# INTRODUCTION

## Myth and Image

This book deals with the depiction of one of the most famous Greek myths, the main hero of which was Perseus.[1] The 8th century BC has provided us with the earliest evidence that Perseus and his fateful adversary, Medusa, fascinated the Greeks. They continually returned to this hero in the centuries that followed, developing and enriching depictions of his myth with new themes. By doing so, they allowed the myth to remain in line with developments taking place in society. The legacy of the Greek myths was taken over by the Romans, who further developed it until the end of the ancient Roman Empire. Medusa's head was one of the most frequently depicted motifs in the ancient world: it was visible everywhere – in temples and private houses, on coins, and on clothing and jewellery worn by men and women daily. These paintings and sculptures are not just illustrations of already existing mythical stories. [2] Word and image have been closely related since the beginning of the Greek mythical tradition, but they have mostly been independent of one another.[3] Some mythological motifs first appeared as words, others as images; some motifs or whole stories are known only in their image form.

It is interesting to follow how myths work in the society for which where they were created, but also how they operate in a completely different environment, which can be very distant both chronologically and geographically. The adoption of Perseus in the visual art of any culture of post-ancient Europe is as remarkable as the origin and development of this myth in ancient Greece. In 1349, an ancient Roman gem with the head of Medusa was part of the collection of Charles IV (**1**). Why did this King of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor keep several images of this monster in his collections? Why did he consider them so important that he had the Crown of the Roman king decorated with them, which was created in Prague around 1349? What did Medusa mean to him and how did he interpret this myth? When analysing an image inspired by the myth of Perseus, its broader historical context becomes the subject of interest. Who ordered the work? What was its function? What role did the work play in the life of the artist who created it?

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[2] Thomas H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991).
[3] Jocelyn Penny Small, *The Parallel Worlds of Classical Art and Text* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Susan Woodford, *Images of Myth in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Klaus Junker, *Interpreting the Images of Greek Myths: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Giuliani, Luca. *Image and Myth: A History of Pictorial Narration in Greek Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013; Katharina Lorenz, *Ancient Mythological Images and their Interpretation: An Introduction to Iconology, Semiotics, and Image Studies in Classical Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Pascalle Linant de Bellefonds and Évelyne Prioux, *Voir les mythes: Poésie hellénistique et arts figurés* (Paris: Picard, 2017).

1. Medusa: Roman agate cameo, milk-white over blue, 1st–2nd century AD. 24 x 26 mm.
From the Crown of the Roman king Charles IV (the left great lily), Prague, around 1349.

This work does not interest itself as much with the timeless validity of the representation of Perseus and Medusa as it does with its temporary conditionality. The local and time-based conditions to which ancient myths responded in post-ancient Europe are as crucial to us as the circumstances in which these myths were created in ancient Greece. We will understand the myth primarily as a means of expression by which the patron and the artist communicated with their surroundings. Traditional image types representing ancient myths were constantly changing; they were filled with new content, which was often in opposition to the original. In the oldest representations, Medusa is usually a hideous monster (**2**). Later, she was most often portrayed as a beauty, which can be seen in the cameo incorporated into the crown of Charles IV mentioned above. How then should we interpret these dramatic changes in the representation of the protagonists of mythical stories? Has the mythical story changed over time, or just its image? Answering these questions is one of the tasks of the research on the representations of myths.



2. Antefix with the head of Medusa. Greek terracotta relief, Northern Ionia, around 550–525 BC.

The study of the literary tradition has had a millenary past, but the study of the tradition of images is a relatively young discipline, the foundations of which were laid at the end of the 19th century. Today, several monographs on the depiction of myths in ancient art, including a series of books by Karl Schefold, have been published. Researchers today use the monumental Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC). Extensive and uniformly arranged articles, accompanied by rich image appendices, summarise the present state of knowledge in this area of research; the articles themselves contain exhaustive bibliographic appendices. The reception of ancient myths in the art of post-ancient Europe is much less explored, although there is a vast array of literary, musical and artistic works. We observe here, too, a striking disproportion. The attention of researchers has almost exclusively focused on the art of the Italian Renaissance of the 16th century, although the highest number of preserved representations comes from the 17th and 18th centuries. Research on Greek myths in contemporary art began only recently.

