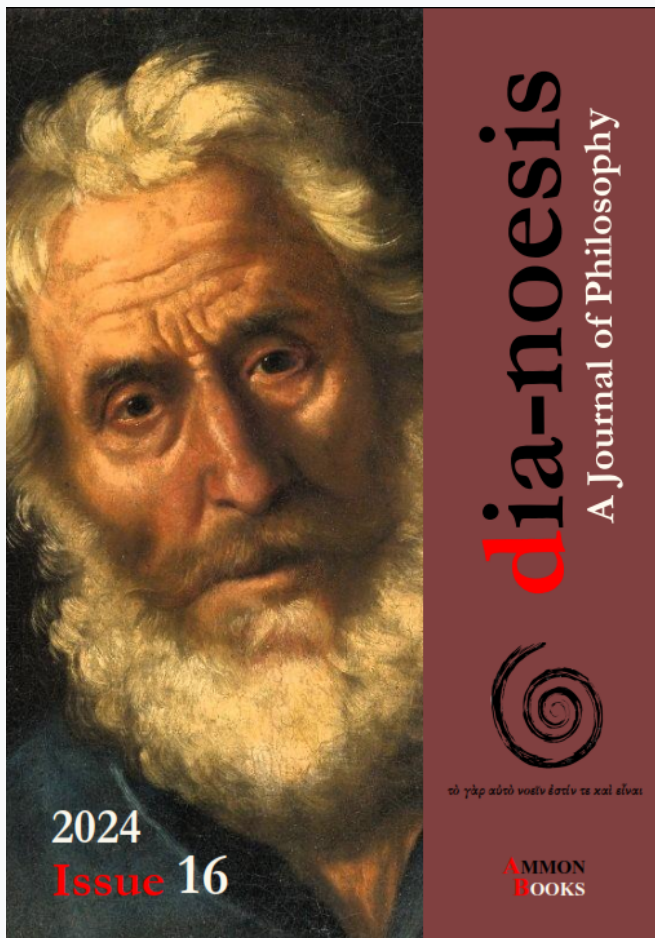


## Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy

Vol 16 (2024)

Philosophy in Late Antiquity Middle Platonism, Neopythagoreanism, and Neoplatonism



### Representation of Harmony in Greek Vase Painting

*Voula Lambropoulou*

doi: [10.12681/dia.39540](https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.39540)

#### To cite this article:

Lambropoulou, V. (2024). Representation of Harmony in Greek Vase Painting. *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 16, 211–218. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.39540>

## Representation of Harmony in Greek Vase Painting

Voula Lambropoulou,  
*Professor, University of Athens*  
voula.lambropoulou@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

*Harmony*, as the representative of Order and Beauty in the world, belongs to the holy circle of *Aphrodite*. It is a beautiful harmony coming from opposites, a *subject* well known in the ancient Cosmogonies. Those among Greeks, who created cosmogonies, are very fond of cosmogonic myths which usually began with love and marriage. The intellectual centre of Greece now is Athens. Here all the arts are cultivated. Here too the Muses establish themselves who now give birth to Harmony. The view of Harmony is the case of graceful, brilliant art and the beginning of symmetry and imperishable unity of the sciences represented by the Muses, and found in the symmetry of beauty and intellect. But above all she brings harmony to the souls and balance and sophrosyne.

**Keywords:** Harmony, Order, Beauty, Greek Vase Painting, cosmogony

The 'Harmony' in early Greek philosophy, is the union of opposites principles (inities) or elements.<sup>1</sup> In mythology Harmony is the daughter of Aphrodite, Goddess of Beauty and Love, and Ares the God of War.<sup>2</sup> Harmony, therefore, is the result of two opposite deities. In this case the male and female principles were *presented* by these two Gods. *It is* a beautiful harmony coming from opposites, a *subject* well known in the ancient Cosmogonies. Those among Greeks, who created cosmogonies, are very fond of cosmogonic myths which usually began with love and marriage<sup>3</sup>.

