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THE EVOLUTION OF HERMES
HIS INFLUENCES AND APPEARANCE FROM THE
ARCHAIC TO CLASSICAL PERIODS

A THESIS BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR DEPARTMENTAL HONORS IN CLASSICS

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Abstract

The ancient Greek deity Hermes has gone through many evolutions since his conception as an early, pre-Olympian god. One of these changes occurred between the Archaic and Classical periods of Ancient Greece. In the Archaic period, Hermes, the patron god of shepherds, thieves and merchants, appeared as a mature, bearded god in sculpture and vase paintings. As the Classical period began, Hermes began to appear as a young, un-bearded man in sculpture, while still being archaized in some vase painting, and in herms. This change occurred because of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)*, which was written in the early Classical period. In this hymn, Hermes is introduced as an infant who is the son of Zeus and the younger brother of Apollo. Hermes began to appear as a young man in Classical style sculpture to fit his role as the younger brother of Apollo. Even though his appearance changed, and he received new spheres of influence that were similar to Apollo's, he continued to act as the patron god of shepherds, thieves, and merchants.

I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this word.

April 3rd, 2020

Haley R. Lavach

To my parents, Chris and Noelle, my brother, Jackson, and my late grandfather, Dr. John Lavach: thank you for your encouragement, support, and your belief that I can accomplish whatever I put my mind to.

And to Hermes himself, who provided the inspiration and good humor needed to complete this thesis amidst the chaos.

Thank you.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Review of Scholarship	7
The Homeric Hymn to Hermes	9
Archaic Depictions of Hermes	15
Classical Depictions of Hermes	18
Hermes	23
Conclusion	26
Endnotes	28
Bibliography	35
List of Illustrations	37
Illustrations	39

Introduction

Hermes is among one of the most well-known and celebrated deities in the Greek pantheon. His iconography and mythology have thrived well after the disappearance of the classical Greek culture, and his persona has permeated Western culture as a trickster and a messenger.

Hermes is featured in many well-known Greek myths and is best known in roles as the messenger of the gods, a trickster, and a *psychopomp*, who leads souls to the underworld. One of his most iconic myths comes from the fourth Homeric Hymn, the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)*. This myth details Hermes' birth and his first day on earth. He was born to Zeus and the nymph Maia on Mount Cyllene. On the first day he was alive, he created the lyre from a turtle's shell, stole Apollo's sacred cattle, and kindled the first fire in order to sacrifice the cattle to his fellow gods. Apollo, upon finding that his cattle were stolen and slain, took Hermes to Mount Olympus to face their father, Zeus, who instructed Hermes to give Apollo his lyre as payment for stealing the older god's cattle.¹

The hymn itself gives Hermes many of his attributes. He is considered a trickster god and the god of thieves because of his theft of Apollo's cattle. In his origin myth, he is able to avoid severe punishment from Zeus and Apollo through rhetoric, and he has an aversion to violence; for this reason, he often considered the patron of orators. His herding of Apollo's cattle also makes him the patron of shepherds.²

Hermes is an easily recognizable figure. His most common iconography includes winged sandals, a traveler's hat that is occasionally winged, and a caduceus.

This makes Hermes one of the more easily identified deities in ancient Greek art.³ Even though his iconography stays consistent, his apparent age does not. There are examples of Hermes as a mature, bearded god, whose age is similar to that Zeus or Poseidon. This is usually indicative of an older image of Hermes, popular during the Archaic period.⁴ After the Archaic period, however, Hermes' image changes dramatically. He takes on the appearance of an un-bearded youth. This form becomes commonplace in the Classical period. The rest of his iconography remains the same. He still wears winged sandals, a traveler's hat, and holds a caduceus in most works.⁵

These two forms are heavily featured in vase paintings and sculpture from both the Archaic and Classical periods. Vase paintings show Hermes involved in scenes from both domestic life, well-known myths and as associated with several other gods and heroes. Hermes is also a popular subject of Greek sculpture, from the famous Praxiteles' statue of Hermes and the infant Dionysus, to Herms, which are boundary markers that feature the head of bearded Hermes.⁶

This thesis will examine images of Hermes in vase paintings and sculpture, beginning in the Archaic period through Classical period. Each work will be analyzed to determine in what religious context it was used in, and to understand why the either the Archaic or Classical versions of Hermes were used in that work. Hermes' change in appearance was the result of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* Beginning in the classical period, he was depicted as young and un-bearded as well and charming and compassionate, corresponding to his appearance in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)*. The archaized bearded depiction of Hermes remained in contexts that corresponded to his Archaic duties, after the *Homeric Hymn*

to *Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* was written, as a serious working god of boundaries, shepherds, and travelers.

Review of Scholarship

It has been well documented that the change from the mature, bearded depiction of Hermes to the un-bearded, youthful depiction took place between the Archaic and Classical periods in Ancient Greece. It has also been well documented that the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* played a significant role in why Hermes' appearance changed. If Hermes was the younger brother of Apollo, and Apollo's appearance is that of a man in his early to mid-twenties, then Hermes should also appear to be a young man.

