PERSEUS

Beginnings

The very first depiction of Perseus and Gorgons is on an Athenian amphora from around 670 BC, on which only Perseus' legs with wings have remained intact. [1] Athena stands between the hero fleeing with Medusa's head and her sisters pursuing him (**3**). The goddess, characterised by a sceptre, faces the Gorgons and therefore is Perseus' helper; the representation proves that she has assumed this role from the very beginning of the image tradition. The author of the oldest surviving painting approached his new task much like a *bricoleur* - a handyman who creates new objects by using whatever materials are available. As a model for the head of the new monster, he may have chosen an object that he was already familiar with - a Phoenician metal pot with snakeheads on its edge. [2] Could this improvisation have inspired the idea of Medusa with snakes for hair? It is possible, as literary tradition has never been superior to artistic tradition in Greece, and both of them thus existed side by side, influencing one another.

3. Gorgons. Athenian amphora, around 670 BC.

To the left of the Gorgons, we see a headless Medusa lying in a meadow as her two sisters run behind Perseus. The speed of their movement is indicated by one of each of their legs extended forward. On their bodies, the Gorgons have scales, a reptilian attribute that corresponded to the snakes on their heads. Their broad faces are shown from the front, as was the case with Medusa later, and they have broad

[1] On ancient representations of Perseus cf. L. Jones Roccos, "Perseus," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, VII/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1994), 332–348.

[2] Eg. Phoenician silver lebes with snakes at its rim, 660–650 BC. Roma, Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, 61566.

mouths with teeth; there are wrinkles on their noses similar to those of lions.[3] The most notable feature of these Gorgons are their eyes, another attribute of reptiles. It should be noted that Homer does not mention snakes in connection with these monsters and emphasises only their eyes.[4]

The oldest relief depicting Perseus and Medusa is also an exceptional representation; it is a characteristic feature of an experimental stage in the development of the pictorial type. Medusa here has the body of a horse, which indicates her wildness or close relationship with Poseidon (**4**).[5] Horses were the attribute of the god of the sea, and the winged horse, Pegasus, was born from intercourse between Poseidon and Medusa. This Gorgon also has a large face with emphasised eyes and sharp teeth. Perseus, with his cap of invisibility, turns away from her and has a small kibisis hanging over his chest. Similar to the above-mentioned Athenian vase painting, on the Cycladic ceramic vase the action is set in a natural frame and, apart from the stylized vegetation, we also find a lizard on this relief.

4. Perseus kills Medusa. Relief on a Cycladic pithos, around 670 BC.

In the Spartan ivory relief of 625–600 BC, Perseus, again with his cap of invisibility, looks directly ahead so as not to see Medusa standing next to him.[6] Nevertheless, he firmly holds one of the snakes that grows from her head, and beside him stands the goddess Athena, leading his right hand with a sword. In later versions, Perseus looks backwards at this moment, which further stresses the frontal face of Medusa, which has become her primary attribute. The way the gods help

[3] Ingrid Krauskopf, "Gorgo, Gorgones. Gorgones in Etruria," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, IV/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1988), 285–345; Maddalena Cima, "Imago Medusae. Miti e immagini del mondo antico," in *La Medusa di Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Studi e restauri*, ed. Elena Bianca Di Gioia (Roma: Campisano Editore, 2007), 19–60.

[4] Homer, *Iliad*, 11, 36–37.

[5] Karen Topper, "Maidens, Fillies and the Death of Medusa on a Seventh-Century Pithos," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 130 (2010): 109–119; Francesco Tanganelli, "Gorgoni e cavalli nel mito e nelle arti figurative di età orientalizzante e arcaica,"*Archivi di studi indomediterranei* 5 (2015): 1–23.

[6] Samos, Archaeological Museum, A 1682.

Perseus in these scenes shows that the Greeks understood them in the same way as we today imagine ghosts. Greek gods were omnipresent and invisible, and some mortals could see and talk to them. The ancient gods knew everything, but their ability to act in the world of mortals was sometimes limited. No one other than Perseus could cut off the head of Medusa.

In the 6th century BC, the theme of Perseus running away with the head of Medusa and her winged sisters chasing after him was a common pictorial type. We find it also on the famous 6th century BC chest, which was one of the sights of Hera's Temple in Olympia, but which we know only from the description.[7] In the middle of the 6th century BC, the Medusa began to flee from Perseus, which is indicated by her arms and legs, which are outstretched and bent so that her body looks like a swastika. She is always looking directly at the viewer, and she usually has a large round face, huge bulging eyes, and a nose with horizontal wrinkles reminiscent of a lion's nose. She is bearded, with mouth wide-open, and shows her boar teeth and with her tongue sticking out. She has snakes on her head and a snake belt. The repulsive features of the Gorgon, such as bulging eyes, stuck out tongue, receding lips baring her teeth, and her protruding hair could have been inspired by the appearance of a corpse beginning to decompose. The appearance of the Gorgon was an impossible combination of masculine and feminine characters, as well as traits of humans and animals or living creatures and corpses, which might have suggested that Medusa was in fact invisible. Medusa was never a human or a half-animal like a sphinx or a siren. She was a demon that could take any form. She could look like something no one had ever seen before, but could also be indistinguishable from a normal human being. There were no tell-tale signs; a Gorgon did not have to be female, and the oldest ones were bearded.

In the first representations, we encounter Athena as Perseus' helper; Hermes appears in this role only after the middle of the 6th century BC. Hermes' help, which was limited to instruction and logistics in the mythical narrative, took the form of a physical intervention on an Athenian vase from 550–530 BC. Hermes stands in front of the fleeing Medusa with a raised herald's staff. With his right hand, Hermes stops the monster so that Perseus can grab her head and cut it off. The hero is depicted similarly to Hermes. A kibisis, shaped like a large bag, is hanging over his shoulder. The gaze of the individual figures characterises them - Medusa stares at the viewer, the immortal Hermes looks at the monster, and the mortal Perseus turns his head away from her (**5**).[8] The Medusa has wings on her back, which are also on the above mentioned Spartan ivory relief. The association of Perseus with Hermes, the patron of the Greek transitional rituals, shows how they perceived this hero's adventures in ancient Greece. Divine technology and know-how are a key element of the myth of Perseus, who appears on the mythic scene as a naive, clumsy and weak young man. Only thanks to Hermes does he perform heroic acts in faraway lands, returning as a mature man whom the adult community must respect. The situation after his return from the mission is the inversion of the initial situation. Perseus begins his career on

[7] Pausanias, 5, 18.

[8] Igor Baglioni, "La maschera di Medusa: Considerazioni sull'iconografia arcaica di Gorgo," in *Storia delle religioni e archeologia: Discipline a confronto*, ed. Igor Baglioni (Rome: Alpes Italia, 2010), 65–72.

the periphery of society, deprived of the family property; he is poor and means nothing in society. From his adventurous journey he returns rich and respected; the emblem of his new social status is Princess Andromeda, a trophy wife. Marriage with the royal daughter sealed Perseus' maturity.

5. Perseus kills Medusa. Athenian olpe, 550–530 BC.

On Athenian kantharos from the end of the 5th century BC, we find Perseus and Medusa's sister, but the characters are placed on opposite sides.[9] We see Perseus with the head of Medusa, and only when we turn the vase, do we find that a winged girl is chasing him. Alternatively, we see a winged girl, and then find out that she is pursuing Perseus. The Greek image type of a woman chasing a man did not often appear; mostly the depicted situation is the opposite-the male deities as a rule hunt mortal girls to rape them. In Perseus' case, the overturning of traditional roles may have been deliberate. We must not forget that these paintings adorned objects of everyday use and were primarily intended to be entertaining. Their additional function was to comment on mythical stories, a typical example being the Chalcidic amphora (**6**). To the right, we see Perseus with a sword behind his belt and behind him is Athena. Nymphs approach the hero from the left. From the first nymph, he receives his winged boots, from the second the cap of invisibility, and from the third the kibisis, which is richly decorated. The sequence of objects corresponds to the sequence of Perseus' adventures: first, he flew to Medusa with his winged boots, then made himself invisible with the cap, and finally cut off her head and put it into the kibisis. From the same time as the Chalcidic vase, there is a bronze relief with the

[9] Strasbourg, Université, Institut d'Archéologie Classique, 1574. Karen Topper, "Perseus, the Maiden Medusa, and the Imagery of Abduction," *Hesperia* 76 (2007): 73–105.

Nymphs handing over Perseus' helmet and the winged boots, which Pausanias saw at the Spartan Acropolis.[10] The nymphs were depicted in this role only in the 6th century BC; on later versions of the armament, it was Athena and Hermes who provided the hero with divine technology.

6. Perseus receives arms. Chalcidic amphora, around 550 BC.

On the oldest illustrations of Perseus' expedition to Medusa, the objects that the gods give him are always emphasised.[11] It is no coincidence that his divine supporters were Athena and Hermes, with whom the Greeks associated knowledge and artisanship.[12] Thanks to divine technology, Perseus could fly, which was necessary to defeat Medusa. There is conflicting information about where Medusa lived, but all ancient authors agree that it was a long way off. Perseus could never have reached this place alone, and that is why he needed to have magic wings. Perseus' equipment and its function is described in a poem from 580–570 BC. Hephaestus decorated the shield of Heracles, the hero's grandson, with a golden Perseus: "neither touching the shield with his feet nor far from it - a great wonder to observe, since nowhere was he attached to it … Around his feet he wore winged sandals; around his shoulders hung a black-bound sword from a bronze baldric. He flew like a thought."[13]

Around 500 BC, winglets appear on Hades' invisibility cap, giving it the same appearance as Hermes' cap. Perseus' magic cap was not canonical in form; it ranged from a Greek felted hat called a petasos to tight headgear and winged helmets of

[10] Pausanias 3, 17, 3.

[11] Magdeleine Clo, "La panoplie de Persée: fonctions de l'objet-attribut," *Gaia: revue interdisciplinaire sur la Grèce Archaïque* 16 (2013), 43–58; Cursaru Gabriela, "Les πτερόεντα πέδιλα de Persée," *ibid*.: 95–112; Marco Giuman, "L'adamantino dono di Ermes. L'harpe di Perseo: uno strumento divino al servizio dell'eroe," *ibid*: 59–79; Ezio Pellizer, "La kíbisis di Perseo: brevi riflessioni narratologiche," *ibid*.: 81–93.

[12] Perseus not only used technological inventions, but he also invented a throwing disc: Pausanias 2, 16.

[13] (Hesiod) *Shield,* 217–227, translated by Glenn W. Most.

fantastic shapes in the form of a Phrygian cap that appeared around 400 BC. At the same time, Perseus' outfits are standardised; as a rule, there are winglets on the cap and the legs. The poem quoted above also lists the following about Perseus: "The head of a terrible monster, the Gorgon, covered his whole back; shining tassels hung down from it made of gold."[14] The bag (kibisis) appears on one of the oldest depictions of Perseus' adventure with Medusa from about 670 BC, the Cycladic pithos which was mentioned previously. In the painted metope from the end of the 7th century BC, Perseus flees with Medusa's head.[15] The kibisis is not shown here, but this could be an artistic convention: the painter shows us what is in the bag that hangs on the hero's arm. A unique scene with Perseus storing the head of Medusa in the kibisis is seen on an Etruscan gem of 450–400 BC.[16] Medusa's head is facing the viewer, but Perseus glances in the other direction while handling the head to avoid her deadly gaze.

On the oldest representation of Medusa's death, she was killed with a straight sword. The "harpe," which is the Greek term for a sickle, appears as the deadly weapon in the 5th century BC literary rendering of the Perseus myth.[17] The oldest depiction of Perseus severing the head of Medusa with a harpe is on a Cypriot seal from the last quarter of the 6th century BC.[18] Bearded Perseus turns away from Medusa, and both have wings on their feet. On the oldest representations, Perseus was not only a beardless youth but also a bearded adult man. The Cypriot origin of the depiction was probably not accidental. Since the 10th century BC this Greek island, thanks to its geographical location, was the main centre from which influences from the Middle East flowed into mainland Greece. A sickle with a jagged blade as a symbol of power and destruction was a traditional attribute of deities and kings in the Middle East, where the word "harpe" probably originated. [19] While on the oldest depictions Perseus' weapon was either a sword or a sickle, from the beginning of the 4th century BC it was depicted by painters as a straight sword from which a sickle springs.[20]

Hesiod knew that Pegasus and Chrysaor were born when Perseus cut off Medusa's head. [21] However, the representation of this uncommon caesarean section appears only in the 6th century BC.[22] Poseidon's totemic beast was a horse, but with Medusa he conceived a winged horse because he lied with her in the form of a bird.[23] The unique Greek terracotta relief from the beginning of the 5th century BC shows Perseus riding on horseback, a harpe in one hand and Medusa's head in the other.[24]

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[14] (Hesiod) *Shield,* 223–226, translated by Glenn W. Most.
[15] Athens, The National Archaeological Museum, 13401.
[16] München, Staatliche Münzsammlung, AGD I,637.
[17] Aeschylus, *Phorcides,* fr. 262 TrGF.
[18] Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung, 2145.
[19] Martin L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 291.
[20] London, The British Museum, 1836,0224.85.
[21] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 280–281.
[22] Cf. Catherine Lochin, "Pegasos," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, VII/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1994), 214–230.
[23] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 6, 119–120.
[24] London, The British Museum, 1842,0728.1134.

In front of the horse is the headless Medusa in a chiton with snake belt; a naked baby, Chrysaor, is emerging from her neck. On the vase painting from the beginning of the 5th century BC, we see for the first time a scene that later became the main pictorial type of the birth of Pegasus (7). Blood flows from the neck of the headless Medusa as Pegasus leaps out of it. The horse has stretched wings, and its forelegs indicate running. In the background, Perseus flies away with a harpe in his left hand and a kibisis with Medusa's head in his right. The flying Pegasus was a prefiguration of the creation of a source of poetic inspiration on the Mount of Muses, which was at the same time a source of glory and the immortality that resulted from it.

7. The birth of Pegasus. Athenian white lekythos, around 480 BC.

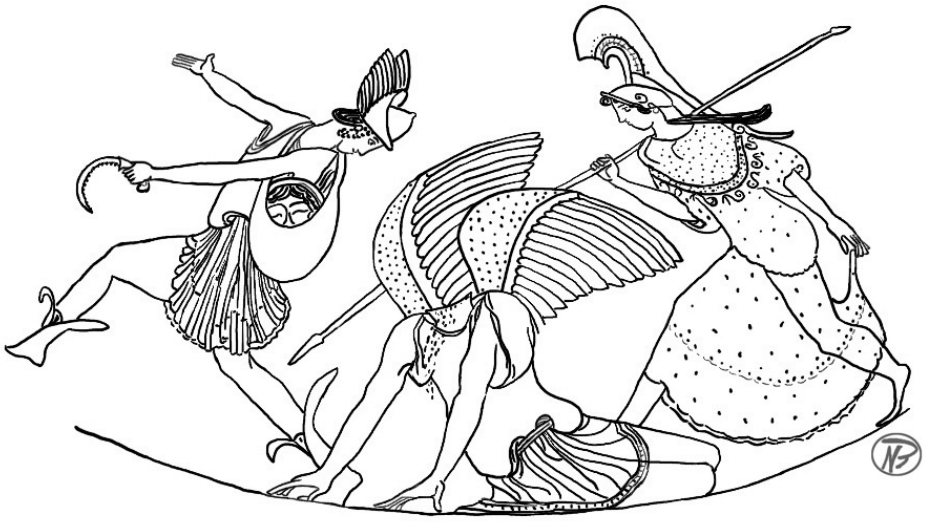
Myths and their depictions allowed people to enter into a chaotic subconscious, meet monstrous characters, experience irresolvable conflicts or unimaginable horrors, and above all carry out heroic deeds. In the case of Perseus, however, a true battle does not take place; its essence is that its progression and outcome cannot be predicted. Perseus carried out a series of planned acts and became a hero by precisely executing them. He first approaches the monster in the prescribed manner, and then, with a special tool, cuts off its head and puts it in a special bag. At the end of this deed, thanks to the special equipment (the cap of invisibility and winged boots), he returns home safely. Perseus' act does not remind us so much of the heroic acts of other mythic heroes, but as a sequence of operations of an experienced peasant and soldier, i. e. a typical citizen of both Greek and Roman states. The Cypriot sarcophagus from the second quarter of the 5th century BC represents Perseus in this role, as a peasant returning from the field.[25] To the left is a fantastic scene - the headless Medusa, from which Pegasus and Chrysaor are born. In the middle of the relief sits a dog who has turned its head toward the headless Medusa. To the right is the bearded Perseus, who has finished his work and smiles with satisfaction. He has relied heavily on his equipment and the training he has received. He has a cap of invisibility on his head and holds a harpe in his raised

[25] New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 74.51.2451.

hand; over his shoulder he holds a rod from which the kibisis with the head of Medusa hangs.

A Beauty and a Monster

Medusa was not only the monster with snake hair and boar tusks that we know from the countless images of the 6th and the beginning of the 5th century BC.[26] She was both a monster and a beautiful woman, and this duality has been Medusa' attribute since the very beginning. According to Hesiod's "Theogony," Medusa had two sisters, Stheno and Euryale, who differed from her by being immortal. Nevertheless, Poseidon had given Medusa priority over her sisters, so she had to be beautiful.[27] On the above-mentioned oldest representation, the Gorgons have grotesque heads but human bodies with ample bosoms. Medusa stands out from the others as the one with the amplest bosom (**3**). A Gorgon Medusa with standard human features can also be found on the also previously mentioned ceramic metope from the end of the 7th century BC.[28] This metope came from Apollo's temple, and the double character of Medusa proves the fact that in the same temple there were also metopes depicting Gorgon as a bearded monster with bared fangs and tongue sticking out. On a carnelian scarab from about 500 BC, Medusa has snakes in her hair and around her neck; her face is swollen, but it is a human face, and she even seems to be smiling.[29]



8. Perseus kills Medusa. Athenian hydria, around 460 BC.

From the second quarter of the 7th century until the middle of the 5th century BC, representations of Medusa as a monster prevailed, while later she was primarily depicted as a dazzling beauty. What caused this change? In Greek art of the 5th century BC, we see a tendency to humanise all monsters, which was related to the

[26] E.g. Athenian hydria, around 490 BC. London, The British Museum, 1867,0508.1048.
[27] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 277–279.
[28] Athens, The National Archaeological Museum, 13401.
[29] Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California, 81.AN.76.3.

fundamental change in the representation of the human figure. In the previous centuries, representation of the human figure in Greek art closely followed Egyptian models. In the early decades of the 5th century BC, however, Greek artists left Egyptian conventions behind and began to represent human beings as they saw them. Verisimilitude was also clearly required in the depiction of mythical monsters. In the mid-5th century BC, Perseus with a winged cap on his head takes away the head of Medusa in a kibisis (**8**). She has carefully coiffured hair without snakes, a regular face, and closed eyes. Behind Perseus, her headless body with wings drops to the ground; however, she manages to maintain her female grace even after death. Her legs are elegantly folded beneath her; the slim fingers of her hands with graceful movements touch the ground. Medusa's attractiveness is also indicated in the fact that Perseus turns his head back to look at the beautiful decapitated body.

9. Perseus kills Medusa. Athenian pelike, around 440 BC.

On a vase from the mid-5th century BC, we see Perseus approaching a sleeping Medusa; she is dressed in a short-girdled chiton and has short hair, an attribute of young girls.[30] This Medusa is characterised as an exotic stranger, whose

[30] Paris, Louvre, 1286.

origin shows a distinctive African physiognomic feature - a broad, flat nose. On the left, we find Poseidon, Athena, and Hermes; from the right, Gorgons are approaching. The picture originated in Athens, which at that time tried to prevent marriages between Athenian citizens and foreigners. In 451 BC, Athenian politician Pericles declared that only those whose parents were both Athenian citizens were entitled to Athenian citizenship. This black Medusa could be seen as a warning that foreign women pose an even greater threat if they are beautiful. On an Athenian vase from around 440 BC, Perseus has rays around his head painted with added white (**9**).

The hero was eventually rewarded by becoming immortal as a constellation of the night sky, which was sometimes indicated by the rays around his head. The hero depicted on the vase stands in front of the beautiful sleeping Medusa, who is a girl of non-Greek origin with short hair, coming from somewhere in the north, as can be seen from her embroidered garments, which were worn by Thracian women. This Medusa does not have snakes for hair, but has large wings on her back. In this duel, there is a striking asymmetry. The perfectly equipped hero, assisted by a powerful goddess, is attacking a beautiful sleeping winged girl who is glaringly vulnerable. Her left hand is placed under her head, and her right arm hugs it precisely as people do in their sleep.

How should we understand this scene? The hero certainly does not need any physical help, which is implied by the fact that the goddess does not interfere in the event - she calmly stands behind Perseus and leans on her spear. So why does Perseus turn to Athena? To assure himself that he must kill the seemingly harmless Medusa? As long as Medusa was a hideous monster, it was not difficult to make sure the hero did not look at her. However, as soon as she turned into a beauty, this became a temptation against which no man was immune. Was Athena's job to ensure that the hero did not begin to doubt the correctness of his act? Was the beautiful Medusa a femme fatale, a woman who seduces men to destroy them? A series of Athenian vases from the second quarter of the 5th century BC speaks against such an interpretation. On these vases, Perseus sneaks toward a sleeping Medusa, who has an unattractive round face and extended tongue. She may have fangs, but she looks somewhat comical and indeed not frightening. On the Athenian vase created before the mid-5th century BC, the hero leans forward to cut off the head of Medusa, but he turns his head from her.[31] This Medusa would not seduce anyone, so we must find another explanation for why the hero turns back.

The key to this series of scenes is an Athenian vase, on which we find an unsightly Medusa with eyes firmly closed (**10**). Perseus tiptoes toward her; behind him stands Hermes, his outstretched hand revealing the tension he is experiencing. Above Medusa stands Athena. Her gesture indicates that she is instructing the hero on how to step toward Medusa safely. On the other scenes from this series, the hero has turned his head away in fear that Medusa will open her eyes and kill him with her gaze. In this scene, he can look at Medusa because he is following Athena's instructions. By doing so, he can get close to Medusa without waking her up.

[31] London, The British Museum, 1864,1007.1726.

10. Perseus about to seize the head of sleeping Medusa. Athenian hydria, around 450 BC.

Medusa's beauty and her sleep might be connected, as both motifs appear at the same time. When Medusa closed her deadly eyes, which was her most noticeable attribute in Archaic Greece, the snakes from her head disappeared, and she turned into a beautiful girl. With Medusa, everything was the opposite. People are sometimes beautiful when they live and always ugly after death. The Medusa was ugly when awake and maybe became beautiful when she closed her eyes in her sleep, bringing about her death. In ancient Greece, closed eyes were a sign of the absence of life. We die after our last breath; the Greeks died after their final gaze was cast.

All Gorgons, not only Medusa, can be sleeping beauties in classical Greek art. On the vase from the third quarter of the 4th century BC, Perseus finds them sleeping under an apple tree.[32] Four figures are all beautiful young girls with long blond hair painted yellow. Perseus holds the head of Medusa but he does not look at her; his head is cast upward. In literary sources, it is stated that there were only three Gorgons; this deviation can be explained perhaps by the fact that the vase painting shows two scenes separated by a tree. To the right are three sleeping Gorgons, and to the left is another sequence of the story - Perseus has now beheaded the Gorgon Medusa. From the 4th century BC on, Medusa was characterised not only by a beautiful girl's face but also by her nudity. On a mirror from the 4th century BC, the erotic character of Perseus and Medusa's encounter is emphasised by the fact that both are completely naked and Medusa is a girl with beautiful and perfectly natural curls. Perseus turns his face from her and cuts her head off. She touches him with both hands drawn behind her. One hand is on Perseus' knee and the other tries to loosen the grip of the hero's left hand, which pulls her head backwards.[33]

In Ovid's "Metamorphoses," which were published around the year 8 AD, Perseus himself tells the readers that Medusa was at first a beauty and only later a monster that he had killed. Ovid's Perseus spoke of Medusa at a feast after

[32] Berlin, Antikensammlung der Staatlichen Museen, F 3022.
[33] Boston, The Museum of Fine Arts, 61.1257.

Andromeda's wedding, where one of his guests asked him why Medusa was the only Gorgon to have snakes instead of hair. Perseus explains to him that Medusa was originally a girl with beautiful hair. He claimed to have met someone who had seen her with his own eyes, meaning she had been transformed into a monster only recently.[34] In Ovid's myth, the transformation of beautiful hair into hideous snakes is another means of expressing Medusa's impalpable nature.

The poet first writes that she lived with her sister Gorgons in the desert at the end of the world, that is, outside the world of people. Several verses later, however, he states that Medusa had many suitors. She lived a mortal life like ordinary men, attended the temple of Athena, and differed from the other girls only by the beauty of her hair. To understand the beautiful Medusas in Greek art, we must bear in mind that the transformation of the monster into the beauty was not complete. Even in the 5th century BC and in the following centuries, images appeared showing that Medusa had retained her original horrific form. For example, on the Roman bronze relief sculpture, Medusa is ugly; she has snakes around her neck and dogs' heads in her hair.[35] In exceptional cases she has scales on her cheeks which characterise her as a water monster, a being which she is related to by her origin.

The image of Medusa evolved throughout ancient Greek and Roman civilisation. From the very beginning, she was a man and a woman, a man and an animal, a living creature and a corpse; from the 5th century BC on, she was a beauty and a monster. In Greek Hellenistic and Roman art, the physiognomy of Medusa was human as a rule; the supernatural character of the monster indicated only snakes instead of hair and wings on her head.[36] However, in addition to the dreadful and beautiful Medusa, a third alternative appeared - the pained Medusa with a wrinkled forehead and an open and disfigured mouth (**11**). The absurd domain that characterised Medusa was thus further extended - alongside a ruthless assailant appeared a suffering victim.

