potentially destructive, power. Its variable characterization in terms of 'colour language' constituted one tool among the many that were available to the Greeks for the construction of her divine personality.

No attribute is as intimately connected with the goddess Athena as the aegis, the terrifying magical object adorned with snakes and, often, the gorgoneion. Ancient authors describe it as, variously, a goat skin, a piece of armour made by Hephaistos and given to Zeus, or as the flayed skin of one of Athena's adversaries, friends or even her father.<sup>1</sup> Modern commentators have paid repeated attention to this intriguing object, assessing its literary and artistic representations in order to trace its origins and to establish its typology and development.<sup>2</sup>

Yet one aspect has been largely neglected: its colour. As will be argued in this article, the nature and the role of the aegis as Athena's prime attribute is reflected not only in its shape and decoration, but also in its colour and luminosity, which vary between extremes of brightness and darkness, and can take on different shades of hue. The colours of the aegis will be explored in relation to the potential for colours in Greek literature and art to express divine power.<sup>3</sup> Colour in this context is accorded more than a strict chromatic meaning and is assessed as a symbol and signifier in the context of discourses between artists, authors and their audiences.

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<sup>1</sup> For different textual traditions of the origins of Athena's aegis, and for its typology in art, see Marx (1993a) 1–34; (1993b); Vierck (1997); (2000 (1991)).

<sup>2</sup> Two doctoral theses have been devoted to the aegis, Wagner (1922) and Vierck (2000 (1991)), as well as numerous articles and chapters, including Halm-Tisserant (1986); Fowler (1988); Hartswick (1993); Marx (1993a) 1–81; (1993b); Villing (2000); (2007 (1992)). Cook (1914–1940) 837–44, is also still worth considering. For a recent (and not entirely convincing) idea concerning the origin of the aegis in Hittite cult and imagery, see Morris (2001).

<sup>3</sup> The significance and pervasiveness of colour in

Greek and Roman art has recently been revived as a topic of scholarly debate: see especially Brinkmann (2003); Brinkmann and Wünsche (2007); Panzanelli et al. (2008); Bradley (2009). The realization that Greek colour terms commonly refer to more than just hue has long been established in scholarship, but their poly-semantic nature has recently been researched with renewed vigour, with many commentators arguing that early Greek colour terms have a wide semantic range that allows them to signal qualities and concepts beyond hue and brightness, while later, Classical usage often, although not invariably, eschews additional connotations – see, for example, the articles assembled in Villard (2002); Cleland et al. (2004); and, in particular, Carastro (2009). A general summary of ancient colour perceptions is also given by James (1996), while Pastoureau has published studies on blue and black: Pastoureau (2001); (2009). Further lucid case studies include that of *chloros* by Clarke (2004) 131–39; and of *porphyreos* in a wider semantic and sensory context by Grand-Clément (2004). The differences and convergences between the poetic and artistic use of colour has been addressed most recently by Grand-Clément (2009), with reference to *porphyreos*/red and *xanthos*/gold-blond. The present study takes a similar, broadly structuralist, approach.

## I. THE BRIGHT GOLDEN AEGIS

For Homer, Athena's aegis is most often precious and golden, with many golden tassels. It is bright as if mirroring Athena's penetrating gaze. In *Iliad* 2.446–9 for example,

Among them [the Achaeans on the battlefield] was *glaukopis* Athene bearing the precious aegis – ageless, immortal, from which a hundred solid gold tassels are hung, all of them cunningly woven, each worth a hundred oxen.

The 'bright' aegis features widely in other authors as well as in art such that it provides an example of the intersection between art and poetry with regard to using colour in divine characterization.<sup>4</sup> A Late Archaic bronze statuette of the Athena Promachos type, for example, is equipped with a cape-like aegis that was once gilded,<sup>5</sup> and what is arguably the most famous of all images of Athena, Pheidias' chryselephantine Athena Parthenos, possessed a golden breast-shield-like aegis, or at least an aegis framed by golden snakes.<sup>6</sup> Reflections of this statue in Athenian vase-painting, such as on a late-fifth-century lekythos in the manner of the Meidias Painter (FIG. 1), suggest something of the splendour of this gold-and-ivory statue.<sup>7</sup> Other representations, too, occasionally seem to allude to a golden colour by giving the aegis a yellowish tinge, achieved through diluted glaze; when this is applied to an aegis otherwise characterized as an animal skin, in keeping with the common fifth-century perception of the aegis as a goat skin, a kind of 'golden fleece' effect is created.<sup>8</sup>

More often, however, a golden colour in art hints at a metallic character, in keeping with the Homeric characterization of the aegis as a metal (gold) corselet fashioned by Hephaistos.<sup>9</sup> The aegis thus becomes closely associated with Athena's other armour, which is also frequently characterized as golden or gold-coloured both in art and in literature. Euripides (*Phoen.* 1372–1373), for example, alludes to the house of Pallas with the golden shield (Παλλάδος χρυσόσπιδος) in Thebes, and Kallimachos (*Hymn* 5.43) mentions Αθηνάια ... χρυσεοπήληξ – 'Athena of the golden casque'.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For Athena herself as bright-eyed and golden (blonde?) cf. Pindar in *Nemean* 10.7 where she is described as *xantha glaukopis*. As Grand-Clément (2009) notes, *xanthos*/gold-blond as a means of characterizing divine splendour is a notion concerning which art and poetry converge.

<sup>5</sup> Athens, National Museum 6447: Niemeier (1966) 35–36, fig. 13.

<sup>6</sup> On the reconstruction of Athena Parthenos, see most recently Nick (2003); cf. also Weber (1993) 114–15; Lapatin (2001) 63–79.

<sup>7</sup> London, British Museum GR 1887.8-1.46 (Vase E 696): Burn (1987) 46–48, 111, no. MM 78, pl. 32. An early fourth-century BC terracotta lekythos takes the shape of a bust of Athena with small bipartite gilded aegis with scales: London, British Museum GR 1893.11-3.4 (Terracotta 1701); Trumpf-Lyritzaki (1969) 6, no. 6. A yellow or gilded aegis can also be part of terracotta figurines – see, for example, Hellenistic terracotta figurines of Athena from Delos: Laumonier (1956) 114–17.

