Introduction

For at least a decade, scholars examining colonial influences on the material culture of indigenous populations in the ancient Mediterranean have found recourse in the concept of hybridity. These investigators have recognized that in situations where different cultural groups meet and mix, artifactual and behavioral traits from both the dominant and the subordinate cultures mix, too. Those traits – what might, in other arenas of discourse, be called “memes” – are subsequently given new and localized meanings. The result is something that is neither one culture nor the other, but rather is new and different, something “in between”: a hybrid. This paper examines archaic and classical Thasos as a colonial context in which individuals belonging to different ethnic groups met and negotiated a wide variety of political, economic, and social relationships. Rather than looking at material of a strictly archaeological nature, such as grave goods or domestic assemblages, the subject of this paper will be an application of hybridity theory to Thasian visual arts. A series of relief sculptures found at Thasos shows that the artists who produced them were aware of – and open to – ideas and styles from across the Aegean and beyond, but they were not constrained to rote copying of those ideas. Hybridity therefore offers a powerful interpretative tool for understanding how Thasians adopted and adapted outside influences to suit their own needs, meanings, and society.

Hybridity and ancient art

The first problem that faces art historians and archaeologists working on Thasos is differentiating between local and foreign attributes in the material record. Artworks such as sculpture have often been seen, by virtue of their variability in style, shape, and decoration, as indicative of the identity of the people who created them. While objects produced in antiquity were often very different from culture to culture, they were, however, created in a milieu of constant exchange – not only of goods, but also of ideas – and it is therefore difficult to connect ethnic identifications to artifacts. Several scholars have suggested that even the concept of ethnic identity may be a modern construct unrelated to the kinds of self- and other-identification practiced in antiquity. If ethnicity is to be used as a way to understand individual and group actions, the term needs to be defined in a way that makes sense when applied to the ancient world. Modern conceptions of ethnicity have defined it variously by making reference to genetics, social networks, cultural assemblages, kinship, language, or shared traditions, or sometimes in combinations of these factors.

Jonathan Hall has made the most thorough recent examination of ethnicity in the Greek world, and his work forms a good starting point for a discussion of the subject. Hall focuses his analysis on what he referred to as “definitional criteria [his italics] or ‘core elements’… [which] are a putative subscription to a myth of common descent and kinship, an association with a specific territory and a sense of shared history.” Artifacts, for Hall, are part of “the operational set of distinguishing attributes that tend to be associated with membership in an ethnic group.” He called this set of attributes indicia. The set also includes “biological features, language, religion, or cultural traits.”

The distinction Hall makes is one between the factors that actually define ethnicity (criteria) as opposed to those that are often, but not always, attached to groups but do not define them (indicia). It is more important for a common ethnic identity that a perception exists that kinship and a heritage are shared, and less so that they truly are shared. Therefore, this perception can be held from either inside or outside the group.

Hall’s definition is an attractive one from the point
of view of creating a theoretical basis for understanding ancient ethnicities. As critics have noted, however, it disregards the ways in which material evidence can be used to identify differences between groups – not only with regard to ethnicity, but for class, gender, or status as well. Hall is correct to note that objects themselves do not define ethnicity, but objects are imbued by their makers with meanings connected to aspects of their group’s cultural identity. Eighth-century Greeks, for example, may not have defined their ethnicity, class, or status by the ekphora and protheseis scenes with which they decorated their painted pottery. They did give their pots a feature that refers to those aspects of Greek identity, however, by depicting part of their traditional funeral process. As Emberling has noted, “in the way material culture was used we may find evidence of the [social, political, and economic] boundaries in the ancient society.”

Art objects are components of material culture, which is itself just one part of culture generally, along with religion, language, literature, social networks, politics, and the like. Culture has been described as a system of symbols shared by a group (of which symbols artworks or their attributes might be examples). It has also been defined as a set of practices. As Richard Sewell has shown, however, culture is not one or the other of these things; rather, it is both simultaneously:

To engage in cultural practice means to utilize existing cultural symbols to accomplish some end. The employment of a symbol can be expected to accomplish a particular goal only because the symbols have more or less determinate meanings – meanings specified by their systematically structured relations to other symbols. Hence practice implies system. But it is equally true that the system has no existence apart from the succession of practices that instantiate, reproduce, or – most interestingly – transform it. Hence system implies practice...The most important theoretical question is thus not whether culture should be conceptualized as practice or as a system of symbols and meanings, but how to conceptualize the articulation of system and practice.”

Sewell’s definition of culture shows it to be dynamic, not static, constantly changing as practices – aka actions – produce different meanings in new situations and as symbols – artifacts – are used in innovative ways.

Material culture is similarly dynamic, as practices are changed by the use of new objects and tools, and as practices change objects in reaction to new needs. By combining Hall’s definition of ethnicity – a shared sense of heritage and kinship – with Sewell’s notion of culture, it is possible to understand how artifacts can give information about their producers’ ethnicity without defining it. Objects have attributes that are imbued with the ethnicity of their creators, and they change over time, just as ethnic and cultural relationships do.

