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# THE WINGED VICTORY

## NIKE IN ANCIENT GREECE

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**Abstract:** The Greek goddess Nike was a popular deity throughout the ancient Greek World. As a symbol of victory, Nike represented triumph within agonistic conflicts. Nike was an important figure in the Greek mind, and while comprehensive studies of who the goddess was and how she was represented through literature and iconography has been conducted, an overview of Nike's development has not yet been done in English. This paper will follow the development of Nike throughout Greek thought, from her earliest representations and mentions in the Archaic Period through the Hellenistic Era, by focusing on the primary objects and literature sources that speak of the goddess.

In the Ancient Greek world, the gods ruled the heavens. In the early Greek paradigm, the pantheon of gods was what inspired weather changes and gifted the philosophers their wit. Often represented as the goddess of victory, Nike was a small figure in the larger context of the Greek pantheon. Often seen in association with gods such as Zeus or Athena, or mistaken for Iris or Eros, Nike is an immensely important character in the story of Greek history, religion, and cultural thought.<sup>1</sup> While the development of Nike has been studiously outlined by scholars of the mid-20th century, a brief overview of Nike, her iconography, and her importance to the Ancient Greek people has not yet been conducted in this century.<sup>2</sup>

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1. A. Moustaka, "Nike," *LIMC* 6, no. 1 (1981): 850–904, here 850, 852.; A.W. Hands, "Common Greek Coins," *Spink and Sons Monthly Numismatic Circular* 16, no. 182 (1908): 10305–10306.

2. Some of the most notable writers who have contributed to the scholarship of Nike is A. Moustaka, Friedrich Wilhelm Hamdorf, Ira Mark, and Alfred R. Bellinger. Without their works, this overview would not be possible. To read more about Nike by scholars not mentioned above, see E. Bernert, "Nike," *PW* 17, no. 1 (1936): 285–307; H. Knell, *Die Nike von Samothrake*,

Through observing primary texts from major Greek scholars, as well as looking at major artifacts from the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods, this overview of Nike and her development can thus be mapped in the English language.

## THE ARCHAIC NIKE

The earliest known mention of Nike was during the Archaic Period (c. 800-480 BCE) in Hesiod's *Theogony*.<sup>3</sup> Published roughly around 700 BCE, the poem is all about the origins of the well-known gods and beasts in Greek mythology. On the birth of Nike, Hesiod states, "Styx, daughter of Okeanos, mingled with Pallas and bore Zelos and slender-ankled Nike in the halls and Kratos and Bia, conspicuous children."<sup>4</sup> Hesiod offers no other explanation for who Nike was other than the brief introduction mentioned above. Similarly, in the Homeric Hymns of the 7th-6th centuries BCE, Nike is described as the child of Ares:

Ares, exceeding in strength, chariot-rider, golden-helmed, doughty in heart, shield-bearer, Saviour of cities, harnessed in bronze, strong of arm, unwearying, mighty with the spear, O defence of Olympus, father of warlike Victory . . .<sup>5</sup>

However, it seems that Nike as the daughter of Pallas is the more popular mythology, as is later referenced by Bacchylides in Ode 11, as well as later Hellenistic and Roman scholars.

During this early Archaic Period, Nike only exists in writing, likely as nothing more than an abstract thought of admirable qualities like her sisters—Emulation, Strength, and Force. Nike, as victory incarnate, represented something to strive for.<sup>6</sup> As such, it is not until later in the 6th century that Nike begins to have her first appearances as a physical being. Her early iconography is nebulous at best—so much so that it can sometimes be hard distinguishing Nike from other

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1995; M. Treu, "Zur neuen Themistokles-Inschrift," *Historia* 12 (1963): 47–69; Rhys Carpenter, *The Sculpture of the Nike Temple Parapet* (Maryland: Mcgrath Publishing Company, 1971); Tonio Höolscher, "Die Nike der Messenier und Naupaktier in Olympia," *Jahrbucks des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 89 (1974): 70–111; C. Isler-Kerenyi, *Nike: Der Tyus der laufenden Flügelfrau in archaischer Zeit* (Germany: Eugen Rentsch Verlag, 1969); C. Isler-Kerenyi, "Nike mit dem Tropaion," *Antike Plastik* 10 (1970): 57–63; A. Spetsieri Choremi, "eine überlebensgroße Nike-statue in Athen," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung* 111 (1996): 363–390.