Before cosmology were cosmogony and theogony. Genesis was conceived as birth, and birth is the result of marriage. The chief marriage of the early cosmogonies is the union of Sky and Earth. On the whole, in Greek Cosmology, Earth and Heaven are essentially the female *and* male principles.<sup>4</sup> In the gap 'between' their divided forms appears the winged figure of the Cosmic Eros.<sup>5</sup> However, a lot has been said about these mythical marriages, the theogonies, the Chaos<sup>6</sup> and the coming of Eros to the world. It was Eros, therefore, who united the two opposite Gods out of whom Harmony was born. According to *mythology she* belonged to, and was worshipped in, Boeotia.<sup>7</sup> However, the Harmony of theogony and the local Theban worship<sup>8</sup> is *present as the* mother of *muses*, like Mnemosyne in Attica.<sup>9</sup>

*Harmony*, as the representative of Order and Beauty in the world, belongs to the holy circle of *Aphrodite*. *In the wedding of Harmony and Kadmus, Apollo and parents were present*. The ceremony is described by Pindarus, Theognis, Euripides, Scholiasts and vividly by Nonnos. Even in Pausanias' time the abode of Harmony and the spot where the Muses sang the nuptial ballad, were considered sights worth seeing. The painters, too, turned with excessive zeal to the presentation of this famous ceremony so one could *see on* the throne of Bathucelus in Amylca the gods *bringing bridal presents* at the wedding Harmony.<sup>10</sup> All this we can gather from some evidence found from the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup>. We have as an example the **Vase of frangois**, of which Harmony's parents, Aphrodite and

Ares, are depicted as being present at the ceremony too. But even more important proof than this is a 5<sup>th</sup> century black-figured **Attican amphora from Region**, on which Apollo, as the inscription names him, dressed in a long mantle like that of the guitar players walks like a chariot pulled by a lion and boar playing the harp. On the chariot there stand the *Harmonia* and the *Kadmos*.<sup>11</sup>

Similar presentations are seen on ancient Ionian **rings from Etrouria**; one of these rings is thought to belong to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Also, on a **vase of the 4<sup>th</sup> century found in Vulci** but today kept in the Attican collection of Berlin (a very similar fragment was also found in the collection of Neapolis under the number 3226) and thought to have been made by the Dorians working in Athens we make the following: Kadmus is depicted fighting with the Theban dragon. The Gods are present too. Next to Kadmus we notice Harmony; there is an inscription naming her. The picture which is facing us must refer, judging from its mode of composition, to another presentation of the 5<sup>th</sup> century which is most probably under the influence of Polygnotus. Kadmus before his fight with the dragon, is shown on a **vase from Krimea (Hermitage no.2189)**. However, it is not certain whether Harmony is present. If, for the evidence proof of **the vase of Berlin** we take in consideration the above views, according to which Kadmus kills the dragon and frees Harmony from him, then we must conclude that the reason behind the killing of the dragon was to complement the legend with other versions too, such as that of the northern legend, Si guardakvida.

In the depiction of an **Attican oak-like lekynthus** with gold decoration Harmony is found again amongst other named figures. In the middle there is a seated female figure, Aphrodite, looking to the left at Eros who seated in her hand; from left Peitho is approaching, with Ygeia following behind; *Τύχη* (Fortune), who belongs to the middle group, is standing below; to the right of Fortune there is a virgin standing with an inscription naming her *'Armonian'*. This is the Harmony that the vase painter presents as the mother of the Muses, naturally not thinking of Euripides, and moves

into the group of the intimate and friendly deities. All these figures are ethereal as if they came from the hand of an inspired artist, and they are presented of worship but from the Attican culture which derives from the common property of intellectual grandeur and the public consciousness. Such characteristics point to a *similarity with* the theory of the world in Pericle's and Plato's time.