11. Medusa. Relief on a Roman bronze phalera, 3rd century AD.

[34] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 794–797.
[35] London, The British Museum, GR 1867.5-10.2.
[36] Orazio Paoletti, "Gorgones Romanae," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, IV/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1988), 345–362.

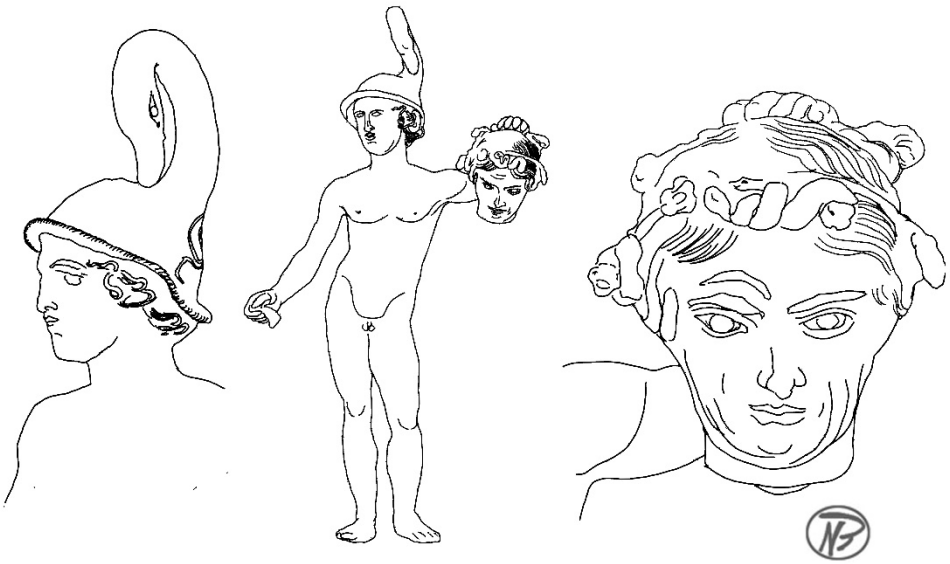
In the myth of Perseus, the most frequent pictorial type is the triumphant hero with Medusa's head in his hand.[37] It does not show any moment in this hero's quest, because he had to flee immediately after the beheading of the monster. In the situation where Medusa's sisters pursued Perseus, it would be absurd for him to stop and triumphantly raise his sword or the severed head. This image type does not illustrate the myth but summarises it and celebrates the hero. Pausanias, in his "Description of Greece," states that at the Athenian Acropolis he saw Myron's statue of Perseus, who had accomplished his deed with Medusa.[38] However, neither the original sculpture nor any of its Roman copies have survived. This type of triumphant Perseus is first documented by a small statue in the Sparta Museum, which dates to the mid-5th century BC.[39] Since then, we encounter this pictorial type frequently in Greek and Roman art. We find it in monumental art, on vases, small statues, coins, rings and amulets. It is one of the most widespread image types in the world. In following millennia, it smoothly crosses the boundaries between cultures and historical epochs.

12. Perseus with the head of Medusa. Lycian marble acroterion from a heroonu, Limyra in Lykii, 370–360 BC (reconstruction).

Immediately after its inception, this image of the victorious Perseus spread beyond the borders of Greece. Already in the first half of the 4th century BC, we find it in Lycia. The sculpture in Lycia shows Perseus running with the severed head in

[37] Ernst Langlotz, *Der triumphierende Perseus* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1960).
[38] Pausanias 1, 23, 7.
[39] Sparta, Museum, 6277. Cf. Angelos Delivorrias, "Zum Motiv des triumphierenden Perseus,"*Antike Kunst* 12 (1969): 22–24.

his raised hand; at his feet we see the headless body of Medusa (**12**).[40] This scene combines the pictorial type of Perseus fleeing the Gorgons and the type of the triumphant hero. The group of statues was part of a tomb decoration; the hero was at the top of the pediment, and at both ends were figures of running Gorgons. The tomb belonged to the local royal dynasty, which probably revered Perseus as its ancestor. At the same time, the type of the victorious Perseus appeared in Etruria. The Etruscan statuette in Leipzig depicts a cap on Perseus' head in the shape of a swan; the hero holds a harpe in his right hand and in the left the head of Medusa, a girl with snakes in her hair (**13**).



13. Perseus with the head of Medusa. Etruscan bronze statuette, c. 350 BC.

The image of triumphant Perseus is often found on ancient Roman imperial coins. Perseus is shown naked with a cloak thrown over his back so that his whole body is revealed, a trait which characterises him as a mythical hero. In his left hand, he holds a large harpe; in his right is Medusa's severed head. There are many variations of the coin type: the hero may hold Medusa's head in his right hand, raised or lowered, and can look in the same direction as Medusa or in the opposite direction. This pictorial type existed in Roman art also in monumental form, which is evidenced by the statue of Ostia on which Perseus turns his head away so that Medusa's head does not kill him. In this sculptural work, Medusa's face is beautiful and her eyes are closed, suggesting that she is dead (**14**). In the luxury villa in Stabii, we find both Perseus and Iphigenia in one room (**15**). They both raise their trophies, Perseus the head of the Medusa, Iphigenia the image of Artemis. Above them is the goddess of victory, Victoria, with a palm branch. Thus, Iphigenia and Perseus are portrayed as winners who have won their trophies thanks to the gods' favour.

[40] Jürgen Borchhardt and Gert Mader, "Der Triumphierende Perseus in Lykien.," *Antike Welt* 3, no. 1 (1972): 2–16; Kim J. Hartswick, "The Gorgoneion on the Aigis of Athena: Genesis, Suppression and Survival," *Revue Archéologique* 2 (1993): 288–290; Tuna Şare, "The Sculpture of the Heroon of Perikle at Limyra: The Making of a Lycian king," *Anatolian Studies* 63 (2013): 55–74.

14 (left). Perseus with the head of Medusa from Ostia.
Marble Roman copy of a Greek original, c. 150 AD.
15 (right). Perseus with the head of Medusa. Roman Wall painting, before 79 AD.

The most widespread image type of the triumphant Perseus was the hero holding the head of Medusa in his lowered hand and raising the sword with which he performed his heroic deed. In this version, the attention is shifted from Medusa's head to the sword, which has fundamentally changed the meaning of the representation. The point of Perseus' existence is not to kill Medusa, an act by which he began his career, but his heroism, which is embodied in the raised weapon. This pictorial model became a model for the Perseus constellation, which explains its extraordinary popularity in later epochs. It entered illustrations of Greek astronomical writings already in the 4th century BC. Thanks to these illustrations, the triumphant Perseus never disappeared from the European cultural consciousness; we shall return to this later.

Literary texts and works of art unambiguously prove that the myth of Perseus was not taken from foreign sources, but originated in Greece in the 8th–6th centuries BC. Image types and motifs that we cease to encounter afterwards point to experiments followed by careful editorial work that aimed to create the impressive picture of the hero, his opponents and the key events in the myth. At the end of the 5th century BC, for example, we find in Greek art a representation of Perseus as he steals the eye of the Graeae, which then appeared also on an Etruscan bronze mirror

of 400–350 BC.[41] The theft of the Graeae's eye prefigures the acquisition of the head of the Medusa and her deadly eyes, but the Greeks apparently did not consider this moment to be visually impressive and thus stopped representing it. In the creation of the image types evoking the myth of Perseus, the Athens of the 5th century BC played a decisive role. The process of reducing, developing and interconnecting individual motifs eventually resulted in the pictorial types that are still in use today. Some motifs, however, appeared only in the ancient literary tradition, although they had enormous potential in the visual arts, which only exploited modern Europe. This was a case of representations of petrification.

Petrifaction and Statues

Already on the oldest representations, Perseus turns away his face from the ugly face of Medusa, but this action is not substantiated in the literary tradition of the time. He was superhuman, so why did this unsightly face scare him? In the Homeric poems, we read that the Gorgons were frightening monsters with terrible faces, the eyes of which were the most terrifying.[42] Hesiod's works does not give reasons for the hero's averted glance.[43] Ancient Greek authors only explained precisely how Medusa's deadly gaze worked in the 5th century BC when they began to write about her beautiful face. In Pindar's Pythian odes from the first decade of the 5th century BC, Medusa has snakes in her hair and a "beautiful face;" Perseus cuts off her head, which brought a "stone death" to the inhabitants of Seriphos.[44] Thus, Pindar knew that Medusa's severed head also held the magical power to kill with its eyes, which Perseus could then use as a weapon. It not only transformed human beings but whole islands and everything that was on them.

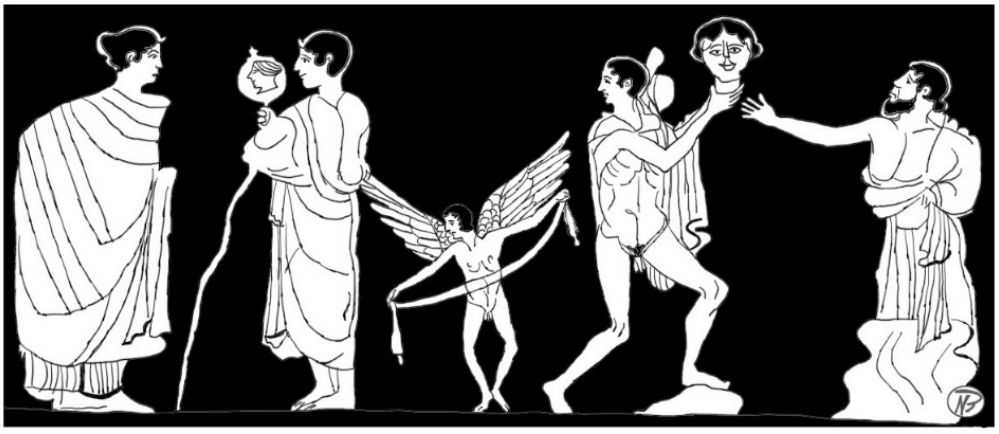
Through the petrification caused by Medusa's gaze, a human being received a monumental and lasting form; a living organism became a stone statue. Pherecydes of Athens wrote that when Perseus returned to Seriphos, he came to Polydectes and asked him to gather all the inhabitants of the island to show them the head of Medusa. He then turned away and took out the head from the kibisis – the people looked upon it and turned into stone.[45] It follows from Pherecydes' account that Perseus' contemporaries had no idea how Medusa's head worked. If they had known, no one would have come to the main square of Seriphos. An explanation of this ignorance is simple – everyone who came to Medusa's abode died, so they could no longer tell anyone else of their fate. The only one to know the terrible effect of Medusa's gaze was Perseus, to whom the gods revealed their secret.

Around 450 BC, not only Pherecydes of Athens, but also the author of the tragedy of Prometheus wrote that every mortal who looks upon the Gorgons was immediately petrified.[46] In the 3rd century BC, Lycophron wrote about Medusa's

[41] New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 26.60.63.
[42] Homer, *Iliad*, 8, 349; 11, 36–37.
[43] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 276–277; (Hesiod) *Shield*, 230.
[44] Pindar, *Pythian,* 10 a 12.
[45] Pherecydes, fr. 11 Fowler.
[46] *Prometheus Bound*, 793–801.

gaze, which transforms everything into stone.[47] In art, petrification from Medusa's head was first shown around the middle of the 5th century BC; it was not a transformation into a stone statue but into a formless boulder.[48] The petrification begins at the ground, so Polydectes merges with the rock on which his throne stood. Perseus holds the head of the Medusa so that he does not see her and does not turn into stone himself. Medusa's gaze does not focus on Polydectes; the vase painter held to the convention of Archaic Greek art, in which a frontal gaze was an attribute of Medusa. However, the monster is no longer represented as in Archaic art; she has the face of a beautiful girl with completely normal hair.

A slightly younger vase painting with the same theme in St Petersburg's Hermitage demonstrates how the Greeks used the Perseus myth to think about petrification and mirror images. On one side of the vase, we see Perseus and Polydectes (**16**). The hero with Medusa's head has one foot laid on a stone lying in front of him, signifying his triumph over Polydectes. The king of Seriphos stands in front of him and has already been turned into boulder up to his knees. Perseus is characterised in the usual way and turns his face away from Medusa's head.



16. Youth with a mirror and Perseus with the head of Medusa. Campanian amphora, 440–420 BC.

The manner in which he holds the lethal head is highly unusual. He does not raise the head by the hair, but holds it by the neck using both hands. On the other side of this vase is a scene with a girl and a young man holding a mirror, which is a commentary on the scene of Perseus and Medusa. The young man holds the mirror in the same way as Perseus grasps Medusa's head. He is seeking the woman's favour with this gift. Eros, who holds a ribbon in his outstretched hands, connects the scenes on the opposite sides of this vase. Medusa's head, with which Perseus kills Polydectes without physical contact, creates a humorous commentary on the mirror, a gift with which the young man wins over the girl at a distance. In this vase painting, the mirror and the head of the Medusa affect those who look at them, but the intentions and the final consequences are the opposite. Perseus wants to get rid of Polydectes with the head of Medusa; the young man wants to attract the girl to him using the mirror. Polydectes vainly attempts with his raised hands to protect himself.

[47] (Lycophron), *Alexandra*, 843.
[48] Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico, V.F. 325.

The girl does not protest; on the contrary, she is looking forward to receiving the mirror, the rear side of which is decorated with a female bust, a prefiguration of the girl's mirror image.

In the 5th century BC literary tradition of the myth of Perseus, the statue is mentioned exclusively in connection with Andromeda. In Euripides' Andromeda, which premiered in 412 BC, Perseus happens upon Andromeda, who is chained to a rock. She seems so beautiful to him that he thinks a skilful sculptor created her from the same stone as the rock to which she is fastened.[49] In this case, the petrification becomes the highest possible praise – the hero thinks the living girl is a perfect statue. Ovid compared both Andromeda and Perseus to statues: "As soon as Perseus saw her there bound by the arms to rough cliff – save that her hair gently stirred in the breeze, and the warm tears were trickling down her cheeks, he would have thought her a marble statue – he took fire unwitting and stood dumb. Smitten by the sight of the beauty he sees, he almost forgot to move his wings in the air."[50] Perseus sees the beautiful girl as a statue, and for a moment he himself changes into a statue, immobilised by her beauty. He avoids the deadly sight of Medusa, but the sight of Andromeda's beauty nearly kills him.

Perseus as a sculptor appears for the first time in Menander's comedy Dyskolos, which premiered at the turn of 316 and 315 BC. Misanthrope Cnemon, the main hero of this comedy, says. "Well, wasn't that Perseus such a lucky fellow, on two accounts? He had some wings, and so didn't meet any pedestrians on the ground. Moreover, then he owned a sort of instrument with which he petrified all who annoyed him! I wish I had one now! Then nothing would be commoner all over than stone statues!"[51] Aelian, who lived in the years 175–235 AD, incorporated in his Letters from a farmer a paraphrase of Menander's text. It is in the form of an answer from Cnemon to his neighbour, who complained that he was indecent to the people. If he were Perseus, as he wrote at the end of his letter, his neighbour would be the first one he would transform into a statue.

According to Lycophron, who lived in the 2nd century BC, Perseus used the head of Medusa to make sculptures by turning people to stone from head to toe. In Ovid's Metamorphoses, Perseus saw sculptures all around the Gorgon's residence: "On all sides, through the fields and along the ways he saw forms of men and beasts changed into stone by one look at Medusa's face."[52] On the way back to his home, Perseus left behind the stone sculptures of all who stood in his way. He first turned Atlas to stone, then transformed Phineus and his companions into stone statues in Ethiopia. He did the same to Polydectes at Seriphos and to Proetus, the hostile brother of Acrisius, at Argos. Ovid described in detail the transformation of Phineus and his companions. Andromeda's fiancé refuses to accept that Perseus should have her hand in marriage. He sets out to kill Perseus with the help of his friends, but Perseus turns them all to stone. Ovid tells how in the fervour of the fight, Phineus calls his companions to help him, even though they are already stone statues. Their

[49] Euripides, *Andromeda*, fr. 125 TrGF.
[50] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 4, 673–677, translated by Frank Justus Miller, revised by G. P. Goold.
[51] Menander, *Dyskolos,* 153–159, translated by W. G. Arnott.
[52] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 780–781, translated by Frank Justus Miller, revised by G. P. Goold.

semblance is so perfect that he recognises each one, but when he touches them, he finds out they are marble statues. Perseus mockingly promises Phineus that he will turn him into a statue, which will decorate Andromeda's palace forever so she can enjoy the frightened face of her former fiancé.[53]

Medusas' residence and palaces, in which Perseus petrifies his opponents with Medusa's head, becomes a mythical analogy in Ovid's poem of the private homes of rich Romans. In these residences, stone statues were a common sight. Copies of the famous Greek statues of the classical epoch began to be made for Roman private residences in the middle of the 2nd century BC.[54] The originals were made of bronze, which became the main material for Greek statues since the 5th century BC, but the copies were made of stone. From the 1st century BC up to the 3rd century AD, workshops in Greece and Italy produced thousands of marble copies of Greek bronze sculptures, which can be found today in Italian galleries and art collections around the world.

In the 5th century AD, Nonnus surpassed Ovid in metaphors based on the analogy between the sculptures and the petrified victims of Medusa's gaze. Hera encouraged Perseus to transform Dionysus' supporters, who attacked Argos, into stone sculptures and decorate the squares of the cities in Argolis with them.[55] When Perseus used Medusa's head to petrify Ariadne, who was fighting on Dionysus' side, the god of wine became furious, but Hermes pacified him by pointing to the advantages of Ariadne's petrified state. He stressed that since she is dead, she can ascend to the heavens and become a constellation. The counterpart of the constellation of Ariadne in the heavens will be the stone statue of Ariadne on earth, a proof of her apotheosis. The stone statue of Ariadne will stand on earth next to that of Hera, the supreme goddess.[56]

This rich literary evidence notwithstanding, Perseus' creation of stone statues was never represented in ancient Greek and Roman art. In antiquity, the sculptures that Medusa created with her eyes lived only in literary tradition. The absence of these images is even more surprising when we realise that the Greek painters knew how to represent petrification, at least since the 4th century BC. We find it on a series of Apulian vases from 350–325 BC. The paintings were somewhat related to Aeschylus' drama Niobe. In it, she mourns over her children, who have become statues, which is the same fate that also awaits her. The transformation of a living human body into a stone funerary sculpture is indicated by the fact that the lower part of the body is painted white. On one vase, the entire lower half of Niobe is white, transformed into marble.[57] Petrification by Medusa's head began to be represented only a millennium later by painters of the Italian Renaissance. In Baroque painting, this pictorial type existed in several variations.

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[53] 5, 180, 241, 249, 209–236.

[54] Ruth Meredith Kousser, *Hellenistic and Roman Ideal Sculpture: The Allure of the Classical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 138–142.

[55] Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 47, 533–564.

[56] Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 47, 690–711.

[57] Oliver Taplin, *Pots and Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Greek Vase Painting of the Fourth Century* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), 74–79.

Mirror Image

In the myth of Perseus, vision holds a crucial position because it determines the hero's fate. In ancient Greece, vision was at the top of the sensory hierarchy. According to the accepted theories of the time, vision physically linked the seer to what was seen, while hearing implied a discontinuity between the speaker and the listener. [58] The sight of Medusa brought sure death, and this seemed to be the reason for the attractiveness of the oldest scenes of Perseus killing Medusa. In these representations, the Greeks saw Medusa gazing out of the image at them and staring straight into their eyes. At the same time, they saw the hero, who turns away and cuts off the head of the monster. Medusa's gaze and Perseus' averted eyes drew the viewer into the represented action. These features allowed the viewer to identify with the mythical hero, experiencing his fear as well as his triumph. At the same time, the picture illustrated the difference between reality and the display of reality. The viewer looks into the face of Medusa but is not turned into stone.

Around 450 BC, Pherecydes of Athens enriched the myth with new features of far-reaching consequences. In his version of the myth, he incorporated not only the petrifying look that Pindar mentioned for the first time; he also comes up with a new element: the mirror image. He wrote that the gods (Athena and Hermes) advised Perseus that when severing the head of Medusa, who was the only mortal among them, he must turn away and showed him her image in a mirror. [59] The shield on which Perseus had seen the reflected image of Medusa allowed him to see her without coming into direct eye contact, which would have meant certain death. When looking at the mirror, the relationship between the source of the image and the perceived subject was interrupted, and the magical power of Medusa's gaze lost its effect. However, the mirror image had another advantage – it allowed Perseus to see what Medusa looked like. The Greeks believed that reflections revealed the essence of what was being reflected in the mirror. The monster could be invisible or could conceal its nature behind its beautiful face, but the mirror revealed its true form.[60]

Europe later came to know Perseus, who looks at Medusa's mirror image while severing her head, primarily from Ovid's Metamorphoses. Ovid emphasises that the hero did not look directly at Medusa but at her image (formam), which was reflected on his shield. He waited until Medusa and her snakes fell asleep and then cut off her head. [61] The Greek word "eikon," which Ovid translates as "forma" also means a portrait or semblance; Perseus thus created an image of Medusa to defend himself from her spell. According to Ovid, however, he did his deed entirely alone without the help of the gods. The motif of Athena, who holds the hero's shield, is found in Lucian's text from the 2nd century AD, where the mythical sea deities tell of this event.[62] In another of Lucian's works, we also find a description of the picture on

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[58] David Chidester, *Word and Light: Seeing, Hearing and Religious Discourse* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); 1–10; Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, *Du masque au visage: Aspects de l'identité en Grèce ancienne* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012).

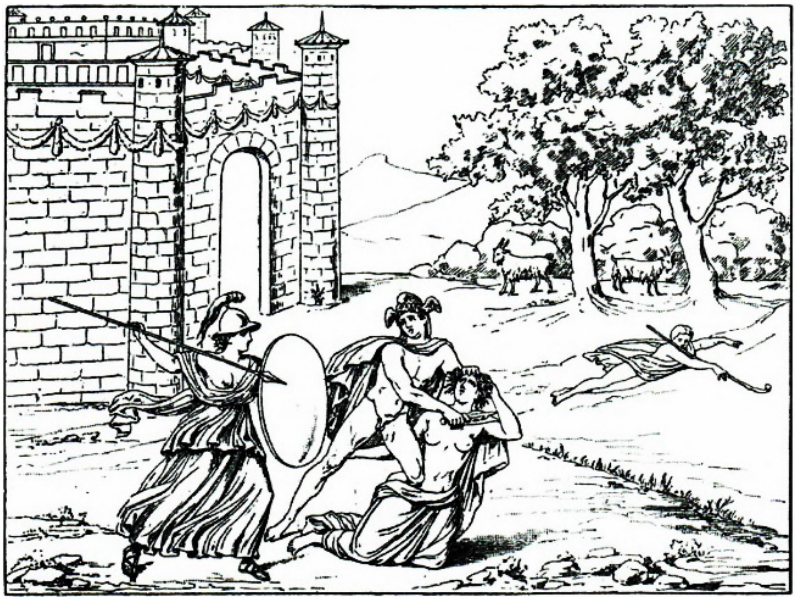
[59] Pherecydes, fr. 11 Fowler.

[60] Frontisi-Ducroux – Vernant, *Du masque au visage*, 70.

[61] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 782–785.

[62] Lucian, *Dialogues in the Sea*, 14.

which Perseus "is cutting off the head of Medusa, and Athena is shielding him. He has done the daring deed, but has not looked, except at the reflection of the Gorgon in the shield, for he knows the cost of looking at the reality."[63] The difference between looking at Medusa and her image is the difference between death and life.



17. Perseus kills Medusa. Roman wall painting, before 79 AD.

The image of Medusa's beheading was not as popular in Roman art as it was in Greece, but it is Roman art that showed Perseus looking at the mirror image during the beheading for the first time. On the fresco in Herculaneum from before the year 79 AD, Athena not only holds the shield so the hero can see Medusa's head – at the same time she attacks Medusa with her spear (**17**). The scene takes place in the countryside outside the city gates, where we can find a shepherd sleeping peacefully in the background. We find this pictorial on the reverse of Emperor Caracalla's coin 198–217 AD and a series of reliefs found on the territory of the Roman provinces of Pannonia and Noricum, today's Hungary (**18**) and Austria,[64] on which the Medusa is sometimes depicted completely naked.

The Roman gilt silver plate found in today's Portugal is perhaps the most detailed depiction of this theme.[65] Perseus, who has a Phrygian cap on his head, is approaching the cave where the beautiful Gorgons sleep. Athena holds a mirror behind Perseus, reflecting his figure, which is ready to attack with the harpe that the hero holds in his right hand. Hermes, who stands in front of Perseus, also assists him; he lifts Perseus' cloak so that the hero would not see the Gorgon if he were to look imprudently at the Gorgons. Votive objects in the foreground and a table, helmet, and torch define the environment as a sacred precinct. It is a shrine to Athena because there is an olive tree there dedicated to the goddess. On a branch of the olive tree sits an owl, another attribute of Athens. The scene of the end of the Medusa thus

[63] Lucian, *The Hall*, 25, translated by A. M. Harmon.
[64] Neumarkt im Tauchental (Oberwart, Burgenland, Austria).
[65] Lisboa, Museu nacional de arquelogia, Au 690.

evokes the beginning of her story – her rape by Poseidon, which took place in the shrine of Athena. Medusa is young, beautiful and almost naked on these Roman images. Her appearance seems to justify the presence of the virtuous Athena, who makes sure that Perseus does not fall victim to Medusa's charm.