In areas where Greeks traded with non-Greeks, such as the hinterland of southern France, scholars have tried to understand interactions by using “world-systems” frameworks that explore the relationship between centers and peripheries. In these models, local leaders in colonized zones (“chiefs” or “big men”) mediated exchanges between centers of production, in the colonizers’ homelands, and peripheral regions, thereby producing differential, status-based access to prestigious imported goods and foreign influences. There are many potential criticisms to be made of world-systems theory, including its emphasis on “macro-scale” economic exchange, rather than on individual transactions and distributions; the mechanistic quality of the process; and the fact that world-systems theory was designed explicitly with modern capitalism, rather than colonization generally, in mind. Most problematic, however, is world-systems theory’s definition of colonizing powers as the “core” and colonized zones as the “periphery.” There were many cores and many peripheries – and a given population center could be either, or both, at any time. Further, the assumption that colonizers and their products were central to the exchange, while consumers in colonized zones were merely peripheral, fails to take into account the full range of power relationships found in economic exchange, whatever the period or location. There is no evidence that individuals in ancient colonial situations were forced to adopt foreign practices, nor that the process of that adoption was inevitable or teleological.

Other researchers, in particular Michael Dietler, have understood the use of imported objects within the theoretical context of “consumption,” where cultural traits selected by local peoples may have had fundamentally different meanings in the new environment. This model is derived from economic studies of the consumption of commodities in anthropology. Perhaps the most important contribution of Dietler’s work is to push the focus of analysis away from the meanings of artifacts to modern observers of colonial situations, and towards the meanings the artifacts had for their users in those situations.

The work of Marshall Sahlins on modern colonialism may have done the most to direct attention away from the perspective of colonizers, which has tended to dominate discourse, and towards that of the colonized. He has demonstrated how indigenous populations faced the same problem of incorporating the presence of colonial expeditions into their worldview as did colonists themselves when dealing with the people they encountered in new lands. Sahlins used the events surrounding the death of Captain Cook at the hands of Polynesian islanders in 1779 as an example. Following multiple visits by Cook to Hawai’i, the islanders began to understand him as acting out the role of Lono, an agricultural deity who returned annually to grant blessings. As part of the Lono myth, the god had to be confronted by the Polynesian king “as cosmic adversaries.” During his time with the Polynesians, Cook thus “metamorphosed from a being of veneration to one with hostility,” without ever having acted in a way that could understandably have aroused such hatred, from the British perspective. The islanders’ interpretation of Cook’s behavior and actions, based on their religious and cultural worldview, however, made it
clear to them that it was necessary for Cook/Lono to be killed as a sacrifice. This is only a single example, though an illustrative one, of how local perspectives must be studied to the same extent as those of the colonizers, if we are to gain any understanding of the shape of events in colonial situations.

Archaeologists such as Yvonne Marshall and Alexandra Maas have adapted Sahlins’ methodology, at least implicitly, from historical questions to evidence from material culture. They examined the use of European ceramics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the indigenous populations of North America, not for domestic purposes for which they were intended, but rather as objects of exchange in native contexts such as potlatches. The objects took on new meanings as they were incorporated into native life. Indeed, the objects became disconnected completely from whatever meanings they had in their original context. As with Sahlins’ work, the activities described by Marshall and Maas are not themselves directly comparable to ancient Thasos. The range of possible interpretations for foreign influence in a colonial context is significantly broadened, however, by the recognition that foreign artifacts could be incorporated into local practices and beliefs with their meanings dramatically altered.

Peter van Dommelen developed the work of Dietler, Sahlins, Marshall, and Maas into a new theoretical understanding of situations in which different cultures mixed, adapting their approaches to the problems of the Greek and Roman world. This new understanding not only takes advantage of work in colonial situations outside the Mediterranean, but also of methods derived from other branches of anthropology, including ethnographic analogy. Hybridity theory recognizes that in situations where two populations meet, the processes of contact and exchange fundamentally change both groups, regardless of differences in power. Artifactual and behavioral traits from both the dominant and the subordinate cultures are selected, or even combined, and given localized meanings. By understanding a culture as hybridized, it is possible to trace the shifting currents of influence from various external sources, as well as to treat the culture as a local and internally consistent creation. Thasian history paints a picture of a society subject to a wide variety of influences, both political and economic. An examination of the relics paced on the city gates will allow consideration of the ways in which these influences were visible in Thasian art and how they changed over time. It will also allow the possibility of understanding what Thasian art was, and how it differed from other contemporary styles.

**Historical context**

Thasos’ location and history are particularly relevant to an understanding of the forms and functions of its material culture. In antiquity, the island lay in one of the most heavily-trafficked areas of the northern Aegean. Rich in natural resources, Thasos is located just a few kilometers off the Thracian coast, near the mouth of the Nestos River. In the Early Iron Age, the region seems to have been one in which members of many different groups moved while seeking commercial opportunities. In this period, the northern Aegean was a frontier zone for Greeks, just as it was for Phoenician traders. The dominant groups in the region, at least until the colonization of Thasos, were indigenous Thracian tribes inhabiting the mainland coast. Thasos traditionally took its name from a Phoenician trader, but it was colonized by settlers from Paros around the middle of the seventh century. The town was located on the northeastern coast of the island, facing Thrace, and its inhabitants constantly tried to preserve their hold on the resources of the mainland.