An article by A. L. Frothingham, "Babylonian Origin of Hermes the Snake-God, and of the Caduceus I," published in 1916 in the *American Journal of Archaeology*, discusses the origins of Hermes as a snake god and includes commentary on the evolution of the bearded Hermes.¹⁰ Again, while the commentary includes the discrepancies between the different iconography and images of Hermes, the article does not discuss the change in Hermes' appearance during the transition between the Archaic to Classical periods in Greece.¹¹ This article explores how Hermes' iconography, especially the caduceus and his affiliation with snakes, evolved over time. While Frothingham does talk extensively about the evolution of Hermes throughout the Mediterranean world, the article does not give context for use of the bearded versus un-bearded versions of Hermes.¹²

The article does discuss Herms at length, especially the symbolism of the bearded head paired with the phallus. According to Frothingham, the form is derived from Hermes' association with snakes, as the snake served as a phallic symbol of protection and fertility in multiple early Mediterranean cultures.¹³

In *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth* by Norman Oliver Brown, originally published in 1947, the author discusses the conception and evolution of Hermes as a deity.⁷ The book goes in depth into the transition between the bearded and un-bearded Hermes, but does not explore the reasons and contexts in which the two different versions are used. This suggests that the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (*Homeric Hymn 4*) plays an important role in the transition.⁸

Brown also emphasizes Hermes' role as the god of thieves. In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (*Homeric Hymn 4*), Hermes both literally and metaphorically steals from Apollo. He steals his cattle, but he also takes on his youthful appearance, and his epithet of the god of music. Brown cites evidence that musical cults of Apollo and Hermes were often in competition with each other.⁸

While Brown writes at length about the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (*Homeric Hymn 4*), he also discusses the idea that the change from bearded to un-bearded may have been a sign of changing time periods. The older, bearded images of Hermes depicted a working man, while the youthful, un-bearded Hermes would have been a symbol of elevated status. He has stolen the high-class spheres of music, especially music competitions from his brother Apollo. Apollo no longer monopolizes the niche of the sophisticated and cultured son of Zeus. This was especially true for those who

were not originally part of the ruling classes, but became wealthy in the Classical period.⁹

The article “Hermes” by Gerard Siebert, published within the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC)* in 1981, contains commentary on hundreds of images of Hermes, as well as commentary on the discrepancies within these hundreds of examples, and how they change over time and from region to region. This is a very thorough account of the types of images of Hermes, including those from the Archaic and the Classical periods.¹⁴ In Siebert’s *LIMC* article, he breaks down the commentary portion into nine subsections. These subsections discuss the evolution of the form of Hermes, the discrepancies between regional depictions of Hermes, his iconography, and the depiction of his role as *psychopompos*.¹⁵

This thesis will examine why and in what ways Hermes’ appearance and spheres of activity were changed in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)*, and how that change influences both vase paintings and sculpture. There are various religious contexts in which each type of Hermes was portrayed, depending on what form and sphere of activity he was assigned.

The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)*

The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)*, is a poem written in the style of Homer, but composed much later than when Homer supposedly lived. According to Vergados’ article, “Commenting on The Homeric Hymn to Hermes: Philology and History,” while the date that the Homeric hymn written to Hermes has been debated for some time, the most credible theory comes from H. Görgemanns,

who proposed that the hymn was most likely written at the beginning of the fifth century BCE.¹⁶ The fifth century BCE is also when the Classical period in Greece begins.

The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)*, that is related to Hermes' change from bearded to un-bearded in the Classical period is the longer of the two written to Hermes. The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* is approximately five-hundred-and-eighty lines long, as opposed to the shorter hymn, *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 18)*, which is only about fourteen lines long.¹⁷

The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* begins with the conception and birth of Hermes to Zeus and the nymph Maia. Almost immediately after he is born, Hermes found a tortoise and created the lyre from its shell.¹⁸

After leaving Mount Cyllene, he traveled to Pieria's Mountains, where he stole fifty of Apollo sacred cattle. As he is leading the cattle away, he came across an old man. He promised the man that he would bless his vineyards if he did not tell anyone that he had seen him. At the Alpheios river, Hermes decided to rest and while he did not create fire, he invented a way to build a campfire. Once he built his fire, Hermes slaughtered two of the sacred cattle and sacrificed the flesh of the cattle to each of the twelve Olympians, including himself.¹⁹

Hermes traveled back to his home on Mount Cyllene and was questioned by Maia. Meanwhile, Apollo discovered that his cattle were missing, and asked the old man if he had seen any cattle. The old man told Apollo that he saw a child leading the

cows away, and Apollo understood that it was Hermes that stole his cattle. Apollo quickly found Hermes and Maia, and was not tricked by Hermes' innocent act.²⁰

The two sons of Zeus found their way to Mount Olympus, and each told Zeus his side of the story. Zeus commanded them to reconcile and find the stolen cattle together. Hermes led Apollo to the stolen cattle, and Apollo demanded that Hermes pay him for his slaughtered cattle, so the young Hermes gave him the lyre. Apollo, impressed with Hermes' ingenuity, forgave him for taking his cattle, and gave him joint responsibility of his sacred cattle, thus Zeus made Hermes the lord over all animals.²¹

Because the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* was most likely published so close to the beginning of the Classical period, there is some consensus among scholars that the portrayal of Hermes in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* is directly related to the change in his appearance.²² This is the result of a change in internal logic. The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* details Hermes' birth and his first days on Earth. Apollo is already portrayed as a young adult, and Hermes is introduced as the son of Zeus, meaning that he is younger than Apollo. In this passage, we see Hermes swaddling himself back up to appear innocent to Apollo:

ὦς εἰπὼν ἤϊξεν ἄναξ Διὸς υἱὸς Ἀπόλλων:
 Κυλλήνης δ' ἀφίκανεν ὄρος καταεῖμενον ὕλη,
 πέτρης ἐς κευθμῶνα βαθύσκιον, ἔνθα τε νύμφη
 ἀμβροσίη ἐλόχευσε Διὸς παῖδα Κρονίωνος.
 ὀδμή δ' ἰμερόεσσα δι' οὐρεος ἠγαθέοιο
 κίδνατο, πολλὰ δὲ μῆλα ταναύποδα βόσκετο ποίην.
 ἔνθα τότε σπεύδων κατεβήσατο λάινον οὐδὸν