18. Perseus kills Medusa. Relief from Roman marble sarcophagus, 2nd century AD.

In addition to the pictorial type of Perseus looking at the mirror image of Medusa during the beheading, there was also a pictorial type of the hero looking at a mirror image of the monster's severed head. In Greek art, Athena and Hermes accompanied him; in Roman art it was Andromeda. In these scenes, we see Perseus, who has successfully escaped the Gorgons with his trophy. He is now safe and inspects the face reflected in a shield or water surface together with his divine companions. It is to be noted that in the visual arts, the theme of the mirror image appeared in the 4th century BC, a century after its first mention in literary texts.[66] On the Etruscan engraving, we see Athena in the centre with an aegis over her breasts and spears in her left hand.[67] In her raised hand, she holds Medusa's head. The monster does not have snake hair, and from her traditional appearance she has retained only an ugly-looking round face. On each side is Perseus with the harpe and Hermes with the caduceus. They all look down at the image of Medusa's head reflected in the water. On the front side of this Etruscan mirror; its owner was thus inspecting her face while on its rear side Perseus, Athena and Hermes look at the mirror image of Medusa's head.

A Greek theatre play, which celebrated success on the stage in the 4th century BC Apulia but is now lost, apparently inspired vase paintings with Perseus and the gods studying the mirror image of Medusa's head. In this series of Apulian vase

[66] Pherecydes, fr. 11 Fowler.
[67] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1970.237.

paintings, Medusa always has the face of a beautiful girl and the image is always displayed correctly, i.e., vertically overturned. We see Medusa's face and its mirror image from the front, which was the standard way to represent this monster. Athena may be experimenting with the mirror image of Medusa's head on her shield (**19**). On the left is Perseus with a cap of invisibility and winged boots; to the right stands Hermes with a caduceus. Although Medusa's eyes are closed, everyone is careful to look down at the mirror image on Athena's shield, which foreshadows the future. After the end of his adventures, Perseus gave the head of Medusa to Athena, who attached it permanently to her shield or aegis.

19. Athena shows to Perseus the mirror image of the head of Medusa on a shield.
Apulian bell krater (detail), 400–375 BC.

Either Athena or Perseus can hold the head of Medusa; the painters also change the setting of the scene. They show us, for example, the well next to which Athena sits on the shield.[68] Perseus, characterised by his cap of invisibility and harpe, may also be looking into the well.[69] He raises his right hand in surprise to show the astonishment of what he has seen on the water surface. On the right, behind Athena with Medusa's head in her hand, there is a satyr with his head turned away. The painter suggested how acute the threat of death was for the person who looked at Medusa's head directly. Satyrs were famous for their curiosity in ancient Greece. They were voyeurs whose passion could only be stopped by one thing – Medusa's head.

On these vases, painters emphasise that the study of Medusa's head took time; its participants are sitting or resting on something. On one painting, Perseus and

[68] Gotha, Schlossmuseum, AHV 72.
[69] Leipzig, Universität, T83.

Hermes lean on a column.[70] This picture is also interesting because Athena already has Medusa's head on the aegis, so we see the monster's head three times and in three different functions. We see the model and its mirror image on the shield, and we can find it on Athena's aegis too. These Apulian vase paintings indicate that Athena's aegis and shield were to be the final place for Perseus' trophy from the very beginning of his adventure. These vase paintings also fundamentally modify Perseus' status – the warrior has been replaced by a researcher trained by Athena, the goddess of wisdom. Athena not only counselled the hero on how to kill Medusa but also allowed him to inspect her face afterwards. Athena was Medusa's chief enemy, and by letting Perseus look at her face, she completes Medusa's humiliation. Perseus triumphs over Medusa not only by severing her head but also by the fact that he was the only mortal to look at her face, albeit in a mirror.

In late Republican and Imperial Rome, the myth of Perseus was a popular subject in the decoration of Roman public buildings and private houses.[71] In these scenes, Andromeda comes to the forefront and replaces Athena and Hermes in scenes with Perseus studying a mirror image of the terrible head. On the shore of the sea, Andromeda sits with Perseus, who holds Medusa's head in his raised hand so that it can be reflected on the water's surface.[72] Perseus always holds the head, so it is he who shows it to Andromeda. We can find this image type on mosaics, gems, lamps and wall paintings. In Pompeii and Herculaneum, we repeatedly encounter variations on the same composition, and therefore we can assume that it is a reproduction of a lost original from Hellenistic Greece. This original was considered masterpiece at the time, and many Pompeii citizens wanted to have their house decorated with the reproduction of this painting.[73]

These scenes are similar to one another, but they are not the same; they differ in the direction of the participants' gaze. They can both look down to the water at their feet, which reflects the head of the Medusa held by Perseus in his raised hand. Virtually the same composition, however, can take on a completely different meaning when Perseus and Andromeda are looking at each other while the water surface reflects all three heads (**20**). In this case, it seems that the mirror image of Medusa is looking at Perseus and Andromeda. Perseus has a sword at his side, on the handle of which he places his left hand. The sword handle is at the centre of the composition and combines this scene with what preceded it – not only the liberation of Andromeda but also the beheading of Medusa. In the Roman scenes of Perseus studying the head of Medusa, a rescued princess replaces Athena, changing the meaning of the scene. In these scenes, two beautiful women's faces confront the hero;

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[70] Taranto, private collection.

[71] Jean Pierre Darmon, "Persée dans le décor domestique romain," in *Héros grecs à travers le temps: Autour de Persée, Thésée, Cadmos et Bellérophon,* ed. Laurence Baurain-Rebillard (Metz: Centre de recherche universitaire lorrain d'histoire, 2016), 55–72.

[72] Gian Grassigli, "Magica arma (Ov. met. 5, 197). Il volto e il riflesso di Medusa tra letteratura e arti figurative a Roma," in *Il gran poema delle passioni e delle meraviglie. Ovidio e il repertorio letterario e figurativo fra antico e riscoperta dell'antico*, ed. Isabella Colpo and Francesca Ghedini (Padova: Padova University Press, 2012), 73–84.

[73] *Real Museo Borbonico* 9, (1833): pl. 39. Pompeii, VI, 2, 22 (c), probably from the Casa delle Danzatrici (Helbig n. 1193).

one of them brings death, the other life and happiness. In ancient Roman thinking, this was not perhaps about two kinds of female beauty, but two aspects of it that could never be separated from one another.

20. Perseus shows Andromeda the mirror image of the head of Medusa on water. Drawing after Roman wall painting, before 69–79 AD.

From the 1st century BC, Perseus observes the mirror image of the head of Medusa also on Roman gems. The hero, characterised by the harpe, is shown in a very unusual stance.[74] Perseus raises and bends the hand that holds Medusa's head, holding it before his own face. This pose was to ensure that Perseus did not see her and did not turn into a stone statue. In front of Perseus, there is a shield on the ground on which the hero can see the image of Medusa's head. The head of the Medusa is often on the same side as the harpe, the instrument with which she was killed. On a chalcedony gem, the hero points at the severed head with his harpe as if it was a pointer.[75] On a sardonyx cameo, a shield lies on the ground in front of Perseus, but the hero looks at the head of Medusa, which he holds in front of him.[76] This would then be his last glance before he was petrified.

Is this the way he died? In the ancient myth about Perseus, who is continuously killing another, his death plays no part. This omission is remarkable because a warrior must die gloriously to become a hero. We have only two mentions

[74] New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 81.6.107.
[75] Florence, Museo archeologico, 14786.
[76] Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, 87.AN.24.

about Perseus' death. According to one version, Proetus' son Megapenthes killed him in retaliation for his father's death.[77] A Byzantine chronicler recorded a very odd version of Perseus' death in the 6th century AD: "After some time King Cepheus, father of Andromeda, drew from Ethiopia against Perseus. Cepheus did not see anymore because he was old. When Perseus learned that he had declared war, he was furious and set off on it, waving Medusa's head and pointing to it. Because Cepheus did not see her, he rode a horse against Perseus. Perseus did not know that Cepheus did not see anything, and he thought the head of Medusa was not working anymore. He turned it to him and looked at it. He was blinded, immobilised like a corpse and killed."[78]

However, the above-mentioned sardonyx cameo certainly does not portray this anecdote about the self-destruction of an ageing Perseus. The hero is depicted here as we know him from the illustrations of his famous acts – a naked young man with wings on his legs and the harpe in his hand. On a carnelian intaglio in Paris we find a similar scene, but here the personification of victory brings a wreath to Perseus.[79] The pictorial type of Perseus looking closely at the head of Medusa has an analogy in the ancient depictions of actors who meditate on a theatre mask they have taken off after the show. We know some such images from the 4th century BC, in which the pictorial type with a victorious Perseus, who meditates on the head of Medusa, is likely to have originated. Perseus, immersed in himself and reflecting on what he has done, is a perfect theme for personal jewels. Their owners wore them hanging around their necks or adorning their clothes so that they could contemplate on the image of Perseus in their moments of leisure.

The myth of Perseus has changed over the ages, but in it, we repeatedly encounter Athena.[80] She performs a variety of roles in the myth, always as Medusa's archenemy. According to Ovid's version of the myth, Athena transformed her into a monster and helped Perseus kill her. According to the version of the myth circulating in classical Athens, it was the goddess herself who killed Medusa. In this alternative myth, Medusa was not the daughter of Phorcys, but of the Earth who bore her together with the Gigantes. With their help, Medusa attacked the Olympian gods, and Athena killed her. Creusa speaks about this in Euripides' tragedy Ion, which premiered in Athens in 412–411 BC. Creusa is a trustworthy witness because the old Athenian man with whom she speaks asks her: "Is this the tale which I have heard before?"[81] That could not be said if the Athenians sitting in the auditorium had never heard of it. Euhemerus, who lived in the 4th or 3rd century BC, also wrote that Athena had personally killed the Gorgon Medusa.[82]

Apollodorus wrote in the 2nd century AD that: "it is alleged by some that Medusa was beheaded for Athena's sake; and they say that the Gorgon was fain to

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[77] Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 244.
[78] Ioannes Malalas, *Chronographia*, 38–39 Dindorf.
[79] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Médailles et Antiques, 100.
[80] Igor Baglioni, "Sul rapporto tra Athena e Medusa," *Antrocom. Online Journal of Anthropology* 7 (2011): 147–152.
[81] Euripides, Ion, 994, translated by Ronald Frederick Willetss.
[82] Hyginus, *Astronomy*, 2, 12.

match herself with the goddess even in beauty."[83] In any case, Athena was obsessed with Medusa, which illustrates the story of her playing the sounds that accompanied her death. The Gorgons killed not only with their eyes but also the sounds they produced. In Nonnus' epic poem, we read about the unconquerable roaring of Euryale, Medusa's sister.[84] According to a lost epic poem on Perseus, the terrible lamentation of the Gorgons was such an unforgettable experience that they named Mycenae after it (from the Greek word for roar, "mykethmos").[85] Athena decided to imitate it and invented the aulos instrument, with which she could mimic all the sounds.[86] The sound came out of a thin bronze lamella that vibrated much like a clarinet or oboe. The instrument not only made it possible to play a vast range of expressive tones, it also allowed for several melodies to be played at once. Pindar writes that Athena called this music "many-headed."[87] She wanted to play the terrible dirge of the Gorgons, in which the hissing of hundreds of snakes on their heads mingled with their terrible voices. No existing instrument could play this, and therefore the goddess invented the aulos to triumph over the Gorgons.

The Medusa never left her home and therefore was not feared by people. She had done nothing at all to Perseus; the hero set off for her head out of youthful recklessness, which Athena used to give people a lesson on what it meant to be human. Medusa, as a combination of man and his counterpart, the snake, brought to an extreme the polarity of beauty and ugliness, life and death, and therefore she had to die. The permanent link between the goddess Athena and Medusa was perhaps to remind the Greeks that Perseus overpowered this monster only through her support and that the Greeks were full-fledged human beings thanks to their gods. Thanks to Athena, Medusa's appearance did not deceive the hero, and he kept his vigilance even when he saw her sleeping. Reason and knowledge are useless if we do not know how to use them properly. Those who do not understand what they see differ not from those who are blind. However, one who does not know what he should not see is even worse off. One wrong look can mean instant death. According to the Greeks, eyes were at the top of the hierarchy of the senses, yet they were only a potential tool of knowledge; a visual perception could also be a deadly trap. We can never be sure of what we see, unless, of course, Athena is standing next to us.

Ancient mythical stories never comment directly on current political events and social or cultural changes, but they are closely related. The Greeks created the myth of Perseus at a time when they began to live in a world of images that played a much more significant role in their culture than in cultures of the surrounding peoples. As soon as the enthusiasm for this new trend faded, the Greeks had to ask themselves what these pictures actually meant and, consequently, the role of the gods increased considerably. Without their help, one does not know what he is looking at. One does not know where to look; one also does not know who and what

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[83] Apollodoros, *Library*, 2, 4, 3, translated by J. G. Frazer.
[84] Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 30, 264–267.
[85] Pseudo-Plutarchos, *On rivers*, 18, 6.
[86] Pindar, *Pythian*, 12; Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, "Athéna et l'invention de l'aulos," *Musica e storia,* 2 (Venice: Fondazione Levi, 1994): 239-268.
[87] Pindar, *Pythian,* 12, 19 and 23.

he or she must not look at. When Perseus looks imprudently at the terrible Medusa, whom he mistakes for a harmless girl, it may be the last thing he sees in his life.

Medieval Perseus

In western Europe, Ancient myths survived the extinction of the ancient world because new content often filled these stories. This was made possible by the fact that myths were interpreted as an allegory already in ancient times. The Three Books of Myths, which Fabius Planciadus Fulgentius wrote around the year 500 AD, was a primary source of inspiration in medieval Europe. In the 9th–12th century, the revived interest in ancient myths and their allegorical interpretation is evidenced by three anonymous Latin texts, the authors of which were the so-called Vatican mythographers.[88] According to Fulgentius, Medusa personified fear, which Perseus overcame, so the threat turned into its opposite – the source of life and eternal glory. Its symbol was Pegasus, who was born of Medusa's blood, "shaped in the form of renown (figura famae); whereby Pegasus is said to have wings, because fame is winged."[89] Pegasus, as a form of glory (figura famae) of which Fulgentius wrote, became the primary attribute of the Christian Perseus.

Fulgentius' allegories heavily influenced two 14th century books, which were very popular at their time. The French-written work Ovide Moralisé from 1316–1328 was the first translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses, but not a translation in the modern sense as we understand it from the 18th century on. The anonymous author has not only retold ancient myths but also interpreted them allegorically. He approached Ovid's text in the same way as the text of the Bible. He assumed that stories in Metamorphoses had several hierarchical levels. At the lowest level was the historical dimension; above it was the moral message of myth while the spiritual sense was at its peak. For instance, Andromeda, who suffered for the boasting of her mother Cassiopeia, became a picture of the human race's suffering from Eva's sin in the spiritual interpretation.[90] The author of the Latin text Ovidius moralizatus from around 1340 was the French monk Petrus Berchorius (Pierre Bersuire), who approached the ancient myths similarly to the author of Ovide moralisé. From classical antiquity, we do not know any allegorical interpretations of Metamorphoses, so in both cases this is an original contribution of medieval Europe to the ancient mythological tradition. Perseus, as we know him, was thus created in medieval Europe, which carefully chose what best suited its specific needs from the heritage of ancient Greece and Rome.

In the Divine Comedy from 1306–1320, Dante describes how the poet and his guide Virgil met at the gates of hell with the Furies, who called upon Medusa to kill the poet. Virgil covers the poet's eyes and Dante turns to the reader: "O you possessed of sturdy intellects, observe the teachings that are hidden here beneath the

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[88] Ronald E. Pepin, *The Vatican Mythographers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).
[89] Fulgentius, *Mythologies*, 1, 21 (translated by Leslie G. Whitbread); Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, 10, 27, 4. Cf. also Bažant, *Statues of Venus*, 95-108.
[90] *Ovide Moralisé*, 4, 6862–7073.

veil of verses so obscure!"[91] According to Dante, Medusa, who turns people into stone, is the devil, who blinds men so they cannot see the truth hidden under the veil of their sensory experience. Therefore, Virgil covered the poet's eyes to protect him from Medusa's irresistible erotic attraction, which has fatal consequences for men. If Dante looks at Medusa, she will "petrify" him, i.e. he will cease to believe in God and fall from him. According to Dante, the meaning of the myth about Perseus is that turning away from oneself and the things of this world is a basic condition of turning to God. The poet in this scene plays the role of Perseus, and Virgil has taken Athena's task, protecting his protégé from looking at the Gorgons. In the Venetian illustration of the "Divine Comedy" from the second quarter of the 15th century, we see Virgil covering the eyes of Dante on the left; on the gate to Hell, there are three Furies with snakes instead of hair.[92]

According to Petrarch, a man cannot resist Medusa's lure, even though he knows he will regret it. Petrarch's Songbook from 1327–1368 is about his love, Laura, who he claims had the same influence on him as Medusa's head had on Atlas, who she turned into a rock. Petrarch cannot detach himself from her curls, even the shadow of Laura turns him into ice, and his face is dangerously pale – her eyes have the power to transform him into a statue.[93] In the next poem, a prayer to the Virgin Mary, Petrarch repents. He writes that Medusa and his mistake, Laura, have transformed him into a stone drenched by his vanity. In other words, it has made him into another Narcissus.[94]

The first systematic attempt to present and interpret ancient mythology as a unified system was Boccaccio's On the Genealogy of the Gods of the Gentiles written in Latin.[95] Boccaccio wrote the work from 1360 until his death in 1374. The first printed edition was published in 1472, followed by numerous re-editions and translations into Italian and French. Boccaccio interprets ancient myths in a medieval manner on several levels. Concerning Perseus, he writes that he was the son of Zeus, who killed Gorgon and ascended to the heavens if we read the text in a literal, historical sense. If we look for morality in it, however, the text tells of the triumph of a wise man, his victory over vices and the path to virtue. In the allegorical interpretation, the story tells of the pious mind despising worldly joy and elevating itself to heavenly heights. In the spiritual interpretation, we understand it as an analogy to the ascension of Jesus Christ to the heavenly Father and the victory over the rulers of this world. The source of the Muses is a stimulus and the goal of heroic acts; Perseus led by Pegasus is a man driven by the desire for fame. Athena's shield is caution and the winged shoes are speed and alertness. Some of the interpretations are of course far-fetched – the curved sword, for example, supposedly means that during war, we must take our spoils. Boccaccio's book together with the works

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[91] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, 1, 9, 55–63 (translated by Allen Mandelbaum). Cf. John Freccero, "Medusa: The Letter and the Spirit," *Yearbook of Italian Studies* 2 (1972): 1–18.

[92] Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana 1035, fol. 17r.

[93] Petrarch, *Il Canzoniere*, 197.

[94] Petrarch, *Il Canzoniere*, 366.

[95] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods, I,* edited and translated by Jon Solomon (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011); Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods, II*, edited and translated by Jon Solomon. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2017).

mentioned above, Ovide Moralisé and Ovidius Moralizatus, was the primary source of knowledge of ancient myths until the middle of the 16th century, when the first comprehensive mythological handbooks were published, the series of which continues until the present.

21. Perseus kills Medusa, Byzantine book illumination, 11th century.

According to Ovid, Athena accompanied "brother Perseus" and, after liberating Andromeda, the hero made sacrifices to Zeus, Athena, and Hermes. Athena was also the first of the gods who visited and welcomed the source of the Muse created by Pegasus, who was born from the beheaded Medusa. However, Ovid does not mention Athena and Hermes as the donors of Perseus' armaments, nor do they give him any advice. When Perseus talks about killing the Medusa in the Metamorphoses, he does not mention any god. He says that he was looking at the image of a monster on a shield he held in his left hand. In ancient art, we do not find the illustration of Ovid's version, but it is depicted in the 11th century Byzantine manuscript of Oppian's Cynegetica, in which Perseus and Medusa are identified by inscriptions (**21**).[96] Medusa is a snake from the waist down and she holds two of the snakes coming out of her head with both hands. Her attractive face with large eyes and sad expression is represented frontally. Perseus kills Medusa with a spear, but he turns his face away and looks into a round shield, which he holds in his right hand.

Already in the 14th century, one of the first illustrated books on ancient mythology appeared in Western Europe, Libellus de imaginibus deorum, but the original illustrations have not survived. The oldest illustrated copy dates to 1420 (**22**). The illustration has little to do with how the mythical figures were depicted in ancient times. The winged Perseus has the severed head of Medusa hanging on a spear. Beneath him lie her slain sisters, whose heads he has also cut off with the harpe he holds in his right hand. In front of Perseus is Minerva, who hands him the "crystal shield" we read about in the text. [97] Post-ancient Western Europe has returned to the pre-Ovid conception of Perseus' myth, in which the deities dominate as assistants and donors of technology, which was, however, fundamentally modified. While in ancient Greece and Rome the primary attribute of Perseus was

[96] Kurt Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 113–114.

[97] Hans Liebschütz, *Fulgentius Metaforalis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der antiken Mythologie im Mittelalter* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1926), 124.

the harpe, which he used to attack, in post-ancient Europe his main attribute was the shield which he used to defend himself.

22. Perseus myth. Book illumination, around 1420.

This shield differed from its ancient counterpart in that it was understood in a spiritual sense, as it was used against the evil which Medusa personified. In the Ovide moralisé, the reader learned that Medusa was "very beautiful," but she was "a slut ... smart and cruel, lousy and insidious."[98] Beginning with medieval Europe, the Gorgons were understood primarily as femmes fatale – seductive but spoiled women who embodied the greatest danger a man could experience. Petrus Berchorius wrote of them in this manner around 1340, claiming that Perseus had to look at them in his shield-mirror, which was the shield of wisdom. Perseus' shield protected him without having to look at the image reflected on it.[99]

The symbolic character of Perseus' shield was best demonstrated by the fact that it was not made of metal, but of crystal or glass. The first mention of the crystal shield appears in the works of Vatican mythographers in the 9th–12th centuries, when the myth of Perseus began to be interpreted as a prefiguration of Jesus Christ fighting with the devil.[100] The debauchery of the devil lies in covering up the real nature of the world. Perseus' transparent shield, on the contrary, reveals it. Giovanni Boccaccio saw Perseus' crystal shield as an attribute of all-pervasive knowledge.[101] The first appearance of Perseus' transparent shield in visual art dates back to the second half of the 15th century.

In the Dutch illustration of the "Ovide moralisé" from around 1484, all figures are portrayed according to the fashion of the time. Perseus hides his face behind the shield while preparing to behead Medusa, so it is clear that it must be transparent. Nevertheless, Medusa's head is shown on it, so it must also be a mirror. In the text accompanying the picture, it is described as a metal shield on the surface of which her face is reflected (**22**).[102] Medusa with one eye is lying down, sleeping, while her two sisters stand and gesticulate lively; this makes no sense, however, as they have no eyes. In the accompanying text, it is written that the Gorgons had only one eye

[98] *Ovide moralisé*, 4, 5740–5744.

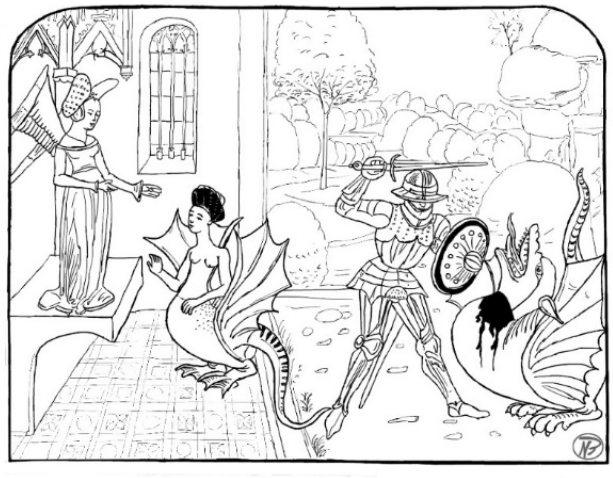
[99] Petrus Berchorius, *Ovidius Moralizatus*, Fa. 13.

[100] *First Vatican Mythographer*, 127; *Second Vatican Mythographer*, 135; *Third Vatican Mythographer*, 14.

[101] Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, 5, 48; 10, 11, 2 ("for crystal renders to the eyes of the beholder whatever is happening outside himself. So also a commander distinguished by foresight sees what the enemy might do, and so he makes himself safe while the plans of the others, which he has foreseen, are foiled," English translation: Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods, II*, 517–519).

[102] *Ovide moralisé*, edited by C. De Boer, vol. II (Amsterdam: Müller, 1920), 130 (4, 5701).

which they shared, a motif that was transferred from the myth of the Graeae. Another illogical element is the presence of Pegasus behind Perseus, who is about to sever Medusa's head, despite the fact that the text says Pegasus was born after Medusa was beheaded.



22 (left). Perseus kills Medusa. Illustration of the Ovide moralisé, c. 1484.
24 (right). Story Perseus. Flemish book illumination, around 1460.

In the Middle Ages, the myth of Perseus and Medusa was represented differently than in antiquity. As in antiquity, however, Medusa was considered a dangerous adversary primarily because she was not what she appeared to be. This was emphasized by the illustration of the work of Christine de Pisan, the first female author in the history of French literature. Around 1400, she wrote the extremely popular L'Epistre Othea. In the Flemish illustration for it from about 1460, Medusa is a dragon that looks like a girl from the waist up (**24**). To her left, Athena is represented as a Flemish lady, but with wings. On the right, Perseus, in the form of a medieval knight, fights a dragon that shows the true form of Medusa.