Thasos became most famous for its wine, but there were also gold mines, marble quarries, and rich forests on both the island and the mainland to attract traders. The relatively extensive literary record concerning Thasos in the archaic and classical periods gives us some idea of life in the region and the relationship of the island to the larger Mediterranean world. The earliest extant literary mention of Thasos comes from Archilochos, who famously compared the island’s shape to “the spine of a donkey, wreathed in unkempt forest.” He described battling – though not always beating – Thracian tribes in the struggle for control of rich territory.

Herodotus was fascinated by the vast wealth of the area, and he visited Thasos in the middle of the fifth century. He noted that the amount of metal resources available for exploitation was so great that Thasian citizens were exempt from taxes. The primary source of revenue was a network of mines on the mainland, such as the one at Scapte Hyle, the so-called “Excavated Forest” that produced 80 talents of gold a year by itself, and less productive ones on the island. The state’s annual surplus reportedly totaled between 200 and 300 talents. Local mines were worked so intensively that Herodotus wrote, “A huge mountain has been turned upside down in the search for ores.”

Thasos’ wealth made it an inviting target for military domination, and, as a result, it was captured no fewer than four times during the fifth century alone. Herodotus gives us an account of the earliest recorded instance of a foreign power attempting to take the island, when Histiaeus of Miletos attacked in 493. Histiaeus was forced to leave his siege before taking Thasos, but the Persian Empire succeeded the following year where he had failed, capturing the island in an apparently uncontested attack. Following the Greek victories of 480 and 479, Thasos seems to have become independent again and joined the Athens and the Delian League. It rebuilt its walls and contributed 30 talents to the League’s treasury. As in other places throughout the Aegean, the development of the League into an Athenian empire was not welcomed at Thasos. It tried to leave the alliance in 465, according to Thucydides, prompted by disagreements over the concessions for mines. Cimon besieged Thasos for three years and, after capturing the city, imposed a huge
had spent his exile in Thrace before returning for his
the same households or tombs as local plain wares.45 At the
gold-mines during the 420’s.40 While serving as general
area and to have owned concessions for working local
Thucydides claims to
continuing to own land in Thrace; Thucydides claims to
in 424, he harbored his detachment of ships at Thasos. 41
Thucydides’ failure to arrive from there in time to save
the Athenian colony of Amphipolis from an attack by the
Spartan general Brasidas was the cause of his twenty-
to Athena’s island to discourage other allies from trying to leave the League.39 During the Peloponnesian
War, Thasos appealed to Sparta for support when it left
the League in 411, at which time it re-built its walls, but it
was brought back into the fold by the Athenians in 407.39
Sparta finally did assist the Thasians in 405, capturing the
island and making it independent once more.

Perhaps the most important literary source for understanding the presence of foreigners at Thasos is Thucydides. He was personally and intimately connected to the region, and in some ways his story is paradigmatic of Athenian interest in the area during the sixth and fifth centuries. Close relationships between Athens and local tribes allowed his father, Olorus, a Thracian noble, to marry an Athenian woman and become an Athenian citizen, probably in the second quarter of the fifth century. They seem to have continued to own land in Thrace; Thucydides claims to have had special connections to the population of the area and to have owned concessions for working local gold-mines during the 420’s.40 While serving as general in 424, he harbored his detachment of ships at Thasos.41 Thucydides’ failure to arrive from there in time to save the Athenian colony of Amphipolis from an attack by the Spartan general Brasidas was the cause of his twenty-year exile from Athens. One later source believed that Thucydides died in Thrace around 400.42

Thucydides was not the only wealthy Athenian with substantial interests in the natural resources of Thrace during the sixth and fifth centuries. The tyrant Pisistratus had spent his exile in Thrace before returning for his final, successful attempt to become tyrant at Athens.43 Eion, at the mouth of the Strymon River, was taken by Athens as a trading port in 476, and Amphipolis had been founded in 437 by an Athenian citizen, Hagnon.44 In this context, Thucydides’ family history does not seem at all unusual.

The picture that has been painted by the ancient literature thus far shows Thasos as a center for overseas trade, and for the mixing and mingling of members of many groups there. Thracians, followed by Phoenicians, Parians, Persians, Athenians, and undoubtedly others, too, must have been common visitors to the island and town. Although early relations between local tribes and colonizing settlers or traders may have been hostile, as evidenced by the poetry of Archilochos, Thucydides’ genealogy shows that, at least by the fifth century, elite members of the indigenous population dealt with outsiders on an equal footing. Despite the region’s political instability, trade probably continued to thrive. Foreign merchants brought desirable goods with them to trade for the Thasian products they wanted. The purchase of imports by people in the northern Aegean created a mixed material culture, as seen, for example, in the archaeological discovery of Attic black gloss fine ware in the same households or tombs as local plain wares.45 At the same time, Thasians probably did not stay at home either, instead traveling to other major centers to bring back still more goods – and ideas. This is particularly likely in the case of artists, who may have traveled as part of their education in sculpting or painting in various styles.