ἄντρον ἐς ἠερόεν ἐκατηβόλος αὐτὸς Ἀπόλλων.
 Τὸν δ' ὥς οὖν ἐνόησε Διὸς καὶ Μαιάδος υἱὸς
 χωόμενον περὶ βουσὶν ἐκηβόλον Ἀπόλλωνα,
 σπάργαν' ἔσω κατέδυνε θυήεντ' ἤυτε πολλήν
 πρέμνων ἀνθρακιὴν ὕλης σποδὸς ἀμφικαλύπτει,
 ὡς Ἑρμῆς Ἐκάεργον ἰδὼν ἀνέειλεν ἑαυτόν.(227-239)²³

“With these words, Zeus’ son, lord Apollo, sped on, and came to Cyllene’s wooded mountain, to the deep-shadowed cavern in the rock where the divine nymph gave birth to the child of Kronos’ son Zeus. An enchanting fragrance pervaded the holy mountain, and numerous long-shanked sheep were grazing the grass. There it was that he then came hurrying, and went down over the stone threshold into the gloomy cave, far-shooting Apollo in person. When the son of Zeus and Maia saw that it was the far-shooter Apollo angry about his cattle, he burrowed down into his fragrant swaddling cloth; as a mass of log embers is concealed under the wood ash, so Hermes curled himself...” (237-239)²⁴

Lines 227 to 239 in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* show that Apollo and Hermes are both sons of Zeus, but that Hermes is an infant. For example, he wraps himself into his baby blankets in his crib.²⁵ Even though we know that Hermes is an infant from the beginning of the hymn, this passage clearly shows a fraternal relationship between the two deities, and that Hermes is significantly younger than Apollo, yet still able to manipulate his older brother.

Even though Apollo praises Hermes’ cunning and ingenuity, he still considers himself the more skilled and more mature of the two, and after he forgives Hermes for stealing his cattle, he asserts himself as the elder, wiser brother. This passage also shows Hermes intelligence and cunning:

θαυμάζω Διὸς υἱέ, τὰδ' ὡς ἔρατὸν κιθαρίζεις.
 νῦν δ' ἔπει οὖν ὀλίγος περ ἑὼν κλυτὰ μῆδεα οἶδας,
 ἴζε, πέπον, καὶ μῦθον ἐπαίνει πρεσβυτέροισι: (455-457)²⁶

“I am amazed, son of Zeus, how beautifully
 you can play such things on the lyre. Well, seeing
 that you’re so clever, small as you are, pray sit there and
 acknowledge what your elders say.”(455-457)²⁷

Lines 455 to 457 demonstrate the power dynamic between Apollo and Hermes. While Apollo respects Hermes’ craftiness and skill, the older deity still expects Hermes to respect him and listen to what he has to say.²⁸

These two passages from the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* show without doubt that Apollo is the elder brother of the two deities and that he holds a certain amount of power over his younger brother. Apollo even prophesizes receiving the lyre from Hermes on the day of his own birth.²⁹ If Hermes is younger and more naïve than Apollo, then he should look physically younger than Apollo in artistic depictions of him. Apollo is consistently portrayed in both sculpture and vase painting as a young man, even in the Archaic period, when Hermes is still primarily bearded.³⁰ As the Classical Period begins, Hermes is also portrayed as a young man in his late teens to early-twenties. After the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* became part of the canon of Greek mythology, it no longer made sense for Hermes to be portrayed as a mature, bearded man.

Even though Hermes was now portrayed as a young man, he still retained the same spheres of influence. He is still the trickster god of thieves, shepherds, and travelers. These spheres of influence are explained within the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* as part of Hermes’ origin story.

Hermes' influence over thieves is very apparent throughout the scope of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4.*

τῶν τότε Μαιάδος υἱός, εὐσκοπος Ἀργειφόντης,
 πεντήκοντ' ἀγέλης ἀπετάμνετο βοῦς ἐριμύκους.
 πλανοδίας δ' ἤλαυνε διὰ ψαμαθώδεα χῶρον
 ἴχνι' ἀποστρέψας: δολίης δ' οὐ λήθετο τέχνης
 ἀντία ποιήσας ὀπλάς, τὰς πρόσθεν ὄπισθεν,
 τὰς δ' ὄπισθεν πρόσθεν: κατὰ δ' ἔμπαλιν αὐτὸς ἔβαινε. (73-78)³¹

“From them Maia’s son, the keen sighted Argus-slayer, cut fifty lowing cows off from their herd, and drove them by offroad ways, over a sandy region, turning their footprints round, for his skill in deception did not fail him; he turned their hooves opposite ways, fore to back and hinder to front, while he himself walked backwards.”(73-78)³²

Very early in the poem, Hermes establishes his competence as a thief and a master of deceit. In lines 73 through 78, Hermes demonstrates this mastery of deception by stealing Apollo’s cattle and then forcing the cattle to walk backwards, so it was more difficult for his older brother to track them.

Hermes’ pastoral duties are also explained through the hymn. After Hermes and Apollo reconcile, Apollo shares the responsibility of his cattle with his new brother.