The Early Modern Perseus

Because the tradition of ancient myths has never been entirely interrupted, it was possible to restore ancient pictorial types in the fifteenth century Italy rather quickly.[103] One of the oldest surviving depictions of Perseus' combat with Medusa in Renaissance art is found in Filarete's decoration of the door of St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. He created it before the mid-15th century, and the doors were later transferred to the new St Peter's Basilica (**25**). Around 1493, Perseus' combat was also depicted on the tombstone of the Venetian Doge Andrea Vendramin in the Church of St John and Paul in Venice, "the most splendid tomb constructed up to that time in Venice and for centuries to come"[104] (**26**). In both cases, these were very prestigious

[103] Cf. Bažant, *Statues of Venus*, 4-6, 109-129.
[104] Anne Markham Schulz, *The History of Venetian Renaissance Sculpture ca. 1400–1530, I* (Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2017), 234. On the church cf. Giuseppe Pavanello, ed. *La basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo. Pantheon della Serenissima* (Venezia: Marcianum Press, 2014), 161–169.

commissioned works placed in ecclesiastical buildings and they must be interpreted in this context. Perseus is shown differently each time, indicating that at the time there was not a fixed tradition of representing this mythic hero.

25 (left). Filarete, Perseus and Medusa. Relief on bronze door from the old basilica of St Peter in Rome, 1433–1445.
26 (right). Tullio Lombardo, Tondo with Perseus killing Medusa.
Stone relief on the grave monument of Doge Andrea Vendramin, c. 1493.

In both cases, the hero wears ancient armour; Medusa is not shown as a monster but as a girl. Filarete followed some ancient depictions and represented Perseus hiding behind his shield and Medusa with her tongue sticking out and snakes instead of hair. The severed head of the monster, however, lies beside the headless body of Medusa, who stretches her arms toward it. We do not find this scheme in any ancient depiction of Perseus' duel with Medusa. The Venetian relief also depicts Perseus in an unconventional manner. The hero holds Medusa's severed head, but he is depicted riding a horse, presumably chosen for an aesthetic reason, as the relief with Perseus forms a pair with the relief of Deianira riding Centaur. In front of Perseus, under the hooves of his horse is the headless Medusa. The image scheme was adapted from depictions of victorious Roman emperors in which we find defeated barbarian warriors in place of Medusa. Venetian Perseus has a beard; later, he was depicted beardless in conformity with ancient convention.

In Botticelli's illustration of the "Divine Comedy" from the end of the 15th century, we see the head of Medusa "all antica," with snakes on her head twisting on all sides, emphasised eyes, a wide-open screaming mouth, and a face distorted by anger.[105] As mentioned above, Dante describes in detail how at the gate to hell three Furies with snakes instead of hair call Medusa to petrify him. Virgil covers his eyes, and the angel arrives and rescues the poet before Medusa appears. Botticelli elaborated upon this scene with a devil raising the head of Medusa, a variation on the ancient pictorial type of the triumphant Perseus.[106]

In Cremona around 1500 a richly decorated portal emerged with two of the most famous mythic warriors, identified by attached inscriptions. To the left is Heracles with a lion's skin over his shoulders and an outstretched club; in the

[105] Dante, *Divine Comedy*, 1, 9, 55–63. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Reg. Lat 1896.
[106] Barbara J. Watts, "Sandro Botticelli's Drawings for Dante's 'Inferno:' Narrative Structure, Topography, and Manuscript Design," *Artibus et Historiae* 16 (1995): 173–174.

medallion beneath there is the multi-headed monster Hydra, which he has defeated. On the right is Perseus, with a shield that matches the mirror's size.[107] The medallion under Perseus depicts the monster that he has overcome. We find here the three severed heads of the Gorgons with closed eyes and pained, open mouths. The depiction could have been inspired by an alternative tradition which we find in the illustration mentioned above in the Libellus de imaginibus deorum, where Perseus cuts off the heads of all the Gorgons. On the Cremona portal, the two Gorgons on each side have normal hair, the middle Gorgon has snakes in her hair, which defines her as Medusa, but she does not have wings on her head. The identification of Medusa is complemented by Pegasus, who is shown below her. All Gorgons have a third eye on their foreheads. As the French ivory carving shows, the three-eyed Medusa was not rare in the 16th century.[108]

In the Hypnerotomachia (Poliphilo's Strife of Love in a Dream) attributed to Francesco Colonna and published in Venice in 1499, the illustration of the Acrisius story is divided into three scenes (**27**).[109] On the left, King Acrisius kneels at the oracle in the temple before the statue of a god. In the middle, the King gives instructions to the builder of the tower in which he intends to imprison Danae. On the right, he orders the guards to keep proper watch over the tower, in which his daughter is already imprisoned. Danae sits dressed, her legs stretched and her hands on her knees. She raises her head, presumably toward the golden rain, in which Zeus has transformed himself. Danae was represented similarly in antiquity, which may have been known to Renaissance artists.

27. Story of Acrisius and Danae. Woodcut, 1499.

[107] Paris, Louvre, R. F. 204.
[108] Ecouen, Musée national de la renaissance, E. Cl.12044.
[109] Eric Jan Sluijter, "Emulating Sensual Beauty: Representations of Danaë from Gossart to Rembrandt," *Simiolus* 27 (1999): 9–12.

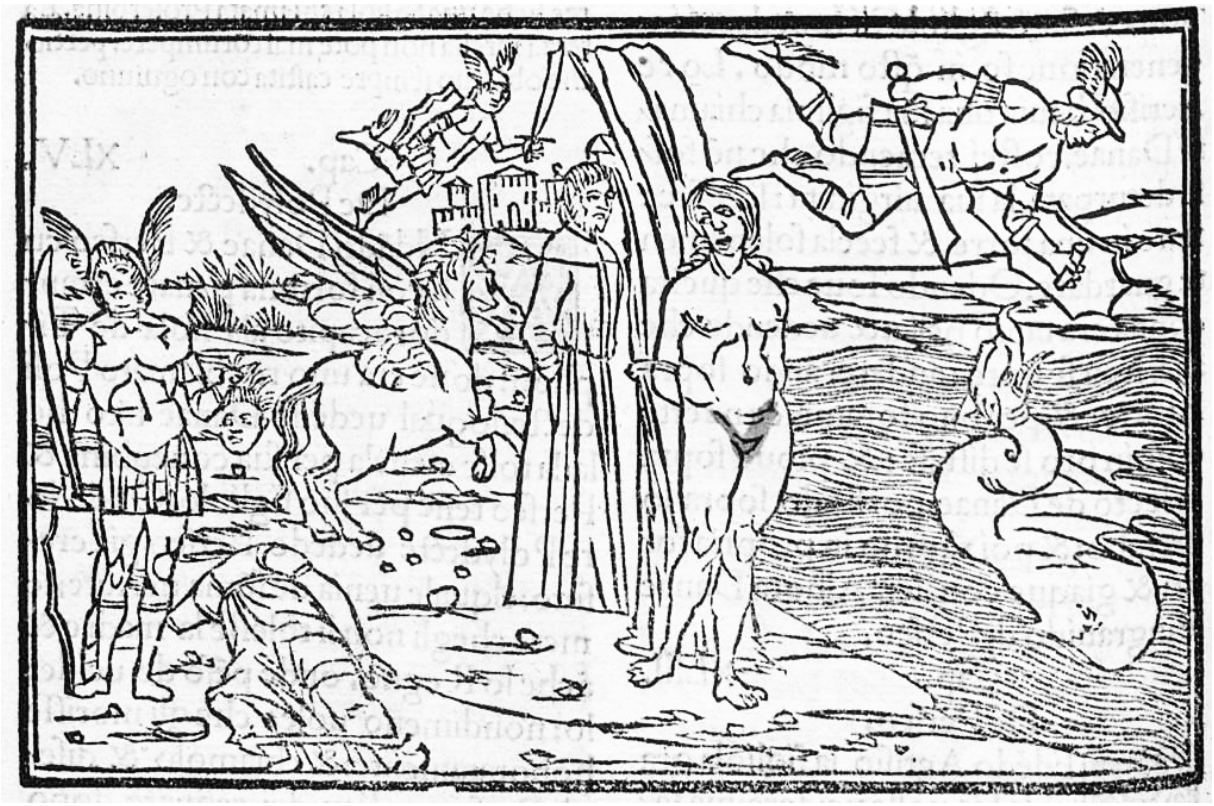
28. Story of Perseus. Woodcut, 1499.

The illustration of the Perseus story also has three parts (**28**). On the left, Athena gives Perseus a shield. In the middle, Perseus has just cut off the head of Medusa. On the right, Pegasus creates the source of the Muses on Helicon. In these illustrations, the author attempted to place the story in an antique environment, which he managed in particular in the scene with Acrisius in the oracle, where he depicted ancient architecture with a niche and an ancient statue of the naked god with a sceptre in contrapposto posture. In the Perseus story, the hero has ancient armour, but the author of the illustration focused on the key moments typical for the allegorical reading of the Perseus myth. It highlights the role of the shield of virtue that the hero has received from Athena and the link between Medusa and the creation of the spring of poetic inspiration on the mountain of Muses. The illustrations of the Hypnerotomachia document the tremendous progress in the revival of ancient pictorial types made by Italian artists in the second half of the 15th century.

In 1497, Giovanni Bonsignori's Italian retelling of Ovid's Metamorphoses was published as a printed book. In a woodcut illustrating the story of Perseus, the hero in ancient armour has a winged cap and boots (**29**). Following medieval usage, the scene is also divided into three parts. On the left, the hero stands with the head of Medusa by her headless body lying on the ground as Pegasus flies away. In the middle, the hero flies through the air; below is Andromeda, chained to a rock. She is completely naked and has assumed the pose of the ancient statue of Venus characterised by a clear contrapposto stance and her head turned to the side.[110] To the right, the hero flies down to a dragon that has emerged from the sea. This

[110] Cf. Bažant, *Statues of Venus,* 27, 41-43 The first naked Andromeda is in the French book illumination of 1494 (London, British Library IC.41148 fol. 49).

composition was then used with variations in subsequent versions of Ovid's Metamorphoses until 1522.[111]



29. Story of Perseus. Woodcut, 1497.

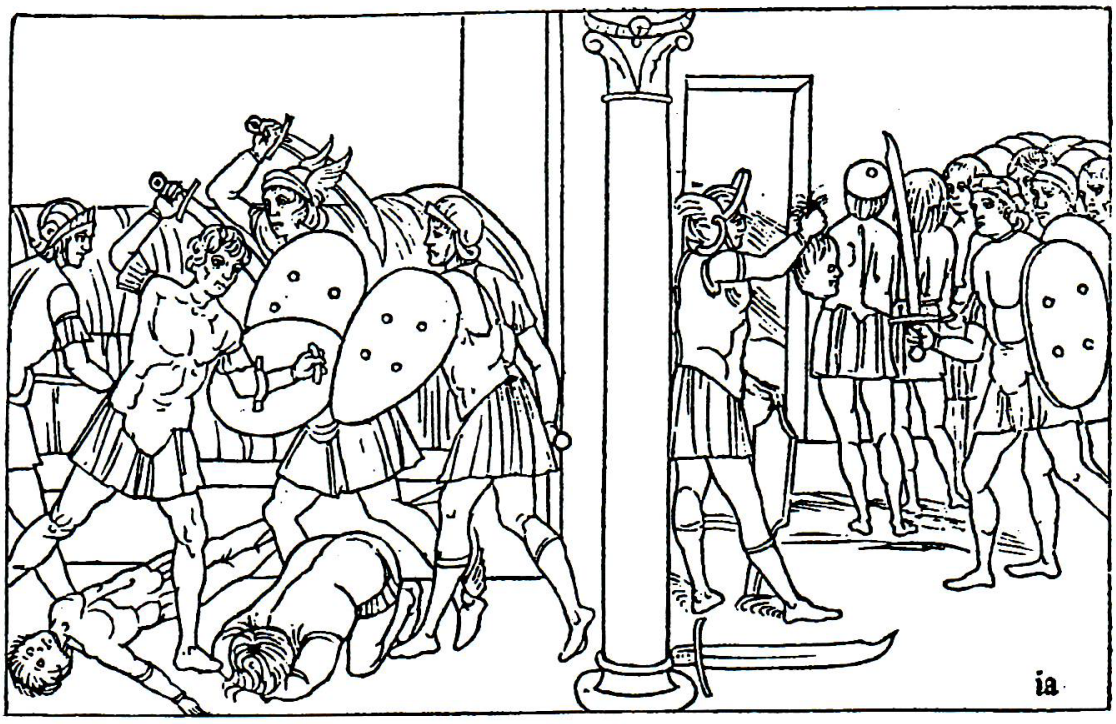
In 1505, an illustrated Latin edition of Ovid's Metamorphoses with a commentary by Raphael Regius was published. In it, we find a woodcut by the monogrammist ia depicting Perseus' struggle with Phineus and his companions (**30**). The scene is divided into two halves by the Corinthian column, and all figures wear ancient armour. On the left is a furious battle in which Perseus, characterised by a winged cap, fights back with a sword. In the background we see the wedding bed. On the right, Perseus stands calmly, placing the sword on the floor and holding out the head of Medusa in his extended hand. Phineus' companions are also shown in static attitudes, which in their case indicate their petrification. The variations on this composition appeared in the editions of Ovid's mythological work until 1553.[112]

Concurrently with the renewal of the ancient form of Perseus, however, the medieval tradition continued. In it, the antique hero was identified with the Christian archangel. In Bonsignori's text from 1375–1377, the story is interpreted in an allegorical way – Perseus was a virtuous man and therefore had wings, an attribute of an angel. For the reception of Perseus in medieval and early modern Europe, it was crucial that the gods gave the flying equipment to him exclusively. Already on

[111] Gerlinde Huber-Rebenich, et al., *Ikonographisches Repertorium zu den Metamorphosen des Ovid: Die textbegleitende Druckgraphik, I.1: Narrative Darstellungen* (Berlin: Mann, 2014), vol. I, p. 124–125, vol. II, p. 58–59.

[112] Huber-Rebenich, *Ikonographisches Repertorium*, vo. I, p. 126, vol. II, p. 62.

illustrations in ancient astronomical tracts, which were carefully copied in post-ancient Europe, Perseus appeared as a warrior with a raised hand and bared sword. In Christian Europe, the same stance became an attribute of Archangel Michael, which was the result of the merging of both myths. In the second half of the 15th century, we see the depiction of the winged Archangel Michael, who has the features of Perseus. In the painting from before 1465, Piero del Pollaiuolo painted Archangel Michael fighting a dragon.[113] He has a winged cap on his head, which Pollaiuolo has taken from the ancient depictions of Perseus. In Perugino's painting, which was created several decades later, Archangel Michael has a shield with the head of Medusa.[114]



30. Monogramista ia, Perseus fights with Phineus. Woodcut 1505.

In 1529–1530, one of the first cycles inspired by the myth of Perseus were created in wall paintings by Raphael's disciple Perin del Vaga for the Genoese villa. It was built by the local ruler and admiral of the imperial fleet, Andrea Doria.[115] The Perseus cycle by Perin del Vaga in Genoa has been poorly preserved. However, the painter returned to Rome, where from 1545 to 1546 he and his colleagues decorated the study of Pope Paul III in the Castel Sant'Angelo with a series of scenes inspired by this myth.[116] The narrative begins on the wall with the door leading to the stairs through which the pope entered his study. Above the door, the introductory

[113] Florence, Museo Bardini.

[114] London, National Gallery, NG288.2.

[115] Claudia Cieri Via, *L'arte delle metamorphosi. Decorazione mitologiche nel Cinquecento* (Roma: Lithos, 2003), 204–206.

[116] Filippa M. Aliberti Gaudioso and Eraldo Gaudioso, *Gli affreschi di Paolo II a Castel Sant'Angelo, II* (Rome: De Luca, 1981), 77–86.

episodes of the myth are shown – the hero's parting with his mother and Athena and Hermes giving him weapons.[117] Each time the pope entered, Perseus began his famous mission once again on the wall painting over his head, emphasising the parallel between the pope and the ancient hero. As stressed above, Christian Europe returned to the pre-Ovidian concept of the Perseus myth, in which deities dominated as helpers and donors of technology and expertise. Because Perseus received the divine technique directly from the gods, he was an ideal model for the pope, who sought absolute rule, the only justification of which was God's will.

In the scene depicting armament in the Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome, Perseus' sword, which is an embodiment of justice, is the compositional centre of the scene. The sword was an attribute not only of Perseus, but also of Pope Paul III, who presented himself primarily as a defender of justice. The series of scenes in the papal study continues clockwise; we find the sequel of the narration on paintings on the eastern wall, with Perseus between the Nymphs and the hero's search for Medusa. On the wall facing the stairway door was the entrance to the pope's bedroom, and on this wall was the most important scene of the Perseus myth – Medusa's beheading. The painter stressed Pegasus' role by representing the winged horse twice: it is leaving its dead mother in the foreground, and in the background, it is standing on the mountain and creating with its hoof the spring of Muses. We can assume that Pegasus accentuated the important cultural mission of Pope Paul III, which played an essential role in his political propaganda.

The cycle then continued on the western wall where there was a door leading to the main ceremonial hall of the papal residence. On this wall was Andromeda's liberation and wedding reception. The liberation of Andromeda was painted by Domenico Rietti, the disciple of Perin del Vaga. In the centre we see King Cepheus, who promises Perseus that he will give him Princess Andromeda as a wife once he rescues her. On the left, the hero comes to the chained princess, and on the right, we see the hero's battle with the sea dragon. In the scene with Andromeda's liberation, Perseus lifts a sword high above his head to kill the dragon. This gesture in the papal study highlighted the political and Christian interpretation of Perseus as the predecessor of Archangel Michael. This saint was represented in the middle of the ceiling of the room in the same pose as Perseus fighting the dragon. The parallel suggested that the rescued Andromeda was the Catholic Church protected by Paul III. Archangel Michael was the central figure not only of the Pope's study but also of the entire Castel Sant'Angelo, which was named after him. Since 1536, the archangel's statue has been on top of it. The archangel is putting his sword in a scabbard to mark the end of the victorious struggle with the enemies of the Christian Church. Perseus struggling with the sea dragon in the painting decorating the papal residence was thus an allusion to the head of the Christian Church struggling with Protestant heretics. The decoration prefigured the aims of the Council of Trident, which ended with a decisive condemnation of reformist tendencies. Paul III opened the council in 1545, the same year that his study in the Castel Sant'Angelo was decorated with Perseus' myth.

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[117] Paris, Louvre, 621.

The Vatican cycle was echoed in the courtroom of Cardinal Tiberio Crispo in his residence in Bolsena from 1554–1561.[118] The builder was likely to have been the illegitimate son of Pope Paul III. Like the other papal nephews, he began his career as castellan at the Castel Sant'Angelo in 1542–1545, so he knew the Perseus room, which was created during his term of office. In Bolsena, Perseus' history is depicted on four panels spread over four walls. The initial scene shows Perseus, Medusa and the birth of Pegasus. The dominant motif is Perseus' raised hand holding a sword. Culture is presented here as a direct consequence of the rule of law; Pegasus appeared in the scene before the hero cut off the head of Medusa. The other two scenes also show Perseus; the second one is very damaged, but the first scene shows his battle with the dragon that threatened Andromeda. The hero is once again characterised by a sword and rescues not only the princess but also her people, which is suggested by the horrified group on the right, where a woman in the foreground embraces a child. We do not find anything like this in ancient depictions. The series culminates in a celebration of the culture that was the result of Perseus' heroic act – Apollo plays "lyra di braccio" in the midst of the Muses at the source of the artistic inspiration created by Pegasus. The other scenes represented on walls of the courtroom in Bolsena stressed that the flowering of culture is a consequence of the rule of law, which must be protected by the sword.

The cycle of Perseus in the Vatican also inspired the cycle of scenes in one room in El Pardo, the residence of the Spanish kings. The Andalusian painter Gaspar Becerra, who was trained in Italy, painted it in 1563. In the middle of the ceiling is a triumphant Perseus with the harpe in his right hand. In his raised left hand, on which he has a shield, he holds the Medusa's head. Here the battling Perseus is an alter-ego of the protector of the Catholic Church, Spanish King Philip II of the Habsburg dynasty. The statues of Perseus accompanied by Pegasus and Andromeda threatened by the Dragon, which Francesco Camilliani created in 1554–1567, decorated the garden of the villa La Abadía, Extremadura. The series might celebrate military successes of Don Fernando de Toledo, 3rd Duke of Alba.[119]

In the 16th century, Perseus was a model of monarchical virtue by the grace of God. He was courageous, righteous and above all pious, and therefore the gods chose him to fight evil and save innocent victims who were in danger of perdition. His role as a peacemaker was closely connected with his cultural mission, and by killing Medusa, he created Pegasus and poetic inspiration. Renaissance rulers also promoted their specific power ambitions and political agenda through this myth. In the Vatican, Perseus promoted above all the struggle for the salvation of humankind and the authority of the Church. The Vatican had an impact on all of European culture as it employed Raphael since the end of 1508. In his workshop originated the majority of the pictorial types that were later used to depict ancient mythology. The

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[118] Allessandra De Romanis, "Il Palazzo di Tiberio Crispo a Bolsena," in *Lo Specchio dei Principi. Il sistema decorativo delle dimore storiche nel territorio romano*, ed. Claudia Cieri Via (Rome: De Luca, 2007), 1–47.

[119] Antonio Ponz, *Viaje de España,* ed. by Castro Maria del Rivero, 1–4 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1988), 2, 522; Anatole Tchikine, *Francesco Camiliani and the Florentine Garden of Don Luigi de Toledo. A study of fountain production and consumption in the third quarter of the 16th century*, 1–2. Doctoral dissertation (Dublin: Trinity College, 2002), 68–72. Only Andromeda and Pegasus are preserved today.

workshop also functioned as a research institute specialising in the study of ancient art. In the 1520s, the artists who worked there moved to rulers' courts in northern Italy and thus expanded beyond Rome a new method of representing ancient mythology based on the careful study of ancient works of art.

31. Achille Bocchi, Endurance (with Perseus, Hercules and Aeneas). Engraving, 1555.

In Achilles Bocchi's 1555 emblem book we find the depiction of the winged Perseus (**31**). The central figure is Athena, around which there are three examples of the "toughest" heroes of world history. At the bottom is Aeneas with scrolls under his arms and leading his son, Iulus, the father of the Roman imperial dynasty. Aeneas transferred the legacy of ancient Trojan civilisation, including laws symbolised by the scrolls, to his new homeland in Italy. On the bottom left, Heracles is characterised by a lion's skin, a club, and the three-headed Cerberus, which he has vanquished. On the top left is a winged Perseus with his sword and Medusa's severed head. On this emblem, the heroes of ancient times are differentiated. If we

were to translate their status into modern language, Heracles would be a soldier, Aeneas a politician, and Perseus a guardian. Perseus' wings indicate his ubiquity, the sword exposed in his raised right hand his authority, and Medusa's severed head his mandate to enforce the law. This concept of Perseus predestined him as an alter ego of Renaissance rulers who aspired to absolute government. They stylised themselves above all as the strict but just protectors of their subjects.

32. Benvenuto Cellini, Perseus with the head of Medusa. Bronze group sculpture, 1545–1554. Firenze, Piazza della Signoria, Loggia dei Lanzi.

In the Florence of the Medici, the group of sculptures by Benvenuto Cellini, probably the most famous work inspired by the Perseus myth, celebrated the absolute monarchy (**32**).[120] The larger-than-life sculpture from 1545–1554 depicts the hero with his left leg resting on Medusa's headless body, but the novelty of Cellini's statue was that it combined this medieval motif with the renewal of the antique gesture of the hand with the trophy raised high. Another triumphal motif is the shield on which Perseus' right foot rests. Medusa's body is lying on a large pillow, a symbol of hedonism and unmanliness on which the shield, the emblem of masculinity, is laid. Being hoisted onto a shield was an ancient motif of enthronization of the ruler, which was carried on in the ritual of the Byzantine emperors and was known in Renaissance Italy.[121] However, the shield in this case was not only a symbol related to the man who had ordered the statue, Cosimo I Medici, but was also an emblem of art. While Medusa's right-hand hangs down, her left hand firmly holds her ankle so she can embrace the shield on which her living face has been mirrored for the last time. The shield was the emblem of both Medusa's death and the birth of the art that Pegasus brought to humankind.

On Cellini's group sculpture, Perseus has just finished his deed, which is highlighted by the blood flowing freely from both the head and the neck of the monster. The hero raises Medusa's head to celebrate his victory and warn all those who would dare to oppose him. The raised hand with Medusa's head is not only a triumphal gesture and a threat but also a moral example. The hero raises his hand with the deadly trophy, but at the same time tilts his head downward. His attitude is relaxed, and on his face, there is an expression of utter peace, which proves his absolute self-control. In addition to a fighting spirit, restraint and prudence were among the virtues of the ideal sovereign. The struggle for life and death, as well as glorious triumph, belong to the past; now is the time for self-restraint and meditation. Cellini's Perseus radiates tranquillity, the chief virtue of the Renaissance rulers, which they adopted via Petrarch from the ancient Stoic philosophers. Perseus, however, has yet another identity; he is a model not only of the sculptor's patron but also of the sculptor himself. The heads of Perseus and Medusa are strikingly similar, the only difference being that Medusa has almost closed her eyes in mortal agony while Perseus looks down at the assembled Florentines. The ability to eternalise the world has been transferred from Medusa, who petrified her victims, to Perseus (Cellini), who immobilises his spectators, amazing them with his artistic genius and the mastery of the technique of bronze casting.