Given the representation of so many different groups in the literary evidence and the intensity with which they seem to have pursued their interests in and around Thasos, it becomes increasingly likely that we should expect to see evidence of the presence of foreigners in the archaeological record. A series of reliefs placed on gates and passageways at Thasos, as large public displays meant for natives and visitors alike, provide a perfect opportunity to examine foreign influences on local art. The use of sculpture on gates, particularly in a programmatic way, is almost unknown in the Greek world, though it does appear in other parts of the Mediterranean. The sculptures from Thasos use local stylistic motifs while also borrowing from foreign traditions, including those of Anatolia, the Near East, Athens, and the Aegean islands. They show how artistic influences from outside the island were transformed by local taste and interests, and further how these mixtures themselves changed over time. Likewise, the themes these works express are determined by interests both local (e.g., local religious beliefs and patterns of commercial exchange) and universal (e.g., liminality and protection). The sculptures are thus a kind of hybrid art. They negotiate a space fraught with political issues of power and subjugation, doing so through the public display of locally important iconic images in a cosmopolitan setting. The thesis of this paper is that there is a connection between economic and political developments and the artistic influences found in Thasian gate reliefs. By examining these connections, it may be possible to create a model for the examination of art produced in other situations where people of different cultures met and mixed.

The gate reliefs
Greek and French scholars have conducted major investigations on the island since the middle of the nineteenth century, and there is a wide range of published archaeological data. Material evidence that can be adduced for understanding Thasian culture includes architecture, coins, amphorai (and their stamps), inscriptions, and the city’s plan. The gates were an integral part of the city’s fortifications, and there is some evidence for their construction phases (Fig. 14.1). Some, if not all, of the circuit was certainly standing before the end of the sixth century, as demonstrated by the construction style, including vertical drafting at wall turns, and the dates of the earliest reliefs.46 Herodotus tells us that between Histiaeus’ invasion in 493 and that of the Persians in 492, Thasos invested its surplus wealth in strengthening its fortifications.47 In 491, a rumor was circulated by Thasos’ local rivals that the island was about to rise in revolt.48 The Persians responded by forcing Thasos to tear down its walls. A.W. Lawrence hypothesized that this demolition was never completed.49 In any case, the walls were probably re-built in the period between Thasos regaining
its independence in 479 and the difficult siege by Cimon in 465–463. Following the Athenian capture they were torn down again. Some sections, such as the stretch of irregular ashlar masonry found between the Gate of Parmenon and the Gate of the Silenos on the southeast of the city, were rebuilt in the fourth and third centuries.

Of the eleven known gates, at least seven were decorated with some kind of relief sculpture. These have been studied and published by Picard and Holtzmann. There is no extant literary reference to any of the reliefs on the gates. In some cases, as with a pair of eyes and a nose carved near the Gate of Parthenon, the sculpture does not seem to be a planned part of the gate’s design. More often, however, the images are integral to the gates they decorate. They depict divine and semi-divine creatures, but never characters that can be certainly identified as normal mortals. The figures appear alone or in groups, at varying scales. The dimensions of the images range from under a meter on a side, as with the relief on the Gate of the Goddess in the Chariot, to almost 2.5m tall, as with the enormous figure on the Gate of the Silenos. The subjects can occasionally be related to their location in the city, but are also likely to be linked to other considerations, such as religious interests.

Fig. 14.1 General plan of Thasos city. [Grandjean and Salvat 2000, fig. 12]
The Gate of Heracles and Dionysus

The earliest known reliefs adorning a gate at Thasos are those of Heracles and Dionysus, located on the west side of the city. An archaic inscription placed below the Heracles relief explains the choice of these two figures: “The children of Zeus and Semele and deep-robed Alcmene are guardians of the city.” Their placement at this location is explained by the gate’s position on the road that goes directly to the city’s Sanctuary of Heracles, continues through the south side of the Agora, and ends at the Dionysion. Heracles, wearing his traditional lion-skin, kneels on the eastern side of the gate, facing out of the city and drawing a bow (Fig. 14.2). This relief, now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, is relatively small, measuring 71cm high by 100cm wide. Heracles’ body is compact, even compressed into the frame, with massive thighs. The mane of his lion-skin is defined by small, diamond-shaped tufts of fur. Heracles’ body is closely reminiscent of his depiction on the east pediment of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi, dating ca. 525. The lion-skin is knotted at Heracles’ waist, covering a chiton that falls between his legs in S-shaped double curves. This drapery style does not appear before 510, giving a stylistic terminus post quem for the sculpture.

The Dionysus relief is now missing. It was lost sometime after its transfer to Istanbul, where it was seen along with the Heracles relief in June 1884. It is preserved today only in a drawing by a local doctor named Christidis at the time of its excavation in 1866 (Fig. 14.3). The slab, estimated by Holtzmann to measure around 70cm by 100–120cm, depicted Dionysus holding a branch and leading three maenads into Thasos in a komastic procession, the parade that formed a crucial part of Dionysiac ritual and symposia. A viewer entering the city would be taking the same route as this divine komos, and would thus be implicated in its revels. The relief was on the west side of the gate, facing the Heracles. An inscription found with the relief, probably dating to the beginning of the fourth century, described regulations for the planting of land belonging to Heracles near the gate. Based on the location of the inscription and certain “non-archaic” features in the drawing by Christidis, Holtzmann has hypothesized that the relief recovered in 1866 was not the original archaic one, which he believes had been placed beside the Heracles and removed between 491 and 463. Instead, he argues that the Dionysus relief drawn by Christidis was a Classical replacement, dating between 463 and the early fourth-century date supplied by the inscription.