3. Mait Kõiv. "A Note on the Dating of Hesiod," *CIQ* 61, no. 2 (2011): 355–77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41301542>.

4. "Hesiod," *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, LCL 57 (London: Harvard University Press, 1914), 383–403.

5. Homeric Hymn VIII to Ares.

6. "Hesiod," 383–403.

gods and goddesses such as Iris and Eros.<sup>7</sup> By taking the base form of a winged individual in motion and adding specific symbols for Nike, the figural victory was born.

The first known sculpture of Nike was found on the island of Delos, originally crafted in 570 BCE–560 BCE. The statue itself stands roughly 0.9 meters tall and is made of marble. In traditional Archaic fashion, the pose of Nike is very stiff, even though she is supposed to be in the action of running. Nike is depicted wearing a peplos, and most reconstructions depict her with wings, as Archermos likely intended. The Delian Nike has been a heavily disputed artifact, with the main argument centered around whether or not the Nike sculpture was an acroterion or a ground sculpture.<sup>8</sup> Nike figures were popular acroteria types and have been found surrounding many temples on the Greek Mainland, especially in Delphi, on buildings such as a temple to Athena and a treasury.<sup>9</sup> However, there is also much argument for the Delian Nike as a ground sculpture, with many claiming a base on the ground near the temple that belongs to her.<sup>10</sup> If the Delian Nike did indeed stand on the ground, on the base that many ascribe to her, then the Nike was carved by Archermos and dedicated to the god Apollo.<sup>11</sup> Archermos is often credited for being the first person to depict Nike with wings, which became one of the main symbols of the goddess by later eras.<sup>12</sup>

A terracotta thymiaterion depicting Nike from the 6th century BCE illustrates Nike's early iconography in a more complete form (Fig. 1). Like the Delian Nike, this Nike figurine is depicted with archaic style hair and eyes in the pose of popular kourai figures from this era. Thymiateria, or incense-burners, were likely adopted from the Near East and were most often used in cult rituals, as offerings, and in burials.<sup>13</sup> The major identifying symbol on this Nike seems to be her wings—which

7. Moustaka, "Nike," 852; Hands, "Common Greek Coins," *Spink and Sons Monthly Numismatic Circular* 16, no. 181 (1907): 10246; Marilyn Y. Goldberg, "Archaic Greek Akroteria," *American Journal of Archaeology* 86, no. 2 (1982): 193–217, here 197–198, doi: 10.2307/504832; E.E. Sikes, "Nike and Athena Nike," *The Classical Review* 9, no. 5 (1895): 280–83, here 282–83, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/693294>; The iconography becomes the most muddled specifically when looking at how all three deities are often shown in motion with wings and with objects, such as staffs or a caduceus, held aloft in their hands. With the weathered state of many of these Archaic statues, it is hard to know with absolute certainty which deity is represented and at which times.

8. For more information about the debate see Kenneth Sheedy, "The Delian Nike and the Search for Chian Sculpture," *American Journal of Archaeology* 89, no. 4 (1985): 619–26. doi:10.2307/504203; and Goldberg, "Archaic Greek Akroteria," 197–198.

9. Goldberg, "Archaic Greek Akroteria," 197–198.

10. Sheedy, "The Delian Nike," 619.

11. *Ibid.*, 620.

12. *Ibid.*; Hands, "Common Greek Coins," 10247; Freidrich Wilhelm Hamdorf, *Griechische Kultpersonifikationen der vorhellenistischen Zeit* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zablen, 1964), 59–60.