Research on depictions of the Perseus myth does not differ from the formula outlined above. Classical antiquity and literary traditions dominate in scholarly articles and monographs that have been published thus far.[4] In addition to very brief overviews, various monographs dedicated to Medusa,[5] Pegasus,[6] Andromeda,[7] and several aspects of the Perseus myth have also been published, in which attention has also been paid to modern images.[8] A reader of the most important texts about Medusa has been published,[9] along with lists of depictions of ancient myths in medieval and modern Europe,[10] the online databases – ICONOS (Università di Roma) and "Gods & Myths" (The Warburg Institute). Nevertheless, this book is one of the first monographs devoted to the development of Perseus' myths from the very beginning until the present.[11]

The book has four chapters devoted to the main protagonists of the myth: Perseus, Medusa, Danae and Andromeda. In each of these four chapters, we will trace the changes in imagery from antiquity to the present day. We ensure an

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[4] Daniel Ogden, *Perseus* (London: Routledge, 2008); David Adams Leeming, *Medusa: In the Mirror of Time* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).

[5] Sara Damiani, *Medusa: La fascinazione irriducibile dell'altro* (Bergamo: Bergamo University Press, 2001); Valentina Conticelli, ed., *Medusa: Il mito, l'antico ei i Medici* (Florence: Polistampa, 2008); Kiki Karoglou, "Dangerous Beauty: Medusa in Classical Art," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 75 n. 3 (Winter 2018), 4-47.

[6] Claudia Brink and Wilhelm Hornbostel, eds., *Pegasus und die Künste* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1993).

[7] Alain Laframboise and Françoise Siguret, eds., *Andromède ou le héros à l'épreuve de la beauté* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1996).

[8] Anne-Lott Zech, "'*Imago boni Principis.*' Der Perseus-Mythos zwischen Apotheose und Heilserwartung in der politischen Öffentlichkeit des 16. Jahrhunderts (Münster: Lit, 2000); Christine Corretti, *Cellini's Perseus and Medusa and the Loggia dei Lanzi: Configurations of the Body of State* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[9] Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers, eds., *The Medusa Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[10] Andor Pigler, *Barockthemen: Eine Auswahl von Verzeichnissen zur Ikonographie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1956); Jane Davidson Reid, *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, I–II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[11] After finishing my book, I discovered the text of Alain Galoin, *Le mythe de Persée dans l'iconographie antique* (s.l., 2020). https://www.academia.edu/42766533/Le_mythe_de_Pers%C3%A9e_dans_liconographie_antique.

unbroken narrative continuity by focusing attention on only one character. The disadvantage of this arrangement is that the same story will be repeated in all four chapters. The ancient myth was radically transformed in the European Middle Ages to incorporate it into the Christian worldview. In the Italian Renaissance, the way myth was portrayed in antiquity was partially restored. However, the medieval interpretation never lost its validity. The approach to Perseus, Medusa, Danae and Andromeda in the 19th and 20th centuries is also very similar. However, by tracing the historical development of the representations of the different protagonists of the Perseus myth independently, we can demonstrate what unites them without distorting where they differ.

In conclusion, it is necessary to explain why we should concern ourselves with the myth of Perseus. Above all, it was chosen because it is connected with the vision and images on which our contemporary culture is built. Perseus' opponent was Medusa, who killed with her eyes. Everyone who looked upon her or those that she looked upon became stone statues. However, Perseus did not look at the monster in his fateful encounter, but saw her on his shield in which she was mirrored.[12] The hero won by duplicating Medusa, which is the essence of figurative art, in which the image is always superior to the illustrated reality. Already in classical antiquity, the myth of Perseus had a relationship with visual art and artists. In post-ancient Europe, this link has been further strengthened. In modern Western culture, Medusa and Pegasus have become the main symbols of art, artistic creation, and the alter ego of artists. The development of depictions of the myth of Perseus shows us how fundamentally the concept and social function of imagery and images changed over time.