<sup>8</sup> New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.28636: Mertens et al. (1987) 60–61. Vase-painting, by its essentially bichrome nature, often shows the aegis with little or no added colour, but characterized through

patterns as a scaly or furry animal skin. In addition, there are numerous instances where the aegis is not even remotely an animal skin but looks more like an abstractly patterned fabric vest (cf. below n. 38). Artists, and vase-painters in particular, allowed themselves much freedom in interpreting and representing Athena's main attribute. Cf. Vierck (2000 (1991)); Villing (2007 (1992)) esp. 133, ill. 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Il.* 15.308–310. Gold as the material of the aegis in the *Iliad* is discussed in an unpublished paper by A. Orchard, 'The Aegis and the Armour of Achilles: Parallels in the *Iliad*'. We are grateful to Annabel Orchard for providing us with a copy of this paper.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. also Proclus *Hymn* 7.4 (Παλλάς... χρυσεοπήληξ). In art, golden armour (and aegis) is found especially in fourth-century BC Attic vase-painting of the Kerch style, examples being a red-figure pelike by the Painter of the Wedding Procession featuring Athena wearing a green dress with a gilded helmet, aegis, spear and jewellery (Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 87.AE.10: Cohen (2006) 11, fig. 3, 337–38, no. 104); a red-figure hydria by the Painter of the Wedding Procession, featuring Athena wearing a green dress with yellow shield and snaky aegis and gilded spear (St Petersburg, Hermitage P1872.130: Cohen

A particularly attractive, somewhat 'lighter' and more decorative version of the gleaming golden aegis, finally, became common in South Italian vase-painting in the fourth century BC. Examples are numerous and include an Apulian volute krater by the Ilioupersis Painter in the British Museum (FIG. 2).<sup>11</sup> Featuring white or yellowish rims and dots on the surface, this is poised, ambiguously, somewhere between a metal mesh, a woollen mesh,<sup>12</sup> and an animal skin: at once a graceful ornament and magical instrument.

With this golden and bright aegis, Athena is involved in a network of meaning that is conveyed by colour associations, one such strand of meaning being that gold is appropriate for representative purposes and to express material value, status and power. More generally, a bright gleam has a long tradition of denoting divine status for Greek gods, as it had earlier for Near Eastern deities.<sup>13</sup> Gods appear as radiant, tall, beautiful, fragrant, with golden hair and golden robes and a brilliant gaze.<sup>14</sup> Such divine dazzling brightness often carried positive connotations of *charis*; a personal aura signifying beauty and vitality, sparkling exquisiteness and attractiveness, which could also be bestowed on mortals.<sup>15</sup>

This golden brightness and *charis* has, in fact, a special connection with Athena. When Homer describes men who possess *charis*, the quality has invariably been bestowed on them by Athena, who confers it like a barely visible 'coating' through bathing, anointing or dressing the recipient.<sup>16</sup> For women, a sleek and healthy glow is more often associated with the concept of *liparos*, a term connected with grease or fat and expressive of fertility,<sup>17</sup> although *charis* can be theirs too, through brightly gleaming jewellery, the work of the smith. Once more these are closely connected with Athena. It is *glaukopis* Athena who gives *charis* to Pandora (FIG. 3) by bestowing on her the jewellery of Hephaistos and a 'cunningly wrought veil' (καλύπτρην δαιδαλέην), perhaps fashioned by herself as a skilful weaver and patroness of female weaving.<sup>18</sup> As the goddess of *metis* ('crafty cunning'), she is no stranger to the use of colour, especially a golden, shining brightness as a means to delight, seduce or deceive.<sup>19</sup> She herself profits from the cunning craftsmanship of Hephaistos, moreover, when he fashions the aegis, which bestows *charis* upon her and re-enforces her own power to bestow *charis* on others. What is reflected in Athena's most intimate attribute, the aegis, then – an aegis that oscillates between metal and wool, and between male and female *metis*<sup>20</sup> – is another aspect of her own complexly bright and luminous character.

(2006) 33–41, no. 105); a red-figure pelike by the Eleusinian Painter featuring a gilded aegis and Corinthian helmet (St Petersburg, Hermitage St 1793: Schefold (1934) 42–43, no. 369, pl. 32.1–2); a red-figured pelike by the Eleusinian Painter featuring a gilded spear, shield, Attic helmet and aegis (St Petersburg, Hermitage St 1791: Schefold (1934) 40–41, no. 368, pl. 35). For an earlier example of golden-coloured armour, see an Attic white-ground oinochoe with Athena wearing a golden-coloured helmet, an effect achieved through the use of diluted glaze (London, British Museum GR 1837.6-9.57 (Vase D 14): Beazley (1963) no. 1213.2).

<sup>11</sup> London, British Museum GR 1867.5-8.1333 (Vase F 160): Trendall and Cambitoglou (1978–1982) no. 8/8. A further example is an Apulian volute-krater by the Dareios Painter in Berlin (Antikensammlung 1984.39: Giuliani (1988) 10–13, no. 3, colour pl. III), but there are countless more.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Harrison (1900) 254–63. On the ambiguous relationship between wool and metal, discussed also further below, see especially Jenkins (1985).

<sup>13</sup> Cf., for example, Cassin (1968) and also

Luzzatto and Pompas (1988) 95–123 (on white and the connotation of brightness, purity and divinity in ancient cultures), 179–25 (on yellow-golden symbolising sun, divinity and incorruptibility). Jewellery, too, often with magical qualities, can be a feature of Near Eastern goddesses, such as Innana: Wilcke (1976–1980) 81–82.

<sup>14</sup> Steiner (2002) 97–98, 168–69. Cf. also recently Causey and Shepherd (2004) 75.

<sup>15</sup> Wagner-Hasel (2000) 152–65; Llewellyn-Jones (2003) 291–93. On shining brightness and the particular role of gold as signifying beauty and value see also Duigan (2004) 80.

<sup>16</sup> Hom. *Od.* 6.232–7; 8.19–21; 2.12–13.

<sup>17</sup> Llewellyn-Jones (2003) 291–93.

<sup>18</sup> Hes. *Theog.* 574–84. Cf. also Wagner-Hasel (2000) 155.

<sup>19</sup> On the topic of colour, cunning and deception, see in particular Duigan (2004).

<sup>20</sup> The ambiguous relationship between wool and metal as disparate and yet alike was explored in terms of its wider gender and economic connotations by Jenkins (1985).



FIG. 1. Athena with (once) gilded aegis on an Athenian red-figure lekythos in the manner of the Meidias Painter, late fifth century BC. London, British Museum GR 1887.8-1.46 (Vase E 696). © Trustees of the British Museum



FIG. 2. Athena with 'mesh' aegis on an Apulian volute krater by the Ilioupersis Painter, about 360 BC. London, British Museum GR 1867.5-8.1333 (Vase F 160). © Trustees of the British Museum



Athena's dress further adds to this complexity.<sup>21</sup> In sculpture, as well as some polychrome vases, Athena is frequently depicted wearing a red dress (*cf.*, for example, here FIG. 7).<sup>22</sup> Red is generally a popular colour in ancient Greek clothing,<sup>23</sup> although for Athena the choice of colour may also be connected with the peplos that she received at the Panathenaia, which appears to have been saffron-dyed (*krokeos*) with additional purple decoration.<sup>24</sup> Like gold, purple – being a rare and valuable dye – stood for wealth and high status, and, like gold, was highly prized for its luminosity. The colour red, more generally, might be understood to stand for the warm, living body, but it could also represent fire and light – thus linking up with the golden, fiery aegis and adding a further layer of colour to Athena's luminous persona.<sup>25</sup>

Like Athena's *glaukos* eyes, the bright aegis is ambivalent by nature.<sup>26</sup> When Apollo uses the aegis to cover Hektor's body when it is being dragged by Achilles (*Il.* 24.18–21), the golden aegis provides a protective shelter, equivalent to a shield:

Apollo kept all disfigurement from his skin, taking pity on the man even in death, and he covered him entirely with the golden aegis [αἰγίδι ... χρυσεῖη] so that he might not tear off his skin as he dragged him about.