13. Maria Lucia Ferruzza, "Thymiaterion Supported by a Statuette of Nike," J. Paul Getty Museum, 2016, <https://www.getty.edu/publications/terracottas/catalogue/53/>.

is where complications arise with Nike being mistaken for other smaller female goddesses such as Iris. Though no statues of Iris remain, her likeness is popular on later Classical Period vases where she is depicted winged, wearing a peplos, and holding a caduceus (Fig. 2).<sup>14</sup> There is also evidence of some possible Nike figures wearing winged shoes and holding the caduceus like Hermes to denote that she was functioning as a messenger, likely for Zeus.<sup>15</sup> Though these Nike figures could be mistaken Iris statues, this confusion further illustrates how changeable Nike's early iconography was. Furthermore, Nike being shown in the iconography associated with Iris, the goddess of messages, and Hermes, the messenger god, could allude to Nike as a messenger of her specific personified trait—victory.<sup>16</sup>

From the end of the 6th century on, however, the image and iconography of Nike seems to become more systematized as she gains a greater role in Greek culture. Nike's appearance on a coin, possibly from Olympia, made in c. 510 BCE illustrates Nike's growing popularity in association with athletic competitions and games.<sup>17</sup> The obverse of the coin is stamped with the image of an eagle—a symbol of Zeus, who was important to the state of Olympia, and with whom Nike had close association.<sup>18</sup> The reverse of the coin depicts Nike in her running stance with a wreath in her hand.

The Olympic games started in Olympia around 776 BCE and became a fixture of Greek life and the concept of *agones* or the idea of struggle and victory often seen during wartime.<sup>19</sup> In the victory poems of the Archaic Period, Nike makes multiple appearances as the one who crowns the winners of athletic competitions. Some of the most notable writers of victory odes are Pindar, Bacchylides, and Simonides. Bacchylides's Ode 11 is one of the most illustrative writings about Nike and her role in athletic games during the Archaic period. Bacchylides writes:

Victory, giver of sweet gifts, great is the honour assigned to thee by the Father of the Heaven-born, throned on high: standing at the side of Zeus in golden Olympus thou judgest the issue of prowess for immortals and for men. // Be gracious to us, O daughter of Styx with the flowing tresses, who guards the right. 'Tis due to thee even now that Metapontion, city honoured

14. Moutaka, "Nike," 852; Hands, "Common Greek Coins," 10246.

15. Moustaka, "Nike," 852.

16. Ibid.

17. Alfred R. Bellinger and Marjorie A. Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," *Numismatic Notes and Monographs*, no. 149 (1962): 1–68, here 3, accessed March 25, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43607474>.

18. Hamdorf, *Griechische*, 59.

19. Andrea Rotstein, "Mousikoi Agones and the Conceptualization of Genre in Ancient Greece," *ClAnt* 31, no. 1 (2012): 92–127, here 94, accessed March 25, 2021, doi: 10.1525/ca.2012.31.1.92.; Thomas R. Martin, *Ancient Greece from Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996), 46.

by gods, is full of rejoicings, while festal bands of stalwart youths hymn the Pythian victor, the brilliant son of Phaiscus.<sup>20</sup>

In Ode 13, Bacchylides continues:

And now, for those who have been crowned with the flowers of glorious Victory at the altar of Zeus the peerless king, that toil nourishes a golden renown, conspicuous in their life-time evermore; few are they among men. And when the dark cloud of death enfolds them, there remains the undying fame of a deed bravely done, with a fortune that can fail no more.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 1: *Thymiaterion Supported by a Statue of Nike*, c. 500–475 BCE. Public domain, courtesy of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

In these two fragments, Nike is set apart as not only the one who judges victory but crowns it as well. In this it

is thus understandable that Nike begins to be depicted holding a crown to bestow upon victors—as she is depicted on the Olympian coin mentioned above. Nike holding a crown, ready to bestow victory, becomes a symbol associated with the goddess for the rest of her tenure through the Hellenistic Period.

While Nike stood as a goddess who granted victory in agonistic athletic competitions in the Archaic Period, the Battle of Marathon changed everything. As an important battle between the Athenians and the Persians, the Athenian concept of Nike shifted to include her as a goddess of wartime victory, closely allied with Athena. The mixture of Athena and Nike would become something special for the Athenian people during the Classical Period, though it had its start here at the very end of the Archaic Era.

After the Battle of Marathon in c. 490 BCE, a Nike statue was erected on the Archaic Acropolis. Offered on behalf of Kallimachos, the Nike stood atop a pillar in a running pose, akin to that of the Delian Nike, stands in the running pose. The sculpture on a whole is much more naturalistic, with the proportions of the goddess being more life-like. Nike's wings would have stretched out behind her and

20. *Bacchylides: The Poems and Fragments*, trans. Sir Richard C. Jebb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 321.