What were the artistic sources for these depictions? The Thasian Heracles has an Ionian style, defined particularly by the size and definition of the musculature. This may

Fig. 14.2 Heracles relief from the east jamb of the Gate of Heracles and Dionysus, Thasos. Istanbul Archaeological Museum 718. Dated around 510–500. [Grandjean and Salviat 2000, fig. 86]
be due to Thasian connections with its metropolis, Paros. As already noted, this Heracles also looks very similar to another Heracles found on the east pediment of the Siphnian Treasury, emphasizing his Ionian origins. His lionskin’s mane is similar to the one seen on a lion attacking a bull on the east stairway of the Apadana at Persepolis (Fig. 14.4). The Near Eastern origin of this style is shown by comparison with Babylonian lion hunt reliefs from Nineveh dating to the seventh century. The image of Heracles the archer became iconic for Thasians. Several series of coins minted starting in at least 411 show either a silenos with a maenad or Dionysus on the obverse and Heracles on the reverse, in the same pose found on the gate (Fig. 14.5).60 The kantharos depicted at Heracles' feet further emphasizes the island's self-identification with its most widely distributed economic asset, wine. Garlan has also analyzed a group of fourth-century amphora handle stamps depicting Heracles as an archer.61

With regard to the other relief, Carpenter has shown that archaic Dionysiac iconography was probably developed in the medium of vase-painting, primarily at Athens, over the course of the sixth century.62 Indeed, scenes including the god, such as komoi, are not commonly found in sculpture relative to painting; the phenomenon of using pots for depictions of Dionysus is probably connected with their use for drinking wine. Holtzmann has specifically compared the scene from Thasos of Dionysus holding up a branch to a scene on a neck-amphora by the Kleophrades Painter (Fig. 14.6).63 In effect, it appears that Thasians adapted a scene known from one medium and used it for a new purpose: to identify themselves with the patron of their best-known industry.

The choice of these two deities as guardians of Thasos deserves mention in the context of contact between cultures. Heracles is a quintessentially hybrid character, bridging the realms of mortal and immortal. He was culturally hybridized as well. Herodotus told of a connection between Thasos and Phoenicia: "At Tyre I saw yet another temple of the so-called Thasian Heracles. Then I went to Thasos, too, where I found a temple of Heracles built by the Phoenicians, who made a settlement there when they voyaged in search of Europe; now they did so as much as five generations before the birth of Hercules the son of Amphitryon in Hellas."64 A much later source, Pausanias, claimed that Thasians were actually descended from Phoenicians rather than Parians, and their worship of Heracles was thus connected to earlier worship of the hero at the Tyrian temple mentioned by Herodotus.65 However, Heracles was also strongly connected with Thasos' metropolis, Paros. The two cities had the same magistracies, the same alphabet, and the same religious calendar.66 According to Apollodorus,
Heracles freed Paros from the rule of Minos and his sons. Thus it would be unsurprising to see his worship instituted on Thasos as well. Apollodorus even associated Heracles directly with Thasos, saying that, “having come to Thasos and subjugated the Thracians who dwelt in the island, [Heracles] gave it to the sons of Androgeus to dwell in.”67 The important point, of course, is not whether any of these sources are literally true, but that it may be more useful for understanding this sculpture to think of the character of Heracles at Thasos as mixed – part Greek, part Near Eastern. Thasians themselves may have thought of their hero as having dual natures, reflecting the hybridity evident in other aspects of their world.

The power and protection of Dionysus must have
seemed particularly important to Thasians as the fame and economic value of their wine began to increase around the Mediterranean in the sixth century. The high quality of Thasos' wine showed the special favor bestowed on its people by Dionysus. He, too, was a god with hybrid aspects. He was the only Olympian whose mother was mortal – though he was actually born from Zeus’ thigh. Perhaps yet more important for the interpretation presented here is the fact that, by the Classical period at least, Dionysus was thought by Greeks to have non-Greek origins – in Phrygia, or, even closer to Thasos, in Thrace.68

The Gate of the Silenos

The gate immediately east of the Gate of Heracles and Dionysus is also decorated with a relief. The panel on the western post carries a relief at a slightly oblique angle to the wall, following the course of the road as it runs out of the city (Fig. 14.7). This feature makes the sculpture clearly visible to those approaching from outside. The single figure is impressive in its scale. Carved from a massive single block, and standing 2.42m high, it is apparently the tallest extant relief figure in the Greek world.69 It is damaged in some parts, but a bearded figure in profile can clearly be seen walking into the city (Fig. 14.8). In addition to his human attributes, he has a horse’s tail and long, flowing hair similar to a mane. The figure is a silenos, a half-human, half-animal follower of the god Dionysus, and one of the deity’s most important emblems. He carries a stemmed kantharos high in his right hand, while his left hand remains free and slightly ahead of him. The silenos wears a pair of calf-high boots with rolled tops and pointed toes; apart from this attribute he is nude. The heel of his back foot is lifted, and both of his legs are bent, giving a naturalistic sense of motion that helps to place this sculpture at the very end of the Archaic period. Stylistically, the silenos has been seen as fitting the Ionian style, with massive muscles and a “picturesque taste for detail,” but that style is not specifically Parian.70 Holtzmann points to the northwest coast of Asia Minor, relating the silenos to the Hermes found on the Siphnian Treasury.71 The silenos’ pubic hair, too, has similarities to a kouros on Samos (Inv. 77).72 Picard called the silenos’ boots “very Ionian and Anatolian; they are of such importance because [they give] the whole piece an impression of the ‘exotic.’”73