In Cellini's own words, his patron decided upon on the placement of the group of sculptures as well as its theme and the specific pictorial type – Perseus with

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[120] Cf. Gerald Schröder, "Versteinernder Blick und entflammte Begierde. Giambolognas 'Raub der Sabinerin' im Spannungsfeld poetisch reflektierter Wirkungsästhetik und narrativer Semantik," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 31 (2004): 175–203; Christine Corretti, *Cellini's Perseus and Medusa and the Loggia dei Lanzi: Configurations of the Body of State* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[121] Lubomír Konečný, "Raising on a Shield: The Afterlife of an Ancient Pathosformel in Seventeenth-Century Art and Politics," in *Welche Antike? Konkurrierende Rezeptionen des Altertums im Barock, I*, ed. Ulrich Heinen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 325–345.

the head of Medusa in hand.[122] This information is confirmed in another source and cannot be doubted.[123] The sculpture was designed for the central Florentine square, the traditional centre of the secular government in Florence, which housed the Palazzo della Signoria, the former seat of government of the Florentine Republic. However, in 1540, the Medici moved their residence to this palace, and when they moved to Palazzo Pitti, the palace began to be called the Palazzo Vecchio. The Perseus statue is located in the Loggia dei Lanzi, an open colonnade built for the Florentine Republic, which became an open-air gallery of sculptures when the Medici became masters in Florence. The sculptures of the Medici collections replaced the discussing citizens of the Florentine Republic. According to Cellini's report on interviews with Cosimo, both the sculptor and his patron agreed that the sculpture would have to overcome everything that had previously been created in Florence. The sculpture had to immortalise Cosimo's government, but only inconspicuously while considering the Florentine Republican tradition, which was still strong. The only explicit links are the heads in the corners of the marble base that refer to the zodiac sign of Capricorn, with which the Duke identified. Domenico dei Vetri created a bronze medal in 1552 with a portrait of Cosimo I de' Medici and a sign of Capricorn on the reverse side. However, Cosimo was born on June 12, 1519; he was a Cancer, and the Capricorn was only his ascendant or rising sign. On January 6, 1537, in the sign of Capricorn, he was elevated as the Duke of Tuscany, and Capricorn became a sign of his second birth.[124] More importantly, however, was the fact that Capricorn was a well-known emblem of the ancient Roman Emperor Augustus.

The group of statues with Perseus stands on a marble pedestal. On it, the statuettes and reliefs prove that it was a celebration of Perseus as an exemplary hero. The bronze relief with Andromeda and Perseus on the front side of the pedestal make it reminiscent of an altar (**33**). The relief's main character is Andromeda, who is depicted in an unnatural pose to make it clear that it is a work of art. Unlike the other characters that blend in with the background, Andromeda, on the contrary, sets out to capture the viewer's interest immediately. While sitting on the rock and facing the on-going duel between Perseus and the sea monster, she surprisingly turns backwards. The torsion of her body is depicted ad absurdum – the legs point in the opposite direction of the face.

This artistic pose of Andromeda differs from other characters on the relief, which are portrayed in much more natural stances. Andromeda's pose reminds us of the statue of Narcissus, on which the artist was working at that time.[125] Although Andromeda is portrayed in the pose of Narcissus admiring his image, she has a different meaning. The princess does not look down to the water under her feet; she

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[122] Carlo Cordié, ed. *Opere di Baldassare Castiglione, Giovanni Della Casa, Benvenuto Cellini* (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1960), 860; Benvenuto Cellini, *Vita di Benvenuto Cellini … arrichita d'illustrationi e documenti inediti, I–III* ed. Francesco Maria Tassi (Florence: Piatti, 1829), vol. 3, 334; John K.G. Shearman, "Art or Politics in the Piazza?" in *Benvenuto Cellini. Kunst und Kunsttheorie im 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. Alessandro Nova and Anna Schreurs-Moret (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003), 20–36.

[123] Detlef Heikamp, "Rapporti tra accademici ed aristi nella Firenze del ´500," *Il Vasari* 15 (1957): 151.

[124] George Francis Hill and Graham Pollard, *Renaissance Medals from The Samuel H. Kress Collection at the National Gallery of Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1967), no. 315.

[125] Florence, Bargello, 286633.

does not admire herself, and her head is turned upwards. Her arm is bent over her head as if she were shading her eyes to get a better view of the statue of Perseus that is directly over her. Her admiration does not belong to her own reflected image, as in the case of Narcissus, but to the statue created by Benvenuto Cellini.

33. Benvenuto Cellini, Liberation of Andromeda, bronze relief sculpture, 1545. Florence, Piazza della Signoria, Loggia dei Lanzi (original: Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, 286640).

For Cellini, the sculptural group with Perseus was the pinnacle of his career and his emblem.[126] On the marble base, there are niches on all four sides including bronze statuettes – the hero's father, Zeus, his mother, Danae, and his divine patrons Hermes and Athena. On the front is Zeus and on the back Hermes; Danae and Athena are at the sides. Athena deviates radically from the ancient pictorial tradition; she is shown naked with only a helmet on her head and a spear; she has already lent the shield to Perseus as the inscription under the statue explains. Athena's nudity is only apparently inconsistent with her proclaimed chastity. Already in 1526, Rosso Fiorentino represented her in the nude to indicate that the goddess was not hiding anything (**71**). Athena's helmet indicates that she is armed with wisdom, her spear announcing her readiness to fight ignorance. Hermes, with a winged cap on his head, is depicted in a strong movement characteristic for the divine messenger. His arms

[126] Matteo Palumbo, "Un tema narrativo nella 'Vita' di Benvenuto Cellini: 'l'impresa' del Perseo," in *La parola e l'immagine. Studie in onore di Gianni Venturi, I*, ed. Marco Ariani et al. (Florence: Olschki, 2011), 305–317.

are raised above his head and he looks upward; the inscription, which states that he is flying to heaven after giving his weapons to Perseus, explains his unusual attitude. Hermes' wings made Perseus the messenger of God, the counterpart of a Christian angel who executes the will of God. Hermes and Athena indicate that Cellini's Perseus is a celebration of not only combat but also of wisdom, technique and art, the patrons of which were Athena and Hermes.

On the marble base, a statuette of Danae covers her face with a raised hand, and her head is humbly bowed to indicate that she is subjected to God's will, which the accompanying inscription stresses. Cosimo I Medici is characterised by his alter ego Perseus as one who uses violence only to establish eternal peace. In the 16th century Zeus' golden rain, which fathered Perseus, was perceived as an allegory of the arrival of the Golden Age. Its celebration in Virgil's Fourth Eclogue was related to the birth of Jesus Christ: "Now is come the last age of the Cumaean prophecy: the great cycle of periods is born anew … Yet do thou at that boy's birth, in whom the iron race shall begin to cease, and the golden to arise over all the world." Cellini's Danae with the small and smiling Perseus looking up to his mother can be seen as an evocation of the conclusion of Virgil's Eclogue "smile upon thy mother… o little boy."[127] Zeus is on the front side, under the statue of Perseus, whose hand with Medusa's head repeats the gesture of Zeus threateningly lifting the bundle of lightning to which the inscription refers. Perseus and the Florentine state were thus under divine protection.

Cellini's statue of Perseus was placed in its present location in 1555. It was intended to dominate the whole area in front of Palazzo Vecchio. Therefore it is located in such a way that both Michelangelo's David (1504) and Bandinelli's Heracles (1533) look at it. Both these statues were made of marble, so they seem to be petrified by the head of Medusa shown to them by Perseus. Cellini transformed Perseus' victory into the victory of bronze casting over stone carving. In comparison with a bronze sculpture, marble statues look dead, which Cellini underlined by emphasising what marble sculpture was not able to render. From the body and throat of the Medusa, blood flows in massive streams, which, in Cellini's time, astonished spectators. Michelangelo's David and Bandinelli's Heracles were not petrified by looking at Medusa's head, but by realising Cellini's mastery. Cosimo had added to David and Heracles the third marble statue, Neptune. Bartolomeo Ammannati finished it in 1565 as the dominant statue of a monumental fountain in which the first Florentine aqueduct flowed. Being a god, Neptune could not be petrified, and as the statue is considerably taller than Cellini's Perseus, he looks down at it scornfully.[128] Everyone knew that Neptune had conquered Medusa before Perseus. Ammanati's Neptune allows us to understand how Cosimo I Medici perceived Cellini's Perseus. It celebrated him as a second Perseus, but if he understood the statue as his double, he would never have allowed another statue to humble it in such a way.

From the moment that Cellini's sculpture was exposed, everyone was amazed by the massive flow of blood that gushed from Medusa's body and head. This motif

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[127] Virgil, *Eclogues*, 4, 4–63, translated by John William Mackail.
[128] Shearman, *Art or Politics in the Piazza*, 33–34.

forms the message of the work, which was connected both with the creator and his personal life, which was full of violence, hatred and artistic ambitions, and his patron, who drowned the Florentine Republic in blood in order to establish the monarchy that he legitimised by his generous support for culture. On the wax model of 1545, no gushing blood is present.[129] The genesis of his masterpiece is perhaps linked to an episode that Cellini described in his autobiography, when he decided to kill his main rival in the Medici court, sculptor Baccio Bandinelli. He waited for him at the village square in San Domenico near Florence. This would not have been his first murder, but, when Cellini saw Baccio Bandinelli unarmed and trembling, Cellini realised how foolish it would be to pour out all his anger on just one of his enemies. As he wrote in his memoirs, he would "kill all his enemies" by completing his Perseus.[130]

The fact that Europe at that time understood Cellini's Perseus with the head of Medusa as a triumph of art is evidenced by the Munich fountain.[131] The sculpture is a variation of the Florentine sculpture and was ordered by the Bavarian Duke William V, who was known as a great admirer of classical art. In the years 1585–1590, Hubert Gerhard created the fountain according to the design of another Dutchman Friedrich Sustris, who was the leading figure in the art produced by William's court. The sculpture was intended for the Munich residence, to which William moved after his appointment as the Bavarian Duke in 1579. The fountain with Pegasus was the central motif of the court and was decorated in a classical manner. The statues were placed in the courtyard and in niches on the walls; in the eastern section, there was an artificial cave. In the grotto, red coral dominated, an allusion to Perseus' myth (which will be further discussed below). The fountain in the artificial cave was crowned with a gold-plated bronze statue of Hermes, and part of the decoration included Apollo and Athena. Court decoration evoking the Perseus myth characterised the Bavarian Duke as a peaceful ruler and supporter of science and art, which would last through the ages. This also contributed to the concept of the Perseus and Medusa statue, linking Munich not only with the mythical past and ancient Greece and Rome, but also with contemporary Florence, which at the time of the Munich statue was considered to be the main centre of art in Europe.

The Christian Perseus

As expected, 16th-century Italian scholars commented on the crystal shield. Lodovico Dolce understood Medusa as an allegorical expression of the world's vices, which

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[129] Florence, Bargello. Johannes Myssok, *Bildhauerisches Konzeption und plastisches Modell in der Renaissance* (Münster: Rhema, 1999), 299.

[130] Cellini, *Vita*, 2, 380: "spero con quella di ammazare tutti i mia ribaldi nimici." Cf. Michael Cole, "Cellini's Blood," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 2 (1999): 215–235; Horst Bredekamp, "Cellinis Kunst des perfekten Verbrechens," in *Benvenuto Cellini: Kunst und Kunsttheorie im 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. Alessandro Nova and Anna Schreurs (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003), 337–348.

[131] München, Residenz, Grottenhof (copy), Residenzmuseum (original). Dorothea Diemer, *Hubert Gerhard und Carlo di Caesare del Palagio I–II* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2004), I, 172–178; II, 143–145, pls. 8–10, 98–100.

transformed a man into stone, that is to say, deprived him of his human senses.[132] Perseus, therefore, set out to kill the Medusa once equipped with Athena's crystal shield, i.e. with the caution that we gain through knowledge. Vincenzo Cartari wrote that the shield of Athena, "which was made of very bright crystal and protected her body from anything that might have been sent to harm it, showed that the soul of the prudent man is covered by his fleshy parts only for his safety and protection, not to cloud his vision so that he can't see the truth of things."[133] Therefore, Perseus' crystal shield acted as a kind of x-ray in which the hero saw the evil hidden beneath the surface. It also could have been a magical filter that was transparent but did not allow evil to penetrate it.

On a painting in Verona of 1450–1500, which represents Andromeda's liberation, Perseus' appearance imitates ancient depictions, but he holds a transparent shield.[134] In the depicted situation, the hero did not need the shield; he knew well that the sea dragon was a monster that he must kill. He also knew well that Andromeda was beautiful and innocent, and so he must save her. The transparent shield is shown here only because it was already an attribute of Perseus. It characterized him regardless of the situation he was in. In the painting of Fra Bartolomeo from around 1490, Athena is also characterised by a crystal shield which bears the head of the Medusa.[135]

34. Baldassare Peruzzi, Perseus and Medusa. Ceiling painting, 1511. Roma, Villa Farnesina, Sala della Galatea.

We can find the shield-mirror on the ceiling at Villa Farnesina in Rome from 1511, where Baldassare Peruzzi painted Perseus, who is about to cut off Medusa's

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[132] Lodovico Dolce, *Dialogo dei colori* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1913), 104.
[133] Vincenzo Cartari, *Le imagini con la spositione de i dei de gli antichi* (Venice: Francesco Marcolini, 1556), LXXVv. English translation: Vincenzo Cartari, *Images of the Gods of the Ancients: The First Italian Mythography*, translated and annotated by John Mulryan (Temple: ACMRS, 2012), 296–297.
[134] New York, Richard L. Feigen & Co.
[135] Paris, Louvre RF 1945-9. Françoise Viatte, et al., eds. *Masques, mascarades, mascarons* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2014), no. 61.

head (**34**).[136] In his left hand he holds her snake hair; in his right he holds the harpe, which is raised to strike the fatal blow. The shield-mirror, reflecting Medusa's figure, is hung on his shoulder, but he does not look at it – he is looking directly at Medusa. This emphasises the symbolic meaning of the shield as a mirror of virtue. The evil that represents the Medusa is perfectly neutralised with the shield of Perseus' virtue, so the hero can look at her without fear and cut off her head. It is only important that the shield-mirror has been placed between the hero and the monster. At Villa Farnesina, the scene has a blue background with stars, which indicates the astrological dimension – the heroes of Perseus' myth were primarily constellations on the night sky with an allegorical meaning. While on the left Perseus beheads Medusa, on the right is Fame with the trumpet and underneath Pegasus, represented as a horse head with a star over its head. Fame is turned away from Perseus toward the centre of the ceiling where the coat of arms of the builder, Agostino Chigi, is painted. Perseus was an emerging zodiac sign during Agostino Chigi's birth on November 29, 1466, so this fabulously wealthy banker could consider it his sign. The scene was to emphasise that the builder was born under a lucky star constellation.

35. Paris Bordone, Hermes and Athena arm Perseus. Oil canvas, around 1545–1555.

In the painting by Paris Bordone of 1545–1555, Perseus is armed by Hermes and Athena (**35**). Hermes puts the cap of invisibility on Perseus, which is in the form of a dark cap or helmet with wings on its sides. The black darkness which spreads above it indicates invisibility. Once Hermes finishes his action, the hero will disappear into the darkness. Athena puts a transparent shield on Perseus' arm through which we see part of her right arm. In the painting of the Dutch painter Gerard de Lairesse from 1665–1666, Athena, descending from a cloud to the ground,

[136] Cieri Via, *L'arte delle metamorphosi*, 298–301.

mounts a crystal shield on Perseus' left arm.[137] Hermes puts on winged shoes and a sword lies on the ground. The traditional scene of the hero's armament takes place in front of the temple of Muses, indicating a direct link between the divine intervention that made the killing of Medusa possible and its consequence – the birth of Pegasus and the creation of a source of poetic inspiration on Helicon.

36. Jan Harmensz. Muller after Bartholomeus Spranger, Perseus. Copper engraving, 1604.

[137] Leipzig, Maximilian Speck von Sternburg Stiftung im Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig, 1631.

Bartholomeus Spranger created a series of paintings and drawings inspired by Perseus' myth. On a copper engraving of his drawing from about 1600, we see Perseus with Athena and Hermes, who equip the hero with winged shoes and a transparent shield that is at the same time a mirror (**36**).[138] In the background, we see Nymphs collecting water from a container held by an old man, the personification of spring. One of the Nymphs points to a pair of women arriving, one carrying a bowl on her head. The spring plays an essential role in graphics; it may be a variation on the spring of the Muses, but the most likely explanation is that the spring generally refers to the well-being and prosperity that Athena, Hermes and their art bring to humankind. Hermes's most important gift to Perseus was a sword that hangs at his side. Hermes is now giving Perseus the winged shoes; the god is portrayed with an open mouth, emphasising his eloquence. Athena's naked breast characterises her as the mother of wisdom. She demonstrates to Perseus how to use the crystal shield. Through the shield, we see the hero's arm, but Athena shows him that it is also a mirror. The goddess holds the shield so that the hero can check the attachment of the sword sheath on his back, which he would not otherwise see. Athena is turned to Perseus, but the index finger of her left hand is pointing out of the image to the viewer, to whom the message of the image is intended. Perseus bears the facial features of the main hero of the drawing, Emperor Rudolf II. By using the ancient hero, Spranger celebrated the Emperor's struggle with the Turks and his insidious domestic enemies, especially his brother Matthias.

In the wall painting at Palazzo Farnese from 1595–1597, Annibale Carracci painted Perseus as he was depicted in ancient Roman art. He severs Medusa's head, but he does not look at her. He turns back to her mirror image on the shield that Athena holds in front of him. Hermes standing behind Perseus looks at the shield with curiosity. Giovanni Pietro Bellori explained in 1682: "Perseus stands for reason of the mind, which by looking into the shield of Pallas and controlling itself with prudence, cuts off the head of the vice represented by Medusa, while men who fix their eyes upon more without judgment grow dull and turn to stone."[139] On Giovanni Mannozzi's ceiling fresco in 1623, the pictorial type of Perseus looking at the shield is combined with the pictorial type of the hero lifting the head of Medusa.[140] In the octagonal frame in the centre of the ceiling, the hero is shown as he flies through the air with winged boots. He looks to his left to his shield, which he holds in front of him, so he can see his hand with the head of Medusa stretched out behind him. The heroism of Perseus is a consequence of his foresight.

The ancient Roman pictorial type, which Carracci renewed, was an inspiration for many artists until the 18th century. The scene is always situated in the landscape

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[138] Jürgen Müller, "'Quid sibi vult Perseus?' Überlegungen zur Imitatio in Jan Mullers Minerva und Merkur bewaffnen Perseus nach Bartholomäus Spranger," in *Hans von Aachen in Context*, ed. Lubomír Konečný (Prague: Ústav dějin umění Akademie věd, 2012), 159–169; Sally Metzler, *Bartholomeus Spranger. Splendor and Eroticism in Imperial Prague. The Complete Works* (New York, NY: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), n. 220.

[139] Giovan Pietro Bellori, *The lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, a new translation and critical edition by Alice Sedgwick Wohl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 81.

[140] Rome, Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi. Cf. http://www.iconos.it/le-metamorfosi-di-ovidio/libro-iv/perseo-e-medusa/immagini/28-perseo-e-medusa/

and Hermes sometimes assists the hero. On the picture of Luca Giordano from around 1650, Hermes is represented flying over Perseus. God shows Perseus where he must strike; his assistance is necessary because the hero turns away from Medusa and looks at the shield that holds Athena (**37**). The main helper of Perseus is Athena, who holds the shield behind Perseus so the hero must turn his head backward in the final defeat. The dark side of Medusa on these images is not shown at all or is only slightly indicated by her snake hair or the petrified figures scattered around her – silent witnesses of the monster's deadly gaze. We find them on Pierre Brebiette's painting from 1633–1638, where Athena stands behind the shield and points to the mirror image of Medusa's beautiful face; her sexual attractiveness is emphasised by her nakedness.[141]

37. Luca Giordano, Perseus and Medusa, oil on canvas, c. 1650.

On Picart's engravings, the petrified victims of Medusa are also found in the lower right corner (**38**). They let Medusa's burning charm lure them in, and now they have been turned into cold stone. The man is defenceless against feminine grace and charm, and therefore Picard's Athena prudently turns the hero's head away from Medusa, who is sleeping beneath him. Her left shows him Medusa's image on the shield. The visual attractiveness of the pictorial type of Perseus killing Medusa stemmed from the artists' juxtaposition of the naked body of a seductive sleeping

[141] Paris, Louvre 21122. Viatte, *Masques,* no. 62.

woman and the fighter attacking with a naked sword. The audience, however, knew that the aggressor was in fact Medusa, and Perseus would quickly succumb to her if Athena and the shield did not protect him. Without God, the hero would be delivered to the powers of hell, and his soul would be damned forever.

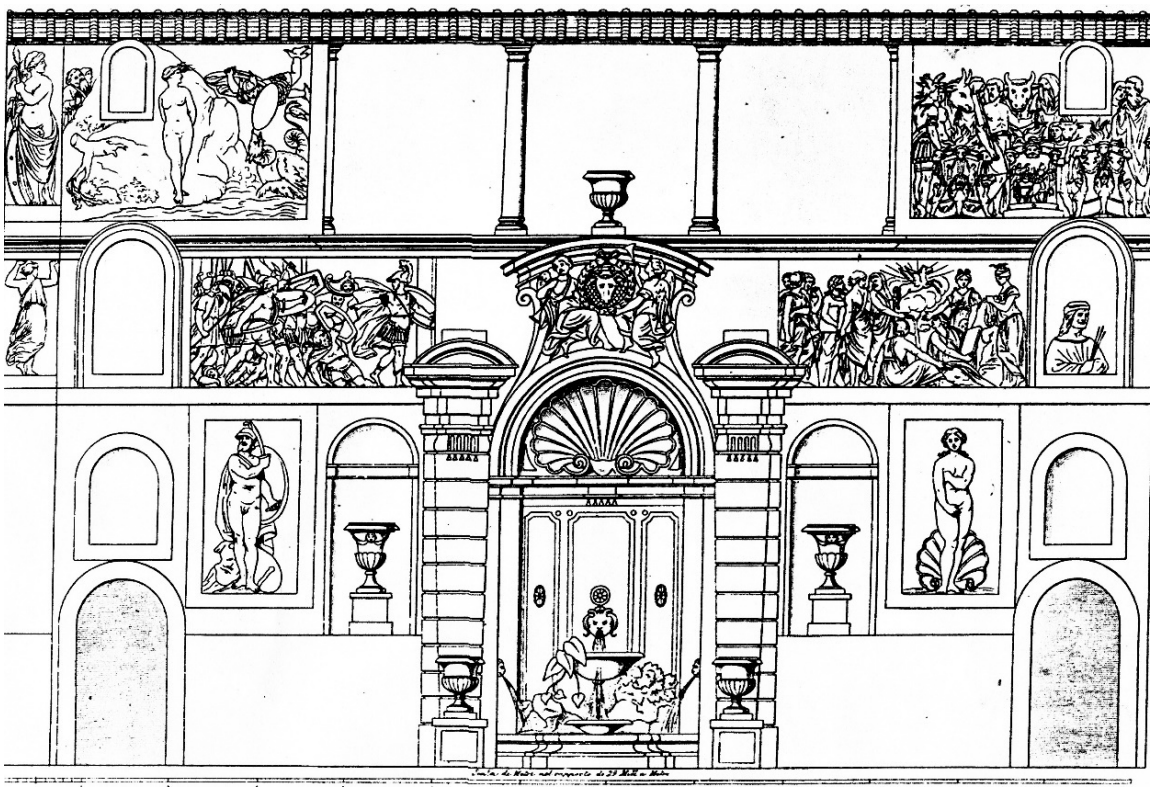
38. Bernard Picart, Perseus and Medusa. Engraving, 1754.

Celebration of Painter

The pictorial type of the triumphant Perseus, which was made famous by Cellini's group sculpture standing in the centre of Florence, attracted the attention of the masses and instructed them. The executioner was an exemplary hero of God's will because Perseus conquered the undefeatable monster only thanks to divine intervention. This made him the ideal alter ego of absolute monarchs, who could only legitimise political power by reference to God's will. Despite all political cues, however, the representations of the Perseus myth were not works of propaganda as we know from the twentieth century. In early modern Europe, the display of the death of Medusa was a warning to the enemy and good news for the subjects – evil has been defeated, and there is nothing now to fear. However, the aesthetic experience quickly overshadows the horrible spectacle, which is absorbed by the brilliance of the work of art.

The very first cycle inspired by the Perseus myth was painted by Polidoro da Caravaggio and his collaborator Maturino Fiorentino as a celebration of painting. It

decorated the façade of the Casino del Bufalo in Rome around 1525 (**39**).[142] The building was demolished in 1885, but the wall paintings were transferred to canvas and stored. Polidoro da Caravaggio was the most prominent of Raphael's pupils, and his façade paintings became fashionable in Rome in the early 1520s. On the main façade of the Casino del Bufalo, the Perseus cycle began in the upper left corner with the scene of the liberation of Andromeda. The princess is depicted in the form of an ancient statue as described in Ovid's writings.[143] On the upper right corner, Polidoro placed the panel depicting Perseus and Andromeda giving a sacrifice to the gods. After this sacrifice, the marriage of Perseus and Andromeda followed, which was interrupted by the intrusion of Phineus and his companions. This scene is depicted on the left under the scene with the liberation of Andromeda.



39. The façade of the Casino del Bufalo with paintings by Polidoro da Caravaggio with Perseus myth, from around 1525. Drawing, 1876.

Consequently, below Andromeda, who is depicted in the form of an ancient statue, we see Perseus changing the invaders led by Phineus into sculptures. On the façade drawing made in 1876, Perseus does not have the head of the Medusa in his hand while fighting Phineus, as this part of the frescos had already been damaged; however, we know it from the drawing that was created immediately after the creation of the fresco.[144] On the right side of the façade, as the counterpart to the

[142] Cf. Henning Wrede, *Antikengarten der del Bufalo bei der Fontana Trevi* (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1982); Isabella Colucci, et al., eds., *Dal Giardino al Museo: Polidoro da Caravaggio nel Casino del Bufalo. Studi e restauro* (Rome: Gangemi, 2003).
[143] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 673–675.
[144] London, The British Museum, 1858,0724.12.

scene with Phineus, there is a final scene of Perseus' story. Pegasus creates the source of artistic inspiration on Helicon, under which the Muses are gathered. Around 1600, in addition to this scene, a half-frame with a painter holding a brush in his hand appeared, explicitly expressing the message of this wall painting. The portrait of the artist was placed under the scene portraying a sacrifice of bulls, a reference to the heraldic animal of the Bufalo family. The celebration of the family that commissioned the painting was combined with a celebration of the art of painting. Other episodes of the Perseus myth were displayed on the side walls of the building. There was a scene with Danae and Jupiter, and the Garden of Hesperides with Atlas, who Perseus has changed into a rock (**40**). The lower part of his body is already an integral part of the rock.