21. *Ibid.*, 339.

in reconstruction drawings she sports the archaic smile. This seems to typify stand-alone Nike figures from this Era through to the Hellenistic Period. Even though the sculpture is still definitely Archaic, the style has come a long way from earlier archaic Nikia figures in terms of movement and naturalism.

This Nike appears to be a personal war monument for Kallimachos's deeds in the Battle of Marathon. The base that is believed to bear the inscription for this statue reads:

Kallimachos of Aphidna dedicated  
me to Athena, the messenger of the  
immortals who have their homes on  
Olympos, since he was victorious as  
polemarch in the Athenian games.  
And at Marathon fighting bravely  
he won fairest fame, For the men of  
Athens, and a memorial of his own excellence.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 2: Oil Flask Lekythos, c. 480 BCE, attributed to Brygos Painter. Public domain, courtesy of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.

Although Kallimachos died in the Battle of Marathon, this statue stands as a memorial to him and his efforts in the war—as well as a symbol of the Greek victory over Persia. Though basic in form, Kallimachos's Nike employs the symbols used by previous representations of Nike—namely her wings and posing.

Interestingly, the Kallimachos Nike is one of the Nikai figures that could be confused with Iris. Based off the discovery of a bronze herald's staff on the acropolis and a reconstruction drawing, Kallimachos's Nike is depicted wearing winged shoes and holding the caduceus, but it is unclear if the herald staff was meant to be Nike's. However, if the reconstruction is correct, Kallimachos's victory monument could embody the earlier idea of Nike as the messenger of victory, rather than the specific bestower of it.<sup>23</sup>

22. Jeffrey M. Hurwit, *The Athenian Acropolis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 130.

23. Hurwit, *The Athenian Acropolis*, 130.

## THE CLASSICAL NIKE

In a now-lost speech from Lycurgus on the Priestess, Lycurgus illustrates the special bond that the Athenians shared with Nike, and her bond with their patron goddess Athena. Found in the Suda, a 10th century CE writing, Lycurgus is quoted as describing Nike “wingless, holding a pomegranate in her right hand and a helmet in her left.”<sup>24</sup> The wingless Nike seems to be an Athenian invention, and the pomegranate and helmet were typical symbols of Athena—the goddess of war and strategy.<sup>25</sup> The Archaic Acropolis likely held an Athena cult-statue with similar iconography—directly linking Athena and Nike together in Athens as early as the 6th century BCE.<sup>26</sup>

In 480 BCE, 10 years after the victorious Battle of Marathon, Athens was sacked by the Persians and the Archaic Acropolis complex was turned to rubble. Around 468 BCE, the Acropolis complex was reconstructed under Pericles and a small temple to Athena-Nike was constructed—possibly over an older altar to Nike.<sup>27</sup> This specific temple to Nike and Athena-Nike is one such illustration of the Athenian love of personified victory and shows evidence of her cult in Athens. Also, in the new Parthenon, a small Nike figure was held by the Athena Parthenos statue, though the statue on a whole is no longer extant.

With Athena carrying personified victory, Athena herself becomes Athena of Victory. Nike was depicted as wingless to denote that she would not fly away and leave Athens vulnerable to defeat; Athens and Athena would always hold victory as their own.<sup>28</sup> With Athena standing within the most important structure on the Acropolis, and with an entire temple dedicated to the combined Athena-Nike, the Acropolis succeeded in being both a religious center as well as a memorial to its destruction. Having features of Nike present on the new buildings and ingrained with Athena inside the Parthenon, Phidias and the other architects of the new Acropolis were able to successfully memorialize the Persian destruction and certify Athenian might.

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24. Suidas, *Suida Lexicon: Graece and Latine, Vol. II* (Cantabrigiae: Typis Academicis, 1705), 622; “Nu 384,” trans. William Hutton, Suda On Lone, July 12, 2011, <https://www.cs.uky.edu/~raphael/sol/sol-entries/nu/384>.

25. Sikes, “Nike and Athena Nike,” 282–283.

26. Andrew F. Stewart, “History, Myth, and Allegory in the Program of the Temple of Athena-Nike, Athens,” *Studies in the History of Art* 16 (1985): 53–73, here 53, accessed March 25, 2021, <http://jstor.org/stable/693294>.