**The Short History of Myth**

Before turning our attention to the depictions of Perseus, let us briefly summarize the development of the conception of classical myth. We must begin by pointing out that we cannot compare the central position of myth in Greco-Roman antiquity to anything we know today. Myths accompanied ancient Greeks and Romans throughout their entire lives. In their childhood, they first heard them from their grandmothers and mothers. When they came of age, they listened to them at banquets where wine was served in vases decorated with mythical stories. From the 5th century BC on, they went to the theatre to see plays inspired by mythical stories.[13] Myths adorned the temple districts, where Greeks and Romans took part in religious ceremonies. Myths also accompanied them on their final journey as they decorated the tombstones and objects with which they were buried.

In the advanced stage of the evolution of Greek society, myths were not replaced by history and philosophy but continued in parallel with both of these epochal novelties, with which the Greeks enriched the intellectual development of humanity. In ancient Greek, *mythos* and *logos* can refer to the same thing – an idea,

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[12] Cf. Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Dans l'oeil du miroir* (Paris: O. Jacob, 1997).
[13] Richard Buxton, *Myths and Tragedies in their Ancient Greek Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

word, speech or narrative. The Greeks, of course, distinguished between *mythos* and *logos*; the latter was associated primarily with rational thought and evidence, but the terms were always two equivalent alternatives. They were two paths leading to the same goal, two ways to express the same thing. Myth was not the precursor to *logos* in ancient Greece, but one of its forms. According to the ancient Greeks, the plurality of myths was a counterpart to the plurality of forms of rationality. During the 6th–4th centuries BC, we see the shift from predominantly mythical to predominantly rational thinking. The Romans took over this conception of myth and the entire Greek culture between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. As in all other areas, Romans not only imitated Greek patterns but also radically transformed them. However, myth remained an essential part of Greek and Roman cultural horizons until the end of their civilisation.[14]

Even after the disappearance of the western half of the ancient Roman Empire in the 5th century AD, ancient myths, including those about Perseus and Medusa, did not disappear entirely from the European culture. In ancient mythology, Perseus was the only hero upon whom the gods bestowed the gift of flying. This inspired Christian Europe to treat him as a pagan ancestor of the Archangel. The reception of ancient myths was greatly facilitated by the fact that the Middle Ages also took from classical antiquity the allegorical interpretation of said myths. This allowed for the integration of pagan stories into Christian beliefs. Thanks to this synthesis, ancient myths were revived in 15th-century Italy. From the 16th to the 18th century, the best artists from across Europe competed in creating the most impressive renditions of the heroes of ancient myths, which the most powerful used to decorate their residences. In early modern Europe, Perseus and other figures of this ancient myth were not only revived, but also became celebrities whose popularity is unparalleled in contemporary art.

The early modern tradition of representing the ancient myth continued to a limited extent in 19th century art, but in the following century, it was mostly only a personal choice of the painter or sculptor. The reason was the revolutionary new approach to art. In 1790, German philosopher Emanuel Kant put forward principles in the theoretical defence of the absolute autonomy of art in his "Critique of Judgment." According to Kant, works of art are not bearers of purpose, but the sense of purposefulness, without this purpose being defined in any way. The only benefit that we have of the work of art is sensual, i.e. material pleasure. Above this, however, Kant placed aesthetic pleasure, which is immaterial and disinterested by nature. Consequently, art does not lead to knowledge. While aesthetic pleasure can be generic, it is never universal, and thus it is always subjective.

Artwork was thus wholly redefined as a product of an autonomous area that is not dependent on life. The only goal of art is the beauty that visualises perfection and order. Aesthetic pleasure stems exclusively from the ability of the human mind to find unity in diversity. The consequences of this shift were far-reaching. It brought

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[14] Richard Buxton, ed. *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge, "Under Which Conditions Did the Greeks 'Believe' in Their Myths? The Religious Criteria of Adherence," in *Antike Mythen: Medien, Transformationen, Konstruktionen. Festschriften für Fritz Graf*, ed. Christine Walde and Ueli Dill (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 38–54.

about not only a theoretical justification of art independent of religious and political power, which was Kant's intention, but also art liberated from any dependence, however it is defined. In art culture, which preaches absolute creative freedom, no tradition can ever be enforced. As Perseus and other figures of ancient myth ceased to be part of the cultural canon, the aims of artists changed in terms of their representations. The synthesis shared by an entire society, which dominated in previous centuries, was replaced by individual analysis. If a modern artist ever represents an ancient myth, he expresses his personal opinion of its essence.