40. Polidoro da Caravaggio, Perseus and Atlas from the Casino del Bufalo in Rome, around 1525. Engraving by Cherubino Alberti, 1570–1615.

In the bottommost decorative area of the main facade, Mars is portrayed on the left, which corresponded with the warlike character of the scenes on the left. His counterpart to the right is Venus, which corresponds to the peaceful character of the scenes on the right side of the facade. Mars, father of Romulus and Remus, and Venus, mother of Aeneas, connect the Casino del Bufalo with the tradition of ancient Rome and its mythic history. Mars and Venus were painted to look like statues standing in the recess; among these illusive paintings were real niches in which stone vases stood in 1876. Because the vases were too low for the niches, we can assume that they originally housed ancient statues. The central decorative element of the Casino del Bufalo façade, a fountain with side niches for real sculptures, connected painted sculptures with the famous collection of ancient sculptures of the Bufalo Family, which was exhibited in the garden around the Casino.[145] The façade of the Casino del Bufalo entered into the dispute at the time surrounding the relative merits

[145] Kathleen Wren Christian, *Empire without End: Antiquities Collections in Renaissance Rome, c. 1350–1527.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 280–286.

of painting and sculpture thanks to several of its aspects – its theme, layout, and applied technique. The layout of the painting imitated sculptural decoration. The façade is divided into strips, in which figural scenes imitate ancient reliefs embedded in the wall. We find here also imitations of recesses with statues. Polidoro da Caravaggio used a technique of monochrome ochre painting with white gloss, which gave the impression that the painted reliefs and statues were made of marble.

Sometime after 1541, another of Raphael's pupils, Giulio Romano, drew up Perseus as a result of his thorough study of ancient art. This explains why Perseus, who holds the freshly severed head of Medusa, already has her head on the chest of his armour, which Romano copied from ancient monuments.[146] His drawing preceded Cellini's sculpture and may have served as a model for it. On the drawing, we find both Perseus' foot on Medusa's headless body and the blood streaming freely from the neck of her severed head. Perseus also has a winged helmet and boots, but unlike Cellini's sculpture the hero holds the severed head at his side, as was usual in the medieval images of the Perseus constellation. Giulio Romano draws Andromeda as a counterpart to his Perseus.[147] Medusa's headless body, on which Perseus places his triumphant leg, has the same function as the dragon on which Andromeda places her leg. The dragon's head is turned to Andromeda and its fearsome jaws are open, but the princess is not afraid of it even though she is still chained to the rock and cannot move her hands. The dragon is petrified, turned into a sculpture created by Perseus with the help of Medusa's dead head. However, Andromeda, Perseus and Medusa are also sculptures. They are placed in niches in the walls on which their shadows are cast. Medusa's limp hand hangs from a niche, as indicated by its shadow on the wall in which the niche is hollowed out. The characters have mirror-reversed poses, so they were most likely preparatory drawings for a trompe l'oeil painting in two adjacent niches, either for the Palazzo Te or for the artist's House in Mantua.

The Perseus myth as a metaphor of not only the visual arts but art in general is summarised by the engraving by Aegidius Sadeler from around 1590 (**41**).[148] It depicts "Hermathena," a double deity symbolising the integral unity of Perseus' patrons, Hermes and Athena. The pair stands on a pedestal with a Latin inscription, a quote from Terence's comedy: "the life of man is like a game of dice." The number we need the most will not fall, so we must repair the work of chance using art. The inscription emphasises the important role of Athena's wisdom and Hermes' eloquence in a world in which blind coincidence would otherwise crush a person. The importance of art and science emphasises all the displayed attributes. The title "Hermathena" is associated with the "cursus" in the sense of "cursus studiorum," or intellectual development. This was embodied by the harmonious union of the two deities. Hermes contributed with eloquence, inventiveness and intelligence, and Athena with wisdom and virtue, which is emphasised by the putti on the sides.

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[146] Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, 21348.

[147] Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, 21349.

[148] Jürgen Müller and Bertram Kaschek, "'DIESE GOTTHEITEN SIND DEN GELEHRTEN HEILIG:' Hermes und Athena als Leitfiguren nachreformatorischer Kunsttheorie," in *Die Masken der Schönheit: Hendrick Goltzius und das Kunstideal um 1600*, ed. Jürgen Müller (Hamburg: Kunsthalle, 2002), 27–32.

Athena holds the shield with Medusa and at her side is a putto, which writes into the book of honour with a laurel. At Hermes' side there is a putto measuring a globe; in its other hand it holds Hermes' caduceus.

41. Hans von Aachen and Joris Hoefnagel, Hermathena. Engraving by Aegidius Sadeler, around 1590.

The engraving by Aegidius Sadeler originated in Emperor Rudolf II's court in Prague, where the centre of the cult of Hermathena was located.[149] With this divinity, the intellectual development of humankind culminated. In the background, Sadeler evoked the beginning of this historical process. On the left behind Athena, Perseus stands with the severed head of Medusa, whose body lies at his feet. Pegasus rises up from Medusa's headless body. In the background on the opposite side, Pegasus is flying to the heavens. The mountain of Muses, Parnassus, is depicted with two peaks, between which is a large spring created by Pegasus' hoof. Sadeler's engraving with Hermathena is a proclamation of artistic autonomy, which would by fully realised later in modern Western culture. The close bond between Hermathena, Perseus' myth and vision is highlighted also in the title sheet designed by Peter Paul Rubens for the "Treatise on Optics" of 1613 (**42**).

At the top, we see Juno with a sceptre on which there is an eye; to the right is a peacock. In its tail, Juno has placed the eyes of the all-seeing Argo, whom Hermes beheaded. This god is represented on the left, holding Argo's severed head in his hand. On the right, we find Athena with a shield with the head of Medusa, on which her eyes are emphasised. Hermathena was Rubens' emblem, the statues of these deities stood at the entrance gate of the courtyard of the garden façade of Rubens' Antwerp palace dating back to 1615–1620. The statue of Hermes here held a painting brush instead of the usual caduceus, which defined him as the artist's alter ego.[150]

At the end of the 16th century, Federico Zuccari painted a scene of the artist's apotheosis on the ceiling of his Roman residence, in which a shield with Medusa's head held a privileged position. The shield is placed at the side of the painter sitting on the clouds; he looks to the heavens and in his raised right hand holds a paintbrush and a pen, indicating drawing (disegno), the foundation of all art. The Medusa's shield under the artist's right-hand highlights the high moral standard of painting. Only painting is capable of celebrating virtue in its entire complexity. The shield looks like gold, which only a painter can imitate; the sculptor can never faithfully imitate metal. To the right of the artist is Athena, who leads his right hand to achieve perfection in his art. To the left of him is Apollo, who lifts the artist's left hand to the heavens, because this god is the source of the ideological message of the work of art.

The Perseus myth also decorated the ceiling of a musical salon in another artist's Florentine residence, which originated around 1600.[151] In its centre is the mountain of Muses with Pegasus, who is celebrated by Amor, who arrives to him with a wreath in his hands. The central figure is Apollo playing the lyre, at whose feet are the Muses. The Perseus myth is summarised in the four medallions around the central scene. The medallion with Danae and the golden rain is located opposite

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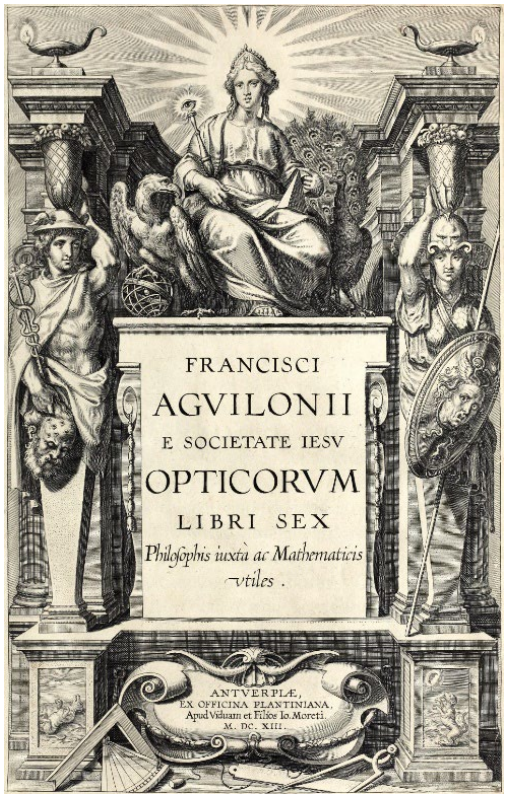
[149] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, "The Eloquent Artist: Towards an Understanding of the Stylistics of Painting at the Court of Rudolph II," *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 1 (1982): 119–145.

[150] Jeffrey M. Muller, "The 'Perseus and Andromeda' on Rubens's House," *Simiolus* 12 (1981–1982): 131–146; Eric Jan Sluijter, "Rembrandt, Rubens, and Classical Mythology: The Case of Andromeda," in *Clasical Mythology in the Netherlands in the Age of the Renaissance and Baroque*, ed. Carl Van de Velde (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2009), 35–36.

[151] Cf. Claudia Cieri Via and Irene Guidi, "Un 'Parnaso Musicale' per Una Casa Di Artista a Firenze," *Artibus et Historiae* 24, no. 47 (2003): 137–54.

the scene with the beheading of Medusa. The conception of Perseus thus meets the birth of Pegasus, i.e. of art and culture. In the other pair of medallions, we see Perseus petrifying Atlas and the liberation of Andromeda. The temporarily immobilised Andromeda stands in comparison to the permanent petrification of Atlas, who has been turned into a statue.



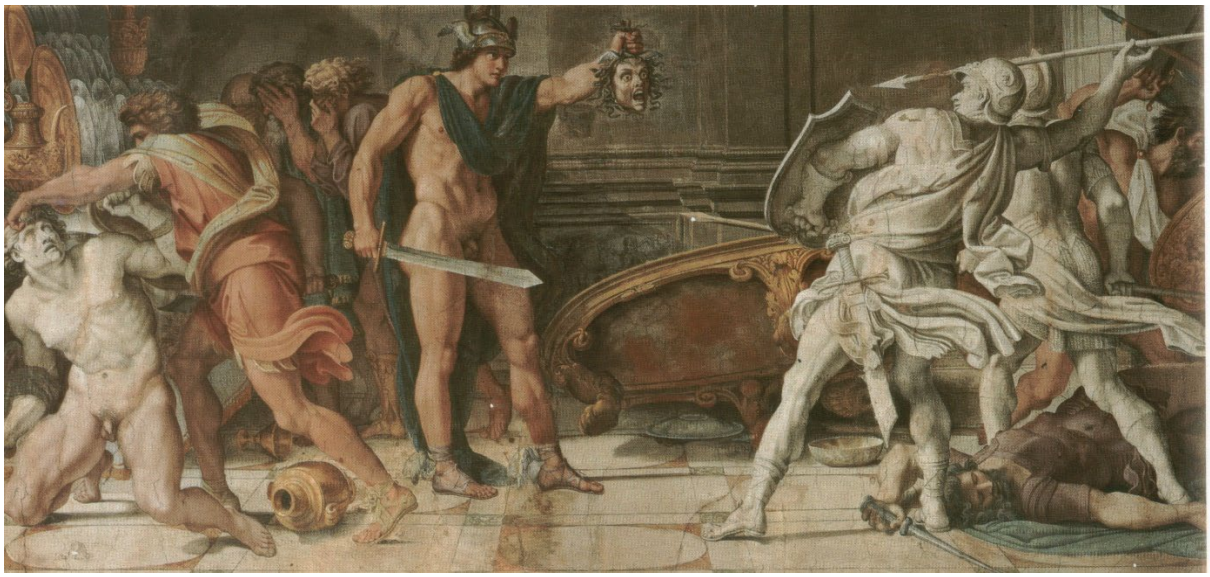
42. Peter Paul Rubens, frontispiece with Hermathena. Engraving, 1613.

The transformation of living creatures into stone form plays a central role in wall paintings inspired by the Perseus myth, which Annibale Carracci put in the opposite ends of the gallery at Palazzo Farnese in 1603–1604.[152] On the southern wall, he portrayed the liberation of Andromeda, whose figure dominates the picture. From the live mourning figures on the right side of the picture, the princess differs in her unnatural pose with arms and legs stretched and her striking whiteness, which is reminiscent of a marble statue. The sculpturesque nature of Carracci's princess was accentuated by the fact that he placed her on a rock that is only a shade darker than her skin. The curved and smooth shapes of her body stand out on the background, which is formed by the sharp edges of the jagged rock.[153] The comparison of Andromeda's beauty to the beauty of the statue is also found in Ovid's Metamorphoses, but in the representation of Perseus, Carracci deviates from the

[152] Cf. Charles Dempsey, *Annibale Carracci: The Farnese Gallery, Rome* (New York: Braziller, 1995); Stefano Colonna, *La galleria dei Carracci in Palazzo Farnese a Roma. Eros, Anteros, Età dell'Oro* (Rome: Gangemi, 2007); Patricia Simons, "Annibale Carracci's Visual Witt," *Notes in the History of Art* 30 (2011): 26–31.

[153] Bellori, *The lives of the Modern Painters*, 90.

ancient Roman poet. The hero does not attack the dragon with the sword but shows him the deadly head of Medusa, an alternative ancient tradition.[154] Carracci preferred it because he wanted to show how the dragon changes into a stone statue.[155] At the same time, as the dragon is petrified, the princess begins to come alive. As she turns her head in the direction of her liberator, her cheeks turn pink.



43. Annibale Carracci, Perseus and Phineus. Wall painting in Roman Palazzo Farnese, 1603–1604.

On the opposite wall of the hall of the Palazzo Farnese, Perseus petrifies Phineus and his companions (**43**). To the right are Phineus' friends, who have already been transformed into marble statues. In the lower left corner of Carracci's painting, we see the kneeling Phineus, who had just seen the head of Medusa, which is indicated by his legs, which are still slightly pink. In the next moment, however, he will become a white statue that will forever beg for mercy, as Ovid describes it in Metamorphoses. Bellori admired the representation of the transformation of the living body into an inanimate statue in this painting. The bloody head of Medusa is abominable, but it creates beautiful white sculptures. The resulting product is characterised not only by the beauty and radiant whiteness but also by silence – the attribute of the statue. On both frescoes, the head of Medusa in Perseus' hands has a wide-open mouth, which emits a terrible roar; its counterpart is the silence of the marble statues. Medusa's head transforms not only organic matter into stone, but also objects, their dresses and weapons of Perseus' enemies. Bellori explains this by reference to Ovid: "a man completely transformed into white marble with all his weapons, as we are used to seeing statues, is easier to recognise than one who might appear in another way, and Ovid himself, describing this fable, calls the transformed assailants armed statues."[156]

Carracci portrayed Phineus in the pose of the famous ancient statue known as the Torso Belvedere, thus linking the myth about Perseus with the famous ancient

[154] Lucian, *Dialogues in the Sea*, 14.
[155] Bellori, *The lives of the Modern Painters*, 90.
[156] Bellori, *The lives of the Modern Painters*, 91.

statues of the Roman collections.[157] The transformation of Perseus' enemies – the sea dragon and Phineus' commando – into marble statues was incorporated into the decoration of the hall precisely because ancient statues were displayed in it. The niches in the lower part of the wall housed the enormous and widely admired collection of ancient marbles of the Farnese family, which today is the pride of the Archaeological Museum in Naples. Some famous specimens of this collection came from the collection of Bufalo, and therefore surrounded the fresco of Polidoro da Caravaggio initially at Casino del Bufalo. As for the allegorical significance of the petrification, Bellori perceived Medusa as she was interpreted in the Middle Ages, in that she: "stands for sensual pleasure."[158]

44. Sebastiano Ricci, Perseus and Phineus. Oil canvas, 1705–1710.

In the painting by Sebastian Ricci from 1705–1710, the relationship of mythic stories and art is explicitly commented upon (**44**). Ricci confronted the fighters petrified by Perseus with statues in the niches of the dining hall. These sculptures are characterised as classical antiquities by having their hands broken; the ancient Greek myth is set in an aristocratic mansion of the early 18th century. The warrior to the right has turned into a marble statue, while the warrior behind him still has a living

[157] Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny,*Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), no. 82.
[158] Bellori, *The lives of the Modern Painters*, 92.

hand ready to throw a javelin; however, it is never thrown because the elbow joint has already turned to marble. The warrior covering himself with a shield on which the head of Medusa is reflected is the inversion of Perseus, who killed the monster with the help of the reflected image.

In his painting of the same subject from 1718, Jean-Marc Nattier expressed the exceptional status of Perseus by Athena, who descends from the heavens on a cloud.[159] The goddess has a shield with Medusa's head, which has become her emblem. Perseus' divine origin is indicated by his golden colouring and the golden statue of Zeus in the background, who is characterised by an eagle at his feet and bundle of lightning in his hand. The gold Zeus is an obvious reference to the golden rain and Perseus' origin. In Nattier's painting, the transformation of people into white marble sculptures results from the previous transformation of Perseus into a golden demigod. The contrast of the golden Perseus and the whiteness of marble warriors is complemented by the gold and silver tableware in the foreground, which originally decorated the wedding table but now is strewn about the floor. A cluster of gold and silver objects is one of the dominant motifs of the painting along with the golden statue of Zeus and Athena in silver armour. These motives form a triangle, in the centre of which is Perseus. In Nattier's painting, gold and silver, which melt again and again to gain new forms and new status, is a metaphor of the transformation of human destiny, which is wholly in the hands of God.

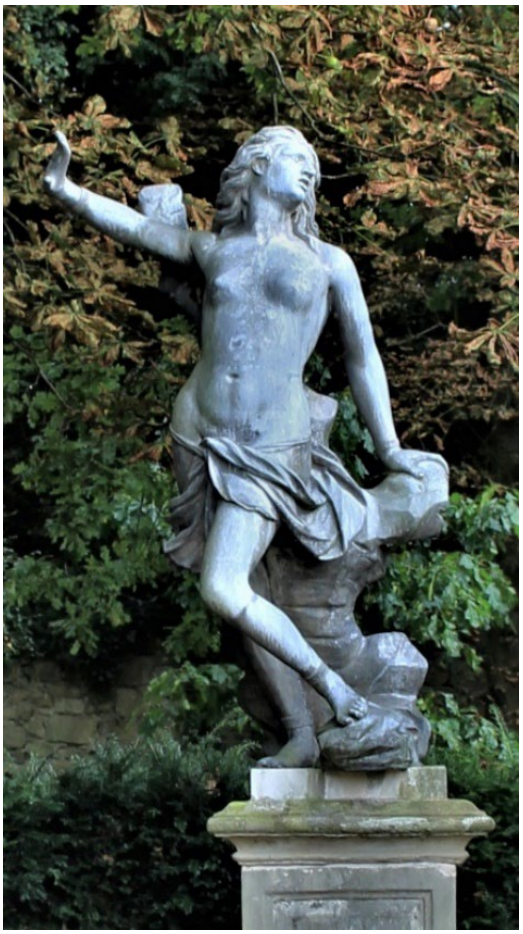
In early modern Europe, the aims of rulers and the artists who worked for them largely overlapped, but they were never identical. The depictions of Perseus were perceived as political or ethical models, but also as a starting point for reflection on art and artists. Artists implemented the ideological projects of their rulers, but, through the Perseus myth, they simultaneously praised their artistic mastery and antiquarian knowledge or reflected on relative merits of painting and sculpture. In the 16th century, this topic was often discussed.[160] Formal perfection of sculpture was generally acknowledged, while painting was considered unrivalled in the utterly convincing imitation of real shapes and probable actions. A statue cannot imitate painting, but a painting can easily evoke the illusion of a sculpture. Drawings and paintings evoking the Perseus myth have become the main argument in favour of painting because in this case, the illusory display of statues could refer to the sculptures that the hero created with Medusa's severed head.

In 1922–1925, American painter John Singer Sargent decorated the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston with the beheading of Medusa, bringing his brilliant career to a culmination.[161] The painting is an epic summary of the traditional concept of the Perseus myth as a metaphor for artistic creation. On the ground of this monumental painting is the headless torso of Medusa. The blood flowing from its neck refers to Cellini's sculptural group, which the painter carefully studied during his residence in Florence at the beginning of the 20th century. The blood flows not only to the ground but also upwards, to the sky, where it passes into the cloud, which is a metaphor for

[159] Musée des Beaux Arts de Tours, 1803-1-14.
[160] Cf. Fabio Mariano Barry, "Sculpture in Painting/Painting in Sculpture: c. 1485–c. 1660," in *Sculpture in Painting*, ed. Penelope Curtis (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2009), 13–19.
[161] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 25.642.

poetic inspiration. Sargent combined in one scene the beheading of Medusa and the subsequent event that was crucial to the emergence of art. Perseus sits on Pegasus, which has grazed Medusa's neck with its hoof and thus opened the source of poetic inspiration, which in this case is the monster's blood. The naked Perseus is sitting on Pegasus' back, the sword already sheathed in its scabbard, emphasizing that the image is an allegory. Perseus looks down at Medusa's body, stretching his left hand back to pass the severed head to Athena. The goddess takes it carefully into her custody – the transformation of living creatures into statues and paintings will continue under the protection of the goddess of wisdom. Medusa has a tangle of green-blue snakes on her head, but her face is beautiful, which is essential for the message of the image. The beauty of art must continuously be kept under control; Athena takes the head of Medusa to place it on her shield, protecting not only herself but also the whole world.

Perseus's Triumph



45 (left). Jan van Nost, Perseus with the head of Medusa. Lead sculpture, around 1700. Melbourne Hall Gardens (Derbyshire, England)
46 (right). Jan van Nost, Andromeda. Lead sculpture, around 1700. Melbourne Hall Gardens (Derbyshire, England).

In 1706, Perseus with the head of Medusa in his raised hand appeared in the garden in Melbourne Hall in Derbyshire, England, where he is the counterpart to the

Andromeda sculpture on the opposite side of the lake (**45**, **46**).[162] The client was the prominent English politician Thomas Coke; the statues were to celebrate the English King William III Orange as a new Perseus. In 1689, he drove his predecessor, the Catholic King James II to exile and saved England (Andromeda) from the Catholic monster. However, we can also find the same image type in the same environment in Catholic countries, where the hero saved the princess from the Protestant monster. We find the triumphant Perseus among sculptures by Matthias Bernard Braun that Jan Jáchym Pachta of Rájov commissioned to decorate his summer residence in central Bohemia around 1725. For the castle gardens in Valeč in western Bohemia, Jan Ferdinand Kager Count Globen commissioned a similar statue in the same Prague workshop (also around 1725). Perseus raises Medusa's head with his right hand and unties Andromeda, who kneels at his feet.

We also find Perseus among the heroes of ancient mythology and history, with which the Holy Roman Empress Maria Theresa decorated the Schönbrunn Park in Vienna in 1773–1780.[163] Prussian King Frederick II the Great, the adversary of Maria Theresa in the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), also claimed to be the second Perseus in his own manner. He celebrated the end of the war with Maria Theresa by building the New Palace at his residence in Potsdam. On the attic of the central avant-corps of its garden front, visitors could see a set of four sculptures by Johann Christoph Wohler, the Elder. On the far left, there is Perseus and the sea monster, while Amor with the arrow in his hand assists him. On the far right, a hero is liberating a girl, but he is dressed in lion's skin, which means that the group of Heracles untying Hesione strayed to the attic decorated with the myth of Perseus. In the middle of the attic, there are two group sculptures. On the left, a half-naked Perseus with the head of Medusa kneels in front of Pegasus, who jumps from Medusa's headless neck. Next, Perseus surprisingly appears again, this time fully equipped, including a winged cap, which Athena puts on his head. On the right, there is a group sculpture depicting Perseus struggling with Phineus. The hero has Medusa's head on his shield, but it seems to be a mere decoration as he fights with his sword.

The pediment below the attic is decorated with a bizarre scene inspired by Perseus' myth. In the centre, we see Athena sitting under the palm of victory, personally sculpting the head of Medusa on her shield with a hammer and chisel. To the left of Athena, Perseus stands and points to her; in the background between them we see Neptune. On the right side of the pediment, we see a semi-nude Andromeda surrounded by her father and mother; below them lies the dead sea monster. On the left side of the pediment are Pegasus and Hermes, who attaches the wings to his legs. On the pediment of the main façade of the palace, we find Athena visiting the mountain of Muses where Pegasus created the spring of poetic inspiration.[164] On the pillar over the top of the pediment of the garden façade we see the statue of Fortuna

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[162] Claudia Schellekens, "Strijd en Verzoening? Het Ikonographische Beeldprogramma van de Tuinen te Melbourne Hall, Derbyshire, Engeland," *Tuinkunst* 1 (1995): 80–94; Ingrid Roscoe, et al., *A biographical Dictionary of Scuptors in Britain, 1660–1851* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[163] Johann Wilhelm Beyer, workshop, marble sculpture, 1773–1780 (Great parterre, right side, n. 25). Cf. Uta Schedler, *Die Statuenzyklen in den Schloßgärten von Schönbrunn und Nymphenburg. Antikenrezeption nach Stichvorlagen* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1985).