But the bright aegis can also be terrifying. Homer (*Il.* 15.307–10) describes the 'dazzling' (*ariprepes*)<sup>27</sup> aegis as horrible or awful (*deinos*), inspiring fear and horror:

Before him went Phoebus Apollo, his shoulders wrapped in a cloud, and he was bearing the furious aegis, terrible [δεινήν], fringed all round, dazzling [ἀριπρεπέες] that the smith Hephaistos gave Zeus to carry for putting men to flight.

The dazzling brightness of the aegis might be imagined to be similar to that of the *lampron* or *stilbon* described later by Plato (*Timaeus* 68a–b), as kinds of white emitting an exceedingly bright, shimmering light that forces its way into the eye and that can be blinding.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>21</sup> The symbolic value of dress colour has recently become of increasing interest to scholarship; see especially Cleland (2003).

<sup>22</sup> Red is, for example, the main colour listed by Manzelli as having left traces on the chiton or peplos of Late Archaic and Early Classical statues of Athena: Athena statue by Euenor, Athens Akr. 140 (1994) 184; seated Athena from akropolis, Athens Akr. 169 (1994) 189; Athena from Gigantomachy pediment, Athens Akr. (1994) 258; Athena from Delphi pediment (1994) 259; Athenas from Aigina East and West pediments (1994) 267–69. Note, however, also the green peplos sometimes worn by Athena on fourth-century BC Attic vases (above, n. 10).

<sup>23</sup> *Cf.*, for example, Brinkmann (2003) 52.

<sup>24</sup> Eur. *Hekabe* 469 with schol. On the peplos and its colours, see especially Mansfield (1985) 64–65; *cf.* also Barber (1992), 116 with n. 36. For the range of hues that saffron could take (including red), see Edgeworth (1988). Saffron-dyed dresses are regularly associated with women, for example, in the dresses worn by the girls in rites for Artemis Brauronia, and its gendered nature (signalling female sex and maturity) has been

explained also by the significance of saffron in women's medicine. *Cf.* Marinatos (1984) 61–77; Barber (1992) 116–17; (1999) 71.

<sup>25</sup> On purple, *cf.* Stulz (1990); Blum (1998); Grand-Clément (2004); and the articles by M.-L. Nösch, I.I. Ziderman and B. Lowe in Cleland et al. (2004). In the *Iliad* (17.551–52) it is a purple cloud in which Athena makes her appearance in the warriors' camp. On the meaning of red in various ancient cultures, see Luzzatto and Pompas (1988) 209–62.

<sup>26</sup> The ambivalent nature of the aegis as both a protective and aggressive weapon has also been noted by Vierck (2000 (1991)) 65.

<sup>27</sup> The precise meaning of Homeric *ariprepes* remains elusive; its semantic range seems to comprise qualities such as outstanding, shining, excellent, beautiful. Though it does not straightforwardly denote 'gleaming bright', the notion of shining and gleam is implied in the term.

<sup>28</sup> *Cf.* Dürbeck (1977) 61–81, 100–05; Wagner-Hasel (2000) 156–77; Levides (2002) 11–12. *Xanthos*, by contrast, is the colour of gold and of the sun, and not as bright as *leukos* or *lampros*.

## II. THE DARK AEGIS

The ambivalence of the bright aegis, therefore, is similar to that of Athena's eyes, with both expressing her divine character and power. But the aegis can very occasionally also be dark. In Pindar's *Olympian Ode* 13.70–71, Athena, in a night-time epiphany before Bellerophon, is described as *κυάναιγίς ... παρθένος*: the maiden of the dark aegis.

*Kyaneos*, another complex colour term, denotes a dark blue, such as that of dark-blue enamel, stone (lapis-lazuli) or even metal,<sup>29</sup> and, like *glaukos*, its links are often with the sea. It can describe the dark eyes of Amphitrite (*Od.* 12.60) in the context of clashing waves (in other contexts, she is *glaukopis*) or Dionysos, as well as Dionysos' hair (*Homeric Hymn* 7.5.15). In fact, most literary descriptions, particularly of women, describe eyes as *kyanopis* (for example, Helen, Elektra, Klytaimnestra), as dark eyes and a down-cast gaze suited the Greek ideal of the female, an identification that contrasts sharply with Athena, who – in literary sources at least – is *glaukopis* and never *kyanopis*. However, one of her attributes can be *kyanopis*: the snake, her companion on the Athenian akropolis from the Archaic period.<sup>30</sup> Like Athena, the snake has a piercing stare (*Il.* 22.95)<sup>31</sup> and can be *glaukopis*,<sup>32</sup> but more often it is associated with *kyaneos*. Aischylos (*Persai* 81–82), for example, refers to the *kyaneon* gaze of the murderous snake (*drakos*),<sup>33</sup> while the whole of the snake's skin is even characterized as *kyaneos* in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield of Herakles* (166–67) (... *δεινοῖσι δράκουσιν' κυάνεοι κατὰ νῶτα*).<sup>34</sup>

It is this dark, *kyaneos* snake-skin that sometimes furnishes the material for Athena's aegis. An Early Classical Attic white-ground cup (FIG. 3) shows Athena wearing a dark red or purple scaly aegis of the 'skin cape' type,<sup>35</sup> which evokes the idea of a monstrous snake-skin or the skin of a snake-bodied monster – in accordance with those myths that explain the origins of the aegis in such a manner.