ὡς εἰπὼν ᾠρεξ': ὁ δ' ἐδέξατο Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων,
 Ἐρμῆ δ' ἐγγυάλιξεν ἐκὼν μάστιγα φαεινὴν,
 βουκολίας τ' ἐπέτελλεν: ἔδεκτο δὲ Μαιάδος υἱὸς
 γηθήσας. (496-499)³³

“With these words he held out the lyre, and Phoibos Apollo took it; and he willingly handed Hermes the shining goad and enjoined on him the care of the cattle, which Maia’s

son accepted gladly.”(496-499) ³⁴

Hermes’ sphere of influence over pastoral life was an important part of his identity in the Archaic period, and the inclusion of this aspect of his godhood would have been crucial to include in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)*.³⁵

Hermes’ role as a trickster god is featured heavily in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)*. Besides being a thief, Hermes is a clever rhetorician, and uses his words to try to get out of trouble when he crosses the older gods. He is even shown to be clever enough to anticipate his brother’s anger, and could have constructed the lyre knowing he would eventually give it to Apollo. ³⁶ Even though the young trickster god has already caused Apollo and Zeus a considerable amount of grief during his first day on Earth, his brother and father are still quite charmed by him.³⁷

Ζεὺς δὲ μέγ’ ἐξεγέλασεν ἰδὼν κακομηδέα παῖδα
εὖ καὶ ἐπισταμένως ἀρνέυμενον ἀμφὶ βόεσσιν. (389-390) ³⁸

“Zeus laughed out loud when he saw the wicked boy
making his fine, expert denials about the cows.”(389-390)³⁹

Hermes, while a trickster and a thief, is well liked for his charm and his humor. Because the Archaic Hermes was characterized as a common working man, it was important that in the telling of his origins, he was still an amiable individual at best and a charming prankster at worst.⁴⁰

The cultural significance of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)* should not be overlooked. Hermes represents or had dominion over many aspects of Greek life. For a change in his appearance to have occurred, the *Homeric Hymn to*

Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4) would have had to have been a very culturally significant piece of literature at the beginning of the Fifth century.⁴¹ Besides the change in age and appearance, the essence of who Hermes is stayed the same, even though the art that depicted him changed.

Archaic Depictions of Hermes:

The Archaic period in Greece begins around 650 BCE and ends in 480 BCE, though the artistic styles associated with this period have a much wider range in dates, depending on medium and location.⁴² For instance, in Attica, the Black Figure style of vase painting first appeared around 620 BCE, but was still being manufactured as recently as the Fourth century BCE. For this reason, the Archaic period is defined more by the style of sculpture that was used, rather than by vase painting or architecture.⁴³

Archaic sculpture can be characterized by its distinctive stiffness and frontality. Sculpture of human figures in the Archaic style are frontal and do not appear to have a natural motion to them. They are stiff and meant to be viewed only from one side.⁴⁴ The Law of Frontality, as described by Ridgway in her book *The Archaic Style in Greek Sculpture*, is, "...if a line were drawn through the vertical center of a statue, the two resultant halves would be perfectly symmetrical and the weight of the figure would be evenly distributed on both legs."⁴⁵ Another element of Frontality and Archaic sculpture is its symmetrical nature. In Archaic sculpture, the body is positioned symmetrically, usually with the arms straight by the side of the body. This position is often seen in Kouroi type sculpture.⁴⁶ One of the reasons that

Archaic sculpture was symmetrical and frontal, is that early Greek sculptors thought of their craft very linearly, and it therefore lacked the depth of the realistic human form.⁴⁷

Another prominent trait in Archaic sculpture is what is known as the Archaic smile. The Archaic smile is an expression carved onto the faces of Archaic sculpture. It is a closed-mouthed smile that does not distort the rest of the expression on the sculpture. It is thought to have originated as a simple way to portray the shape of the mouth, as well as making the sculpture seem joyful.⁴⁸

In the Archaic style, the god Hermes is predominantly displayed as a bearded, mature god, similar to Zeus or Poseidon. In the Archaic style, he is meant to be read as a working man.⁴⁹ He is the messenger of the gods, and the guardian of property boundaries, especially around sanctuaries. He has several important jobs that should be the responsibility of a mature god.

The *LIMC* lists its images in chronological order, therefore the first images of Hermes within the *LIMC* are sculptures of a bearded Hermes from the Archaic period. These sculptures are distinctly Archaic, with their Archaic smiles and the lack of depth in their faces. One example of an Archaic Hermes is a bearded head from Attica, *LIMC* Hermes 9, dated between 520 BCE between 510 BCE (Fig. 1).⁵⁰ The image of the head in the *LIMC* is a profile of Hermes that is characterized by its lack of depth.⁵¹ The front of the head is very flat, with the eyes, nose, and mouth all parallel to each other, and the ear seems disproportionately large for the head. This is a fitting example of a sculpture that is meant to be viewed from the front, and not from the side.