[164] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 5, 254–268.

with a horn of plenty, which emphasised the historical context of this updated Perseus myth. Thanks to the military successes of Frederick the Great, the Prussian state flourished as a centre of culture. Frederick the Great loved Ovid's Metamorphoses, which we find in many of his building projects, where he presented himself as a peaceful ruler and patron of art.[165] The way the Perseus myth was treated in the New Palace, however, shows how the content of this form of celebration of the sovereign may become empty.[166]

In early modern Europe, works of art created for the political elite were often ambiguous. This may be demonstrated using the relief of Perseus created by Lorenzo Mattielli for Prince Eugene's Viennese City Palace, which was built by Fischer von Erlach in 1696 (**47**). Prince Eugene was then thirty-three years old and had already accomplished his first victory against the Turks in Habsburg service. Emperor Leopold I generously rewarded Prince Eugene, who became the commander-in-chief of the Habsburg army. He was a well-educated patron of the arts and had an extensive library; it is said that on his war campaigns he always kept a travel bookcase with classical authors in his tent. On the eastern portal of his palace, there is a relief with Perseus and Medusa on the left and one with Achilles and Hector on the right. Both Medusa's head and Hector's body are trophies of war; Perseus and Achilles thus triumph over the overwhelmed enemy. Nevertheless, Perseus looks thoughtfully and directly at the head of Medusa. This glorified the prince's military competence, courage and wisdom, as everyone knew that to look at Medusa's head meant immediate death. The prince's Perseus does not lift Medusa's head to show it to the whole world; he does not want to boast of his victory and does not care what others think of him. He wants to learn something about himself; he wants to know who he killed, why he did it, and what the consequences of his deed are.

In the mid-eighteenth century, Johann Joachim Winckelmann launched a new wave of reception of ancient Greek art, which he proclaimed as a model that modern art must imitate. For him, the absolute peak was represented by the Apollo Belvedere in the Vatican collections.[167] This statue was a model for the famous Perseus lifting the severed head of Medusa created by Antonio Canova (**48**).[168] Both Apollo and Perseus walk briskly with their left hands stretched forward. The difference was only in attributes – Apollo held a bow in his raised left hand and an arrow in his lowered right hand; Canova replaced the former with the head of Medusa and the latter with a sword. Canova also revealed the source of his inspiration, which significantly

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[165] Sibylle Badstubner-Gröger, "Bemerkungen zum Thema der Metamorphosen des Ovid in den plastischen Bildprogrammen friderizianischer Architektur," in *Studien zur barocken Gartenskulptur*, ed. Konstanty Kalinowski (Poznan: Wydawn. Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, 1999), 203–229; Saskia Hüneke, "'Nec soli cedit.' Dekoration und Bauskulptur am Neuen Palais," in *Friederisiko: Friedrich der Große. Die Ausstellung. hg. von der Generaldirektion der Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg* (Munich: Hirmer, 2012), 286–293.

[166] Daniela Gallo, "Persée dans la sculpture européenne du XVIII^{e} siècle," in *Héros grecs à travers le temps: Autour de Persée, Thésée, Cadmos et Bellérophon*, ed. Laurence Baurain-Rebillard (Metz: Centre de recherche universitaire lorrain d'histoire, 2016), 115–145.

[167] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, translated by Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton (La Salle: Open Court, 1987), 5, 21.

[168] Johannes Myssok, *Antonio Canova: die Erneuerung der klassischen Mythen in der Kunst* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2007), 197–206.

contributed to the success of the statue, in the fact that Perseus wears a cloak over his outstretched hand. In the case of Apollo, the cloak is not substantiated by the represented action, which has helped to make it a hallmark of this famous statue. In the bronze original of this ancient sculpture, the cloak was not needed; however, when it was converted into marble, it was necessary to support the forward-stretching hand. Canova designed the stability of his marble statue similarly. [169]

47 (left). Lorenzo Mattielli, Perseus and Medusa, after 1708. Stone relief on eastern porch of the palace of Prince Eugen, Wien.
48 (right). Antonio Canova, Perseus with the Head of Medusa, marble sculpture, 1797–1801.

Canova's Perseus is the last of the great tradition that began in the 5th century BC. At the same time, it is one of the first demonstrations of creative freedom, which Kant advocated in his "Critique of Judgment" of 1790.[170] Canova began working on the sculpture in 1797, and in 1801 he exhibited it in his Roman studio as a counterpart to Apollo Belvedere, which he acknowledged by putting a plaster copy of it next to his statue. Canova's goals were expressed in a letter, which he wrote in Rome on May 9, 1801 and was addressed to his Venetian patron Giuseppe Falieri: "In

[169] Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, *Canova et ses ouvrages, ou Mémoires historiques sur la vie et les travaux de ce célèbre artiste* (Paris: Adrien Le Clerc, 1834), 101.
[170] David Bindman, *Warm Flesh, Cold Marble: Canova, Thorvaldsen, and Their Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 4, 180–181.

these days, I have finished a statue that perhaps overcame Apollo Belvedere. It shows the Perseus triumphant with the head of the Medusa in one hand and the sword in the other. This sculpture really inspired such enthusiasm that I cannot describe to you. I think it will end up somewhere in France, where much more money has now been concentrated than anywhere else in Europe, not to mention poor Italy."[171] The letter proves Canova's identification with the ancient sculpture, but also his attempt to break free from this tradition. To understand the artist's intentions, it is also important to bear in mind the miserable political situation in Italy at the time. In 1796, Napoleon's army invaded Italy, where its main adversary was the papal state with which the sculptor had identified himself since 1781 when he settled in Rome. Canova also suffered due to the political developments in his native Venice, which Napoleon ceded to Austria. At that time, the sculptor's Francophobia reached its peak, and the disruption of Europe and the humiliation of Italy was so painful for him that he considered immigrating to America.[172]

The political developments of the time undoubtedly influenced the origin of Canova's Perseus. "Its thinly veiled theme of madness and civil war," Johns emphasised, "reflects Canova's anxiety about the cataclysm in Italy occasioned by the French triumph and his concern with his own professional future."[173] However, as Johns also pointed out, the artist, who specialized in monumental sculptures, could not afford a definite political stance. His clientele was limited to the wealthiest Europeans, whatever their political affiliation. Emperor Napoleon, then the richest patron of art, and the members of his court were among his greatest customers. Canova's Perseus has a Phrygian cap on his head that was at that time an attribute of the French Revolution, but this does not mean that the sculptor identified his Perseus with them or distanced himself from them. Canova's Paris from 1810 also had a Phrygian cap,[174] which demonstrably has nothing to do with the French Revolution. When Canova exhibited Perseus in his studio, he exhibited next to the sculpture a scholarly commentary on the helmet of invisibility, in which visitors could learn that in classical art, Perseus was sometimes represented with the Phrygian cap with two flaps. Canova clearly felt the need to emphasize that the cap of his Perseus has nothing to do with the French Revolution, which meant that he was at least aware of this link. However, none of the visitors are known to have commented on the cap, nor did they associate the statue in any way with the French revolutionaries.

However, the French occupation of Italy influenced not only Canova's Perseus concept but also the fate of the statue itself. When Canova finished his Perseus and exhibited it in his studio in 1801, it was enthusiastically received, and the statue was destined to become the dominant element in a square in Milan. However, the Pope prohibited it to be exported from Rome, which was recently deprived of its most famous classical sculptures. Napoleon's peace treaty with the Papal State, which was concluded in 1797, stated that the most precious works of art, including the Apollo Belvedere, would be transferred to the Louvre in Paris forever. In 1802, the Pope

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171 *Alcune lettere di Antonio Canova ore per la prima volta publicate* (Venice: Alvisopoli, 1823), 29–30.
172 Antonio Muñoz, *Antonio Canova: Le Opere* (Rome: Palombi, 1957), 58–59.
173 Christopher M. S. Johns, *Antonio Canova and the Politics of Patronage in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 9.
174 Munich, Neue Glyptothek, WAF B 4.

bought Canova's Perseus, which was to be put on a pedestal on which the Apollo Belvedere formerly stood. It was an unprecedented honour, and the very first post-ancient work of art exhibited in the Vatican collections next to the famous ancient statues.

49. Medusa Rondanini. Roman marble sculpture, 2nd century AD.

Rome was at that time the centre of the production of sculptural copies of ancient sculptures, and by making a mere copy of an ancient sculpture or variation of it, Canova would hardly have attracted the attention of the discriminating Roman audience. He had to somehow outdo the ancient sculptors. This was the reason that he chose Perseus as a subject, setting himself beside the ancient author of Apollo Belvedere, but also following Benvenuto Cellini and his legendary sculpture in Florence, one of the most celebrated works of the Renaissance. Canova's Perseus differs from that of Cellini mainly in that the head of Medusa is a variation on the ancient Medusa Rondanini (**49**), which depicts a beautiful but dead face with stiff features, a blank expression and half-opened mouth, in which a loose tongue is

visible.[175] However, Canova was inspired not only by this work but also by the face of Laocoön, from the famous Vatican group statue. His face is distorted by immense pain and Canova's Medusa was thus given a remarkably sorrowful look, which helps to create the new message of this statue. Her painful face arouses sympathy, which cannot be said of Cellini's Medusa, who is beautiful but calm and arrogant.

The success of Canova's Perseus is evidenced by the fact that in 1804–1806 he created a copy for Count Jan and Countess Valeria Tarnowski, which is located today in New York (**48**). However, the Apollo Belvedere was returned to the Vatican collections in 1815. After the return of the original ancient statue, Canova's modern variation lost its former significance, although it remained in the Vatican collections and is still exhibited in the same hall as the Apollo Belvedere. More importantly, the perception of Canova's sculpture in general has changed. In the second decade of the 19th century, Neoclassicism ceased to be an attractive novelty and has become an attribute of the political establishment. Models coming from ancient Greece and Rome began to sink behind the European cultural skyline. The artists turned away from them and began to represent what they saw around them. In connection with this, the cultural map of Europe was changed profoundly. Before 1800, its undisputed centre was Italy and the country's monumental sculptural works inspired by classical antiquity and commissioned by elite clients. After 1800, the centre of artistic production transferred to France and to paintings, which were available also to the middle class, in whose self-expression the ancient tradition had no justification.

The glory of Canova's Perseus fell just as quickly as it rose, giving critics the opportunity to speak. They drew on the steady condemnation that Karl Ludwig Fernow had formulated during the sculptor's life.[176] Canova was paradoxically criticised for the way in which he departed from the classical tradition. The sculptor was generally known as the most famous neo-classicist, but today we observe unambiguously romantic tendencies in his work that point to the future. His sculptures differ from ancient models in their exuberant emotionality and tendency to naturalism. The single viewpoint is also a non-classical feature; when viewed from the side, his Perseus is so flat that it looks more like a relief. The sculptor wanted to maximise the audience's emotions, and therefore gave up on the multiplicity of viewpoints. This was associated with the extraordinary attention he devoted to the surface treatment of his statues, for which he was also criticised.

A distinctly romantic feature is Medusa's ambiguity, a counterpart of which can be found in Goethe's Faust, the definitive version of which was published in 1833. During the Witches' Sabbath, a beautiful girl fascinates Faust because she looks like his beloved Margaret, whose death was his fault. Mefistofeles warns him: "Leave that alone – it only can do harm! It is a magic image, a phantom without life. It's

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[175] Janer Danforth Belson, "The Medusa Rondanini: A New Look," *American Journal of Archaeology* 84, no. 3, (1980): 373–378; Johannes Rössler, "Im Blick der Medusa Rondanini: Aporien klassizistischer Theoriebildung in Zeichnungen von Johann Heinrich Meyer und Friedrich Bury." In *Heikle Balancen: Die Weimarer Klassik im Prozess der Moderne*, ed. Thorsten Valk (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2014), 179–198.

[176] Carl Ludwig Fernow, *Über den Bildhauer Canova und dessen Werke* (Zürich: Heinrich Gessner, 1806), 191–195.

dangerous to meet up with; its stare congeals a person's blood and almost turns him into stone – you've surely heard about Medusa."[177] Faust, however, cannot tear his eyes away from the girl, who causes him grief and pleasure at the same time, and the air of death enhances her beauty. He notes a red string on her neck, a reminder of death in the execution room, which delights him because it reminds him of her love. Mefistofeles finally identifies the girl in which Faust recognised Margaret as Medusa: "You're right, I see it too. She also can transport her head beneath her arm, thanks to the fact that Perseus lopped it off. I see you never lose your craving for illusions."[178] Faust and Margaret are the second Perseus and Medusa. The fact that Faust cannot tear himself away from the image of Margaret proves that he has not yet wholly abandoned his former self and his love for Margaret. She decided to pay for the sins to which Faust enticed her, but her death was not in vain. It is an entirely new aspect that Goethe and Romanticism introduced to the myth about Perseus and Medusa. In Goethe's Faust, the hero met the avatar of Medusa, whom Perseus had killed, in the figure of Margaret, whom he recognised as his victim. Unlike the ancient Perseus, however, Faust looks directly at his victim. The romantic Medusa is beautiful and horrible, but that is why she can change us. In Medusa, we recognise the evil we have done, and that can lead us to our better self.

An important innovation of Canova's Perseus that deviated from Cellini and the artistic tradition was that the hero is looking at Medusa's head as Faust was looking at Margaret. The audience knew the myth of Perseus and was aware that it would mean the hero's certain death because he would be immediately petrified.[179] This was undoubtedly the reason why Canova chose this theme, and it is the author's assertion that it was not a humorous motive.[180] Sculptors, of course, do make jokes, but we do not know of any such joke in Canova's top sculptures. Canova wanted us to think about the message of the statue of Perseus looking into Medusa's face. Is Perseus meditating over Medusa's head a guide to our inner being, where there is good, evil, beauty, and horror all side by side? Canova's sculpture is, in any case, an original combination of the pictorial type of the triumphant and meditative Perseus. Canova's Perseus, who is questioning the death of Medusa, is also her first modern portrayal. Medusa has always been a mortal threat, though sometimes hidden behind a beautiful face. On this statue, Medusa above all endangers herself, which is suggested by her snakes. On the Rondanini Medusa, which the sculptor used as a model, the human face is consistently separated from the snakes. This detail means that Medusa distances herself from them. On Canova's Medusa, two snakes press to her chin, and two others crawl over her cheeks to her open mouth, suggesting in this way that the snakes and the girl form a unity that only death can end.

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[177] Goethe, Faust 1808, 1, 4189–4194, translated by Stuart Atkins.
[178] Goethe, Faust 1808, 1, 4186–4189, translated by Stuart Atkins.
[179] Sarah J. Lippert, "Canova's Perseus as Emblem of Italy," *Iconocrazia* 10 (2016): 10 http://www.iconocrazia.it/canovas-perseus-as-emblem-of-italy /
[180] As suggested Christina Ferando, "Staging Neoclassicism: Antonio Canova's Exhibition Strategies for Triumphant Perseus," in *Das Originale der Kopie: Kopien als Produkte und Medien der Transformation von Antike,* ed. Tatjana Bartsch et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 141; Johannes Myssok, "Die 'tröstende' Kopie. Antonio Canovas 'Neue Klassiker' und der Napoleonische Kunstraub," ibid.: 100.

Perseus's Doubts

The perception of classical mythology changed profoundly in the third quarter of the 19th century.[181] In England, the main inspiration for artists was the first part of the monumental and widely-read History of Greece by George Grote, in which the author retold classical myths, which, following Heyne, he presented as the original expression of the ancient Greek imagination. In Grote's opinion, this applied above all to the Perseus story. In his words, Greek myths were neither a dogmatic belief system nor a distorted history. Therefore, they could not be a source of knowledge of Greek history; he understood them as a magnificent attempt to create a purely imaginary world of beauty. John Ruskin and Walter Pater agreed that myths cannot be analysed, but only experienced. This attitude changed the way classical myths were represented in English visual art.

The most famous and ambitious cycle of Perseus created the prominent English 19th-century painter, Edward Burne-Jones.[182] The cycle follows previous traditions closely, but under the influence of Walter Pater, it prefigures the twentieth century in its fascination with the dark side of the classical myth. The painter had had an intense relationship with ancient culture since his studies at Oxford, and the myth of Perseus interested him from 1865 on. Ten years later, Arthur Balfour asked Burne-Jones to decorate his London House's reception hall with a picture cycle at his discretion. Edward Burne-Jones, at that time already a famous painter, proposed the myth of Perseus to the young politician and later British Prime Minister. Balfour was not a typical conservative politician; he was an educated person and an expert in visual art with exquisite taste.

First in 1875–1876 the painter realised his project as a series of gouaches, which are now in the London Tate Gallery.[183] In their preparation, Burne-Jones studied the representation of this myth in ancient art. This is evidenced, for example, by the third scene depicting three nymphs handing over the hero's magic weapon components, helmet, winged shoe and bag for Medusa's head. The only model for this scene is the ancient amphora in the British Museum in London (**6**). Perseus' history was to be displayed on ten monumental panels filling the three walls of the salon in Balfour's house; the space between them was filled by an acanthus ornament of gilded stucco. The six paintings were to be alternated by four embossed panels on which the figures were made of bronze-plated stucco and silver on a golden-coloured wooden background. Two of these relief panels were planned to be placed over the door, the lining of which was conceived in the same way as the wooden background of these panels. The artist's goal was to integrate the paintings into the interior of the salon, which was to be complemented by coloured glass windows and special lighting.

In his cycle on Perseus as well as in his work as a whole, Burne-Jones combined classical inspiration with Renaissance and medieval models. The figures

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[181] Grote, George. *A History of Greece, I* (London: Allison, 1846).

[182] Fabian Fröhlich, "The Perseus Series," in *Edward Burne-Jones: The Earthly Paradise*, ed. Christofer Conrad and Annabel Zettel (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 103–135.

[183] Kurt Löcher, *Der Perseus-Zyklus von Edward Burne Jones* (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1973).

on his paintings are squeezed into a tight space that they fill entirely, an element known from medieval illumination. At the same time, he consistently used the latest findings of classical archaeology and the study of Italian Renaissance in his work. There was one crucial aspect in which Burne-Jones fundamentally differed from the artists of the past whom he admired. The artists of all previous epochs always identified with their patron and his concept of the world. Through the representations of Perseus' myths, they promoted the conventions of the society in which they lived. Burne-Jones was not at all interested in the views and attitudes of his patrons, and he thoroughly distanced himself from the society in which he lived, as demonstrated in his bitter caricatures of the life of the social elite of his time. Through the cycle of Perseus, Burne-Jones protested against materialism, technological development, and the moral decline of Victorian England, with which Balfour, on the contrary, fully identified himself. The artist showed this in an artistic style in which rationalism and pronounced classicism mingles with the nostalgia of the Middle Ages and its mysticism. Balfour commissioned from Burne-Jones an attractive backdrop for social conversation, but the artist from the very beginning had planned an almost sacral space destined for individual meditation.

The project demonstrates the inconsistency of artistic attitudes of Burne-Jones and other equally minded artists. They are collectively called Pre-Raphaelites, but in fact, they are in a way the last proponents of the attitude that emerged in the post-Raphael era in the second quarter of the 16th century. These Mannerist painters seemingly referred to recognised models but equally and vehemently emphasised the individuality of the creator and his creative freedom. However, this attitude must not be at the expense of the primary goal of their art, i.e. an effort toward general validity, which was, of course, restricted to the elite class. Unlike the Italian 16th-century Mannerists, however, the English Pre-Raphaelites did not fulfil their conservatively progressive program. They insisted that their art should mirror the personal state of the mind of the creator; at the same time, however, they could not break away from their artistic models. Pre-Raphaelite art is an attempt at the impossible; it strives toward original but "second hand" art.

The Burne-Jones cycle of Perseus was conceived to pull the audience away from its time and place it in an alternative dimension of noble ideals. On the walls of Balfour's salon, the painter planned the paintings as imaginary gates through which the audience would enter the world of absolute beauty, which one can never enter in real life. The paintings invited the spectator to close his eyes and immerse himself in a mystic trance. "I mean by a picture," said Burne-Jones, "a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be, in a light better than any light that ever shone – in a land, no one can define or remember, only desire."[184] Between 1876 and 1885, Burne-Jones painted a series of large-scale gouaches in life size that is now in the city gallery in Southampton. The only relief panel that the artist ever completed and exhibited in 1878 is located in Cardiff. In 1887–1893, he painted eight panels as oil on canvas, which became a part of the decoration of Balfour's house and today are exhibited in Stuttgart (**50, 52–55**). Burne-Jones died in 1898; he did not finish his

[184] Christopher Wood, *Burne-Jones: The Life and Works of Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898)* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), 6.

Perseus cycle despite (or perhaps due to) his incessant preparatory works and pursuit of perfect technical performance.

Burne-Jones was inspired not only by ancient sources but also by the epic The Earthly Paradise that his friend William Morris published between 1868 and 1870. At that time, it was a trendy piece of work, in which the author rewrote European myths. The story of Perseus was part of the section called The Doom of King Acrisius. The original motif that William Morris brought into the myth about Perseus and Medusa was Perseus' sympathy for the monster he was about to kill. His Medusa speaks for the first time; from her mouth we learn what she thinks and desires. For the first time, Perseus also regrets that he must kill her. However, according to Morris, the death of Medusa made Perseus' love for Andromeda possible, thus making her a reincarnation of the hero's victim. Morris describes how the hero, who begins his quest for Medusa at night, asks an old woman for directions.

50 (left). Edward Burne-Jones, The call of Perseus. Oil canvas, 1877.
51 (right). Edward Burne-Jones, The death of Medusa I. Gouache on paper, 1882.

This is what we see in the background of the first scene of the Burne-Jones cycle (**50**). In the Call of Perseus, we see a dark landscape; on the horizon is the hill with the city that the hero has left. In the middle of the picture on the left, the naked hero sits while a shrouded woman bends over him. In Morris' epic, when the moonlight falls on her, the hero realises that she is Athena; this scene is displayed in the foreground on the right of the Burne-Jones image. The motif of a goddess who has transformed into an old man to make it easier to communicate with mortals is known from ancient mythology. However, in the myth of Perseus, we only encounter this motif with Morris and Burne-Jones. Athena, characterised by a helmet, is in front of the naked Perseus, who is sitting on the well. His nudity suggests that at this very moment Perseus has been born for a second time as he has been turned into a hero. With his right hand, Perseus shields his eyes as if he were afraid to look directly at the goddess. She, however, stares at him as if to hypnotise him, making her similar to Medusa. Athena holds the magic sword that she has brought to the hero, and in her outstretched left hand she holds a small toilet mirror with a handle.

Transforming the shield, a male attribute, to this purely feminine attribute, is an androgynous conception of Perseus' myth typical for Burne-Jones. This detail is even more critical when we realise that with this unheroic mirror Athena shows the hero the way to the Graeae. Thus, Perseus' quest for Medusa's head begins.

The first version of the death of Medusa is a grouping of characters that do not ostentatiously belong to one pictorial space (**51**). Their symbolic character is emphasised by the absence of the background and attached inscriptions with the names of the displayed protagonists. Serpents fall from Medusa's severed head, as in ancient times it was rumoured that the Libyan desert was full of poisonous snakes born of the drops of blood from Medusa's head when Perseus flew with it over the desert.[185] This Medusa produces evil while bringing benevolence to humanity in the form of the gigantic Pegasus. The model for this scene was the ancient pictorial type, and horses from the Parthenon frieze at the British Museum served as a model for Pegasus. According to his wife's words, Medusa was what Burne-Jones was attracted to the most in the ancient myth of Perseus.[186] In his epic, Morris did not perceive her as a monster or femme fatale, but as the embodiment of deceived innocence – the Victorian "fallen girl." The wretched girl asks the hero to end her suffering: "Oh ye, be merciful, and strike me dead." [187] Edward Burne-Jones has fully identified with this concept.

52. Edward Burne-Jones, Perseus and the Graeae. Oil canvas, 1892.

[185] Apollonios, *Argonautica*, 4, 1513–1517; Lucan, 9, 619–699.
[186] Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones, I–II* (London: Macmillan, 1904–1906), vol. 2, 59–60.
[187] William Morris, *Collected Works, I–XXIV*, ed. Mary Morris (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1910–1915), vol. 3, p. 204.

In the second painting of this cycle, Burne-Jones portrayed Perseus as he leans over the sitting Graeae, who are passing about their eye (**52**). In the Burne-Jones painting, the old and ugly Graeae resemble the famous Botticelli Graces from Spring (Primavera); their true nature only conveys an inhospitable environment. Their clothing reveals that Burne-Jones studied the draperies of classical Greek statues in the British Museum, but Perseus' ostentatiously fantastic armour, which looks as if it was designed for a dress parade, contrasts with this antiquarian approach. In the name of absolute beauty, the pre-Raphaelite artists abolished the boundaries between opposites. Burne-Jones' Perseus, therefore, has female features, and his female characters look like men; in his Perseus cycle, there are no distinctions between positive and negative figures or the young and old.

53 (left). Edward Burne-Jones, The rock of the doom. Oil canvas, 1884–1888.
54 (right). Edward Burne-Jones, The doom fulfilled. Oil canvas, 1888.

It is characteristic for Burne-Jones' conception of beauty that he does not even distinguish living beings from ideal sculptures. In the painting The Rock of Doom, the model for the princess was a marble statue inspired by Praxiteles' Aphrodite of Knidos from around 360 BC (**53**). It shows the same excessive contrapposto and side-turned head. In the following scene of the Perseus Cycle The Doom Fulfilled, Andromeda is represented in a similar pose, but this time we see her from behind (**54**). Andromeda has not changed her appearance because a statue does not change. We can only walk around her and look at her from another angle. In the painting The Doom Fulfilled, Burne-Jones openly refers to Morris by taking over his unorthodox concept of the sea dragon as a gigantic worm. As we can expect with Burne-Jones, the opponents are strikingly similar – Perseus' armour has the same dark colour and reflects light in the same way as the dragon's skin. In addition, Perseus' helmet is very similar to the dragon's head. The hero does not seem to fight with a terrible monster, but with himself. This impression is heightened by the fact that the body of the dragon is strikingly abstract. Needless to remark, Andromeda does not react in any way to what is happening right next to her. The struggle for life and death is taking place in her proximity, but she looks as if she was about to take her daily bath in a swimming pool.