As a single over-life-size figure placed on the jamb of a portal, and depicted as entering an “interior” space – that is to say, the interior of the city – the silenos composition is directly comparable to the reliefs found at Persepolis and elsewhere. Indeed, sculptures regularly appeared in Persian palace architecture, on window
jambs, door jambs, and gateways. Sculptures of a king followed by two attendants on the jambs of the north and south entrances of the Council Hall at Persepolis, from the time of Darius I (reigned 522–486), are particularly good comparanda for the Thasos reliefs (Fig. 14.9).74 The symbolic importance of the silenos to Thasians is clear in the context of the island’s fame and prominence in Aegean wine production and trade. When silenoi are depicted in art – most commonly in vase-painting – they are often seen taking part in komoi. A single silenos, as here, might have caused an ancient viewer to think of komoi, of Thasos’ connection to Dionysus, and, just as with the previous gate, it would make the viewer a participant in a komos each time they entered the city here.

**The Gate of Zeus and Hera**

To the west of the Gate of Heracles and Dionysus stands the Gate of Zeus and Hera. On the left side of the gate, in the post, is a sculpture measuring 116 by 72cm.75 The relief shows two draped female figures framed by a naiskos façade (Fig. 14.10). The larger female is seated, facing out of the city, with her feet supported by a low stool. The woman’s left arm is down, beside her lap, holding a rod or scepter, while her right arm, badly worn, appears to be raised towards the curls of hair that fall on her chest. Her head is missing. The standing female figure’s body faces to the viewer’s left, away from the city, but her head appears to be turned right, towards the seated woman. She is interrupted by the seated woman as she prepares to depart. The standing woman also seems to have wings, making her a divine messenger – Iris. The other woman has thus been identified as Hera. The naiskos pediment is surmounted by a central acroterion in the shape of a bird, perhaps an eagle, spreading its wings. On the other post of the gate was a sculpture, approximately the same size as the first, now partly preserved in four fragments (Fig. 14.11). The poor condition of the fragments does not allow much to be said about the sculpture, except that it also contains two male figures, one seated and facing out of the city, and the other with his head turned to face the first. The seated figure has a bare chest, although he is draped below. These figures, too, are framed by a naiskos façade with three acroteria, two of which are at least partially preserved. The central one is again a bird with spread wings. By analogy with the more complete work on the facing post, the two males have been identified as Zeus and Hermes.

Based on their general affinity with the architectural style of classical Attic grave stelai, these works have traditionally been seen as products of the late fifth century.76 Holtzmann has looked more closely at the iconography of the reliefs, arriving at the conclusion that they are composite images, formed from iconographic details whose dates range from before 480 (Iris’ sickle-
shaped wings) to the third quarter of the fourth century (the floral corner acroteria on the naikos). He therefore places the sculpture before 315.77 The sculptures’ “eclecticism,” as he calls it, is not particular to Thasos in this period – indeed, it is found in works carved in Athens (Holtzmann cites, for example, Athens NAM 1425 and NAM 54).78 Here again, however, we see Thasian artists adopting a type of sculpture known from a context that was not only different, but foreign – the Attic grave stele, complete with the characteristic seated figures and naikos framing device – and using it in a new way. The people depicted are not the deceased with a family member or servant, and the scene does not take place in the underworld or in a real domestic space. We are shown, rather, the supreme Greek deity and his wife, at home on Olympus with personifications of their command, their respective messengers. It is an expression of the protection of Zeus and Hera over Thasos, but in a format normally employed for grief and memorial.

Why did Thasians choose this way to invoke protective gods? There is no extant mythology to connect Zeus and Hera to Thasos. The choice of these gods here may have more to do with their status as a couple – thereby allowing the creation and placement of two reliefs facing each other, just as stelai outside the gate did – in conjunction with a desire to mimic the grave markers nearby stylistically. It is possible, but perhaps less likely given his position of secondary importance on the relief with Zeus, that Hermes is presented here specifically because of his role as guide for dead souls to the underworld. A better reason for the design of this pair of reliefs is probably the proximity of one of the city’s main cemeteries, which lay on the road that entered the city at this point. That road, as with most roads approaching Greek cities, was lined on both sides with stelai memorializing the dead. An example of such a grave stele found at Thasos is that of Philis, now in the Louvre and dating 450–440 (Fig. 14.12).79 The two reliefs on the gate would have continued the string of sculptures seen by travelers entering the city. The gate would have become an integral part of an unbroken whole. At the same time, depicting the gods in a mode normally associated with funerals created a thematic break that would prepare a newcomer for entrance into the urban space. The normal single meaning in classical Athenian sculpture

Fig. 14.9 King with attendants entering the Council Hall at Persepolis. West jamb of south entrance to Council Hall. Dated to the reign of Darius I (522–486). [Schmidt 1953, pl. 75]

Fig. 14.10 Hera and Iris relief, from west jamb of the Gate of Zeus and Hera, Thasos. Dated around 325–315. [Holtzmann 1994, pl. 18]
of two figures regarding each other, one seated, within an architectural enclosure, was enhanced, producing a fascinating dual significance.