The serpentine connotation may be even clearer in connection with multi-coloured scales: Pindar, for example, calls the snake not just *kyaneos*, but also colourful – and hence artful, ambiguous and cunning? – via the term *poikilos* (Pind., *P.* 4.249).<sup>36</sup> In Archaic art, snakes often appear with multi-coloured scales, usually in a red/blue scale pattern, and the same kind of scales (blue, red, green) also dominate Athena's aegis in Late Archaic depictions, one particularly striking example being the Athena from the West pediment of the temple of Aphaia on Aigina, a copy of which has recently been restored to its original colour scheme.<sup>37</sup> Later on, the abstract

<sup>29</sup> Koch (1996) 39, 42–44, 101; cf. Dürbeck (1977) 139–68; Weber-Lehmann (2008). On *kyanos*, metal and *Corinthium aes*, see also Giunilia-Mair and Craddock (1993) 22–23; and cf. also Jenkins (1985) 122–23. According to Plato, *kyaneos* is created by mixing the bright *lampros* with black, *melas*, thus producing a dark colour nearly identical to *melas* but more lustrous. See most recently Levides (2002) 16–17.

<sup>30</sup> On Athena and the snake, see Bodson (1990); on the snake see also Grabow (1998).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Loraux (1995) 218–20, who connects the snake's name is related to root of *derkomai*, 'to gaze', which in turn is related to Oxyderkes, Athena's epithet in Argos.

<sup>32</sup> Pind. *Ol.* 6.45, *P.* 4.249; cf. *Ol.* 8.37; cf. also Cornutus, *Theologiae Graecae Compendium* 20b.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Irwin (1974) 101.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Koch (1996) 167.

<sup>35</sup> London, British Museum GR 1881.5-28.1 (Vase D 4), by the Tarquinia Painter, about 470–460 BC: Beazley (1963) no. 570.33; Reeder (1995) 279–81, no. 79.

<sup>36</sup> The term *poikilos* carried an interesting range of connotations in Archaic and Classical Greece, as it was applied not only to multi-coloured animal skins and plumage, but carried connotations of rich and complex artistry, particularly in metalwork and jewellery; see most recently Villacèque (2008), with further literature. On *poikilos* implying cunning, see also Jenkins (1985) 115; Detienne and Vernant (1991) 18–21.

<sup>37</sup> Brinkmann (2003) cat. no. 284; Brinkmann and Wünsche (2007) 84–87, figs 138–43. Red and blue may have been chosen also because they provide a good, clear contrast visible from a distance: Hoepfner (2002) 40–41. For other instances of a scaly colourful aegis, see Manzelli (1994) 225, 258; Vierck (2000 (1991)) esp. 40–80; Brinkmann (2003) 50–51, cat. 20, 225. On the Siphnian Treasury, Athena's aegis had red, blue and green scales, on Akr. 142 they are green and red. The scales are often also reminiscent of bird feathers, featuring a central ridge. Athena's helmet, by contrast, appears to be consistently painted blue: see Manzelli (1994) 193 (Akr. 648: green = oxidized blue?), 194

chequered fabric patterns that become popular in late fifth-century BC representations of the aegis in Attic vase-painting are renderings of the same concept of a *poikilos* nature.<sup>38</sup> Both the dark and the multi-coloured scaly aegis then point to its nature as an artful, complex, magical and potentially dangerous monster's skin.

What then, is the significance of Athena's *kyanaigis*? In connection with eyes, *kyaneos* provides an antithesis to Athena's bright, darting eyes that corresponds better to a female ideal, as we have discussed. However, *kyaneos* can also be disconcerting and potentially threatening. The snake's connection with the earth, with the cycle of life, death and rebirth, and with the afterlife in general is well attested in ancient Greek thought, and the term *kyaneos*, along with *melas* (black), can belong in this context.<sup>39</sup> Darkness in general carries a variety of connotations linked to the earth and its fertility, but is also linked with death, mourning and the underworld.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, in the night-time epiphany of Pindar's *kyanaigis* Athena, mentioned above, the goddess does not brighten the night with a gleaming aegis, but associates herself with its darkness. If a black mist or cloud descends on a mortal, it usually brings grief, disaster, peril, defeat and death, as opposed to the yellow/golden cloud which indicates divine blessing.<sup>41</sup> When accorded a chthonic quality linked to the earth, deities and heroes were usually associated with darkness, often involving black victims and night-time sacrifices. This darkness mirrors their wrathful and dark side, as they can dispense both special blessings and evil punishment and oblivion; they are approached with fear by the worshipper, and their unpredictable temper and anger needs to be propitiated with special sacrifices.<sup>42</sup>

In fact, as Llewellyn-Jones has argued, in addition to mourning it is anger in particular that can be expressed by dark colours.<sup>43</sup> The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, for example, refers to *kyaneos* clothing of Demeter, but this is more than just an expression of grief: the black veil that Demeter throws over her shoulders when she hears of Hades' abduction of her daughter also signifies her transformation from the passive state of sorrow into an active state of fury. Similarly, as the Arcadian Demeter Melaina ('The Dark' – Paus. 8.42.1–2) and as Demeter Erinys ('The Fury' – Paus. 8.25.4–6), she is not just mournful but also vengeful and wrathful. The dark colour of the veil intensifies the gesture by allowing her effectively to step outside the realm of the normal, concealing her from usual patterns of social interaction. Angry thoughts are characterized as black (*Il.* 17.83; 17.498, 573; *Od.* 4.661–63);<sup>44</sup> the dark aegis, too, is explicitly associated with anger: in the *Iliad*, 'Zeus ... will himself shake over them all his dark aegis [ἐρεμνὴν αἰγίδα] in anger for this deceit' (*Il.* 4.166–68), and in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles* (444), the

(Akr. 305: green = oxidized blue?), 268–69, 258 (Athena from Old Athena Temple pediment), 267–69 (Athenas from Aigina East and West pediments). On the possibility of colours changing hue over time, see also Wehgartner (2002) 94–95.

<sup>38</sup> See the examples in Villing (2007 (1992)) 133 figs 9–10, pls 42–43. The patterns used for the aegis are identical to the 'oriental' fabrics used by vase-painters to characterize the *poikolos* dress of Persians, other Orientals (such as Paris, as, for example, on Villing (2007 (1992)) pl. 43) or Amazons; as Villacèque (2008) has recently argued, following the Persian wars such fabrics embodied problematic connotations of Eastern luxury that stood in contrast to democratic austerity.

<sup>39</sup> On the close relationship between *melas* and *kyaneos*, see Dimitriou (1947) 80, 95–96.

<sup>40</sup> On black as a colour associated with death and mourning, see Dimitriou (1947) 79; Irwin (1974) 97–98; Llewellyn-Jones (2003) 305–06. Cf. also Maxwell-

Stuart (1970); Fountoulakis (2004) 112–13 (both *melas* and *kyaneos* connected with mourning); Luzzatto and Pompas (1988) 43–92 (black connected with birth/fertility, death/mourning, and evil in both Egypt and Greece).

<sup>41</sup> Llewellyn-Jones (2003) 307.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Irwin (1974) 96, 182–87. On chthonic rites and rituals, see Scullion (1994); on black victims, the negative connotations of black animals and further observations on the colour black, cf. also Stratiki (2004). Ekroth (2002) demonstrates, however, that much in the chthonic-Olympian distinction is less strict than often assumed.