27. Ira S. Mark, Machteld J. Mellink, and James R. McCredie, “The Sanctuary of Athena Nike in Athens: Architectural Stages and Chronology,” *Hesperia Supplements* 26 (1993): I–185, here 12–17, 20–30, accessed March 25, 2021, doi: 10.2307/1354000.

28. Sikes, “Nike and Athena Nike,” 282; Hands, “Common Greek Coins,” 10247.

Though it has not been found, the interior of the Athena-Nike temple likely held a golden cult statue of Nike.<sup>29</sup> The rest of the temple is decorated with mythological scenes from the Gigantomachy as well as scenes from the Battle of Marathon and the Battle of the Greeks. The Gigantomachy was a beloved Greek myth that functioned as a representation of the victory of the gods over evil, but it also was a myth important to Nike.<sup>30</sup> A parapet surrounds the temple with more scenes of Nike in a processional manner.

The sculptural program of the temple parapet illustrates Nike in a number of her roles as a deity—such as awarding trophies and accompanying individuals in their endeavors. In almost all sculptures, she is shown in movement or flight, robed in the richly carved textiles that the Classical Greeks so loved. One of the most well-known parapet sculptures is of Nike tying her sandal. Even though the Nike Sandalbinder is a well-known image, it is the sculptures of the enthroned Athena-Nike and the enthroned Athena accompanied by Nike from the parapet that introduce an interesting iconographic program that was not specific to Athens alone.

In another coin from Olympia, this one dated from c. 452-432 BCE, the enthroned Nike is depicted.<sup>31</sup> This was apparently a popular image, as it was minted multiple times throughout the Classical Era.<sup>32</sup> Nike sits on a rock, her head in one hand and a crown of victory in her other.<sup>33</sup> In accordance with typical Nike iconography, her wings stretch out behind her, though because the goddess is sitting, the wings are functionally useless.<sup>34</sup> As such, it is likely the wings were included since they are an established symbol of the goddess, along with the laurels which she holds. Enthroning a deity places them in a spot of authority and divinity—a symbol extended to Nike in this coin type, which further alludes to her importance as a decider and bestower of victory, as well as how important the concept of victory and *agones* was to the Greeks in both athletic and wartime avenues.

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29. See Homer A. Thompson, "A Golden Nike from the Athenian Agora," *HSCP* 51 (1940): 183–210, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45134349> and Dorothy Burr Thompson, "The Golden Nikai Reconsidered," *Hesperia* 13, no. 3 (1944): 173–209, <http://jstor.org/stable/147012> for more information about the Nike cult statue from the Temple of Athena Nike.

30. See Euripides, "Ion," *The Complete Greek Drama*, ed. Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr., trans. Robert Potter (New York: Random House, 1938).

31. Charles Theodore Seltman, *The Temple Coins of Olympia: reprinted from "Nomisma" VIII.IX.XI* (Cambridge, Bowes and Bowes, 1921), 30; Bellinger and Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," 5; For more on the seated-Nike type see Hands, "Common Greek Coins," *Spink and Sons Monthly Numismatic Circular* 17, no. 193 (1908): 11049–11758, here 11062.

32. Seltman, *The Temple Coins of Olympia*, 34.

33. *Ibid.*, 36; Bellinger and Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," 5–7.

34. Bellinger and Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," 6; Bellinger claims that the wings could still have been included as an aesthetic choice, however the wings of Nike were an important part of her iconography and could have been included to fulfil that purpose.

Olympia continued to be an important state for images of Nike with the erection of the Paionios Nike in 421 BCE. Much like the Kallimachos Nike, the Paionios Nike sits on the top of a pillar with an inscription that dedicates the statue to the victory of the Greeks in the Archidamian War.<sup>35</sup> Even though she is made from heavy stone, the goddess appears to still be very slightly airborne as she alights on the top of the pillar, memorialized as constantly bestowing victory.