Another example of Hermes in Archaic sculpture is another head of Hermes, LIMC Hermes 11, dated to 500 BCE (Fig. 2).⁵² This head is viewed from the front, and it is easier to see what the artist intended, even with the erosion that the head has suffered over time. The eyes, Archaic smile, and hair would have been given detail with brightly colored paint that has now worn away.⁵³

Hermes was also a deity commonly included in vase paintings. He appears as early as the seventh century in Attic black-figure vase painting, usually as an assistant to or an overseer of a hero such as Herakles or Perseus, while Attic red figure appeared later in the Archaic period.⁵⁴ Because of his roles as *psychopompos* and his reputation for aiding heroes, it is expected that Hermes be present in scenes where he is not necessarily the primary figure, or the one that the scene is about.⁵⁵

The Hermes in Archaic vase painting is most often still bearded, and often in his role as *psychopompos*, leading the souls of fallen heroes to the Underworld. An excellent example of Hermes in this role is in the Sixth-century BCE red-figure vase painting of the death of Sarpedon (Fig. 3). In this vase painting, Zeus' son, Sarpedon has been killed, and Thanatos and Hypnos, the winged gods of Death and Sleep respectively, are lifting him up to carry him to the Underworld. Overseeing this process is Hermes, identifiable by his traveler's clothing and his caduceus. He is bearded in this painting, which is consistent with the time period that the scene was painted in.⁵⁶

Hermes, as mentioned above, was also fairly common in scenes aiding heroes. In a Sixth-century black figure vase, Hermes is included in a scene of Herakles strangling the Nemean Lion (Fig. 4). He is not centered in the scene, but off

to the right, overseeing Herakles. Hermes is depicted as bearded, and wearing his usual travelling cloak and hat and wielding his caduceus. In this image, he also appears to be wearing winged sandals.⁵⁷

The context in which the bearded Hermes is used becomes significant when presented with an Archaic depiction of Hermes that is beardless. The existence of an un-bearded portrayal of Hermes in the Archaic period is inconsistent with the conventional portrayal of Hermes during this period. This particular vase is a Sixth-century black figure vase from Nola, which is in southern Italy. that it does not portray a recognizable narrative scene.⁵⁸ This image of Hermes, while identifiable by his caduceus, is the primary figure painted on the vase, and he is flanked by two sphinxes.⁵⁹

While it may be difficult to assign much context to Archaic sculptures of Hermes where only the heads remain, in Attic vase paintings, it appears that the bearded Hermes is consistently depicted in mythological scenes, where he has a task as an overseer or as *psychopompos*. These are his duties as a god, which complements his Archaic portrayal as a mature, working man.

Classical Depictions of Hermes

The Classical period began in 480 BCE and lasted until 323 BCE with the death of Alexander the Great. Before the true style of the Classical period came into fruition, there was a transitional period in Greek sculpture from 480 BCE to 450 BCE. This in-between style of sculpture is known as the Severe style. While these

thirty years are known as the Severe Period for Greek sculpture, the Severe style existed beyond the scope of those thirty years.⁶⁰

The Severe style is characterized by its stark and stiff form. While the style is a significant step away from the frontality of Archaic sculpture, it still lacks the fluid motion that is seen in the High Classical style of sculpture. The human figure is much more natural in the Severe style than in the Archaic style, and the limbs stray from their place at the side of the body, showing that artists were interested in playing with motion.⁶¹

The Severe period was one of learning and experimentation. Artists were still confined by some of the stark lines of Archaic sculpture, and while artists began to experiment more with expression and drapery, the execution could still sometimes be crude.⁶² The subject matter also began to change. The simple Kouros shifted into sculpture that either depicted a young mortal man, or Apollo. Apollo was the favorite subject of Severe artists, who took the opportunity to create long, wavy hairstyles for the god.⁶³ These figures of Apollo could have easily evolved into the young Hermes later in the Classical period.

During these same decades, the Classical style was also born. It is important to note that even though the Classical style becomes the predominant style after 450 BCE, the Archaic and Severe styles were still being produced.⁶⁴ It is also important to note the problem of Roman copies, which Ridgway includes in her book on Fifth-century BCE Greek sculpture, and her separate book on Roman copies in Greek sculpture. While the Greek originals and the identity of their sculptors may not have survived, Roman copies have survived, but are not true, authentic Classical pieces,

and may not have been sculpted in the same style or with the same finesse as the original masterpieces.⁶⁵ However, for the purposes of this thesis, the Roman copies of Greek originals will be considered because of their subject matter and the date they were originally sculpted.

Classical sculpture is defined by its natural motion and balance and its realistic anatomy and structure of the human body. Another important aspect of Classical sculpture is its subject matter. There is an emphasis on both the divine and human strife. The gods become more compassionate and more human.⁶⁶

Hermes is no exception to this. The relief of Orpheus and Eurydike shows Hermes gently leading Eurydike away from her new husband (Fig. 5). The relief is in the High Classical style from the late Fifth-century BCE, but only the Roman copy remains. While this is may not be the first example of an un-bearded Hermes in sculpture, it is considered a masterpiece, and each figure is labeled with their name at the top of the relief. Hermes is beardless, and an excellent example of Hermes in the High Classical style during the Fifth-century BCE. Brunhilde mentions in her book, *Fifth Century Styles in Greek Sculpture*, that because the katabasis and anabasis portion of the Orpheus and Eurydike myth had not yet been articulated, this relief may show Eurydike's initial death and descent to the Underworld.⁶⁷ While he does not have his caduceus, he is still wearing his traveler's hat. In this context, he is very gently taking Eurydike's wrist to lead her away.⁶⁸ The compassionate and emotional scene does not portray Hermes as a working man simply doing his job, like in the Archaic vase paintings. The Hermes that was sculpted in this relief seems to be mourning along with the couple as he stands close to them.