<sup>43</sup> Llewellyn-Jones (2003) 299–301.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. also Irwin (1974) 135–55. That other cultures might have different colour associations for anger is suggested, for example, by the angry red gleam (*ní-melám-huš-a*) that is attributed to Babylonian Innana: Wilcke (1976–1980) 81.

*eremnos aegis* is explicitly associated with anger. To illustrate that this is not a clear-cut picture, we might point to Hesiod, *Theog.* 406, where Leto *kyanopeplos* is described as an exceptionally kind and caring goddess, a characterization that is perhaps connected with the nurturing powers of the fertile earth. The dark *kyanaigis* thus possesses the same disconcerting and powerful nature that also characterizes the sea when it is *kyaneos*, as well as *kyaneos* Dionysos, dark-veiled Demeter or the snake as a skin-changing creature of the earth. *Kyaneos*, like *glaukos*, can have threatening and dangerous associations in addition to protective and nurturing functions.

The threatening, angry potential of the dark aegis may be reflected in a small number of representations of a dark aegis in fourth-century BC South Italian vase-paintings. A black aegis with white and gold spots and a white gorgoneion with gold and brown hair is worn by Athena attending Orestes in Delphi on an Apulian red-figured bell-krater of around 370–360 BC.<sup>45</sup> Athena has just appeared and has put the Furies to sleep, and is now gesturing towards Orestes who is clinging to the omphalos. A more dramatic rendering of the same scene on an Apulian oinochoe by the Felton Painter of the mid-fourth century BC (FIG. 4) shows Orestes and the Erinyes surprised by the striking and highly unusual apparition of Athena riding a griffin in a red nimbus or aura, gesturing towards the fleeing Orestes.<sup>46</sup> The iconography of an apparition in an aura resembles images of the sorceress Medea, and is striking not least since the bright and dazzling light of the aura is spectacularly offset by the dark aegis worn by Athena at its centre. In other words, both darkness and light are at the command of Athena. It has been suggested that the representation on the oinochoe was inspired by Aeschylean tragedy,<sup>47</sup> and in fact the dark aegis in these scenes is reminiscent of passages in Aeschylus' *Septem* which describe the Fury as *melas*, dark (977; 988) and dark-aegised (699–700: μελάναιγίς οὐκ εἶσι δόμων Ἐρινύς, ὅταν ἐκ χερῶν θεοὶ θυσίαν δέχωνται;). Black Furies – though not furies with a dark aegis – also appear in art, for example, on a Paestan hydria by Python, dating to about 340–330 BC (FIG. 5).<sup>48</sup>

*Melas* denotes the very darkest of dark colours: according to Plato (*Timaeus* 67e–68b) *melas* is the darkness that compresses the visual stream to total elimination.<sup>49</sup> A completely black aegis is the very antithesis of the bright aegis, comparably powerful yet operating in different ways: the golden aegis illuminates or even blinds, while the *melas* aegis, even more so than the *kyaneos* aegis, obscures or absorbs.<sup>50</sup> The choice of this aegis is determined by the context. When Athena comes to help Orestes against the Furies, she has appropriated their angry aspect by appropriating their dark aegis – which is, of course, her own attribute anyway. The blinding bright aegis is turned into a dark magical weapon, and Athena herself is transformed into a Fury.

Perhaps we can see the dark, angry and magical potential of Athena reflected in her dark aegis on other South Italian vases too. An Apulian calyx-krater of the Black Fury Group, dating from 390–380 BC, shows Athena punishing the Kekropids while wearing an aegis that is shaded brown.<sup>51</sup> A related phenomenon may be witnessed on an Apulian volute krater by the

<sup>45</sup> Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 1976.144: Padgett (1993) 74–75, no. 17; Vermeule (1979) 186–88.

<sup>46</sup> Taranto 214005: Schauenburg (1977) 251–52, pl. 70.1–3; Kossatz-Deissmann (1978) 105, no. K42, 112–13, pl. 24.1; Laubscher (1980) 233–34, pl. 49.4; Demargne (1984) 961, *Athena* 38, pl. 707.38; Mugione (2002) 71–72, fig. 12; Todisco (2003) no. Ap. 57; Sena Chiesa and Arslan (2004) 280, no. 280; Trendall and Cambitoglou (1978–1982) no. 7/62, pl. 57.1. The choice of animal for Athena to ride, a griffin, is equally unparalleled and further adds to her subversive, threatening appearance. For a suggestion that Athena has appropriated Apollo's griffin, see Kossatz-Deissmann (1978) 112.

<sup>47</sup> Kossatz-Deissmann (1978) 112–13.

<sup>48</sup> London, British Museum GR 1772.3-20.37 (Vase F 155): Trendall (1987) no. 2/249.

<sup>49</sup> On the terms *melas* and *kyaneos* in Plato, see most recently Levides (2002) 11, 16; cf. also Dürbeck (1977) 139–68; on *melas* and its connotations, see also Vidal-Naquet (1986) 111–12.

<sup>50</sup> Compare also the cult of Dionysos Melanaigis attested by Pausanias (2.35.1; cf. also Schol. Ar. Ach. 146) at Hermion. The epithet Melanaigis might derive from the sacrifice of a black goat to the god. Cf. Vierck (1997) s.v. Aigis 7; (2000 (1991)) 151–52.

<sup>51</sup> Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 7.AE.93: Mayo and Hamma (1982) 8–89, no. 18; Todisco (2003) no. Ap. 28.





FIG. 3. Athena with a dark-red or purple scaly 'cape' aegis on an Attic white-ground cup by the Tarquinia Painter, about 470–460 BC. London, British Museum GR 1881.5-28.1 (Vase D 4). © Trustees of the British Museum



FIG. 4. Athena with a black 'bib' aegis on an Apulian oinochoe by the Felton Painter, about 370 BC. Taranto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 214005. After Laubscher (1980) pl. 49.4



FIG. 5. Black Furies on a Paestan hydria by Python, about 340–330 BC. London, British Museum GR 1772.3-20.37 (Vase F 155). © Trustees of the British Museum



FIG. 6. Athena Rospigliosi with stars on her aegis, Roman copy of a Greek original of the early fourth century BC. St Petersburg, Hermitage inv. 269. After *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 18 (1923) pl. 7



Underworld Painter, where Athena is fighting with the gods against the giants.<sup>52</sup> The dark, blotchy blood-red colouring of her aegis not only recalls the origin of the aegis in the flayed skin of a monster or other creature, such as the earth-born fire-breathing monster called Aigis described by Diodorus (3.70) that seems to be akin to the giants themselves (other sources cite a giant called Pallas, the Gorgon, or Athena's father also called Pallas). It is also surprisingly similar to the animal skins worn by the giants whom she is fighting. We have here another example of how Athena assimilates the dangerous powers of her adversaries to her own advantage through the medium of the aegis, but also how the fourth-century artists' choice of colour and patterns tended to be inspired by, and matched to, particular situations, rather than timeless essences as had dominated Archaic art.<sup>53</sup>

### III. THE *GLAUKOS* AEGIS?

Each type of aegis in its own way defines and expresses Athena's physical and magical powers. The dark aegis both offsets and complements the goddess's bright, flashing eyes, as an expression of her powerful fury. The bright shining aegis, with its fiery sun-gleam or blinding white light and the power of *charis*, is akin to, and yet different from, the sea-gleam of Athena's eyes. Yet there is also, finally, a rare aegis that appears analogous to these *glaukos* eyes: an aegis which we might term the *glaukos* aegis.