## THE HELLENISTIC NIKE

When Philip of Macedonia and his son Alexander the Great entered the scene in Greece, Nike was the undoubted goddess that bestowed victory. The image of Nike was adopted by these Macedonian kings and made their own. With Nike already established in her role as victory goddess, Alexander's taking on the Nike symbolism was an interesting political move, especially because he had not yet achieved any major victories as ruler of Greece and had a tenuous relationship with the Greek natives at best.<sup>36</sup> The act of Nike granting victory would have been a powerful image for a would-be world conqueror to absorb. Alexander would later go on to have a multitude of successes in warfare and gain a massive amount of territory that would propel both Macedonia and Greece into its final stage as a Hellenistic empire during the last few centuries before its subsequent conquest by the Romans.

With the expansion of the Greek Empire during the Hellenistic Period, Nike was not only spread abroad, but she also gained a new fame at home. Nike began to be depicted with all the drama that Hellenistic artists could afford. Some of her most notable depictions from this period include the Nike depicted on the Gigantomachy scene on the Great Altar of Pergamon and the Nike of Samothrace.

The Gigantomachy Frieze on the Altar of Pergamon is one of the most incredible Hellenistic examples of sculpture. It has been claimed that Pergamon, a city near the coast in Asia Minor, went to great lengths to make itself appear equal to the great Greek city of Athens.<sup>37</sup> In the words of Jacob Burckhardt, a Swiss historian from the 19th century, as he wrote to a friend upon gazing at the Gigantomachy scene for the first time:

This discovery . . . has shattered the systems of the archaeologists and tumbled an entire pseudo-aesthetics to the ground. . . . Since we have

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35. Olympia Vikatou, "Pedestal of the Nike of Paionios," Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2012, accessed April 3, 2019. [http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/2/eh251.jsp?obj\\_id=5989](http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/2/eh251.jsp?obj_id=5989).

36. S. Perlman, "The Coins of Philip II and Alexander the Great and their Pan-Hellenic Propaganda," *NumC* 5 (1965): 57–67, here 64, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42662671>.

37. Richard Whitaker, "Art and Ideology: The Case of the Pergamon Gigantomachy," *Acta Classica* 48 (2005): 163–74, here 163. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24595401>.

come into possession of these terrifyingly glorious spectacles . . . everything that has been written about the emotional power of the Laocoön is for the wastebasket. Try to imagine a frieze . . . as of now, well over 200 feet long; 8-foot tall gods locked in struggle with giants and protruding so far out from their background that they practically constitute free-standing sculptures; a scene of biting, battering, chopping, crushing, involving also powerful dogs and lions, and with the snake-like tail-ends of many of the giants forming into heads that bite the gods in the back and leg—all this taking place . . . relentlessly and unforgivingly. The artistry and style . . . such as to make Phidias tremble on his throne.<sup>38</sup>

This glowing review of the Gigantomachy Frieze tells of the grandeur and the drama of the sculptures. The Gigantomachy is the story of the struggle of the gods versus the giants in the age before man. With all the gods depicted, Nike makes her appearance on the eastern frieze alongside Athena, an interesting mythological divergence since she was previously depicted as the charioteer of Zeus.<sup>39</sup> However, with Pergamon's wish to be equal to Athens, it is unsurprising that references to Athena and Nike together, as Athens loved, would be made.

The sculptures of the altar follow the style set by Skopos during the Late Classical Period on Mainland Greece. The few figures that still have faces express dramatic emotions, with deep-set eyes that are turned towards the heavens. Like Burckhardt mentioned, the sculptures are so deeply carved they are almost detached from the frieze. Nike is shown to the right of Athena. Though her head is missing, her wings extend out behind her, and her arm is reaching towards the top of Athena's head, as if she is bestowing a laurel wreath of victory in her typical iconography.

This newfound popularity of Athena-Nike does not seem to be contained to just Athens or Pergamon in the Hellenistic Era. The Lysimachus coin from c. 297 BCE illustrates this. The obverse of the coin depicts Alexander in a deified role, with the horns of Zeus Ammon.<sup>40</sup> The reverse of the coin depicts an enthroned Athena, with Nike standing on her outstretched arm. Nike's wings stretch behind her as she reaches out to crown the name of Lysimachus—one of Alexander the Great's successors. By using the image of Athena and Nike together, Lysimachus

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38. Lionel Gossman, "Imperial Icon: The Pergamon Altar in Wilhelminian Germany," *The Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 3 (2006): 551–87, here 551.