In the 18th century, however, there appeared also the view that myth could not be considered art as we understand it today, i.e. as an individual creation. The traditional concept that ancient myths were poetic creations that could but do not necessarily have a deeper meaning began to be criticised. Bernard de Fontenelle in France, Giambattista Vico in Italy, and above all Christian Gottlob Heyne in Germany understood ancient myths and mythical images as the oldest form of human thinking and artistic creativity. [15] For them, they were not individual creations, but an anonymous manifestation of unstructured social consciousness. Heyne, therefore, began using the neologism "myth" and "mythical." Until then, the terms used in European languages were derived from the Latin word "fabula." Fabula, like die Fabel in German, or fable in English and French emphasises the fictitiousness of ancient myths. To remove the stamp of false stories from classical myths, Heyne began using a brand-new term, the various versions of which are now used in all languages of the world.

In 1793, Friedrich Schelling published the study "On myths. Historical legends and philosophical doctrines of the oldest world," in which he thoroughly elaborates on Heyne's thesis. He came up with a radical thesis that the meaning of a myth lies only in what it is telling. It is not tied to anything beyond itself; it does not refer to religious beliefs and speaks of human problems in general terms exclusively. Mythical characters are an integral part of the story, and allegorical interpretations of the character or story disturbs the integrity of the myth. In the allegorical text, the message is detachable from the idea it expresses; in Schelling's mythical text, one is inherently involved in the other. Schelling summed up his concept half a century later in his last work in the following and often-quoted sentences: "The mythology is not allegorical, it is tautegorical. The Gods are there actually existing beings that are not something else, that do not indicate something else, but that indicate only that, what they are." [16] In the allegory, the literal version is only a bearer of meaning, which is hidden, and it is necessary to know the key to reveal it. While in the allegory the word means something else, in its opposite, the tautegory, the words mean exactly what they refer to.

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[15] Tanja Susanne Scheer, "Heyne und der griechische Mythos," in *Christian Gottlob Heyne: Werk und Leistung nach zweihundert Jahren*, ed. Balbina Bäbler and Heinz-Günther Nesselrath (Berlin: Gruyter, 2014), 1–28.

[16] Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke, II, 1* (Stuttgart: J. G. Gotha, 1856). The English translation: Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, translated by Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 136.

Despite the proclamations made by Heyne and Schelling, the search for the allegorical essence of myths continued to occupy researchers, and today there is a whole library on the subject.[17] The allegorical interpretation that went out of fashion in the eighteenth century was resuscitated by Max Müller, who in the second half of 19th century was the leading authority on classical myths. He was an orientalist and explained the similarity between the oldest Indian and Greek myths by the fact that they come from the first phase of human development. He claimed that myths originated as soon as people began to speak. Centuries later, their narratives became independent and began to live their own lives; people have believed in the reality of what their oral traditions have provided. Müller famously stated that the myth is a disease of the language – myths originated because, in the primitive developmental stage of the language, people lacked abstract concepts and the neuter. The God Zeus was initially a wholly common sign of something shining, and so on.

The ancient rationalist strategy, which argued that verbal narratives began to be taken literally later, came back to the scene, although this time with a brand-new function. In the second half of the 19th century, classical mythology was not integrated into the Christian concept of the world as in Renaissance and Baroque Europe; on the contrary, scholars began to emphasise the uniqueness of the culture of ancient Greeks and Romans. In these interpretations, natural phenomena dominated so heavily that it began to seem ridiculous to researchers themselves. Lewis Richard Farnell bluntly remarked that it seemed as if ancient mythology was nothing but a noble conversation about the weather.[18]

At the end of the 19th century, it was clear that ancient myths couldn't be understood as the garbled results of observations of natural phenomena. A new potential source of mythical inspiration – ritual – therefore emerged in scholarly literature. In her work "Prolegomena for the Study of the Greek Religion," first published in 1903, Jane Ellen Harrison wrote about Medusa: "in her essence Medusa is a head and nothing more … she is in a word a mask with a body later appended. The primitive Greek knew that there was in his ritual a horrid thing called a Gorgoneion, a grinning mask with glaring eyes and protruding beast-like tusks and pendant tongue. How did this Gorgoneion come to be? A hero had slain a beast called the Gorgon, and that was its head… the basis of the Gorgoneion is a cultus object, a ritual mask misunderstood. The ritual object comes first; then the monster is begotten to account for it; then the hero is supplied to account for the slaying of the monster."[19]