*Glaukos* is the most prominent colour term associated with Athena. Its special meaning has been discussed in detail in a previous article,<sup>54</sup> where we argued that *glaukopis*, as well as being one of Athena's most common epithets, is also one of the most intriguing, open as it is to a variety of interpretations and translations, including 'light blue-eyed', 'green-eyed', 'grey-eyed', 'gleaming-eyed' and 'darting-eyed'. The reason for this is the minefield that is *glaukos*, used as it is of a variety of things that are not all the same colour – at least not in accordance with our way of ordering colour – including the sea, the olive, the vine, the moon, the dawn, a type of fish, the sky, and certain types of eyes. If we are to select a particular hue, the light blue-green(-grey) range is the most promising.<sup>55</sup> Always, however, *glaukos* is a gleaming, shimmering colour, inherently luminous beyond any connotations of hue.<sup>56</sup>

Literary descriptions of *glaukos* eyes often represent them as wild, attributing them to foreigners or linking them with eye-diseases. In women, *glaukos* eyes are described as unattractive, by comparison with the ideal of dark eyes exemplified by cow-eyed (*bo-opis*) Hera. Assessments of this kind may be linked to the relative rarity of light-coloured eyes in

<sup>52</sup> Berlin, Antikenmuseum 1984.44: Giuliani (1988) 15–17, colour pl. IV.

<sup>53</sup> The conventions of using colours in Greek painting changed somewhat from the Archaic to the Classical period; the restricted yet bright palette of the Archaic period does not always appear realistic, as 'appropriate' colours were used to convey the essence of objects; cf. Koch (1996) 51–53. Later, 'true colours' were a priority for Plato, and discussions raged around the virtues of the restricted 'four-colour-palette', but numerous sources also attest to the process in which the creation of a life-like illusion that replicated the surface of objects and their three-dimensionality was increasingly perfected by ancient painters. On the changing perceptions and social meaning of colours and colour connotations in Archaic and Classical Greece, see also most recently Villacèque (2008), with further refer-

ences, and on fifth-century BC perceptions of colour in art and poetry, Grand-Clément (2009).

<sup>54</sup> Deacy and Villing (2004). *Glaukos* has since been mentioned in a few studies, but mostly only marginally; see, however, Raina's discussion (2003) of *glaukos* and *charopos*.

<sup>55</sup> Studies into colour perception have uncovered a lesser sensitivity to the green-blue distinction than to any other. Cf. Hardin and Maffi (1997) 363–64. In some languages, no clear line is drawn between 'green' and 'blue', and it has been demonstrated that Greek colour terms relating to dyes in particular can have a considerable inherent variability bridging different hues, with saffron ranging from yellow to red, and purple from red to pink to black: see, for example, Edgeworth (1988).

<sup>56</sup> On Greek colour, hue and luminosity, see above n. 3.

Mediterranean countries, making them more conspicuous, and at once fascinating and dangerous in a manner that bears comparison with the modern Greek or Turkish ‘evil eye’, which is invariably blue, as well as with the appearance of someone with glaucoma.

However, rather than a particular hue, it is the connotations carried by *glaukos* that are of essence for the characterization of Athena, who is a goddess with a flashing, darting gaze. The same types of eyes that are dangerous or ‘foreign’ in humans, and unattractive in women, are appropriate for a deity known for her intelligence, her masculinity and her association with the large-eyed owl, the *glaux*. As the warrior virgin, moreover, she is a goddess who, unlike mortals, needs no protection herself from the potentially harmful gazes of others. In fact, Athena’s gaze itself has the potential to destroy, an ability that finds its most powerful manifestation in connection with the Gorgon Medusa, whose gaze turns those she looks on to stone and whose head regularly adorns Athena’s aegis. The association can go even deeper when Athena’s own gaze becomes fused with that of the Gorgon through her epithet *Gorgopis* (‘Gorgon-eyed’).

Athena’s *glaukos* eyes were thus vital to how she was characterized through expressing her protective and nurturing powers that were also inherently ambivalent and threatening. The *glaukos* aegis, by contrast, is a more peripheral phenomenon.

The *glaukos* aegis, which can be light blue or possibly also green, is depicted in only a very small, and essentially late, number of artistic renderings. The idea of a green aegis may go back to the early fifth century BC, in that a Late Archaic terracotta statuette of Athena from the Athenian akropolis features a green cape-aegis with a purplish-brown gorgoneion,<sup>57</sup> but here it may be indicative more of the *poikilos* skin of the snake rather than of a gleaming *glaukos* (or perhaps even the result of oxidization of an originally blue colour).<sup>58</sup> Later, a green aegis is worn by Athena attending the fight of Achilles against Agamemnon on a Roman wall-painting in the Casa dei Dioscuri in Pompeii.<sup>59</sup> However, unmistakably bright and airy, and unique to Roman art, is the light-blue aegis, which appears strikingly on a bust of Athena from the Casa dei Cervi in Herculaneum.<sup>60</sup> If we were to look for the perfect incarnation of the concept of *glaukos* as far as a light-blue/green/grey hue combined with the brightness appropriate to Athena are concerned, we could hardly do better than this example. In all likelihood, it is the fancy of a wall-painter, who transferred the concept of *glaukos* or *glaukopis* Athena to the goddess’ main attribute, the aegis. Even if Athena/Minerva was not often connected with colour terms in Latin literature, her association with Greek *glaukos* would have been well-known, and the colour terms that are used generally fall well within the range of meaning of *glaukos*.<sup>61</sup> For Cicero (*nat. deor.* 1.83), Minerva’s eyes are the bright colour of the sky (*caesios oculos Minervae*), while those of Neptune are a darker blue, *caerulos*. Otherwise, however, in Latin, the term *caerulus/caeruleus* would seem to be a good equivalent to *glaukos* although there is also the less common *glaucus*. It also carried partly similar connotations in being closely associated with the sea, river deities and the sky, although, unlike *glaukos*, it could be both dark and light.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps the most interesting use of *caerulus* is in Virgil’s *Aeneid* (8.622), where the breastplate that Venus has just brought to

<sup>57</sup> Berlin, Antikenmuseum T.C. 3493; Rohde (1968) 39, no. 12, fig. 12. It seems that Athena wears a green aegis over a red dress also on an Early Classical terracotta relief from the akropolis (Athens, Akropolis Museum 12990).