Praxiteles' sculpture of Hermes with the infant Dionysos is among the most well-known images of Hermes (Fig. 6). While there is still debate over the authenticity of the surviving sculpture, it would have originally been created by Praxiteles around 340 BCE.⁶⁹ In recent years, scholars reported that the sculpture is a Roman copy, especially with the publication of H. Froning's article on the sandals that Hermes wears in the particular sculpture. Froning identified them as distinctly Roman footwear, which concludes that Praxiteles' Hermes and Dionysos must be a Roman copy.⁷⁰

Regardless of whether or not the surviving sculpture is a Greek original or a Roman copy, the sculpture shows Hermes caring for the infant Dionysos, not long after he was just birthed from Zeus's thigh. Hermes is looking upon the infant fondly, as if remembering how his brother Apollo looked upon him. Hermes is beardless and appears to be a young man in his early-twenties, while his new little brother, Dionysos, is an infant.⁷¹ Similar to the relief of Orpheus and Eurydike (Fig. 5), Hermes is touching the other figure, suggesting an emotional connection. Dionysos is clinging to Hermes, and even though Hermes is obviously caring for the infant, it is clear in the body language of Hermes that he is not simply caring for Dionysos out of duty, but out of familial love.

Vase painting in the Classical period also went through a similar change in the Fifth-century BCE. The figures became more realistic and natural, and because of this, were able to convey more emotion.⁷² One vase painting that uses this new style is an Attic red-figure vase that portrays the judgement of Paris (Fig. 7). The figures in the vase painting are not restricted to one plane, and are painted close enough

together to look as though they are naturally interacting with each other. Hermes, identified by his caduceus and winged sandals is un-bearded and youthful in this vase painting. He is nude except for a leopard's pelt and appears to be speaking with Paris and interacting with a dog.⁷³ The scene is not necessarily chaotic, but Hermes especially seems casual in his interaction with the other characters in the scene. He is not allocated to the edge of the scene as though he was in the Archaic vase paintings, but in the center of the scene.

Even though the technical style of figures evolved in the Fifth-century BCE, Hermes was often archaized in vase paintings. In several instances, he is still painted with a beard, and is sometimes still removed from the rest of the scene. The birth of Dionysos is the subject of one such Attic red figure vase from the middle of the Fifth-century BCE (Fig. 8). There are two main figures, which are both bearded males: Zeus and Hermes. Zeus is pictured seated and cutting infant Dionysos out of his thigh. Hermes is present, but he is looking away from Zeus, with his head turned to watch over the other deity. Hermes is bearded and identifiable by his traveler's hat, cloak, and winged sandals.⁷⁴ While the figures are painted in a Classical style, the mood of the painting is rather sterile compared to the Classical style sculptures of Hermes.

Another vase painting from the middle of the Fifth-century BCE shows a scene of Hermes weighing the souls of Achilles and Memnon (Fig. 9). In this vase painting, Hermes is archaized by being painted with a beard. He is wearing his traveler's hat, caduceus, and winged sandals, and he is acting as *psychopompos*.⁷⁵ In this scene, Hermes is not the gentle guide leading Eurydike away from Orpheus. He is

the pinnacle of neutrality as he weighs Achilles' and Memnon's souls in front of their pleading mothers. He is archaized in both appearance and demeanor.

In the Classical period, the un-bearded and the bearded Hermes exist in two completely different contexts. Classical sculptors create gentle, charismatic portrayals of Hermes that align with his character in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (*Homeric Hymn 4*). When he is un-bearded in vase paintings, he still retains his casual charm. However, many Classical vase painters chose to archaize him in scenes where he is performing his Archaic duties as a *psychopomp* or watching over Zeus as he births Dionysos.

Hermes

Hermes are a type of boundary marker that is characterized by having the head of a bearded Hermes on top of a wide pillar. In the middle of the pillar, there is often a stone phallus. The existence of bearded herms into the Classical period is evidence of the continued archaizing of Hermes in contexts where he is still performing his archaic duties as an overseer of rituals. While they originate in the Archaic period, they are created throughout the Classical period. However, the head of Hermes remains bearded with few exceptions.⁷⁶

Hermes were used both boundary markers and in religious rites. While many herms have survived to modern times, it is the depictions of herms in vase paintings that give context for their use. There is evidence that herms were used as boundary markers within homes and in sanctuaries. This evidence appears in an article published in 1962 in the *American Journal of Archaeology* by J. McCredie. He

describes one herm as a Roman copy of a herm similar to the Hermes Propylaia, sculpted by Alkmenes and originally installed at the entrance to the Athenian akropolis.⁷⁷ The other herm that McCredie describes is a smaller herm sculpted several centuries after the Classical period that would have been at the entrance to a private household. This herm may have been a crude copy of a Greek original from the Classical period.⁷⁷ While this herm does not fit within the two periods that this thesis covers, the function of the herm and where it was found is important for understanding the practical use and purpose of herms.

There is an array of vase paintings depicting herms in religious rites. One such vase is an Attic red figure vase, *LIMC* Hermes 102bis, painted at the end of the Fifth-century BCE depicting the sacrifice of a bull in front of a herm (Fig. 10). The herm is bearded and the phallus is prominent. There is a young man standing next to the bull and what looks like a tub or tray where the blood of the bull will be collected after the bull is sacrificed.⁷⁸

There are also vases that display scenes depicting entire processions to a herm. One Attic red figure vase from the middle of the Fifth-century BCE, *LIMC* Hermes 101, is painted with a procession to a sacrifice at the base of a herm (Fig. 11).⁷⁹ There are three figures that are marching towards the herm on the far left of the vase. The first figure is a musician playing a flute, the second and third figures are women bringing offerings to the herm. The herm itself is bearded and has a prominent phallus with a bench at the base of it.⁸⁰

The fragment of an Attic red figure vase, *LIMC* Hermes 106, from the early half of the Fifth-century BCE shows a man offering libation directly to a Herm, (Fig.