39. References to Nike as charioteer are plentiful in the Archaic Greek writings of Simonides, specifically fragment no. 79 and epigram XXVII. Nonnus in *Dionysiaca II* 205 also makes mention of Nike as charioteer. Bellinger also has discussions of Nike as charioteer appearing on coins. See Bellinger and Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," 7–12; Thompson, "The Golden Nikai Reconsidered," 197.

40. Bellinger and Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," 30.

was able to tie himself not only to victory, but to the grandeur and might of Classical Athens during a period of relative political unrest.

The usage of Nike as propaganda only continues with the Nike of Samothrace from c. 220-160 BCE. The Samothrace Nike is most known for her “storm-tossed” drapery, mentioned repeatedly by scholars.<sup>41</sup> It is because of her drapery that many scholars believe that she stood on a base meant to look like the prow of a ship at sea or the shore of a particularly stormy island.<sup>42</sup> From as early as the Archaic Period, Nike was sometimes depicted with naval paraphernalia to denote a sea victory, so having this Nike in direct association with the sea is unsurprising and falls within her logical iconography.<sup>43</sup>

Like Athena, Nike also had important connections with Zeus which has been previously touched on during the discussions of the Olympia coins from the Archaic and Classical Eras. A. Moustaka, in his exploration of Nike in the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, identifies a small Nike figure that would have been held by the chryselephantine statue of Zeus inside the Temple of Zeus in Olympia.<sup>44</sup> Herodotus speaks of a naval battle between the Greeks and the Persians Book VIII of his *History*, saying, “Bronze will come together with bronze, and Ares//Will redden the sea with blood. To Hellas the day of freedom//Far-seeing Zeus and august Victory will bring.”<sup>45</sup> Nonnus, though Roman, writing in the 5th century CE, also links Nike and Zeus together by claiming that Nike was the one to bring Zeus to war against the giants and encouraged him to use the might of his storm against the giant Typhon.<sup>46</sup>

It is thus logical to assume that when paired with Zeus, Nike could be the harbinger of the storm—once more fulfilling an early Archaic role of messenger to announce an absolutely crushing defeat that could mean nothing but victory for the Greeks, over whom she watched. Echoing once more the words of Bacchylides, it is through Nike’s grace that she chooses the victorious.<sup>47</sup> Those whom Nike denies could face the wrath of destruction. It is a punishment for those who even think that defeat of the Greeks is possible.

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41. Andrew Stewart, “The Nike of Samothrace: Another View,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 120, no. 3 (2016): 399–410, here 402–403; For descriptions of Nike as storm-tossed see Moustaka “Nike,” and Sikes, “Nike and Athena-Nike.”

42. *Ibid.*, 400.

43. Thompson, “The Golden Nikai Reconsidered,” 202; To find more about the depiction of Nike with naval-based imagery see also “Winged Victory of Samothrace,” Musée Louvre, [http://musee.louvre.fr/oal/victoiredesamothrace/victoiredesamothrace\\_acc\\_en.html](http://musee.louvre.fr/oal/victoiredesamothrace/victoiredesamothrace_acc_en.html).

44. Moustaka, “Nike,” 868.

45. Herodotus, *Histories VIII*, 77.

46. Nonnus, *Dionysiaca II*, 205.

47. Bacchylides, Ode 11,13.

## CONCLUSION

When asked to name the important gods of the Greek pantheon, Nike is not likely to be the first goddess selected. Her role in the great myths of Greece was subtle and she has often been overlooked today in favor of greater heroes and gods. However, the idea of a personified victory was a unique thought in the Greek mind. Nike's ability to bestow or take away victory was an important action for the Greeks who were consistently participating in hometown competitions, as well as battles within the Greek mainland and abroad. Nike's associations with the gods and athletic games shaped her into the goddess of victories in competition and war. By the fifth century BCE, and due to the Greek conflict with Persia, it appears her role in war was magnified and she claimed more power than ever through her association with Zeus. Nike was a popular subject to put on temple roofs as an acroteria and as a dedicated offering to the gods. Even though Nike may not have been an important goddess from a modern-day understanding, her role in Ancient Greece and abroad during the duration of the Greek civilization is vastly important and deserves more recognition.