**Conclusion**

This review of some reliefs located on gates at Thasos allows for some conclusions about the production of art in an arena of mingling between different groups. The sculptures were a hybrid of foreign motifs and local preoccupations with security. While Greeks did not normally decorate city entrances with sculpture, the idea had a long history in the Near East and Anatolia. Picard noted Hittite entrances at Karatepe as comparanda for the practice at Thasos. It seems likelier, however, that the reliefs from Persepolis, already mentioned in connection with the *silenos* sculpture, being much closer in date, and with Persia having recognized connections to Thasos in the sixth and fifth centuries, are the ancestors (directly or indirectly) of the Thasian works. In contrast with the subjects of the reliefs from Thasos, the subject is rarely divine in Persian gate sculpture. The usual depiction
shows the king or other royal human figures, or animals, or humans with animals. This distinction may point to a difference in the function of the Thasian reliefs. While in both contexts the sculptures were meant to advertise power and strength, the Persian reliefs are statements of the strength of the king. The Thasian sculptures make reference to divine protection rather than earthly power. As has been seen in the three examples described above, the protection of the gods is more than merely metaphorical in these compositions. The deities’ real physical and spatial relationships with the city are emphasized: the gods enter Thasos, defend it, or send assistance to it in the form of messengers. The themes of the Thasian sculptures are also different from those in Persia. They are intimately connected not only to political issues, but also to economic ones, especially the wine trade. Thasos used its public art to emphasize its economic advantages, which could thus be seen as evidence of continued political importance and influence.

Thasians were clearly aware of artistic styles and formats created far from their home, including the Persian use of transitional spaces as loci for the placement of sculpture, the depiction of Dionysus in Athenian art, and the phenomenon of classical Attic grave stelai. This awareness must be attributed to their broad contacts with the Aegean and beyond. It also seems from the mixing of styles in individual works that political and military domination was not the only factor in artists’ choice of motifs. The Heracles relief, for example, was produced during an independent period in Thasos’ history, but in the shadow of the Persian empire, and it therefore draws on both Ionian and Near Eastern traditions. The economic fact of widespread trade – perhaps especially in the movement of local marble around the Aegean – is the likeliest explanation for the exposure of Thasian artists to the various styles and ideas seen on the island. Foreign traders came to the island to buy resources, undoubtedly bringing luxury goods, including art, with them. Thasians traveled abroad, too, selling their wares in foreign ports, gaining exposure to different cultures. The artists on Thasos responded to these influences by combining and transforming traditions to create a distinctive hybrid, yet local style, characterized by new notions of the ways in which art could be used to express power and strength. By understanding Thasian gate reliefs as hybrid works, it is possible to fully appreciate both the foreign influences and the local interests that led to their creation.

Of course, none of these people are responsible for any errors made here.

**Notes**

2. For emphasis on the “in-between-ness” of hybrid cultures, I thank Bernard Knapp (personal communication).
3. This perspective developed in the nineteenth century, when scholarship and nationalism became intertwined in the European academic world. Racial differences that were identified between different European nations became the starting point for analysis of archaeological remains as ethnically categorizable. Boas emphasized the uniqueness of cultures, and Montelius developed the first typologies of artifacts. The two approaches were combined by Kosinna in his use of German prehistoric archaeology to prove the superiority of the German nation. Finally, Childe adapted Kosinna’s approach to culture and artifacts while discarding its racist underpinnings (Trigger 1989, 148–173).
5. See note 4 supra. Kosinna thought of German ethnicity as genetic. V.G. Childe associated ethnicity in the past with what he referred to as “archaeological cultures.” Childe’s terminology explicitly equated groups of artifacts with groups of people (Emberling 1999, 126).
12. The critical distinction to make in defining ethnicity from material culture is between the maker of an object and the user of that object. Because users may not employ an object for its intended purpose, their ethnicity cannot be derived from an analysis of that object. There is, however, some probability that the object reflects aspects of its creator’s identity.
13. Emberling 1999, 127. It would be more accurate to replace the word “used” in Emberling’s statement with “produced,” when it comes to analyzing the archaeological record. Antonaccio went further when she wrote, “Hall does not address the ways in which material culture shapes action or practice in a reflexive relationship (2003, 57).” See Sewell quoted below for a discussion of how objects and practices affect each other.
17. Antonaccio (2003) has deployed Sewell’s definition to understand the tension between a jointly-held culture identity of “Greekness” in the archaic and classical periods and the ways in which different poleis simultaneously constructed their own varied and local cultures.
19. World-systems theory was developed by Wallerstein (1974).
21. Dietler 1997, 483–488. Dietler developed the theoretical framework of consumption for his dissertation on Greek...
imports in southern France (1990), and much of his other work relies upon it (1998, 1999, and forthcoming). He has used the different implications of drinking Coca-Cola in the United States, where it is a relatively generic product, and drinking the same beverage in East Africa, where Coca-Cola has high status and is reserved for entertaining guests, as a modern analogy to demonstrate the theoretical underpinnings of the consumption approach. Consumption has also been used in other contexts such as historical archaeology (Cook et al. 1992). Other authors who work on the classical world have been less rigorously theoretical about their use of the term, preferring to see only an economic side to consumption (see, for example, many of the papers in Crielaard et al., eds 1999).