Fulgentius' allegorical interpretation of Perseus' myth from around 500 AD, with the help of which ancient myths were incorporated in Christian culture, and these modern interpretations are strikingly similar. The inspiration of the mythical story is allegedly an objectively documented fact or speculation to explain this fact. This method of interpretation is also popular today, as Stephen R. Wilk's book proves.[20] An alternative thesis that the ancient myth could only be understood based

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[17] Eric Csapo, *Theories of Mythology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005).

[18] Lewis Richard Farnell, *The Cults of Greek States, I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 9.

[19] Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 187.

[20] Stephen R. Wilk, *Medusa: Solving the Mystery of the Gorgon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

on the myth itself, which was defended by Heyne and Schelling, asserted itself only in the last third of the 20th century in the Paris structuralist school. However, it is clear today that, even after two centuries of diligent research, scholars have not reached any consensus on classical myths.

The only thing that appears evident today is that it is futile to search for mythical archetypes. Even if "Urmythus" existed, we would never know anything about it because we have no way of doing so. Today, most scholars agree that each ancient myth and every aspect of it must be approached individually.[21] All the links connecting ancient myths to the time in which they were created are potentially as important as the structure of the myth and its links to other myths. The author of this book would like to emphasise that his aim is not to reveal the secrets of Perseus and Medusa. There are so many essays and monographs today with this very aim that they could fill a large library cabinet. This book is not about Perseus' myth, but about how people represented it. Why did they represent this myth in this or that particular way, and what does it tell us about them? How do we look at these sculptures and paintings today, at the beginning of the 21st century? What does it say about us? These are the questions that are asked in this book.

**The Story of Perseus**

In the last part of the introduction, we briefly summarize the story of Perseus. The following story is just one of the many ways in which the events of the myth about Perseus, which we know from literary tradition, can be arranged and intertwined.[22] Every retelling of the myth is its own interpretation, so every narrator automatically enters into a discussion about what the mythic story or motif means. It has been like this from the very beginning; everyone tells myths differently, though not arbitrarily, a fact which lends myths their admirable vitality. Sigmund Freud and all other modern interpreters of Greek myths have only continued on in the tradition established by those who created these myths. For this book, we can sum up Perseus' story in a series of crucial events that feature a few highly personalised legendary figures. Acrisius, King of Argos, did not have a male descendant, and therefore went to the oracle for counsel. He learned that he would not have a son, but his daughter Danae would give birth to a son who would kill him. To prevent this, he locked his daughter in an impenetrable tower or in an underground bronze chamber. Whatever shape the prison had, it had to have an opening to ensure the flow of air. The supreme god Zeus used this to enter the prison in the form of golden rain and with Danae begot Perseus.

The angry Acrisius did not want to call upon himself the wrath of the gods by murder, and therefore locked his daughter away for the second time, this time in a chest he had thrown into the sea. However, the chest with Danae and her son did not

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[21] Roger D. Woodard, *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone, eds., *A Companion to Greek Mythology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

[22] Robert L Fowler, *Early Greek Mythography II. Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 248–259.

sink and arrived safely at the island of Seriphos, where it was caught by Dictys, half-brother of Polydectes, the local king. Perseus grew up in Dictys' home, where he and his mother lived. Polydectes, however, wanted Danae to marry him, which she refused. Therefore, he sought to remove her only legitimate protector, her son Perseus. He provoked the hot-blooded young man to promise that he would bring him anything, even the head of the terrible Medusa. Perseus stunned everyone with his boastful proclamation but soon found himself trapped. He thus goes on an adventurous journey to Medusa's land, while the gods, Athena and Hermes, help him.