The last Burne-Jones image from the Perseus cycle, The Baleful Head, was inspired by Pompeian paintings depicting Perseus, who shows Andromeda the image of Medusa reflected on the surface of the water (**55**). However, Burne-Jones gave the composition a new meaning; his painting emphasises that the purpose of art is to show horrors that would annihilate the viewer if they were real. Burne-Jones took over this concept from the co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. In the poem Aspect Medusa (Medusa Beheld) from 1870, Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote: "Andromeda, by Perseus saved and wed, hankered each day to see the Gorgon's head: till o'er fount he held it, bade her lean, and mirrored in the wave was safely seen that death she lived by. Let not shine eyes know any forbidden thing itself, although it once should save as well as kill: but be its shadow upon life enough for thee." Rossetti planned to create an image on this theme, which he did not paint; however, several of his preparatory drawings have been preserved.[188] On them, Perseus firmly holds Andromeda's hand and prevents her from falling into the pool where the head of Medusa is reflected.

55. Edward Burne-Jones, The baleful Head. Oil canvas, 1885–1887.

In his poem and drawings, Rossetti updated the aforementioned encounter with Medusa described by Dante Alighieri in the Divine Comedy. Rossetti's Perseus

[188] Dante Gabriel Rosetti, Aspecta Medusa. Lost drawing of 1867: Henry Currie Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An illustrated memorial of his art and life* (London: G. Bell, 1899), p. 109. Cf. Matthew Potolsky, "The Substance of Shadows: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Mimesis," *Victorian Poetry* 50, no. 2 (2012): 167–187.

is Dante's Virgil and Andromeda is Dante, whose eyes are covered by his guide. Rossetti, however, radically abandoned the traditional mimesis concept that distinguishes the unrealistic picture and the reality that the picture captures. Perseus introduces the artist, Andromeda personifies the viewer and the water in the fountain is a work of art; there is, however, no original. The only thing accessible to the spectator is the work itself. The moment the viewer tries to penetrate beyond its boundary, he becomes like Rossetti's Andromeda, who destroys the image of Medusa on the surface of the water by touching it. Burne-Jones understood his painting The Baleful Head similarly, as evidenced by the gesture of Perseus' hand preventing Andromeda from approaching the water, a gesture that the painter must have taken from Rossetti, as it cannot be found in ancient Roman models from Pompeii.

Burne-Jones' celebration of the eternal and ideal beauty is, in any case, entirely personal and time-bound, which was another paradox of the Pre-Raphaelites, who sought generality, anonymity and timelessness. Perseus shows Andromeda Medusa's head as a part of the preparation for marriage, which is indicated by the fact that he is not looking at Medusa's image, but at Andromeda. She does not repay his gaze because she fascinatedly stares at the reflection of the beautiful face of Medusa, who is her twin. Andromeda is no longer naked; she is appropriately dressed, but is a woman who, by her very nature, was a danger to the Victorian man, as her emblem was the beautiful but deadly Medusa.[189] This reading corroborates the fact that the ancient myth intertwines here with the biblical story of original sin. The couple looks at the head of Medusa under an apple tree full of fruit. The viewer is informed of this by a leaf of the apple tree that has fallen to the surface of the well. It lies beside Andromeda's face and points to her, denoting the princess from the ancient Greek myth as the second Eve.[190]

The ancient cycle of Burne-Jones has an unmistakably English, late-Victorian character. The characters of Perseus' myth have ostentatiously indifferent expressions; their movements are torpid as if they were acting out the thousandth performance of a boring play. This was not, however, the artist's intention; the expressionless faces were to express eternity and superhuman beauty, which was his ultimate goal.[191] According to his wife, the painter was fatally attracted not only to beauty but also to misfortune.[192] In his paintings, Burne-Jones' dream of uplifting beauty turns into an oppressive nightmare full of destructive melancholy, which ultimately determined their tone. However, Burne-Jones' classicistic romance inspired by medieval spirituality is still attractive for two reasons. He showed his own world, which was incredibly sad but so convincing that even science-fiction films could be filmed using its backdrops. In addition, he endowed this world with the persuasiveness of eyewitness testimony and the urgency of the intimate confession of a man of modern times. He is a person that we know intimately. He desperately wants something and suffers by not doing anything about it.

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[189] Adrienne Auslander Munich, *Andromeda's Chains: Gender and Interpretation in Victorian Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
[190] Fröhlich, *The Perseus Series*, 134–135.
[191] Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, vol. 2, 125.
[192] Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, 309.

In 1882, English sculptor Alfred Gilbert created a statuette of Perseus that was his self-portrait.[193] The statue depicts Perseus, whose slim, naked figure contrasts with his slightly over-dimensional equipment, which includes a winged helmet, a sword and a winged shoe, which he examines. The hero is young and inexperienced; his only hope lies in these magical accessories, but he does not fully trust them because he has not yet tried them. Gilbert created the statuette after visiting Florence in 1881 when he was twenty-seven years old. He wrote about the statue: "After seeing the wonderful and heroic statue by Cellini, amazed as I was by that great work, it still left me somewhat cold insomuch that it failed to touch my human sympathies. As at that time my whole thoughts were of my artistic equipment for the future, I conceived the idea that Perseus, before becoming a hero was a mere mortal, and that he had to look to his equipment. That is a presage of my life and work at that time, and I think the wing still ill-fits me, the sword is blunt and the armour dull as my own brain."[194]

In 1900, Camilla Claudel introduced original innovations in the pictorial type of Perseus raising the severed head of Medusa, her self-portrait. She was largely forgotten as a sculptor, but has recently come to the forefront due to the feminist movement, which has inspired successful films about her life. In her monumental sculptural group, the defeated monster has the body of a young girl with huge wings which liken Medusa to an angel (**56**).[195] Her vulnerability is highlighted by her nudity; she is curled up, and she stretches her left hand to the place where her head was only a moment ago. Perseus unconcernedly steps over her body and looks at the gold-plated bronze shield (which is now lost) that he holds in front of him in his right hand. He looks at the mirror image of the head of Medusa held in his left hand. The fact that he holds the shield in his right hand clearly shows that it is his most important attribute. The hero has killed Medusa with the help of his shield, and now he looks at her head and himself at the same time. The composition was not usual, but it is known from the ceiling fresco in Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi, which was painted by Giovanni Mannozzi in 1623.[196]

This sculptural group is exceptional in that Camilla has portrayed Medusa as a particular person with an individualised face that sharply contrasts with the ideal form of Perseus. The face of the mythical monster has the features of a woman between thirty and forty years of age. Once she was beautiful; now she is corpulent and her features are worn. She is remarkably similar to the sculptress, which is also evident from the comparison of her profile in the photograph, where she stands behind the statue she has created (**57**). The Medusa as an alter ego of the sculptor

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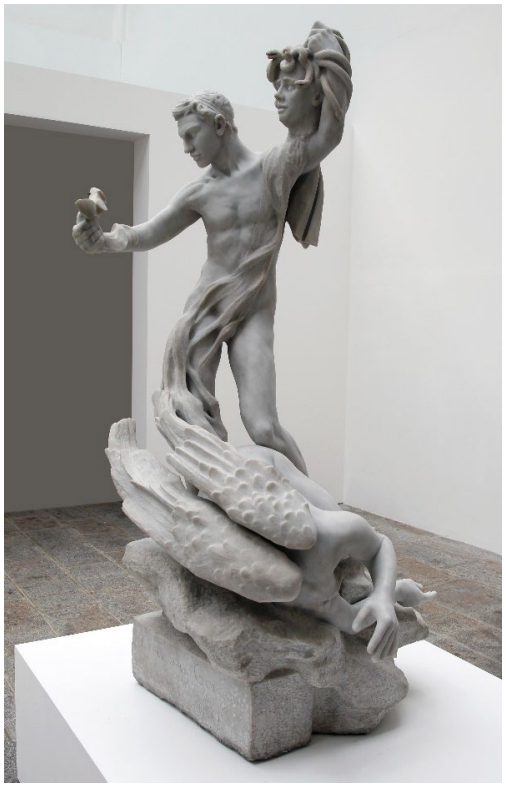
[193] London, Tate gallery, N04828. Cf. Jason Edwards, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Aesthete: Alfred Gilbert's Perseus Arming (1882) and the Question of 'Aesthetic' Sculpture in Late-Victorian Britain," in *Sculpture and the Pursuit of Modern Ideal in Britain, c. 1880–1930*, ed. David Getsy (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 11–38.

[194] Joseph Hatton, *The Life and Work of Alfred Gilbert* (London: Virtue1903), 10.

[195] Marie Victoire Nantet, "Camille Claudel médusée," in *De Claudel à Malraux: Mélanges offerts à Michel Autrand*, ed. Pascal Alexandre and Jeanyves Guérin (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2004), 17–34.

[196] Rome, Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi. Cf. http://www.iconos.it/le-metamorfosi-di-ovidio/libro-iv/perseo-e-medusa/immagini/28-perseo-e-medusa/

would not be surprising; in the second half of the 19th century, there are many analogies, as we shall see in the next chapter. The similarity was discussed at the time Claudel's statue was created, and later her brother Paul Claudel addressed this issue in the following: "Whose face is that with bleeding hair, which he raises behind her, if not madness? However, why do not I see in it rather the image of reproaches? This face at the end of the raised hand, yes, I seem to know well its disturbed features."[197] In Medusa, Claudel saw not only his sister but also the personification of her madness.[198]



56 (left). Camille Claudel, Perseus and Gorgon. Marble group sculpture, 1902.
57 (right). Camille Claudel in her Paris atelier on Île Saint-Louis by plaster model for the group sculpture Perseus and Medusa. Photo, 1899

The Perseus and Medusa sculpture, whose plaster model was completed in 1899, was Camilla Claudel's last piece. Ten years later, she was taken to a psychiatric hospital where she lived until her death in 1943. The origin of sculpture and the beginning of the sculptor's mental problems were associated with a turbulent breakup with Auguste Rodin. The famous French sculptor met Claude when she was nineteen and he was forty-three. Rodin became her teacher, co-worker and lover. Claudel began to deal with the theme of Perseus and Medusa in 1898 when their relationship began to collapse. Claudel then accused Rodin of trying to destroy her not only as a woman but also as an artist.

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[197] Paul Claudel, *Œuvres en prose* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 285.
[198] Claudel first mentioned that Medusa was a crypto-portrait of Camille in a diary entry from 1943: Paul Claudel, *Journal, II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 462.

Rodin undoubtedly influenced the choice of Perseus' myth and the composition of the Camilla Claudel statue. At a time when she was his mistress and associate, he created a small sculpture of Perseus killing Medusa (**58**).[199] The work was influenced by Italian Renaissance sculpture, which Rodin was intensely interested in at that time. Like Perseus on the famous Cellini sculpture, Rodin's hero stands above the headless body and holds the head of Medusa, whose face resembles the face of the victor. Unlike Cellini's statue, however, the attitude of Rodin's Perseus is fatally unstable. He raises his right leg vigorously to escape the scene as quickly as possible. However, he soon begins to stagger helplessly as Medusa tightly grips his left foot. The hero is forever connected with his victim; his victory is at the same time his defeat.

58. Auguste Rodin, Perseus and Gorgon, before 1889, original lost, bronze cast from 1927.

Claudel portrayed Perseus as we know him from ancient art as a beautiful and confident victor. She conceived her own version of the myth on a monumental scale, as if she wanted to humiliate Rodin's tiny and confused hero. There is no doubt that her sculpture is of an autobiographical character, but what she truly had in mind is still the subject of controversy. We know only three things certainly: first, Camille Claudel may still have been in full control of her senses when she created her Perseus

[199] Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, *The Bronzes of Rodin: Catalogue of Works in the Musée Rodin, II* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2007), 595–596.

and Medusa, as her paranoia did not begin until 1905. Secondly, in this work, Perseus is not Rodin, who has killed his love, as is sometimes written about the work. Perseus is young and ideally beautiful; he is not Medusa's merciless executioner but rather a noble saviour. Around 1900, this interpretation of the traditional myth is not surprising. According to William Morris' epic Earth Paradise, Medusa was not horrible. Only the situation that she experiences through no fault of her own is horrible. Thirdly, it seems that the sculptress later radically re-evaluated this sculptural group.

The plaster model was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1899, and the marble version was commissioned by the sculptress' patron, Comtesse Maigret, for her Parisian palace. François Pompon made the sculpture in a reduced but still larger-than-life scale, and it was exhibited in 1902. The plaster model remained in Camille's studio, where she destroyed it in 1912. The following year, on her brother's initiative, she was transferred against her will to a psychiatric hospital. She could never leave it and return to sculpture. This was thanks to the consent given to the arrangement by her beloved brother, whom she had previously considered to be her protector. It was her mother's decision, but the one who probably reproached himself for it for the rest of his life was her beautiful brother, the famous poet Paul Claudel.

The painting by the German painter Lovis Corinth entitled Perseus and Andromeda originated at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries when the reception of the classical myth in the visual arts changed dramatically.[200] The naked princess, who still has an iron handcuff on her hand, is standing on the dead dragon. The monster lies on its back, with the sword that the hero used to kill it still sticking out of its chest. Perseus in medieval armour puts one leg on the dragon, but turns his head toward Andromeda; he stands behind her, wrapping her in a cloak. The monumental painting was undoubtedly an ambitious project, which the artist considered to be very promising; his expectations, however, were not fulfilled, and the work did not evoke great interest at the time. The painter, however, returned to the theme later in his painting and graphics, which preserve the original composition.[201] The canvas on which Corinth painted Perseus and Andromeda was initially twice as wide, but the artist cut off the side characters and left only the hero and the rescued princess to show off their contrast, the element on which the painting is based. The main character is undoubtedly Andromeda, whose nudity aggressively enters the viewer's space; Perseus, on the contrary, is ostensibly inconspicuous and completely anonymous, kneeling behind the princess with a lowered visor so we cannot see his face. Corinth replaced Perseus with a medieval knight; his alter ego.

Corinth, the German painter from East Prussia, presented himself as a classical hero and descendant of the Germanic conquerors of Prussia. His heroic deed was filled with new content; his goal is not to fight with evil and rescue the innocent victim. Andromeda is not a mythical princess, but a living model from Corinth's Berlin Studio. Her perfect make-up and fashionable hairstyle from around 1900, as

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[200] Schweinfurt, Museum Georg Schäfer, MGS 5206. Cf. Sigrid Bertuleit, *Lovis Corinth. Der Sieger. Zum Gemälde "Perseus und Andromeda" 1900* (Schweinfurt: Museum Georg Schäfer, 2004).

[201] Oil on canvas, 1916, private collection. Dry point, 1920, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Kuferstichkabinett, 1961/277.

well as her relaxed expression and slightly open mouth, has nothing to do with the situation – it is the learned grimace of a professional model. The orientation of the legs and face is almost the opposite. The right hand is stretched forward and the left hand backward. This unnatural torsion had a purpose only in painting academies, where it allowed young painters to familiarise themselves with the anatomy of the female body. The real model entered the picture also thanks to the ruthless naturalism with which the painter represented the folds of fat on her side, the wrinkles on her skin and other signs of her mature age. Perseus-Lovis Corinth's trophy is not a princess, but an academic model; the heroic act is not performed with a sword but with a brush and paint, and his goal is not general well-being but the social recognition of his work.

59. Lovis Corinth, Victor. Oil canvas, 1910, Lost.

The correctness of this reading of Corinth's painting of Perseus and Andromeda is confirmed by the painting Victor from 1910, which, unfortunately, we know only from a reproduction (**59**). The composition is the same, but Corinth's armour visor is raised so that we can recognise the painter's face. He stands behind his half-nude wife with his hand on her shoulder, which she strokes tenderly. In his left hand he holds a spear, a symbol of the painter's brush, and his wife has a golden wreath in her hand, the prize that the artist has awarded himself. This again was not improvisation, but a purposeful act, as Corinth also returned to this subject in engraving.[202] The modern man, whose identity is clearly defined, has replaced the hero of classical myth. He does not convey to the viewer a universal message but a personal problem. The consensus of the whole of society was replaced by an

[202] Dry point, 1921/1922. Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Kuferstichkabinett, 1956–136.

individual decision to act, which does not, however, call for any action to be taken by the audience.

Swiss painter Paul Klee created New Perseus in 1904 (**60**). The graphic was a part of a satirical series with which he began his artistic career.[203] The title proves that he was fully aware that he was leaving the thousand-year tradition of representation of the myth of Perseus. An integral part of the graphic is the explanatory text attached at the bottom left: "Perseus. Wit has triumphed over Suffering." The painter commented on it in the same way in his diary.[204] His Medusa is a parody of hunting trophies in the petit bourgeois apartments of his time, which Klee suggested by hanging this head neatly at the top of the graphic. Traditional roles are reversed; Medusa (Suffering) is shown from the profile and with her eyes turned up so she does not see anything. Perseus (Wit) is turned to the viewer, staring at him with wide opened eyes. Similar to Cellini's sculpture, the hero who has overcome Medusa becomes Medusa himself. Part of Klee's play was that Perseus was indeed inspired by the ancient model.[205] However, he is a boxing veteran whom we'd never consider to be the personification of Wit if Klee had not told us so. This suggests that we must take his words with a grain of salt. The triumph of Klee's Perseus is only apparent. Rather than the triumph of wit over suffering, Klee's graphic art expresses their inseparable unity. The comic and tragic cannot be separated, just as we cannot separate the heroic act and routine of everyday life.

60. Paul Klee, New Perseus. Etching and aquatint, 1904.

[203] Gregor Wedekind, "L'art de la negation. Les débuts satiriques de Paul Klee," in *Paul Klee. L'ironie à l'oeuvre*, ed. Angela Lampe (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2016), 36–41.
[204] Paul Klee, *Tagebücher. 1898–1918,* ed. Wolfgang Kersten (Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1988), 196.
[205] Phyllis William Lehmann, "A Roman Source for Klee's Athlete's Head," *The Art Bulletin* 72, no. 4, (1990): 639–646.

An analogous parody of the pictorial tradition is the painting Perseus Killing the Dragon by Félix Vallotton of 1910 (**61**).[206] At the autumn Paris Salon, the painting caused a scandal and was not understood even by the painter's supporters, as the noble drama is depicted here with earthbound materialism. Everything is overturned in the opposite direction; the sea monster is a banal crocodile, and Perseus is naked and has no magic weapon; he is killing the dragon with a stick. Andromeda is naked, as was customary, but not attractive. Nevertheless, her pose was taken from the ancient pictorial type of a crouching Aphrodite, which originated in Hellenistic sculpture. Vallotton was in no way rejecting the ancient myth as such. On the contrary, he continually returned to it until his death in 1925.

61. Félix Valloton, Perseus killing the dragon, oil canvas 1910.

Perseus and Andromeda especially fascinated Valloton; nonetheless, he rejected clichés and empty stereotypes, just as Klee or Corinth did. Vallotton's Perseus is as personal as theirs, in this case because of the contrast between men and women. According to Vallotton, there can be no relationship other than the fight for life and death between man and woman, and so they are condemned to solitude, which is the central theme of this painting inspired by the myth of Perseus. Andromeda is looking back at the hero with unconcealed contempt. The name of the rescued princess, who was traditionally the protagonist of these scenes, was omitted from the title of the painting; its main hero is Perseus and his heroic act. The image is not dominated by the naked body of Andromeda, as was customary, but the anatomy of Perseus, whose every muscle is tense to the maximum to achieve this superhuman performance. Vallotton never sold the painting, which indicates that its message was personally important to him.

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[206] Jeanne-Marie Demarolle, "Persée, Andromède et Félix Valloton: Le Mythe de Persée revisité," in *Héros grecs à travers le temps: Autour de Persée, Thésée, Cadmos et Bellérophon*, ed. Laurence Baurain-Rebillard (Metz: Centre de recherche universitaire lorrain d'histoire, 2016), 147–164.

The problematic Perseus appears also in works of central European artists who responded to the threat of German fascism by updating the ancient Greek myth. The most famous is the enigmatic triptych, which German painter Max Beckmann painted in Dutch exile in 1940–1941.[207] The mythical hero has overpowered the sea dragon, but he carries on his back not only the slain monster but also Andromeda, who stands out in the painting as his prey. In 1938, the problematic Perseus also appeared in the painting of Czech avant-garde painter Emil Filla.[208] The naked Perseus is depicted from the front, and in his right hand he holds a dagger; in the left, he holds the severed head of Medusa. Under her head is her headless body, and blood flows from both. Medusa has an open mouth, her large eye is painted in the same colour as her head, and she has no iris, making it look as if her eyes were closed. Medusa and Perseus' head have an identically deformed nose. In this manner, the permanent connection between man and monster, attacker and victim are indicated. The ambiguity of Perseus is expressed by his non-heroic attitude. He does not stand as usual but kneels on one knee as if praying or begging for forgiveness for what he has just done. It is repentance rather than triumph.

The ambiguity of Medusa is emphasised by the fact that large wings grow from her head. Filla undoubtedly knew that the ancient Medusa was commonly depicted with wings, as he collected ancient art, had an extensive collection of photographs of ancient art monuments, and studied ancient mythology in depth. On Filla's painting, the wings are highlighted by an unusual size and colour; they are golden, so they have a colour similar to the body of the sun-tanned hero. The yellow, naked body of Medusa is shown in a pre-death spasm, making it look pitiable. Her dark blue head, however, is ominous even after death. The snakes on Medusa's head are alive, and those facing the hero are still attacking him.

In 1930s and 1940s, European avant-garde artists confronting political violence often turned to mythology. In mythic duels, however, mythical creatures blended into each other, the victor became the vanquished, and the rescuer became the attacker.[209] Perseus is the hero who has defeated the monster, but violence remains terrible even when it is in some way justified. Filla expressed this in the painting "War" from 1939. Today the painting hangs in the Czech Memorial in Terezín, where the victims of Nazi Germany are remembered. The image shows the same subject: a man with a knife in one hand and a severed head in the other. Beneath him is the defeated and headless opponent; blood is flowing from her body as well as from her severed head. In this case again, the victor does not look at the victim, but turns away from her; in both cases, their bodies are shown as if their skin had been stripped off, showing their exposed muscles. The hero suffers no less than his victim.

Nevertheless, the ambiguity and travesty of the Perseus myth are typical for the majority of modern works of art. The central theme of Aaron Bohrod's painting of 1974 is memory.[210] The painting's background shows an old wooden wall with peeled layers of varnish. Beneath the vanishing white paint, we see remnants of

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[207] Folkwang Museum, Essen, G 261.
[208] Prague, National Gallery, O 8337.
[209] Oliver Shel and Oliver Tostmann, *Monsters and Myths. Surrealism and War in the 1930s and 1940s* (New York: Rizzoli, 2018).
[210] Madison, Wisconsin, USA, Chazen Museum of Art. Gift of Bryan S. Reid, Jr., 1998.14.

previous green paint. Like the layers of varnish, memories overlap, erasing and reviving one another. Bohrod, an American surrealist painter, did not believe in the myth of progress that the avant-garde of the 20th century celebrated with their abstract paintings. His paintings continued on in the figural tradition known from the works of surrealists in the 1930s. However, the American painter differed from the European surrealists in his cheerful playfulness. Bohrod's Medusa is portrayed as a bust, which is however in no way a traditional symbol of art. It is a tiny vase, a content-empty decoration. Bohrod enumerates all aspects of the conventional image type of the head of Medusa but translates them into their opposite. Medusa's snakes have been replaced by peculiar dried pods. They come from the black locust tree, also known as the false acacia. This tree has beautiful and delicious flowers, but all of its parts are otherwise toxic. It is also a dangerous and invasive tree. Medusa's deadly eyes are highlighted, but they are the red eyes of a rabbit. The theme of the threat, which was the most common attribute of Medusa, is travestied in the object shown on the right, an old pocket knife.

At the end of the 20th century, postmodern artists returned to traditional themes and image types, but they placed them in unusual contexts. Since the beginning of their artistic career, Anne and Patrick Poirier had been intensively involved with the Perseus myth. These two French postmodern artists met during their stay at the French Academy in Villa Medici, Rome, where they lived and worked in 1967–1971. At that time, they decided to link their artistic career with classical antiquity and archaeology. The content of their work is a fictional version of ancient antiquity, which they present using artificial fragments, fictitious models and careful documentation of non-existent archaeological research. The theme of Perseus and Medusa in their work is associated with the reflection of the monster's face on the water surface, which is a life-giving element and a source of artistic inspiration. Their Well of Medusa has stood in Berlin since 1987 (**62**).

The three-and-a-half-meter-high bronze head of Medusa with gold-plated wings is a variation on the Hellenistic type of the pathetic Medusa with a pained expression. Only the front of the head with wrinkles and wide-open eyes is visible; the lower part is immersed in the water. It is not a portrait of Medusa, but her severed head that Perseus holds above the water; only the hero's hand his hold on the snaked hair is represented. The creative power of the Medusa is indicated by the fact that water flows into the pool from her head. On the back of the fountain, a tiny golden bronze horse representing Pegasus appears above the water. The Poirers always showed the mythical horse without wings. A marble rock emerges from the water; on it, we see tiny fragments of ancient columns, the symbol of art and its extinction, which is brought about by time.

Perseus was a universal alter ego of art patrons and artists in early modern Europe. What characterises all modern paintings and sculptures of the this myth is that no one identifies with the hero. The women surrounding Perseus – i.e. his mother Danae, the bride Andromeda and above all his opponent, Medusa have come to the forefront.

62. Anne and Patrick Poirier, The Well of Medusa (Berlin-Halensee, Henriet-tenplatz).
Bronze, gilded bronze and marble, 1987.