25 Ibid. Obeyesekere forcefully criticized Sahlin for his “assumption” that the Polynesian islanders were so naive and irrational as to really believe Cook was the god (Obeyesekere 1992). Sahlin responded to these complaints by showing that Obeyesekere’s argument, which was meant to restore dignity to the islanders, in fact refused to try to contend with the islanders’ own interpretation of the events (Sahlin 1995).
28 Van Dommelen 1997.
30 Aristophanes Ekklesiastai 1112–1124, Hdt. 6.46.3.
31 Archilochus fr. 22 (West 1993, 7).
32 West 1993, fr. 5, 93.
33 Hdt. 6.46–47.
34 Hdt. 6.47.2 (translated in Rawlinson 1942).
35 For Histiaeus’ abortive siege, Hdt. 6.28. For the Persian capture of the city, Hdt. 6.44.
36 The payment of a 30 talent tribute to the League was instated in the 440’s, replacing an earlier levy of three talents. Originally Thasos provided 30 ships, but converted its responsibility to a cash payment between 478 and 454 (Meritt et al. 1953, 239–240). Meiggs argued that Thasos’ normal responsibility before the revolt of 465–463 was 30 talents, but that the amount was reduced to account for the new indemnity forced on the losers. In any case, as Meiggs notes, even at the higher tribute rate, Thasos was paying the same amount as Aegina (1972, 85–86, 573).
37 Thuc. 1.100–101.
38 Thuc. 1.101.5.
39 For the rebuilding of Thasos’ walls, Thuc. 8.64. For the capture of the city in 407, Diod. Sic. 13.72.
40 Thuc. 4.105.
41 Thuc. 4.104.
42 Marcellinus 19.
43 Hdt. 1.64.
44 For Eion, Hdt. 7.107, 7.113. For Amphipolis, Thuc. 4.102.
45 Large quantities of Attic black gloss pottery found at local sites and dating to the fifth and fourth centuries are on display in the nearby archaeological museums of Thessaloniki, Abdera, Kavala, Komotini, and Samothrace.
46 Lawrence 1979, 241.
47 Hdt. 6.46.2.
48 Hdt. 6.46.1.
49 Lawrence 1979, 115.
50 Grandjean and Salvat 2000.
52 The maenads shown with Dionysus on the Gate of Heracles and Dionysus are not “normal” mortals. They are more than merely devotees – divinely inspired, and existing outside of normal temporal and spatial boundaries. The Passage of the Theoroi, East of the Agora, may form an exception to this rule, but that sculpture does not appear on one of the city gates.
54 IG XII.8.356.
55 Ridgeway 1993, 106.
56 Holtzmann 1994, 14 n. 54.
58 IG XII.8.265.
59 Holtzmann’s reconstruction is a complicated one for a sculpture whose composition and context are not well understood, and it demonstrates the difficulty of working on artworks known only from second-hand sources.
63 Munich J408, 8732, and 2344 (Holtzmann 1994, 24). He notes that Dionysus holding a branch, especially up high, at the level of his head, is a rare motif at the end of the archaic period.
64 Hdt. 2.44.3–4 (translated in Rawlinson 1942).
65 Paus. 5.25.12.
67 Apollodoros 2.5.9.
68 Linear B tablets containing Dionysus’ name confirm that he was worshipped in Greece during the Mycenaean period, but his classical mythology – especially as seen in Euripides’ Bachai – was more complicated.
71 The stylistic affinity of the silenos to the Siphonian Hermes has been questioned by Barringer (1998, 205).
73 Picard 1962, 95.
74 Schmidt 1953, 116.
75 Holtzmann 1994, 68.
76 Boardman 1985,182.
77 Holtzmann 1994, 76–77. Around the same time, the entire gate seems to have been revamped and given a monumental entrance with a projecting tower. The connection between the gate renovations and the placement of the sculptures is difficult to prove (at least in part because the new tower would have blocked much of the natural light necessary for viewing the sculptures), but assigning the sculptures a date in the fourth century is less problematic.
78 Holtzmann 1994, 78.
80 Picard 1962, 42.
81 For the building of Thasos’ walls, Thuc. 8.64. For the capture of the city in 407, Diod. Sic. 13.72.
82 Thuc. 4.105.
83 Thuc. 4.104.
84 Marcellinus 19.
85 Hdt. 1.64.
86 For Eion, Hdt. 7.107, 7.113. For Amphipolis, Thuc. 4.102.
87 Large quantities of Attic black gloss pottery found at local sites and dating to the fifth and fourth centuries are on display in the nearby archaeological museums of Thessaloniki, Abdera, Kavala, Komotini, and Samothrace.