<sup>58</sup> On the changing of colours over time, see above, n. 37.

<sup>59</sup> Casa dei Dioscuri (VI,9,6), Naples Museum inv. 9104; Richardson (1955) 135–39, pl. 33; Maiuri (1957) 88–89.

<sup>60</sup> Casa dei Cervi IV,21; Tran Tam Tinh (1988) 49, figs 53–54; Cerulli Irelli et al. (1990) pl. 131.

<sup>61</sup> That Roman culture knew and made use of colour symbolism, as did Greek culture, and that Latin colour terms could carry connotations beyond mere hue, has been demonstrated in recent scholarship. Cf., for example, André (1949); Edgeworth (1992); Clarke (2003); (2004); Bradley (2004).

<sup>62</sup> Edgeworth (1992) 55, 107–12 (on *caeruleus/caerulus*), 133 (on *glaucus*); Clarke (2003) 47–49 (on *caeruleus/caerulus*); cf. also André (1949) 162–83 (on terms for blue); Luzzatto and Pompas (1988) 127–51 (on terms for blue in ancient cultures).



Aeneas is compared to a blue cloud (*caerula nubes*) illuminated by the sun's rays.<sup>63</sup> This, we would moot, might have been the kind of image that was in the wall-painter's mind when he supplied his Athena with a light-blue aegis: a divine, gleaming, airy, magical breastplate that embodies her nature as *glaukos*.

The concept of the *glaukos* aegis, however, can also be taken beyond notions of hue. Borbein discussed it in relation to the aegis adorned with stars that is a feature of a Classical statue type of Athena, Athena Rospigliosi (FIG. 6).<sup>64</sup> Because *glaukopis*, he argued, was applied to the moon from the fifth century BC onwards,<sup>65</sup> while the adjective *glaukos* could describe the dawn, the moon, or stars,<sup>66</sup> Athena herself was associated with the moon and stars by virtue of her *glaukos* nature.<sup>67</sup> So was, it seems, the gorgoneion, which was sometimes identified with the face discerned in the full moon.<sup>68</sup> A few pictorial monuments seem to support this. A star (and moon) sometimes appears as Athena's shield blazon, especially on some Panathenaic Prize amphorae.<sup>69</sup> More importantly, however, an Attic red-figure amphora by the Nausikaa Painter of around 460 BC features a crescent moon on Athena's aegis<sup>70</sup> and a star-studded aegis with gorgoneion is worn by Athena/Minerva on several Etruscan bronze cists, mirrors and figurines.<sup>71</sup> Athena's aegis, then, can be a foil for the *glaukopis* moon, itself a symbol of Athena, and might therefore be equated with the starry sky, which is *glaukos* too. It might even be a star itself: the goat star, which according to some sources is the very goat whose flayed skin constitutes the aegis, or the giant Aster ('star'), whose skin Athena flayed according to others.<sup>72</sup> Finally, if we see in this *glaukos* Athena with her *glaukos* attributes the Athena Phosphoros – bringer of light – of Eustathius' commentary on the *Odyssey* (1.22), the analogy with the stars even becomes tangible for Athena herself in that Phosphoros is also the morning star.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Cf. also the Homeric image of the aegis as a thunder-cloud.

<sup>64</sup> Borbein (1970) 41–42. On this statue type and the starry aegis (preserved only on some of its Roman copies), cf. also Hafner (1995) 13–14, and most recently Altripp (2009); (2001) 189–90. Anti (1920) had put forward a concept of Athena as light, and in particular as the star that guides seafarers at night. The idea was taken up by Hafner, who sees the stars on Athena's aegis as reflections of the night sky in Lemnos, where Athena impatiently urges the Argonauts to leave, guided by the stars which served as orientation points in ancient seafaring. Altripp, in contrast, considers political symbolism in relation to stars as symbols of victory.

<sup>65</sup> Empedokles fr. 42 D.-K.<sup>5</sup>; Euripides fr. 1009 Kannicht.

<sup>66</sup> Dawn: Theokr. 16.5. Moon: Mesomedes, *Hymn. in Solem* 21; Plut., *De facie in orbe lunae* 2.4 = *MOR.* 920E; Triphiodor, *Iliou halosis* 514f. Stars: Arat 369; Himer., *Or.* 12.37 Colonna. On celestial connotations of blue, see also Luzzatto and Pompas (1988) 130–42.

<sup>67</sup> For Athena's connection with the moon, see Plut., *De facie in orbe lunae* 5.2; 24.9 = *MOR.* 922a; 938b; cf. also Pottier (1908) 534; Préaux (1975); Dürbeck (1977) 175–76; Jöhrens (1981) 448–49 (collection of sources); Pötscher (1998) 108–10.

<sup>68</sup> Clemens Alex., *Strom.* V 8 p. 676 P; cf. also Plut., *De facie in orbe lunae* 29.6 = *MOR.* 944b, who describes the face in the moon as appearing to many grim, horrible and frightening. See also *RE* 7 (1912)

1644 s.v. 'Gorgo' (Ziegler); Borbein (1970) 41 with n. 74.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Yalouris (1980). Cromez (2001) suggests an interpretation of Athena's shield blazon of a gorgoneion amidst star's rays as the emblem of democrats returning to Athens in 403 BC. For further instances of stars on Athena's shield, helmet and dress, see also Altripp's discussion of Athena Rospigliosi (2009).

<sup>70</sup> Yalouris (1980) 316, pl. 14.12.

<sup>71</sup> Colonna (1984) 1065 Athena/Minerva 179, pl. 781.179; Dohrn (1972); Colonna (1984) 1071–72 Athena/Minerva 247; Anti (1920) 311–14, figs 24–25. These and other representations are also discussed by Eisler (1910) 77–79. The remarkable afterlife (reintroduction?) of the stars on the aegis/gorget in the early history of the United States of America is currently being investigated by Henry W. Moeller, to whom we are grateful for bringing this phenomenon to our attention.

<sup>72</sup> Mousaios, *Theogony*, DK 2 B 8; Arist. (*Peplus*) fr. 637 Rose<sup>3</sup>; cf. Eisler (1910) 78–79; Berger-Doer (1981) 903 s.v. 'Aster'; Fowler (1988) 107; Robertson (2001) 55.