12).⁸¹ The herm is identifiable by the bearded face and the prominent phallus. In the background of the fragment, there is an image of a bull's skull. This could be a reference to Hermes' role as a shepherd and cattle-herder.⁸²

Another example of a herm used in a religious rite on an earlier Attic black figure vase, *LIMC* Hermes 105, painted around 480 BCE (Fig. 13).⁸³ On this vase, two figures are making libations before a herm. The herm is the focus of the painting, and the figures making libations are on either side of it. The herm itself is covered in offerings from previous libations and sacrifices.⁸⁴ Putting the herm in the center of the vase shows the significance of the herm in this religious rite.

Alkmenes' Hermes Propylaia is an example of a herm that was sculpted during the Classical period, but was heavily archaized. The face is described as being Classical, but the hair and the pillar were Archaic. It is likely that the pillar and hair were archaized because that was the conventional thing to do.⁸⁵

Herms, while originally based on the god Hermes, made a significant split from him in the Classical period. They are more closely related to the archaized Hermes that also appear in some vase paintings created in the Classical period. Considering the number of vases that have survived that depict herms at the center of multiple types of religious rituals, such as libations, processions, and sacrifices, the herm was still a significant part of daily life for many Greeks. Since Hermes was guardian of boundaries and entrances, it would have been important to include herms in religious rites for the protection of boundaries and property.

As far as herms go, there does not seem to be much similarity to the youthful, un-bearded Hermes that became popular during the same time that these Attic red

figure vases were made. While the herm and Hermes still shared the same root-names, Hermes became a different type of deity in the Fifth-century BCE, and was no longer an Archaic figure, while herms remained archaized throughout the Classical period.

Conclusion

Hermes, as a pre-Olympian deity, went through many evolutions. His very earliest origins are linked to a Babylonian fertility god who was associated with snakes. This early Hermes had several recognizable roles, from messenger to trickster, and those traits stayed with him as he was brought to Greece.⁸⁶ From his introduction in Greece, he became one of the most recognizable characters in the Greek Pantheon, and was one of the gods heavily featured in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.⁸⁷

Archaic Hermes was depicted as dutiful working man, and his personality could be more closely compared to Hephaistos than to the Hermes in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes (Homeric Hymn 4)*. In Archaic sculpture, his face is plain. It could be the face of any middle-aged Greek man, and is not impressive or extraordinary in any way. All of his spheres of influence are over working people including shepherds, messengers, and merchants.⁸⁸

These jobs all involve constant travel, which is why he almost always wearing his traveler's hat, traveler's cloak, or winged sandals. While his followers would not have had winged sandals, they would be travelers who had those other items of clothing. Working people would have wanted a deity that they could relate to, and see

themselves in. The Archaic Hermes was not a king or a great warrior to aspire to. Instead, the Hermes of the Archaic period was a dignified but amiable working god who could be prayed to often for luck on long journeys and a favorable year for livestock.

As the Archaic period ended and the Classical period began, there was an economic boom, and some of the working-class people who had worshiped Hermes were now part of a wealthier class.⁸⁹ This period of economic opportunity coincided with the publication of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (*Homeric Hymn 4*). Hermes was now a young man, and even though the hymn explains his origins as a thief and a shepherd, he has also gained some of Apollo's spheres of activity, such as music. The followers of this newly evolved Hermes would have been eager to take their place in society, just as Hermes was motivated to join his brother and the rest of the Olympians.

The continued prevalence of herms was strictly religious. The original fertility god that came to Greece lived on in the Classical period only through the herm. The prominent phallus is a common symbol of fertility, and the context in which the herm was used in religious ceremonies became separate from the Hermes that emerged during the Classical period, and even from the hard-working Hermes from the Archaic period. Although separate, the herm continued to be an important part of Greek religion, and a popular subject for Attic red figure vase paintings.

In the art of the Classical period, Hermes was portrayed in two very different ways. Hermes, when bearded is a hardy, working man that seems just to be doing his duty in a neutral, amiable way. While the bearded Hermes was less common in the

Classical period, he is still used when the Hermes is shown doing a thankless job. He is not involved in the scenes he appears in, and is simply doing his job of overseeing heroes and gods, or leading souls to the afterlife. The contexts in which he appears only include the spheres of influence he was known for before the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (*Homeric Hymn 4*) was written.

When Hermes is portrayed as un-bearded in Classical art, he is presented as charming and cunning, but also emotional and compassionate. He has a wider range of emotion than the mature, bearded Hermes does. The Hermes that is introduced in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (*Homeric Hymn 4*) has a level of sophistication that the Archaic Hermes did not. On the day he was born, the infant Hermes was able to steal fifty heads of cattle, and eventually win the admiration of his brother and father for his intelligence, rhetoric, and mastery of music.

Hermes is a complex and multi-faceted part of the Greek pantheon. He is in the background or the narrator of many famous myths, but is rarely the main character in any of them. Yet he is still one of the most easily recognizable figures in Greek mythology, if not all of western mythology. The archetype of the good-humored trickster is universally loved, and yet Hermes is still practical, humble, and hard-working. These are traits that most people want to see within themselves, and so Hermes continued popularity is not surprising, even after multiple evolutions.

After the introduction of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (*Homeric Hymn 4*), he became a deity capable of both hard, physical labor as well as a deity with mastery over music and rhetoric, two skills reserved for the ruling classes in the Fifth-century

BCE. He is a figure that was culturally significant from the moment he was born on Mount Cyllene, and one that has continued to be recognizable in the western world.

