

Pegasus among the gods

Pegasus, the mythic winged horse, is one of the easiest characters to recognise in ancient art. He is shown on his own, as on the tondo of a **skyphos** or drinking cup [[Symposion 2](#)] or with one of the many heroes or gods. Poseidon was Pegasus' father, Bellerophon his first rider (Hesiod tells us of the fight between the hero and the Chimaera in his *Theogony*) and Zeus his master. Pegasus carried Zeus' lightning and thunder. With his hoof, Pegasus created the fountain of Hippocrene, later used by the Muses. Pegasus is shown with Nike, the goddess of victory, on a **skyphos** [[Myth and Religion 23](#)]. With this simple representation of the two winged creatures the artist uses the viewer's knowledge of Pegasus' myth to suggest a relation between the two characters: he reminds us that Pegasus, born out of the severed head of the monster Medousa, could be the symbol of the victory of Greek intelligence and strength over fear and darkness.

The images on ancient Greek pots were often related to the object's function. The **skyphos** used at drinking parties, for example, displays the god of wine, Dionysos, on the sides, and Pegasus in the **tondo** (bottom) [[Symposion 21](#)]. Here Pegasus is simply one of many mythical creatures who might be found on the tondo of a drinking cup, to be revealed when the wine in the cup was drunk.

The painter might adapt characters found in regional cults and beliefs to accommodate the tastes of local people. Pegasus is connected with the goddess of warfare and wisdom, Athena, as they decorate the two faces of a Corinthian coin [[Greece xxx](#)]. People seeing these two characters together would immediately remember that Athena had caused Pegasus' birth by helping Perseus to kill Medousa. She also made it possible for the hero from Corinth, Bellerophon, to ride the winged horse into many adventures by giving him a golden bridle. Corinth's coin here celebrates its local hero city by showing his horse, Pegasus, and the supporting goddess, Athena. In this manner, ancient objects were not merely decorative, but gave people a way to interact with the myths they passed on through generations.

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