<sup>73</sup> Phosphoros the morning star: for example, Ar. *Ran.* 345. Otherwise, Phosphoros can also be an epithet for torch-bearing Hekate or Artemis: Eur. *Hel.* 569; Ar. *Lys.* 443. Note in this context in particular the representation of a torch-bearing Athena (fighting a giant) on an Apulian red-figured plate: Bonham's London Sales Catalogue 13 October 2006, 80 lot 185. On stars and Athena, see also Anti (1920).

There is no need, however, to become overly deeply involved in speculative astrological and cosmological interpretations<sup>74</sup> when we may point instead to the more obvious connection of Athena with the moon and stars, as is hinted at in descriptions of her birth,<sup>75</sup> and which was possibly elaborated in Orphic and Pythagorean ideas, especially in South Italy.<sup>76</sup> This conceptualization, part, perhaps, of a general cosmic significance for Athena,<sup>77</sup> may have found a visual expression in a Gnathian skyphos (FIG. 7) of the fourth century BC<sup>78</sup> which shows Athena against the background of a starry sky with moon(?), wearing a red dress and aegis, holding a spear and, most bizarrely, riding a strange male winged being blowing a horn. The highly enigmatic scene has been discussed by Olmos,<sup>79</sup> whose preferred interpretation is that of Athena triumphant after the victory of the gods over the giants. The interpretation is problematic in that the winged being is not rising from the earth, as Olmos argues, but floating, detached, in the air, and is thus not of the earth but of the sky. Only the giant 'Aster' would make sense in this context, although why he should blow a horn and carry Athena on his back remains a mystery. As a second option, Olmos raises the possibility of identifying the winged being as a Triton and thus links the scene with the birth of Athena. Interestingly, there is a Triton attached to one of the Roman copies of Athena Rospigliosi,<sup>80</sup> but this is a singular instance and the winged figure looks no more like a Triton than a giant. Nevertheless, Olmos' argument has a certain appeal when we consider that, according to the description of Athena's birth in the the *Homeric Hymn to Athena* (28), the skies reverberate with cosmic clamour when she is born; this might explain the horn in the being's hands. Unusual for any context is Athena's red aegis, which matches her red dress; it may symbolize the warm glow of the fiery sun, contrasting with the cold, silvery glow of the moon and stars. The strange piece of red shawl-like garment at her back seems to reinforce the sense of her as a comet-like apparition.<sup>81</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

What colour, then, was Athena's aegis? As with Athena's eyes, the key to the chromatic characterization of the attribute and its meaning lies in brightness rather than hue. Athena's eyes are typically *glaukos*, bright and gleaming, with hues ranging from light blue to green and grey, marking her as an exceptional female and evoking her protective, but also disconcerting and threatening, potential. In a few rare cases, her aegis too seems to have become infused with *glaukos*, which seems strangely appropriate: particularly when equipped with the gorgoneion, the aegis can be seen to become part of the goddess' gaze that could turn those she looked on to stone.

More usually, however, Athena's aegis is different. Rather than possessing the bright clarity of *glaukos*, it has a complementary kind of brightness: a yellow or gold that shines like the fire of the

<sup>74</sup> This trend was prevalent particularly in nineteenth-century scholarship, when sources such as those quoted above were rated particularly highly and gods were often seen as personifications of natural elements, with Athena personifying the moon, stars, aether or air; cf. Deacy and Villing (2001b) 7.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. R. Olmos in Cabrera Bonet (2003) 410–12; Altripp (2009).

<sup>76</sup> Suggested by Todisco (1993), but rejected by Altripp (2009) who rejects Todisco's identification of the head in Metaponto as that of a South Italian Pythagorean-inspired cult statue of Athena.

<sup>77</sup> On Athena as guardian of cosmic order, see also Mugione (2002).

<sup>78</sup> Madrid, National Archaeological Museum 1999/99/141: R. Olmos in Cabrera Bonet (2003) 410–

12 (colour images); Villing (2009) 117 Athena add.56; Christie's New York Sales Catalogue 30 May 1997, 58 lot 121. We are extremely grateful to P. Cabrera Bonet and R. Olmos for generously allowing A. Villing access to the skyphos, for helpful discussions, further references and for supplying photographs.

<sup>79</sup> R. Olmos in Cabrera Bonet (2003) 410–12.

<sup>80</sup> Altripp (2009).

<sup>81</sup> On Orphic and Pythagorean ideas and Athena in South Italy, see also Todisco (1993) 239–41. The theme of the starry night sky is also echoed on another Gnathian vessel, an oinochoe decorated with the moon and stars of around 330–320 BC: London, British Museum GR 1873.8-20.312 (Vase F 573); *CVA British Museum* 1, pl. IV D.c.4 (GB 40).



FIG. 7. Athena and cosmic creature on a Gnathian skyphos, fourth century BC. Madrid, National Archaeological Museum 1999/99/141. © Madrid, National Archaeological Museum

sun, or the fire of the metal from which Hephaistos forged the aegis according to some sources. It is the sparkle of precious metal or the gleaming brightness that is inherent in any Greek deity and that has the potential to blind the mortal onlooker who unwittingly sets eyes upon the god. It is also the gleam of *charis*, however: the beauty, vitality and sparkling (and cunning) attractiveness that Athena herself possesses and that she can bestow on mortals under her protection. These gleaming colours stand in contrast to the dark or even black aegis, the *kyanaigis* or *melanaigis*, that expresses the dark, wrathful and furious side of the goddess. *Kyaneos* is mostly a dark blue, although it can also have a lustrous quality, and, like *glaukos*, be associated with the blue of the sea. Yet Athena can be *kyaneos* only through her aegis and not through her eyes.

None of these terms are mutually exclusive or contradictory when associated with Athena, but rather complement and enhance each other. Even when she is *kyanaigis*, Athena is capable of being *glaukopis*. Her *glaukos* eyes and her bright aegis are powerful on account of their blindingly gleaming quality that penetrates whatever they fix upon. The power of the *kyanaigis* or *melanaigis* lies in its impenetrable all-engulfing darkness that may express Athena's anger and that may result from her appropriation of her adversaries' dark powers. Athena's *glaukos* and *kyaneos* features can be seen to operate in diametrically opposed ways, yet to the same effect of enhancing and expressing their owner's divine powers. And while being *glaukopis* is a fundamental trait of the goddess, the brightness or darkness of her aegis can be used as more variable, and circumstantially relevant, expressions of her power and personality.

The aegis, then, could be light or dark, brightly shimmering or darkly obscuring, taking on different hues and luminosity in different circumstances. It was coloured in ways that denoted Athena's protective and inherently ambivalent, and potentially destructive, power. Colour was, in short, a key element in the sophisticated language used by the Greeks to construct the principal attribute of a complex and multi-faceted deity.

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