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List of Illustrations:

1. Figure 1. Profile of the head of Hermes. Attica. 520 BCE-510 BCE. Gerard Siebert, "Hermes", in *LIMC*, ed. Lily Kahil (Zurich: Artemis, 1981).
2. Figure 2. The Head of Hermes. 500 BCE. Gerard Siebert, "Hermes", in *LIMC*, ed. Lily Kahil (Zurich: Artemis, 1981).
3. Figure 3. Death of Sarpedon. Sixth-century BCE. Susan Woodford, *Images of Myths in Classical Antiquity*, (Cambridge, U.K; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 161.
4. Figure 4. Herakles strangling the Nemean Lion. Sixth-century BCE. Susan Woodford, *Images of Myths in Classical Antiquity*, (Cambridge, U.K; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 30.
5. Figure 5. Orpheus and Eurydike. Fifth-century BCE. Naples. Brunilde Sismondo Ridgway, *Fifth Century Styles in Greek Sculpture*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 209-210.
6. Figure 6. Praxiteles' Hermes and Dionysos. 340 BCE. Thomas H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece: A Handbook* (World of Art. London: Thames and Hudson, 1991,) Fig. 109.
7. Figure 7. Judgement of Paris. Fifth-century BCE. Susan Woodford, *Images of Myths in Classical Antiquity*, (Cambridge, U.K; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 92.
8. Figure 8. Birth of Dionysos. Fifth-century BCE. Thomas H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece: A Handbook* (World of Art. London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), Fig. 108.
9. Figure 9. Hermes weighing the souls of Achilles and Memnon. Fifth-century BCE. Susan Woodford, *Images of Myths in Classical Antiquity*, (Cambridge, U.K; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 207.
10. Figure 10. Sacrifice of a bull to a herm. Fifth-century BCE. Gerard Siebert, "Hermes", in *LIMC* v2, ed. Lily Kahil (Zurich: Artemis, 1981), fig. 102bis.
11. Figure 11. Procession to a herm. Mid-Fifth-century BCE. Gerard Siebert, "Hermes", in *LIMC* v2, ed. Lily Kahil (Zurich: Artemis, 1981), fig. 101.

12. Figure 12. Fragment of a vase depicting libation to a herm. Early Fifth-century BCE. Gerard Siebert, "Hermes", in *LIMC* v2, ed. Lily Kahil (Zurich: Artemis, 1981), fig. 106.
13. Figure 13. Two figures giving libation to a herm. 480 BCE. Gerard Siebert, "Hermes", in *LIMC* v2, ed. Lily Kahil (Zurich: Artemis, 1981), fig. 105.

Illustrations



Hermes 9

Fig. 1



Hermes 11

Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



129. Orpheus relief, replica in Naples

Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

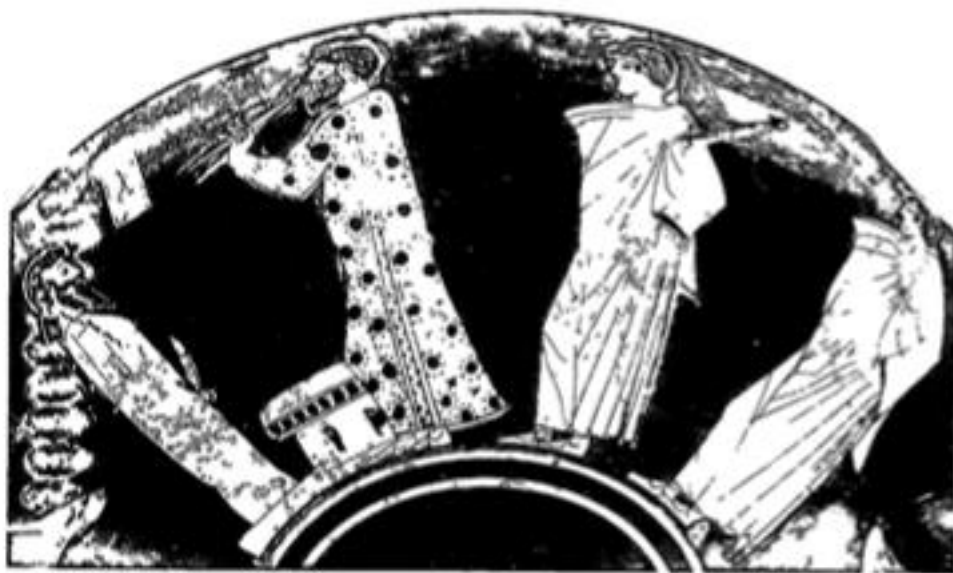


Fig. 9



Hermes 102 bis

Fig. 10



Hermes 101

Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Hermes 105

Fig. 13

Autobiography

Born on May 19th, 1998, I, Haley R. Lavach, was born in Richmond, Virginia, to Noelle and Christopher Lavach. In seventh grade, I took my first Latin course, which I continued to take through all four years of high school. My Latin teacher, Daniel McGraw, was an incredible teacher who immersed his classes into the culture and mythology of the ancient Mediterranean world. My favorite memory from the six years I had him as a teacher was when he put on a one-man reenactment of *The Iliad*. I attended Patrick Henry High School, where I graduated in the top five-percent in my class in 2016. I am graduating from the University of Mary Washington in May 2020 with a Bachelor's degree in Biology and Classics. I owe many thanks to Liane Houghtalin, Joseph Romero, Angela Pitts, and my fellow thesis writers, who offered constant advice and support throughout this whole thesis-writing process. And of course, a thank you to Hermes himself.