According to a later tradition, Medusa was originally a girl with beautiful hair, whom Poseidon raped in the temple of the virgin goddess Athena right before her eyes. Athena punished the girl by turning her into a monster with snakes instead of hair and giving her a petrifying gaze. The girl, transformed into a monster, began to transform all living creatures into stone. According to an older tradition, Medusa was one of the mythical Gorgons whose sisters were Graeae. The Medusa differed from them by being mortal, but Perseus had to learn how to kill her. This was revealed to him by Graeae, whose task it was to guard the Gorgons. While Medusa's eyes were supernatural, Graeae were almost blind. They had only one eye that they shared amongst themselves. Perseus seized this eye and returned it only when they showed him the way to the Nymphs that guarded the weapons and instruments with which he could accomplish his mission. According to another version, he received these objects from Athena and Hermes.

The Medusa was endowed with supernormal abilities so that no mortal could vanquish her. Perseus succeeded thanks to divine technology and instructions on how to proceed. He had winged boots and a winged cap so that he could fly. He was invisible thanks to the cap of Hades. He learned that he must not look at Medusa, but only at her mirror image on his shield. He also had a distinctive bent sword - a harpe, which could cut the monster's hard snake skin, and a kibisis, which was the bag in which the head of the monster could be carried without threatening the hero. In this myth, it is striking that on his quest for Medusa's head, Perseus experiences a series of mortally dangerous situations that all concern vision. The hero wins because he sees his enemy without being spotted; he knows what's ahead of him without looking. First, he steals the Graeae's eye in the moment that it is being passed from one to the other, and thus they cannot see anything at all. Then he kills Medusa because he does not look at her. He escapes her sisters - they do not see him, as he wears the cap of invisibility on his head.

When the hero cut off Medusa's head, Chrysaor and Pegasus, descendants of Poseidon and Medusa, sprung from the stump of her neck. Pegasus was a winged horse, which then created the spring of poetic inspiration with his hoof. On the return journey, Perseus used Medusa's head as a weapon because it retained its lethal effects even after separation from the body. He used the head for the first time in conflict with the giant Atlas. When he refused to accept the tired hero into his house and thus violated the law of hospitality, Perseus petrified him with Medusa's head. Thus, the Atlas Mountains emerged in Africa. When Perseus crossed over Ethiopia, a semi-mythical African country, he saw the local princess Andromeda. She was tied to a rock on the coast as the sea monster Ketos approached her. Poseidon

sent Ketos to punish Andromeda's mother Cassiopeia for boasting that her daughter or she herself was more beautiful than the Nereids, the Sea Nymphs. Ketos ravaged the land, so the local King Cepheus had to sacrifice his daughter to appease this sea dragon. Perseus saved the girl, and her parents rewarded the hero by giving her to him as a wife. However, Phineus, Andromeda's fiancé, attacked Perseus. The hero petrified him with Medusa's head, and after returning to Seriphos, he did the same with Polydectes, who forced Danae to marry him after Perseus left the island. Later, during an athletic contest, Perseus accidentally killed Acrisius, so the prophecy that the grandson would kill his grandfather came true. There were different versions of Perseus and Andromeda's next life. According to one of them, their son Perses founded the Persian Empire.

It is incredible how easy it is to update Perseus and transfer him to the distant future. In 1981, the first of a series of blockbuster films featuring Perseus was released. [23] The hero, who overcomes the monster with snake hair, excels by performing his heroic acts lightly and as if without the slightest effort. Perseus differs from Heracles and all the other heroes, who carried out equally great deeds but first had to suffer for a long time. They were humiliated and ridiculed; their victory always came after a prolonged and exhausting struggle. Perseus is young and beautiful - he never hesitates and he is never tired. He is the darling of the gods, who shower him with their ethereal equipment and advices. People may admire Heracles, but if one wanted to be a hero, he would surely want to become Perseus.

The hero is reincarnated in Luke Skywalker from the film epic Star Wars, the first episode of which appeared on screen in 1977. Skywalker was also of an uncertain origin and seemingly lacked any future, yet he was called upon to travel to the unknown, where he executed great deeds and liberated the princess. His predestined and powerful supporters equipped him with the necessary knowledge and technology. Perseus' story seems to be written forever in the memory of humankind because, even after thousands of years, it attracts every new generation. How is this possible? The reason the ancient myth is able to move from one civilisation to another is because it expresses complex human experiences using impressive but intuitively understandable metaphors. When sharing elementary experiences, one can avoid complicated artistic conventions and long stories.

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[23] 1981, "Clash of the Titans"; 2010, "Clash of the Titans"; 2012 "Wrath of the Titans."