In the same way she is presented on an *óvoç in epinetron from Eretria of the second* half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. We see Aphrodite with the attendants consisting of Eros, Harmony, Peitho, Core and Hemeros, being driven before our eyes. When Harmony broke the bounds of the worship in Boeotia and reach the Attican grounds where all the arts and sciences flourished, just after all the bright victories *of* the Greeks, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, then Aeschylus thought it wise not to present her as *the daughter of the* wild god of War, the destructive Ares, and so presented her as the goddess giving blessings and belonging from now on the public religion, the daughter of Zeus. Also, in the above described epinetron from Eretria, there appear on the side below Pyleus and Thetis engaged in a fight; further down there follows the wedding of Admitus and Alkestis and finally the wedding of Zeus and Hera. Nonnos (XIII, 351) copies from their wedding feasts the apples of Esperides, which custom he incorporates into the Theban tradition. Zeus, as it goes, appointed Harmony, the daughter *of* Ares *and* Aphrodite, to be the wife of Kadmus *and on the day if this* festival the Gods abandoned their heavenly abodes in order to celebrate in common with their beloved ones in Kathmia. The Charities and the *Ωραι* also came in order to adorn the feast and the highlight of the feast was thought to be that moment during which the Muses sang their wonderful ballad.

The intellectual centre of Greece now is Athens. Here all the arts are cultivated. Here too the Muses establish themselves who now give birth to Harmony. The Aeschylus's view of Harmony the case of graceful, brilliant art and the beginning of symmetry and imperishable unity of the sciences represented by the Muses, and found in the symmetry of beauty and intellect. But above all she brings

harmony to the souls and balance and sophrosyne.

Here as well as there the scenery is ideal for pure art and the figures move in gold divine forms. There are depicted here, not only mythological scenes with finely and graceful figures, but also holy devils, mythico-allegorical figures in formation appearance and composition in a group. Euripides, like the painter, allows his imagination to prevail. Erechtheus' children, Harmony and the Muses, Aphrodite and Wisdom together with Eros, stand exactly on the same level. In exactly the same way the figures move and appear in Euripides's lyric scenes. Men and Gods are pictured next to *'Ευδαιμονία'/' Πανδαισία', "Παιδιά", "Ευνομία"* etc. or on the vases with the gold decoration. It is in the nature of the thing that these figures are not foreign or distant to the Athenian way of presentation. As soon as the name is pronounced to the Athenian ear, it sounds very familiar like something known from long ago that suddenly takes concrete form. So, one does not wonder at finding this Harmony presented on the vases with the gold decoration too; in fact, one looks for her there and is very pleased when he finally finds her.

## References

1. Aristotle *Metaphysics*. A' 986a.22
2. Homer, *Odyssey*. 262-316
3. Hesiod *Theogony*. 979, 980 and 934
4. Plato, *Sophist*. 242d-e
5. Hesiod. *Theogony*. 123
6. Aeschylus. Fr. 44, 1-5
7. Aristophanes, *Aves*, 699 and 696
8. Hesiod. *Theogony*, 937 and 975
9. Pindar, *Pythian*, XI, 1-7
10. Homer. Hymn to Apollo. 195-196
11. Black-figure Attic amphora "with a neck" from Region, Calabria, by the Diosphos Painter. About 500 BC, No. 361411. Paris, Musee du Louvre CA 1961. In front: Depicting Cadmus and Harmony in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar. Behind the animals Apollo the guitar player. Inscriptions with the names of Cadmus, Harmonia and Apollo. J.D.

Beazley, *Paralipomena*, Oxford 1971, 248, 135.  
12. Nonnos, XIII, 351 (Epinetron)





Red-figure Epinetron

[https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%95%CF%80%CE%AF%CE%BD%CE%B7%CF%84%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%BD#/media/%CE%91%CF%81%CF%87%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%BF:Attic\\_red-figure\\_Epinetron\\_Antikensammlung\\_Berlin\\_1.jpg](https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%95%CF%80%CE%AF%CE%BD%CE%B7%CF%84%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%BD#/media/%CE%91%CF%81%CF%87%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%BF:Attic_red-figure_Epinetron_Antikensammlung_Berlin_1.jpg)





The marriage of Cadmus with Harmonia. Black-figure amphora of Diosophos Painter, early 5th B.C. Cadmus guarded the Aryan spring and Ares married him with his daughter Harmonia. On the vase, Cadmus and Harmonia on a chariot pulled by a lion and a bull. Apollo the harpist following on foot heralds the wedding procession. Paris, Louvre, ca 1691